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Orthodox Insights for a Contemporary Interreligious Dialogue

Abstract

The interreligious dialogue assumes that faith is not an inarticulate discourse but an expression of the rational aspect of the human being. A Christian-Muslim dialogue, based on a common monotheism as a starting point, shouldn't be understood as a philosophy of religion, situated outside the particular religious traditions. Religious thinking, like the dialogue between theologians, is rational as much as it can be expressed through sacred texts, confessions and dogmas.

Keywords

Interreligious dialogue, mission, conflict, violence, tolerance



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Introduction

The dialogue between world-religions is promoted both by academic environment and by international ecclesiastical bodies.

Our contemporary interreligious dialogue is marked by the necessity of mutual understanding, the respect towards the spiritual and cultural treasure of different religions, the common spiritual experience of the members from communities living together in a well-defined territory, and also the human solidarity manifested in positive and practical attitudes towards the challenges contrary to human nature and fueled by the centrifugal movement of today's society.

The dialogue between Christianity and Islamism is based on a common belief in God as personal and transcendent reality. One of the major difficulties of the dialogue has an anthropological character, namely the *human being as homo peccator*. The consequences of sin are multiple and concern the entire world regardless of religion or denomination.

1. The need for dialogue

In the Christian world, the interest in interreligious dialogue has increased in the last 40 years. The starting point of this type of dialogue was marked by common elements present in the great monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islamism, elements long underestimated by theologians.

The interreligious dialogue is based on the consciousness of religious and cultural plurality, a reality which, by faith, experienced a remarkable extension and a qualitative change. The coexistence does not reside in the regional particularity of unresponsiveness and indifference but is based on dialogue, the

only one capable of expressing the contextual religious reality. The dialogue supports the coexistence relations and it also determines questions and gives answers much needed for mutual cognizance.

Mutual cognizance brings forward exchanges, cooperation in all aspects of social, economic, cultural and religious life. This way, confessional boundaries can be exceeded. "It is difficult to name a specific aspect of the dialogue. Causing exaltation for some and reservedness for others, the dialogue is often an incomprehensible *object*".¹

In this type of dialogue the experiences prior to meetings are very important², but also the ways of theological expression during these meetings. The dialog among partners of different denominations is meant to create a close atmosphere, an opening of mutual concerns towards man, world and their purpose. At the same time it must be taken into consideration the limitations and difficulties that may arise during the dialogue. "In both cases, the integrity of each partner must be respected. Beyond the border of mutual respect, the commitment in dialogue shows the love for Christ. This is an affirmation of Life against destructive forces and chaos, it is a participation in the effort of all those who, with no great illusions, try to achieve a better human community. The dialogue cannot become the secret weapon of an aggressive Christian activism, but the way of living the faith in Christ with the fellow man and in the service of human community".³

In this respect, the dialogue occupies a distinct and legitimate place in the life of Christian communities without contradicting

1 I. Bria, Philippe Chanson, Jacques Gadille, Marc Sprindler, *Dictionnaire œcuménique*, Les Éditions du CERF, Paris 2001, p. 81.

2 Sri Lanka 1974, Bangkok 1980, Assisi 1986, Rome 2007, etc.

3 I. Bria, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

the life in Christ as permanent confession of Truth and unceasing Trinitarian Love.

There cannot be dialogue without evangelical confession. Thus, through dialogue the evangelization becomes an instrument of the missionary work, and that is why it sometimes leads to situations of hesitation in the group of dialogue partners of other religions. Without the testimony of Truth, the dialogue becomes ambiguous. In Christianity, the Truth was incarnated and gave us *the Annunciation*, the only way to eternity. The experience of the interreligious dialogue in the Church's life always insists on the opening towards the other within the confession and it brings back up the missionary attitudes and methods in the past. For instance, *the Ottoman captivity of Saint Gregory Palamas*⁴ was understood as ascetic and apostolic experience, as a chance of personal spiritual completeness and a unique missionary opportunity.

