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Orthodoxy and Islam¹

Abstract

Within the historical approach on interreligious dialogue, it should not be overlooked that the representatives of Orthodox Churches were actively involved in promoting and supporting interreligious dialogue by participating in the meetings that have focused on relations with people of other religions. In this context, the Orthodox Churches come with a whole tradition that stretches to the early centuries, the relations with Jews and Muslims being an integral part of the history of Orthodox Christianity. The Orthodox Christians, with their bi-millennium tradition, where there are different interpretations of other religions, bring to the modern world an approach that takes into account personal relationship with people of other religions. Analyzing how the representatives of the Orthodoxy and the Islam in Romania are trying to find solutions to the many problems facing the world today, we can say that lately in Romania, the interreligious, intercultural and interethnic dialogue increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. Among the followers of the two religions that live in these territories for centuries, the relations have varied over the time, reaching today to a situation in which the believers live in peace, protected by the laws of the Romanian state which guarantee the freedom of thought and religious expression. Moreover, lately it has been attempted to find solutions to the global crises which are, not infrequently, religious.

Keywords: Interreligious dialogue, Orthodoxy, Islam, “Danube model” in Romania.

Prawosławie i islam

Streszczenie

Dokonując historycznego spojrzenia na przebieg dialogu międzyreligijnego, nie można przeoczyć udziału w nim przedstawicieli Kościołów prawosławnych, uczestniczących aktywnie w spotkaniach z reprezentantami innych religii. Kościoły prawosławne angażują się w ten proces, niosąc w sobie całą swoją tradycję, sięgającą pierwszych wieków, oraz doświadczenie relacji z Żydami i muzułmanami, będące integralną częścią historii prawosławnego chrześcijaństwa. Chrześcijanie prawosławni z ich dwutysiącletnią tradycją, w której podejmowano zróżnicowane interpretacje innych religii, wnoszą we współczesny kontekst bogactwo osobistych relacji z osobami wywodzącymi się z innych religii. Analizując sposób rozwiązywania aktualnych problemów przez

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prawosławnych i muzułmanów w Rumunii, można stwierdzić, że zarówno w wymiarze ilościowym, jak i jakościowym następuje wyraźne ożywienie dialogu międzyreligijnego, międzykulturowego i międzyetnicznego w tym kraju. Relacje pomiędzy wyznawcami tych religii, zamieszkującymi od wieków terytorium Rumunii, zmieniały się w różnych okresach, osiągając obecnie poziom, w którym wierni żyją w pokoju, strzeżonym przez rumuńskie prawo państwowe, gwarantujące wolność myśli i wyznania. Co więcej, ostatnio podjęto próby rozwiązania globalnych kryzysów, które nierzadko mają charakter religijny.

Słowa kluczowe: dialog międzyreligijny, prawosławie, Islam, „model Danube” w Rumunii.

1. Short introduction

The interreligious dialogue is not a new theme in the history of Christianity, the possibility of accomplished being analyzed from the early centuries when the new religion spread across the world. Nowadays, the way other religions are viewed has changed essentially, the religious, political, economic and social realities being completely different than in the beginning. “The question of how to understand other religions from a Christian point of view is not only of theological interest. It also has various practical implications regarding the Christian attitude toward the spiritual searching of our own era, as well as more general implications for future of humankind”².

A proper analysis of interreligious dialogue cannot disregard the past, the more that the ideas from the works of Holy Fathers, ecclesiastical writers, theologians and old thinkers remain valid and are used as themes in the current interfaith discussions. “The works of the fathers never lose their relevance, since they deal with questions to which the answers are decisive for the present and future of humanity. It has become fashionable to speak of a «post-Christian» era, of a decline of interest in traditional Christianity among young people, of «Christianity without a future». Most radical forecasts predict the disappearance of Christianity from the religious world map in the third millennium, its absorption by Islam. May I express my hope that these forecasts will be found wrong, that Christians will stand firm together for the preservation of their doctrine, their church and their Tradition. From the example of Russia we see that the Christian faith is by no means a «relic of the past», that thousands and millions of people, including youth, are returning to the «patristic faith». It is my hope that a Christian spring is yet to come. I want to believe that the 21st century will witness the healing of divisions among Christians and the revival of the «faith of the universal church, which the Lord gave, the apostles preached and the fathers preserved»³.

² ARCHBISHOP ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, transl. Pavlos Gottfried, Geneva 2003, 128.

³ BISHOP HILARION ALFEYEV, *Orthodox Witness Today*, Geneva 2006, 170.

In the most of the works that deal with the history of interreligious dialogue, it is noted that, in the modern period, the pioneers of dialogue were the missionaries, majority Protestants and Catholics, who, in their endeavor, they had to learn the language of those who they preached the Gospel of Christ. At the same time, they have produced special works showing how the Christian message was perceived in a world that still did not know Christ.

