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CIPRIAN GLIGAN

A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON ECUMENISM AND ITS "RECEPTION" IN ROMANIAN ORTHODOXY

Abstract. Ecumenism is a very generous and full of challenges topic that has generated extremely diverse opinions over the years, from hostility and vehement criticism to favorable, even enthusiastic attitudes. In the first part of this short essay, I want to talk about the difficulties in understanding the ecumenical movement and its role in establishing collaborative relationships between Christians from various denominations in Romania, noting the institutional and personalistic dimensions of ecumenism. In the second part, I will refer to the ecumenical dynamics of Romanian Orthodoxy (including the distorted reception of the decisions of the Holy and Great Synod of Crete, 2016), marked by the Church's openness to dialogue, the indifference or ignorance of contemporary society towards religious issues, but also of the necessity of God's presence in the world, the only guarantee that reconciliation, understanding, collaboration and communication is possible among people of different beliefs, nationalities, cultures and traditions.

Keywords: Christianity; ecumenism; orthodoxy; society; dialogue; clerics; lay people.

FOREWORD

The ecumenical movement is in general quite little known in Romanian society, although the Romanian Orthodox Church entered the Ecumenical Council of Churches as early as 1961. Although ecumenism is talked about from time to time, there is no real debate on ecumenism and its consequences on church life and interfaith relations in Romania and the establishment of a climate of cooperation and collaboration between people of different religious orientations. It is not about a polemical discussion, based on emotions

Ciprian GLIGAN – PhD student at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Episcop Dr. Vasile Coman," University of Oradea in Romania; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4070-4868; e-mail: ciprian gligan@ yahoo.com.

and preconceived opinions, but on solid arguments and mutual respect. When hierarchs, professors of theology, monks or simple laypeople formulate criticisms of ecumenism, they should come with logical explanations, not with theological improvisations, full of contradictions and meaningless "traps."

A brief analysis of how ecumenism is perceived in Romania (especially among Orthodox Christians) shows us that we have three large social categories. The first consists of those who criticize any ecumenical activity (sometimes vehemently), without presenting definite evidence in their favor; the second is made up of those who, overwhelmed with a suspicious "enthusiasm," are willing to give full credit to ecumenism, without fear of possible undesirable consequences; the third and most numerous group consists of all those who know nothing about ecumenical dialogue and are not interested in it at all. I think that both would need some truthful information about what ecumenism means, if not out of interest, or out of curiosity, at least as evidence of a minimum level of religious culture.

INTRODUCTION

The ecumenical movement is not perfect, just like any other similar movement, and it can and must be subject to criticism and correction, but before criticizing it, knowledge of the principles by which it works is needed.

The first thing to consider when talking about ecumenism is the fact that it does not divide, it does not break apart, but it unifies. The ecumenical movement is essentially a "movement to restore the visible unity of Christians throughout the world (*oikumene*), received with enthusiasm at its beginnings, weakened and often contested today, due to some of its weaknesses and failures."[1] Of course, everyone has the right to say what they want and to agree or disagree with the directions that the Ecumenical Council is following, but no one can ignore what the ecumenical movement is, at least at the institutional level, because it possesses an inner discipline that implies respect for the values of Orthodoxy in general and each Orthodox Church in particular.

[1] See the speech of Patriarch Daniel "Let us preserve the unity of faith and Orthodox canonical discipline, but also peace between cults," at the opening of the session of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, July 8-9, 2009, *Ziarul Lumina* July 10, 2009.

Nevertheless, ecumenism remains a topic that generates contradictory discussions because, although it militates for unity, it is often received as a "Trojan horse" in the "court of Christianity." The meaning of the actual terminology is too easily overlooked, because *oikumene* is not an invention of ecumenical theologians, but is a concept that includes the desire for unity among Christians everywhere, as well as in the history of the Universal Church.

As far as history is concerned, as many times as the Church has gone through major crises, it found the inner strength to "gather" in ecumenical synods, meant to elaborate formulas of faith that would give peace and unity to the entire Christian world. This is what happened at all the seven ecumenical synods that consecrated the ecumenical assembly as the only authentic means of church legislation, in the doctrinal, canonical and liturgical fields. However, history also shows that every Christian group has the freedom to accept or not the decisions of the ecumenical synods in whole or in part. This is why we now have the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church (in its many forms) together with other Christian denominations, the Coptic Churches or the Syro-Jacobite Church, etc.

