



Marin Bugiulescu

Inter-Christian Dialogue. Short History, Tendencies, and Perspectives

Abstract

Ecumenical dialogue is one of the most necessary topics in contemporary theology, and that's from the perspective of the reluctance of some Christians to engage not so much in a cordial relationship, but especially in one of brotherhood and communion with other confessions. Regarding Christian unity, we can confirm that the presence of the Church begins when we declare our affiliation to the living Body of Christ. Church has a theandric, living, and existential structure. The church has a unique and unitary constitution that historically begins in Jerusalem in a catholic way and extends to the end of the ages. Confessional ethics has a necessary consequence in respect of doing



Rev. Professor Ph.D. Marin Bugiulescu, Director of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, „St. John Chrysostom” Târgoviște, Romania, Associate Member of Dumitru Stăniloae Scientific and Interdisciplinary Research Center, Valahia University, Târgoviște, Romania

something for an ecumenical approach. Ecumenical dialogue is the responsibility of theologians, church leaders, and experts in this field. In this viewpoint, Christian peoples are called to pray for the unity of all Churches and peace in the world.

Keywords

Church, Inter-Christian dialogue, confessions, ecumenical dialogue

1 Introduction

The Church is the Body of Christ and the only organism of man's salvation and of the sanctification of creation. Apart from the statement given by the Holy Scripture, which presents the Church as the *Body of Christ* (I Corinthians 12:11-14), the Church is the community and theandric institution founded on God's revelation, and, above all, the salvation work made by Christ. If the first millennium after Christ was characterized by the spread of Christianity and ecumenical synods, the second millennium was marked by Christian denominational divisions (Catholicism, Protestantism, and neo-Protestantism in all its forms).

The emergence of various schisms and reforms has generated new Churches and denominations, but this has not meant a change in the eternal and unique plan of the Church, because they are not essentially the reality of the one and only Church.

Regarding the etymology of the word *dialogue*, it comes from the Greek word *dialegomai*. In *the Septuagint* (LXX), it refers to an intense discussion, an uninterrupted conversation. In the New Testament, *dialegomai* appears several times; in this context, *di-*als meaning *for some reason*, and *legomai* means *speech*. In other words, the conversation has a well-established causality, so the prefix "dials" gives the notion a specific imprint.

We could say that “in the beginning” was dialogue, that is, the dialogue which was followed by “communication” and “understanding” (in the sense of clarification). Plato and Socrates used the word “dialogue” with its former meaning, and Aristotle in the sense of „communication”. Latin literature uses the word in terms of “mutual communication”. This provides information, communication, or a clarification about what has been given from God, for those whom He has asked. This is, in fact, the archaic meaning of the word “dialogue”. Christianity, after the great schism (1054) and then through the rupture produced by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, lost its unity of faith and life. The effects of the schism to 1054 would last until the 20th Century, when the Catholic-Orthodox Joint Declaration of 1965 did not end the schism, but withdrew excommunications laid down in the 11th Century. The declaration was made by Roman Catholic Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I.

The ecumenical dialogue already established between the Christian Churches has led to the formation of new ecumenical ethics which does not result in arrogant and ideological confessionalism that imagines the Church of Christ and His truth only within the boundaries of their own churches, seeing heresy in the constitution and activities of other Christian Churches. It requires that we see God's Word and His truth, that we love and recognize it beyond the borders of our churches. Authentic ecumenical dialogue and the new confessional ethic call for us to accept this basic principle without reservation. Thus it is built on the base of the “Christian fraternity”.

“Dialogue is connected deep down with the search for truth and a striving for wisdom. It excludes fanaticism. A fanatic is a person who, convinced that he is absolutely right, locks himself up in his own position and refuses any critical testing or challenge. Dialogue presupposes precisely the engagement of

people with critical minds, who question the obvious and also allow others to challenge them”¹.

Ecumenical spirit has a testing area in the question of whether interfaith ethics resist the influence of the other Church by forcing a person’s conscience to adhere to other Christian Church. An essential requirement of interfaith ethics is that the religious history of the other side does not suffer divisions through biased distortion². Historical religions have taken considerable steps in this direction, to get closer to the historical realities, but it cannot be definitely said that we have done everything, and no reference can be made to all denominations.

