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# Orthodox Church's Attitude to non-Christian Religions

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## Abstract

This article aims to provide a framework for the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards other religions, an attitude that must be expressed today in the public space. Contemporary global society is a society of the plurality of religious identities. Nowadays, the Orthodox Church has to rethink the pastoral missionary program taking into account this new reality.

## Keywords

Orthodox Church, dialogue, religion, salvation, revelation

## I. Introduction

The way the other religions are looked at from a Christian perspective has fundamentally changed nowadays, given that religious, political, economic, and social realities are completely different from those of the past. Clearly, the issue of reporting to non-Christian religions is not only a theological interest, but also has many practical implications regarding the attitude of the Christian Church to the spiritual quests of the times

we live in and, in general, to the course of humanity<sup>1</sup>. Although there are theologians who position themselves in a critical manner towards other religions as organic systems and units, they nevertheless show an attitude of respect and love to their followers, according to the example of Christ (cf. Matthew 8, 10.21-28). Because every man carries in him the “image” of God and the possibility of “likeness” by virtue of the inner components of his existence, respectively free will, a mind able to reason, and the availability to love<sup>2</sup>.

By sharing this vision of Christianity’s opening to all the religions of the world, the Orthodox Church, through its representatives, tries to establish “bridges” for discussion and dialogue with them. Starting from the idea of the unity of all humanity through creation, as a “leap” of the same Creator of all, in papers of strict specialty or contextual in other papers, the Orthodox theologians accurately and wisely outline the premises and the conducive framework favorable for communication with non-Christian religions.

## II. Unity of the human race - the basis of the dialogue between peoples, cultures, and religions

Although within the great family of humanity, every nation and ultimately every individual has its specificity and particularities, they all feel structurally linked together, being the work of the same Creator of all. Obviously, there is a creation unit, on the basis of which humanity is by no means a “cosmopolitan monotony” but a unity in diversity<sup>3</sup>. All nations are part of the social organism that is the people. It is, therefore “one body, but more limbs”, each with its own specificity, its inheritance, and its merits, all together, serving the whole and helping one another (Luke 2,14; 1 Corinthians 12, 12-26, Ephesians 2, 14-17)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Anastasios YANOULATOS, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2003, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Anastasios YANOULATOS, *Misiune pe urmele lui Hristos. Studii teologice și omilii*, Editura Andreiana, Sibiu, 2013, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> †NICOLAE, Mitropolitul Ardealului, *Studii de teologie morală*, Sibiu, 1969, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Pr. lect. Dumitru ABRUDAN, “Creștinismul și mozaismul în perspectiva dialogului interreligios”, in: *Mitropolia Ardealului*, XXIV (1979) 1-3, p. 161, cf. Pr. dr. Liviu STAN, *Rasă și religiiune*, Sibiu, 1972, p. 26; Pr. prof. Dumitru. I. BELU, “Ortodoxia și discriminările rasiale,” in: *Ortodoxia* XV (1963) 1, p. 40.

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Looking at things from this perspective, the Orthodox theologians consider that the fundamental premise from which to engage in the relationship with non-Christian religions must be the unity of the human race, with its four main characteristics: the unity of origin (Acts 17, 26), the unity of being and body and soul structure, the aspiration unit and the destiny unit (1 Timothy 2, 4). This unity helps us greatly to understand correctly the aspects and significance of the depth of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions of the world<sup>5</sup>.

The idea of the unity of all humanity through creation, as a premise of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions of the world, is found not only in the original reality of man's creation in the image of God but also in other elements of the Old Testament biblical Revelation Testament.

For example, many Bibles discovered in the Old Testament a completely different way of thinking from what they called the Greek way, which corresponds to our current pattern of thinking. This is the so-called comparative thinking. According to this way of thinking, the patriarchs, prophets, and kings of the people of Israel use singular forms to express plurality and plural forms to express singularity. "I" for Israel itself and Israel for each individual. A conclusive example is found in Numbers 20,19: "The children of Israel said to him: We will go the great way; and if we drink of your water, my flocks, I will pay you the price; I ask nothing but to get to my feet"<sup>6</sup>.

The fundamental difference between thinking and our European model of thought is, without doubt, the fact that we are thinking in an alternative way of exclusion: "or-or", or I or ourselves, when the sons of Israel thought through closure, in the sense that I and us mean the same thing<sup>7</sup>.