There have been religious wars, there have been attempts at forced conversion of Orthodox Christians either to Catholicism or to Protestantism; there were times of persecution directed against all Christians by the communist regime that went as far as imprisonment, exile, torture, and death, but the Church moved on.

If in ancient times ecumenism (terminologically and doctrinally associated with the idea of unity among Christians everywhere) was faced with heresies and pseudo-Christian ideologies that challenged either the divinity of the Son or that of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of hypostatic unity with its dogmatic consequences, or was opposed to the veneration of icons, today it faces the ignorance, skepticism and indifference of society where indifference to religious values tends to become the rule. How else could one understand the refusal of the representatives of the European Parliament to expressly mention in the European Constitution the contribution of Christianity to the cultural and social development of the old continent? Have these gentlemen forgotten that the Church is the one that created the first institutions of education, culture and art, including social and medical assistance

in Europe?[2] It seems to be a rhetorical question, since the answer is evident in the increasingly anti-Christian attitude of those who rule the destiny of Europe today. Removing the Church from social dialogue at the European level compromises the very idea of union, cooperation, and mutual support on which this multinational structure was built.

At a time when there is a recrudescence of conflicts within the European Union that can lead to the breakdown of unity on a national basis, isolating the Church and its mediating role is a major strategic mistake. In crisis conditions, during which the unity of thoughts and actions is endangered, the Church, through its ecumenical experience, can become an element of balance and stability. In a period marked by wars that can lead to the dismemberment of peoples and nations, the Church's ecumenical experience should be exploited to the maximum. The worldwide ecumenical movement can contribute to easing the dissensions, disturbances, and centrifugal intentions of peoples in the middle of some social political and economic controversies, because its history is confused with the history of local relations and unity, on the local and international levels. In other words, it can be considered a source of inspiration for how it succeeded in managing to collaborate between different denominations, nationalities and beliefs.

That is why ecumenism should be a topic of interest not only for theologians, the clergy or people interested in religious life, but also for those who occupy important dignities in the state at the national or European levels. Ecumenism is a reality in today's world, proposing peaceful coexistence among Christians regardless of denomination by fulfilling the greatest evangelical commandment: to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 19:19). Yet, it also has inter-religious reverberations and can be a model of cooperation among peoples and nations of different beliefs.

I would like to mention that the goal of this essay is not to explore the possibility of implementing religious ecumenical practices in the social and political life of Europe, but to provide a brief description of the problems faced by Romanian Orthodoxy for its members to understand the real mean-

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[2] Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church said that the phrase "the cultural, religious and humanistic [heritage] of Europe originated initially from Greek and Roman civilization and, later, from the philosophical trends of the Enlightenment" without making any reference to the overwhelming importance of Christianity. In the light of the cultural, religious and humanistic heritage of Europe, this is simply a terrible insult to the intelligence of mankind; see Nicu Dumitrașcu, "Diplomația Religioasă: o nouă dimensiune a dialogului dintre Biserică și Societate, cu referire la Sfinții Vasile cel Mare și Ioan Gură de Aur," *Revista de Diplomație Religioasă* 1(2003): 35.

ing of ecumenism, to establish a climate of peace and collaboration with Christians of other denominations, yet without radical attitudes and fundamentalist manifestations, because these do not lead to unity but to turmoil and conflict.

THE INSTITUTIONAL AND PERSONAL DIMENSIONS OF ECUMENISM

From the very beginning, we must note the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church has always been open to dialogue with other Churches,[3] starting with the conviction that only together they will be able to confess Christ as the only hope for spiritual healing in the contemporary world.[4] Jesus Christ assumed our human nature, cleansed it, sanctified it, and raised it to glory, to the intimacy of the eternal love of the All-Holy Trinity. He is the Door that leads us into divine life and communion (John 10:9).[5]

However, the Orthodox Church has always had a special relationship with the Catholic Church, which it regarded as a *sister Church*. More elements unite rather than separate the Orthodox and Catholics, for example patristic tradition and in general the dogmas of the seven ecumenical synods, sacramental doctrine and practice, apostolic succession of the episcopate, belief in the saints and martyrs, convergence in most ecclesiology issues, and collaboration among local and regional communities.[6] Things are not the same when we talk about the Protestant Churches or other Christian denominations, whose dogmatic and liturgical heritage is much simpler, and the possibilities of cooperation are fewer, mostly at the social level.

