

Orthodox Perspectives on Globalization: The Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue

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ABSTRACT: This paper represents an Orthodox Christian perspective on globalization and also claims that interfaith dialogue is a missionary imperative. Globalization, the fundamental trait of our time, requires a rising to the opportunity offered by the *ever larger and increasingly dense network of interconnections and interdependences of the social life*—a new view of the world, of man, of life and faith. In other words, between globalization—perceived as a socially determined substrate for post-modernity—and the manifest subjectivity of the religious beliefs and practices (by means of a spiritual superstructure), an inseparable two-way relationship will be generated, which may prove stimulating for the interaction of ideas, religious beliefs and practices that, inevitably, will integrate into the multitude of connections feeding the ever more open character of the society. This paper attempts to answer several general questions on the relationship between globalization and dialogue. Therefore, under the circumstances, what particular trait of globalization may come to (re)define and (re)calibrate the dialogue among the great religions of the world? In other words, why does globalization—which reduces the contemporary man to the temporal flow of production and consumption¹—make a dialogue inevitable and socially necessary? And why such dialogue meets the significant challenges brought about by the global interconnection?

KEY WORDS: globalization, inter-faith dialogue, post-modernity, Christian Church

The Foundations of the New Inter-Faith Dialogue

In the environment of the global interconnections within post-modernity, which seems to overcome the gaps between cultures and spiritual faiths, it incurred a true *shrinkage of space and time* (David Harvey) within the global village (Marshall McLuhan) which the society seems to have grown into². Submitted to analyze from a multitude of perspectives, be it political (A. Mc. Grew, 1992), sociological (S. Lash, J. Urry, M. Castells), cultural (S. Hall) or anthropological (J. Friedman), globalization will incur several major mutations, in the religion and religious faith as well, from the point of view of both communities themselves and individual faith, interconnected with the involution of the traditional religiosity or the dilution and the relativization of the faith itself. In other words, we are confronted with an obvious reality, marked by a paradoxical religiosity—on the one hand, more and more strongly individual and growingly diffuse along with the proliferation of the gnosiological and soteriological relativism and, on the other hand, growingly *public* and publicized, resulting from its transformation into a subject within the huge flow of data which our contemporary global society circulates. Consequently, the classical thesis about the coexistence of a dialogue and inter-religious relations as well as the major institutionalized religions, will be updated along with the new factor represented by globalization, into a new imperative and with a new understanding of the present religious time. The contemporary inter-faith dialogue is—in other words—specifically connected to the global society and its dominant *ideology*—postmodernism; it is adapting to a new reality which tends to subject everything to its own momentum toward relativism, even though, unlike the past modernity, will avoid exposing the traditional religions and their related institutions to disapproval. A dialogue in which, as shown by W. T. Anderson, beliefs *growing aware of the existence of others . . . can contemplate one another*³ in the context of religious practice flowing inexorably towards autonomy, the political, the social and the cultural *emancipating themselves in such a way that the religious is a simple element of the latter*.⁴

In such circumstances, the contemporary world—divided among ethnicities, cultures and religions, will be called into globalism as though, only by means of the post-industrial society and the technological and scientific revolution—a world devoid of God—would aspire to regaining its original unity and restoring the original condition of space for manifestation of the human nature, bearing, however, the indestructible seal of the divine image within man. A global world which, coveting its own autonomy, could only relate to the immanent limits prescribed by the institutionalization of modernity, taking on and fetishizing the political, economic, social and cultural values; *a modern global world* that will (re)define its own axiological references and will design / build them, subordinating to these the appropriate elements of its contents.⁵

Under these circumstances, the space-time frame of each religious faith grows to encompass the whole world; a global world will demand from the religions, and necessarily so, to rediscover and re-empower their universal vocation in order to provide an answer *to man's inner longing for religiosity and communion with the Divine*. In the globalization context, religions assimilate their condition of *social actors*, thus being inevitably subjected / exposed to the interactions with other similar actors; moreover, the shrinkage of the physical distances by means of the cyberspace, is borne out by the reality of a *global culture* fueled by an extreme stimulation of the exchanges occurring among cultural and spiritual values, because *every culture is tentative; it is always open to receiving, assimilating . . . and, in turn, eager to provide something worthy*⁶ for other cultures, so that the faiths are in an unprecedented position of losing more and more of their traditional dimensions, especially the ethnic and civilizational ones, which had been previously defining each of them.

Under such circumstances,

A) the actual course for globalization may be regarded/ interpreted as a politically and geopolitically, economically and socially determined result of the mutations occurring—along the transition to post-industrial era—in the production and consumption of the material, cultural and spiritual assets: an age where science and technology are prevailing, where production management and technical intelligentsia are the leading force, *exporting* energy

and less qualified manpower-consuming technologies to other countries and which, in many cases, provide living standards hitherto unimaginable. Therefore, an *objective* determinism is manifest in the development and generalization of the course towards globalization, production and consumption becoming polycentric human activities -coagulated into tentacular, transnational networks—which are guided by the unique and defining resort of pragmatism and efficiency, ultimately aiming at a financial profit. Thus, being a product of the post-industrial society and the scientific-technical revolution, globalization has been, in a sense, inevitable, a step in the evolution of mankind on a historical scale. At the same time, it is irreversible,⁷ as long as the basic mode of production can not be dismantled without the risk of a global as well as a social collapse.

