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The doctoral thesis
***Contributions of the Romanian Orthodox Theology
to the Theology and Ecumenical Movement***
- summary -

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The doctoral thesis, entitled *Contributions of the Romanian Orthodox Theology to the Theology and Ecumenical Movement*, is crucial for the current theological research and a challenge the Romanian Orthodox Church should answer more and more firmly, as well as empowerment of the relationships and interactions of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the current ecumenical theological dialogue. During this third Christian millennium, the most debated theological subject relates to the contextualisation of Christian teachings to the needs of contemporary people, as well as to an adaptation of the revelational language of the Church, to be understood and followed by the lay or the indifferent of today; it seems that the responsibility for this *aggiornamento* belongs to the ecumenical theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the existing Christian denominations, where the contribution of the theology and ecumenical vision of the Romanian Orthodox Church are welcome with interest and enthusiasm.

This doctoral research highlighted that the Romanian orthodox theology is not closed, self-sufficient, detached or indifferent to the developments of the inter-Christian environment, blind to the real problems and needs of our contemporary world, but it has a clear identity, it is open to dialogue and to the challenges of the current society, it is actively involved in all ecumenical events, presenting each and every time its identity founded in the divine revelation and renewed by ecclesiastical tradition, thus contribution to deeper orthodox spirituality and life.

Due to its renowned theologians – hierarchs, priests and laymen, the Romanian Orthodox Church it has brought a crucial contribution to the development and in-depth knowledge of the identity of ecumenical theology grounded in the teachings of Christ. For an orthodox theologian with a true ecumenical vocation, who has a biblical and patristic foundation in the scientific research, who is sensitive to the ecclesial dynamics of the Church mission, who is responsive to current theological issues and not influenced by certain denominational limitations, the ecumenical movement should not be just one among many interests, but an existential priority and a holistic vision over the context that shaped and defined ecumenical theology within human history, where the genuine ecumenism suffered serious changes in meaning and accurate perception, once it reached theological analysis or reflection and dynamic tradition consciousness.

This paper intends to provide the reader with an opportunity to enter the complex phenomenon of ecumenism, by means of clear, succinct and punctual reading, following a

logical and comprehensive evolution. The title of the paper intends to emphasize from the very beginning that the Romanian Orthodox Church has always had as a fundamental component of its activity the evangelisation mission. The Romanian Orthodox Church accomplishes a Christian mission through various instruments and methods, adapted to a wide variety of situations and issues, and constant participation in the ecumenical movement may be such an opportunity and chance to bring important results for the purposes envisaged.

Starting from the theoretical assumptions, followed by a presentation of the main historical landmarks of this universal phenomenon, supported by a consistent theological and doctrinarian support, this paper aims at leading the reader toward the applicative side of ecumenism as well. Once here, the reader finds new perspectives with regards to possibilities to integrate and use efficiently this missionary and pastoral tool in the perspective of the overall theological actions of the Romanian Orthodox Church facing the requirements of the new contemporary evangelisation.

On the other hand, the thesis focuses on highlighting some aspects which are less known or explored in the literature, namely revealing the contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Theology treasury to the development of theology and ecumenical movement, as research and in-depth study of ecumenical theological themes may lead to a new realistic and coherent model of theological attitude both for students in theology, as their academic and spiritual personality is shaping, and for those who serve the One Church of Jesus Christ with their pastoral-missionary and cultural and educational activities. The study and knowledge of ecumenical theological issues represent an important responsibility of the Romanian Orthodox Church in order to achieve optimum dialogue with all Christians.

The paper is structured in three main parts, comprising nine chapters, preceded by a motto, the contents of the research, abbreviations, the list of key words, and an introduction and followed by overall conclusions, annexes, the bibliography, curriculum vitae and honesty statement.

In the **Introduction** I focused on five distinct components, namely: rationale, purpose, documentation, current research stage and working method, as I intended to write a realistic analysis on how to approach this theme and become familiar with it, how to place it within the current scope of ecumenical and theological research, how to define its relationship with orthodox theology and why it is (still) necessary to write or to study about the ecumenical movement. In other words, the introductory notions were used to present us

the family of the theological research and ecumenical movement, as well as the literature in the field.

The first part of the paper, entitled *Ecumenical Identity of Orthodox Theology*, comprises three chapters where I attempted to highlight and clarify, first of all historically and etymologically, the main concepts presented by the very title, in order to shed light on the correct position of the terms mentioned. This clarification of the basic notions is necessary, as it is well known that when we embark on the journey of scientific research it is recommended that we relate to the real and authentic meanings of words and not allow ourselves to get carried away by insufficient or misleading interpretations of the concepts used.