Mutual confession is inherent in the human dialogue. You cannot have a genuine dialogue unless it is created and seen as a meeting of commitments that mutually ask and answer. The tensions between members occur when some of them show a preconceived, proselytizing manipulation towards the *weaker* group. In any dialogue, "the man is seen as a limit; a convergence between the empirical and transcendental world or the world of those seen and those unseen. As a consequence of its convergence condition, of point where two different realms meet, man has the position of a *mediator*, being the only

⁴ Ioan I. Ică jr, *Violență și dialog interreligios în captivitatea otomană a Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, in the volume: *Violența „în numele lui Dumnezeu”. Un răspuns creștin*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia 2002, p. 163.

creature with dispassion perspectives from the immediate condition and projection in the future.”⁵

Not only Christians have in their missionary doctrine the right and obligation to herald their own teaching. However, a missionary zeal and a distorted belief can affect the respect towards the liberty and dignity of a human being, of communities, threatening the harmony of cohabitation and the social peace. In these situations, many dialogue partners have suspicions regarding the philanthropic, medical, economic actions of the Christian world, elements dissimulating an unintentional proselytism.

In recent decades, the connection between mission and dialogue was addressed by international forums and various churches. Beyond different attitudes, sometimes even contradictory, almost all elaborated documents testify a remarkable evolution of the Christian thinking regarding the task of promoting the interreligious dialogue. Unfortunately, the editors of these documents note a certain tension among the spiritual and moral conditions of the genuine and legitimate dialogue on the one hand, and the missionary implications of some theologians on the other. However, Christians have the task of living wisely in the middle of this tension, with Christ’s humility and attitude.

At the *World Missionary Conference* in San Antonio (1989) was emphasized that among the followers of other religions, the Christian confession requires:

- a physical presence in these geographical areas;
- sensitivity to deepen their commitment;
- and an affirmation of God’s work and love.

⁵ Rus Remus, *Concepția despre om în marile religii*, extract from *Glăsu Bisericii*, XXXVII, no. 7-8/1978, p. 44.

The participants have also stressed that the Mystery of God in Christ is beyond our comprehension and human knowledge. This is why in the non-Christian environments the Christian missionaries are called to bear witness of the Truth, not to become harsh judges of different nations.

Beyond this fact, the problem of dialogue and mission requires a serious analysis of at least two fundamental theological questions:

1. How are we supposed to know more about non Christian religions in order to engage constructively in this type of dialogue if we are reluctant to the *interreligious* term?
2. How is it seen nowadays the religious pluralism within the divine plan of redeeming the whole world?

A shortcoming of the contemporary interreligious dialogue would be that the theologians involved have yet to agree on a well-defined *starting field*. There are many orientations, affirmations and stands invoking more and more the development of a regulatory principle of the interreligious dialogue. For now there is no uniformity of thinking among the Christian and non-Christian theologians and this leads to extreme attitudes: either it is about the intransigent, exclusivist and ecclesial-centric attitude which states that the faith in the Church and its dogmas requires the refuse of non-Christian religions because Christianity is, par excellence, the revealed religion and only it has soteriological value or based on a syncretistic new-age type of relativism the non-Christian religions are given the right to lead their followers to eternity with the same authority as the Church.

The median position gives a different horizon. Protecting itself from the relativism and syncretism it confesses Christ as Plenitude of the Revelation, opening sincerely to other religions for the sole purpose of knowing the Truth. This double

movement of closeness through dialogue and opening through confession is the only permitted attitude, without compromises or proselytizing interests. "If we would agree our own words then we would have just one teaching (...) there will come a time when we will agree one another."⁶

The human freedom alone is decisive without polemics and undesired tensions. The Christian dogma pollinates, it does not polemize; that is why the interreligious theological dialogue needs to be completed by a spiritual attitude based on the model of Christ and the Apostles. A new religious tradition requires patience in listening, prayer and love for the *other*.

2. Faith, Society, Politics

The need for mutual understanding between the Islamic world and the West has never been so present. Europe is dismayed by the events in the Middle East and by the claims of the Islamic groups in the Muslim world. All these lead to a deep concern at European and international level.

Islamic renewal is seen as a threat to political stability and to the interests of the West. In the last decades, the afghan conflict, the overthrow of Shah in Iran, the killing of president Sadate in Egypt, the war between Iran and Iraq, the failure of American politics in Lebanon and the activities of Shiite militia in the southern Lebanon, the overthrow of dictatorial regimes in North Africa, Egypt and Lebanon, have worried the West which

⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas, *Scrisoare pe care a trimis-o Bisericii sale din Asia pe când era captiv*, translation by Ioan I. Ică jr, in the volume: *Violența „în numele lui Dumnezeu”. Un răspuns creștin*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia 2002, p. 192-193.

became more and more aware of the complexity of Islam and the revolutionary potential of the fundamentalist movements.