B) Being established on a foundation and having finalities that are both aiming at a lucrative finality—economical, financial and technically-productive—globalization is produced to be lacking spiritual and religious meanings of the same magnitude. In fact, the religious dimension can be no other than what post-modernity can produce—and whose vehicle it is. Therefore, not surprisingly, globalization lacks a *vertical dimension*, dwelling the limits of a *horizontal manifestation*,⁸ less prone to provide theologically coherent and valid answers to the basic human quest—ever the same, nowadays as well as in the past or future. And even if it were to do that—a consequence of the postmodern temptation for a reconsideration of the religious thought and practice—it would conceive, formulate and advance solutions with too meagre a chance to face the commands of the theological coherence and sustainability. In these circumstances, the referential values of the *recent man* (HR Patapievič) are subjected to a radical transformation, generated by human society itself; for, the obsession for efficiency and profitability could not be converted into anything else than a new form of hedonism, empowered by utilitarianism (Benjamin Barber), consumerism and individualism. In the same way as the obsessive lust for pragmatic efficiency—immediately convertible into profit—dominates the global social action, the *recent man* is limiting his own quest favouring his aim, immediately compatible with what the surrounding globalizing abundance allows him to

discover: hedonism. Man will thus then tend to flatten his existence, to compress his vertical dimension and to cancel his openness to metaphysics, getting to cease being a real *anthropos* as long as his skyward gaze becomes more indifferent and estranged. The destructure force of globalization proves to be so huge; it stresses—a solvent and a mixer—on a man who, though living in a world more transparent than ever, is, paradoxically, in the position of being alone, constrained to a condition of absolute solitude by a society which, as the sociologist Thomas Luckmann was saying back in the 1960s, has primed the force of the individual motivation/individualistic work over, weakening ever more the frail connection that was making the individual human to exist as a community⁹ being. Enslaved by what Father professor John I. Ică jr. called *the perverse triad* consisting in production, profit and consumption/performance/communication,¹⁰ the human living in the global world is already in a major crisis of identity, his existence being unilaterally laid under the spectrum of the efficiency converted into consumption—a fact that is hereby proven able to establish a *culture—a global culture* devoid of spiritual fabric, with a *purely utilitarian trait and unilaterally oriented towards material values*.¹¹ Respectively, the global world's human abdicates, willingly and in exchange for temporary and questionable benefits, from his authentic vocation, replacing his life—preamble of a singular eschatological destiny in this universe—with a *specious living founded on the convenient mediocrity of consumption, which substitutes the true human identity by refusing the existential depth*.¹² Therefore, outlined is here the image of a man absolutizing one's actual condition, because *modernity starts from the actual state of man, defining him precisely by placing man in such a state, seen as unsurpassable*,¹³ suppressing man's inward call to transcend one's own humanity.

C) In these circumstances, position of the Christian Church within the global society will be determined by the following sentences with a decisive role:

1 post-modernity decreed the equality of all religions, while their origin *and cause* which is deemed to be purely immanent, rational and not transcendent, divinely determined;¹⁴

2 the contemporary man is medially positioned between the sky—which he rejects because he has lost eschatological reflex and hope, and earth—from which he finds himself estranged by repudiating his lost identity—ethnic, cultural, religious.¹⁵

In fact, what we have merely indicated above are the terms of the secularization expression, which excludes the Christian Church, the global society striving to *eliminate religion from the social life*, a consequence of *the artificial separation between the public and private sectors*, so that *man forgets his spiritual assets*.¹⁶ But it is not the secularization itself the cause of the Christian Church being excluded from the socially recognized assets of the contemporary field, but *post-modernity which overlaps and takes control over its spiritual dimension*. However, globalism/universality are not stranger to the Christian Church; on the contrary, they are—in a certain sense—its constitutive; for, the Church Fathers, especially St. Athanasius the Great, saw the cosmic dimension of the Church as a *reflection of Trinitarian communion which emphasizes the identity of each nation and culture's particular but also the loving binding all of them together*.¹⁷ From this perspective, from a biblical perspective, one may even speak of the existence of *a history of globalization*, such as Noah's Ark or its opposite, *the gigantic utopian project of the tower of Babel, a testimonial for the hubris that had gripped mankind, but also the divine sanction that was drawn thereupon*. In fact, theology is the subject which, eschatologically, does produce *the perfect form of globalization*, i.e. *the heavenly Jerusalem, where the elect will be reflected in harmony under the rule of the Lamb*.¹⁸ Eventually, *the global constitution dwells inscribed in the inner core of creation*,¹⁹ not in itself antagonistic to the divine economy from the point of view of the prescribed social coagulation; in fact, the history between the fall and the eschaton is the element altering the globalism as a origin and final goal of humanity, rendering it with dimensions and meanings foreign to its genuine vocation. In other words, the globalization that we live and receive as a universal model for the marginalization of the Church and faith, can only be a deformed, dark shadow a unit of genuine humanity, which will rediscover the fundamental meanings at the Eschaton.