Within this historical approach should not be overlooked that the representatives of Orthodox Churches were actively involved in promoting and supporting interreligious dialogue by participating in the meetings that have focused on relations with people of other religions. In this context, the Orthodox Churches come with a whole tradition that stretches to the early centuries, the relations with Jews and Muslims being an integral part of the history of Orthodox Christianity. The Orthodox Christians, with their bi-millennium tradition, where there are different interpretations of other religions, bring to the modern world an approach that takes into account personal relationship with people of other religions, their history being an enlightening one for the way they were perceived, and at their turn, they have to understand those who they preached the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. “The Orthodox stance may be critical of other religions as systems and organic units, but towards the people who live in the climate of other religions and Confessions the stance is always one of respect and love according to the example of Christ. For man continues to bear within himself the «image» of God and the possibility to «likeness» by virtue of the innate components of his existence – free will, a mind capable of reason, the disposition and the possibility of love”⁴.

The dialogue was and continues to be an integral part of Orthodox tradition, Christians emphasizing, in discussions with people of other faiths and ideologies, the quality of man as “image” that tends to “likeness” of God, being created and living on earth as a unique and free person.

The dialogue does not mean relativism or syncretism or any weakening of Christian faith from those who are sincerely engage in his development and promotion. But, “in order for it to be genuine and fruitful, however, it requires true Christian understanding, consistency, and repentance; that is, it requires us to re-experience our faith continuously, through humility and genuine love. This is precisely the «perfect love» that «casts out fear» (1 Jn 4:18) – every form of fear – and that fills us with hope. The power of God’s truth opens up unexpected doorways to lead us out of life’s impasses. It is our responsibility to share with others the certainties and deep spiritual experiences that God has bestowed on us,

⁴ ARCHBISHOP ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Mission in Christ’s Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*, Brookline – Geneva 2010, 225.

and we must do so without boastfulness – simply, peacefully, with gratitude and understanding, always respecting the personality and the freedom of those with whom we speak”⁵.

2. The involvement of the Orthodox Churches in the interreligious dialogue

In 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople sent a brotherly letter “unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere”⁶ urging all Christian denominations to meet and to create a “League of the Church”, following the example of the “League of Nations” established a year earlier. This was not the first call of the Ecumenical Patriarchate that took into consideration the meeting of all Christians, regardless of denomination, to promote an inter-Christian dialogue. About encyclical work of 1920, more known and appreciated in the inter-Christian dialogue history, Willem Adolph Visser’t Hooft (1900–1985, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches – WCC), said that this represented “an initiative which was without precedent in church history”⁷. This Encyclical remains the basis on which local Orthodox Churches have engaged in this movement.

During the periods that has elapsed since the establishment of the WCC in 1948 and until now, the Orthodox Churches were part of WCC programs, are actively involved in the discussions at all levels. In this context, the Orthodox Churches have participated in the meetings that have focused on interreligious dialogue. An important role in the promotion of the dialogue with representatives of other religions had Bishop George Khodr of Mount Lebanon, which, at a meeting in Addis Ababa (1971), where they founded a program in the WCC that promoted the interreligious dialogue, he highlighted the role and importance of this dialogue in the context of the realities facing the world in 20th century. “The increasing need for unity makes dialogue imperative if we wish to avoid a *de facto* syncretism of resurgent religions all claiming universality. In face of this resurgence of religions and a plurality which shows no signs of yielding to the Gospel, the question arises as to whether Christianity is so inherently exclusive of other religions as has generally been proclaimed up to now”⁸.

⁵ ARCHBISHOP ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World*, 126.

⁶ *Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere*. Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920, in: M. KINNAMON, B.E. COPE (ed.), *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva 1997, 11–15.

⁷ W.A. VISSER’T HOOFT, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva 1982, 1.

⁸ G. KHODR, *Christianity in a Pluralistic World – the Economy of the Holy Spirit*, in: M. KINNAMON, B.E. COPE (ed.), *The Ecumenical Movement*, 402.

This is not just a particular problem, but is related to the whole Christian life and must start from the theological meaning of the term *oikonomia*. *Oikonomia* is not reduced only to the historical events, but do we fully participate in the life and mystery of God. Finally, *oikonomia* is closely related to the concept of *kenosis* of the Son of God from the Incarnation and, if we look at the Old Testament, of God since the creation of man. The connection of man with God belongs not only of the Hebrew people, but to all humanity, God letting him confessed as well in other traditions. “Christ is hidden everywhere in the mystery of his lowliness. Any reading of religions is a reading of Christ. It is Christ alone who is received as light when grace visits a Brahman, a Buddhist or a Muhammadan reading his own scriptures. Every martyr for the truth, every man persecuted for what he believes to be right, dies in communion with Christ. The mystics of Islamic countries with their witness to suffering love lived the authentic Johannine *agape*”⁹.

