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ABSTRACT

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**The Unity of the Church and the Ecumenical
Movement
Neo-testamentary grounds**

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Key words: unity, ecumenicity, mission, diaconry, ecumenical movement.

The choice of the topic of this doctoral thesis, *The Unity of the Church and the Ecumenical Movement. Neo-testamentary grounds*, has aimed to be a deeper analysis of the theme approached for obtaining the title of Master in Orthodox Theology, whose title was *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement in the 20th century*.

The issue of the unity of the Church is relevant in the contemporary Church, triggering a great interest in the Christian world, but also controversies regarding the definition of the Church and the attaining of the common partaking of the Truth. According to the Orthodox teaching, *Truth* is the name of Christ, Who is the Head of the *one, holy, ecumenical and apostolic Church*. The Unity of the Church is given by its Head, namely Christ, Who has revealed to us one faith and has made us partakers of one redeeming Baptism. From this perspective, the unity of the Church has its grounds in the *New Testament*, which also reveals its ecumenicity, in the sense that it embraces the whole creation, leading it towards transfiguration to the extent to which man cultivates spiritual perfection.

We have tried to analyze all these aspects in the pages of this thesis, making use of a contemporary key in agreement to the contemporary language.

The Unity of the Church is characterized in the contemporary theology as an immediate problem for the life of all the people, with a direct reference to their way of existence¹. This direct reference to man's life is given by the fact that the existential truth of the unity of the Church represents man's only possibility of salvation, because the salvation act is accomplished only in the authentic living of the Truth, Who is Christ.

Therefore, the Church is directly connected to Christ and lives the relations of the infinite love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, because it has Christ *for its head*, by Whom it is introduced and progresses in life, yet it has, at the same time, *the Holy Spirit*

¹Yannaras, *Unitatea Bisericii*, p. 14.

as its animating soul and gives itself as an offering to the Father². Consequently, the model of the *Trinitarian communion* represents as well the model of the Church, since the Pentecost (*Acts 2: 1-13*) constitutes the extension of the *Trinitarian communion* in the life of the Church³. This model has been revealed to us by the Savior Himself, Who is praying to the heavenly Father, on the eve of His Passion and sacrifice: *that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us (through the Holy Spirit) so that the world may believe that You have sent Me (John 17: 20-21)*.

Considered the fifth act of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, *if His Embodiment, His Crucifixion, His Resurrection and His Ascension are the first four acts*⁴, the Church is the *divine life* of Jesus Christ *extended from His Body into the believers*⁵. The descent of the Holy Spirit represents, in this way, the *passage from Christ's redeeming work in His personal humanity to the extension of this work in the other human beings through the Church*⁶. Saint John Chrysostom highlights the fact that at the Pentecost, *a new and amazing thing happened: just as back then, at the Babel Tower, the tongues divided the world, similarly now, at the Pentecost, the tongues unified the world and restored the harmony of what had once been divided*⁷.

According to Father Dumitru Popescu, the foundation of the Church took place only on the Pentecost day (*Acts 2: 1-13*), with its two aspects, seen and unseen⁸. Father John Romanidis brings to light the fact that *the uncreated Church existed as well before the creation, as Kingdom and glory hidden in God, hosting God, the Logos and the Holy Spirit*⁹. Yet, the Church becomes at the Pentecost the Body of Christ, because since the Pentecost the settling of the Holy Spirit in the one inspired by God occurs as well by means of Christ's human nature. For this reason, the Pentecost is considered the birth certificate of the Church, which means its appearance in the world, although it is

² Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology) II, p. 228.

³ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, p. 241.

⁴ Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology) II, p. 201.

⁵ Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology) II, p. 202.

⁶ Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology) II, p. 202.

⁷ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia a II-a la Sfânta Cincizecime* (Saint John Chrysostom, *Second Homily on the Holy Pentecost*), P.G., L, col. 468.

⁸ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, pp. 243-244.

⁹ Ἰεροθέου, *Ἐμπειρική Δογματική*, Β', pp. 246, 249, 252.

uncreated, being the glory of God, the uncreated place of worship where God lives and where the one who has reached spiritual perfection is called to live.