Therefore, the presence of ecumenism is an indisputable reality, a truth beyond any doubt, which should be given due attention, without fear, prejudice, or exaggerated interpretations. In other words, its reception or rejec-

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[3] Patriarch Daniel states that the "Romanian Orthodox Church has always been peaceful, it has coexisted for centuries with people of other ethnicities and religious beliefs, defending the righteous faith without humiliating others," *Ziarul Lumina* July 10, 2009.

[4] It is especially important that all ecumenical actions gain a wide resonance among the faithful, not simply remaining at the concept stage, to penetrate the consciousness and practices of local communities, engaging all, alike, clergy and laity.

[5] Patriarch Daniel, "Hope is born from faith and manifests itself through love," *Statement made during the XIII Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), July 15-21, 2009*, *Ziarul Lumina* July 16, 2009.

[6] Ion Bria, *Ortodoxia în Europa. Locul Spiritualității Române* (Iași: Trinitas Press, 1995), 155-156.

tion must come after a balanced analysis, based on concrete facts, not on momentary emotions, because any decision can affect entire communities.

On the other hand, those who speak in favor of or against the ecumenist phenomenon in general are themselves part of certain professional categories, with certain responsibilities, that cannot be overlooked.

In the case of the clergy, any religious manifestation that could harm Eastern doctrine, worship or tradition must be looked at very carefully because they – by their status – have the obligation to defend and protect them, although even they hold different opinions on these matters. Some clergy are more circumspect, or even refractory to any collaboration with representatives of other confessions, while others, on the contrary, are more open to dialogue and participation in common pastoral projects.[7] Both, however, can change their opinions, the former becoming more flexible, and the latter a bit more restrained.

The case of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is well-known. In the first part of his academic activity, he did not take part in ecumenical dialogue after his release from communist prisons (1964), an act preceded by the entry of the Romanian Orthodox Church into the CEB (1961). He later spoke in laudatory terms about the ecumenical movement, even becoming one of the prominent participants of the Romanian Orthodox school in numerous national and international ecumenical gatherings. Towards the end of his life, after the Revolution of December 1989, he again became a serious critic of ecumenism, in contrast to those previously published works in many articles and specialized studies.[8] If a legendary name of Orthodox theology such as Father Stăniloae had this double change of attitude, it should not be surprising that this phenomenon is also present among today's teachers, theologians and clergy.

In the case of the laity, things are different, and this is because, despite the good intentions they may have, they do not have specialized training and, moreover, they are subject to pressure from civil society that publicly campaigns for secularization, globalization and, in general, the desacralization of

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[7] For an exploration of the concept of "reception of ecumenism" from an Orthodox perspective; see Kallistos Ware, "Receptive Ecumenism. An Orthodox Perspective," *Louvain Studies* 1-2 (2008): 46-53. The author analyzes the reception of ecumenism in Orthodox circles starting from the conviction that it must include, above all, three fundamental elements, namely: the peace that prayer gives (which implies not isolation but fraternity), *metanoia* (repentance or regret for the committed sins) and the Trinitarian way of thinking and living.

[8] Pavel Aurel & Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai, *Adevăratul și Falsul Ecumenism* (Sibiu: "Lucian Blaga" University Press/Andreiana Press, 2010), 132.

public life. That is why they are more willing to dialogue and collaborate, often confusing social cooperation with religious work. This confused attitude comes from a certain ignorance and indifference of most members of today's society to the limits of religious and social or socio-religious experience. More concretely, those who support unlimited cooperation between Christians of various denominations (implying of course also the Churches or religious structures to which they belong) use ambiguous and inconsistent language. On the one hand, they want a total separation of Church and State, going as far as eliminating symbols and religious education from schools for fear of a so-called indoctrination, as if Christian morality harms the spiritual health of the people! On the other hand, although they declare themselves neutral from a religious point of view, they propose analyzing religious life and practices in Romania based on secular principles and concepts. This double measure comes, as I mentioned above, from ignorance and indifference, two major causes of the spiritual crisis faced not only by contemporary Romanian society but the world everywhere.

If we talk about *ignorance*, things are as simple as possible. During the communist regime, Romania went through an extended period of religious prohibition that left serious traces in the souls of people who were particularly Christian.