These truths emerge, on the one hand, from the unique event of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ which includes all of the earth and, on the other hand, in the event of Pentecost that flows over all the people. Thus, the world’s religions are like real schools of Divine Mercy which must look with patience and understanding. There is a universal community that can, under certain conditions, to enrich religious experience, but all must be viewed in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In this context, there may be individual gifts also in other religions which we should see them beyond the symbols and historical forms, especially starting from the religious apofatism. We have the duty to communicate with the people of other religions, renouncing to the pride and religious superiority. Our goal is reflected in the identification of the Christian values present in other religions, because from here we can present to these people, Christ, as the One who unites all¹⁰.

The ideas about the relation that should exist between Christianity and other religions were described in several meetings attended by the representatives of the Orthodox Churches. Thus, at the first meeting, preceding the Panorthodox Conference, which took place in Chambésy (Switzerland) in 1976, it was pointed out that the Orthodox Churches contribute to understanding and promoting the interreligious dialogue and, in this respect, mediate to combat the religious fanaticism of any kind. Also it was discussed the need for reconciliation between the people belonging to different religions. The ideal of interreligious dialogue was seen in the desire to acquire freedom, peace on earth and work to support all people, regardless of race and religion. These proposals and goals were resumed and accented at the third Orthodox Pre-conciliar meeting held in Chambésy in

⁹ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 406.

1986. In fact, most meetings that focused on the theme of interreligious dialogue in general, and the nature of relations between the Orthodox, Muslim and Hebrew in particular, were held in Chambésy, under the supervision of Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreou of Switzerland. Those strengthened the desire of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to promote and strengthen the relations with neighbors belonging to other religions.

On 7 January 2000, in the message sent from Bethlehem, to the Primate of the Orthodox Churches stressed the need for dialogue with people of other religions and ideologies, continuing also the desire of peaceful coexistence of groups and religious minorities in territories around the world, without affecting the freedom of conscience of each person and the belonging of every man to his own nation: “We look to the other great religions, particularly the monotheistic ones of Judaism and Islam, and we are prepared to build up even further the presuppositions for dialogue with them, looking to achieve a peaceful coexistence of all peoples (...). The Orthodox Church rejects religious intolerance and condemns religious fanaticism wherever these phenomena may appear”¹¹.

3. Essential steps of the dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Muslims

3.1. The Byzantine era

Anastasios Yannoulatos speaks of the existence of three major periods in the dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the Byzantine era, since the emergence of Islam until the fall of Constantinople under Turks on May 29, 1453.

The first phase extends from middle of 8th century until middle of 9th century, the Byzantine attitude being one of “mainly derisive and disparaging”¹². Among the early Christian writers who have dealt with this problem is St. John of Damascus, with the work *The Source of Knowledge*. For him, Islam is not a religion to be taken seriously, considered more a Christian heresy. Another writer dealing with Islam is Bishop Theodor of Harran from Mesopotamia in the work *Against the Jewish and Saracen Heresies*. This is considered to be the first serious work about studying the Islamic teaching. This period “of literary confrontation between Christians of the east and Islam was centered in Syria, where the seat of the caliphate was located. The works of the two theologians referred to above

¹¹ “A Message of love without discrimination is sent by the primates of the Orthodox Churches from Jerusalem”, January 8, 2000.

¹² ARCHBISHOP ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World*, 104.

reflect actual experiences based on direct personal dialogue with Muslims. Both of these theologians lived among a Muslim population and knew the Qur'an in the original"¹³.

The second phase of the dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Muslims is between the middle of the 9th century and the middle of 14th century, the center of eastern researches being the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Among those involved in the discussion are Samona of Gazes, with the paper *Dialexis with Ahmet the Saracen*, Euthemios Zigavenos, with the work *Dogmatic Pano-ply*, Nicetas Choniates, with the paper *Treasury of Orthodoxy*, Bartholomaios of Edessa with the work *Censure of the Haragene* and Nicetas of Byzantium, with the work *A Refutation of the Book Forget by the Arab Muhammad*. This text, although controversial, stated also a detailed analysis of the Qur'an, being at the same time an attempt to translate the sacred book of Muslims in Greek, while the Latin translation appeared only in 1141. "The impressive success and spread of Islam was becoming a nightmare for the Byzantines. They realized that this religion, in spite of or perhaps precisely because of its logical and ethical peculiarities, was a major threat to the empire. They therefore adopted a more hostile policy"¹⁴.