Confessional ethics has the important consequence of supporting ecumenical thinking in our Christian community. Ecumenical dialogue is the responsibility of the church leaders, theologians, of specialists in the field. Church members are called to pray for the unity of all Christian churches. Beyond our Church, we must look to the universal Christian Church, and, above all, to the master of the Holy Church, God, and the world created by Him – which God maintains, has saved and desires to sanctify. The path must be taken from serving Christian unity to keeping the created world united, to preserve and renew it.

¹ Moyaert Marianne: *Interreligious Dialogue*, in David Cheetham/Douglas Pratt/David Thomas (eds.): *Understanding interreligious Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 206.

² Petraru Gheorghe, *Dialogul interreligios in perspectiva teologiei Bisericii Ortodoxe* (Interreligious dialogue in the perspective of the theology of the Orthodox Church), in *Dialog Teologic*, Editura Presa Bună, Iasi, 1999.

2 Ecumenical openness and dialogue; missionary ecclesial needs

In the first Christian centuries, ecumenism stood for the universality of a synod of the Christian Church, which ensured the teaching of the faith it elaborated, a normative approach for the whole Christendom, addressed to the entire Christian Church.

In the New Testament, *oikoumene* represents the inhabited earth, the whole world (Luke 2: 1), the whole earth where the authority of Christ is exercised (Matt. 28:14), which the apostles and their successors are called to share with Him (Matt. 28, 19). Before 1453, ecumenism defined the unity in diversity of the Church of Christ under direct submission to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. "Ecumenism has become a theological reality since the first rupture in the Church of Christ and has taken on a more precise outline since the Reformation (sixteenth Century)"³.

The term *ecumenical* used to describe the ecumenical movement has, nevertheless, a different meaning. Ecumenism or ecumenical movement is the twentieth-century trend manifested in the Christian world that aimed to unite all the Churches to reach a single flock and a single shepherd. Originally born within Protestantism, the desire to restore the unity of the Churches has a favorable echo among the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. In 1910, the International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh emphasized again the inseparable link between Christian unity and mission. The ecumenical movement has been developed continuously since 1920, and has its roots in the initiatives and actions taken in the Anglican and Protestant world in the second half of the nineteenth century.

³ Sterea Tache, *Credința și misiune, (Faith and Mission)*, Editura Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Bucureștilor, 1999, p. 1.

The central moment is the creation of the World Ecumenical Council of Churches (WCC). 147 Churches have confessed that they understand to be together. Although the Churches differ in doctrine and discipline, they could still bear common witness through the bonds of collaboration, mutual aid, and prayer. The Ecumenical Council of Churches has no ecclesiastical or canonical authority, but only the authority granted by the Churches. It acts on behalf of the member Churches, if it is entrusted this responsibility by one or more Churches. The Ecumenical Council of Churches was founded in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on August 22nd, 1948. At that moment, the doctrinal basis of the Ecumenical Council of Churches was defined in the following terms: a fraternal association of Churches that accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as their God and Savior. In 1961, in New Delhi, the definition was completed as follows: WCC is a fraternal association of Churches that confess Jesus Christ as God and Savior, according to Scripture, and try to respond together to their common call to glorify the one God, in three persons, the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit.

After the recognition of the Holy Trinity, the Orthodox Churches became members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. From the very beginning, since 1948, it was pointed out that the WCC was not and would never become a super-church. It solely aimed that we all be one, a flock, and a shepherd. The WCC tries to practice the respect of social cooperation of Christians, overcoming religious prejudices, in order to achieve Christian unity.

Ecumenism wants a Christian mission in the name of the Gospel of Christ, who sacrificed Himself for the unity of the world (John 17:21). True unity in faith will be achieved when Christians around the world confess in their hearts and minds the righteous faith, lived through Christ every day, as the symbol of faith teaches us: “...and in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”.

Not only is interreligious dialogue exchange of ideas, but it is also a gift, as it is based on prayer. It means maturity of thought and examination of conscience, the will to reconcile, and unity in

truth. It is a renewal not only of the expression of faith but also of one's personal experience. It is a dialogue of salvation. The dialogue is the ideal means of confronting different points of view, for examining the divergences that separate Christians.