Thus, at the Pentecost, the mystery of the Church with its new dimension has been uncovered, and this is *the whole truth* revealed by the Holy Spirit (*John* 16: 13)¹⁰, illustrated in the prayer of the *Divine Eucharist*: *The Lamb of God is broken into pieces, the One that breaks Himself into pieces and is never disjoined, the One that is always eaten and never ends but Who sanctifies those who partake of Him*. This state of holiness that man receives by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, has been shown at the Pentecost, when it has been revealed that the Body of Christ became, from external to man, internal to him¹¹. While, at the *Transfiguration*, the Body of Christ was exterior, yet the revelation was interior to the Disciples present, at the Pentecost, the revelation remains interior, but also the Body of Christ is also interior now to every man¹². For this reason, in the Orthodoxy, there is the problem of the re-living of the Pentecost by every believer in the illumination and deification states, because the essence of the Orthodox theology is not the rationalization of the faith and of the living, but the experiencing of the states of the spiritual life, namely the states of purification, illumination and deification.

The Holy Apostle Paul directly called Christ *Head of the Church* (*Col.* 1: 18, 24; 2: 18-19; *Ephes.* 1: 22-23; 4: 15-16; 5: 23), and the Church *Body of Christ* (*Rom.* 12: 4-8; *1 Cor.* 6: 15-16; 10: 17; 12: 12-27; *Ephes.* 1: 20-23; 4: 15-16; 5: 23; *Col.* 1: 17-18, 24; 2: 18-19). This truth expresses the teandric constitution of Christ, Who remains united to the Father and the Holy Spirit, according to the divine nature, and remains united to men according to His human nature. By virtue of this constitution, Christ is the Head of the Church, *Who opens the whole mankind to God*¹³. Father Dumitru Stăniloae speaks about the *teandric constitution of the Church* and not about its *teandric nature* in order not to give the impression that in the Church *the divinity and the humanity* have been united in one nature in a Monophysite sense¹⁴.

¹⁰ Ἱεροθέου, *Ἐμπειρική Δογματική*, Β', p. 255.

¹¹ Ἱεροθέου, *Ἐμπειρική Δογματική*, Β', pp. 255-256.

¹² Ἱεροθέου, *Ἐμπειρική Δογματική*, Β', p. 256.

¹³ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, p. 252.

¹⁴ Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), II, p. 214, nota 20.

Christ works in the Church by a triple service: as a prophet or a teacher, as a king or Shepherd of the whole world and as a bishop or overseer. This triple service is lived in the *Divine Liturgy* and spreads onto the level of each man's living, according to his spiritual life. Due to Christ's work in the Church by means of His triple service, the faithful man is in the Church, according to the Holy Fathers, *king, prophet and priest*, just like Christ: *king, by virtue of his dominion over the sinful passions; priest, due to his offering himself to God, and prophet, as an initiate of the divine mysteries*¹⁵. Therefore, the threefold service is reflected for each believer *only on a personal level, because on the community level the responsibility goes to the sanctified servant of Christ*, and to those who accomplish the specific callings of political leader and school teacher¹⁶.

In the *Symbol of Faith* we confess that the Church is *one, holy, ecumenical and apostolic*. The Church is *one*, because it is the Body of Christ; it is *holy*, being sanctified by its Head, and all those in connection with this Head are also sanctified; it is *ecumenical*, because it holds *all the truth* and perfect accomplishment, and because it is spreading throughout the world; it is *apostolic*, because it relies on the Holy Apostles, and all those who are members of the Church have the apostolic tradition, whereas the clergy have the apostolic succession¹⁷.

Consequently, the unity of the Church is given in Christ, its Only Head, *Who remains above the Church, as His body, in order to lift the believers to the life of the Trinitarian communion, but Who also descends in the Church, through the Holy Spirit, to contribute to the development of the Church as His Body*¹⁸. The Unity of the Church has an ontological character, because it is not a unity from below, a juridical unity, but a unity from above, in Christ, the embodied Logos, *Who overflows in it the unifying power of the Trinity through the Holy Spirit, according to the Father's good will*¹⁹.

In today's world, people speak a lot about the union of the Churches, promoting collaboration in the philanthropic and social domain, and to a lesser extent about the unity of the Church, forgetting that it is precisely this unity that concerns the authentic

¹⁵ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, p. 257; Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), II, p. 243.

¹⁶ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, p. 258.

¹⁷ Ἱεροθέου, *Ἑμπειρική Δογματική*, Β', p. 265.

¹⁸ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, p. 268.

