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THESIS

THE ROLE OF ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE AND INTERRELIGIOUS OF THE MISSION IN THE ROMANIAN DIASPORA

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

The context of the Romanian diaspora

Diasporas, in their perennial flux, were in perpetual change, modulating and being modulated by the host societies. The history of Romania, in particular, serves as a miniature world of these changes and adaptations¹. Post-Decemberism marked a turning point in the history of Romanian migration, with an exodus of unprecedented proportions. But what is remarkable is the speed and complexity with which these diasporas have adapted and integrated into their adopted countries.

From its humble beginnings in rural Romanian communities to the cosmopolitan cities of Western Europe and North America, Romanian diasporas have reflected a diverse range of experiences, cultures and beliefs. This amalgam of backgrounds provided fertile ground for interactions, sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflicting, but always evolving.

In the midst of this diversity, the need for continuous adaptation and reinvention was born. Whether they are faced with linguistic, cultural or religious differences, Romanians in the diaspora have sought ways to build bridges, negotiate common spaces and find a balance between ancestral tradition and globalized modernity².

At the base of this adaptation process is the confrontation between individual and collective identity. Religion, in this context, was not only a tool for identification, but also a vehicle for dialogue and understanding. Faced with doctrinal and ritual differences, many Romanians found that it became a spiritual refuge, offering a factor of stability and belonging³.

However, this adaptation was not uniform or linear. There was a diversity of experiences and trajectories, influenced by factors such as age, gender, education and socio-economic situation. Thus, the analysis of the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the Romanian diasporas requires a nuanced and multidimensional perspective.

¹Dumitru Sandu, *The social worlds of Romanian migration*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2010, p. 10; Adrian Niculcea, "The Relation Between religion and Politics - a Problem in Romania of Today", in: Dumitru A. Vanca, Mark Cherry, Alin Albu (Ed.), *Religion & Politics. The Church-State Relationship: from Constantine the Great to Post-Maastricht Europe*, Vol. I, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2013, p. 532

²See Ioan Vasile Leb, Mihai L. Constantinescu, "Orthodox Diaspora", in: Rev. Prof. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Tulcan (Coord.), *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology*, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2019, p. 279

³Lavinia Stan & Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 19

In the light of this context, our research aims to deepen the understanding of the impact and significance of the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the Romanian diasporas. By trying to answer complex and often interconnected questions, we aim to highlight how faith and religion shape and are shaped by the diaspora experience.

Diasporas are often a mirror of the tensions and interactions between the original and the adopted culture. An in-depth analysis of Romanian migration in the European space highlights this phenomenon, with an emphasis on the role that spirituality and religion play in defining identity in the diaspora⁴.

Thus, this paper aims to deepen the understanding of how ecumenical and interreligious dialogue evolves in the context of the Romanian diaspora, emphasizing both the challenges it faces and the opportunities it brings, from a theoretical perspective.

Research methodology

The methodology adopted for this research focuses on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, with an emphasis on interpretation and analysis. Since ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in modern communities involves both theological and social and cultural aspects, it is essential to use a multifactorial and multidisciplinary approach.

1. **Literature analysis:** The research will begin with an extensive examination of the main and secondary literature related to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, with a special emphasis on the context of the Romanian diaspora. This will include specialized articles, books, studies and reports that address the chosen topic. The aim is to identify current trends, main debates and gaps in the existing literature.
2. **Document analysis:** An essential component of the research will be the analysis of documents issued by the Romanian Orthodox Church, by various Christian denominations and interreligious institutions. This will give us a perspective on the official position of the various religious entities regarding the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the diaspora.
3. **Analysis of statistical data:** The available statistical data regarding the presence and distribution of the Romanian diaspora, as well as their religious affiliation, will be analyzed to provide a clear picture of the distribution and density of Romanian believers abroad.
4. **Case studies:** The research will analyze certain exemplary cases of diaspora communities, in which ecumenical and interreligious dialogue played a significant

⁴Dumitru Sandu, *The social worlds of Romanian migration*, p. 123

role. The case studies will provide deep and contextual understandings of the ways in which dialogue is manifested and the challenges these communities face.

5. **Synthesis and interpretation:** Based on the data collected and analyzed, the information will be synthesized to answer the research questions and to offer a holistic vision on the role of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the context of the Romanian diaspora.

This methodology allows a comprehensive understanding of the researched theme, combining the literature analysis with the examination of documents and statistical data, culminating in the analysis and interpretation of the results.

The current state of research

The current stage of research regarding the role and mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the diaspora is incipient, although the academic and theological interest in this topic has registered an increase in the last decade and a half. The constant expansion of Romanian communities abroad, especially in Europe, fueled this concern. In the theological and missionary literature, numerous aspects related to the mission of the Orthodox Church were addressed in a general framework. Among the notable contributors are Prof. Dr. Valer Bel ⁵, His Holiness Nifon Mihăiță ⁶, Rev. Prof. Dr. Mihai Himcinschi ⁷, Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Chirilă ⁸ and Rev. Gheorghe Petraru ⁹. However, regarding the specifics of the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the diaspora, the specialized literature is still modest.

A notable work that explores the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Spain is that of Professor Francisco Diez de Velasco¹⁰. Other studies have addressed aspects related to the canonical and legal organization of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Spain and Portugal.

This thesis aims to add to the existing body of literature, by bringing new data and missionary-pastoral analyzes on the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the diaspora.