From his beginnings, man was created as a social being, able to exercise this capacity in interpersonal relations with other human beings and with the Holy Trinity as well. History presents the social organization of humanity, in the initial phase, in an extended family environment, and then, over time, in unified tribes based on degrees of kinship or common goals. The Holy Scripture presents humanity as a family linked to divinity through communion.

The inseparable relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit in the *iconomy* (activity) of salvation is actualized by the Church as Body of Christ. The Church is founded on a twofold divine economy: the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the way in which how God has ordained the deliverance of man and of the world from sin. The Second Ecumenical Council of (Constantinople in, 381,) constituting the final part of the Symbol of Faith, decided through its Article IX, decided that the whole of Christendom must believe and confess in a holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, in addition to the other truths of faith concerning the Holy Trinity. The Church is a society of persons and a place in which all creatures are rooted, namely in Jesus Christ. because its essence is in and through Him. The notion of church is linked "sui generis" to the ecumenical mission that inaugurates the kingdom of God to all creatures (Acts 1: 8) because "the Church is the sacramental project of the gospel, visibly manifested by the reconciliation of faith"⁴.

The deified humanity of Christ, in which we are also included, realizes a fundamental unity between God and people through

⁴ Nifon Mihăiță, *Misiologie creștină (Christian Missiology)*, ASA, București 2002, p. 25.

the Church, supported by the intercession brought by the Hierarch Christ who makes humanity a single being by incorporating into the world of the triune fire:

“That all may be one after as You, Father, in Me and I in You, so also they in us may be one, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me ... I in them and You in Me, so that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me” (John 17: 21-23).

Ecumenism advocates for the union of all in Christ, in the realization of the unity for which the Savior prayed. Because He is: “God, His very being, in His providence, in His Incarnation, in His presence in the Church, and in His last manifestation at the end of the ages”⁵.

The purpose of the mission of Church is to share the Gospel teaching and the message of the resurrection with others, as naturally as possible and in a manner adapted to their socio-cultural qualities⁶. The Church preaches the gospel, but must continue to care for those who have received it, providing them with everything necessary for a full experience of it in daily life.

Conversion is the ultimate aim of preaching, that is, “*an act of profound change and spiritual renewal*,” which is, in fact, the total commitment to the service of God. Through its ministers, the Church, at any time and in any place, must: “*preach repentance and baptism in the name of Christ, for the redeeming of sins*”⁷.

⁵ Meyendorff John, *Biserica Ortodoxă ieri și azi* (The Orthodox Church: Yesterday and Today), București, Ed. Anastasia, 1996, p. 27.

⁶ Lawrence Bill, *Păstorirea eficientă* (Effective Pastoring Giving Vision, Direction, and Care to Your Church), Editura Bee International, București, 2000, p. 25.

⁷ Nifon Mihăiță, *Misiologie creștină* (Christian Missiology), ASA, București 2002, p. 26.

Baptism is the concretization of personal conversion. It realizes only the beginning of the process of perfection, because in baptism there is a resurrection to the new life in Christ, a factual re-birth or, as Paul calls it in Titus 3,5, a *πάλλιγγενέσιά*, which places man in a real relationship with Christ, the absolute model of our perfection, because: "He is the image of the invisible God (Col.1,15), He is the perfect Man who restored to the sons of Adam the likeness of God, deformed from the first sin"⁸.

Receiving the faith, the evangelical word, strengthens the mission of the Christians, revealing them as active parts of the Christ body. The One Church built on the Way of Truth and Life that springs from the resurrection of Christ presents itself in the world as the infallible reality of faith sustained by the priestly work of the Holy Spirit who permanently draws man to God. The Holy Liturgy has at its center the Eucharistic sacrifice, which, through the work of the priest (Christ), introduces the sacrifice of the whole community into the sacrifice of Christ. The Holy Eucharist is the unifying center of the whole ecclesial community because, by sharing Christ in the community, an intimate and profound connection is made between the believer and God, and between him and the community members of which he is a part.

3 Dialogue and ecumenical mission in contemporaneity

Today, the ecumenical dialogue takes place in a very complex political and social context: on the one hand, we are a part of the process of globalization. On the other hand, we are witnessing war, violence and conflict, often religiously motivated.

