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# THE CONTEMPORARY INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE. SHORT CONSIDERATIONS ON THE STRUCTURE AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX VISION

Review  
Article

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## Abstract

*In the postmodern contemporaneity, when, as W. T. Anderson shows, the world religions can discover, in full awareness, what divides them and approaches them, and when, as Jean Delumeau emphasizes, "... different religions exalt each in its language, wisdom and compassion, sincerity and humility, which are precious common values, nobody may not wish them disappear"<sup>1</sup>(Nicolae Achimescu, 2013), the Orthodox Church opens its doors to all the believers of the world awaiting the love of the Lord, as Rev Professor Dumitru Belu writes in his iconic book *About love*<sup>2</sup>(Dumitru Belu, 2016), understanding through tolerance and co-existence the inter-religious dialogue. The renewal of the religious world societies will start, in this context, from the hope that the inter-religious dialogue has the faith in its "mission for promoting a globalization capable [...] of sustaining authentic dialogue between religions and cultures"<sup>3</sup>(Dumitru Popescu, 2003). In other words, Orthodoxy is sincerely<sup>4</sup>(Nicolae Achimescu, 2006) on the path of the dialogue, being aware of the need and the utility of the dialogue, but also of the chance, perhaps unique, of making public sacred and liturgical tradition, given the fact that it is God „who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4).*

## THE INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE VISION OF REVEREND PROFESSOR EMILIAN VASILESCU

Even if some western theoreticians as Samuel P. Huntington or Hans Kung highlight the significant role of the religious factor in the coagulation and the feed of the differences / antagonisms between cultures and civilisations, the spirituality of the Orthodox East, as a profound conscious spirituality, unlike the Catholic West or the Protestantism, believes that "...religion does not separate us and does not bring us together unless we are using it for this purpose" (Nicolae Achimescu, 2013), *conferring a special religious identity and individuality*. In other words, the eastern Orthodoxy stays faithful to a teaching that is continuously trinitarian Christo-centric and ecclesial-centric and to a liturgical practice profoundly dedicated to the work of the Holy Ghost and that will not use the indubitable reality of the religious differences – some major, with determinant directions or irreconcilable – as pretext for ignoring or repudiate other religious beliefs. Thus, the Orthodox Church, the one that "...extend, with love, the notion of human to all human beings" (His Beatitude Father Patriarch Justinian, 2005), *will relate to the sensible problem of the dialogue with the non-Christian religion in its own manner, seeing in them concrete forms similar to those called by the sociologist G. Schmitthen "the native-perennial dimension of the human religiosity"*<sup>7</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2013). For Orthodoxy, the dialogue with the non-Christians will represent "the expression of a graceful state" (Nicolae Achimescu, 2013), a fundamental human challenge that tries to discover, in the chaotic concert of the world religions, *the ultimate essence of the human condition, its profound religiosity, the intrinsic necessity to search the transcendent and relate/ connect to it, because independently from their absolutely heterogeneous contents the religions of the world maintain an ancestral and imprescriptible common found – what Mircea Eliade called «the universal, trans-empirical and fundamental unity of the religious phenomena»*<sup>9</sup> (Mircea Eliade, 1965).

On this dimension of research acted the well-known professor of history of religions and philosophy of religions from the Faculty for Theology of Bucharest, Professor Emilian Vasilescu (1904-1985), who was between 1960 and 1970 a real pioneer in the Romanian space in the problem of the dialogue with the non-Christians. Many of his visions and conclusions – unfortunately little known in the international space, due to the political circumstances of his time – anticipated an important part from the solutions later adopted by the international specialised

organisations / forums. An exquisite specialist in the history of religions, a field he endowed with numerous synthesis and hundreds of studies and articles, Professor Emilian Vasilescu worked in a field that was arid in those times. The Orthodox Churches, in general the Christian churches, did not formulate at that time a perspective or a common vision on the inter-religious dialogue, a deficit that manifested actively to the level of all the confessions relevant globally (Emilian Vasilescu, 1971). Moreover, the difficulties registered during the previous dialogue attempts – generated equally by doctrinarian incompatibilities and by the permanent temptation of the parties to use missionary, apologetic or even polemic approaches – required per se a preparation/ theorisation more attentive, more elaborated, of the inter-religious dialogue.

