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Arguments and Assets of Orthodoxy in Contemporary Europe

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Abstract

The cultural complexity of the European geopolitical space comes with a number of new perspectives on the axiological system on which the societies that inhabit it are founded, and this has become an indisputable part of our daily reality. The sensitive points on the daily agenda are just as many chapters of ethical, moral and, no less important, religious debates. If European civilization and modernity are creations, par excellence, of Christianity and remain a mark in the history of Christianity, the mental structures, the anthropological paradigm, the political approach and everyday life are constantly detached from the recipe of christian living. In this context, it is natural and constructive to ask whether Christianity can still offer solutions to a world that manufactures synthetic solutions and what could be the strengths of Orthodoxy so that it, as a depository of a living tradition, can be an offerer today.

Keywords

Orthodoxy, Churches, unity, divine-humanity, solidarity, subsidiarity, interreligious dialogue.

I. Introduction

“... the trust and expectations of the majority of people are directed towards religion. Religion is a support in times of profound change in the conditions of people’s lives. Religion remained the motivational resource for behaviors in difficult situations. In the European civilization in which we live, solutions are once again expected from the Judeo-Christian tradition”¹.

Religious nationalism, primary anti-Westernism, obscurantist integrism, are these the marks of an Orthodoxy whose integration into the European construction is already a given, despite the reluctance that was massively pulsating in recent consciousness? Rejecting this caricature of Orthodoxy, it is not difficult to recognize that, unfortunately, there are not a few Orthodox who spread such an image, making themselves complicit in a serious structural distortion. In this sense, the geopolitical context puts an ideological, moral, social, canonical and jurisdictional pressure on the validity of the paradigm of an authentic Orthodoxy, developed organically from the incarnate Logos, consistent with a cause that transcends history, without abstracting from it. One of the voices most entitled to express himself, from within the Church, on this subject, is that of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I:

“It would not be possible for all churches not to condemn violence, war. The Russian church disappointed us. I did not want the Church of Russia and Brother Patriarch Kirill to be this tragic exception. I do not know how he can justify himself in his conscience. ... I expected Brother Kirill to stand up to this crucial, historic moment. If needed, to sacrifice his throne, to tell Putin, «Mr. President, I can not agree with you, I resign»”².

¹ Andrei MARGA, *Religia în era globalizării*, Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 9.

² Renee MALTEZOU, *Orthodox spiritual leader says Russian church has ‘disappointed us’ over Ukraine*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/orthodox-spiritual-leader-says-russian-church-has-disappointed-us-over-ukraine-2022-05-25/> (accessed on 28.02.2023).

Appeals issued in the past have the force to draw, even today, the guidelines. An international ecumenical meeting on Europe after the Kosovo crisis was organized in Oslo by the Conference of European Churches (K.E.K.). The joint final document states that the Kosovo crisis has once again demonstrated the need to make Europe “a unified body”³. Regretting the old European antagonisms, between those who belong to the tradition of Eastern Christianity and those who stick to the Latin tradition exploited throughout this conflict, the participants in the meeting wanted to emphasize that “Orthodox and Western traditions are two lungs of the same European body. The future of Europe depends on the ability of peoples to live together, shoulder to shoulder with the same obligations”⁴. I would appeal, relying on the book of everyday realism, to the need to virtually widen the perimeter of Europe to think, inclusively, the need of the whole world to assume a set of cohesive and irenic responsibilities; or, for this project, Orthodoxy has more than adequate tools and know-how.

II. Unity according to the model of the Trinity

The Orthodox Church wants each of the sister Churches that compose it to live from its own life, with its language and tradition, unity and diversity in the light of the One Trinity. This inspired vision should constitute Orthodoxy’s contribution to the project of a united Europe, whose voice is heard in a complex polyphony. The speech of the former president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, before the members of the European Parliament, is more than suggestive:

“It seems to me that at the balance between generations, Europe has the task of leading a determined reflection on the uncertainty of its contribution to the world, to understand that we have

³ *Le Service Orthodoxe de Presse (SOP)*, Nr. 243, December 1999, p. 12, [https://fraternite-orthodoxe.eu/bis/SOP/collection%20mensuelle/SOP-1999%20\(234-243\).pdf](https://fraternite-orthodoxe.eu/bis/SOP/collection%20mensuelle/SOP-1999%20(234-243).pdf) (accessed on 28.02.2023).

⁴ *Le Service Orthodoxe de Presse (SOP)*, Nr. 243, December 1999, p. 12, [https://fraternite-orthodoxe.eu/bis/SOP/collection%20mensuelle/SOP-1999%20\(234-243\).pdf](https://fraternite-orthodoxe.eu/bis/SOP/collection%20mensuelle/SOP-1999%20(234-243).pdf) (accessed on 28.02.2023).

brought to the world's attention not only Human Rights but that we have also shown them and The Holocaust, that we not only inspired the realization of the industrial revolution and then that of computer science, but that we also imposed the disfigurement of nature in the name of material wealth, the looting of resources and the pollution of the atmosphere. It is about understanding that we have certainly opened the way to an immense development of science and technology, but we have done so at a very high price: that of removing any very important and very complex human experiences that formed over several millennia. Europe must start with itself. In accordance with the best of the spiritual traditions, it must respect the higher cosmic order that surpasses us and also the moral order as a consequence of it. Humility, kindness, politeness, respect for what we do not understand, the deep feeling of solidarity with others, respect for all otherness, the will to make sacrifices or good deeds that only eternity will reward, this eternity that observes us, quietly, through our conscience - here are so many values that could and should be the European construction program. The great mission that awaits Europe would be to try to show, through its very existence, that it is possible to oppose the great danger that its civilization full of contradictions is looming over the world”⁵.

Today, the nucleus of spiritual energy whose burst made possible the emergence of modernity is being exhausted. Christians can, with humble strength, provoke, determine a certain meaning, a certain fire, a certain light. If they don't do it, if they don't know how to find their place in the secularized society, the consequence will be its abandonment in the hands of pseudo-religions.

In contemporary European society, most often, silence reigns over God. In many circles it has become inappropriate, almost obscene, to talk about God. It has been said: Modesty regarding God has replaced modesty regarding sex. And even more than modesty, a real inhibition: what our

⁵ <https://www.nistea.com/teologie/locul-bisericii-ortodoxe-in-constructia-europeana/> 576 (accessed March 1, 2023).

ascetics call oblivion - a kind of spiritual sleep, which can be very agitated, and which media techniques, in moments of rest, fill with prefabricated dreams.

The attitude of the faithful European, in this opacity of silence, is undoubtedly that of refusing to make faith an ideology; it is the behavior of the one who wants to be different, with humility, to let it be understood that nothingness is not the last word; it is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, the attempt to deepen people in existence, through an authentic culture. In other words, to wake them up; to anguish and amazement, to existence as an interrogation.

There is no doubt that sacred societies thought too much of God against man. Does Christian personalism have another origin? This Trinitarian, that is, ecclesial, approach to man and the relationships between people could not overcome the opposition between the individual and solidarity - an opposition that tortures contemporary society -, could it not become the ferment of history, the impetus of the future, reconciling the unification of humanity with the identity reaffirmed by each person and each culture? Could the Christian conception of man break through contemporary atomism, delivering the solutions? The answer is an affirmative one, Christianity and Orthodoxy being able to find ways out of what we call "Atomistic society, ... voluntary association of limited interests ... [in which] each remains alien to the others, but can meet with the others"⁶. Tarkovsky, commenting on the luminous appearance of the icon of the Trinity, at the end of his film about Andrei Rublev, writes: "Here at last is the Trinity, great, serene, filled with a rush of joy from which human brotherhood springs. The concrete division into one and three, and the triple unity into one offers a rich perspective for the future still scattered in centuries"⁷.

II.1. Divino-humanity: argument of solidarity

We could call the Incarnation as the effort to enlighten culture and society through the brilliance of liturgical and spiritual life, prolonged in

⁶ Mircea VULCĂNESCU, „Creștinul în lumea modernă”, in: Ioan I. ICĂ JR, Germano MARANI, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 82.

