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SUMMARY OF PHD THESIS

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE. MISSIONARY EVALUATION

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Argument and objectives of the research

Man is a dialogical being. From a social, religious, cultural point of view, this is the only way to think. In the rational imagination, the term dialogue suggests a formal connection in which two or more agents focus on building an agreement on a clearly defined subject. In this sense, dialogue may not be the enemy of truth, but the relationship may become problematic, if the object of the exercise is the negotiated solution to a knotted problem, a degree of compromise and accommodation enters the equation. Thus, the term dialogue is associated with the activities of politicians and civil servants and, inevitably, emits a personal interest and undisclosed reasons. It is not surprising that, when the word dialogue is applied to the meeting of religions, it often attracts a certain degree of suspicion, as if entering into a dialogue with people of another tradition means a relationship of negligence.

There is, however, another part of the dialogue experience. When people meet as people of faith, the term dialogue comes to connote another dimension of the relationship between me and the other. Such a model of dialogue subordinates the issues discussed with the significance of the meeting itself. He is not concerned with negotiating the results, but with a meeting of people who are close to an end in themselves.

In practice, of course, the distinction between the two meanings is never so clear - and, no doubt, people engage in interreligious dialogue for many reasons. For those who are intellectually curious, he challenges them to different ways of talking about the complexity of religious reality. For others, it creates an acceptable form of mission, one that upholds the cultural state of the time. For the politically conscious, it is a way to meet the demands of justice, to know the neighbors and to develop resources for social cohesion. Sometimes the emphasis is on clarifying ideas and concepts and sometimes it is about building trust and understanding. However, whether we are talking about what is called the dialogue of theological exchange or the practical dialogue of common life, the only thing that all forms of dialogue share is the experience of learning. When working on common projects, when sharing important concerns, when discussing various theological aspects, not only is mutual understanding built and barriers to exclusivism hindered, but a new light is shed on whole areas of her entire life. Not only does one learn more about the other, but one also learns more about oneself.

For many people, who have a theological maturity and a sense of civic belonging to the community, located in a multicultural and pluralistic world, through dialogue dialogue is a deep, not diluted, way of meeting. Learning about another religious tradition goes hand in hand with learning about oneself. But how precisely does faith deepen and what is learned? How can the beliefs and symbolic structures of one religious tradition become a source of reflection for another? In addressing these questions, believers face a dilemma. Either it moves towards a kind of universalism, identifying supposedly common elements that are shared by all religions, or it incorporates the most attractive and useful elements of other traditions into a single all-inclusive model of their own. Universalism attracts difference, all-inclusive absorbs it. In the current world of volatile religious and anti-religious engagements, in which secular fundamentalist and liberal sensibilities dispute their claims to authority against each other, dialogue is an imperative.

Today's world has entered a new stage, in the experience of interconnecting all religions, nations, civilizations beyond the boundaries of identity, culture, society, politics, namely the experience of global civilization. Globalization is shaping the world of the 21st century, representing, in equal measure, an opportunity for transparency and visibility, for knowledge through new digitized communication techniques, which facilitates the information circuit with incredible speed, but with a very fast and diverse model. still superficial, in an anonymous uniformity. The core of global civilization is religion-in-dialogue, a religion in dialogue with other religions, religion in dialogue with secular and pluralistic society, but also religion in dialogue with itself. It is what marks the transition from an era of monologue to an era of global dialogue.

For this reason, the promotion of dialogue is considered a necessity in increasingly religiously diverse societies. Dialogue includes processes of understanding, in a broader sense, both between religions (interreligious dialogue) and within religions (interreligious dialogue), as well as between religion / religions and other societal subsystems (religion-society dialogue [century] . In the logic of contemporary reality, Peter L. Berger It states that we can talk about two dualisms: (1) religious dualism, ie the coexistence of different religions in the same society, and (2)

religion-state dualism, ie between religions and state.¹ If the polarization of society intensifies, becoming interdependent at all levels, man must define his position in this world as a citizen of a state, as a participant in a social culture, as a religious affiliate. The space in which it is located increases exponentially through globalization. The world is becoming increasingly interdependent at all levels and, somehow fluid, impossible to grasp in frameworks in which certain principles of relationship are validated over a wider period of time. The current challenge of the Covid 19 pandemic is a good example of this.