Given the above presented element, Professor Emilian Vasilescu – independently from the Japanese Protestant theologian Seiichi Yagi – put an accent on the inter-religious dialogue based on sincere opening and reciprocal acceptance, because the Fathers of the Church, especially Saint Atanasie the Great, "...permits us to understand the global culture as a reflex of the trinitarian communion that underlines the identity of each nation and its private culture, but also the connection of love between them" (Dumitru Popescu, 2003). Thus, he proposed the structuring of the inter-religious dialogue in the following sequential stages:

**1. The preparation stage**, approaching matters of reciprocal interest and with common doctrinarian signification, as *peace, solidarity or philanthropy*<sup>12</sup> (Emilian Vasilescu, 1971), themes that help in overcoming the suspicions and the reciprocal mistrust;

**2. The dialogue itself**, with a theological and doctrinarian content, intended to be conceptualised from an academic perspective and flexibly institutionalised, a perspective from which Professor Emilian Vasilescu proposed – in 1971 (!), as adequate organisational solution, the establishment of an "Organisation of the United Religions" and of a "World Council of all Religions", empowered to ensure and make permanent the inter-religious exchanges, exactly the environment of dialogue necessary for the reciprocal knowledge (Emilian Vasilescu, 1971).

The following mentions are required for this principia scheme:

**a).** During the 60's and the 70's, the separation between the two antagonistic political-ideological blocks and the repressive tendencies of the communist political regimes from the Eastern Europe and Asia reflected negatively inclusively on the freedom of the confessions in relating through dialogue, with restrictions especially in the external connections and in the establishment of relations

with the similar foreign entities. As a consequence, Professor Emilian Vasilescu intuited that, for not being restrained/ blocked by the authorities of the socialist states, the inter-religious dialogue should put on the first place – at least theoretically and declarative – themes as the *social progress, the peace, the human solidarity, desirable themes for being claimed by the respective states* (Emilian Vasilescu, 1964);

**b).** From a theological point of view, Professor Emilian Vasilescu thought the *preparing* stage as a necessary preamble, opportune for the accumulation of a capital of reciprocal acceptance and trust, which is necessary for the achievement of a proper dialogue between the parties – the main confessions of the world see the divinity, the world, the human and the salvation from distinct different perspectives. Moreover, assuming completely the indelible condition of Christian, Professor Emilian Vasilescu saw this preparing stage as an optimal solution for the overcoming – through opening and love for the fellow beings as taught by the Holy Gospel – the two fundamental interrogations that continuously return and threaten to affect the continuity and the development of the dialogue with the non-Christian religions, which are:

**1.** May the non-Christian religions be considered as possessors/ keepers of the divine revelations? If not, does the dialogue with them have any meaning? If the answer is positive, which is the axiological and soteriological positioning reported to Christianity?

**2.** Can the believers of the non-Christians be delivered in their religion? In other words, is there deliverance outside Christianity, outside the Christian Church? Is the exclusivist position of St. Cyprian of Cartage still valid?

**c).** Passing to the areal of the proper dialogue, Professor Emilian Vasilescu formulated a series of proposers whose sustainability is certified by the manner the dialogue have been developed in the last three centuries, as follows (Emilian Vasilescu, 1971):

**1.** The abandonment from all the parties of the polemical approaches, which are excessively apologetically and, especially, of the positions that may be interpreted as *proselytism*; this positioning is simultaneously circumscribed to the thesis of the opening, which must characterise the inter-religious dialogue, and also to the elementary fact that all the major the non-Christian religions present, *similar to the Christians, apologetic and polemical elements and resources, a dialogue based on this type of “arguments” being practically impossible*;

**2.** The progressive abandonment of the doctrinarian and cult-liturgical discussions, concomitant with the emphasizing of the moral-

ethical component of the debates, due to the universal, unanimous recognised/ admitted character of the values – *practically, there is no significant religion without its own portfolio of moral-ethical commands, founded inclusively in a doctrinal manner* –;

**3.** The use of the dialogue as *pragmatic means for the reciprocal spiritual enrichment, for the accumulations of new knowledge on what is valuable and significant for each of the world confessions*.