Those who today declare themselves Orthodox Christians but do not live in a Christian way confuse religious freedom with the possibility of selecting a fashionable faith. They no longer know anything about the history of the Orthodox Church and the role it played in preserving the unity of the people; they do not know anything about the role of Orthodoxy in the formation of the Romanian language and culture; they do not know anything about its role in the country's social and even economic development. In short, they do not understand the importance of knowing their history, their nation, whose genesis bears a Triadological imprint: faith, language and people.[9]

The ambiguity of this secularized thinking comes from the misconception that all the evil that man faces comes from outside himself, and he is unable to effectively oppose it. It is unfortunately ignored that the greatest dangers come from within. Man's soul is the seat of all actions that can destroy him, because he has changed the natural order of things. God is no longer present in a person's life, as was the case in popular Romanian Christianity, but remains somewhere in the immensity of a sky or as inaccessible transcen-

[9] Dan Puric, *Despre Omul Frumos* (Bucharest: Supergraph Press, 2009), 88.

dence. Contemporary Christianity leaves the impression that God no longer descends into the world to fulfill man's aspirations for eternity.[10] Yet, God is also waiting for a sign from us, which is unfortunately given less and less often. Ignorance does not fully explain unbelief, although it is a disease of the contemporary world, but strengthens it, giving it the tools by which man consciously or unconsciously distorts his goal in life. Patriarch Daniel said that we are facing *an indifference of the world towards the Church*, rather than simply unbelief,[11] which seems to be an increasingly clear truth for everyone.

Indifference is another disease of this society. It often hides behind *ignorance*. We often hear expressions like "I don't need to go to a Church," "I have a special relationship with God," or "I don't need intermediaries, saints or icons" from some of our colleagues or acquaintances who, nevertheless, declare themselves to be Orthodox Christians. I think that, despite this social optimism coming from a desire for so-called "European spiritual emancipation," they are rather experiencing a spiritual drama, which leads to a major identity crisis. A man without the conscious declaration of a religious identity is in a terrible vacuum. Due to this void in the soul and the inability to fill it with God's love, a human being oscillates between resignation and indifference. Therefore, there is a need for an ontological restoration of contemporary man in such a way that he rediscover the face of God within himself, whose reflection is visible in his fellow men. In other words, knowing the spiritual foundations of the other is the way by which man can more easily reach self-knowledge.

This small "theological-spiritual extrapolation" is welcome and clarifies some aspects of the personal dimension of ecumenism that often seems neglected in specialized discussions. Self-knowledge (or self-rediscovery) represents an ecumenical subject *par excellence* because it presupposes responsibility and exigency in interpersonal actions, which is the reverse of indifference and resignation. The same is true of self-love, which has nothing to do with biological narcissism, but rather means the condition of *re-friending* one's person.

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[10] Dumitru Popescu, "Vocaţia europeană a creştinismului românesc," in *Ortodoxia românească*, ed. by Nicolae Corneanu (Bucharest: Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, 1992), 203.

[11] Patriarch Daniel "Hope is born from faith and manifests itself through love," *Ziarul Lumina* July 16, 2009.

In the authentic Orthodox tradition, you cannot be a friend to someone if you cannot be a friend to yourself. Through this re-friending with your condition, with your race and faith, "you will think differently about yourself."[12] In other words, re-friending oneself involves not only befriending those who are similar, but also those who are different. Together, differences and the similarities lead to mutual ennobling and beautification. Our re-friending with *ourselves* and with *each other* should lead to another greater and more beautiful re-friending, namely*, re-friending with God*.[13] This is, in fact, our main goal, to return to our condition as Christians and confessors of Christ, *together*, regardless of denominational affiliation.

Therefore, I believe that the personalistic dimension of ecumenism should be given much more attention because it preceded any institutional initiative; it has always been present, in all places, and is at the heart of human history. Moreover, it is our organic need to show who we are and to understand ourselves through others. It is also a duty we have towards our supreme Creator who wants us all *to love each other and be one* (John 17:21).

THE ECUMENICAL DYNAMICS OF ROMANIAN ORTHODOXY

In the Romanian Orthodox Church, there are two major principles. Even though they are not recorded in an official document, they are part of its pastoral and missionary tradition and strategy.

The first refers to not being directly involved in social life, this being the responsibility of the trade unions. However, it is indirectly present through a significant number of social projects, some of them in partnership with other Churches, especially from abroad. They remain in the area of social support and solidarity and promote a social ecumenical spirit, and this help takes no account of the confession or faith of the person concerned, but of their needs. Likewise, the Orthodox Church considers that the involvement of its representatives in political life is an occasion for scandal and disturbance as the members of the Christian communities support parties with different ideologies. In other words, instead of creating a bridge between people, it ends up sowing suspicion and mistrust; instead of creating the premises of human solidarity, it contributes to social division and enmity. The direct involvement of clergy in politics is a profoundly anti-ecumenical action.