This "comparative thought" is nothing but the unquestionable testimony of the perpetuation of the consciousness of the unity of the human race throughout history. And as an expression of the unity of the

<sup>5</sup> Pr. prof. C. SĂRBU, "Poziții principale ale ortodocșilor față de celelalte religii", in: *Ortodoxia*, XXI (1969) 4, p. 511, cf. Pr. Olimp Căciulă, "Ura de rasă, păcat strigător la cer", in: *Ortodoxia* IV (1952) 3-4, p. 348.

<sup>6</sup> †Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, Arhiepiscop al Sibiului și Mitropolit al Ardealului, *Biserica slujitoare*, Sibiu, 1986, pp. 18-20 [extras din rev. *Studii Teologice* XXIV (1972) 5-8].

<sup>7</sup> †Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Biserica slujitoare*, p. 20. †Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, "Câteva probleme în legătură cu Ebed Iahve în Deutero-Isaia," in: *Ca toți să fie una*, București, 1979, p. 448.

human race by creation, it is one of the biblical-theological grounds of the reciprocal ministry and, at the same time, the opening of Christianity to all the religions of the world.

On the other hand, Emanuel Clapsis<sup>8</sup> emphasizes that the universality of God's love, as experienced by the Eucharist, unites the whole creation with God. Humanity and creation are the Body of Christ in the broad sense, through the recapitulation of all in Christ. In this way, the Church includes, in a certain way, not only the Orthodox Christians but also the other people who wish to live with God, manifesting their love for all creation and humanity. The Holy Spirit is present throughout the world in a mysterious way beyond the limits of the Church, revealing divine love and freedom.

Regarding the presence of God beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, the great Romanian Orthodox theologian, Father Professor D. Stăniloae, emphasizes that

“The existence of the Churches does not mean that God has restricted His work to their own framework only. The Son of God Incarnated by assuming a human nature that was not yet in the Church. The New Testament then tells us of cases when God works directly on humans without the apostles' preaching, meaning the Church (the gospel centurion, Saul, Cornelius, etc.). St. Paul's Apostle and usual experience confirm that God is exercising His judgment also on those who are not part of the Church when they do not fulfill His will in their hearts (Romans 1, 18-22.25; 2, 14)”<sup>9</sup>.

Considering the unity of the human race, we have a better understanding of why certain ideas and practices related to those in non-Christian religions are found in Christianity without having been borrowed from them. Since human nature is one and the same in its body and soul structure, it is self-evident that the aspirations and manifestations of mankind have been the same everywhere since forever. That is why certain analogies and parallels between Christianity and other religions are absolutely normal. At the

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<sup>8</sup> Vezi pe larg Emmanuel CLAPSIS, “Theology of Religions as Concern for Ecumenical Dialogue of Orthodox Theologians,” in: Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, Thomas FITZGERALD, Cyril HOVORUN, Aikaterini PEKRIDON, Nikolaos ASPROULIS, Guy LIAGRE, Dietrich WERNER (eds.), *Orthodox Handbook of Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2013, pp. 668-675.

<sup>9</sup> Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere orthodox,” in: *Ortodoxia*, XXVIII (1976) 4, p. 527.

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same time, we understand better why Christianity has borrowed various elements from other religions and cultures of mankind<sup>10</sup>.

### III. The need to open and communicate the Church with all humanity

Today, more than ever, the Church must manifest a greater openness and be in a close relationship with all humanity, with all men, regardless of their faith or culture. By experiencing it in the universal horizon, as Father Staniloae<sup>11</sup> points out, the Church has the great chance of growing and enriching more and more spiritually.

At the same time, in the past, the image of a closed, isolated Church was, of course, also linked to the static vision of the Church about God and the world. In contrast to this conception, today more and more Orthodox Christians are aware that such a vision must be replaced by one about an open Church without rigid boundaries and without attacks against those outside it because only to the extent that the Church itself opens to those outside it, and they also open themselves to it<sup>12</sup>.

Moreover, it is known that God works on people, on entire humanity, not only through the Church but also through the people inside or outside the Church of Christ - on the ecclesial community. That is why the Church must always be open to the will of God both when sending it to work upon people as well as when He asks it to obey and see His work in people.

At the same time, it must be borne in mind that, ultimately, the world is one of a spiritual point of view, remaining, of course, divided from other points of view. Ideas and values are universal, they circulate among all people and become common<sup>13</sup>, regardless of the people, culture or religion to which they belong.

<sup>10</sup> C. SĂRBU, "Poziții principale ale Ortodocșilor", p. 511.

<sup>11</sup> D. STĂNILAOE, "Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox", p. 530.