In the last part of this sequence, we mention that the theoretical approach elaborated by Emilian Vasilescu – a vision put in circulation by the official and scientific publication of the Romanian Orthodox Church – was implemented in Romania in the 70's when under the lead of the Orthodox Patriarch Justinian Marina (1901 – 1977), the social and philanthropic actions of the main autochthonous religions were organised and developed on a cooperating basis and the humanitarian interventions were solidary, tending to overcome numerically and qualitatively the autonomous actions (Emilian Vasilescu, 1964).

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEEPENING OF THE RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

The pioneering activity of Professor Emilian Vasilescu was continued, in the following years, by a series of Orthodox thinkers, so, at the present time, the Romanian Church possesses a set of analysis and diagnose studies, useful for approaching and developing relationships and the inter-religious dialogue according to its own hermeneutic reference points and to the elements of exegetic traditions based on the writings of the Holy Fathers.

In fact, it is all about a continuous development in the area of the imperative dogmatic referential of the dialogue, where the Romanian Orthodoxy could conclude – starting from the general outlines established by Professor Emilian Vasilescu –, *on the necessity and the opportunity of relating with the non-Christian confessions, a conclusion supported by numerous doctrinarian and moral arguments*.

**a).** If Professor Emilian Vasilescu related to the preparing stage of the dialogue under the aspect of a pragmatic way of overcoming the political-ideological restrictions from the former socialist countries during the 60's and the 70's, *the decisive elements of the social contextualisation for the contemporary inter-confessional relating are the process of globalisation and its “spiritual”*

*structure, the postmodernity.* Implicitly, the Romanian theologians assimilated their specificity on the dimensions related to or influencing the theological content of the dialogue, *including the extreme relativity and subjectivity attached to religion and to religiosity by the postmodernism, the following elements being determinant:*

1. The contemporary reality constraint the Christianity to a condition of one religion among other religions, because globalisation turned the world into “a house with several apartments” (W. Welsch); moreover, under the conditions in which each significant confession claims to possess exclusively the absolute and integral truth, any of its criteria and the supernatural revelation, the Holy Gospel, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and other aspects are sinking in relativism, thus “no religious community may not come with the pretention unless in a subjective form, of possessing the absolute truth” (Nicolae Achimescu, 2013);

2. Although sometimes a certain tendency of levelling the values and excessive report to each own referential is impeached – only – to the Roman Catholic and Protestant West<sup>18</sup> (Bruno Cescon, 2003), globalisation facilitates the exchange of spiritual values, generating an “increased spatial global proximity”, a “compression of time and space” (David Hurvey) and feeds what is called “the global village” (Marshall McLuhan)<sup>19</sup> (John Tomlinson, 2002), connecting everything and stimulating the generalised interdependencies;

3. A determinant landmark of postmodernity, the religious pluralism is directly correlated and expresses pragmatically the ideas of religious freedom and freedom of consciousness; as part of the universal values, the religious pluralism will not be possible to repudiate, because it would lead to the “ghetto” of the Church (Peter L. Berger), to its impossibility of fulfilling the divine-human mission; complementary, as J.B. Metz and G. Schmied show, “the anorexia [of the Church] for modernity and pluralisation might lead to an eventual fundamentalist option”<sup>20</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2013), a tendency that is unacceptable;

*Under these social circumstances, the inter-religious dialogue is inevitable;* shortening the separating distances and becoming closer to each other, especially due to the electronic mass communication devices, the religions may not ignore each other, even if, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith sows, “...few of us, the Christians, know sufficiently” on the presence and the work of God in other confessions<sup>21</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006).

**b).** Beyond this determination, the Romanian theologians emphasize the dogmatic dimension of the inter-religious dialogue, finding its most relevant reasons in the most profound structure of the Christological, pneumatological and