⁵Rev. Prof. Dr. Valer Bel, *Mission of the Church in the contemporary world*, Renaștea Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2010; Rev. Prof. Dr. Valer Bel, *Mission, parish, pastorate. Coordinates for a missionary strategy*, Renaștea Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2006

⁶Prof. Dr. Nifon Mihăiță, *Christian Missiology*, Asa Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005

⁷Fr. Mihai Himcinschi, *Church in society. Missionary aspects of the Church in today's society*, Reintregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2006

⁸Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Chirilă (coord.), *The Mission of the Church in the Holy Scriptures and in History*, Renaștea Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2006

⁹Rev. Prof. Gheorghe Petraru, *Orthodox Missiology, I. The Revelation of God and the mission of the Church*, Pamfilius Publishing House, Iasi, 2002; Rev. Prof. Gheorghe Petraru, *Fundamental and Missionary Theology. Ecumenism*, Editura Performantica, Iasi, 2006.

¹⁰Francisco Diez De Velasco (coord.), *Las Iglesias Ortodoxas en España*, Editorial Akal, Madrid, 2015

2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN ROMANIA

The ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Romania is anchored in a historical context in which the Romanian Orthodox Church had a fundamental role in promoting coexistence and tolerance between different religious denominations.

Situated between Eastern and Western religious traditions, Romania proves to be a fertile ground for ecumenical dialogue. This facilitates a "complex process that requires a differentiated and adaptable approach to the particularities of each tradition"¹¹.

Through its geographical and cultural positioning, Romania often serves as a "bridge" between the different civilizations of Eastern and Western Europe. This gives him a "unique opportunity to moderate and facilitate dialogues between various religious and cultural traditions"¹². One of the key aspects of this ecumenical bridge is the connection between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the other Christian churches.

Globalization and the digital environment have accentuated the need for a modern ecumenism, bringing people and ideas from various parts of the world into closer contact. In this context, the Romanian Orthodox Church has "the role of negotiating and interpreting these changes within the broader framework of the Christian tradition"¹³.

Another interesting dimension is the impact that ecumenical dialogue has on national identity. According to specialized literature, "active involvement in the ecumenical dialogue can serve not only to improve relations between the various Christian traditions, but also to affirm and consolidate national identity"¹⁴.

Regarding religious pluralism, the Romanian Orthodox Church has played throughout history a vital role in mediating and facilitating interreligious dialogue. Daniel N. Nelson, in *Romania After Tyranny*, discusses the historical and political context that contributed to the formation of this pluralism, with special mention of the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church¹⁵.

In the post-communist stage and in the transition to democracy, the Romanian Orthodox Church actively participated in the spiritual and social restructuring of the

¹¹Lucian Leustean, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London, 2014, p. 97.

¹²Lucian Leustean, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 105

¹³Lavinia Stan & Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, p. 145

¹⁴Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 87.

¹⁵ Daniel N. Nelson, *Romania After Tyranny*, Routledge, London, 2021, p. 87.

country. Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, in the work *Church, State, and Democracy in Expanding Europe*, show how the Romanian Orthodox Church contributed to the consolidation of a culture of dialogue and tolerance in Romanian society¹⁶.

Integration into the European Union was another major factor that facilitated ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, in *Politics after communism*, emphasizes how European values and community legislation had a positive impact on religious tolerance and ecumenical dialogue in Romania¹⁷. As an active member in global organizations, the Romanian Orthodox Church ends up having "improved opportunities and responsibilities in terms of improving relations between religious communities and in addressing global moral and ethical issues"¹⁸.

Romania has been actively involved in international forums that promote ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Thus, participation in the Alliance of Civilizations of the United Nations represents an example in this sense. The US Department of State, in *the International Religious Freedom Report for 2019*, noted that "the [Romanian] government continued to publicly support religious freedom and promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue"¹⁹.

In the context of globalization and the complexity of international relations, the contemporary era presents both challenges and opportunities in terms of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Romania

Social and ideological polarization

First of all, one of the great challenges of our time is social and ideological polarization. This can have harmful effects on the dialogue, both at the national and international level. An accentuated social division leads to the increase of religious intolerance, which complicates ecumenical and interreligious efforts. In a country with a diverse religious heritage like Romania, this becomes a problem of prime importance. Social and ideological polarization is a global phenomenon, but which finds its particular manifestations in Romania as well. In the context of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, this polarization can degrade the quality and substance of the discussions, lead to isolation and to the accentuation of stereotypes. Civic and religious organizations strive to combat these effects through a series of education and counseling programs. However, the

¹⁶ Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, *Church, State, and Democracy in Expanding Europe*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, p. 174.

¹⁷ Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *Politics after communism*, Polirom, Iasi, 2002, p. 204

¹⁸ Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, p. 83.

¹⁹ US Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019*, US Department of State, Washington DC, 2020, p. 12.

process is arduous and requires constant attention to encourage openness and avoid truncating the dialogue.

Migration and cultural diversity

Another challenge, but also an opportunity, is represented by migration and increased cultural diversity. On the one hand, this can lead to tensions between different religious communities; on the other hand, it provides a platform for dialogue and mutual learning. For example, the increasing presence of Muslim communities in Romania constitutes an opportunity for expanding and deepening the interreligious dialogue. The changing demographic dynamics of Romania, with an increased flow of migrants, adds a new complexity to the ecumenical and interreligious landscape. Paradoxically, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge, because it brings new tensions and misunderstandings; an opportunity, because it adds a new layer of diversity that can be fruitful in dialogue. In this context, local administrations and non-governmental organizations try to create dialogue spaces and facilitate interaction between different religious communities.

Technology as a "Double-Edged Sword"

Modern technology, although sometimes seen as a polarizing tool, can also be a powerful vehicle for dialogue. Online social media platforms, for example, offer opportunities for intercultural and interreligious exchanges, but they can also be spaces where stereotypes are perpetuated and hate speech is encouraged. The role of technology is dual in the context of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. If social networks can be a minefield of misinformation and hate speech, they can also be a tool for disseminating correct information and promoting dialogue: "the digital age has enormously multiplied the opportunities for people to know each other, but it has made more difficult and more superficial"²⁰. Also, technology can serve as a channel for organizing virtual events that bring together people from different traditions and religious communities, opening the way to deeper understanding and more productive dialogue.