⁷ Olivier CLEMENT, *Contacts*, Nr.144/1988.

the inventive love of God, who becomes man. This is where the theme of divine-humanity comes into play. Society has often thought of God against man, but God and man do not oppose each other, but on the contrary: they unite and communicate in Christ without separation and without confusion. Divino-humanity is the space of the Holy Spirit and the creative freedom of people.

At the same time, divine-humanity will have to illuminate differently the acquisitions and researches of modern humanism. As Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch said in a conference held at the Sorbonne⁸, we go even further than Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. We go further than Marx because there are no infrastructures and superstructures, but all the structures of history act on each other with no other possible synthesis than that, unconceptualizable, of the person embedded in the earth and in the sky at the same time. We go further than Nietzsche because we met the “Dancing God” on the frescoes of the Chora chapel in Constantinople: body of lightning leaping to bring Adam and Eve, you and me, out of the graves, and to restore man’s vocation as a created creator. We go further than Freud because asceticism teaches us to release desire from needs and to “direct it to its origin”, as Saint Gregory Palamas says. Only the opening of the heart, from its abyss of light, so long unconscious, can offer desire an infinite space, the space of the Resurrection. Otherwise, hitting the wall of nothingness, it turns into a death drive.

Understanding the above, we only know that the Christianity of the 21st century, and especially the Orthodox Church, has a huge number of martyrs - not forgetting, so close to Athos, the “white martyrdom” of the monks -, and that here is a kernel of energy capable, if it will not be diverted by the contemporary intelligence, but fertilizes it, capable of upsetting History.

II.2. Orthodoxy and the Christian Churches in “Unification Europe” (*A soul for Europe*)

In 1992, Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, launched the “Let’s give Europe a soul” program. Beyond words, the

⁸ O. CLEMENT, *Contacts*, Nr.144/1988.

message that was intended to be transmitted could sound like this: If in the next decade Europe will not have “a soul”, a spirituality of its own, the game of true unification will be lost. For the first time since the beginning of the European construction, the support of the European Churches was openly requested, implicitly recognizing the existence of a connection between the territory of the community and Christianity. Even if Mr. Delors justifies his speech in a key of secular understanding, the message is still obvious: “I said at one point that Europe needs a soul. This may have shocked some religious people, but I said this in the secular sense of the word. Even today, Europe needs a soul”⁹.

Our call is to at least find the way to an answer to the following question: “Can Orthodoxy contribute to the affirmation of a European spiritual identity?” We can answer this question only if we look at the spiritual-cultural landscape of the “other Europe”, which is in a feverish search for a coherent answer to balance the European “religious balance”:

“From this point of view, the Orthodox Church can be a chance, a remedy for a global society marked by individualism and the marginalization of religious institutions. Religious memory, tradition, so important to Orthodoxy, is an integral part of European collective memory”¹⁰.

In continuation of the ideas expressed previously, it must be said that a possible positive evolution does not depend only on the Orthodox Churches, but also on the Western attitude towards Orthodoxy, perceived for a long time beyond the fault, as part of a different area of civilization. Prejudices of all kinds, cultural stereotypes, the choice of a minimalist way of reasoning in the face of its complexity, are present not only in most Western media references but also in pretentious analyzes of some sociologists of religions. All these only project the idea that the Orthodox space is a “neighbor”, a different civilization from the European, Catholic or

⁹ Jacques DELORS, *Europa are nevoie de un suflet*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/headlines/> (accessed March 1, 2023)

¹⁰ Mirel BĂNICĂ, “Un suflet pentru Europa. Dimensiunea ortodoxă”, in: *Dilema Veche*, Anul I, Nr.43, 5-11 November 2004, p. 12.

Protestant one. Maintaining the idea of difference and symbolic exclusion based on religion can have catastrophic results in the future. Father Dumitru Stăniloae emphasized this aspect, of the need for a complex, uninhibited vision of the cultural and religious spectrum of Europe: “Europe is a symphony and not a homophonic song”¹¹.

The need for a “soul of Europe” resides, among other things, in the fact that the political map of Europe is not identical to its cultural and spiritual map. As I said, Europe needs the revival of its spiritual valences, a “recivilization” or a new Christianization in the tone of the needs of this millennium. Either way, the European Churches can make a considerable contribution to this project: “At the level of a well-articulated local ecumenism, the Churches and Christian denominations can (re)build the foundation of our continent threatened by amnesia”¹².

It is wise to remember that the project of European unification cannot be left only in the hands of politicians, but the Churches themselves have an important role, directly proportional to the responsibility of the image of the current European society:

“The convulsions of Europe in the last decade of the last century were nourished not only by the abominable deeds of some local dictators like Milosevic ... but also by the arrogance of the Western European man and, unfortunately, of the Christian Churches. ... The failures in the recent history of Europe are not only the result of the inability to coordinate the political will of the continent’s peoples, but also of confessional selfishness. This is how, without giving justice to geopolitical theories, we must still seriously and honestly ask ourselves the question regarding the spiritual unity of our continent. In front of the Copenhagen decision, we have to ask ourselves whether, this time too, the political project takes precedence over the ecumenical one”¹³.

¹¹ M. BĂNICĂ, “Un suflet pentru Europa...”, p. 12.

¹² Radu PREDA, “Revoluția europeană și Bisericile”, in: *Renașterea*, Nr. 1/2003, p.3.

¹³ R. PREDA, “Revoluția europeană și Bisericile”, p.3.

As an argument to what has just been said, let us remember that the Catholic Church of Germany will proclaim, through the voice of Cardinal Lehmann, the bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO as a “just war”. Moreover, when the Orthodox bishop of the Kosovo region was waiting at the gates of Rambouillet to expose the Serbian Church’s plan for multi-ethnic coexistence, no representative of any other Church will express solidarity with him. Today, as I mentioned at the beginning of this text, an Orthodox religious leader is politically undermining the Gospel and life. Returning to the exhortation of the former president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, to give a soul to Europe, we remind you that the economy alone cannot guarantee the unity of the European architecture. Therefore, “the search for an identity guarantee, something unaccountable, without interest and debts, has become a concern of strategic rank”¹⁴.

If the Catholic and Protestant Churches are obliged to repair the damage caused by the confessional and ideological division of Western Europe, surely their approach cannot avoid Orthodoxy, which has proven to be the bearer of an integrative vocation. This is of real use all the more since European unity is a continuous process that requires the synergy of several actors. Therefore, the vision of the “two lungs” or the “soul for Europe” is clear evidence that Western Europe feels the need for a closer relationship with Eastern Europe and therefore with Orthodoxy.

“Abandoning its defensive attitude, Orthodoxy can today become a powerful river of life, removing obstacles from the way, balancing certain opposites and leading its own believers, and together with them Christians of other confessions, to the experience of Pentecost, to the experience of unity in complementarity and diversity”¹⁵.

So far, we can affirm that the Orthodoxy of Europe of the third millennium brings the continent the roundness it needs and the lack of which it has suffered, consciously or not, for almost a thousand years. The

¹⁴ Radu PREDA, “Un suflet pentru Europa”, in: *Renașterea*, Nr. 5/2000, p. 3.

¹⁵ Georges LEMOPOULOS, “Unde se termină Ortodoxia”, in: *Service Orthodoxe de Presse*, Nr. 244, January 2000, pp. 25-26.

Europe of the third millennium needs unity, a unitary spiritual profile, a soul of its own. United Europe has been, from the beginning and until today, the answer given to barbarism, terror and human tragedies, and it must remain so; standard of humanity capable of generating valid models of coexistence. The positive answer to imperialisms and nationalisms was and is the creation of an ecumenically and politically united Europe based on a new version of capitalism and market economy and a subsidiary democratic state. As father Ioan Ică said,

“The Euro-Atlantic integration [thus also the process of European unification] is a chance and a challenge for all the Christian Churches and religions of Europe. It asks them to overcome selfishness and secular rivalries, a reassurance of their spiritual resources and their unifying potential through the awareness of the complementarity of traditions, of the universalization of their openness in accordance with the culture of self-giving and communion that makes up the very essence of the Gospel never sufficiently fruitful in the life of Christians and Churches. We are certain that, as Hannah Arendt said, the opposite of violence is not non-violence, but the human community, free and solidary, a plural and diverse human community, but, at the same time, unified and integrated”¹⁶.