The third phase of relations with Islam runs from middle of 14th century and middle of 15th century during which is characterized in terms as "calm and objectivity"¹⁵. Now are noted personalities like St. Gregory Palamas, the author of several works: *To the Atheist Chionai*, *A Conversation Recorded by the Physician Taronites, Who Was Present and Witnessed the Event*; *Letter Sent to the Church from Asia, Where Its Author Was Being Held Captive*; *Letter to David the Disypatos, a Monk*. Other Byzantine writers with similar concerns are: Monk Joseph Vryennios with the work *Conversation with an Ismaelite*; John VI Cantacuzenus with the works *Against Muhammedans* and *Against Muhammad*; Manuel II Palaeologus, with the work *Dialogue with a Persian of the Rank of Mouterizes in Ancyra, Galatia*. "The Byzantines can be considered the forerunners and initiators of Christian-Islamic dialogue, which in our day is encouraged on an international scale"¹⁶.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

3.2. The dominance of Islam in the former Byzantine Empire

In the first part of the Ottoman period it can be spoken about some dialogue between the two religions through that it has tried the developing of the spirit of mutual understanding. Some early Christian writers, who have dealt with the relationship between Christianity and Islam in the Ottoman Empire, were Patriarch Gennadius II Scholarius and diplomat George Amiroutzes. Unlike George of Trebizond, who also wrote about Islam (born in the Byzantine Empire and died in Rome), the first two continued to live in the territory named *Dār al-Islam* (territory where the Ottoman Empire stretched) without going to Western Europe. George of Trebizond, reached the Christian West, wrote the paper *On the Truth of the Christian Faith*, in which he presented the differences between Christian and Muslim teachings, trying at the same time highlighting the possible similarities to mutual understanding of the Christian inhabitants of the former Empire.

A special form of literature developed in this period had a more apocalyptic and eschatological character, which spoke in the context of the spread of Islam and forced islamization, the close of the final time when Christianity will triumph forever. Thus, the writings like oracles, legends and prophecies, especially starting from Revelation of St. John the Evangelist are multiply, to which it gave political and social interpretations. It was the most widespread form of literature in those centuries, having also the function to awaken and to maintain the hope of final victory of Christianity among the population. This kind of literature has developed mainly in Russia, when Moscow began to be considered “new Constantinople”, and the Tsar “new Constantine” (these formulas were used by Bishop Zosimos of Moscow referring to Tsar Ivan III, the Great). “The combination of this kind of history with theology, and the human need to interpret history and the future of humankind through predictions and prophecies from the past, is well known throughout the Christian world, and over time crept into the Islamic world as well, giving rise to numerous myths, beliefs, and expectations. The humans of every era dress their fears and concerns with eschatological images and await, under these symbols, a better future. In times of war and adverse social situations, they interpret the images as eschatological prophecies that foretell the punishment of believers for their apostasy, as well as their future redemption”¹⁷.

¹⁷ A. ZIACA, *Orthodoxy and Islam – Major Concerns for Orthodox Engagement*, in: *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, ed. P. KALAITZIDIS, TH. FITZGERALD, C. HOVORUN, A. PEKRIDOU, N. ASPROULIS, G. LIAGRE, D. WERNER, Oxford 2013, 680.

3.3. Modern Period

Regarding the contemporary era, the situation of the relationship between Orthodox Christians and Muslims was changed so that the interreligious dialogue has taken a new face. In the WCC was established a Department for Interreligious Dialogue where the Orthodox Churches have permanent contributed. The interest in dialogue between Christians and Muslims manifested as well in the Conferences of European Churches and increased due to the collaboration between the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Chambésy, Switzerland) and the Royal Academy of Studies of Islamic Culture (Al Albait Foundation, Amman, Jordanian)¹⁸.

The current realities between Orthodox Christians and Muslims cannot and must not forget the past in order to understand him and trying not to repeat the mistakes caused by religious, political, economic and social divergences, starting from the period of the crusades and from the conquest of Byzantine Empire and reaching until the colonial system from 19th–20th century and until the realities of our time. It must not be overlooked the orthodox situation in the countries where the majority is represented by the Muslim population. In this context, “it is necessary to add that more care will have to be taken in the future to prevent yet new errors from being made, lest the poor and persecuted Orthodox minorities now living within Muslim majorities are forgotten or even sacrificed for the sake of promoting a favorable climate for Christian-Islamic dialogue. Just as there must be consideration and respect for Muslims living in the west, there must also be true solidarity with Christians who are oppressed within hard-core Islamic environments in Africa and Asia. Modern Christian-Islamic dialogue must take into consideration the present conjuncture of world events, the broader situation worldwide, and increasing global interdependence”¹⁹.

From 1986 to 2008 there were 11 meetings of this level between the representatives of Orthodoxy and Islam in which were treated different themes: authority and religion in the traditions of both religions; models of historical co-existence between Christians and Muslims; peace in the two monotheistic traditions; the problem of the religious pluralism; the youth involvement in the religious life; the role of education in the Christian-Muslim interfaith discussions; education in Christianity and Islam; cooperation between the representatives of the two religions; the issue of the equality before the law; the role of religion in the modern world peace; the ability to build an interreligious dialogue and the importance of young priests, imams, students, scholars and

¹⁸ ARCHBISHOP ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World*, 116.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

leaders in respect of the two religious communities. “Such initiatives encourage the participation of intellectuals and young religious leaders in dialogues and therefore in the process of mutual interreligious understanding and rapprochement between religious and cultural communities, facilitating dialogues and interreligious partnerships and allowing participants to act locally as well as ecumenically, contributing thus to mutual understanding and the advancement of reconciliation”²⁰.