Youth activism

A notable positive aspect is represented by youth activism²¹. Newer generations, more educated and more connected to global realities, play an increasingly important role

²⁰Gurie Georgiu, "The recent polyhedral physiognomy of the Romanian Orthodox parish in the diaspora. Lecture on cultural and pastoral anthropology", in: Mihai Himcinschi, Remus Onisor (Ed.), *Pastoration and mission in the diaspora*, Volume I, Reintregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2021, p. 21

²¹Eugen Maftai, "The paradox of migration. The discovery or rediscovery of Romanian Orthodoxy far from home", in: Mihai Himcinschi, Remus Onisor (Ed.), *Pastoration and mission in the diaspora*, Volume I, Reintregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2021p. 322

in facilitating ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Initiatives such as interreligious dialogues organized in universities or even in schools show a growing interest in this form of interaction. Youth activism is a ray of hope in the landscape of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Romania. With a generation that is more educated and more open to diversity, there is an increased potential for positive exchanges. The Erasmus program, for example, facilitated the exposure of young people to various cultures and religions, encouraging a constructive dialogue. At the local level, there are also initiatives in schools and universities that focus on intercultural and interreligious education, with the aim of shaping future citizens with a more inclusive mindset.

Foreign policies and international interest

Finally, another dimension worth addressing is that of foreign policies and international interest. Cities such as Bucharest and Cluj have hosted ecumenical and interreligious events at the international level, emphasizing Romania's role as a meeting point for different religious and cultural traditions. This fact not only ensures greater visibility for Romania on the global stage, but also facilitates collaborations and partnerships that can have lasting positive effects. Romania is starting to play an increasingly important role in the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue at the international level. With a foreign policy that tries to balance relations with the European Union, the United States and the countries of the Middle East, Romania becomes a fertile ground for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. International conferences, symposia and other academic events, hosted by Romanian cities, contribute to increasing visibility and strengthening the country's role in these discussions.

In the ecumenical and interreligious context of Romania, the contemporary era brings with it an unprecedented complexity, characterized by a wide range of challenges and opportunities. The discussion focused on crucial sub-themes such as social and ideological polarization, migration and cultural diversity, technology as a *Double-Edged Sword*, youth activism and foreign policy and international interest. Each of these subthemes, in one way or another, shapes and influences the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, either constructively or obstructively.

However, the opportunities seem to balance, if not outweigh, the challenges. Migration and cultural diversity offer opportunities for the enrichment of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, both through the diversity of participants and through the richness of discussion topics. Technology also serves as a tool of global connection, enabling dialogue between communities that would otherwise have no access to one another. Youth

activism²² and increased education offer promise for a more tolerant and inclusive future, with the potential to reshape public discourse in more positive directions. Internationally, Romania is in a unique position to serve as a bridge between various global communities, due to its geopolitical and diplomatic commitments.

3. THE MISSION IN THE ROMANIAN DIASPORA

The mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the diaspora cannot be understood without referring to the theological and ecclesiastical foundations of the mission of the Church in general. According to tradition, the Church's mission has its roots in the Trinitarian mission, the starting point being the divine mandate to preach and baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching let them observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28, 19-20). The mission belongs to the very being of the Church, and this is anchored in the trinitarian and kenotic communion²³ of the Church's existence, which becomes a theophany in the world²⁴.

The mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the diaspora faces a series of complexities that derive from the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, but also from the economic and social dynamics of the Romanian communities abroad. The Diaspora "challenges the Church to get out of the territorial motherland", and to adopt preaching and pastoral methods that are often atypical or adapted to the specific context. This can include a variety of missionary approaches, from "supportive" to "defensive", depending on the conditions and needs of each community.

In a globalized world, the universality of the Gospel message and the missionary imperative of the Church intersect with the particular realities of the Romanian diaspora. Each Romanian Orthodox community in the diaspora is part of the "same flock of Christ," but each has unique needs and unique circumstances that demand a specific "inculturation" of the mission. This may include different strategies of pastoral, educational and social engagement, designed to respond to the challenges and opportunities of each community.

²²Brînzea Nicolae, Radomir Marius Sorin, "Youth, the Church and the Challenges of Contemporary Society", in: *Altarul Reintegrării*, new series, year XXI, no. 1, January-April 2016, p. 270

²³See Prof. Dr. Stefan Buchiu, *Dogma and Theology. Orthodox dogmatic and symbolic theology course*, Sigma Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 217-219

²⁴Mircea Basarab, "The Church's Mission and Globalization" in: Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Chirilă (coord.), *The Church's Mission in Holy Scripture and in History*, Renaştea Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2006

In the light of the Trinitarian mission and the kenotic nature of the Church, the mission in the Romanian diaspora is not only a geographical extension, but also a complex manifestation of the Church's vocation to bring the world into the Kingdom of love of the Most Holy Trinity. This involves a series of adaptive and flexible approaches, which respond to the particularities and challenges of each individual community. "In this sense, the life of the Church and the mission are inextricably linked to each other [...] the Church's participation in sending Christ to the world or in His service is embodied in its missionary activity under all aspects: evangelization, testimony and pastoral care"²⁵.

In Orthodox theology, the mission of the Church is understood as a participation in the divine-human work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, in the context of the Trinitarian communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the mission of the Church in the Romanian diaspora is not a peripheral subject, but a central one, confined to soteriology and ecclesiology.