Under these conditions, there is even talk of a religious refueling of the West, not in the form of syncretism, but of regaining an objective vision of human society through the prism of man’s transcendental vocation. Orthodoxy can offer these coordinates to a world that does not regard Christianity in the manner of a “Consumer Gospel”, the understanding that the West currently has on the Christian line, “A Gospel for devout consumers”. The crusading mentality must be eliminated and the paradigm of unity in diversity reconfigured. “Orthodox is by nature open, quiet, serene, knows how to convey, talk to others, and through this Orthodoxy

¹⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan Ică, “Biserica și valorile euro-atlantice”, in: *Renașterea*, Nr. 6/2002, p. 2.

can be for the next century, for Europe and for the world, a hope of salvation”¹⁷.

III. Interreligious dialogue – spiritual dimension of the European unification process

“The Christian churches are ready to intervene for a united Europe and to be aware again of the importance of Christian spirituality for the new structure of Europe. Our churches and peoples belong to Europe and can make their specific contribution to the new structuring of our continent”¹⁸.

III.1. Interreligious dialogue from the Orthodox Church perspective

From the Orthodox point of view, the first coordinate of ecumenism is the union of all Christian Churches in the integrity of the apostolic teaching testified by the undivided Church from the beginning. The institutional nature of the Church consists not so much in jurisdiction, chancelleries, orders and reports, but predominantly in the communication of grace and in the maintenance of the life of communion through the same Mysteries, and in the special ministry, recognized by all those who administer them. Ecumenism understood from the embrace of all divine or human values, or from the actualization of all human values in the light of Christ by each Christian, in a unity in diversity, must be open to all humanity. This necessity is, in particular, in accordance with two circumstances: God is also active beyond the borders of visible Christianity, and by learning from God’s work, in a world that is becoming more and more unified in its variety, the Churches can also approach their unity in variety.

Restoring the visible unity of the Christian Church has always been an active concern of Orthodoxy, the Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarch

¹⁷ Serafim JOANTĂ, Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan of Germany and Central Europe, “În secolul ce urmează, Ortodoxia poate fi, pentru Europa și pentru lume, o nădejde de salvare”, in: *Filocalia*, supplement to *Renașterea* magazine, Nr. 1, January 2001, p.2.

¹⁸ Pr. Lect. Constantin PĂTULEANU, “Dialogul teologic bilateral dintre EKD și BOR, Glosar VIII, București, 3-8 iulie 1998”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, CXVI (1988) 7-12, p. 145.

Joachim III, of May 30, 1902, being a suggestive example for the way in which the dialogue with the heterodox is perceived: the sine qua non condition is that the holy doctrine that Christ gave us to be kept unchanged, unmixed, undivided and unseparated, as the Saints and God-bearing Fathers decided in the ecumenical councils. What Patriarch Joachim III proposed was the establishment of a federation of churches following the model of the League of Nations, being convinced that, “in addition to the common benefits expected from mutual exchanges, the great moral strength of the holy Orthodox Church of Christ can be shown yet another given to the world; for its source is the possession of unchanging truth, and its strong support is the unshakable unity of the local Churches”¹⁹. Father Dumitru Stăniloae saw ecumenism as a state, a reality in which the Holy Spirit urges the Churches to love each other because their division was not only an open conflict but also a lack of love and, in the same direction of thought, Patriarch Ignatius the IV of Antioch shows that at the origin of every division there is also a lack of love.

The Orthodox Church understands that the main obstacles to achieving a viable ecumenism today are the following: secularization, which manifests itself as relativism regarding Christian doctrine and morals, regarding the ultimate questions of existence, in a context of religious, cultural and ethnic pluralism; radical confessionalism and religious fundamentalism that come from the fear that through dialogue and cooperation with others one loses one's own identity and integrity; the aggressive proselytizing of sects, which use the economic crisis as an opportunity to convert people. As the Patriarch Daniel also affirmed,

“In fact, there is not a crisis of true [spiritual] ecumenism today, but a crisis of superficial and secularized ecumenism. Ecumenism cannot be replaced today by confessional hatred or religious wars, by isolation or arrogance, because the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to unity and love towards our brothers and sisters. Today's ecumenism must be renewed through a deep and existential conversion to Christ and through

¹⁹ *Enciclica Patriarhală și Sinodală a Patriarhiei Ecumenice din anul 1902*, <https://lumea-ortodoxa.ro/index.html?p=2196.html> (accessed on March 02, 2023).

a stronger spirituality, spirituality through which then comes hope and strength in our efforts for communion and cooperation in our divided world”²⁰.

Regarding the Orthodox position, the message sent by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, on the occasion of his visit to Romania in 1999, covers the palette and scope of the dialogue: the dimension of love and sacrifice, and not of domination and power. The principle that must reign is that of equality and respect for peoples and cultural tradition.

“If Western Europe wants to get out of the spiritual impasse in which it finds itself today, it must return to its source and strengthen its ties with God and His creation, instead of falling into pride and an attitude of superiority. ... We, the Orthodox bishops, assure the Catholic and Protestant brothers that our Church has no intention of breaking fraternal relations with them”²¹.

III.2. Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church

Within the relations with the Orthodox Churches, two major elements should be mentioned as representative of the attitude of the recent past. First: on December 7, 1965, in two simultaneous ceremonies, in the Vatican and in Constantinople, the anathemas between the two Churches, caused by the Great Schism of 1054, were lifted. Second: between May 7-9, 1999, the Sovereign Pontiff, in person Pope John Paul II visits a predominantly Orthodox country for the first time in history²². On November 30, 1979,

²⁰ IPS DANIEL, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, “Ideal și criză în Mișcarea ecumenică. Ecumenism spiritual și ecumenism secularizat”, in: *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, XI (1999) 218-219, January 31, pp. 1-2.

²¹ The Ecumenical Patriarch BARTOLOMEU I, “Biserica Ortodoxă și Europa contemporană, Speech at the opening of the academic year, București”, in: *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, X (1999) 236, November 15, p. 2.

²² Father Patriarch Teoctist affirmed on this occasion that: “This meeting is nothing but the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit”. Text taken from: “O întâlnire sub semnul harului”, in: *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, XI (1999) 226-227, June 1, p. 1.

under the sign of the first event, Patriarch Dimitrios I announced, in Constantinople, that an Orthodox-Roman-Catholic Commission was established for the dialogue between the Churches²³. The international joint commission for theological dialogue was made up of 28 Orthodox (two from each Church) and the same number of Catholics. Until the 6th session of the Dialogue (June 1990, Freising, Germany) the work of the Commission was going quite well.

III.2.1. The *Eastern-Catholic* problem

The political changes in Eastern Europe in the 1989s reinstated the former Greek Catholic Church, now called, in Vatican documents, the Eastern Catholic Church. Reviving this Church and regaining its right to exist, the Orthodox Churches interpreted that this reintegration is done in many places abusively, not taking into account the norms of dialogue, established until then, between the two Churches. The dialogue commission mentioned above met, with great difficulty, in its 7th session, in 1993, at the Balamad Monastery in Lebanon, where it developed a document of great importance regarding the united issue, called the “Balamad Document”. This document bilaterally assumes that the unions are not a third Church but are integrated into the Roman Catholic Church (art. 3 and 16), and the conclusion of the meeting was the declaration of the fact that uniatism cannot constitute a model and a method of union between these Churches (art. 2, 4 and 12), but it is necessary to find other methods to achieve unity²⁴. The role of the Church in public life and the retrocession of church properties raised controversies in Romanian society after 1989. The retrocessions led to strained relations between the B.O.R. with the Greek Catholic Church, which requested the return of all the patrimony owned by it before the communists came to power, possessions that had been confiscated by the communist regime. This type of restitution was

²³ Hans SCHWARTZ, *One Lord and One Church. Wishful Thinking and Hard Realities*, Myriobiblos, The Etext Virtual Lybrary of the Church of Greece, 1992, p. 2 <http://www.myriobiblos.gr/index.htm> (accessed 28 February 2023).