⁸ Yannoulatos Anastasios, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns)*, Ed. Bizantină, București, 2004, p. 109.

Ecumenicalism has been characteristic of the Church since the time of Pentecost, when the message of Christ was transmitted in the world to listeners of different cultures, in many languages and dialects. Father Dumitru Stăniloae emphasizes the teaching about the extension of salvation achieved by Christ through the ecclesial framework or in the form of the Church⁹. The relationship between Christ, the Priesthood, the Holy Sacraments and the faithful is proof of the presence and work of the Church in the world. This presence is complete only in the Orthodox Church, which has remained One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Through its indestructible connection with Christ, the Orthodox Church is a full Church in comparison with the other Churches and Christian denominations.

Without neglecting the charismatic reality and soteriological implications specific to the historical confessional Christian churches, Father Dumitru Stăniloae presented the Orthodox teaching comparatively, but does not resort to doctrinal speculations, deviate from Orthodox thought or relativize the ecclesiological truth. However, he is not against ecumenism either. On the contrary, he participated in various ecumenical conferences as a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which allowed him to theologially express the doctrinal, canonical and cultic truth in this regard. "The ecumenical movement has the indisputable merit that it brought into the life of the Churches the accentuated preoccupation with the problem of their unity and urged them to enter into dialogue in order to achieve this goal"¹⁰. This theological teaching was reaffirmed on June 16-26, 2016, at the Holy and Great Synod of Orthodox Churches in Crete, which stated that: "The Orthodox Church has a deep awareness that it

⁹ Stăniloae Dumitru, *Teologia Dogmatică (Dogmatic Theology)*, volumul II, București 1987, p. 206.

¹⁰ Stăniloae Dumitru, *În problema inter-comuniunii (On the matter of inter-communion)*, *Ortodoxia*, Nr. 4, București, 1971, p. 561.

is the Church of Christ” (About the Holy and Great Synod of Crete, 16-26 June 2016, Question 36, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest 2017, pp. 30-31, see also Question 38.38, pp. 36-39)¹¹.

Dialogue has been and continues to be an integral part of the Orthodox tradition.

During the early Christian centuries, ecumenism signified the universality of a universal Church synod. As His Eminence Metropolitan Nifon points out: “The Church is the sacramental project of the Gospel, visibly manifested through the reconciliation of faith”¹².

The mission of the Church is to make Christ known regardless of any circumstances. Today, the World Council of Churches seeks to practice the respect of religious, moral and social cooperation in the Christian environment, overcoming confessional prejudices, in order to achieve Christian unity.

“The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity. The WCC brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians and including most of the world’s Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC’s founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin

¹¹ Despre sfântul și Marele sinod Din Creta, 16-26 iunie 2016 (About the Holy and Great Synod of Crete, 16-26 June 2016), Editura Basilica, București 2017.

¹² Nifon Mihăiță, *Misiologie creștină* (Christian Missiology), ASA, București 2002, p. 25.

America, the Middle East and the Pacific. There are now 350 member churches”¹³.

Inter-Christian dialogue must be analyzed from several points of view. On the one hand, we speak of intercommunication within Orthodoxy, while on the other hand, we have differentiated situations within the relations between the Eastern and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, within the relations with the Romanesque Church, Catholic and Protestant Churches. Eastern Orthodox Churches include the four ancient patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople; the Patriarchate of Georgia; the patriarchates of Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania; as well as the Autocephalous Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It also includes several autonomous churches, such as those of Sinai and Finland. The Oriental Orthodox Churches include: Coptic Orthodox (Egypt), Armenian, Ethiopian, and Syrian Orthodox Church.

The rupture of ecclesial communion between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches occurred gradually over the fifth and sixth centuries, due to a theological controversy over the relationship between the divine and human natures assumed by Christ. This controversy centered on the expression “two natures in one Person” adopted at the Council of Chalcedon (451). The non-Chalcedonian churches have preserved a Christology called *Monophysitism*, which supports a single nature of God, the incarnate divine Word.