<sup>12</sup> D. STĂNILAOE, "Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox", pp. 530-531.

<sup>13</sup> D. STĂNILAOE, "Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox", p. 532. Diac. prof. Emilian VĂSILESCU, "Sf. Trei Ierarhi și cultura vremii lor", in: *Studii Teologice*, XIII (1961) 1-2, p. 61; Pr. prof. I. G. COMAN, "Problema raporturilor dintre greci și «barbari» în lumina Sfinților Părinți", in: *Studii Teologice*, XXVI (1974) 3-4, p. 170; Pr. prof. Nicolae ACHIMESCU, *Religii în Dialog*, Trinitas, Iași, 2005, pp. 67-68.

The world nowadays is an eminently interdependent world. More than ever, the truth of St Paul's words on the Church is confirmed now: "And if one member suffers, all members suffer with him" (1 Cor. 12, 26). Indeed, the Savior Himself has commanded us to show love to one another and to work in such a way that we can fulfill the ideal on earth for which He prayed: "Let all be one, as You, Father, I and I for you, so that they too may be one" (John 17, 21)<sup>14</sup>.

The peaceful coexistence of peoples, cultures, and religions necessarily presupposes universal solidarity<sup>15</sup>, all and all being the creation of the same God. The apostle Paul clearly conveys the urge to this solidarity: "Take on yourselves one another's troubles, and so keep the law of Christ" (Galatians 6, 2). Likewise, all of St. Paul suggests that the command of the love of the enemies and the proclamation of equality of all men are written on the same line of solidarity of all men: "There is no Jew, or Greek, servant or free, male or female: because you are all in one Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3, 28)<sup>16</sup>.

From the side of the Orthodox Church, Metropolitan George Khodr of the Lebanon Mountain had an important role to play in promoting dialogue and opening up to other religions. At the Addis Ababa (1971) meeting, when the foundations for promoting interreligious dialogue to the World Council of Churches (CMB) were laid, he highlighted the role and importance of the mentioned dialogue in the context of the realities facing the world in the 20th century<sup>17</sup>.

The issue of the interreligious dialogue was resumed and debated also at the third Presidential Meeting held in Chambésy (1986)<sup>18</sup>. Besides, most meetings on the subject of interreligious dialogue in general

<sup>14</sup> D. ABRUDAN, *Creștinismul și mozaismul*, pp. 64-65; Dr. †Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, "Jaloane pentru o teologie a slujirii", in: *Ca toți să fie una*, p. 424.

<sup>15</sup> Prof. C. PAVEL, "Aspectul teologic al solidarității umane", in: *Ortodoxia*, XIX (1967) 2, pp. 184-185; Pr. prof. C. SĂRBU, "Solidaritatea umană", in: *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, XXXVI (1960) 9-12, pp. 615-627.

<sup>16</sup> C. PAVEL, "Aspectul teologic al solidarității", p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> Georges KHODR, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World – the Economy of the Holy Spirit", in: Michael KINNAMON and Brian E. COPE (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key and Voices*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997, p. 402.

<sup>18</sup> See *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism. Statements. Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement. 1902-1992*, compiled by Gennadios LIMOURIS, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1994, pp. 112-115.

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and the nature of the relationship between Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish, in particular, took place in Chambésy under the direct supervision of Metropolitan Damaskinos Papanдреou of Switzerland, encouraging the Ecumenical Patriarchate to promote relations with the other religions<sup>19</sup>.

Also, on 7 January 2000, within the message sent from Bethlehem, the leaders of the Orthodox Churches emphasized the need for interreligious dialogue and dialogue with secular ideologies, thus suggesting the desire for peaceful coexistence between peoples, cultures and religions throughout the world without having affected somehow the freedom of consciousness of each individual and the belonging of each person to their own reason<sup>20</sup>.

Unfortunately, the opening of the Orthodox Church to dialogue with non-Christian religions has not always been appreciated by all theologians, some of whom define it, on the one hand, as a form of modern syncretism promoted on a global scale, chasing globalization, as a tool for leveling all ethnicities, cultures and religions, and, on the other hand, as a distortion of the meaning and meaning of the Christian mission in today's world.