The first chapter of the thesis, entitled *Historical Perspective on Ecumenism*, focuses on the general notion of ecumenism, more precisely on the clarification of its etymology and its development throughout the history, by highlighting the current meanings of the word and what we understand today when we use it; on the creation of the ecumenical movement, also presented in general terms, by emphasizing the main landmarks concerning its structure, as well as its activity, as reflected by meetings or general assemblies where certain theological topics were debated. In other words, in the four sub-chapters I intended to clarify the identity of the current ecumenism, what it really proposes, whether it is a viable and efficient solution in the endeavour towards unity of all Christians, what is the correct interpretation of this movement and whether we ought to promote it and participate in this movement, but also how it could be improved so that it works better for the Christian unity.

The second chapter, entitled *Historical perspective on theology*, is mainly a clarification of the concept of theology, by indicating its terminology and definition, as it is quite well known that this is a complex term which embeds multiple meanings, by applying the historical filter to see its development, but also its current aspects or meanings, as well as the manner it is perceived by the contemporary world. I also attempted to sketch some guidelines for an orthodox theology open to universality, the so called *ecumenical theology*, with deep roots in the divine revelation, showing the connection between theology and spirituality, as well as the new visions or meanings provided by contemporary theologians on the Church theology.

The third chapter, entitled *Ecumenical perspective on the Orthodox Church*, focuses on the concept of Orthodox Church, as I presented its etymology and definition, I showed

the specificity of the Orthodox Church among the other denominations and within the new context given by the ecumenical movement, I indicated punctually and clearly what the Orthodox Church is and is not today and, last but not least, I analysed the main principles of the Orthodox Church in its dialogue with the ecumenical movement, elements that indicate that our ecumenical identity becomes obvious and renewing when we are enlightening others and serve as genuine landmarks in building the Christian belief .

The second part of the research, entitled *Romanian Orthodox Theology and Ecumenical Movement*, aims at bringing novelty to the current theological scenery, as it is a potential starting point in an examination of the participation of Romanian Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches and a first attempt of synthesis in this field, indicating the main moments and aspects of the participation of Romanian Orthodox Theology to the theology and ecumenical movement. From this perspective, the second part of the paper comprises four chapters where I tried to emphasize and clarify the main contributions brought by our Church to the ecumenical dialogue, more and more current and challenging for today's generations.

The fourth chapter of the thesis, entitled *Testimony of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ecumenical Context*, focuses on emphasizing the ecumenical vocation of the Romanian Orthodox Church, showing that it holds a privileged role in the dynamics of the universal or ecumenical Orthodox Church in terms of openness to the ecumenical dialogue, bringing forward the bridging role our Church has in the current ecumenical context, as well as its profile within today's Christian testimony. In other words, the three subchapters show the willingness and predisposition to ecumenical openness of our Orthodox Church, by mentioning some telling and vibrant testimonies for the Christian world, in order to see whether the Romanian Orthodox Theology is a viable and efficient solution in the attempt to Christian unity.

The fifth chapter, entitled *Romanian Orthodox Theology in Ecumenical Commissions*, describes the main participation of the Romanian Theology and Orthodox Church in the three Ecumenical Commissions which are part of the World Council of Churches and whose task is to debate and clarify theological or practical issues, namely: *Faith and Order*, *Life and Work* and *Mission and Evangelism*.

The sixth chapter, entitled *Romanian Orthodox Theology, in the World Council of Churches*, describes the main participation of the Romanian Theology and Orthodox Church in the general assemblies organised so far, by mentioning the Romanian orthodox

theologians who took part in these meetings, as well as the Romanian orthodox theological contribution, and by capitalising on some of the theological and dogmatic aspects brought by the Romanian Orthodox Church to the current ecumenical dialogue. Obviously, the chapter does not intend to be exhaustive, as it would be quite impossible, especially when we consider that the literature in the field is heterogeneous, even missing sometimes, but it aims at presenting where we are within the current theology, by emphasizing the main contributions to the theology and ecumenical movement that are specific to the Romanian Orthodox Theology.

The seventh chapter, entitled *Romanian Orthodox Theology, in the Conference of European Churches*, attempts to emphasize in a clear and punctual manner the participation of the Romanian Theology and Orthodox Church in this European structure of ecumenical dialogue, as one that is closer to the Christian origins and ecumenical spirit shared by the Romanian Orthodox Church, an ecumenical organisation where the Romanian Orthodox Church may be easier invited and respected, understood and perceived, analysed and testified.