According to the universality principles, the World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches that confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures. Therefore, they seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In reality, the Orthodoxy member churches are called to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship and promote their common witness in

¹³ <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc>.

work for mission and evangelism for renewal in unity, worship, mission, and service. That is the only way for the unity of churches.

4 Romanian Orthodox Church - ecumenical dialogue, trends, and perspectives

For the Romanian Orthodox Church, the ecumenical dialogue was a constant of its evangelical mission in the perspectives of faith. On 30th of June 1902, the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III addressed all local Orthodox Churches a patriarchal and synodal encyclical, asking their opinion on the relations with "*the two great offspring of Christianity, that is, with the Catholic and Protestant Churches*"¹⁴. On 9th of May 1903, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church responded to this encyclic, affirming that the Orthodox Church must keep its doctrine unaltered, and that the unity of the Church of Christ should be achieved by the coming of the Western Christian denominations to Orthodoxy, and no dogmatic or canonical concession can be made. Starting with its presence at the World Church Conference "*Faith and Order*" held in Geneva from 9 to 23 August, 1920, attended by Professor Dragomir Demetrescu and the Rev. Professor Gheorghe Rădulescu from Constanta, the Orthodox Church Romanian introduced its assumed values of ecumenical dialogue. A new ecumenical opening was affirmed at the Congresses of Practical Christianity (*Life and Work*) and of Dogmatic Christianity (*Faith and Order*) – Stockholm (Sweden) – August 1925, then – Lausanne– (Switzerland) August 1927.

¹⁴ Niculae Șerbănescu, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română și mișcarea ecumenică*, in "Ortodoxia", nr. 1-2/1962, p. 108.

The Romanian Orthodox Church has been actively involved in the ecumenical movement from the beginning. Although in Moscow, in 1948, the Romanian Orthodox Church had been prevented from participating in the first General Assembly of the newly created Ecumenical Council of Churches, as soon as the political context allowed it, it resumed ties with the Ecumenical Movement, its admission being considered a sign of continuity. In the relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the WCC, Patriarch Justinian (1948-1977) focused on the presentation of the Romanian Orthodox Church as a living institution and as a model of ecumenism, the emphasis being laid on practical collaboration. The Romanian Orthodox Church has laid greater importance on the visits of ecumenical delegations, to which a special protocol has been dedicated. In turn, the Ecumenical Council has discovered a reliable partner, Romania is seen as a potential country for organizing ecumenical events.

During Patriarch Justin (1977-1986), ever more intense concern for the theological part is observed, against the background of the progress made by the Faith and Constitution Commission, which are materialized in the *BEM* document. At the same time, the relationship between the WCC and the Romanian Orthodox Church begins to be marked by the problem of communist state policy, a problem accentuated during the first years of pastorate of Patriarch Teoctist, especially due to the policy of systematizing villages and demolishing churches, promoted by the communist state.

The Romanian Orthodox Church's concern for theological and ecumenical issues has been especially strong since its participation in the Faith and Constitution Commission meetings in Stavanger, in 1985, and Budapest, in 1989. At the two conferences, the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented by Bishop Timothy Sevcicu of Arad and, by the Hieromonk Dr. Daniel Ciobotea, Patriarchal Counsellor, director of the Contemporary Theology and Ecumenical Dialogue Sector, the future Patriarch of the Ro-

manian Orthodox Church (since 2007), this being the second Romanian included in the staff of the CMB, at the Bossey Institute. In 1989, the largest Romanian delegation took part in the proceedings of the World Conference of the Commission for Mission and Evangelization in San Antonio. The delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church consisted of: Metropolitan Antonie of Transylvania, Nifon Ploieșteanul- Patriarchal Bishop-Vicar and Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Hieromonk Daniel Ciobotea - director of the Contemporary Theology and Ecumenical Dialogue Sector and Lecturer at the Christian Mission Department of the Orthodox University Theological Institute in Bucharest, priest Professor Nicolae Necula, priest Professor Dumitru Popescu, assistant deacon univ. Ioan Sauca, - who since 1994 has been involved in the leadership of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and the nun Nazaria Nița. At the same time, 1989 marked the promotion of a new personality who would play an important role in the relations of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the CMB, Bishop Nifon Ploieșteanul, coordinator of the Department of Ecumenical Relations of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Thus, the presence of the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the 7th General Assembly in Canberra, February 1991, had a great significance, being the first after the fall of communism. The General Assembly in Harare was held in December 1998¹⁵. The Romanian delegation to the 8th CEB General Assembly was quite numerous compared to other Orthodox Churches. During the talks, the Romanian delegates stood out for their balanced position, Bishop Nifon having an important role in the discussions between the Orthodox. In recognition of his ecumenical involvement and openness, Bishop Nifon was awarded the Prize for Ecumenism and Peace by the