anthropologic teachings of the Church. It is an important development, because Professor Emilian Vasilescu insisted mainly on the general-human reasons of relating to the non-Christian religions, decrypting the recurrence of the fundamental moral-ethical values – peace, love, goodness, modesty and so on – in each of the major confessions of the world<sup>22</sup> (Emilian Vasilescu, 1971, 1953), values which, crystallised in an universal moral-spiritual valid matrix, will have beneficial effects also on the contouring of some theological or liturgical similitudes/ convergence factors. The religious diversity of the contemporary world may be seen as an effect of the fall, as an alienation of the religious consciousness, previously reported to divinity in an authentic plenary way and which, alter by the sin of the proto-parents, fragmented (Dorin Oancea), broken in lots of pieces of Truth, which, constituted in a *mythosphere* (Victor Kernbach), are organically accompanied the growth of the human civilisation. *In fact, it is historically attested the fact that there was no society or culture without a religious thinking, no matter how elementary.* Thus, the religious consciousness is an explicit given of the humanity and of each individual, as a far echo of the Edenic times, as an indestructible reflex of the human beings longing for the direct communion with the Creator. Each attempt of the humans to restore *koinonia* with God – attempts concretised in a first stage under the form of the myths and later institutionalised in autonomous religions – , comes to highlight a part from the unique Truth, valuing the “perpetual nostalgia of the paradise” (Nichifor Crainic) that marks the human existence; seen as a search for God, all these attempts are legitimate, even if the results – the multitude of religious systems coagulated in time, are so far from the authentic religion. There is no other way in the absence of the supernatural revelation; without its contribution, the theological gnosiology is poorer, because the natural revelation reached its limits once philosophy, especially the Platonism, postulated the unique transcendent divinity and the thesis of the natural immortality of the soul. Thus, we conclude that, “no matter how degraded a religion is, it is still in the limits of the human”<sup>23</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006); implicitly, the inter-religious dialogue brings face to face religions that preserve more or less elements from the primordial Truth, with obvious minimal compatibility and possibility of interaction and relation.

Under these circumstances, *after Rev Professor C. Sârbu located the reasons of the dialogue (C. Sârbu, 1969), in their ontological unity (Acts 17:26), somatic structural unity, aspirations and destiny (I Timothy 2, 4) – an anthropological argumentation, Rev Professor Nicolae Achimescu deepens the dogmatic dimension of the inter-religious dialogue, depicting a series of*

*Christologic and pneumatological elements – “reasons for the [inter-religious] dialogue to be a permanent preoccupation of Christianity”* (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006):

1. through incarnation, Our Saviour Jesus Christ assumed the human nature in its integrity (excepting the sin), overcoming in His person all the racial and ethnical barriers separating nowadays the people, because in Him “...there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28); in the same time, in His Resurrection, Christ, „who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), showed the path for the entire humanity; thus, Christ restores in Him the original ontological unity of the human kind and, in the same time, calls all the people to unite with Him, showing the universality of his work and message;

2. As first underlined by the Indian Christian theologian Stanley-Jedida Samartha (1920 – 2001), the entire humanity is addressed simultaneously the work of the Holy Ghost, as the Saviour teaches (“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” – John 16:13); as “...was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2), the Ghost comes to sanctify, to transfigure the entire Creation; the work of the Holy Ghost is addressed to each and to all, as the incarnation, the sacrifice and the resurrection of Christ is for each human and for the entire humanity, because “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world” – John 1:9.

The inter-religious dialogue based as above shown will be able to relate to what the religions of the world have in common from the Edenic *koinonia* of the human with the Creator; seen and developed in a Christologic and pneumatological perspective, it will only institutionalise the vocation for unity of the humanity – one detectable in each part of our being, even if the profound heterogeneity of the fallen world tends to eliminate it. Thus, the authentic meaning of the dialogue will be the one searching and valuing what the major religions have in common, because “...Christ takes us out of our isolation and connects us intimately with our human fellows”, so Christology and not the compared religion must be the base of our interest<sup>26</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006). A dialogue with premises tending toward unity will put behind the divergences, not ignoring, but recognising the theological reasons.

c). Supporting the dialogue with the other religions, Orthodoxy is pleading for valuing globally what

Professor Andrei Marga calls the “conciliation potential of the Christianity”, its unique capacity to find common point with (at least) a significant part of the other major confessions <sup>27</sup> (Andrei Marga, 2003), due to the following aspects:

1. The Christian dogmatic achieves what Andrei Marga calls “the rationing of the uncontainable”, not because it aims to decrypt the divine indescribable aspects. But because it aims to explain exhaustively – in the limits of the divine mystery – and in the terms of its own reasoning, the economical divine work on the humans and on the world;

2. The conversion of the landmarks of faith and practice into moral-ethical values and values for the individual behaviour, with metaphysical consistency derived from the profile and the specificity of the Christian teaching, meaning the “transfer of faith in the area of morality”;

3. Based on the incarnation of the Word and on the hypostatic union, in the “unchanged, undivided” character (The 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council) of the divine nature and of the human nature in the person of the Saviour, the Christian religion connects its universal vocation with the super rational fact it is based on; thus, the Christian universalism passes beyond the opening to the world of any other major religion, possessing a metaphysical preemptory dimension;