However, openness and dialogue with other religions and cultures do not mean relativism or syncretism, as no diminution of Christian faith or self-identity by those who sincerely engage in their approach. To be genuine and sincere, dialogue with other religions requires "real Christian knowledge, consistency, metanoia" - that is a permanent re-life of our own faith in the spirit of humility and true love. Just this "perfect love casts away fear" (1 John 4, 18)<sup>21</sup>, every kind of fear, and fills us with hope. The duty of each of our partners engaged in genuine and sincere dialogue and openness is, first of all, to share with each other the certainties and the deepest experiences that God has given us all. Simple, peaceful, arrogant, grateful, truly understanding the meaning of what is being discussed, each of those present must fully demonstrate the authentic ability and willingness to listen and speak to allow being heard. It is a special state of soul, a harsh statement, a gift of God that not everyone has.

<sup>19</sup> Israel SELVANAYAGAM, "Interfaith Dialogue," in: John BRIGGS, Mercy Anda ODUYOYE, Goerges TSETSI (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 3, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2004, pp. 161-162.

<sup>20</sup> A. YANOULATOS, *Misiune pe urmele lui Hristos*, p. 227. Adrian BOLDIȘOR, *Importanța și actualitatea dialogului interreligios pentru lumea contemporană: istorie, perspective, soluții*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2015, p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> A. YANOULATOS, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane*, p. 151.

#### IV. Primordial and natural revelation - the heritage of all peoples and religions

In the past, some Christian theologians did not see anything good in other religions, and when they had to recognize some positive elements in their doctrine, their morals and cults considered tricks “invented by the devil to mislead believing Christians”<sup>22</sup>. Of course, later, such a conception was approached by most of them, being replaced by a more generous view of the common inheritance of fragments of primordial revelation within the various religions, as well as the vision of the natural revelation, on the basis of which the followers of some of the non-Christian religions have come to know the true God even though they have been deprived of direct revelation made by God through His messengers<sup>23</sup>.

From the earliest Christian ages, during the collision between the Church and the dominant religions, both in theoretical and practical terms, the concepts of the presence of the divine Logos in the world, of its preparation for the coming of Christ and about the sparks of the divine Word of Greek culture that preceded Christianity have been formed and spread. Thus, in the vision of St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher (about 100 - about 160), all who lived before Christ with the idea of the divine Logos are Christians: “Those who have lived according to the Word are Christians, even Heraclitus and those like them, and to the barbarians: Abraham and Ananias, Azariah, Misail and Elijah, and many others ...”<sup>24</sup>. In another place, St. Justin speaks of the presence of the *Logos spermatikos* in the world before the incarnation of the divine Logos, in the sense that high

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<sup>22</sup> Diac. prof. Emilian VASILESCU, “O nouă orientare în relațiile dintre cultele religioase”, in: *Ortodoxia*, IV (1952) 3-4, p. 611; Rus REMUS, *Conștiința despre om în marile religii*, București, 1978, p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> E. VASILESCU, “O nouă orientare”, p. 611; Pr. prof. I. G. COMAN, “Prezența Mântuitorului Hristos în noua creație, după învățătura Sf. Părinți”, in: *Ortodoxia* XVIII (1966) 4, p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> Sfântul IUSTIN MARTIRUL ȘI FILOSOFUL, “Apologia întâi în favoarea creștinismului”, XLVI, in: *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, traducere, introducere, note și indici de Pr. prof. dr. T. BODOGAE, Pr. prof. dr. Olimp CĂCIULĂ, Pr. prof. dr. D. FECIORU, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 75; Pr. Alexandru. I. STAN, “Biserica Ortodoxă și religiile necreștine”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXXVI (1984) 3-4, p. 190.



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ideas can also be found in non-Christian religions, being prefigurations of the incarnation and activity of the divine Logos<sup>25</sup>.

Also, trying to bring arguments from the Greek-Roman culture to prove that God was revealed to pagan peoples before the incarnation of his Son<sup>26</sup>, Clement of Alexandria states that pagan religions and philosophies were a sort of guide or “pedagogue” to Christ:

“Before the coming of the Lord, philosophy was necessary for the Allies to lead them to justice; but now it is useful to lead us to godliness. Philosophy is an intellectual training for those who, by demonstration, acquire faith [...]”<sup>27</sup>.

In turn, Origen asserts that God has confessed Himself not only to certain peoples and times but has enlightened countless souls from all places and times, such as, for example, in Plato’s case<sup>28</sup>. In Origen’s opinion, reminiscences of God’s providence can be found not only in philosophy but also in religious pagan traditions. In addition, he suggests that Greek mythology, just like the Old Testament narratives, in the form of allegorical stories, only describe truths related to life<sup>29</sup>. That is why Christians must not insult the faces of the gods, as they are attempts to imagine God. Origen never attempted to minimize the differences between Christianity and the religions of Antiquity, but merely to suggest the shortcomings of the latter, making a critical assessment of them.