This concern of the Western world had a positive result due to the conscious effort made by the Church, politicians and businessmen, even journalists; a unanimous effort made for the correct understanding of the complexity of the Muslim world and fundamentalist phenomena which takes more and more diverse shapes. "However, the attitude of the western population about Islam is always overshadowed by a distorted idea that notably associates the pure essentially fundamentalism with gun traffickers terrorists."⁷

The common history of the two worlds, the West and Islam is painful. It is enough to recall only two events: the 1572 landing of the Ottoman navy in Lépante and the siege of Vienna in 1681. Instead, the Christian-Orthodox world was closer to the Islamic environment, both geographically and spiritually. Therefore, in the Islamic-Christian dialogue, the orthodoxy has a specific contribution which starts from the recognition of the related elements: the presence of some Christian ideas in Koran, ever-virginity of the Mother of God, payer and asceticism would be only a few.

On the other hand, under the complex of an administrative and political inferiority, the Islam has always sought to reaffirm its independence towards the West, but in the need for rapid modernity, it also assimilated the life principals of the *western man*. But this rapid assimilation of western modernity caused contradictions in the Islamic world, part of it being isolated, to this day, in a ghetto of extreme traditionalism.

⁷ Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, *Religion et changements socio-politique: l'Islam et l'Occident*, en vol. *Religion et société*, Genève, Chambésy, 1998, p. 151.

In the Orthodox conception, modernity and Westernization does not necessarily mean the destruction of spirituality and culture. The religious culture and experience complement each other in the process of evangelization; the role of culture and progress is considered as being positive. In this respect we have the example of Japan. The modernism and scientific progress is extreme in the Japanese society but the culture remains unaltered. Contrary to the Japanese experience, most of the times the process of Westernization of the Islamic world has to fight the principles of an inflexible tradition that generate the fundamentalism.

The reformist attempts of modernization and Westernization in Islam have triggered a process of interesting interaction between the West and local Westernization forces on the one hand, and the traditionalist-fundamentalist forces on the other. It would be interesting to analyze their nature, the initiatives, results and possible failures of the fight for forced modernization and also of the traditionalism of the Islamic society where modernization is accepted but it is also seen as a process that requires slow and careful implementation.

The event of modernity, for the *benefit* of Western civilization is scrupulously analyzed by the Islamic world. Modernity has also destroyed, not just built. This is why the Orthodox world is worried. The ecologic, economic crisis, the secularization, the unemployment and migration of the labor force, globalization and consumerism are just a few examples in this regard. Enslaved by materiality, the Western world is cold when it comes to the transcendent needs of the contemporary man. "The indifference of the West is more striking as the western intellectuals knew for long time the factors that weaken the faith, a state which is then sent to Muslim countries causing many reactions: the excesses of consumerist society, alienation and spiritual emptiness for a large number of citizens in the

industrialized and urban societies, the coexistence of wealth and poverty increasingly blatant.”⁸

Western modernity has encouraged the feminist movement based, from the beginning, on purely social grounds, its theological arguments being raised much later. After the end of Second World War Germany was rebuild with work force coming particularly from Turkey. The Communist Block was excluded. This led to the interaction of the two cultures. The Western woman was in a constant emancipation, the Islamic woman was a traditionalist. When having reached its peak, the feminist movement proved to be a failure and some of its followers went to the other extreme readily accepting the Muslim way of life fostered by the mixed marriages. Now, the desire to be unconditionally subjected to man, to belong to a tradition opposite to feminism arose.

The same happened with the ascetic aspect. Almost missing from the current spirituality of the Western Christianity the asceticism was lost in the globalizing consumerism. In the West, the Islamic ascetic offer was and still is a counterbalance to what the post-modernity has triggered in this area. The *Ramadan* continuously amazes the westerner through its asceticism, prayers and charity perpetrated for a month, a time of spiritual reflection and purification confessed every year by the Muslim believers in a Europe of *super-market consumerist society*.

These are just two of the social and economic causes for the conversion of the westerners to Islam. We can also add the political causes.

What meant the *theology of liberation* for the South African Christianity represents today the *doctrine of Islam's rebirth* in

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

the same territory. It is essential to understand the traditions and imperatives of Islam which combine themselves perfectly with the common forces of all countries in the Third World. This is how the *Islamic fundamentalism* is born; it wants to be a *return of the society to the foundations of culture with the help of the principles contained in the Koran*.

If we examine the scheme of the interaction between tradition and modernity in Christianity and Islamism, at least in political terms, we must admit that the latter has seen an immediate success, without persecutions, in a time in which the Christianity stressed on the obedience towards the Church and State's secular authority.