²⁴ IPS ANTONIE, Metropolitan of Ardeal, “Participări ale delegațiilor Bisericii Ortodoxe Române la reuniuni ecumenice: Dialogul dintre Biserica Ortodoxă și Biserica Romano-Catolică cu privire la uniatism”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, CXI (1993) 3-4, p.43.

known as *restitutio in integrum*²⁵. On December 31, 1989, the National Salvation Council repeals decree 358/1948, and the United Church enters into legality. On January 29, 1990, in Cluj, Metropolitan Alexandru Todea, together with bishops Ioan Ploscaru, Terțulian Langa, Vasile Hossu and Lucian Mureșan, formulated a request to the Ministry of Religion, requesting *restitutio in integrum*, i.e. the entry into possession of all his assets, confiscated by the communist regime: churches, parish houses, cathedrals, seminaries, chancelleries, bishops' residences²⁶.

Although it had been proposed to condition these retrocessions on the criteria of the community as the main and legitimate beneficiary, the Greek Catholic Church had initially refused to accept this, pleading for the retrocession of all the churches that had previously belonged to it before the communists came to power. It thus requests the Ministry of Cults to publish an act by which it communicates the *restitutio in integrum* of its possessions in the five dioceses: Blaj, Oradea, Lugoj, Cluj, Baia-Mare and the Vicariate of the Archdiocese of Blaj, with its center in Bucharest and which included 27 parishes²⁷.

In the years that followed, especially in the period 1993-1994, several steps were taken in addition to the president of that period, Ion Iliescu, in addition to Ovidiu Gherman (President of the Senate), Adrian Năstase (President of the Chamber of Deputies) and Nicolae Văcăroiu (Prim - Government Minister). For this purpose, a series of requests are addressed and lists of signatures are collected for the return of all Greek-Catholic places of worship. The Greek-Catholics request the Prime Minister to propose to the Romanian Parliament the adoption of a memorandum bill, which also provides for the retrocession of the assets and institutions of the United Romanian Church, up to December 1, 1948. If, in a locality there is only one church and believers of both denominations (Orthodox and Greek-Catholic), the religious services in that church were to be held alternately, through a mutually agreed program²⁸. Another requirement was

²⁵ Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Biserica în mers. Convorbiri cu presa 1995-1998*, Vol. II, Editura Arhiepiscopia Sibiului, Sibiu, 1999, p. 119.

²⁶ Anton MOISIN, *Mărturiile prigoanei contra Bisericii Române Unite cu Roma, Greco-Catolice, între anii 1990-1995*, Editura Polsib, Sibiu, 1995, p. 99.

²⁷ Anton MOISIN, *Mărturiile prigoanei contra Bisericii Române Unite cu Roma...*, p. 100.

²⁸ Anton MOISIN, *Mărturiile prigoanei contra Bisericii Române Unite cu Roma...*, p. 140.

the abrogation of the other provisions regarding the assets of the Greek Catholic Church. In the end, the Greek-Catholics gave up this principle and accepted that only part of the confiscated parishes and churches be returned to them, the Orthodox justifying this fact by the fact that they could not all be returned, because, in the meantime, the believers who had once been Greek-Catholics, had become Orthodox in the meantime. The Orthodox Church insisted on the principle that the church belongs to the faithful. Therefore, if they became Orthodox, the Church was theirs, regardless of the cult to which they belonged before. The Orthodox Church claimed that the same had happened in its case, in 1700, when some of the Orthodox became Greek-Catholic, including their churches, even though they had been Orthodox before²⁹.

The tension between the two Churches was also based on the 1992 census, which the Greek Catholics rejected, considering it false. They claimed that it had been made in such a way that a person could easily declare that he was of the Orthodox religion. Among the arguments brought in support of this statement was the fact that, in the part of the bulletin that referred to religion, the Orthodox religion or the Orthodox denomination was written, and the other denominations were mentioned on the next page, each with a code and a number. Thus, when people were asked which code corresponded to them, they did not understand, and hence the confusion of choosing the denomination to which they belonged³⁰.

One of the most important documents in the dialogue with the Orthodox Churches is the Pastoral Letter of the Pope, "Orientale Lumen", from 1995, which sheds light on the face of Christ as it was understood and lived by the Eastern Church from the beginning until today. by virtue of the apostolic inheritance:

"The Eastern Christian tradition involves a way of receiving, understanding and living faith in the Lord Jesus. It is very close to the Western Christian tradition, which is born and nurtured from the same faith. And with all that, it is distinguished, in a legitimate and wonderful way, to the extent that the Eastern

²⁹ Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Biserica în mers...*, p. 119.

³⁰ Anton MOISIN, *Mărturiile prigoanei contra Bisericii Române Unite cu Roma...*, p. 198.

Christian has his own way of feeling, understanding and living, in an original way, his relationship with God. I would like us to be close, with respect and emotion, to the act of adoration expressed by these Churches, rather than the tendency to isolate, from one another, the specific points of theology, which appeared polemically over the centuries, in the debates between the Westerners and Eastern”³¹.

Another issue worth mentioning regarding Uniatism concerns the possible reorientation of the position of the Roman Catholic Church in considering the Orthodox Church as a “sister Church”. Thus, two days after the beatification of Pope Pius IX, on September 5, 2000, the Declaration of the Holy Congregation on the Doctrine of Faith with the title “Dominus Iesus. On the saving uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” was officially presented at the Vatican. Its explicit purpose is to respond to the danger to the Church’s mission, represented by relativistic theological theories that try to justify religious pluralism by denying the definitive and complete character of the Revelation brought by the Savior Jesus Christ. Regarding the “Uniqueness and unity of the Church” (art. 16) it is stated:

“The faithful are required to testify that there is a historical continuity, rooted in the apostolic succession. ... This is the only Church of Christ that after the Resurrection our Savior gave to Peter for shepherding ... This Church constituted and organized as a subsisting society in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and in the bishops in communion with him”³².

The interpretation of those who deduce from the formula “subsist in” the thesis that the one Church of Christ could also subsist in non-Catholic Churches and ecclesial communities, is contrary to the authentic meaning

³¹ *Orientale Lumen*, Il regna, 9/1995, p. 266, apud Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru POPESCU, *Ortodoxie și Catholicism. Dialog și Reconciliere*, Ed. România creștină, 1999, p. 125.

³² https://koaha.org/wiki/Dominus_Jesus#IV._Unicit%C3%A0_e_unit%C3%A0_della_Chiesa (accessed March 2, 2023).

of the conciliar text. The Council chose that word precisely to clarify that there is a single existence of the true Church, while outside its visible borders there are only “Elementa Ecclesiae” which, being elements of the same Church, lead and tend towards the Catholic Church.

The practical application of this theory, probably representing the true objective of Catholic ecumenism for the next period, is represented by another internal document, called “Note on the expression Sister Churches” addressed by Cardinal Ratzinger before the 8th session of the Catholic-Orthodox theological dialogue from Baltimore (July 9-19, 2000)³³. This was sent to all the presidents of the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences in the world and it tries to explain the ambiguity of the use, in the last 40 years, of the expression “Sister Churches” by the Catholic ecumenists, regarding the Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed and Lutheran Churches, considering the deviations from the official doctrine according to which the Catholic Church can only be a “Mother Church” and not a proper “Sister Church”. It remains for the Orthodox Churches to take note of these documents in the evolution of future contacts and to act according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils³⁴.

III.3. Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches

An example of good practices for the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches is that offered by the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany. Thus, between October 3 and 8, 1998, the 8th dialogue meeting between the two Churches took place in Bucharest, this meeting having a special importance in that the participants recalled the progress made in the almost 20 years since the beginning works.