The third part of the thesis, entitled *The Impact of the Ecumenical Movement on the Romanian Orthodox Church*, comprises two chapters aimed at providing the interested reader with concrete details on the local results and effects of the participation of Romanian Orthodox Theology to the ecumenical movement.

The eighth chapter of the paper, entitled *Romanian Local Ecumenism*, intends to present the main ecumenical events which took place in our country, with direct reference to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly organised in Sibiu in 2007 and to the interconfessional theological conferences organised in our country, as major local ecumenical events, but also to highlight the specificity of the Romanian local ecumenism, understanding it as another concrete and current way of passing the genuine message of Christ, maintained unchanged by the Orthodox Church, to those who did not have access to it, regardless the reasons.

The ninth chapter, entitled *Current Challenges and Perspectives on Ecumenism*, presents details related to the rationale and specificity of genuine ecumenism, more precisely what ecumenism is and is not, trying to disprove the main unfounded ecumenical attitudes. In this chapter I also speak about the attitude the ecumenism of the 21st century should have, namely I emphasized the theological role and the ecumenical co-responsibility in the current society, and in the end I highlighted some elements regarding who and what

we should be in the current ecumenical environment, often lay and lacking substance. In other words, in this last chapter I focused on what we should do in the future, as the ecumenical work needs continuity; what the theological research and the ecumenical approach should take into consideration mostly; what are the viable projects which should be supported and last but not least, how we should prepare ourselves, from the educational, theological, pastoral and ecumenical viewpoints.

The thesis ends with some conclusions aiming at synthesising the main opinions presented throughout the paper. These general mentions may indicate that the thesis is quite generous in scope, but very sensitive in topic, which has been insufficiently researched so far and is crucial for the current Romanian Orthodox Theology, as well as for the Orthodox Theology, generally.

Synthetically, in this doctoral research I:

- ❖ Emphasized what the Romanian Orthodox Theology proposes to the contemporary world;
- ❖ Presented the activity of the ecumenical movement, as it was created and reflected by the meetings it organised;
- ❖ Highlighted how current the orthodox theological message is to the world, focusing on the universal, ecumenical or synodical characteristic of the Romanian Orthodox Church;
- ❖ Presented the contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the development of ecumenical theological argumentation, as starting point for the other remarkable contributions;
- ❖ Analysed how traditional theological teachings are perceived in the current area of the ecumenical movement;
- ❖ Published and researched all final documents with theological content drafted by the general assemblies of the World Council of Churches, in an attempt to soothe the wounds of the past;
- ❖ Saw how Romanian Orthodox Theology influences and changes in a creative manner the opinions of ecumenical theologians participating in the ecumenical general assemblies;
- ❖ Noted the effects of presenting the Orthodox teachings in those ecumenical meetings, even though sometimes they do not reach as far as we would like.

In an attempt to highlight the contribution of the Romanian Orthodox theology to the theology and ecumenical movement from the doctrine perspective, I might say that the main

Orthodox theological aspects could be briefly described by the following:

1. The Romanian Orthodox Theology brought to the ecumenical movement the real teaching about the Holy Trinity, as a source and a model for the future Christian unity, indicating that the Trinity is the source, the model and the purpose of the long sought unity.

2. The Romanian Orthodox Theology contributed to presenting the reality of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the purpose of revealing the godly nature of manhood, as a landmark in any vision on the Christian faith and life, with Jesus Christ both divine and human, as embodiment of the real Christian unity. The role of the ecumenical movement is not to change the Saviour's identity, but to find again the trust in the identity of the Son, which is presented by the divine revelation and genuinely testified and communicated to the next generations by the Orthodox Church. The ecumenical theology should render Jesus Christ accessible, true to His Gospel, should testify Him as the one and only God, the Head of the Church, His mystical body, and only from this perspective should He be testified: one God and one Church.

3. The Romanian Orthodox Theology understands and always brings to the ecumenical dialogue that fact that the Holy Spirit may inspire the unity of faith, as the Spirit of communion, supporting and inspiring the Christian life as lived by the principles of the Gospel and experimented by the ecclesiastical tradition of the one Church as proposed to the contemporary world.

4. The Romanian Orthodox Theology insists on the true ecclesiology, proposing a unique vision on it, stating that Christ founded only one Church and that the world – God's creation – is the ecclesiastical space where we should testify on the true faith by a righteous life. In fact, ecclesiology is the most debated theological topic during the meetings of the World Council of Churches, as there is a wide range of opinions on the institution of Church. The Orthodox participate in the ecumenical dialogue with the purpose of calling all people in the unity of Christ to the one true Church of Christ: there can only be one Church, as Christ only founded one Church.