The main concern of the Islamic intellectuals was to highlight the legitimate exercise granted to power, the regulation and organization of a conquering and expanding society based on *Sharia* (the Islamic law). The evangelic text: *Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's* (Mat. 22, 21), was translated in Islam through *al-amru bi'l ma'ruf wa'n-nahy an al-mun-Kar*, i.e. *glorify the good and shun evil*⁹.

Therefore, no need for another defined relation between Church and State. The notion of *State* was based on the inherent consistency for the development of the Islamic world in the last hundred years. The successive attempts of leaders and governments trying to modernize the administrative and political structures or to separate religion from the state have been consistently rejected by fundamentalists claiming the Koranic origins of Islam in order to legitimate their opposition towards a government which they believe it's non-religious.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

The political opposition of the fundamentalists, inspired by the Koranic vision of an ideal society, was ignored by the governments throughout the Islamic world. Some governments, with the desire of modernization, also fueled by the feeling of preserving the tradition responded in various ways. However, Turkey is the first Muslim country that has tried to define and implement the division between *Religion* and *State*. Instead, in order to highlight the sources of the Islamic authority, Saudi Arabia recruited fundamentalist forces through Zia-ul-Haq movement in order to consolidate and legitimate its rise through power's representatives in Pakistan. The governments that fail to conciliate their own fundamentalist forces endanger their own existence as it has happen in recent years to the Kingdom of Shah in Iran.¹⁰

We can say little about anchoring the Islam in the political life as it takes into consideration the special conditions in which its doctrine was born in the Middle East.

Instead, the Christianity has spread throughout the sophistic Mediterranean world when the persecution from the first three centuries has ceased. The political power was already based in the new doctrine. The Byzantine emperors led by Constantine the Great (272-377) were converted and anchored in the legal

¹⁰ Christoph Schönborn, *Dominus Jesus et le dialogue interreligieux*, en rév. *Communio*, n° XXVII, 3 mai-juin, 2002, p. 109: "In Iran, the problem of genuine dialogue between cultures is addressed in a particularly acute manner (...), the Christianity and Islam are understood as universal and missionary religions. They are not only for one country, but for all people of all nations. Their founders and the revelation that was given to them has burdened them with the task of taking the light to all people as message and wish for salvation (...), our religions were missionary from the first moment and they remained like this until today. This aspect which we cannot give up is part of our identity of faith".

system set by the Roman law; they have also set the borders of the empire and established the bases of a new civil administration.

In Islam, the Genesis belongs to a world situated in the desert, among the tribes. Here, the society was governed by a power based on family ties, within one or more migratory tribes. The formation of their own identity was a struggle for life and sometimes they understood the concept of *identity* as being a *territory* where the struggle for the preservation of identity became the fight for a habitat area.

Under these circumstances, in a limited geographical area, Muhammad had manipulated the loyalty of the group against the tribe chiefs and from here was born the political authority later based on the Koran. Therefore, the political power becomes an exercise aimed at the wealth of newly established communities. Authority is exercised for the support of communities, not isolated for its individuals. At least theoretically, in Islam there is no Machiavellianism.

Although it was part of a long tradition, the link between *community* and *loyalty* was shaped differently in Islam, being weakened by the abandonment of nomadic condition and setting up communities in the cities. Shortly after that, the migrants became sedentary farmers. Moreover, they adapt in countries where the primary context never existed. However, *the tradition of community* and *the right governance* remain the pivots of Islam and of Islamic law which are applied as essential Koranic principles of the contemporary society in the Islamic world. Nevertheless “the Muslim right absorbs the massive changes happening in society”.¹¹

¹¹ Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, *op. cit.*, 154.

However, the Islamic society knows the fruits of modernity. In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was occupied by military and politico-administrative powers of Western influence. Even the army was reformed based on the western model, and from the army, the reform easily went to the administrative, politic and economic environment, especially through Islamic students trained in the Western schools and through traders. Based on the European model, academic colleges arise in India and Middle East.

After the First World War new Islamic states arose with new opportunities in the politic and economic area. However, the idea of universal Islamic community does not disappear. After 1950, the economy of western type is developing in the Islamic states. Based on the western psychology, it starts the great exodus of Muslims towards the giant city. "In their psychological view, the absence of distinction between Church and State has relocated the religion and Koranic notion about the right governance practiced only for the welfare of the people."¹²

Worldwide, for the Islamic world, the governments have raised awareness about the recrudescence of fundamentalism. For example, the force of the popular fundamentalism was manifested more obvious in Iran. Here, "the fundamentalism restored the confidence of Islam in its own culture and, in a large part of the Islamic world we are witnessing wars of independence from the West."¹³

The fundamentalism has revived the new efforts concerning the achievement of community's Islamic ideal. For example, the

¹² *Ibidem*, p.157.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p.158.