An important role in promoting and supporting the dialogue between Orthodox Christianity and Islam had the Department of Theology of the University “Aristotle” from Thessaloniki, where was developed the interreligious dialogue in general, and Islam in particular. Thus, in 1980 was founded the *Society for Greek-Arabic Studies*, which publishes the journal *Graeco-Arabica* and which held a several interfaith meetings between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. In 1990 was founded the movement *Orthodoxy and Islam* which includes Orthodox and Shi’i Muslims from Iran. This movement has organized several important interfaith meetings in Athens and Tehran.

In September 1993 the Department of Theology at the Theological Faculty of Thessaloniki organized a meeting about *Islamic Studies in Greece and Islam’s Place in Greek Public School Textbooks*. In May 15, 1995 took place in Thessaloniki the meeting *Islam in Greece: Meeting with the Evangelical Church of Germany’s Representatives for Islam* attended by teachers belonging to several religious traditions. In November 2009 the Department of Bible literature and religious studies at the Department of Theology of Thessaloniki organized an international conference entitled *Ibadism, Ibadī Studies, and the Sultanate of Oman*, which particular emphasis the interdisciplinary, creating a relationship between the representatives of the two religions. On 29 March 2012, the academic leader of Sultanate of Oman, Dr. Abdulrahman al-Salimi presented in Thessaloniki the essay on the theme *Christians and Muslims and the Issue of the Middle East*.

In Athens, the dialogue with Islam was promoted by Anastasios Yannoulatos that, through all its work, has had and continues to have a leader role in promoting and supporting the dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Muslims.

In most current problems from different territories where the believers belonging to Orthodoxy and Islam are living, the religious leaders emphasized the idea that any war is actually a victory of evil and a fight against God. In Europe, this was the message conveyed by the Grand Mufti of Chechnya, the Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow, and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, together with the signatories of the *Bosphorus Declaration*. As well was the case in the Middle

²⁰ A. ZIACA, *Orthodoxy and Islam*, 682.

East, where the personalities like Patriarch Ignatius IV and the Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, Georges Khodr, supported the idea of a close collaboration between Orthodox Christians and Muslims to maintain the peace in the territories milled from wars.

On 9 February 1994 was signed in Istanbul (Turkey) *Bosphorus Declaration* by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, by Rabbi Arthur Schneier (Appeal of Conscience Foundation), by Mehmet Nuri Yilmaz (the President of Office of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey) and by Cardinal Roger Etchegaray (the President of the Pontifical Council on Peace and Justice). The *Bosphorus Declaration* was adopted as a result of the *Conference on Peace and Tolerance: Central Asian, Caucasus and the Balkans*.

This statement refers to the *Berna Declaration* from 26 November 1992 signed by patriarch Paul of Serbian Orthodox Church, by al-Hajj Jakub Efendi Selimoski from Sarajevo, by Archbishop and Metropolitan of Sarajevo Vinko Puljic and by Rabbi Arthur Schneie. The *Berna Declaration*, which was adopted in the context of the war in former Yugoslavia, stated that “any crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion”.

Starting from this statement and considering the fact that the violence spread to other territories in the world (Bosnia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan), the signatories of the *Bosphorus Declaration* reiterated the call for peace and understanding between representatives of various religions, starting from the truth that the human life is sacred. There is no doctrinal basis to enable the violence in God’s name. No war is religious and the victims recorded from violence, intolerance and abuse are among children and women, and this has a considerable effect in the terms of emigration. The participants at conference urged to peace and mutual understanding, constructive dialogue and to promote the religious freedom around the world. The conflicts of any kind should cease and, in this respect, must find the best means against the scourge caused by extreme nationalism and ethnic differences²¹.

Following the letter signed by 138 Muslim leaders in 13 October 2007, *A Common Word Between Us and You*, Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow and of all Russia replied on 14 April 2008, in which he assumes that Muslims and Christians have a common goals, therefore they should be join the efforts to achieve them. But this goal cannot be accomplished without a clarification how each partner sees the other’s values. Christians and Muslims have the duty to remind to all humanity the existence of God and the spiritual dimension of man, as are present in every religious tradition. They also remind the world the essential

²¹ *Bosphorus Declaration*, <http://www.appealofconscience.org/d-577/declarations/Bosphorus%20Declaration> (21.08.2016).

human virtues: peace and justice, morality and law, truth and love. Christians and Muslims are united mainly through the observation of the commandment of love of God and neighbor. On the other hand, it is necessary to identify those doctrines of faith that apply to both religions. Therefore it should carefully analyze all the faith teachings specific of each religions, in full, and then can be compared with each other. Christianity cannot talk about the love of God and the love of neighbor unless discusses about the Trinity of God. For Christians, God is love (1 John 4,16). But God, for Christians, is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Holy Trinity is a Being and Three Persons. God is love because it is the Unity of the Three Persons. The love between people and their love for God derived from the divine love, because man is created in God's image. He feels that he is the son of God by grace and not a slave, because God was made man so that man might become God. The Son of God was incarnated from love for every human being. Man's love for God is connected to his freedom. The man choose freely to love God and not from fear.