4. Christianity is placed inside the inter-religious dialogue, with its experience, already relevant, of practicing the ecumenism, of the institutionalised relations of its major confessions; thus, the experience of relating in conditions of doctrinarian and liturgical divergence is a relevant argument in affirming the opening of the Christianity toward the other religions.

d). When, in 1975, the *World Council of Churches* identified among the global problems concerning each of the world religions and what it called “the appearance of new societal models and their impact on the destiny and the role of the religion”<sup>28</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006), the impact of the globalisation and of the postmodernity on the religious thinking and practice was on its way to materialisation. Since then, the mutations in the social and cultural environment – some marked by the change of the place and of the role of the institutionalised religions on a world scale – have been nuancing determinant the basic context of the inter-religious dialogue.

As a result, *the Romanian Orthodox theologians identified during the last years several factors of influence used by postmodernism to change radically the climate of interacting with the major religions, challenging them in an unimaginable manner for the previous generations*, e.g.:

1. The concept of institutionalised religion loses more and more its actuality and relevance, because

postmodernity “appeared as a reaction toward the traditional meta-rations”<sup>29</sup>(Jean Francois Lyotard; Ion Popescu, 2005), claiming the dissolution of the consecrated religious institutions, considered to be “...restraining and exterior to the human individuality, to its fundamental freedom” (Adrian Nicolcea, 2005); implicitly, the religious faith and practice become more and more subjective <sup>31</sup> (Dumitru Popescu, 1998), more and more related to the individual and his private aspirations and more estranged from the “classical” forms of expressing the religiosity;

2. The postmodern world stripped of meaning the concept of transcendent origin of some religions, levelling them axiological and considering them as equalling theological, gnoseological and soteriological power; thus, the religions “close themselves in the immanent horizon of the history”, limiting to themselves a world tempted to “not accepting anything normative in an absolute manner”<sup>32</sup> (Gheorghe Petraru, 2005) and refusing to the humans the vocation and the right to search the transcendent;

Due to the more diffuse, subjective and relative religions, the act of faith is affected too – as intellectual unprovable certitude, which does not look for a rational certification; the faith will go back in evolution, taking the expression of an individual pulsation – *believing without belonging*, one that is not institutionalised, informal, without dogma and ecclesiology <sup>33</sup> (Gheorghe Petraru, 2005), anytime and easy retractable; the postmodern man “is living profoundly the drama of the relativism and legitimates the relativity”, so the society in general “risks to legitimate anything, even if unacceptable”<sup>34</sup> (Emil Stan, 1998).

Unless the modern world, too little permissive to the super rationality and faith, the postmodernism brings “the coming back of the religiosity and the new bewitching of the world”, rediscovering and making place for the human vocation of “being an active factor in the harmonious union of the beings, leading them to God and gather them in Him” (Vasile Citirigă, 2005); it is not a resurrection of the traditional institutionalised religions, but a “new religiosity”, one “closed for the limits of the immanent”, suspicious of being “created by the humans after their desires, pleasures and interests” (Gheorghe Petraru, 2005). From a conceptual point of view, “the new religiosity” comes to describe, in an obvious generic manner, all the forms, formulas or methods for the research, quantification, expression and promotion of the individual/ group relating to the supernatural, others than those consecrated by the traditional religions. Principally, all these forms will be only:

1) *subjective*, because they will legitimate points of view, interpretations, solutions and so on, belonging to individuals/groups that ignore the

traditional confessions, being outside and hostile to them;

2) *profoundly heterogeneous*, as long as they are conform to absolutely subjective visions on divinity, world, humans and deliverance;

3) *relative*, because they are aligned to the postmodern principle of “equality of religions” and

4) *diffuse*, because, in the given context of the global world, they are limitless disseminated without any organised form.

Under these circumstances, *the content and the dynamics of the contemporary inter-religious dialogue will have to be connected to the following important facts:*

a. The pressure of the “postmodern spirituality” aims, even if with various intensity, all the major traditional religions; obviously, the Christianity is the most exposed one, but the religion from Asia are in no better situation;

b. The “new religiosity” acts similarly, aiming to dislocate the unity of the major religions, promoting subjectivity and relativism, denying the foundations of the traditional confessions and feeding the tendency of multiplication of the centres for spiritual irradiation (Ion Popescu, 2005).