¹⁵ See the journal *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (Romanian Orthodox Church), CXVI, No. 1-6, 1998, pp. 78-79.

Catholic Episcopate of Southern Italy, Bari-Taranto, Italy, in September 1999. In 2016, His Eminence Archbishop and Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste¹⁶ was appointed representative of the Romanian Patriarchate in the Special Inter-Orthodox Commission to prepare the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, which took place on the island of Crete, Greece in June 2016. Aslo, an important ecumenical role have been played by His Eminence Nifon in preparation of the Pope's two visits to Romania (in 1999 and 2019). Therefore, after 1989, in the new climate of freedom, the ecumenical preoccupations of the Romanian Orthodox Church were not limited only to the relationship with the WCC but were also geared towards Roman Catholic Church for organizing Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis visit in Romania. In the contemporary period, the Romanian Orthodox Church has had delegates to all major events of the WCC, while also being present in the staff of Geneva. During the ecumenical meetings, the Romanian Orthodox Church tried to pursue a moderate policy, always maintaining a balance between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of churches' mission in the world, showing trust and willingness to dialogue.

A new approach to ecumenical relations was at the end of the 20th century, which born new visions and challenges of ecumenism in the next century. Although the Roman Catholic Church did not pursue any dialogue with other Christian denominations for a long time, the Fourth General Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala, 1968 saw the participation of observers from the Vatican for the first time, which marked the new attitude of the Roman Catholic Church on the Ecumenical Movement. Visits to Orthodox countries have been intensified since Pope John Paul II. During his

¹⁶ On December 26, 1999, he was elected Archbishop of Târgoviste, and on March 7, 2008, the Holy Synod of the B.O.R. granted him the title of Metropolitan "ad personam", conferred publicly on July 10, 2008, in Târgoviște, by His Beatitude Father Daniel, Patriarch of Romania.

pontificate, He conducted a great number of trips in different countries of the world and highly valued ecumenical dialogue between the different rites of the Christian religion and other religions. Pope John Paul II visited Romania at the invitation of Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church¹⁷. Patriarch Teoctist in the first week of January 1987, a few months after his election as Head of the Romanian Church, he visited Pope John Paul II in Vatican. After almost two decades Pope John Paul II, on 7 to 9 May in 1999, visited Romania, the first visit by a pontiff to a mainly Eastern Orthodox Christian country in almost 1-thousand years, since the Great Schism of 1054. His Holiness Pope John Paul II uttered a speech in Romanian:

"With great joy I come, today, to Romania, a nation dear to me and that I wished for a long time to visit. With great emotion I kissed the ground, grateful before anything to God almighty that, in His provident goodwill, allowed me to see this thought accomplished. (...) I trust that my visit will help heal the wounds produced in time between our Churches in the fifty years that passed and will open a up a new season of reciprocal collaboration full of trust (...) Romania, bridge country between Orient and Occident, turning point between Central and Oriental Europe, Romania, that tradition names with the beautiful title of "Garden of Virgin Mary".

From 31 May to 2 June 2019, Pope Francis also visited Romania, continuing the ecumenical dialogue. The visit by Pope Francis was in continuity with the visit of John Paul II in 1999. The official motto of the visit was: "Let's walk together". Pope Francis

¹⁷ Patriarch Teoctist (1986-2007) was the fifth Patriarch since the Autocephalous Church of Romania was raised to the rank of Patriarchate (in 1925), succeeding Miron Cristea (1925-1939), Nicodim Munteanu (1939-1948), Justinian Marina (1948-1977) and Justin Moisescu (1977-1986).

visited the new Orthodox People's Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest. His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania (2007-present), greeted him at the Cathedral. In this ecclesiological space, the Lord's Prayer was uttered as Pater Noster, in Latin, and as Tatăl nostru, interspersed with Paschal hymns in Romanian. At the end of the ceremony, His Beatitude Daniel and Pope Francis offered blessings to all Christians present at this memorable historical and ecumenical event.