¹⁹ Popescu, *Pantocrator*, p. 268.

and true life of every believer in Christ. It is out of this confrontation of opinions that the topic of our study has emerged, *The Unity of the Church and the ecumenical movement*, based on the analysis of the neo-testamentary grounds. The relation between the unity of the Church and the ecumenical movement, on the one hand, and the neo-testamentary grounds, on the other hand, is not made from the position of a purely speculative approach of these issues, to the benefit or to the detriment of the present form of what is called the *ecumenical movement*, but has in view the way in which the Church of Christ has preached the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ in the then world, which was undergoing an ecumenical movement, namely a movement of spreading of His teaching in the *world οἰκουμένη*²⁰. We have been obliged to this as well by two concepts promoted in the ecumenical movement or in the relations with the Vatican, *the branch theory* and the concept of *Sister Churches*.

Saint Maxim the Confessor considers that the Church is the *type and the icon of the whole world*²¹, and man is called to preserve the unity of the Church. *He who does not keep the unity of the Church*, according to Saint Cyprian of Cartagena, *does not accomplish God's law, does not keep the faith of the Father and of the Son, does not keep life and salvation*²². The unity of the Church is ontological and closely connected to the unity of faith. Consequently, the breaking up with the true faith means getting out of the integrity offered by the One Church, namely breaking the organic unity with the Body of Christ. This is precisely what the *branch theory* illustrates, by showing the negative sense of the breaking up of the branches from the body of the Church. This is why this theory cannot illustrate the truth regarding the One Church, because it promotes the *Church sociologically and not theologically*, in other words, as an association of Christians, and not as the Body of Christ²³. The branch theory was launched by the protestant world, in order to justify its existence in history and the right to the name of Church. Later on, this

²⁰ It should be mentioned that the term designating the *world* in Greek is *κόσμος*, which means the world regarded as the whole universe, but also *οἰκουμένη*, which refers to the world from the face of the earth. For this reason, we are using the second Greek term, which is also the New Testament one, in connection to the Romanian term *lume* (world).

²¹ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Mistagogia* (Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Mystagogia*), P.G., XCI, 668 C.

²² Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii sobornicești* (Saint Cyprian of Cartagena, *On the unity of the Ecumenical Church*), PL 6, 504 A.

²³ Mantzaridis, *Globalizare* (Globalization), p. 43.

theory also found ground in the Roman-Catholic doctrine, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1958-1966), which appropriated the sociological conception about the Church. In fact, the Church is not a social institution, but the place where the *deifying communion*²⁴ is lived, being the *spiritual hospital* where man is healed. *The grace of the Holy Spirit is given to all men, Christian and non-Christian, believers and non-believers*, yet this grace becomes effective and fruitful only in the One Church, because man is not moving only along his horizontal dimension, but also along his vertical one. For this reason, the *branch theory* is considered a *secularized theory, in line with mondialization*²⁵.

The Greek theologian George Mantzaridis considers that the denomination of *Sister Churches* is not adequate to characterize the relations between the Orthodox and the Roman-Catholic Church. The good will gestures and the kind dispositions should neither affect the *dogmatic purity, nor hide the existing difficulties*. For this reason, the Greek theologian proposes that the use of this attribute is adequate, after the schism, only for the local Orthodox Churches. Actually, even the Roman-Catholic position is, in certain documents, obvious, since it considers itself not the *sister, but the mother of all the other local Churches*, which is *very much consonant with the contemporary mondialization process*²⁶. For example, the concept of *Sister Churches* was condemned by the Roman-Catholic Church circular letter *Note on the expression "Sister Churches"* (2000). In this circular letter it is declared that the Roman-Catholic Church cannot be an actual Sister Church, but is the only Mother Church, and the use of the expression *Sister Churches* represents a deviation from the Roman-Catholic doctrine²⁷.

Considering these aspects, the analysis and the drafting of the subject of our study required the approach of several research methods, namely the documentation and

²⁴ Sfântul Grigorie Palama, *Cuvânt doveditor al Duhului Sfânt* (Saint Gregory Palamas Discourse proving the Holy Spirit), 2, 7, 8, *Συγγράμματα*, Α', έκδ. Π. Χρήστου, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1962, p. 149; Mantzaridis, *Globalizare* (Globalization), p. 70.

²⁵ Mantzaridis, *Globalizare* (Globalization), pp. 44-45.

²⁶ Mantzaridis, *Globalizare* (Globalization), pp. 46-47.

²⁷ See Lucian N. Leuştean, «Stadiul dialogului interreligios și perspectivele sale în ecumenismul european» (The stage of the inter-religious dialogue and its perspectives in the European ecumenism), in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 2 (2002), p. 34; Natalia Vlas, *Globalizarea și religia la începutul secolului XXI* (Globalization and Religion at the Beginning of the 21st Century), Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, pp. 252-253.

bibliographic research methods, along with the comparative, analytical, sociological, historical-canonic and local analysis methods.