Postmodernism and Globalization: An Orthodox Christian View

If, from the formal point of view, globalization seems to be fully compatible with the Christian idea, its contents reveals its purely human origin, for the contemporary man alone—and without any recourse to theology and faith—has discovered that transcendence of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and spiritual borders, simply facilitates his individualistic and mercantile, dominating ends. Thus, paying the price of tearing off his true vocation, man has built a world just with himself and for himself, the self/ego becoming the only landmark, the only goal and the only means, for *ancient man was in a dialogue with the Cosmos; the Medieval man was in a dialogue with God; whereas, modern man is in a dialogue to himself*.²⁰ In these circumstances, Father John I. Ică jr. noted that, under the pressure of post-modernity, religiosity tends to reflect two completely different state of affairs, i.e.²¹

1 the assumption of political and national/nationalist meanings and identity, so that the essential purpose of religion is duplicated by subjective factors which can be easily instrumented political and economically;

2 the dissolution of faith into a sentimentalist and Pietist approach, easily manipulable, and easily failing into an individualistic-egocentric vision—susceptible to sooner place the faithful on the trajectory of the individual pursuit of happiness and fulfillment.

A) In fact, *the spiritual goal* of postmodernism seems to be rebuilding the religious, the re-theoretization of the religion, so to speak. And the temptation for this kind of enterprise is proving to be a major one, as long as Jurgen Habermas talks about *the need of returning to the sacred, to religious*, while Martin Riesebrodt speaks of the *return of the religion during the globalization age*,²² leading to a veritable resurrection of religiosity. However, the reality and consistency of such quests—fueled by the too easily forgotten detail which, in the words of Nikolai Berdyaev, *man is a natural being, but with a supernatural vocation*—is altered and even compromised when it is placed outside the divine revelation. *The recent man* does not hesitate to seek his religious ideal that he has regained

consciousness of and is eager to explore God, but without knowing how, and therefore failing in his attempt. Man will proceed to search for the transcendent landmark, valuing it as a source for his passage through the world, or will (re)lay the Divine at the origin of his moral-ethical standards. He will achieve that, however, solely by means and methods available to his nature, to his limits—to be more precise—and fatally failing, because such a quest is *no longer communely oriented on the vertical axis of transcendence-immanence or temporal past-future, but on the individualistic and purely immanent horizontal axis of sense-nonsense, life-death, health-sickness, ego-non-ego, imaginary-real*²³. This failed attempt will reveal, once again, the consequences of the human Fall; although there is something lying at his very core—indestructible and significant—that pushes him relentlessly towards his Creator, the synergistic content of the authentic theophanies will limit man's ability to retrieve his true religion. Therefore, despite its somewhat laudable trait, the human striving toward God is imperative required to be fully connected to the sole criterion of Truth: The Church.

B) Going beyond modernity, with its hostility to religion and religiosity—a position made possible as long as positivism and scientism serve for answers to the need *for believing*, such an intrinsic need for man - in fact, even constitutive to him—*the recent man, as if into a curvature of the historical space* (J. Baudrillard), seems to suddenly rediscover his past, and moreover, man is reconsidering it²⁴—because, unlike the completely unpredictable future—the past anchors man to a minimum of certainty. Going into this time warp, the postmodern man is merely asserting *his natively-perennial dimension of [his own - emphasis added] religiosity* (G. Schmitthen); so that, obviously, the globalization age and the isolation of the religious from the social by means of secularization, *does not stand, by far, for the end of religion*.²⁵

Moreover, because *even dead, God would still remain the one uncontrollable reference for the world*,²⁶ and in these terms, we may also speak about *the chance of religion—for reinsertion into the social [emphasis added], into postmodernism and globalization*, because the present *tends to deepen the new—meaningful and precious—metaphysical and religious dimensions with whom we*

do coexist in spirit, although that is *a system of faith provided for public consumption*.²⁷ The critical term in this equation is “consumption”, actually the idea—fundamental to the reality of postmodern spirituality—of subordination of the religious to the market requirements, enshrined in a world where the optimal sale of goods and services has become decisive. Thus, post-modernity opens to the religious thought and practice; yet, not to the world of traditional religions, but to a universe of individual religiosity, diffuse, relativistic, anonymous and syncretistic, ecclesiastically un-commissioned,²⁸ in which the inclusivist language no longer distinguishes between truth and error.²⁹