Practically, *all the main religions are in a defensive position, under the same pressure of the postmodernity that repudiates not only their powerfully institutionalised structure, but also their metaphysical foundations, including the vocation and the gnoseological and soteriological capacity.* Thus, the traditional confessions are all in the situation of adapting their message and social behaviour to the challenges of the “new religiosity” that obviously generates to each main religion new perceptions of the inter-religious dialogue and the relations with those which, at their turn, plead for the consecrated concept of religiosity.

Presenting an extraordinary intuition on the contemporary evolutions, the conference “The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems” (Jerusalem, 1928) concluded that, from the perspective of the main religions, even there is a dangerous state, this is not generated in any case by their own interaction and missionary-apologetic objectives, but by the “anti-religious feeling and by the secularism”<sup>38</sup> (Adrian Boldișor, 2015). It was practically an invitation to cooperation and well living together addressed to the institutionalises religion, in the context where the audience of each confession started to degrade, a step completed in the Christian space by the nuances brought by the *World Council of Churches*, after 1970, when was admitted that there is no contradiction or reciprocal exclusion between the commitment to dialogue with the non-Christians and the missionary imperative from *Matthew* 28:19, because both have “their own

integrity and vocation”, so the “dialogue [with the non-Christians] and the [Christian] mission could coexist”<sup>39</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006). In fact, a there is required a nuancing of the meaning of the Christian mission in order to better adapt it to the objective of the coexistence and of the dialogue with the non-Christians, which is a big challenge for Orthodoxy and all the other Christian cults, because “the obstacle of the Gospel will always accompany us; the biggest command of Jesus Christ asking us to go into the wide world to baptise all the people in the name of the Holy Trinity cannot be abandoned”. In the same time, we must admit that, we will not gain credibility in front of the non-Christian religions if we pretend in a triumphal manner that we are the only one possessing everything and disposing of everything”<sup>40</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006), meaning that, we should not insist on the theme of the Christian exclusivism in theology, gnosiology and soteriology.

In spite of this problem – obviously difficult to solve, even if we admit, as Reverend Alexander Schememann shows, that the mission means “not only the effort to convert someone to the true faith, but also the spiritual nature of the mission: the Christian love, the philanthropy and the self-giving”<sup>41</sup> (Alexander Schmemmann, 2006) –, the Romanian Orthodoxy is in accordance with the Report of the Conference *World Council of Churches* from Cambridge (1979), admitting that “some concepts of certain non-Christian religions [...] may prove to be close to the teachings of the *Holy Gospel*” and that all the main institutionalised confessions teach “...a piety and a profound obedience in front of a merciful God, close to the believer; the consciousness of the interconnection of all the things and the highlighting of the transitory character of the entire existence”<sup>42</sup> (Alexander Schmemmann, 2006). Thus, it is recognised the aspirational unity of all the religions, given by their ancestral unity and the common nostalgia – transformed in aspiration – for the Kingdom of God, Brahmaloka, Sangha or Ramarajya. Under these circumstances, the Orthodoxy calls all the religions of the world to a solidary recovery of those “dimension of hope” that animates each of them, a fundamental common characteristic, generating a vocation for the promotion of the agreement, peace, justice and love, with the power to give to “all believers the feeling of unification” in the belief that “God, the Absolute Truth and Goodness, will win in spite the persistence of all the destructive forces”<sup>43</sup> (Alexander Schmemmann, 2006) Thus, a climate the Conference on World Cooperation for Development (Beirut, 1968), which called all the religions “to value their doctrine, cult and discipline not only for satisfying the religious necessities of their believers, but also to fulfil the

great ideals of the world”<sup>44</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006).

### **POSSIBLE AND PRACTICAL OUTLINES OF THE RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Although confronted with serious impediments, the inter-religious dialogue is, at least from one point, inevitable (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006); thus, without ignoring the divergences and absolutizing the compatibility elements, the dialogue must use the tendency of the global and postmodern world of using “the deepening of the new metaphysical and religious, significant and valuable dimensions, to whom we co-exist in spirit” (Marin Aiftincă, 2001), which may be and extra-chance, completed by the fact that, as the Lutheran theologian Gustav Mensching (1901 – 1978) observed, “the specific character and the different spirit of each religion become very clear for the one looking to other religions” (Gustav Mensching, 1938).