5. The Romanian Orthodox Theology introduced in the ecumenical dialogue the notion of *Tradition*, as life and memory of the Church, as well as a secure and concrete way of sharing the revealed message, knowing that it has been preserved and testified as pure and true as it was revealed.

6. The Romanian Orthodox Theology constantly emphasized the importance of the Eucharist for the Christian unity. In order to achieve unity, there should be first Eucharistic

unity, which leads to Christian unity, based on the apostle unity and doctrine, as the Eucharist is the true Word and communion.

7. The Romanian Orthodox Theology proposes a return to the true theology and meaning of this concept, stating that the true theology is the one that allows for the presence of God in its reflection, namely that dynamic and living theology which involves an ontological relationship or connection, and not the passive, sterile or individual theology. The Romanian Orthodox Church always reminds the ecumenical theology that the ecumenical man nowadays should become a theologian in vocation, open to the other, able to relate creatively with another person.

8. The Romanian Orthodox Theology always spoke about the unity of theology and spirituality, of testimony and living in faith, of theological hermeneutics and capacity to apply the divine revelation into daily life, within each Christian nation, bringing liturgical life as novelty to the ecumenical movement, as centre of the life of Church and as reflection of the revelation, especially through the Holy Mass. By this, the Romanian Orthodox theology proposes as method to communicate the Christian faith a liturgical or doxological language that should meet this high and sublime requirement of Christian unity.

9. The Romanian Orthodox Theology states that the ecumenical theology and the Christian faith may not be communicated apart from the orthodoxy of life in Christ. In other words, the theological doctrine should have a viable counterpart in the practical life of the Christian, as a visible result of faith, as the role of a true Christian is to serve. Only sin leads to discord and lack of Christian unity, unsettles the right meaning of the genuine ecumenism, as inductive to dialogue in order to find Christ. From this viewpoint, sin leads to uncertainty and insecurity regarding the Christian identity.

10. The Romanian Orthodox Theology brought to the ecumenical dialogue the Orthodox iconography, a true and deep Christian art, stating that iconography is a symbolic language which reveals divine realities and shows us the eschatological dimension of the faith and the Kingdom of God.

11. The Romanian Orthodox Theology contributed to emphasizing the local symphony of the Orthodox Church, promoting the true *koinonia*, as there is no denominational tension in this structure of Church. The local structure of the Church does not minimize the importance and universality of the Church plenitude.

12. The Romanian Orthodox Theology brought a substantial contribution to the correct understanding of the mission as *martyria*, maintaining that it is difficult to identify and

follow a sustainable and credible ecumenism without constant evangelism of Christians in the spirit of Christ's teachings, without a Christian life transfigured in the gospel, without mystical and ascetic effort. Hence, the mission of ecumenism is to rediscover and reinforce the identity of Christ, through love and truth, to highlight the beauty of the face of God in each individual baptised in the name of the Holy Spirit.

13. The Romanian Orthodox Theology states that the highest contribution of Christian faith to the contemporary ecumenism is achieved by promoting love. Love is a true ecumenical virtue, the strong link that brings together seemingly opposed attitudes of mindsets, the most important value when we promote the Christian identity. Permanent love for God and neighbour gives identity, dignity and a sublime nature to the human being.

To conclude, this doctoral research in Orthodox theology testifies about the activity and the dynamic participation of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches, but also about how the one Church of Christ should reveal and promote the true theological treasure received as a gift from Jesus Christ, through the Holy Apostles and Father of the Church. We may note that the theological message comprised by the Holy Writ and the Holy Tradition was kept with remarkable fidelity by the Orthodox Church, through its theology and spirituality, and made accessible to each Christian generation, in any historical context.

The contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Theology to the theology and ecumenical movement was quite substantial and important, specific and welcome, as it maintained unchanged the mystery of faith, it revealed the true theological dynamism within the current ecumenical context and it always signalled the danger of having ecumenism fall in a future with no connection to the theological hermeneutics, reminding that theology and mysticism, theology and spiritual experience, theology and diacony converge towards the intended purpose. Thus, the Romanian Orthodox Theology remained faithful to the biblical and patristic teachings, where we find the seeds of the divine Logos, a revealed theology which expressed and maintained the true faith which, in this new Christian century and millennium should be the starting point of any debate of ecumenical theology in the perspective of unity of all Christians, "that they all may be one" (John 17, 21).