The Current Condition of Interfaith Dialogue

Bringing together cultures and civilizations that were barely—if at all—interacting, globalization does also produce a very specific social context of communication and interaction among the world religions, that is, an inter-religious dialogue. This situation - fueled by many factors, from the generalization of global electronic communication to - for instance, economic immigration and waves of refugees - is overlapping what is proper to the postmodern thinking: namely, *a primacy of diversity at the expense of unity, a heterogeneity of the discourse, a diversity of life [and] worldviews*.³⁰ In other words, globalization carries along, inseparably, the idea of pluralism (i.e. religious pluralism, in respect with our topic), even more so as—given the value stressed on the virtually universally accepted freedom of conscience—the pair made by the religious freedom and religious pluralism can not be infringed without the risk of utmost negative social implications.³¹

In these circumstances, we can systematize the spiritual-religious circumstances of the contemporary inter-faith dialogue as follows:

1 *the transformation of the existence into a source of insolvent experience of the tragic: the modern and postmodern human tragedy due to the fact that he is forever longing for God, the search for Christ; this inner tendency, doomed to remain unanswered as long as it*

would not find a normal way, the search for the God beyond the world, by means of and exclusively sustained by the supernatural revelation as it is reflected in the Church *by the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition*, is incurring a confusion on man, who shall not be able to find peace, and shall live in a restless and troubled state,³² to constantly seek answers and certitude—anchors among the mixed value state incurred by the contemporary world;

2 *the extreme relativization of the religious truth: no religious community can continue to claim - other than in a purely subjective manner—to hold the absolute truth;*³³ In fact, the postmodern world, marked by the gnosiological failure of positivism on the fundamental philosophical interrogations—world, its origin and cause, life, man and his destiny, etc.—tends to reject the idea of certainty, single truth, preferring a *polycentric world* mentioned by Andrei Kuraev, a pluralistic world that makes it possible for one to *exclude God from the Universe “in a” fatalistic vision . . . [about the Universe], with a God devoid of power;*³⁴ but a polycentric world creates a *risk of slipping toward a radical pluralism, absolutely relative, and whoever would accept such a pluralism, would be forced to declare that there is no common basis for assessing the same truth*³⁵ so that a postmodernist spirit deepens into the relativist drama and legitimizing relativity . . . in relativizing everything, postmodernism is prone to legitimize anything, even what is unacceptable;³⁶

3 *the significant erosion of the doctrinally-structured religions; the relativization of the truths of faith outlines a new religious horizon, an agnostic belief, ontological and not biblical and dogmatic-ecclesial, of an individual religiosity - believing without belonging, lacking any confessional allegiance;*³⁷

4 *the resurrection of spirituality in typical postmodern forms that make man, once again, to recognize different forms of pluralism;*³⁸ on the other hand, *the return of the religious and (re)enchantment of the world* leads to the redefinition of faith and religious practice as a *new religiosity, imprisoned within the walls of immanence, created by man according to his own desires, pleasures, interests,*³⁹ and so very heterogeneous that it opens the path of “the dissolution of the universal perspective” of the religious faith⁴⁰. The fact that a globalized world—spiritually structured along the lines of post-

modernity—is seeking its religious roots, is in itself a desirable fact. But mostly directing these searches for the sensitive ego, lacking existential depth and eschatological openness—*because “today” has become the mantra of the human existence; because today the achievement of all promises is being sought for*⁴¹—does expose, if need be, man’s inability of emerging, by himself, from immanence. Being egotistically bound for oneself, for personal success, comfort and success, *the recent man* grows even further atrophied into his fallen condition, altering it even more so by rejecting the Truth of the Church, for the simple fact that man [can] no longer believe in a universal truth, taking a programmatic option favoring *relativism, in the most radical expression of this philosophy*.⁴²

Orthodox Christianity and the World of Religious Pluralism

In a world where religions and beliefs are claiming, each of them, not only legitimacy, equal forces—if not soteriological exclusivity—and an overall gnosiological sustainability, while any mutual disregard gradually cease to be a politically and socially acceptable solution in a global society, the Christian church is in a position to seek for the best line of conduct; the possible options were expressed by Peter Ludwig Berger as follows:⁴³

1 *adapting to pluralism*; this solution implies a continuous accommodation of the Church—from the point of view of the professed faith, religion and ethics—to the confessional diversity of the environment. This attitude is obviously unacceptable as long as it will certainly lead to *loss of identity, in the sense that pluralism, which is in constant change, will force the Church to continuously adjust and readjust*;

2 *rejecting the multi-confessional reality*; this position is also regarded as unacceptable because that would imply *isolation of the Christian Church, ghettoization, giving up the universal vocation, becoming a homogeneous closed system, claiming to be the depository of the absolute truth*. Furthermore, according to the theologian J.B. Metz or the sociologist G. Schmied, *any lack of openness towards modernity and pluralism could lead to a possible fundamentalist approach*;