Arab states have considered rejecting the borders set by Europeans in order to form a United Arab Republic.

The consequence of the merger between modernization, westernization and Islamic tradition remains to be analyzed in the light of interreligious dialogue and it remains to be seen whether traditional forces will influence the politics and development of Islamic countries in all sectors of social life with all the interest presence of the great powers in this area.

3. Orthodox missionary confession in conflict situations

Human history has seen many ways of obvious manifestation of human freedom. One of them, and perhaps the most obvious, was the repeal of communism in Eastern Europe since 1989 when human freedom was manifested in all social domains: religious, economic, cultural, ethnic, politic, etc.

If we had to seek the political and social roots of the human freedom we will certainly turn to the *Declaration of the Human Rights* from 1948 which is the most contextualized expression of human consciousness in society.

These *rights* are rooted in the soul of the human created by God and may be considered the expression of universally-moral claims. In the light of this assertion we can state that the 3rd millennium is a millennium of persuasion for which we need to find a common language for dialogue between religions and people. On the one hand, this is only a matter confirming the religious and legitimate pluralism of the expression *spiritual freedom* and, on the other hand, we unfortunately have to face the refusal of any idea of universality and comprehension of the human being and human experience. This refusal may be the cause of the dialogue blockage and general human

comprehensibility at international level, a situation that inevitably generates fundamentalist movements on a religious level and, for dictatorial regimes, at political level.

The fall of communist regimes from the end of the last century are clear proof that in the search for the freedom of the human nature, nations made a common front; only that this won good will have to be defended with dignity and continuous sacrifice of the civil society. The human value and dignity have overcome the false ideologies. Totalitarian ideologies, both political and economic, deny the value of the human being, of life itself; the Church considers these ideologies as being an aggression against human dignity.

Despite different religious and social beliefs revolutionaries show a basic characteristic: they all agree that the human being, intelligent and free is capable to think, to choose and to keep in its ontology the mystery of life, of own existence. It is and will remain an apophatic entity and that is why social solidarity was an important part for the success of these revolutions. These people fought against totalitarianism and social solidarity was the weapon, the light of freedom and hope for better times. "Therefore, it is logical that at the foundation of a human community there is something *unifying* under which the members of that community feel united and bound together."¹⁴

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by the search for freedom: decolonization, national and individual independence. In fact, the origin of the Second World War was based on violation of the human rights. Many countries have suffered terrible for only one reason: it was considered that they had a culture and ideology different from the dictatorship. Unspeakable crimes were committed in the name of these

¹⁴ Rus Remus, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

barbarian ideologies and the result was the destruction of culture and society. Unfortunately, after 1948, the human rights have been violated by the atheistic and materialistic communism, a bipolar and ideological system of a security in the service of the dictatorship.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights carefully and thoroughly examines the purpose of the human rights even if there is a need for a *Declaration of Nations' Rights*. As members of the Orthodox Church we should seriously consider this fact for two reasons: first, by virtue of the recent geopolitical changes in Africa, Asia, Middle East and Europe; the second, because of the indestructible link between justice and peace in the world.

After 1989, the nation is manifested more strongly in the world. The specificity of the situation is the mobility of a powerful nation that tends to change its ethnical, cultural, economic and religious borders. Migrations, social interactions and globalization of the economy are just a few examples of this real international situation. Ethnical and cultural particularities tend to emphasize more and more a growing demand for identity and survival in response to the current Tower of Babel, a model for the society and civilization at the beginning of the 3rd millennium.

The Orthodox Church is obliged to admit the new context, to present the situation responsibly¹⁵, with deep analysis, and to offer for discussion aspects concerning the theological, anthropological, moral-ethic and legislative side of the contemporary society.

¹⁵ Patelos G. Constantin, *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements 1902-1975*, Edition World Council of Churches, Geneva 1978.

The tension between particular and universal is not a new topic; it is in the structure of the human being. It derives from the human nature, and the historic and real aspect of this nature creates specific human groups: the family, ethnicity, culture and nation. The tension between them is inevitable but also very creative.

The rights of a nation are rooted in this reality. In fact, the rights of a nation are nothing else but the human rights at community level. Actually, defining the word *nation*, which is not identical with the word *state*, is quite a difficult task, but absolutely necessary if we are to avoid the past mistakes and, as Orthodox Church, to be actively present in the social life. In this context, the World Central Committee includes legal programs that support integrity, the society and nation, both having a substantial contribution to the progress of the whole world.