A last aspect must be specified in the argumentation of the research topic. Interreligious dialogue is not a simple debate between exponents of two or more religions. There is a risk that the dialogue will be abused due to distortion of meaning, its sphere and preconditions. The dialogue between religions, equated with meetings, debates and negotiations until the banalization, has been formalized, being equated with this type of meetings that do not propose anything concrete, ie a long-term strategy, but takes place without b its participation with the involvement of the young generation. The common aspects of religions can be viable sources for an initiative and continuity of reciprocity²: on the one hand, communication and exchange of perspectives will prove to be enriching experiences that facilitate creativity on each side; on the other hand, this is a process that must be approached with discernment, as a lack of attention to theological issues can have serious implications for future positions in dialogue, not only between religions, but between religions, between religions and societies. Religious identity remains an essential aspect emphasized in the discourses of each religion.

In the logic of these remarks, the objectives proposed in this doctoral thesis are the following:

- a) the definition of interreligious dialogue in the context of contemporary pluralistic society;
- b) the sketching of a historical framework of the interreligious dialogue in tandem with the first ecumenical impulses;

¹ P. Berger, „Toward a New Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age”, *Toward a New Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, in *Religious Diversity and Interreligious Dialogue*, Anna Körs, Wolfram Weisse and Jean-Paul Willaime (eds.), Springer, 2020, p. 22.

² V. Latinovic et al., *New Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue*, in V. Latinovic, G. Mannion & P.C. Phan, *Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 5.

- c) framing the interreligious dialogue as a solution against religious syncretism and religiously fundamentalism;
- d) evaluation from the point of view of missionary theology of interreligious dialogue in the framework of exclusivism, inclusiveness and pluralism;
- e) elaboration of missionary frameworks for the situation of Christian witness in the interreligious dialogue;
- f) highlighting from the missionary point of view the position of the Orthodox Church towards the interreligious dialogue through the Synod of Crete.

Relevance of the topic in the context of current research (national / international)

One of the defining characteristics of religiosity in the contemporary world is the fact that almost every religious person faces in the immediate and immediate register, a plurality of religious offerings. This is one of the consequences of globalization by expanding our historical and geographical horizon, mixing people through migration and travel, the presence of all possible ideas on a global market, as realized in the form of communication to the digital world. a sum of religious traditions, some of an alternative nature.

In modern European history, this reconfiguration is something quite new to experience, at least in terms of the pace at which this flow takes place. Even after the collapse of religious unity in the Reformation, the majority of European countries remained homogeneous for political reasons. For example, in a mixed confessional country such as Germany, the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* guarantees that the vast majority of the people belong to a single religion, Christianity. Of course, in the majority of European countries there was a Jewish minority, but this was often demoted to a marginal space and almost always excluded from full civil rights. Moreover, the Jews did not represent a radical religious otherness for Christians, because the Old Testament is part of the Christian canon of Holy Scripture.

The social conditions of such forms of religiosity disappeared in the second half of the twentieth century, and the Second Vatican Council and the Orthodox meetings were a remarkable theological attempt to face the new situation. it becomes re-discussed. An increasingly complex theology of non-Christian religions has developed, which has sought to mediate between the claim to absolute absurdity of most religions and the plurality of religious traditions. In addition to the more traditional exclusive

approach, both inclusive and pluralistic theologies of religion have been developed. The results of these new theological approaches have been both a greater openness to non-Christian religions and a foundation of the religious certainties that have characterized Christianity for nearly two millennia. The latter process has been met with disapproval by many Christians and still is.

In these conditions of visibility of religious plurality, compared to which European states have adopted political principles such as tolerance and religious freedom, the missionary impulse has been readjusted to new vectors. On the one hand, the secularization has desecrated society, forcing man to a constant defragmentation of Christian affiliation and the elimination of the Christian religion from the public sphere, and on the other hand, a very different part of the religion, intensely identities in relation to the other. The Christian mission, thus, is rethought on these two levels: re-Christianization and definition of identity. In this context, interreligious dialogue can be a good missionary tool.