Based on these teachings of faith, we must seek the way of a sincere dialogue between Christians and Muslims for cooperation between the two religious communities. The doctrinal dialogue is more productive than laconic and exclusive presentation of a certain teachings of the two religious traditions.

Christians and Muslims must respond together to the current challenges facing believers: the spread of anti-religious spirit, the new morality that contradicts the religious teachings of traditional religions or other challenges of the contemporary times. Christians and Muslims must work together to avoid the danger of religious syncretism that often occurs in interreligious dialogue. There is also the danger caused by those who want to see Christianity and Islam in the conflict or to see them united by a false moral indifference, giving priority to the precepts of secularization.

In the eastern European countries that have emerged from the former Soviet bloc were formed bodies of collaboration between Christians and Muslims which are working together for a better understanding among believers. The situations in the Muslim countries, where the followers of Christianity are a minority without being able to freely express their faith, should be carefully analyze.

The exhortation of the letter of Muslim religious leaders can intensify the common actions and to contribute to improving the situation of Christians in the countries with predominantly Muslim believers. The Christian-Muslim cooperation can be intensified both on doctrinal and practical field, combating the intolerance and the xenophobia, to promote peace, justice, and to protect the holy places. The interreligious dialogue must be developed both locally and globally, while international bodies should be more careful and more sensitive to spiritual

and cultural traditions of different people, regardless of religion to which they belong²².

4. Dialogue between Orthodoxy and Islam in Romania

In Romania, a large Muslim community lives, of a Turks, Tatars and Albanians, whose status was officially recognized in 1928. The first established Muslims in Romania are certified in the 11th–12th centuries, with the coming of the Pechenegs and Cumans, and especially in the 13th century, when, in 1241, a part of the Golden Horde settled in the vicinity of the Carpathian Mountains. In the period 1262–1264 the Byzantine emperor Michael Palaiologos granted to the two heads of the Turks, Izettin Keyaus and Saru Saltâk Dede, the right to establish the military camps in Dobrogea, with the obligation to defend the borders of the Byzantine Empire by the invasions from the north. This is the moment when the Turks settled in the Babadag. Muslim communities as we know them today began to establish in the territory of today's Dobrogea in the 14th–15th century, with the establishment of Ottoman suzerainty over the Romanian Countries²³.

Regarding the religious organization, the Muslim cult Romania has gone through many changes in the modern and contemporary period. The religious activity is led by the Mufti who is secret elected from the Imams. The number of Muftiates in Romania started with four in 1877, two in the interwar period. In 1943 there was only one by the union of the two from Tulcea and Constanta. The current headquarters of the Muslim Mufti Office is located in Constanta.

In addition at Mufti, there is a synodal college (Sura Islam) which includes 25 members. The synodic college also includes four representatives from another Muslim organizations and the Director of the National College "Kemal Ataturk" from Medgidia. The synodic college is in charge of solving some problems both administrative and disciplinary, especially in terms of worship.

Each Muslim community is led by a committee of 5, 7 or 9 members elected for four years. Prayers are led by an imam, assisted where necessary by a hatip or a muezzin. In Romania are more than 50 Muslim communities and 20 branches, mostly in Constanta County. Other communities are in Tulcea, Braila, Galati and Bucharest. In the late 19th and early 20th century three censuses were made in

²² HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH ALEXEY II, *Response to the Open Letter of 138 Muslim Theologians*, in: *A Common Word Between Us and You*, 5-Year Anniversary Edition, MABDA, English Monograph Series, No. 20, 2012, 181–186.

²³ SECRETARIATUL DE STAT PENTRU CULTE, *Viața religioasă din România*, Coordonator Dr. Adrian Lemeni, Volum realizat de Dr. Florin Frunză și Ștefan Ioniță, București 2005, 85.

Romania, in 1859, 1899 and 1912, the number of Muslims being 1,323, 44,732 and 46,406. In the census from 1930, 185,486 faithful were living in Romania. Following the post-communist census Muslims number varied: 55,928 (in 1992), 67,257 (in 2002) and 64,337 (in 2011)²⁴.