A joint report was drawn up, addressed to the leaders of the two Churches, called “Dialogue of closeness in faith”, which captures

³³ Pr. Prof. Dumitru ABRUDAN, “Dialogul teologic ortodox-catolic”, in: *Telegraful Român*, year CILVIII, nr. 29-32, p. 1 and August 15, 2000, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ Arhid. Conf. Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Dialogul Ortodoxo-Catolic”, in: *Renașterea*, year XI, nr. 10 (130), October 2000, pp. 8-9.

the existing stage of dialogue and, at the same time, emphasizes some particularities, such as the fact that this dialogue is carried out between “Churches”. Of course, the centuries-old contacts between the Protestants and the Orthodox in Romania were mentioned; Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition were treated in connection with the Confessions of Faith of the Church; The Sacrament of Confession was treated in the context of its importance for the renewal and salvation of believers, and “Salvation in Christ” in the context of the restoration of the world. Thanks to this dialogue, it was found that, in the Evangelical Church, alongside the Holy Scriptures, which play an important role, there is also a meaningful and living church tradition. The participants in this dialogue emphasized, once again, in the final statement, the positive attitude of the B.O.R. and E.K.D. towards European integration:

“They are ready to intervene for a united Europe and to be aware again of the importance of Christian spirituality for the new structure of Europe. Our churches and peoples belong to Europe and can make their specific contribution to the new structuring of our continent”³⁵.

As part of the dialogue with the Anglican Church, we mention the visit to Romania of His Grace Dr. George Leonard Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England and of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, between September 6-10, 1993. The dialogue relations between the two Churches date back from the 18th century, and in the interwar period there were numerous contacts in search of a common line towards the unity of faith. After the meeting of theological dialogue in Toronto, Canada, between September 10-17, 1990, a significant deadlock was entered, caused by the decision of the General Synod of the Church of England, of November 11, 1992, to allow the ordination of women³⁶.

³⁵ Pr. Lect. C. PĂTULEANU, *Dialogul teologic bilateral dintre EKD și BOR*, p. 145.

³⁶ Prof. Liviu STOINA, “Vizita în România a Grației Sale, dr. George Leonard Carey, Arhiepiscop de Canteburry, Primatul întregii Anglii și al Comuniunii anglicane din întreaga lume”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, CXI (1993) 7-9, p. 124.

Regarding the dialogue of the Orthodox Churches with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we mention the 4th meeting in Limassol, Cyprus, between January 8-13, 1994, as being the end of the line or, more specifically, another blockage. The previous three sessions focused on the teaching of the Holy Trinity as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In the Limassol meeting, the following lectures were presented: “Holy Trinity in Creation and in the Incarnation of God”, “Communication of the Attributes and Deification of Human Nature”, “Christ of Revelation” and “Christ of History”³⁷.

IV. The time of Orthodoxy?

“Perhaps Orthodoxy will once again become the denominator of viable regional alliances and the spiritual alternative of the excessively secularized West; perhaps, in the next millennium [third millennium], the East will be able to revitalize all of Christendom”³⁸

This vocation of Orthodoxy can materialize either in the utopia of people who have invested excessively much trust in their religion, or in the crushing but natural reality of a properly understood and handled Orthodoxy, depending on the ability of the Orthodox to probe the current mission of their religion and not indulge in a kind of phantasmatic lethargy. We mention two essential coordinates in this regard, namely the need for a correct acceptance of Orthodox ecclesiology and, as a consequence of this, detachment from the state and ethno-philetism or religious nationalism.

First of all, the Orthodox Church must give up the psychology of being a victim in front of European and/or global policies and position itself as a concrete dialogue partner and an opinion leader in matters related to the dynamics of the world. It is about a synergetic affirmation and not

³⁷ “A IV-a Întrunire a Comisie Mixte pentru dialogul teologic dintre Bisericile Ortodoxe și Alianța Mondială a Bisericilor Reformate, Limassol, Cipru, 8-13 ianuarie 1994”, in: *Teologie și Viață*, LXX (1994) 1-4, p. 164.

³⁸ Teodor BACONSKY, “Decadența etatismului și renașterea ortodoxă”, in: Ioan. I. Ică jr și Germano MARANI, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 355.

about a disintegrating competition, according to the principle of unity in diversity. Among the countries belonging to the European structure, Greece has a majority Orthodox population, Italy Catholic, Great Britain Anglican, Sweden Protestant, etc. A first rule, to be considered, is participation in dialogue, and here the discourse of Orthodoxy can provide consistency. Moreover, in order for Orthodoxy to manifest its valences in contemporaneity, an Orthodox lobby is needed; it is necessary for the Orthodox to create another image of Orthodoxy, “which is not so Eastern, but above any true faith preserved unaltered from Christ the Lord and the Holy Apostles”³⁹.

Then, Orthodoxy must acquire certain premises with a directing role for the place it must occupy in the current European context. A first aspect would be that the Churches, and therefore the Orthodox Church, have the duty to accept that certain peoples have become multi-ethnic and religiously pluralistic. Experience shows that partners, especially when they are of different religions, are happy to find that we preserve our identity and that we do not resort to compromises dictated by circumstances. Moreover, the Orthodox experience of identification with the destiny of the people must not slip into intolerance towards other faiths or ethnicities and, finally, overcoming the problematic of each individual state, the Churches could, more than anyone, prevent Europe from closing comfortably in herself. The churches have the duty to help Western Europe to open up to Eastern Europe, no less to integrate into Western Europe⁴⁰. Thus, the role of Orthodoxy in the new Europe could be multiple, if “it would at least free itself from nationalistic idolatry, ... if it would at least free itself from a rigid ritualism not to reach, as the West risked and risks, to a kind of aphasia in connection with God, but to understand that the liturgy and the rite are nothing more than the symbolism of a meeting”⁴¹.

The Eastern churches can be useful to the West, borrowing from the rich spirituality they possess. Perhaps the words of the apostle Paul addressed to a distressed man who asked him for help would be appropriate: “Silver

³⁹ Mitropolitul Nicolae CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 266.

⁴⁰ Mitr. N. CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, pp. 261-262.

⁴¹ Olivier CLEMENT, *Adevăr și libertate, Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate*, Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 196.

and gold I have not; but what I have, that's what I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!" (Acts 3, 6). In such conditions, Orthodoxy has the task of bringing a vivid and profound answer to all questions. A rechristening of today's Europe can only have in mind an introduction of faith and spiritual life in the bosom of communities, and Orthodoxy has countless resources for this:

"The presence of Orthodoxy in Europe is a chance for all Christians. It can effectively help them to rediscover the fullness, actuality and freshness of the Christian Tradition of the first centuries. The role of a Berdiaev and the Orthodox from Meudon in the birth of French personalism, the fruitful influence of Orthodoxy on Catholic thinkers such as Jean Danielou or Louis Bouyer, the amazing rediscovery of the meaning of the icon in the West, the audience enjoyed by a collection such as the one entitled *Eastern Spirituality* from Bellefontaine, the spiritual brilliance of a few Catholic monastic communities that knew how to open themselves to Orthodox influences - all this only suggests what would be the results of an even deeper penetration of the Orthodox germ into Western Christianity"⁴².

The same author warns:

"This implies, of course, that the Orthodox do not fall prey to the temptations of ecclesiastical nationalism, so contrary to the true spirit of Orthodoxy"⁴³. In the same way, Christos Yannaras says that "our great duty, of those of us in this Orthodox culture, is for art and faith to be the priority and the priority form of expression, free from any ideology"⁴⁴.

⁴² Placide DESEILLE, *Ce este Ortodoxia?- cateheze pentru adulți*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2004, p. 232.

⁴³ P. DESEILLE, *Ce este Ortodoxia?*, p. 232.

⁴⁴ Christos YANNARAS, *Ortodoxie și Occident*, Editura Bizantină, București, 1995, p. 70.

IV.1. The principle of subsidiarity

The best model for tomorrow's Europe is the undivided Rome of the first Christian millennium, because it offers us the example of a world, undoubtedly diversified, but united by sharing the same culture and by the ecclesiastical communion on which it is based. The very principle of subsidiarity that Europe has already appropriated today is of Eastern origin and is clearly reflected in Orthodox ecclesiology. The deep essence of this Orthodox ecclesiology resides in the fact that each local Church is in communion with the universal Church, and each represents the Church in its integrity.