Trinitarian theology is the ontological foundation of any discussion of mission in Orthodox theology. God, in the Trinitarian communion, is the source and target of the mission: "the highest experience for rational beings is the experience of living in communion, a communion that has its origin in the life of the Holy Trinity, God himself being the communion par excellence as Father, Son and Holy Spirit"²⁶. The Father sends the Son into the world and, through the Son, sends the Holy Spirit, making Himself present and active in human history²⁷. In this sense, any missionary act of the Church in the Romanian diaspora is, in the last instance, an act of participation in the Trinitarian mission²⁸.

Christ's incarnation, death and Resurrection form the soteriological axiom around which any attempt to articulate a theology of mission gravitates. He is the One sent by the Father to save the world and, through this, defines and legitimizes the missionary action of the Church. In the Romanian diaspora, this implies a Christocentric understanding of the

²⁵Prof. Dr. Valer Bel, *Dogma and preaching*, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 1994, p. 144.

²⁶Mihai Himeinschi, *Trinitarian doctrine as missionary foundation. The relationship of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son in Eastern and Western theology. Its doctrinal and spiritual implications*, Reintregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2004, p. 292

²⁷Rev. Prof. Dr. Valer Bel (Coord.), *Orthodox Missiology. Manual for Theology Faculties in the Romanian Patriarchate*, Vol. I, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p. 100-104

²⁸Archim. Vasilios Gondikakis, *Entry into the Kingdom*, Translation by Rev. Ioan Ică and Protos. Paisie, Diesis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2007, p. 50-51; George Istodor, "Remarks of the external dimension of the mission in the current context", in: Mihai Himeinschi, Remus Onisor (Ed.), *Pastoration and mission in the diaspora*, Volume I, Reintregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2021, p. 112; Rev. Prof. Vladimir Fedorov, "The Mission of Orthodoxy Today", in: *Yearbook of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Patriarch Justinian". Academic year 2003-2004. Dedicated to the memory of Father Dumitru Stăniloae on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth*, Bucharest University Publishing House, (Year IV) 2004, p. 227

mission that emphasizes the need to proclaim the Gospel as an invitation to communion with Christ and, implicitly, with the Holy Trinity.

The Church is the Body of Christ, the medium in which the Trinitarian mission becomes accessible to humanity. In the context of the Romanian diaspora, this presupposes a dynamic ecclesiology, capable of responding to challenges of a cultural, ethnic and social nature, without compromising the doctrinal or eucharistic integrity of the Church.

The mission of the Church in the Romanian diaspora, like any other mission, has an eschatological dimension. The expectation of the second coming of Christ orients all missionary actions towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. This offers a teleological perspective that understands mission not as a temporary activity, but as part of the eternal divine work. "Regardless of the spiritual attitude of contemporary man, the eschatological mission of the Church still remains an active and valid approach, because, otherwise, it would contradict itself. Co-belonging between the Church and the world is given through the act of creation, through the economy of salvation realized by the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world and for the life of the world and through the foundation of the Church. That is why Christ is seen in the New Testament as the perfection of all creation. The world is created for communion with God, without which its existence has no meaning. That is why the Church is the center and axis of the world. The world is through the Church on the way to its ultimate perfection, which consists in the communion of God with the people saved and deified by grace, the communion for which the Church, through its existence in the world and its indissoluble connection with the world, is a continuous sign or anticipation"²⁹.

Thus, the mission in the Romanian diaspora, viewed through the prism of Orthodox theology, is an incorporation of the multiple dimensions of the Trinitarian, Christological, ecclesiological and eschatological revelation. It calls for a deep understanding of the Divine mystery as the source and goal of all efforts, and invites us to reflect on how this theological vision informs and concretely shapes missionary actions in such a diverse and complex context as the Romanian diaspora.

Socio-political elements

The socio-political elements in the context of the mission in the Romanian diaspora assume a constellation of factors that shape, regulate and influence the way in which the Romanian Orthodox community inserts itself into the wider structures of the host society.

²⁹Dr. Alexandru Nicolae Agignoei, "The eschatological mission of the Church towards the world outside the public divine worship: human values and religious freedom both here and now and there and then", in: *Journal of Freedom of Conscience*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2022, p. 228

Among these elements, the social component is distinguished by a particular complexity, offering a mixture of opportunities and challenges for the mission.

The social insertion of the Romanian Orthodox communities in the host societies is manifested through a series of mechanisms, including, but not limited to, social networks, social capital and solidarity practices³⁰. These mechanisms are not only effects of an organic collectivity, but also instruments through which the mission is materialized and operationalized. In sociological terms, they can be seen as forms of collective "agency", through which the community navigates the social spaces of the diaspora and negotiates its identity in relation to the dominant structures. The social capital accumulated through these solidarity networks and practices becomes a substrate for carrying out the mission, facilitating access to resources, information and opportunities. It also helps to create bridges between the Romanian Orthodox community and other ethnic or religious groups, opening the way for a multidimensional collaboration and an intercultural and interreligious dialogue: "it should also be noted the important role played by transnational religious solidarity to strengthen the churches of Romanian immigrants"³¹. However, this social insertion also brings with it a set of challenges, such as the risk of cultural or religious assimilation, which can dilute the ethnic and theological distinctiveness of the community.

The social elements of the mission in the Romanian diaspora represent a multidimensional reality, with a multitude of implications for missionary dynamics and strategy. These elements cannot be isolated in an academic analysis, but must be understood in their complex interconnection with cultural, ethnic and theological factors. They also require a flexible hermeneutic and practical approach, able to adapt and respond to the specificities of each individual social context.