Nobody can deny the existence of a nation. The nation is the expression of freedom and of peoples' self-determination. Each nation has its own spirituality, language and culture. We know the role of national culture in the fight against oppression and tyranny. Each nation, without claiming infallibility, has the right to live freely, based on its own traditions, avoiding the violation of fundamental human rights and oppression of minorities. For instance, Father Stăniloae, has never claimed the infallibility of the nation, clearly asserting that it can fail: "in the phase of the sin, nation has sinful manifestations because human nature in general, in all its diversifications is sinful".¹⁶ Indeed, a *national action*, notably in terms of history, may be blameworthy when

¹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scurtă interpretare teologică a națiunii*, in the volume *Fiecare în rândul cetei sale - pentru o Teologie a neamului*, Christiana Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p.118.

is directed against the Creator and His laws, implicitly against the nation itself.

The indictment of universality means nothing else but the rights of particularities. Above all is the peace, the respect and social solidarity. In our ethno-centric ecclesiastic system we are invited to pay increased attention to our religious minorities inviting them to permanent dialogue. The conflict between orthodox believers from different ethnic groups is not wanted – as, for example, in Palestine where there is increasing harshness between the Palestinian Orthodox and Greek hierarchy from Jerusalem. This tension can lead to conflicts with negative consequences for the believers of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Similarly, there is a visible conflict between the Moldavian Orthodox believers from Bessarabia and Russian or Ukrainian Orthodox who are related to the Russian Patriarchate. We can also mention here the tensions between the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox believers from the south of Danube and the cold relations between Jerusalem's Patriarchate and the Romanian Patriarchate regarding Jericho

We must learn to live in a diverse area starting from the Balkans, Africa, Russia, etc. It is difficult because the social reality and the particularity of people may be considered a barrier difficult to surpass. Manipulating the nations through hate and exploiting these difficulties by incompetents and corrupt political leaders may determine us to reject each other. This reflex expresses a kind of extreme nationalism that may end through violence and terror. Despite differences, the dialogue relation between humans must be maintained. This is the humanity created by God. Different cultures are in fact ways of substantially approaching the people. "As for the human in particular, God has created Adam and Eve. Virtually they included all nations. These are findings during time of faces that

are eternally in God. At the foundation of each national type there is an eternal heavenly model which that nation will fully acknowledge in it.”¹⁷

The essence of the dialogue consists in the teaching about the godly mystery of man as a free person. Consequently, it is much easier for us to recognize the importance of the *religious freedom* as a fundamental right together with the *freedom of consciousness*. These two aspects are the foundation of the human rights and the face of a really free society, and the anthropology can be the starting point in the interreligious dialogue because “the divine work through man is accepted by almost all religions in a way or another, depending on its concept about Divinity. In a dialogue, the immediate empiric content in which this worked is dressed is not important, but the fact itself, the fact that the man is the vehicle, the instrument of the divine confession. A strengthening and assertion of ourselves may be reached through this mutual acknowledge.”¹⁸

The sentence of accepting or rejecting the culture of a nation is related to the human ontology. A more careful analysis leads us to the following distinctions between patriotism and nationalism: the patriotism is the love for the country and nation, the respect for others and the wish to promote good relations between people; the nationalism is, in its most radical expression, just the opposite. When we face the religious fundamentalism or with the extremist nationalism is a disaster. There are contemporary attempts to divide the world after new criteria, based on religious or cultural boundaries, as in Samuel Huntington’s theory. From his point of view, the future conflicts

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.117.

¹⁸ Rus Remus, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

will be those between religion and culture. For him, the Western civilization is a synthesis consisting of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism and the Orthodoxy and Islam are those causing the problems due to their conservatism.

As Orthodox we should reflect more on this theory. Locally, the Church does not always actively participate in the life of civil society. And internationally we do not get involved enough in the genesis of forums preparing the future of the world. For example, we missed the last United Nation Conference in Cairo (1994), about family and social development; in Copenhagen (1995) regarding the relations between West and East, in Beijing (1995) about the social status of women.

Then how can we apply the theoretical and practical principles of our confession in concrete conflict situations?

To fully live the freedom is a challenge for our spiritual progress, for our morality and for the morality of all people and nations. How can we use this freedom? This is the key questions. The *culture of freedom* has its roots in *the moral structure of the human's freedom*. This *culture* belongs to both the incarnated Truth and the human being. It can be said that the free dialogue on different doctrines is the same with the development of morality of the personal and national profile which does not create impediments for the culture of human freedom.