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[12] Puric, *Despre omul frumos*, 127-128.
[13] Ibidem, 128.

Therefore, in Romanian Orthodox theology, there is a general opinion that the Orthodox Church must remain in its "area" of competence, because its primary mission is man's spiritual rebirth, the formation of a solid religious consciousness, which can only be an ecumenical one.[14] This is because the greatest evangelical commandment is to "love one's neighbor." In other words, the formation of personalities capable of leading a permanent fight against individual egocentrism, hypocritical love, and ethnic and racial discrimination introduces us with certainty into a space of civilization with authentic ecumenism. Religious disorientation, contemporary man's apathy, ignorance and disinterest in the problems of a world in a state of spiritual collapse are the results of a religious concept that ignores the descent of God to earth. It thinks that God remains hidden and motionless in the sky. It is a bankrupt teaching that leads man to a state of total ignorance in relation to the reason for his existence. It is precisely here that we can talk about the European and ecumenical vocation of Romanian Christianity.[15]

In the Orthodox tradition, the evolution and development of society depends on the religious contribution of each member. An authentic religious life is the only way one can "analyze the carrier germ of selfishness"[16] that divides, not unites. It is what supports (founds) the freedom and particularity of each person and entire nations; the more authentic, the purer it is, the more transparent the face of God becomes in the world. In other words, the Church's presence in society must be prophetic and critical of all contemporary challenges, yet not through a pseudo-political attitude, but through a life of simplicity, asceticism, and moderation. This is because the goal of the Orthodox Christian life is to receive the Holy Spirit and share his gifts of "love, joy..." (Gal 5:22) that occurs in all people; it directly influences human relationships at the local and ecumenical levels.[17] The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives makes it easier for us to overcome human hostilities and social conflicts and contributes fundamentally to reconciliation, understanding and communication among people.

Concretely, Romanian Orthodox Christianity shows that the only viable way through which contemporary man can transform the torturous attitude of distance towards God into the fullness of life surpassing nature, which

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[14] Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Ortodoxia şi problemele lumii contemporane*, transl. by de Gabriel Mândrilă and Constantin Coman (Bucharest: Bizantina Press, 2003), 234.

[15] Popescu, "Vocația europeană a creștinismului românesc," 203-204.

[16] Yannoulatos, *Ortodoxia şi problemele lumii contemporane*, 232.

[17] Yannoulatos, *Ortodoxia şi problemele lumii contemporane*, 235.

brings him inner peace and responsibility towards others, is God's *dynamic descent* into the world. By virtue of God's dynamic descent into the depths of the human being, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, man has the possibility not only to control his passions, but above all to turn selfishness into an unconditional love for God and his fellow man. This is how man is enlivened by the presence and power of God; he no longer thinks only of himself, but also of his neighbor with kindness and love.[18] This is the *man of humanity*, as our popular tradition states, or the *beautiful man*.[19] He is, without a doubt, also an *ecumenical man* because he does not live simply for himself, but *he lives life* through the love he shows towards his fellow men.

The second principle concerns the defense of Christian teaching in the form and content that the ecumenical councils left to us. The Orthodox Church has not changed any of the decisions of these synods, nor from patristic tradition. This is why every time a possible change appears on the horizon, even if it is not implemented, the Orthodox Christian world is faced with a certain anxiety, which, in some places, can turn into a real revolt against Church leaders. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church in general and the Romanian one in particular do not exclude collaboration with other Churches.

The dynamics of the Orthodox world require a rethinking of inter-church and inter-Christian relations. In this sense, the inclusion of the theme, *the Orthodox Church's relations with the entire Christian world*, on the agenda of the great synod in Crete, a subject that caused a lot of confusion among clergy and practicing Orthodox believers in Romania, should be seen.

Although the document regarding the involvement of the Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement adopted in Crete has a fairly balanced content, the interpretations of some clergy, especially from the monastic world (but also including secular) are irrational and illogical. The concrete reality is replaced by an imaginary one, where natural collaboration with other Christians, of another denomination, is considered "treason."