**a).** The Romanian Orthodoxy received favourably the last accumulations of the ecumenical movement related to the opportunity of a dialogue in stages with the non-Christian religions, according to the following schemata<sup>48</sup> (Michael Kinnamon, Brian E. Cope, 1997-2002):

1. *The reciprocal accommodation*; the stage, similar to an preamble, aims to overcome the biases and the potential restraints, as well as an adequate positioning of the parts in relation with the determinant elements of the represented religions;

2. *The comparison of the major landmarks – doctrinarian, cultural, moral-ethical*; it will be acted for the report of the fundamental theological values and referential of the dialoguing partner to the other axiological field, with the separation of the eventual convergence elements and of the irreconcilable elements; in the hypothesis of the compatibility factors, similar or close values, the dialogue may continue;

3. *The exploration of the convergent values*; as essence and pragmatic scope of the religious relating, this stage comes to reveal what the religions share, meaning what they preserve from the Edenic communion.

**b).** The adequate selection of the dialogue theme is obviously determinant for the perspective of reciprocal relating; thus, the ecumenical movement defines the following types of dialogue, together with their characteristics<sup>49</sup> (Michael Kinnamon, Brian E. Cope, 1997-2002): *the practical dialogue*, aiming to adopt positions/ answers for some

religious, political and social problems (principal or punctual); *the cognitive dialogue*, destined to identify those doctrinarian or moral-ethical elements that may be used as relation bridges and *the spiritual dialogue*, oriented to the religious values of the parts. According to this frame, Nicolae Achimescu distinguishes the following forms of dialogue<sup>50</sup> (Nicolae Achimescu, 2006):

1. *The scientific dialogue*, destined to establish common points of view in the doctrinarian and moral-ethical teachings, “with the intention of reaching an consensus, whenever possible”;
2. *The dialogue of the beliefs and mentalities*, trying to solve the problem of the particular constituents of the dialoguing religions, with the explicit aim of manifesting “respect for the freedom of the people to preserve their faith without any constraint”.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although complex and difficult to quantify with precision, the problem of the inter-religious dialogue cannot be ignored, even if our adhesion to Christianity places us inevitably in the situation of having restraints toward the theological viability of other religions. *Still, assuming the necessary cognitive limits related to the divine economy, the work of God among our fellow creatures with other religious beliefs – because, in the end, deliverance is an act entirely depending of God – we will be able to report ourselves to the idea of the inter-religious dialogue starting from those ideal premises represented by sincerity, openness and reciprocal trust.*

*Thus, the major institutionalised religions will be able to discover each other in reality; sitting at the table of the theoretical and practical dialogue, they will be able, perhaps, to express solidary the simultaneous adhesion to values as the good, the peace, the love and the justice, supporting them in spite of the doctrinarian and liturgical divergences. Religions will be able to transmit to all the nations an urge for peace, social and national justice, reciprocal trust and social progress, showing the capacity of each of them to address not only to the spiritual individuals, but also to communities, to assimilate and implement the values of the communities, achieving the authentic aim of the Christian community. Beyond the relevant aim of reciprocal understanding and religious coexistence, a common answer is possible to be found for the challenges of the contemporary world, in order to “transfer” it their respect for the universal moral-ethical values. In the same time, the inter-religious dialogue must be perceived as a natural answer of the institutionalised religions to the pressure – in various degree of intensity – of the globalisation and of the postmodern “spirituality”;*

*if the last factor opposes to the major religions, denying their legitimacy, soteriological capacity and gnoseological positioning, the impact of globalisation is more insidious, because, by putting in contact religions, cultures, values and mentalities that are different or antagonist, it menaces the general-human reason of the dialogue, placing the believers of various religions in situation with a high potential for conflict or that do not favour the peaceful living between people.*

Assimilating integrally all the problems of the dialogue with the non-Christian religions and hoping for their development and bringing to fruition, the Romanian Orthodoxy opens sincerely toward the other confession, recognising and discovering them with their values, capable to enrich the universal spirituality. Simultaneously, the Romanian Orthodox Church expresses, with the solidary voice of its theologians, the belief that, through dialogue, the traditional religions will make their voice heard when the values of peace, justice, fraternity and philanthropy will be endangered anywhere in the world.

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