“It is striking [said Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg in April 1994] that the real and deeply democratic organization of the Orthodox Christian Church, with its degree of administrative autonomy and local authority of bishops, patriarchs and autocephalous Churches, to which is added, at the same time, the Eucharistic unity in faith, represents a prototype, recently institutionalized by the European Union under the name of the principle of subsidiarity, as being the most effective method in terms of articulating its powers”⁴⁵.

Going further, father Ion Bria makes the following mention:

“Orthodoxy is also a matter of the history of a people or a nation. In the case of many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the history of a nation cannot be understood without the history of a local church. Orthodoxy has always defended the polyphonic system in which each local Church preserves its ethnic and cultural identity, its specific mission. Being autonomous and autocephalous with a limited territory and its

⁴⁵ Radu PREDA, “Bisericile ortodoxe în Europa celor 27”, in: *Biserica în era globalizării*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2003, p.303.

own synod, any local Church is a prototype in the heart of a universal communion”⁴⁶.

On discernment, in order to establish balance, Olivier Clement urges us:

“The simultaneous rediscovery of the universality of the Church and of Eucharistic ecclesiology will gradually erode the borders of autocephaly. ... What an example it would be for Rome, which knows reverse temptations! And for Europe in the process of unification! And for the entire planet that aspires to unity, but fears uniformity!”⁴⁷.

The Orthodox Church finds itself in the “crazy love” of a God who defines himself as liberating fatherhood and indivisible communion. Therefore, if the separation of the Christian West and East pushed the Christian world into the chains of disintegration, their ongoing meeting could bring about a “reintegration in the chain”.

Orthodoxy must be extremely aware of the current state of affairs and implicitly of its current calling. Orthodox conscience has an answer at least to the provocation of Western atheism and nihilism which destroyed, literally and not accidentally, Christianity transformed into the religion of the West. Already today, without becoming apocalyptic, the impasse of Western civilization is no longer a theoretical one. “It manifests itself in the agony and absurdity of everyday life. This civilization of the balance of horror, of rational programs of general happiness, of toxic residues, of insatiable consumption, of the enslavement of human existence by totalitarian ideologies has come to threaten life on a universal scale”⁴⁸. Under these conditions, Orthodoxy can constitute “a civilization at the antipode of the Western one that survives in a mysterious way and that preserves a universal, saving word for man”⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion BRIA, *Ortodoxia în Europa. Locul spiritualității românești*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 1995, p.153.

⁴⁷ O. CLEMENT, *Adevăr și libertate*, p. 196.

⁴⁸ Christos YANNARAS, *Abecedar al credinței*, Editura Bizantină, București, 1996, p. 201.

⁴⁹ Christos YANNARAS, *Abecedar al credinței*, pp. 200-201.

I tried to show the need for awareness also regarding the relationship from the West to the Orthodox East because, as Cardinal Schoenborn said at the beginning of the jubilee year 2000, during the reception at the archbishop's palace in Vienna, "without Orthodoxy, Europe would be incomplete"⁵⁰. And, finally, if Stephen Runcinman announced the "millennium of Orthodoxy", the Orthodox Church must realize that "its role is not to confront the autonomous culture of the West from the perspective of incompatibility, but to selectively assume it, spiritualizing it"⁵¹.

IV.2. Positive considerations on Orthodoxy

I think it is good to keep in mind, in addition to the accusations against Orthodoxy (more or less justified, beyond the unfavorable geopolitical context at the moment) and some positive points from some non-Orthodox, in order to balance both the accusations and the praises and to leave the attitude towards it to the ability of thinking, discernment and sincerity of each one. Because many Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans and even neo-Protestants felt obliged to pay homage to Orthodoxy, we bring a series of opinions in this regard.

Thus, in 1974, Cardinal Gabriel-Marie Garrone observed that "the East today exerts a real attraction on a large number of believers"⁵². Pope John Paul II himself praised Orthodoxy in his speeches addressed to the faithful on August 11, September 1 and 8 from the balcony of "Castel Gandolfo". Here are some excerpts:

"I wish to draw attention to the development of Eastern theology which, even in the centuries following the Partisan period and the painful schism of 1054, developed profound and stimulating perspectives, which we lean on with interest. An important doctrinal development occurred between the 8th and 9th

⁵⁰ Radu PREDA, *Bisericile Ortodoxe în Europa celor 27*, p. 291.

⁵¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Stelian TOFANĂ, "Bisericile creștine și globalizarea: provocări, perspective, interogații", in: *Spiritualitate și consumism în Europa unită*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2004, p. 380.

⁵² Gabriel-Marie GARRONE, "Atracția Orientului", in: *L'Osservatore romano*, XXV (1974) 50, December 13, p. 5.

centuries, following the iconoclastic crisis triggered by some Byzantine emperors, determined to completely suppress the veneration of holy icons. By resisting such an absurd interference, many persons had to suffer; our thoughts turn especially to John Damascene and Saint Theodore the Studite. The victorious end of their resistance was decisive not only for piety and sacred art, but equally for the deepening of the Mystery of the Incarnation itself. Finally the defense of the icons was based on the fact that Jesus of Nazareth, God, really became man. That is why the artist legitimately strives to reproduce the face of the Savior, using not only the force of genius, but especially the submission to the Spirit of God. The icons send to the Mystery that surpasses them and help to feel its presence in our lives. Another important moment of Eastern Theology was the so-called Hesychast controversy. In the East, hesychasm means a practice of prayer characterized by deep peace of mind, embedded in the uninterrupted contemplation of God while invoking the name of Jesus. Numerous tensions have arisen over some aspects of this practice. However, the generosity of the intention that directed the defense of this spiritual method must be recognized, that is, the emphasis on the concrete possibility offered to man to unite with the One and Triune God in the intimacy of the heart, in this profound union of grace, which Eastern theology is pleased to qualify by using the term theosis or deification. Precisely in connection with this, Eastern spirituality gathered a very rich experience that was strongly proposed especially in the famous collection of texts by Nicodim the Aghiorite from the end of the 18th century bearing the telling title of *Philokalia* or the love of beauty. During the following centuries and up to our time, Eastern theological thought also experienced interesting developments not only in the classical places of the Byzantine and Russian tradition, but also in the Orthodox communities spread around the world. It is enough to mention among the many deepenings worthy of being emphasized the theology of beauty elaborated

by Pavel Nikolaevich Evdochimov starting from the eastern art of the icon, no less the theory of deification carried out by the specialist in theology that was Loth Borodin”⁵³.

After these thoughts about Eastern theology expressed by the one who can be called, without exaggeration, one of the most important and knowledgeable people of the 20th century, let’s go through some considerations of the same personality, about Orthodox spirituality:

“The Eastern Fathers start from the awareness that the authentic spiritual commitment is not limited to a meeting with oneself, to the need to find a certain interiority, but from the necessity of the existence of a path of obedience to the Spirit of God. In reality, they argue, man is not truly himself unless he closes himself in the Holy Spirit. Saint Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyon who, due to his origin and formation, can be considered as a bridge between the East and the West, conceived of man as composed of three elements: the body, the soul and the Holy Spirit (see *Against Heresies*, 5, 9, 1-2). His intention was certainly not to confuse man with God, but he wanted to emphasize that man does not reach perfection except by opening himself to God. For Afraate the Syrian, who is an echo of the thought of Saint Paul, the Spirit of God is offered to us in such an intimate way that it becomes almost a part of our own self. (Exhibits 6, 14). In the same vein, a representative of Russian spirituality, Theophan the Recluse, calls the Holy Spirit the soul of the human soul and sees the purpose of spiritual living in the progressive spirituality of the soul and body (cf. *Writings on spiritual life*). And he also says that the real enemy of inner asceticism is sin. It must be defeated to make way for the Spirit of God. In it, so to speak, not only the human being is transfigured, but the universe itself. A difficult road, but the goal is a great experience of freedom”⁵⁴.

⁵³ Mitr. N. CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, pp. 243-244.

⁵⁴ Mitr. N. CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, p. 245.