In the context of the mission in the Romanian diaspora, the political elements take shape in a complex intersection between the community identity and the political framework of the host societies, acting as an additional side that shapes and conditions the missionary activities. Political values oscillate between two limit points, since - under a polarizing aspect - there are two possibilities for the existence of social life: an individualist possibility and another universalist possibility. In other words, "social life is either organized in such a way as to receive the individual and his interests, or the

³⁰See George Istodor, "Outline of the Mission's External Dimension in Today's Context," pp. 117-118

³¹Irina Ciornei, "The Political Incorporation of Immigrant Associations and Religious Organizations of the Romanian Residents in Spain", in: *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai: Sociologia* ; Vol. 57, Issue 2, Dec. 2012, p. 70

individual is completely subordinated to the authority of common life and the state. That is why political values can be primarily individualistic or universalistic"³². Personalist values consider the state and the law as being at the service of the individual - either for a purely eudaemonistic purpose or for a cultural purpose -, and the other values place the individual at the service of a general purpose, realized in the state and through the state³³.

In a macro-political perspective, these elements include the relations between the Romanian state and its diaspora communities, but also the way in which these communities relate to the policies of the host states. In this sense, immigration policy³⁴, foreign policy and legislation regarding religious freedom become key factors in the missionary equation.

Through the prism of a political analysis, it is essential to consider the way in which the Romanian Orthodox community is situated in relation to the categories of power and authority within the host societies. The existence of political parties or organizations that can be sympathetic to ethnic and religious communities can facilitate the expansion and effectiveness of missionary work, providing opportunities for collaboration and political support. In contrast, the presence of xenophobic or nativist political forces can generate serious obstacles, from legal restrictions to social marginalization³⁵.

The political influence is also manifested through the public discourse and the media representation of the Romanian Orthodox community³⁶. This aspect becomes essential for shaping the public image and for mediating the community's relations with the wider society. Thus, the control and interpretation of public narratives about Romanian identity and Orthodoxy become components of a well-conceived missionary strategy.

Another significant political element is the way of internal organization and administration of diaspora communities. Decision-making processes, including those

³²Petre Andrei, *Sociological works, I, Sociology of knowledge and value*, Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Bucharest, 1973, p. 277

³³Pr. lect. university dr. Marius Nechita, "Social assistance of the family and the child in the context of freedom of conscience", in: *Journal of Freedom of Conscience*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2020, p. 405

³⁴Assoc. Prof. Mădălina Botină, "The Migration Phenomenon in the EU, Reflected by Human Rights Under the Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Case Study on the Inter-Vention of the People's Advocate Through the Children's Advocate to Protect the Rights of Migrant Children in Romania", in: *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2021, p. 523

³⁵Gurie Georgiu, "The European Public Space from Constantine the Great to Maastricht" in: Dumitru A. Vanca, Mark Cherry, Alin Albu (Ed.), *Religion & Politics. The Church-State Relationship: from Constantine the Great to Post-Maastricht Europe*, Vol. I, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2013, p. 41

³⁶"Romanian immigrants faced similar obstacles upon their arrival in the late 1990s and early 2000s: they faced the stigma of being low-skilled immigrants, while at the same time being portrayed as criminals in Italian political discourse and in the mass-media, thus resulting in harsh discrimination on the labor market and in the public sphere. Such social imaginaries could also be due to the popular perception that Romanians belong to the Roma ethnic group. However, after Romania's accession to the EU in 2007, Romanians are EU citizens and are considered *first-class immigrants* ." – Francesco Molteni, Iraklis Dimitriadis, "Immigrants' Religious Transmission in Southern Europe: Reaction or Assimilation?" Evidence from Italy", in: *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Volume 22, issue 4, December 2021, p. 1489

related to missionary aspects, can be influenced by the governance models of the community, by the relationship with the church hierarchy, as well as by the level of lay involvement in community affairs. This has an impact on how the mission is perceived and implemented, either as a *top-down process* dictated by a central authority or as a bottom-up community effort.

The role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the integration of diaspora communities

The role of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Romanian Orthodox Church) in the integration of Romanian communities in the diaspora is a subject of particular complexity and relevance, as it involves multiple levels of commitment and interaction - theological, cultural, social and political. Romanian Orthodox Church acts not only as a religious institution, but also as a platform for the construction and consolidation of national and ethnic identity in the context of the diaspora. "The Romanian Orthodox Church had this habit and continued to take care of its believers settled outside the country's borders, guided by the principle of a dynamic organization of Orthodoxy, in which taking care of its own believers must come before any limitation territorial"³⁷.

At the theological level, the Romanian Orthodox Church has taken measures to ensure the continuity of religious practice among diaspora communities. Thus, parishes and deaneries are created and supported in various countries, each adapting to local specificities. Any of these functions under the auspices of episcopates, such as the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Western and Southern Europe, which deals with parishes in France, Spain, Italy and other Western European countries, or the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Canada. These ecclesiastical structures have the role of maintaining and encouraging the Orthodox religious life in accordance with the canons and traditions of the Church.