The church answers the current turmoil in the communion expressed through the Holy Sacraments as being the only solution of open and sincere relation between the people of the same world. And yet, as missionaries we have dilemmas: are we involved enough in the Church's life? Do we participate in the divine-human work with all the belief that we work together with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit? Have we the dynamic of the Mystery (I Tim. 3, 16) of our faith or our

missionary involvement is only the fear of an inevitable fatalism or an idolatrous behavior?

It is needed that within the interreligious dialogue the missionary confession is genuine and considers these doubts.

4. Towards a Common Axiology between Islam and Christianity?

The relations between Islam and Christianity have oscillated over history. In the east, until the fall of Constantinopol (1453) there were three important stages of the Byzantine-Islamic dialogue¹⁹: *the first stage*, initiated by Saint John of Damascus²⁰ († 750), presented in the paper *Heresy 100* (P. G. 24, 764-773), and Theodor, Bishop of Haran († 820), in the paper *Against the heresies of Jews and Sarassins*; *the second stage*, 9th – 14th century, having as representatives Samona of Gaza, Eftimie Zigaben, Nichita Choniate, Bartholomew of Edessa and, the most significant, Nichita the Byzantine with his work *Rejecting the bible forged by the Arab Mohammed* (P. G. 105, 669-805); and *the third stage*, 14th-15th century, with the great theologians: Saint Gregory Palamas²¹, Joseph Bryennios, the Emperor John VI Cantacuzino and Manuel II Palaiologus. “Whether the used arguments are convincing or not, these Byzantine treaties show that there is a common conceptual

¹⁹ Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Dialogul cu Islamul din perspectivă ortodoxă*, in the volume. *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane*, translation by Gabriel Mândrilă and Constantin Coman, Byzantine Publishing House, Bucharest 2003, p. 123.

²⁰ Saint John of Damascus considered the Islamism an anarchist heresy.

²¹ Saint Gregory Palamas highlighted more the common point between Christianity and Islam.

ground for both religions, which made the *dialogue* to be possible”²².

From the twentieth century, the Islamic-Christian *axiological* dialogue balanced all the time between *antagonism* and *coexistence*, today being highlighted by another significantly different duality: *antagonism* and *complementarity*.

Currently, in some European countries,²³ the image of Islam is negative due to right movements. The Christian European area is veiled by an idealist vision in relation to the Islam’s past, is filled with hegemonic nostalgia and Orientalism. “The Orientalism is dead like the analysis area, but it still survives as the spirit, as the perspective of a world looking towards a totally different world”²⁴.

The hasty conclusion in the European opinion regarding the Islam and the behavior of its followers is that it delivers violent or terrorist actions which unfortunately contribute to a negative projection of its image in Europe and throughout the Christian world.

But the image of the West is not better in the Islamic countries. They qualify the West as a corrupt and dominant world, likely to attract the attention of the Muslim community through its principles and way of life.

²² Anastasios Yannoulatos, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

²³ The massacre in Norway, in which more than 90 people have lost their lives, was planned by a right-wing extremist, a *Christian fundamentalist* who hates Muslims, the investigators have found a number of hateful messages posted on the internet by Anders Behring Breivik, aged 32, being accused of killing the 90 young people on the Island of Utoya, Norway.

²⁴ Francis G. Lamand, *Vers une axiologie commune à l’Islam et à l’Occident*, International Lawyer, Conférences/La tenue de cette conférence sous l’égide de S.E., p. 6.

Despite the sad findings, the Islam and West are called together to develop cultural, economic and politic exchanges now and in the future because the ethical values that characterize them come from a common, Abrahamic ground. In a world of globalization, the constitution and major economic and politic convergences within the new globalized area lead to an inevitable connection between the two worlds.

We believe that the debate of a thesis about the common axiology between Islam and West is possible. By *axiology* we understand the meaning of dynamics of *common value*, not in the terms of critical approach but only what is *valuable* in the sense of *openness to the other*.

In order to achieve its purpose, this axiology must be implemented in at least three directions: socio-cultural, spiritual and economic.

Socio-cultural axiology

Social axiology is made of principles which are the basis of public politics in any type of society. These principles are the very *values* that characterize the society as Islam or West and which can be defined as *generally acknowledged interests* (qualifies as *social body* in the West) and which are part of the individual or collective behavior code. These values of the society are linked through an essential unique value which is its vehicle: *the sense of community*.