Of course, the cultural wealth of the Christian East is not overlooked either: Humanity owes many treasures to the Christian East. I wish to recall its rich and uniform culture which derives from the monumental architectures of Constantinople, Moscow, Saint Petersburg and so many other cities. It is a culture that is also reflected in the bright mosaics, in the gilded domes, in the icons rich in mystery, in the liturgical components that are so solemn and majestic. The religious art of the East testifies to the splendor of Christ, whom it represents in the imposing figure of the Pantocrator, or shows Him in the silent communion of divine intimacy, as can be seen from the precious icon of the Trinity created by Andrei Rubliov. The culture of the Christian East then produced vigorous literary works, contributing in a significant way to raising the consciousness of humanity, even in our time. I take Vladimir Soloviev as an example. For him, the very foundation of culture consists in the unconditional recognition of the other. Hence the refusal of a monolithic cultural universalism, unable to respect and accept the multiple expressions of civilization. He was also consistent with this vision when he became the fiery prophet of ecumenism. And how could we forget, among the greatest writers of all time, Feodor Dostoevsky? His look as a believer penetrates the depth of the human soul, describing the great adventure of freedom in its infinite paths, in the light of the conviction that Christ is the secret of true freedom. In the depth of his human and Christian vision, he touches truly universal chords, proving a deep knowledge of man and a great concern for his destiny. The deep soul of his thinking is the love of Christ. In this he sees the beauty that gives birth, the beauty that does not wither, the beauty that saves the world. That is why he feels great pain, it is enough to quote the Legend of the great Inquisitor, when he sees that people, sometimes Christians themselves, are afraid of him, they are afraid of the true freedom that he came to bring them⁵⁵.

And the sovereign pontiff concludes the references with the following phrase: "Since we believe that the ancient and venerable tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the patrimony of the Church of

⁵⁵ Mitr. N. CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, pp. 245-246.

Christ, the first duty of Catholics is to know it in order to be able to feed on it and favor, after everyone's powers, the process of unity"⁵⁶.

After discovering Orthodoxy, many Westerners realized that it represented authentic Christianity, the unbroken tradition of the Church⁵⁷. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, explaining how he was drawn to Eastern monasticism by the Patericum, makes the following remark: "My mind turned to one of my favorite books: the Patericum, a writing about the 4th century saints who had founded hermitages in the desert. ... The first time I picked it up, I didn't eat, drink, or sleep until I finished it. Spiritual books are like good wine - the older it is, the better it is"⁵⁸.

Therefore, there is no doubt the attraction that Orthodoxy exercises nowadays, beyond its inevitable institutional downfalls at the moment, an attraction that brings with it a huge responsibility for the Orthodox, namely that through their life and behavior they do not betray it, not disappoint those who want to know it and, above all, to give up "ethnic property" type views on Orthodoxy. Praise should be an incentive to be living examples. Concretely, all that remains for us Orthodox is to prove through our very lives: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5, 16).

IV.3. Orthodox identity assets

Europe is, without doubt and in antithesis with the intrinsic specificity of its culture, a unitary space, managing to assert itself as such, paradoxically, through spirituality. Europe also means culture, and we consider culture those values that reopen man's access to the primordial reality. In this sense, Orthodoxy had an essential cultural contribution leading to the achievement of: the "Byzantine commonwealth", meaning that space of cultural and religious communion of the Christianized Roman Empire. Perhaps it is not by chance that the "Orthodox nostalgia" of the West is

⁵⁶ Mitru N. CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, pp. 245-246.

⁵⁷ We recomand PETER GILLQUIST, *Devenind Ortodox – o călătorie înspre credința creștină primară*, transl. Ioan-Tănase Chiș, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2006 și 2016.

⁵⁸ Richard WURMBRAND, *Cu Dumnezeu în subterană*, Editura Casa Școalelor, București, 1993, p. 52.

being discussed, to which the Orthodox countries have served as bulwarks for more than a millennium.

We can then talk about a true cultural-religious import from the East to the West during the Crusades and of course, speaking of Uniatism, we say that it caused a transfusion of Eastern blood in the Church of the West, which thus began to emerge from the isolation of Latinity.

The great Byzantine empire was young and strong through its religion and that is precisely why the characteristic feature of Byzantium must be sought in the Orthodox religious sphere, this being in fact the quintessence of the success of the Byzantine symphony from a cultural point of view. We believe that the anguish of the West and the freedom of the East built Europe through Christianity, which had a colossal contribution that managed, on the one hand, to transform the invasions of migrants into a Carolingian Empire, to convert nomadism and, on the other hand, to transform Byzantium into the new European cultural center, until the West would find itself.

That is precisely why Christianity, as a defining and definitive cultural heritage for the European space, must be the basis of European pluralism. If we trace most of the good elements of European civilization, we will see that they come, to a large extent, from Orthodox Byzantium, which was the defender of the ancient Greek tradition and literature, their Christianizer and the transmitter of the Christian treasure in the West.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, being asked at one point how to explain the fact that a political body like this Council deals with monasticism at the end of the 20th century, the century of the technological and informatics explosion, answered, among other things, that “Western Europe cannot survive without truly spiritual sources”⁵⁹.

Horia-Roman Patapievici states: “It was only in the culture of postmodern modernity that the relationship between man, his soul and the truth was broken. From now on, it is considered that the profession of false or harmful doctrines can possibly only have perverse social effects”⁶⁰. That is why it is necessary to deepen people’s existence through an authentically

⁵⁹ <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/editoriale/ortodoxia-integrarea-europeana-91087.html> (accessed March 3, 2023).

⁶⁰ Horia-Roman PATAPIEVICI, *Omul recent*, Humanitas, 2001, București, p. 25.

Christian culture, in which we encounter the orthodox theme of divine-humanity. Modernity has often thought of God against man, but God and man do not oppose each other, on the contrary: they unite and communicate in Christ without separation and without confusion. Divino-humanity is the space of the Holy Spirit and the creative freedom of people.

The Orthodox Church has a huge number of martyrs - not forgetting, so close to Athos, the “white martyrdom” of the monks - which means that here is a kernel of capable energy, if it is not diverted by contemporary intelligence, but fecundates it, capable of upsetting History. A Trinitarian, that is, ecclesial, approach to man and the relationships between people could overcome the opposition between the individual and solidarity, which tortures contemporary society, could it become the ferment of History, the impetus of the future, reconciling the unification of humanity with the identity reaffirmed by each person and by every culture.

The Orthodox Church can be a chance, a remedy for a global society marked by individualism and the marginalization of religious institutions. Religious memory, the tradition so important to Orthodoxy, is an integral part of European collective memory. If the Catholic and Protestant Churches are obliged to repair what they have damaged through the confessional and ideological division of Western Europe, surely their approach cannot avoid Orthodoxy which, in its genuine form, is the bearer of an integrative vocation. The Orthodoxy of the Europe of the third millennium brings to the continent the roundness it needs and the lack of which it has suffered, consciously or not, for almost a thousand years.

Religious refueling of the West, not in the form of syncretism but of regaining an objective vision of human society through the prism of man’s transcendental vocation, could be done from the Eastern perspective of dialogue: the dimension of love and sacrifice and not of domination and power. Thus, the Eastern Churches can be useful to the West by lending them from the rich spirituality they possess. It can effectively help to rediscover the fullness, actuality and freshness of the Christian Tradition of the first centuries. The role of a Berdiaev and the Orthodox from Meudon in the birth of French personalism, the fruitful influence of Orthodoxy on Catholic thinkers such as Jean Danielou or Louis Bouyer, the amazing

rediscovery of the meaning of the icon in the West and many others. The very principle of subsidiarity that Europe today appropriates is of Eastern origin and is clearly reflected in Orthodox ecclesiology.

The Orthodox consciousness has an answer at least to the challenge of Western atheism and nihilism, but it will also have to correct the historical error it commits through its Russian branch.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the role of Orthodoxy is not to confront the autonomous culture of the West from the perspective of incompatibility, but to selectively assume it, spiritualizing it.

V. Conclusions: Orthodox troubles; actuality and pastoral discernment!

According to Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu, “Orthodoxy is facing serious problems, among others with that of primacy on the church level and no less with the preponderance of the national factor in the ecclesiastical ones”. It is not a secret for anyone that Orthodoxy is, at the same time, local and universal, since the Eucharistic presence of Christ is full in every community where the Holy Liturgy is canonically performed. However, local is not the same as national, which is the reason why the Ecumenical Patriarchate condemned philetism, i.e. religious nationalism, in which Vladimir Lossky denounced the “capital sin” of Orthodoxy.