5 Conclusions

The first step of the inter-Christian dialogue is to gather and discuss without prejudices, and establish a worldwide dialogue and shared moments of prayer.

All steps in the inter-Christian dialogue must be taken to provide complete information about the ecumenical results and inform believers about the Christian life to prepare the ecclesial conscience responsibly.

The main reasons for the intensification and continuation of the inter-Christian dialogue concern the following aspects:

- Christianity is a religion of love and dialogue;
- The unity of the Church and the unity of faith;
- The unity of the Church and the diversity of the Churches;
- The work of the Holy Spirit in and out of the Church;
- The salvation and sanctification of man and the world;
- The Holy Sacraments and the sacraments;
- The existence in the synaxarion of universally honest saints, then the mutual recognition of local saints;
- Liturgical issues of a pastoral nature;
- Issues related to ecclesiastical jurisdiction;
- Recognition of the seven ecumenical synods;
- The modern problem of migration and the diaspora.

Regardless of the nature of the inter-Christian dialogue and the extent of ecumenical manifestations, the Orthodox Churches have always declared their faithfulness to the teaching of apostolic faith expounded by the Holy Fathers, and preserved in the confessions of faith, among which the Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol prevails. The Church is catholic, ecumenical, or synodal in the historical form of the unity of all local, national churches of all times and places that preserve the unity of Christ. The vivid relationship between Christ, Priesthood, Holy Mysteries, and believers is an evident proof of the presence and work of Christ in the world. Due to this presence of Christ, the Orthodox Church, is and remains the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

Bibliography

1. *Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Romanian Orthodox Church-journal)*, CXVI, no. 1-6, 1998
2. *Despre sfântul și Marele sinod Din Creta, 16-26 iunie 2016 (About the Holy and Great Synod of Crete, 16-26 June 2016)*, Editura Basilica, București 2017.
3. Lawrence Bill, *Păstoriarea eficientă (Effective Pastoring Giving Vision, Direction, And Care To Your Church)*, Editura Bee International, București, 2000.
4. Meyendorff John, *Biserica Ortodoxă ieri și azi (The Orthodox Church: Yesterday and Today)*, București, Ed. Anastasia, 1996.
5. Mihăiță Nifon IPS, *Misiologie creștină (Christian Missiology)*, ASA București 2002.
6. Moyaert, Marianne: Interreligious Dialogue, in: David Cheetham/Douglas Pratt/David Thomas (eds.): *Understanding interreligious Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 193–217.
7. Petraru Gheorghe, *Dialogul interreligios in perspectiva teologiei Bisericii Ortodoxe (Interreligious dialogue in the perspective of the theology of the Orthodox Church)*, in *Dialog Teologic*, Editura Presa Buna, Iasi, 1999.
8. Plămădeală Antonie IPS, *Lucrările Comitetului Central al Consiliului Ecumenic al Bisericilor (The work of the Central Committee of the Ecumenical Council of Churches)*, Kingston (Jamaica)", în: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, anul XCVII, 1-2, 1979

9. Șerbănescu Niculae, Biserica Ortodoxă Română și mișcarea ecumenică, în "Ortodoxia", nr. 1-2/1962
10. Simeon Sfântul Noul Teolog, *Întâia cuvântare morală (Ethical Discourses)*, în Filocalia Nr. 6, traducere Dumitru Stăniloae, București 1977.
11. Stăniloae Dumitru, *În problema inter-comuniunii (In the matter of inter-communion)*, în revista *Ortodoxia*, Nr. 4, București, 1971.
12. Stăniloae Dumitru, *Sinteză eclesiologică (Ecclesiological synthesis)*, în revista *Studii Teologice*, Nr. 5-6, București, 1955.
13. Stăniloae Dumitru, *Teologia Dogmatică (Dogmatic Theology)*, volumul II, București 1987.