This sense of community, also called *civic sense* in western secular societies has declined in the west, although the notion of common sense is situated in the heart of the medieval Christian philosophy, especially in Thomas Aquino's thought.

This community feeling was preserved in Islam as it is mentioned in the Koran: "*And let there be arising from you a community inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.*"

(Koran, III 104) and it allows the families of believers to claim the purpose of human unity and solidarity. This is the Islamic meaning of the word *community*, i.e. mutual commitment of each believer, each member of the community put in the service of others, an action that allows the social axiology to become a reality guiding the values in society towards the good of the community.

We believe that some Western countries can learn from the social of Islamic community to revive the sense of *citizenship* which has a tendency to decrease in already globalized societies.

Spiritual axiology

The spirituality is a common impulse for the three monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islamism) and it aims at human and creation's ascension towards the Creator.

The spirituality is the dynamism of each believer in search of transcendence. The interreligious dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims, which grew harder in the last two decades, has allowed the reinforcement of the topic regarding the common spiritual axiology between Islam and Occident.

The West has fully paid the price of rapidly scientific and technical progress through which has been destroyed the sacred meaning of life. Even if the West wants to serve the humanity through its scientific discoveries, unfortunately this action sometimes tends to secularize more the human life; the scientific western progress should reduce the distance between the creature and its Creator, not to increase it.

God is the only Master of the world and the sense of sacred should allow each believer *to consider the scientific knowledge as a gift from God* and not a unanimous and exclusively human power. "Western society is desacralized and the West must look towards the Islam to find the meaning of the sacred, this power

of raising the human spirit, as an occasion to cancel the distance between the creature and Creator”²⁵.

Economic axiology

The recent emergence of the notion of *globalization*, with a strict reference to the economy, has theoretically resulted in a doctrinaire-ideologically frame which led to the convergence of markets, and in general, to the emergence of a global economy, i.e. the penetration of markets at international level.

From an economic point of view, the Islam and West are irresistibly tangent, both having a new orientation tending to satisfy the common social needs through common means and this new orientation was found in the economic complementarity that generates *interest* solidarity.

Throughout its history, the West has created economic systems that alternatively installed the capitalism, socialism and *social capitalism*. “There is no irreducible difference between the western economic systems and the Islamic economy. Actually the Koranic doctrine is in favor of a *social capitalism* based on a resemblance of purposes and means, on the principle of balance and the imperative of social justice”²⁶.

At the heart of Islamic economy is the man, God’s creation and not the profit. The contribution of the Islamic economy in the West is possible, desirable, and necessary to temper the implacable logic of power relations and to fundament the human dimension of the economic development, namely the achievement of a common economic axiology between Islam and the West based on mutual interest.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

It remains to be seen whether or not the future of the interreligious dialogue between the two worlds can be based on common values in the social, religious and economic environment. However, present in any type of dialogue, the Orthodoxy will show respect for religious and interconfessional pluralism, for the religious experiences of different spiritualities, and last but not least, for the man created by God after His image and likeness (Genesis 1, 26).

Conclusions

The Christian mission, and generally the religious missions (Islamic, Judaic) inevitably pass through the threefold path of the *missionary typological node*. Of the three missionary attitudes: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism²⁷, only one becomes an evangelical preaching doctrine.

According to the three missionary categories there may be a harsh or closed evangelical stand described as exclusivist; a liberal attitude, of tolerance and total respect for the other's doctrinaire and cultural differences, specific for pluralism; and – not least – *the mission aiming to the identification with the other*²⁸, with our neighbor, called *Christological inclusivism*.

²⁷ "Each of the three models is not necessarily excluded by the other and, in practice, it can be shown in a more complex and nuanced manner, it can even include the elements of the other type. This topic of missionary models or of ideal types of mission was written by Max Weber as a paper in the field of religious sociology", Jean- Paul Gabus, *Musulman mon prochain?*, rév. Irénikon, Tome LXVIII, 1995, Monastère de Chevetogne, Belgique, p. 6.

²⁸ This was the title of the article presented at the ecumenical council in Chevetogne entitled *Mission, Proselytism and Christian Unity*, 30 of August – 2nd of September 1994 (n. a.).

The dialogue with the Islam, and generally with all non-Christians, looks for the *preaching and seeking the seeds of the Word in this religious tradition*. The Christological-missionary imperative (Mat. 28, 19-20) implies respect for other religions, respect for contemporary man in search of answers to all essential questions in his life, and respect for the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the foreign man bearing the image of God.

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