“The confusion between local and national implies the ethnic reduction of the concept of the people of God ... Christ is not the head of a nation (a civil mixture of natives and foreigners), but of those members who are in solidarity with Him, at a given (liturgical) moment and in a concrete community space”⁶¹.

We do not deny, by this, the contribution of the Orthodox Church to the formation of national consciences and even to the moral salvation of Eastern European nations, but we try to find the moral balance of nationalism, or,

⁶¹ Teodor BACONSKY, “Decadența etatismului și renașterea ortodoxă”, p. 355.

in other words, to avoid falling into extremes that could disqualify us. Despite the fact that today Orthodoxy arouses more and more the interest of “outsiders”, there are also critical eyes, and rightfully so: “Even if it fascinates some fervent spirits, Orthodox Christianity makes the East of the continent l’autre Europe in which would show a clear tendency to double the modern Nation-State through the Church-Nation scheme”⁶².

This excessively nationalistic tendency of Orthodoxy appears, on a closer look, as the apple of discord, the laboratory of negative image and negativist attitude of contemporary Orthodoxy:

“The lay orthodox theologians of the interwar period massively embarked on the risky path of a Christian-ethnocentric thinking and a radicalized political activism in an authoritarian and totalitarian sense. At the base of their theoretical vision was the reductionist dogma of the structural identity between Orthodoxy-Nation-State (Monarchy). Ethnocratic orthodoxy was supposed to provide the mystical binder for a corporatist fusion of society and for an authoritarian politics with clearly totalitarian tendencies. Nationalist and corporatist orthodoxy, a kind of mystical fascism, was present as the autochthonous theological-political solution to the social dilemma. ... This whole approach was doubled by a polemical delimitation and a virulent criticism against the West, Catholicism, Protestantism and modernity, respectively their intellectual values and social and political culture: universality, reason, the individual were systematically discredited as sources of atheism in favor of autochthonism and collective mysticism, exalted as bearers of faith. ... Nation, Church, State had to form a single theological-political organism, endowed with messianic virtues and whose social and political content was the utopia of the reactivation of the rural tradition of Romanian Christianity”⁶³.

⁶² Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: radiografia unei probleme”, in: *Gândirea Socială a Bisericii*, p. 527.

⁶³ Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române...”, pp. 536-537.

Immediately after 1989, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală recognized, without special efforts, the fact that “the Orthodox hierarchy did not have the courage of martyrdom”⁶⁴. In these conditions, we can make the poisonous and paradoxical connection between the doctrine stated above and the lack of martyrdom:

“The common platform for the refusal of conflict and the assumption of compromise and collaboration between the Orthodox hierarchy and the communist state was represented by nationalism and the popular character of Christianity. ... The Byzantine symphony had turned into a cosmocracy, into the total control and domination of the communist state over the Church which, by virtue of nationalism, accepted the humiliating function of propagandist of an oppressive and dehumanizing ideology”⁶⁵.

In this sense and against the self-sufficient Orthodox direction, we could adopt the attitude expressed by Kallistos Ware, who insists on the fact that, in addition to being open to the root of the Eastern Tradition, we Orthodox should “take more seriously Western philosophy ... which could help us creatively understand what we are missing”⁶⁶.

What stands out, beyond the good intentions, is the absence of any principled reflection on the nature of politics, democracy, civil society, themes still undiscovered for Romanian theology, probably also due to the fixation on the national and state categories of the 20th century. The Orthodox Church, even if it probably counted on certain advantages, still bears the unpleasant reverse of these inhibitory orientations. This is how Andrei Pleșu emphasizes this state of affairs: “In a normal society, the Church has the role of directing consciousness, and culture is nourished by it as a sure foundation. Now with us the situation is such that culture

⁶⁴ Teodor BACONSKY, “Dialog amânat”, in: *Dilema Veche*, I (2004) 43, November 5-11, p.12.

⁶⁵ Ioan I. ICĂ JR, “Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române...”, p. 540.

⁶⁶ Kallistos WARE, “Teologia ortodoxă contemporană”, in: Pr. Dr. Constantin Coman, *Ortodoxia sub presiunea istoriei*, Editura Bizantină, București, 1995, p. 83.

should temporarily assume the role of radiating positively on the Church from a moral and intellectual point of view”⁶⁷.

Aware of the seriousness of the reality we are expressing, we ask ourselves what the “profit” balance is. In order not to become a “regressive handicap”, Orthodoxy must learn coexistence, dialogue, acceptance of differences, negotiation, and manifest its vitality not through simple, tautological identity self-affirmations, but through concrete personal and community commitment, through creativity⁶⁸. The main handicap that must be overcome is that of the immature community, dominated by three schizophrenic formalisms: the liturgical formalism of the clergy, the votive formalism of the laity and the critical formalism of the intellectuals. Only in this way will we be able to have “patriots without nationalistic hysteria, Europeans proud of their Romanianness and believers out of the straitjacket of medieval nostalgia”⁶⁹. And Horia Roman Patapievici denounces “the counterproductive fixation of the Orthodox Church in populist and anti-intellectualist clichés and in an anachronistic mentality towards the laity and society, towards culture and science”⁷⁰.

In order not to be accused of sardonic theory and ill will, although our attitude is exactly the correct attitude of a convinced and sincere Orthodox, I will expose a living example that subsumes the quote from the beginning of the chapter. At the beginning of 1996, a painful conflict arose between the Patriarchy of Moscow and the Patriarchy of Constantinople on the subject of the Estonian Orthodox Church. When the latter sent Bishop Ioan of Finland to Estonia, thus responding to the request of the faithful there, the Patriarchate of Moscow reacted virulently by cutting off relations with the Finnish Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which deeply affected the unity of Orthodoxy. Instead of clarifications, I will continue to reproduce the text of the editorial from the American newspaper “The world”, written by Metropolitan Filip Saliba of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America:

⁶⁷ Andrei PLEȘU, Interview in *România literară*, Nr. 1, January 6, 1990, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Ioan I. ICĂ JR, “Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române...”, p. 551.

⁶⁹ Ioan I. ICĂ JR, “Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române...”, p. 551.

⁷⁰ Ioan I. ICĂ JR, “Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române...”, p. 552.

“The tragic conflict between the two Patriarchates could have been avoided if we had developed an Orthodox system of effective arbitration of disputes between the sister Patriarchates. ... We Orthodox consider ourselves, and rightfully so, the heirs of the faith that was once and for all handed down to the saints. But we are not able to solve our problems in a harmonious way because we do not have an arbitrator. Our system is not working. In the Byzantine period, the emperor was the one who presided over the meetings of the ecumenical synods...in other words, he was a kind of arbitrator. It is really embarrassing to see how, in our planetary age where the means of communication are so perfected, the Orthodox do not get to solve the problem of Estonia. ... What a shame that around the commemoration of almost two thousand years of Christianity, two of the most important Orthodox patriarchies cut off their fraternal relations because we do not have a mechanism that categorically deals with such problems. This is why we invite Orthodox theologians to come down from their ivory towers to examine this issue objectively and without ethnic or historical prejudices. In conclusion, I would say: let’s stop using formulas like the most holy synod, the most beloved brother and the most venerable patriarchy when we attack each other behind our backs. This is not true Orthodoxy”⁷¹.

In order for Orthodoxy and the Orthodox to once again show their creative and revolutionary genius identical to that of Christianity itself, instead of denouncing the scholasticism, rationalism and pragmatism of Western culture as losing and ineffective, they must relearn to think Christianity, society, history, current affairs, politics, modernity in clear, classic, rational and universal terms. The Orthodox Church must come out not only from the external political enslavement of the state and the nation, instead showing solidarity with society and humanity, but also from the internal intellectual captivity of uncritical, triumphalist and, ultimately, uncreative reporting towards its own theological tradition and historical course.

⁷¹ Mitr. N. CORNEANU, *Credință și viață*, pp. 249-250.