

Ion Bria, *Mission and ecumenism studies*, translated from English by Daniel Buda, editors and coordinators Aurel Pavel and Daniel Buda, Astra Museum Print, 2013, 272 p.

The present work is not a book in the proper sense of the word of Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, but a chrestomathy made of 26 studies written in English by Fr. Bria and published in various important magazines from abroad: *The Ecumenical Review* and *International Review of Mission*. Fr. Bria, being in the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, is the Romanian theologian with the most studies published outside the country's borders, who brought an important and unique contribution, in the same time, in the domain of Dogma, but mostly, in the domain of authentic mission and ecumenism.

The volume is realised at the Centre for Theological Research of the Centre for Ecumenical Studies of „Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu, with the wish of Pr. Lecturer Dr. Daniel Buda and the financement of Mr. Dietrich Werner, the coordinator of the Theological and Ecumenical Education Department from the World Council of Churches. The present volume, although contains the translation into Romanian of various mission and ecumenism studies of priest Professor Ioan Bria, is, otherwise, a tribute to his personality, which emphasizes in the same time his theological, missional and ecumenical thinking, which enriches young generations of theologians even today.

Priest Bria is considered to be a visionary an orthodox apologist of the missionary interconfessional theology, through the fact that he publishes a series of major works with a missionary orientation, in which he tries to elaborate an orthodox missiology which is in harmony with the pastoral realities of the contemporary world. In the same time, priest Bria elaborates important studies about ecumenism, where he emphasizes the Orthodoxy's contribution in the Ecumenical movement.

Romanian theologian shows in his studies that the Ecumenical Movement is a new experience in the life of the Churches and it needs time

for a universal consensus and for the final form which the Church should have, as the dogmatic positions which represent the object of ecumenism need broad debates and new re-formulations in conformity with the culture and contemporary needs. He appreciates the fact that, in a critical and unfavorable context, there was a wish of the divided Christians to go for the search of a visible unity of the Church. Sure is the fact in an environment without trust, which was the result of the Second World War, the Ecumenical Movement inspired a wide series of actions and experiences which modeled (through bilateral conversations, practical cooperation, research, theological dialogue, reconciliations beside political divisions) the consciousness of unity. In addition to this, all Christian communities admit that, after many centuries of separation, the Ecumenical Council of the Churches offered a solid frame, in which the Churches clarified and redefined the essential terms and the conditions of their ecumenical engagement.

Fr. Bria shows that, for Orthodoxy, ecumenism is not a fashion or a *aggiornamento*, but is part of Christ's Church's nature itself. Many of the problems, worries, and expectations of today's ecumenical community are part of Orthodoxy's life itself. For example, keeping the vital communion, learning the authentic faith and the preaching of the Gospel to all human beings are not simply some imposed "programs", but they are part of the Orthodox Church's essential calling. The Orthodox Church's testimony in the Ecumenical movement must not be understood just as triumphal statement, that it represents the Church, a saint, catholic and apostolic one, but must be understood as an effort, in the spirit of love, humility and ministry in order to be more involved in the faithful service, a service for the whole pre-conciliar process, which allows an approach for the reciprocal recognition and in order to discover and overcome persistent differences.

Romanian theologian wishes Orthodoxy not be led by those who are uninitiated in ecumenism, by those who omit its catholic, ecumenical dimension and militates for the participation of orthodox theology at the re-construction of a conciliar community, as in the end, to arrive at a Eucharistic communion. But before this aim, it dissociates the legitimate confessional identity from the inflexible confessionalism in order to characterize the conciliar ethos and in order to identify the ecumenical insufficiencies in the confessional positions. He does not agree with the stillness in an independent heterodox confessionalism, in the name of a wide diversity or of a theological pluralism without boundaries, as these

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are not enough to overcome obstacles found in the process of restoration of Christian unity.

Another important theme approached by Fr. Bria is the theological renewal in the new social-politic context after 1989. In his thinking, renewal does not mean neither legitimate innovation, nor concession in the doctrinal aspect, nor adaptation out of hope or complacency. Renewal, not being an aim itself, serves the Church in its work of updating of salvation both historically and personally. He is aware that the place and calling of Orthodoxy in the contemporary secularized world depend on the renewal of its own values and its capacity to testify these values for the world and in its service. Renewal does not mean replacing the Gospel with abstract ideologies, but retake the Gospel where it is either contradicted or replaced by traditions that immobilize continuity and renewal.

On one hand, I express by joy that it was started a reevaluation of important Romanian theologians' contributions, through the publication or translation of their studies or through unique studies that reflect their thinking. On the other hand, I express my hope that devoted apprentices and those that met closely Fr. Bria will start to gather the studies and articles spread all over the world, which, unfortunately, are unknown, and to realize, in the priest's mother tongue, a full collection of his beautiful and complex work.

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