The Muslim places of worship in Romania are the mosque (geamia) and mesgids, in number of 78 (75 mosques and 3 mesgids). Among them, there are some historical monuments: Central Geamia (built in the reign of Carol I) and Hunchiar Geamia in Constanta, the Mosque Sultan Esmahan in Mangalia, the Mosques from Medgidia, Hârșova, Amzacea, Babadag, Tulcea, Macin and Isaccea. Also among the historical monuments are included the tomb of Gasi Ali Pasha and of Saru Saltâk Dede from Babadag²⁵. The religious Muslim cult has in concession 108 cemeteries in Romania.

Since 1990 they founded several Islamic foundations and associations aimed mainly at supporting the Muslim Cult of Romania in religious and spiritual activities of the Muslim Rite population, promotion and perpetuation of Islamic culture, education of children and young Muslims in the spiritual teachings of the Qur'an, ensuring religious information for all believers. These include: Foundation Taiba, Islamic and Cultural League, Semilunar Foundation, the Muslim Association from Romania.

The most important relationships that Muslims have developed over the time in Romania are with the World Islamic League and with Islamic Salvation, both with the base in Saudi Arabia, and Islamic Organization for South-East Europe in Vienna.

In 2008 the Romanian Government gave the Decision on the recognition of the Muslim status in our country, published in Official Monitor no. 469 of 25 January 2008. The decision was adopted under the art. 29 paragraph (3) and art. 108 of the Romanian Constitution, republished, and the art. 49 paragraphes (2) and (3) of Law no. 489/2006 on religious freedom and the general regime of denominations.

By the decision of 2008 the Muslim Cult status was recognized and the Decree of the Presidium of the National Assembly no. 590/1949 was repealed for approving the Statute of the Muslim Cult from Popular Romanian Republic, unpublished, as amended. The Status of Muslim Cult approved as the Annex to this Decision by the Government in 2008 specifies that all Muslim believers compose the Muslim Cult, which is autonomous and is governed according to the religious-moral principles established by the Sharia (Islamic law). The Muslim

²⁴ STATE SECRETARIAT FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, *State and Religions in Romania*, transl. Della L. Marcus, Bucharest, 2015, 25, 30, 34.

²⁵ SECRETARIATUL DE STAT PENTRU CULT, *Viața religioasă din România*, 85.

Cult respects the Constitution and the Law of Romania, is not subject to any institutions or religious organizations in the country or abroad and uses in religious services both Romanian language and the language of the Qur'an, while the correspondence and accounts shall be made in Romanian language. It is mentioned then in the status the appurtenance to the Muslim Cult (Mufti Office headquarters in Constanta as legal personality, the five basic principles of Islam – profession of faith, the fulfillment of the mandatory religious services, fasting Ramadan, pilgrimage, alms (zekatul) –, practicing religious duties will not be inconsistent with the Romanian law, the religious practices that will perform according to the Sharia and to the Muslim tradition in Romania, while followers of Islam will not be used to racism phenomenon, hatred of other religions, nationalities or to the state institutions) the Muftiate tasks and the organization and duties of Islam Sura: Synodal College, the Muftiate selection, formation and organization of the Mufti Office, Muslim communities (management of places of worship, the Mosque committee, the revenue of Muslim communities).

Between 1880–1967 a Muslim Theological Seminary worked at Babadag, then at Medgidia (1901), and has ceased operations until 1993 when they reopened the courses at Medgidia, where a pedagogy section (Moslem Theological and Pedagogical High School) is set up. The National College “Kemal Atatürk” from Medgidia was founded after the Protocol signed in 1995 between the Republic of Turkey and Romania. The college has primary, secondary and high school, Muslim classes being according to the profile of vocational-theological curriculum tutorials. “It is the only facility of this kind serving the Turkish-Tatar minority in Romania, being strategically positioned geographically in Dobrogea with the ethnic Turkish-Tatar population”²⁶.

The Seminary is provided by specialist teachers coming from Turkey. The objects of study specific to the Muslim religion thought here are: Hadith (teachings of the Prophet) Fikih (Islamic law), Siyer (Life of the Prophet), Qur'an Kerim (Qur'an study), Tefsir (Interpretation of the Qur'an), Akaid ve Kelam (Spirituality and Spiritual Training), Hitabet (Liturgical Practice). Graduates of the 12th grade can get the certificate of professional competence and can practice the profession of imam. Also, there is a choir school that prepares students for various celebrations and devotional song manifestations. “Establishing and maintaining the schools enable the Tatar Turkish minority in Romania to continue the traditions, customs and prepare truly servants of tomorrow that will perpetuate to the Muslim congregation, the divine message

²⁶ O. ABLACHIM, *Cultul musulman. Material referitor la învățământul religios și teologic al cultului musulman*, in: *Învățământul religios și teologic în România*, Ediție îngrijită de lect. Dr. ADRIAN LEMENI și BOGDAN DEDU, Sibiu 2006, 269.

of the Prophet, the unity of the school representing continuation of the old Muslim seminary”²⁷.