There were several anti-ecumenical demonstrations during and after the end of the work of the synod in Crete, the protestors claiming in a crooked logic that the participation of the representatives of Romanian Orthodoxy constitutes a tragic moment in the history of the Church because old dogmas are being altered and new ones are being proclaimed, among which is

[18] Popescu, "Vocația europeană a creștinismului românesc," 204.
[19] Puric, *Despre omul frumos*, 129.

ecumenism. It is, without a doubt, a one-sided interpretation that is not based on credible arguments, but on "theological inventions" intended to cause confusion and misunderstandings among believers. The Church's response came from several directions, either directly through the statements of some "officials," even starting with Patriarch Daniel, the leader of the Romanian Orthodox clergy delegation at the synod, or indirectly, through the organization of meetings, conferences, interviews, or special publications. In the face of the aggressiveness of the challengers, who, in the absence of evidence to support their views, resorted to slander and willful distortions of reality, the Church's response was clear, lucid and quite reassuring.

The presence of the patriarch and the other hierarchs at the synod and the discussion of Orthodoxy's relations with other Churches and religious structures does not affect one's faith, because dialogue does not alter its identity, but on the contrary, illuminates and highlights it. The most eloquent example is the fact that the majority of Romanian Orthodox believers in the diaspora, led by their priests, pray in *locasuri* (spaces) belonging to other Churches, without renouncing their own faith.[20] On the contrary, it is a sign of cooperation among and the desire of all Christians to remain in touch with each other and testify to the same unique Christ, each according to his liturgical tradition. Even if some aspects of the decisions of the synod in Crete triggered more heated discussions, theological conferences were organized during which an attempt was made to clarify and explain them. Put differently, to mitigate any negative effects on clergy and Orthodox Christian communities, to prevent the escalation of internal disturbances, but also to provide a platform for a correct understanding of how the discussions took place, various documents were adopted, an orthodox theological vision regarding ecumenical collaborations and cooperations with other Churches took shape, a well-planned program of conferences and debates was needed, including a clear public agenda, supported by theologians and professors of theology with specialized training. On the other hand, it was mentioned that all the documents issued by the Synod can be improved during future Pan-

[20] Patriarch Daniel states very clearly that: "We have many churches that do not have their own place of worship (in the diaspora n.a.), and then they use Roman Catholic or Protestant churches as a loan for a while, without creating confusion about the faith. This shows that, from the point of view of practical organization of pastoral care, we need to show that we can be orthodox without being fanatics, we can be faithful, but showing working faith through love," https://basilica.ro/patriarhul-daniel-despre-sfantul-si-marele-sinod-este-foarte-important-sa-mentinem-comuniunea-euharistica-chiar-daca-a vem-uneori-pozitii-diferite, accessed: 10 October, 2023.

Orthodox meetings,[21] especially since in Crete, for various reasons, four important Orthodox Churches did not participate in the work of the synod.[22]

In a word, any good intention, as was the convening of this synod, despite a fairly "proper" agenda, because it did not include extremely important themes, such as the standardization of the calendar of the Easter holidays, or the respect of the jurisdictional limits of each individual Orthodox Church, created numerous confusions among clerics and believers and produced a series of difficulties, simply because some documents were associated with ecumenism and the ecumenical movement. This is unmistakable evidence that this subject has remained quite sensitive for practicing Christians. Therefore, there is a need for a "church policy" capable of dispelling doubts and strengthening the faith of righteous people in the Church and its official representatives.

On the other hand, strengthening ecumenical relations cannot be done through emotional gestures and super-optimistic statements, but through a coherent and responsible attitude. In this sense, we can affirm without any reservation that Romanian Orthodoxy is quite flexible and open to dialogue with the other Churches, without fear that through cooperation it would lose some of its identity. The most convenient example is given by its participation in various ecumenical religious services performed on the occasion of religious, scientific and cultural events, for example: the General Sessions of the World Council of Churches, the Conferences of the European Churches, and other international conferences or symposia with themes of this kind. The same is not the case when it comes to the Holy Mysteries of the Church, which involve a relativization of the teaching at the doctrinal, liturgical, and canonical levels. Such gestures of so-called "intercommunion" not only blur the differences, but also weaken the unity of faith, the only basis for possible restoration of communion between different Churches. Regarding the Holy

[21] See Patriciu Vlaicu & Răzvan Perșa, eds, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod – eveniment eshatologic sau normalitatea canonică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2028), 8.