The approach of a subject of the Orthodox teaching cannot be done only based on the *Holy Scripture*, but also with direct reference to the *Holy Tradition*, namely to the two organs of the divine Revelation, preserved in the *one, holy, ecumenical and apostolic Church*. These attributes of the Church, defined and presented in the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* by the Holy Fathers reunited during the first two Ecumenical Councils of the history of the Church, express, on the one hand, the coordinates of the being of the Church. On the other hand, these attributes represent the characteristic features within which the Church is moving, to be the permanent grantor of the keeping of the authentic teaching revealed by the world's Savior Jesus Christ, which He has entrusted to His Church through the Holy Apostles, being transmitted, by apostolic succession, until the end of the centuries. For this reason, one of the concerns of the Church hierarchy is to remain within the vein of the apostolic succession, which is closely connected to the uniqueness of the Church.

In the light of this approach, we have wanted to evoke the topic proposed for our study, considering, on the one hand, the richness of the neo-testamentary testimonies about the unity of the Church and the living of its ecumenicity during the apostolic period, and, on the other hand, the continuity of this unity, but also of this ecumenicity, during the periods that followed in the history of the Church, these being granted by the Ecumenical Councils and the experiences of the Holy Fathers. The present study is not meant to be a detailed analysis of the topics resulting from the approach of the subject *The Unity of the Church and the Ecumenical Movement*, starting from the neo-testamentary testimonies. Actually, such an analysis would have led, given the issues encountered and the richness of the bibliographic material, for each of them, to going much beyond the volume of this work and the time dedicated to its writing. Therefore, this study represents an iconographic description of the themes specific of this subject and it makes their presentation from the perspective of the fact that the Church has kept and maintained its unity and ecumenical dissemination, namely its going out to all the nations from the face of the earth along the centuries. In this way, the approach of this subject has imposed several research axes, complementary to one another.

The first research axis aimed to present the symbolism of the Church in the *New Testament* and its connection to Christ, analyzing and highlighting the moment of the Pentecost and of the foundation of the Church of Christ, the attributes of the Church and their importance for the accuracy of the faith and the guaranteeing of men's salvation. The reasons of this approach are multiple and lead to the discovery of certain aspects such as: a) The Church is the Body of Christ, and its Head is also Christ, so that Orthodox theologians such as Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Father George Florovsky and John Karmiris, affirm that the Church *is Christ Himself*; b) in the Orthodoxy, there is the problem of the re-living of the Pentecost by every believer, because the essence of the Orthodox theology is not the rationalization of man's faith and living, but the experiencing of the states of *purification, illumination and deification*; c) the symbols of the Church from the *New Testament* (water of Baptism, Lord's house, pillar and foundation of the Truth, Christ's Bride etc.) highlight the uniqueness of the Church and its role for man's salvation and the transfiguration of the creation; d) The Church existed as well before the creation, as Kingdom and glory hidden in God, in which God the Father, the Logos and the Holy Spirit dwell, and at the Pentecost the Church becomes the Body of Christ; e) the Holy Fathers see the ground of the unity of the Church in the presence of the same Body sacrificed and resurrected, traversed by the plenitude of the Holy Spirit; f) the unity of the Church is neither an institutional unity, nor one fragmented into centers or communities with various faiths or different interpretations of the apostolic faith, but a unity of spiritual life, experienced in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This unity to Christ and in Christ is not based just on the affirmation of a common faith, but on the common experiencing of the faith by means of a pure life and of a life as close to God as possible, and concrete testimonies about it have been written down along the centuries. Therefore, at the basis of this experience is the state of purification and those who do not make any efforts to obtain the state of purification observe the power of Christ from the Church in the life of those who are purified and by whom different charismas of the Holy Spirit are manifested. For this reason, it can be noticed that the basis of the unity in the Orthodoxy does not start from the bottom, from the believers' agreement, but from above, from Christ, as the Orthodox theologians (for instance, John

Karmiris and Father John Meyendorff) or even occidental theologians (H. Schultz) affirm.

The second research axis deals with the aspects related to the mission of Christ's Church in the world, starting from neo-testamentary landmarks and the missionary example of the Holy Apostle Paul. The mission relies on serving God and one's fellows, and this is why it also comprises two essential aspects: a) one related to the world's evangelization, namely the preaching of the *Evangel* in the world or the *ministry of the word* (*Acts* 6: 4), so that each generation of people may hear about Jesus Christ and believe in Him (*Rom.* 10: 14-15); b), another related to the confession or the confessing of the faith in Christ, which refers to the totality of the Christian life: cult, prayer, participation to the Holy Mysteries, serving one's fellows etc. In order to understand these two aspects of the mission, it is necessary to directly relate them to the neo-testamentary sources, to the vocabulary of the primary Church, to the apostolicity of the teaching of the Church and the holiness of its members, as the best evidence and strongest evangelization method.