Culturally and ethnically, Romanian Orthodox Church places a special emphasis on preserving and promoting Romanian values, customs and traditions. Cultural events are frequently organized, such as traditional holidays, art exhibitions, symposia and conferences that bring community members together³⁸. These serve not only as ways to maintain an emotional connection with Romania, but also to provide a space for socialization and reaffirmation of the Romanian identity: "The Mother Church supports

³⁷Răzvan Brudiu, Alexandru Ciucurescu, "Orthodox Diaspora: analysis, nuance and redefinition", in: *Altarul Reîntregirii*, No. 3/2021, p. 154

³⁸See Georgian Păunoiu, "Romanian Diaspora in the Land of Cantons. Two Orthodox parishes: Bern and Basel", in: Mihai Himcinschi, Remus Onisor (Ed.), *Pastoration and mission in the diaspora*, Volume II, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2021, p. 235-238

and encourages her spiritual sons and daughters from outside the country's borders and he understands the difficulties they face in their struggle to ensure a better future. At the same time, however, these Romanian Orthodox believers often live in increasingly secularized and individualistic societies, often being viewed with coldness or suspicion, a fact that does not instill in them a sense of peace and contentment. That is why their participation in the liturgical life of the parish, as well as in the cultural events and social-philanthropic actions organized by the parishes in the Romanian diaspora, is a special benefit and joy. Through the activities of the parish, the Orthodox faith is professed, Romanian traditions are transmitted and the Romanian language is cultivated, all of which contribute to preserving the ecclesial, cultural and ethnic identity of Romanians outside of Romania. At the same time, a harmonious coexistence of the Romanian migrants with the citizens of the adopting countries is necessary, for a social integration in the host countries, but without the cultural assimilation of the Romanians.³⁹

Socially, the Romanian Orthodox Church aims to provide support and assistance to community members in vulnerable situations. Social involvement is encouraged through social assistance programs, helping Romanians abroad or refugees. This can also include charitable or humanitarian initiatives, such as the distribution of food and material aid for Romanians in difficulty in various countries. "The presence of the Church in the public space through the clergy can constitute a way of Christian-religious education that derives from the event, from the teaching word and from the behavior of the clergy. The presence of the priest at various events in the parish can inspire the behavior and deeds of the parishioners. Opening up to people and dialogue with them can create opportunities in offering advice and teachings for a better knowledge of the Church, of God, of man, of the world and an understanding of the impermanent values of life"⁴⁰.

At the political level, the role of the Church is more nuanced. Officially, Romanian Orthodox Church maintains an apolitical position, but its impact as a social and cultural actor in facilitating dialogue between Romanian communities in the diaspora and local or national authorities cannot be denied⁴¹. In a sense, through its representatives, the Church can serve as a channel of communication between the diaspora and the institutions of the

³⁹Daniel, Patriarch of Romania, "Foreword." The Romanian Patriarchy blesses and supports the communion of Romanians everywhere", in: *Romanian Orthodox Church, promoter of the ecclesial, cultural and ethnic identity of Romanians outside Romania (studies and articles)*, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p. 7-8

⁴⁰† Emilian Nica Bishop-Vicar of the Archdiocese of Râmnicu, "Mission of the parish through social-philanthropic and educational activities", p. 18

⁴¹Gurie Georgiu, "The European Public Space from Constantine the Great to Maastricht", p. 44

Romanian state, thus contributing to the development of public policies that take into account the specifics and needs of Romanian communities abroad.

In this multidimensional context, the Romanian Orthodox Church manifests itself as a pillar of stability and cohesion, offering a wide range of resources and services that contribute to the efficient integration of Romanians into the host societies, without losing sight of maintaining a strong bond with the motherland.

It is important to mention the concrete ways in which the Romanian Orthodox Church contributes to the integration and sustainability of Romanian communities in the diaspora. This multifunctional role of the Church is not limited to isolated acts, but involves a long-term strategy that involves collaborations with other institutions, be they religious, educational, or governmental.

Romanian Orthodox Church not only gets involved in charitable and philanthropic acts, but also becomes a support for Romanians in situations of crisis or necessity. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous parishes and dioceses developed assistance programs for affected Romanians, offering material aid, counseling services and spiritual support⁴². Such initiatives, often carried out in partnership with other organizations or local authorities, amplify the role of the Church as an agent of integration and support in the community: "the pandemic played a "mirror function" in highlighting the multiple characteristics of religious circles related to immigration, emphasizing the role their importance as actors of well-being and places of trust. From a perspective of subsidiarity, their activities allowed them - in the context studied and also in synergy with the public administration - to play an important role in supporting families and individuals whose path to inclusion was made even more difficult by the pandemic. In fulfilling this role, religious organizations related to migration have found (or rediscovered) an important help in the civic protagonism and voluntary work of young members"⁴³.

The actions and initiatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Romanian diaspora go beyond the purely religious sphere, covering a wide spectrum of activities that contribute to the cohesion and integration of Romanian communities. Through educational, social and intercultural efforts, Romanian Orthodox Church becomes an important vector in preserving and promoting Romanian identity, in facilitating dialogue and cooperation

⁴²Sorin Ionițe, *Report, 2020: In the fight against the pandemic, the Church intensified prayer, philanthropy and protecting people's health* in <https://basilica.ro/raport-2020-in-lupta-cu-pandemia-biserica-a-intensificat-rugaciunea-philanthropy-and-protecting-human-health/>, access date 13.06.2023

⁴³Roberta Ricucci and Luca Bossi, "From Collectivities to Families and Back to the Individual: Religiosity, Migrations and Civic Engagement at the Beginning of the COVID Period in a Multicultural Italian City", in: *Religions* ; Basel, Vol. 13, Issue 6, 2022, 497

with other communities and in assisting its members in situations of need or crisis. Each of these dimensions strengthens the role of the Church as an agent of stability and integration within the Romanian diaspora, a role which, in the light of contemporary changes and challenges, remains essential.

4. THE ROLE OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE ROMANIAN DIASPORA

The ecumenical and interreligious dialogue represents a theme of major significance in the study of the Romanian diaspora, especially in the context of globalization and religious pluralism. Within the diaspora, the Romanian Orthodox Church (Romanian Orthodox Church) intersects with a plurality of religious and denominational traditions, offering a fertile context for dialogue and for theological and cultural exchanges. This dialogue is not only a theological imperative, but also a social and cultural necessity, given that religious diversity is becoming a norm in most Western societies, where Romanian diasporas are more visible.