Regardless of how it is approached, interpreted, elaborated, the interreligious dialogue is not realized between religions as abstract agents and the dialogic process, but between people who belong to two different religions. In the equation is the relationship between a self and a you, so the dialogue is doubled by a hermeneutic process, the understanding of the other, that a you is different from me. Dialogue and hermeneutics are at the core of the complex process of understanding the other. By definition, the other is not me. He is different from me. In the interreligious dialogue, we can only be concerned with the religion of our partner as some kind of external thing - for example, as a community that has had a positive or negative historical relationship with my religious community. Or we may be interested in the religion of our partner as something more internal, something interdependent with, even interchangeable with, a vision of the world, a way of thinking and being and a whole orientation towards life. In such circumstances, edifying questions proliferate: how can I understand the other - who has a different view of the world and a different way of thinking - when by definition it is different from my own view of the world and my way of thinking? How would such a thing be possible and, if so, how would it be best done? Through a sophisticated analysis of language, culture and the dynamics of understanding, hermeneutics provides clarity on this confusing subject. We begin by acknowledging that we all see, think, and know from a certain perspective, in our case religious. That is, we never see and think from a neutral perspective or the taboo race, but always from

a particular point of view rooted in our culture, our language, our vision of our world and / or our experiences. There is no escape rooted in the particle in this way. The conceptual / linguistic / cultural / particular experience place is the prism from which we perceive something. It is that when we live in a certain place and from that place we can see as far as the horizon as possible to see from that place; we can see the things that are in the sphere of this horizon. If we do not have a possibility of the visibility of a wide horizon, we cannot express ourselves in relation to what we do not see and perceive. The specific conceptual / linguistic / cultural / experiential place determines what is within our limits, in our range of knowledge and determines the horizon, the limit of our understanding. We cannot literally conceive of what is outside our horizon.

However, although we cannot avoid always staying grounded in a certain conceptual place, we can expand our horizons. In the interreligious dialogue, the encounter with the other and the gradual and difficult process of taking that otherness and doing it from one's own conceptual point of view, expands our horizon. This incorporation into the conceptual / cultural / experiential world of the other is what makes the interreligious dialogue so fascinating from an intellectual point of view and also gives it a potential for personal stimulation and growth. It is therefore emphasized that there is not and cannot be a method by which this is achieved; it is a process of discovery of what is not known, of what is outside one's horizon, of what is conceptually different. Consequently, this point of confusion, ignorance or immeasurability is a critical signal that here, at this moment, there is something we do not yet understand; it is an invitation to expand our horizons, continuing to ask and listen until something the other person manages to pass, determining an experience of the relationship.

In this way, contemporary missionary theology reconfigures its missionary-dynamic principles. The other I am addressing is born, raised, educated in a different cultural, social, religious order, in another language that determines meanings and meaning. Thus, interreligious dialogue is not a technical mechanism of communication, but a lasting experience of penetrating the complexity of otherness. The Savior Jesus Christ did not abstractly dialogue with sinful women, Samaritans, customs officers, etc., but engaged in a concrete experience of human relationships. Through this experience, he penetrated the intimacy of the other's thinking and sensitivity, and this other saw in Him, in His teaching, the full meaning of his own life.

For these reasons, the way in which I have structurally elaborated this doctoral thesis is relevant because it relies on the theorizing of the philosophy and technique of

interreligious dialogue, on the one hand, it presents a very different historical framework. contextualizes the principles, frameworks, advantages and limitations of interreligious dialogue from a missionary point of view.

Of course, the contribution of this research is a modest one in relation to those who have dedicated their lives and professional-academic directions in the elaboration, understanding and reconfiguration of the interreligious dialogue. It is worth mentioning here Catherine Cornille, Leonard Swidler, Tinu Ruparell, Paul F. Knitter, Terrence Merrigan, John Friday, Grammham Oppy, Francis X. Clooney. From the spectrum of Romanian theologians, with scientific expertise in the field of missionary theology, we mention Fr. Mihai Hincinschi, Fr. Istodor Gheorghe, Fr. Aurel Pavel, Fr. Gelu Călina, Fr. Nicolae Brînzea, Fr. Gheorghe Petru, Fr. Dăvid Pestroiu, Fr. Cristian Sonea.