The third research axis concerns the ecumenicity of Christ's Church, analyzing several aspects from different periods of the Church: from the time of the *New Testament*; from the period of the Holy Fathers corresponding to the first centuries of Christianity; from the time of the Ecumenical Councils. The Ecumenicity of the Church is closely connected to its mission, namely to the spreading of Christ's teaching throughout the *world-oikouμένη*, and *reflects the unitary way of assuming the manifestation of the Church of Christ in the whole creation*. In the Orthodox Church, several trends have developed, aiming to clarify the relation between the local Church and the ecumenicity of the Church, such as the insistence on the local Church as *ecumenical Church* (Fr. Nicholas Afanasieff), the emphasis on the Eucharistic act (John Zizioulas, metropolitan of Pergamon), the highlighting of the open ecumenicity of the Church by assuming the open ecumenicity of the Church in the eschatological dimension (Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae). Yet, all these only highlight one side or the other of the ecumenicity of the Church of Christ, which ecumenicity is directly related to the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church, because, devoid of this relation it turns into an ideology.

Consequently, the fourth research axis focused on the unity of the Church according to the vision of the *New Testament*, highlighting the following coordinates: a) neo-testamentary grounds of the unity of the primary Church; b) the unity of Christ's Church by the work of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost and the gift of tongues (glossolalia); c) the unity of the preaching, related to the unity of faith; d) the uniqueness of the Baptism and its validity given by the unity of the Church; e) the divine Eucharist as mystery of the complete union; f) the unity of the Church mirrored in the unity of the family. Following the presentation of these coordinates, one can distinguish the fact that the unity of the Church is related to its uniqueness, which also reflects the first feature of the Church included in the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, namely that the Church is *one*. This truth is lived by the Orthodox Church, which is Church not just in part, but completely and holding the fullness of faith that leads man to salvation.

Based on this conviction, the Orthodox Church is involved in the ecumenical movement, whose presentation constitutes the fifth research axis, undertaken according to the following points: a) the origin and the evolution of the Ecumenical Movement; b) the constitution and the organization of the World Council of Churches; c) adhesion of the Orthodox Church to the Ecumenical Movement; d) presentation of the General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches; e) aspects concerning the participation of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the World Council of Churches: adhesion, personalities involved in the Ecumenical Movement and Orthodox contributions. The historical analysis is accompanied by the evaluation method, whose aim is a correct perception of the Ecumenical Movement and of its form in the contemporary world.

The aspects gathered following the presentation of this research axis have led to the last axis of approach of the subject, related to the topic concerning the unity of the Church and the Ecumenical Movement, reflected in the *New Testament*, having in view inter-confessional aspects regarding the unity of the Church and the road covered from the neo-testamentary unity of the Church to the present Ecumenism. The aspect brought to light is that the ecumenical movement has been present in the life of the Church even since its beginnings, in the sense that the Church has been moving towards the world in order to embrace it all. The breaking up from the Body of the Church of certain Christian denominations and the attempt of justifying them as Churches led to the formulation of

certain theories or concepts regarding the unity of the Church, which was no longer regarded in relation to the fact that the Church is one but instead the Church Union Movement was promoted, which meant the transformation of the Ecumenical Movement of the Church into Ecumenism or the redefinition of the ecumenical movement from the perspective of the remaking of a unity that the Church has never lost but only those that broke away from it did.

The approaches and the aspects shown above highlight the novelty of the research and the uniqueness of the approach of the topic proposed as a doctoral thesis within the New Testament Chair. The Orthodox Church is the Church itself, having the original plenitude of the ecclesial reality given by the presence of God in it by his uncreated energies, and by its teandric structure, because Christ is God and of the same being, according to the divine nature, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but also Man and of the same being, according to the human nature, with the human nation.

The mission of the Orthodoxy has been and continues to be the unity of the Church, not just on a local level, but also on a universal level. The Orthodoxy has a great responsibility towards Christ, Who is the Truth, and in the light of this fact, its responsibility includes both keeping the teaching of faith unaltered and receiving with humbleness and love in its bosom those looking for the Truth and for salvation.

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