[22] Antiochian Orthodox Church (http://orthochristian.com/94045.html, accessed: 20 September, 2023); Russian Orthodox Church (https://mospat.ru/en/2016/06/13/news132897/, accessed: 20 September, 2023); Bulgarian Orthodox Church (https://sofiaglobe.com/2016/06/01/bulgarian-orthodox-church-withdraws-from-pan-orthodox-council-in-crete/, accessed: 20 September, 2023); Georgian Orthodox Church (https://orthochristian.com/93902.html, accessed: 15 September, 2023): See the comments in Vlaicu, Perșa, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod*, 428-429, 433-435, 438-439, 444-446; Pavel, Buda, "Prima poziție oficială a Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Ruse față de sinodul din Creta. Câteva comentarii preliminare pe marginea acesteia," *Revista Teologică* 4(2017): 304-308.

Eucharist, we must return to the fundamental principle of Orthodox ecclesiology, implying Orthodox ecumenism, according to which "the Holy Eucharist is not a means or a stage towards Christian ecclesial unity, but the most intense manifestation of the unity of the Church, its coronation."[23]

Finally, I believe it is fair to recall that, despite a certain rigidity in keeping intact the fundamental elements of its faith, the Orthodox Church does not seek to build and strengthen its unity and integrity by destroying the unity and integrity of other Churches. Moreover, the principle on which its entire activity is based excludes proselytism and promotes the exploration of common themes, capable of training for both local and universal ecumenism.[24]

CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian Orthodox Church is open to inter-confessional dialogue, as long as it takes place with responsibility and fairness, within the horizon of everyone's expectations: the unity of faith. At the same time, however, we must note the fact that "a process of separation consumed over so many centuries cannot suddenly metamorphose into union. The will for unity, the love of unity, which Romanian Orthodoxy evokes as the basis of the beginning of the union, remains essential."[25] At the same time, there is a need for a balanced religious education that allows those interested to discover the beauty of Orthodoxy and its ecumenical vocation. Romanian Orthodoxy upholds ecumenism that excludes proselytizing forms and the dominance and supremacy tendencies of any particular Church. It is a demanding ecumenism in which the models of possible Christian unity must not in any way affect the theological purity of Orthodox principles.

The former metropolitan of Transylvania, Antonie Plămădeală, sums up this ecumenical vision of the Romanian Orthodox Church very precisely when he states: "Each denomination preserves its identity, but respects the others in the hope of union. Christians of any denomination can pray together and take part in each other's services, with the freedom to give or receive

[23] Patriarch Daniel, "Let us preserve the unity of faith and orthodox canonical discipline, but also peace between cults," *Ziarul Lumina* July 10, 2009.

[24] Bria, *Ortodoxia în Europa. Locul Spiritualității Române*, 133-35.

[25] Constantin Galeriu, "Sinteză a teologiei ortodoxe române contemporane," in *Ortodoxia românească*, 257.

Holy Communion, as the Church, their faith and their conscience allow them. And… that's it. It's not much, but it's more than nothing and more than could be done before."[26]

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KRÓTKI KOMENTARZ O EKUMENIZMIE I JEGO „RECEPCJA" W PRAWOSŁAWIU RUMUŃSKIM

Abstrakt

Ekumenizm jest tematem hojnym i pełnym wyzwań, wywołującym przez lata całkowicie różne opinie, od wrogości i zaciętej krytyki, do postaw przychylnych, a nawet entuzjastycznych. W pierwszej części tego artykułu chcę nawiązać do trudności w rozumieniu ruchu ekumenicznego i jego roli w stanowieniu relacji współpracy między chrześcijanami różnych wyznań w Rumunii, a także o instytucjonalnym i personalistycznym wymiarze ekumenizmu. W drugiej odnoszę się do dynamiki ekumenicznej w prawosławiu rumuńskim (włącznie ze zniekształconą recepcją decyzji Świętego i Wielkiego Synodu na Krecie w 2016 r.), cechującej się otwartością Kościoła na dialog, indyferentnością albo ignorancją współczesnego społeczeństwa odnoszącą się do zagadnień religijnych, ale też koniecznością Bożej obecności w świecie, dającej jedyną pewność, że możliwe jest pojednanie, zrozumienie, współpraca i komunikacja między ludźmi różnych przekonań, narodowości, kultur i tradycji.

Słowa kluczowe: chrześcijaństwo; ekumenizm; prawosławie; społeczeństwo; dialog; duchowni; świeccy.