Short frame of the thesis

The background of the paper is designed in a systematic manner to facilitate the coherent presentation of the ideas and arguments presented. In this order of ideas, the paper is divided into five chapters, each chapter having in structure a series of subsections. The first chapter - *Religious pluralism and redefining the frameworks of religious identities* - aims at a contextualization of the missionary approach of the interreligious dialogue in contemporary society. Here I followed the fluid course of society from a religious point of view, from modernization - secularization - globalization to pluralization. A section is reserved for the analyzes of religious pluralism as an intensification of religious diversity in the XX-XXI centuries, taking into account the global social trends that train religion, and implicitly the mission of the Church, in new reconfigurations. One aspect that I considered important to note here is the significance and retraction of religious boundaries through the tendencies of fragmentation and hyper-differentiation in modernity and postmodernity.

Chapter II - *The Interreligious Dialogue. Historical-phenomenological systematizations and ecumenical impulses* - preface the complexity of the meanings of the interreligious dialogue, providing a historical framework of the development phases of this dialogue between religions. Although it is a recurring theme in recent concerns of theologians and researchers in the spectrum of sociology of religions, the interreligious dialogue records a clear history of antiquity, but with a materialization from the Middle Ages by Peter Abelard, Ramon Cusnnus and Nicholas. The milestone

of the institutionalization of the interreligious dialogue is the establishment of the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, and from a Christian perspective the declaration of Our State and the Second Vatican Council in order to change it.

Chapter III - *The Dialogue as a Communication and Relational Instrument in a Religiously Pluralized World* - is intended to be an overall presentation, but taking into account the particularities of the interreligious dialogue. After highlighting the defining vocabulary of the interreligious dialogue, in the sections of this chapter the following aspects are synthesized: the interreligious dialogue as a hermeneutic process and bidirectional interaction; the four dimensions of dialogue: understanding, learning, transformation and cooperation; the techniques and means of interreligious dialogue; the levels of religious dialogue (practical, communicative, spiritual / theological) and relationship with the public sphere; the integration of interreligious dialogue in the context of international policies and dialogue as a tool for promoting global ethics.

The principles of interreligious dialogue also impose a series of challenges that must be addressed with the utmost responsibility and missionary finesse, namely the issue of truth and the possibility of saving non-Christians. The treatment of these topics is the background of Chapter IV - *The Interreligious Dialogue and the Problem of Truth. The cadres of exclusivism, inclusiveness and pluralism*. Theologically, religious diversity, from a Christian point of view, is approached from three angles of interpretation: exclusivist, inclusive and pluralistic. Each of them maintains positive and negative elements, but which must be carefully weighed in the logic of the Church's mission.

The fifth chapter - *The mission of the Church through interreligious dialogue: possibilities, challenges, dilemmas* - is a missionary evaluation of the dialogue between religions. After presenting the missionary models in relation to non-Christians (expansion, deaconry, presence, dialogue and kenosis), the question is answered whether the Christian mission and the interreligious dialogue are mutually exclusive or complementary to the principle of the construction of the missionary. The last section of the chapter is reserved for the orthodox position expressed by the Synod of Crete towards the interreligious dialogue.

Applied scientific methodology

Regarding the research methods on the proposed topic, we will combine the systematic, historical-critical and comparative approach, highlighting the content, the particularities, the missionary applicability of the interreligious dialogue. A systematic analysis of the topic proposed for research has the advantage of providing a coherent and careful presentation of the constituent elements of the interreligious dialogue, as well as of the context in which it takes place. The historical-critical method facilitates the sketching of an itinerary for the institutionalization of the interreligious dialogue starting from the Middle Ages, moment in which the first approaches of the dialogues between the monotheistic religions are elaborated. The comparative method is providential throughout the research, especially in Chapter IV in which the three directions of the Christian attitude towards non-Christian religions are critically and evaluatively analyzed: inclusiveness, exclusivism, pluralism.

The research also retains an interdisciplinary character, with many inflections in the spectrum of the sociology of religion and hermeneutics. This appeal is absolutely necessary, as sociology provides concrete data on religious evolution in society based on the statistics and measurements it operates, and hermeneutics provides references for socio-cultural interpretation.

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