3 *the acceptance by the Church to take part in the competitive market of the coexisting confessions*; Peter L. Berger believes that, in fact, given the *competitive environment* in which the denominations suggest for *consumption* extremely diverse anthropological models, soteriological solutions and moral-ethical values, the Church *should accept a third solution, namely, to comply with the rules of the market economy*, a view that he has advanced as the only valid, to the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (1993). Peter L. Berger made clear the eminently secular context in which the Western Churches are placed and are operating, in which, “The Church has become a specialized agency . . . limited to managing individual salvation,”⁴⁴ a religious social entity among other similar entities, subjected (and exposed) to the criteria of a competitive market, in which the ratio between “the demand for spirituality” and “the market supply” is decisive and where “no normative is accepted as absolute.”⁴⁵ Prior to being theorized by Peter L. Berger or, for example, by J. P. William—who spoke of “a market of religions” i.e. *the psycho-market*, driven by “small companies of salvation,” advancing “soteriological supply” in competition terms⁴⁶—this trend has been conceptualized and practiced by the Western post-Protestantism, as a multinational religious organization—a kind of corporate body, capable to coalesce and multiply local communities of believers, sometimes morally rigorist but with little inclination toward the teachings of the faith itself; such organizations, operating in the form of a multitude of coagulated nodal centers within a tentacular network, obey the rules of the global market, are able to obtain and redistribute resources, instituting *the new religious movements* so characteristic for the postmodern global society. Obviously, from the point of view of Orthodoxy, a market solution of the kind is not and cannot be a solution; it continues to believe that, as Jurgen Moltmann has put it, the Church “is still the crown of society”⁴⁷ while, it is impossible [for the Church - TN] to descend towards the criteria for validation by the secular world, since, as the mysterious body of Jesus Christ the Redeemer, simply cannot obey them. Then again, Orthodoxy can not enter a soteriological competition against other religions, in a purely human of race for gaining new adherents, mainly because salvation is a divine act par excellence, whereas the institution of

conversion by secular advertising is totally foreign [*to the Orthodox Church - TN*]. Orthodoxy believes that “the human factor, with his striving, cannot be all it takes to convert people, . . . but it takes God’s work”, because, in general, “man can do nothing alone, without God’s help” (I Corinthians 3: 5–9).⁴⁸ The purpose of the Orthodox mission “aims rather to bring God to the people than to bring the people to God,”⁴⁹ because it assumes that “the most important thing, even in which concerns that mission, is the intensity of the ecclesial life”, being mainly interested in “its own life, especially sacramental.”⁵⁰

In these circumstances, acknowledging the surrounding confessional diversity and regarding pluralism as an open reality, which leaves “mutual openness, trust and responsibility”, excluding the danger of radicalism,⁵¹ Orthodoxy will be able to comply to the following coordinated action, suggested by Father Ioan I. Ică jr.⁵²

a) by regaining “*the inner spiritual forces*” and overcoming the ambiguity generated by a search for external support, “most of times in a humiliating servitude;”

b) by assuming “the condition of a minority and a spiritually, morally, socially and culturally active Diaspora”—in a radically secularized world—by regaining the “the spirit of the witnessing Christian and of the apologists of the pre-Constantinian age,” in order to “become the soul of the body of the world” and to “enliven the humanity flesh with the life of God.”

The Possibility of Interfaith Dialogue

Starting from the fact that it is God who “*wishes all men to be saved and to come to the true knowledge*” (I Timothy 2:4) and Jean Delumeau’s observation that “different religions exalt, each in their language, wisdom and compassion, sincerity and humility, precious common assets that nobody may want to see disappearing,”⁵³ the inter-faith dialogue is emerging as having sufficient ground for institutionalization and permanence. In relation to the current configuration of the inter-faith dialogue, there is a lot of history. Among these, it stands out the establishment in Chicago (1893) of *the World’s Parliament of Religions*, Chicago, 1893 at the initiative

of Paul Carus (1852–1919)⁵⁴ who rediscovered in Dao De Jing—the classic Taoist writing—the sign of the revelation of Yahweh within the space of Chinese culture and civilization,⁵⁵ the Edinburgh Conference (1910) with their Commission *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions* or the Conference *The Christian Life and Message in the Relation to Non-Christian Systems* of Jerusalem (1928), the latter criticizing “the exclusive attitude of Christians towards other religions.”⁵⁶ After 1948 and especially after 1968, the *World Council of Churches* has stimulated the inter-faith dialogue, for whose needs it developed the *Guidelines on Dialogue* (1979), which sets the guidelines of communication and relationship with the non-Christian religions; this was after, in Nairobi (1975), “it was necessary to define the nature, scope and limits of the inter-faith dialogue in order to eliminate the danger of syncretism.” Finally, we quote the message “*A Common Word Us and You*” (2007) of a total of 138 Muslim scholars who pointed out that “the necessity of love for God and for the neighbor stands for the connection between Christianity and Islam.”⁵⁷ In respect with the inter-faith dialogue itself, we believe that the first problem that arises is the very possibility for that; in other words, in the context of a variety of religions and religious beliefs—which may hardly foresee the existence of convergent elements—could the idea of a dialogue in itself prove theologically sustainable, within the aforementioned institutionalized forms? We do believe that the necessarily favorable response is favoured by the following features, specific to the Christian thinking:

a) a multitude of forms of religiosity stems from the alienation of nature and the human condition incurred after the fall—their state being able to compromise the bond of communion with God, which ensure the frameworks for man’s genuine worship; from this point of view, religions are merely the expression, more or less successful, of man’s attempt—again more or less assisted by God—to be restored to the heavenly communion with the Creator; implicitly, religions will contain more or less Truth, according to “the dose” of the included supernatural revelation, and will gnosologically and doctrinally fructify these so that, “no matter how degraded as a religion, it will

still stay human”⁵⁸ i.e. within the sphere of the legitimately and specifically human aspiration toward God;

b) the non-Christian religions comprise a glimpse of Truth either as an “echo of the primordial revelation, or as a result of the *Spermatikos Logos*’ action, followed by the arrival of the perfect Logos οτασλογος”⁵⁹—such glimpses determining at least a minimum of compatibility;

c) the ontological unity of the human race (*“And He made every nation of men from one blood, so they may dwell on all the face of the earth.”* Acts 17:26), complemented by the structural unity of mind, aspiration and destiny of the whole mankind,⁶⁰ makes man prone to finding his peers within and through dialogue, with whom, in fact, he is consubstantial and whom he receives under the spectrum of otherness only as a consequence of the ontological disturbance of his nature, as a result of the sin; in this respect, one may glimpse the perspective of the mysterious recuperation of the unity of humanity within Christ, for the Savior “retrieves us from our own isolation and puts us in an intimate relationship with all our peers;”⁶¹

d) taking human body, Christ assumed—in order to deify it—the very human nature as such (save the sin), thus overcoming, within His own hypostasis, any ethnic or religious difference; in Christ, mankind—so heterogeneous nowadays—has the revelation of the primordial unity; for *“one is neither Jew nor Greek; one is neither a slave nor free; one is no longer man or woman; for you are all one in Jesus Christ”* (Galatians 3, 28); the incarnation of the Word restores the human condition, correcting the tendency towards fragmentation into separate hypostases—leaving no trace of the perceptible common origin—because God, through Christ, “has entered Himself in relation to the people of all faiths and all times, featuring the Gospel of salvation;”⁶²

e) finally, we also note the argument in favor of a dialogue formulated by the Indian Christian theologian Stanley-Jedida Samartha (1920–2001), a remarkable militant for inter-faith dialogue, which emphasized the role of the immediacy of the Holy Spirit in fostering communication between religions, relying on the direct promise expressed by the Savior: *“and when He comes, the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you into all truth ...”* John 16:13—within

a universal work aimed at transfiguring all creation, like that of Christ Himself: “*The Word was the true Light that enlightens every man that cometh into the world*” John 1:9; therefore, “all men are open, in a way, to the work of God’s Spirit” so that, as S. J. Samartha says, the Holy Spirit “can only be regarded as a property monopolized by the Judeo-Christian tradition”—thence, the need for a “more sensitive recognition of the comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit;”⁶³ therefore of the possibility and necessity of an inter-faith dialogue.

The Christian Church in Dialogue

In respect with the non-Christian religions, the Church recognizes them as partners, working together for the “fulfillment of the contemporary world great ideals,”⁶⁴ as recommended by *The World Conference for Cooperation and Development* (Beirut, 1968), given that they produce “a profound piety and obedience to a merciful God, near to the believer,” accepting “the consciousness of the interconnection of all things, the transitory nature of all existence [and] suffering as part of life,” prophesizing “man’s ability to avoid being subjected by the material goods “and acting according to the creed of “the principle of inflict the least damage of all creation,” as the report of *The Conference on faith, science and the future* (Cambridge, 1979).⁶⁵

When in a dialogue with the other great religions of the world, the Church is fully aware that each of them may claim and sustain, apologetically and missionarily, their own faith, regarded as redemptional, their own theological, gnosiological, anthropological and soteriological teachings. Therefore, the fundamental purpose of the inter-faith dialogue is to detect and quantify the common religious values, as well as moral and ethical, for the involved parties, building on the assumption that “every Christian should be . . . aware of his human solidarity with all peers, regardless of their manifest faith or lack of faith.” This way, Christians will engage with a “sincere enthusiasm to listen to the part we want to communicate with; . . . and in this situation, the dialogue is the result of work of the Spirit”⁶⁶—for, “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear his

voice, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). The dialogue with the non-Christians expresses the Church's awareness about the unity of humanity beyond its infinite fragmentation, stemming from the disobedience of the original sin; by means of the dialogue, "... we share our common humanity, dignity and we express our common concern for this humanity."⁶⁷ Being a Christian means discovering the others, and therefore those of another faith, in the light of our faith in Christ the Savior of the world, who calls to regaining our original unity and enjoying its eschatological fulfillment, because "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself . . . and sowing us with the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19), and "the mystery of His will" is "all be again united in Christ, things in heaven and those on earth - all in Him," Ephesians 1:9–10.

Compared to the non-Christians, he who believes in Christ will always open into a "personal and humble" communication,⁶⁸ fully aware that "in every nation, he who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him," Acts 10:35 and then, "When the Gentiles who have not the law, by nature do the law, these, not having the law, are their own law, which showing the deed of the law written in their hearts, by testimony of their conscience and judgments, accusing or defending them" Romans 2:14–15.