Primary in this discussion is the understanding that ecumenical and interreligious dialogue does not equate to the dilution of theological identity or doctrinal compromise. It is, rather, an exercise of mutual understanding and collaboration with a view to common goals, be they social, moral or, in certain cases, even theological. In this sense, the ecumenical initiatives in which the Romanian Orthodox Church has been involved at the international level, such as the World Council of Churches, provide a structured framework for such interactions, involving theological dialogues, cultural exchanges and joint charitable projects.

The same principle applies to interreligious dialogue. In the multicultural societies of the West, the simultaneous presence of several religions in the public space requires an interreligious dialogue and understanding. This not only facilitates peaceful coexistence, but also allows a deep understanding of doctrinal and ritual differences and similarities.

Moreover, in the context of the diaspora, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue also becomes an instrument of social integration. Participation in ecumenical and interreligious initiatives can help the diaspora community to integrate more efficiently in the host country, contributing to improving the image of the Church and the Romanian community in general. It is an opportunity for the Romanian community to participate in

the public discourse and to contribute to the social and spiritual development of the society in which it was inserted.

We can observe the role of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as a vector of modernization and adaptation to the complex realities of the contemporary world. One of the pressing concerns in diaspora studies is how religious traditions transform and readjust in the cultural contexts of host countries. In this sense, the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is revealed as an effective tool for self-reflection and doctrinal reevaluation.

Conducting a dialogue is not only an exercise in religious diplomacy, but an intellectual and spiritual effort to reconfigure religious theology and practices in a way that responds to the questions and challenges of the 21st century. This is, in fact, a process of mutual learning; the exchange of knowledge and experiences can lead to a theological and liturgical renewal that can revitalize the community of believers. In this regard, a useful reference is the work of Peter B. Clarke, "New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World", which examines the impact of globalization on religious transformation⁴⁴. He points out that "with the rise of globalization, Eastern religions have begun to act as catalysts of change everywhere in relation to the form and content of religion and spirituality, in the way they are understood, organized and practiced and in the way the boundaries between religious and secular"⁴⁵.

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue can also be perceived as an effort to develop a shared public ethic in a world marked by cultural and religious pluralism. In the context of the Romanian diaspora, where identities are frequently in flux and where the encounter with "the other" is a constant, the construction of such ethical bases becomes imperative.

In a similar way, the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue serves as a way of consolidating the social capital of the Romanian community in the diaspora. The relationship with other religious communities and non-governmental organizations can contribute to the strengthening of social networks and access to the material and symbolic resources necessary for the well-being of the community⁴⁶. In this pluralistic and complex landscape, the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the Romanian diaspora represents a fertile ground for theological innovation, cultural adaptation and community

⁴⁴ Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006

⁴⁵ Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World*, p. 308

⁴⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000, pp. 122-123

consolidation. It is also a source of opportunities and challenges that can lead to the revival and reconceptualization of the role and mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in a global context.

Thus, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is not an option, but a necessity within the Romanian diaspora. It serves multiple purposes: from improving intercommunity relations to facilitating integration and from deepening theological understanding to enriching the common spiritual heritage. The dialogue brings to the fore the need for a not only tolerant, but also curious and respectful approach to the "other", whoever he may be, without sacrificing or compromising one's own identity and integrity⁴⁷.

5. MISSIONARY AND PRAGMATIC ETHOS IN THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA

The missionary and pragmatic ethos in the Romanian Orthodox diaspora is a complex mixture of ideological, theological, cultural and social factors. To deeply understand this ethos, it is essential to examine the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, and how these two dimensions affect community practices and perceptions. The diasporic context adds an additional level of complexity, demanding an adaptation to new geopolitical and social realities without compromising the traditional integrity of the faith.

In practical terms, this is reflected in the diversity of missionary strategies and pastoral approaches. In the United States, for example, Romanian Orthodox parishes have developed various educational and social programs to meet the needs of the community, from Romanian language and culture courses to social services for immigrants. Similarly, in Western Europe, where the Romanian community is one of the largest groups of Eastern European migrants, the Romanian Orthodox Church plays a crucial role in providing social and spiritual support.

On the pragmatic side, ethos manifests itself by adapting to the legal and social realities of the host countries. Here we can discuss collaboration with local authorities for building places of worship, participating in transnational charity projects and embracing more democratic forms of governance for the management of church affairs.

⁴⁷Diana-Ionela Ancheș, "Tolerance within the European Construction Philosophy", in: Dumitru A. Vanca, Mark Cherry, Alin Albu (Ed.), *Religion & Politics. The Church-State Relationship: from Constantine the Great to Post-Maastricht Europe*, Vol. I, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2013, p. 311

In this complex context, the missionary and pragmatic ethos of the Romanian Orthodox diaspora manifests itself as a continuous effort to balance between identity and adaptation, between tradition and innovation, between a commitment to the past and responsibilities to the present and future.

The importance of the priest's mission expressed in the liturgical dimension

The liturgical aspect of church life in the context of the Romanian Orthodox diaspora is a field that is particularly relevant within the priestly mission. The liturgy, in its etymological meaning of "work of the people", is not only an expression of the life of the ecclesial community, but also a way of preaching the truth of faith and a way of living together, in a profound way, the mysticism of the Church. It is through this that the importance of the liturgical dimension is highlighted in an acute way in the activity of priests in the diaspora.

In the first instance, a significant aspect is the way in which the liturgical dimension serves as a theological and spiritual anchor for the community. The liturgy represents a landmark of stability and continuity, linking the diaspora community to the tradition and spiritual heritage of the Orthodox Church. This is of paramount importance given that community members may be subject to multiple and diverse cultural and identity pressures, conditioned by their migrant status. By participating in liturgical services, believers return to a central core of their Christian identity, strengthened and nourished by communion with God and with other members of the community.