In the Romanian space, the meeting between Orthodoxy and Islam has existed for several hundred years, even if the conditions that occurred were not always favorable and the dialogue is not always crowned with success. In our times it has been multiplied the meetings were the representatives of the Orthodox Church and Islam have been addressed general and particular issues of the believers of the two religions.

At the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Justinian the Patriarch” of Bucharest a debate took place in January 2013, attended by the representatives of the Muslims and the Faculties of Orthodox Theology and Sociology from Bucharest. The event was organized by the Centre for Studies and Documentation *Society. Law. Religion*, in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology.

The meeting was devoted to the debate about the necessity of the interreligious and interethnic dialogue in the European social context in which the Muslim communities are growing and spreading, leading to the new realities territories with a growing number of Muslims. Jusuf Murat, Grand Mufti of the Muslim Cult of Romania, presented the Muslim community in our country and the “Danube model” of interethnic and interreligious community, which has existed for eight centuries and enjoys great appreciation in the whole European area as a possible example that can be followed in the other European territories.

In October 2013 the debate *Connections and Similarities of Different Religions* was held at the County Library “Alexandru and Aristia Aman” in Craiova, meeting organized by the County Library from Craiova, the regional daily *Word of Liberty*, by TVR Craiova, and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Craiova. Among the participants were the representatives of the Archdiocese of Craiova and the Faculty of Theology from Craiova, of the Jewish Communities from Craiova, of the Islamic and Cultural League from Romania, of the Islamic Center from Bucharest, of the Romano-Catholic Church, and of the Baptist Church Sacrifice from Craiova. The participants spoke about the links between the great religions beyond the differences between them. In this context, the role of followers of different religions should be to exercise in the involvement in community and the development of spiritual qualities of the people, and also in solving the main problems that arise in the everyday lives of believers who live surrounded by representatives of other religions and ideologies.

In June 2014 the symposium *The Impact of Secularization on Religious and Moral Values in the Contemporary Society* was held in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Bucharest. This meeting was attended by the professors from the

²⁷ ONDER ABLACHIM, *Cultul musulman*, 270.

Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Bucharest and from the International University Al Mustafa from Qom. In his speech, Father Professor Nicolae Achimescu pointed out that our world began to ignore both God and the religious and moral values that drove along the history. The interest in the interreligious and intercultural dialogue with teachers from Iran is important if it wanted to search for answers to the question: where and how we stand to these problems given that the secularization is a phenomenon that is found in all societies and religions? The participants attempted to formulate answers to this problem based on the observation that our world is plurireligious and multicultural, the people of different religions live together in the same territory and must respond with the challenges of a widely secularized society.

5. Conclusions

In a world in constant change and transformation, in which people tend increasingly to forget the essential values that guided them throughout the ages, economic, social and political problems are merely consequences of a crisis much deeper: the religious one. In this context, people belonging to different religions and ideologies are called to respond together to current challenges that seem to shake the foundations of modern civilization. Such interreligious dialogue is possible and desirable. But often, mistakes of the past are real obstacles against the desire to achieve a constructive dialogue.

In the preaching of the Gospel message, the Orthodox Christians must take into account the complex changes that have occurred lately in the world. “One of the greatest problems the Orthodox churches face in the modern world is understanding what it means to be the Church of God in a pluralistic society. That is to say, once the churches affirm that the Church exists not only for its members but for the salvation of all, how does the Orthodox Church exercise its transformative role in a world where different religious, racial, ethnic and cultural communities demand public recognition?”²⁸

In the multicultural and plurireligious context in which we are living, Christianity is viewed with hostility in territories with non-Christian population, in democratic countries is viewed as equal with other religions, in the countries of Orthodox tradition, begins to lose this quality, there is a nostalgia for past times, and in territories such as Asia and Africa, the teaching environment often proves to be unfamiliar. In these circumstances, the Orthodox Churches must take into

²⁸ E. CLAPSIS, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, Geneva – Brookline, Massachusetts 2000, 127.

account the relationship between the Gospel and culture of each territory where the Good News is preached.

Analyzing how the representatives of the Orthodoxy and the Islam in Romania are trying to find solutions to the many problems facing the world today, we can say that lately in Romania, the interreligious, intercultural and interethnic dialogue increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. Among the followers of the two religions that live in these territories for centuries, the relations have varied over the time, reaching today to a situation in which the believers live in peace, protected by the laws of the Romanian state which guarantee the freedom of thought and religious expression. Moreover, lately it has been attempted to find solutions to the global crises which are, not infrequently, religious.

The dialogue between Orthodoxy and Islam is emerging as a form of collaboration between the representatives of the two religions in order to provide and to offer religious solutions, based on the local realities, to solve various large-scale conflicts.

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