A humble dialogue humble, with love, for the love for Christ has saved the world, the appropriating and recognizing what is truly valuable and soul-uplifting in the non-Christian religions⁶⁹, should not lead, however, to a dilution of Christocentrism, to an abdication from the force lines and the dogmatic references of the doctrinal Christianity, the danger of relativism and syncretism⁷⁰ being ever present. Relevant for such a danger is the situation that occurred at the seventh *General Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Canberra, 1991), when Chung Hyun Kyung, from the University of Seoul—in a study on the acculturation of Christianity in Asia and Africa—identified the Holy Spirit with the personal spirit of some biblical characters (Agar, Uriah or the children killed by Herod), and also with the spirits of the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Chernobyl, the victims of the Crusades or those of Tiananmen Square and, finally, the traditional Korean spirits.⁷¹ Staying within the exclusively

institutional framework of the dialogue—which can be carried out without a missionary-kind temptation for deviating approaches, because “no other realization of the human condition of our time has the potential for conciliation which Christianity produces”⁷²—the Church reasserts love and understanding toward the non-Christian brethren precisely because the belief in the One God, “a God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all, and in all,” Ephesians 4:6, and whose glory fills the earth (*Isaiah* 6 3) and whose Kingdom comprises the whole world: “his kingdom doth reigns over all”—Psalm 102:19 and “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; world and all who live in it”—Psalm 23:1—a God whom those on the other side, despite the fact that they would not know to name Him as such, they do sense Him with their entire being: “And Whom, in times past, suffered all nations to go their own ways, Though He Himself has not left un-confessed, making you well, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness”—Acts 14:16–17.

Concurrently, the Christian Church enters into a dialogue with the non-Christians, strengthened by the call addressed to the world in the name of Christ—“Behold the judgment for all the earth is the hand stretched out over all nations!”—*Isaiah* 14:26, not forgetting that it is treasuring the overwhelming love of God: *for God so much loved the world that He gave His begotten Son so that whoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*—John 3:16. In this way, the Church will recognize, in the multitude of the contemporary religions “a gift of God” and as many forms “of expression of the awareness of the divine mystery” —as it has been expressed at the *Conference of the Catholic Bishops* in 1989—and, at the same time, a further call for compliance to Christomorphism, which is the truly fundamental and unique truth [of the Church - TN].

Conclusions

As Nicholas Achimescu has emphasized, the inter-faith dialogue occurring between the world religions is a human response of the whole mankind, starting from the archetypal dialogue in which

God Himself enters the world with the embodiment of Jesus Christ as man. From this point of view, consistent with the Trinitarian Christocentrism, and thus to the ecclesiocentrism of our faith, we understand that, being in a dialogue with our non-Christians brethren, we will be in the natural logic of a radical ontological change brought about in our nature by Christ. Thus, such a dialogue could be seen as “a joint effort to advance towards Truth,”⁷³ as an attempt “to achieve a true communion . . . through forgiveness, reconciliation and a new creation” from all faiths and active religious ideas, within that which W. Walsh called *the home with several dwellings* and which is the contemporary world.

Extrapolating, in fact, in the specific matter of the inter-faith dialogue, the Christian Church can do nothing else but what our Master Jesus Christ did, the one Who, by means of His sacrifice and resurrection, opened a way to salvation for every individual, so that, among those of other faiths, our goal will be to follow Christ, whose work “aimed at all humanity, Christian and non-Christian.”⁷⁴

NOTES

¹ Ioan I. Ică Jr., Globalization - Mutations and Challenges, in *The Church in Mission. The Romanian Patriarchy in Anniversary* (București: EIBMBOR, 2006), 692.

² John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, transl. Cristina Gyurcsik (Timișoara: Amarcord Publishing House, 2002), 11.

³ Dumitru Popescu, *Orthodoxy and Globalization. Global Culture and Particular Cultures*, in *The Church in the Globalization Age* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2003), 12.

⁴ Olivier Clement, “Christianity, Secularization and the Europe,” in Ioan I. Ică, Jr., Germano Marani, eds., *The Social Thought of the Church. Foundation, Documents, Analyses, Perspectives* (Sibiu: Deisis Press, 2002), 509.

⁵ Tomlinson, 2002, 73.

⁶ Marin Aiftincă, “Global Culture and Cultural Identity,” in *The Church in the Globalization Age*, 213.

⁷ Popescu, 2003, 92–93.

⁸ Dumitru Popescu, *The Rootless Man* (București: Publishing House Nemira, 2001), 86.

⁹ Cătălin Raiu, *Orthodoxy, Post-Communism and Neoliberalism* (București, Publishing House Curtea Veche, 2012), 15–16.

¹⁰ Ică Jr., 2006, 693.