The priest, in his capacity as minister of the Sacraments, plays a key role in the maintenance and development of this liturgical life. By proclaiming the word, administering the Sacraments and through pastoral activity, he helps to integrate theological meanings and to cultivate the spiritual life of the faithful. This integration is not only doctrinal, but also existential. Through the Liturgy, the priest introduces the faithful to an experience of the Kingdom of God, preparing them for the eschatological encounter with God.

In addition, the liturgical dimension offers fertile ground for the manifestation of philanthropy and community solidarity. In the liturgical setting, community members can experience a sense of collectivity and belonging, which is vital for maintaining cultural and religious identity in the diaspora context. The priest, in coordinating and officiating the Liturgy, becomes a central point in the activation of this solidarity. Through his sermons, by organizing special moments of prayer for the needs of the community and by involving

the laity in the various services and liturgical responsibilities, he can contribute to strengthening community ties and promoting an active ecclesial life⁴⁸.

In the diaspora context, priests are often called upon to adapt liturgical practices to local realities, without compromising their theological and canonical integrity. This may involve using the local language in some parts of the Liturgy, or adapting certain liturgical practices to the needs of the community. This kind of flexibility requires a deep understanding of liturgical theology to ensure that any adaptation remains consistent with Church teaching and historic Orthodox liturgical practice.

At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that the liturgical dimension of priestly activity in the Romanian Orthodox diaspora finds its roots not only in the liturgical tradition, but also in the Orthodox theology of the Incarnation. In the act of Incarnation, the divine Logos assumed human nature, sanctifying and restoring the entire creation. Similarly, the Liturgy is not just an event that takes place in an isolated sacred space, but has implications for the entire community and, by extension, the world. Here, the role of the priest becomes crucial again, as he makes possible this intersection between the divine and the human, between the sacred liturgical space and the profane world.

The liturgical dimension of the priestly mission is much more than a series of rites and formulas; it is the space where faith is lived, experienced and transmitted. For the priest in the diaspora, this is an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity to bring faith into the concrete of people's lives and a challenge to do it in a way that respects and enriches the Orthodox tradition. It is a balancing act that requires not only deep theological erudition, but also pastoral sensitivity, intercultural competence and, last but not least, a life of prayer and communion with God.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The historical context of the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Romania takes place on a complex terrain, marked by significant political and social changes. In the contemporary era, this complexity has increased, generating a series of challenges and opportunities. Religious and ethnic pluralism, accelerated by globalization, has created an environment in which dialogue becomes not only desirable, but necessary. In this landscape, the Romanian Orthodox Church has assumed a significant role, performing a variety of functions that transcend ecclesiastical boundaries.

⁴⁸Priest Dr. Marius Florescu, "Studies regarding the internal and external mission of the Orthodox Church", p. 72

First, the Romanian Orthodox Church was a key actor in strengthening the ecumenical dialogue, engaging in theological discussions and organizing interfaith events. This allowed a better understanding between the different faiths and contributed to the mitigation of religious conflicts, implicitly to the promotion of an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Second, the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in charitable and social actions served as a vehicle for dialogue, establishing bridges of understanding and cooperation with other religious communities.

In the educational context, the Romanian Orthodox Church used educational institutions as platforms to educate and encourage interreligious dialogue, thus redefining the intersection between religion and education in a way that facilitates dialogue and cohesion. At the same time, collaboration with other religious traditions was an important dimension of his efforts, including in the political sphere and in civil society, where he contributed to the promotion of democratic values and the consolidation of the rule of law.

At the international level, the Romanian Orthodox Church has been recognized as a dialogue and collaboration partner, especially within global ecumenical organizations. This generated a significant impact, improving Romania's image on the world stage and consolidating the country's status as an actor that supports cohesion and pluralism in the global context.

The relationship between the different religious cults in the Romanian space has deep roots, with a historical context that reflects periods of peaceful coexistence, but also of conflict. Key institutions and events have played a role in the development of this dynamic, be it religious institutions, legislatures or non-governmental organizations. Mass media and public perceptions also have an important role in shaping ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, contributing to the construction of narratives that can either support or inhibit dialogue.

In the academic context, research and discussions on this topic have brought new perspectives and contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexity and importance of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Romania. These preliminary conclusions suggest that ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is not only a theological luxury, but a pragmatic necessity for the stability and prosperity of Romanian society, both within the country's borders and in external relations.

Considering these aspects, it is obvious that the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Romania is not reduced to a purely theological or spiritual dimension. It is a complex manifestation that involves social, political, historical and cultural aspects. In a

broader sense, dialogue has become a tool through which much more comprehensive issues can be addressed, from social inequalities to political conflicts and environmental issues. In a constantly changing world, these aspects of dialogue are critical to understanding how a more inclusive and sustainable society can be shaped.

In the long term, a successful ecumenical and interreligious dialogue can serve as a replicable model in other diasporic contexts, not only for Romanians, but for all ethno-religious groups that try to build an existence abroad. This would have profound implications, as such a model could be instrumentalized in addressing a variety of global issues, from conflict and displacement to climate change and social inequality.

Finally, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the context of the Romanian diaspora should not be seen as an end in itself, but as a continuous process of negotiation and reinterpretation. It involves a series of adjustments and recalibrations, taking into account demographic fluctuations, global political changes and technological developments. In this dynamic, dialogue remains not only relevant, but essential, providing a framework in which the various communities can coexist, collaborate and, ultimately, co-create a common vision of the future.

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