- ¹¹ Popescu, "Orthodoxy and Globalization," 87.
- ¹² Adrian Lemeni, "Globalization: A Diversion from the Unification of the World Into Christ," in *The Church in the Globalization Age*, 444.
- ¹³ Anca Manolescu, *The Style of the Religion in the Late Modernity* (Iași: Publishing House Polirom 2011), 63.
- ¹⁴ Nicolae Achimescu, *Religion, Modernity and Post-Modernity* (București: Publishing House Trinitas, 2013), 491.
- ¹⁵ Ică, Jr., 690.
- ¹⁶ Popescu, *The Rootless Man*, 482.
- ¹⁷ Popescu, "Orthodoxy and Globalization," 90.
- ¹⁸ Ovidiu Pecican, "Church, Globalization and Posthistory: Anti-Babel or An Apocalyptic Age?," in *The Church in the Globalization Age*, 235–236.
- ¹⁹ Dumitru Popescu, "Orthodoxy and Globalization," 16.
- ²⁰ Nicolae Balca, *The Crisis of Culture*, in *Telegraful român*, nr. 42 (1936): 58.
- ²¹ Ică, Jr., 695.
- ²² Achimescu, 236; 300–301.
- ²³ Ică, Jr., 695.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 694.
- ²⁵ Achimescu, 179.
- ²⁶ H. R. Patapievici, *The Recent Man* (București: Publishing House Humanitas), 87.
- ²⁷ Marin Aiftincă, *Culture globale et identite culturelle* (București, 2001), 9.
- ²⁸ Valer Bel, "The Witnessing Community in the Environment of A Secular and Global World," in *Symposium: Modernism, Post-Modernism and Religion*, edited by Vasile Nechita (Constanța: 2005), 34.
- ²⁹ Gheorghe Petraru, "Modernist and Postmodern Conceptual Paradigms and Their Impact on Theology and the Mission of the Church," in Nechita, 55.
- ³⁰ Achimescu, 312.
- ³¹ Ibid., 511.
- ³² Vasile Citirigă, *The Mistery of Man and His Tragedy in the Postmodern Age*, in Nechita, 239.
- ³³ Achimescu, 401.
- ³⁴ Gheorghe Istodor, *Postmodernism: A Major Challenge For The Mission of the Christian Church*, in Nechita, 124.
- ³⁵ Achimescu, 521–522.
- ³⁶ Emil Stan, "Nae Ionescu and the Post-Modernism," in *Viața Românească*, nr. 11–12 (1998): 170–174.
- ³⁷ Petraru, 56.
- ³⁸ Istodor, 116.
- ³⁹ Petraru, 53.
- ⁴⁰ Ion Popescu, *The Phenomenon of Personalization in Post-Modernism*, in Nechita, 251.
- ⁴¹ Horațiu Trif, "Tradition and Eschaton: A Short Anamnesis On The End of Modernity," in *Verso*, nr. 2–3 109–110 (2014): 8.

⁴² Adrian Niculcea, “The Romanian Intellectual between ‘The Death of God’ and the ‘Imagined’ Christianity,” in Nechita, 262.

⁴³ Achimescu, 346–347.

⁴⁴ Ică, Jr., 698.

⁴⁵ Petraru, 59.

⁴⁶ Achimescu, 207.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁸ Constantin Coman, *quoted art.*, in Nechita, 335–336.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 336–337.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 331.

⁵¹ Achimescu, 512.

⁵² Ică, Jr., 698.

⁵³ Achimescu, 20.

⁵⁴ Adrian Boldișor, *The Importance and the Actuality of the Inter-Faith Dialogue For the Contemporary World: History, Perspectives, Solutions* (Craiova: Publishing House Mitropolia Olteniei, 2015), 17.

⁵⁵ Dan Țăreanu, *The Modern Anti-Trinitarism—Theological Presumptions and Conceptual Structures* (Sibiu: Publishing House Andreiana, 2015), 157–158.

⁵⁶ Boldișor, 18–20, 22–26, 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 70–71, 133.

⁵⁸ Achimescu, 53.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 59–60.

⁶⁰ C. Sârbu, “The Main Position of the Orthodox toward Other Religions, in *Ortodoxia*, XXI nr. 5 (1969): 511.

⁶¹ Achimescu, 19.

⁶² Ibid., 15–16.

⁶³ Ibid., 30–31.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20–21.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Emilian Vasilescu, “Preoccupations Within the Romanian Orthodoxy Concerning The Non-Christian Religions,” *Ortodoxia* nr. 1 (1971): 40.

⁷⁰ Emilian Vasilescu, “The Religious Syncretism In Our Times,” *Studii Teologice* nr. XIX nr. 3–4 (1967): 150.

⁷¹ Boldișor, 158. See also Vasile Nechita, *The Abrahamic Religions in the Post-Modernist Context* (Iași: Publishing House Vasiliana, 1998, 2010), 240.

⁷² Andrei Marga, *Modernity, Religion, Culture*, in *The Church in the Globalization Age*, 30–31.

⁷³ Nicolae Achimescu, *Religions in a Dialogue* (București: Trinitas Publishing House, 2006), 15–18.;

⁷⁴ Ibid., 19.