According to the Milan Edict (313), Eusebius of Caesarea (265-339) also emphasized the universality of divine revelation to all people and all nations, stating that each man possesses natively the readiness to be religious: “His Word God in Heaven equips all men with the gift of judging and contemplating His wisdom”<sup>30</sup>. Of course, although divine revelation is

<sup>25</sup> Sfântul IUSTIN MARTIRUL ȘI FILOSOFUL, “Dialogul cu iudeul Tryfon” LXIX, LXX, in: *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, pp. 228-231.

<sup>26</sup> CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, “Cuvânt de îndemn către eleni (Protrepticul)”, in: *Scrieri. Partea Întâi*, traducere, introducere, note și indici de Pr. D. FECIORU, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 4, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, pp. 67-162.

<sup>27</sup> CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, “Stromatele” V, in: *Scrieri. Partea a Doua*, traducere, cuvânt înainte, note și indici de Pr. D. FECIORU, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 4, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, pp. 25-28.

<sup>28</sup> ORIGEN, *Împotriva lui Celsus*, 6, 47; PG 11, 1372.

<sup>29</sup> ORIGEN, *Împotriva lui Celsus*, 4, 38; PG 11, 10888.

<sup>30</sup> “Demonstrație în folosul Evangheliei,” IV, 5, 12, I. A. HEIKEL (ed.), *Eusebius Werke*, bd. 6: *Die Demonstration evangelica*, Leipzig, 1913.

universal, it has not been understood and accepted by everyone. This, even though in all periods of history and in all nations there have been people who have distinguished themselves by “righteousness and appreciation”<sup>31</sup>, and who, because of their spiritual purity, have seen the divine truth with the help of the eyes of the mind. Eusebius of Caesarea defined these people as God-lovers of all time, who “confessed with their righteousness” or “Christians in deed”<sup>32</sup>.

However, their “Christian” experience was not inspired by the religious context in which they lived, but emerged from the natural revelation, leaving them guided by the divine Logos present in every human being. In this way, all people, regardless of their ethnicity, culture or religion, have the opportunity to participate prospectively and potentially to the revelation of Jesus Christ<sup>33</sup>.

Therefore, people in all places and times can naturally come to a knowledge of God in the sense that they can, by detachment, make a certain knowledge of God from the created things of the universe (Romans 1, 20), from the testimony of moral conscience (Romans 2, 14-15), or, by contemplation of the human soul and can come to the belief in God as His archetype. That is why the preach from Areopag of apostle Paul (Acts 17, 22-34) is a convincing example of using natural intuitive revelation to discover the ultimate truth or to properly understand what is given, but, because of recognition, is misinterpreted<sup>34</sup>.

## V. How is the salvation postulated by non-Christian religions perceived

The idea of salvation is very old and is present in different forms in all religions. No believer, no matter how liberated he is in other respects, agrees only with the thought of the absolute certainty of his salvation. All his religious teaching, all his rituals, all his practices and his religious aspirations ultimately aim at acquiring salvation.

<sup>31</sup> EUSEBIU din CEZAREEA, *Istoria Bisericească*, I, 2, 6.

<sup>32</sup> EUSEBIU din CEZAREEA, *Istoria Bisericească*, I, 4, 6.

<sup>33</sup> R. RUS, “Concepția despre om în marile religii,” p. 185; R. RUS, “Poziții creștine față de religiile necreștine”, In: *Ortodoxia XXV* (1973) 2, pp. 265-266.

<sup>34</sup> R. RUS, “Concepția despre om în marile religii”, pp. 185-186.

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On the basis of the general action of the divine pronouncement, God has never deprived people of a general grace, through which they always take care “after the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1, 11). Through the work of this grace, a certain connection has always been maintained between all men, regardless of their ethnicity, culture or religion, and God, which is, in fact, the essence and reason of any religion (cf. Acts 17, 27 etc.)<sup>35</sup>.

The question of how God acts toward the believers of other religions for salvation is an aspect of the mysterious way in which God leads the world to its finality, imprinted upon it from creation. However, the will of God to the salvation of all men (1 Timothy 2, 4) implicitly affects non-Christians, also giving them the possibility of salvation<sup>36</sup>. Christ also works secretly outside His Church, that is, by His prior or charitable grace<sup>37</sup>. This is also the reason why, in the newer theology, it is increasingly necessary to conceive that no rigid distinction should be made between natural and supernatural<sup>38</sup>.

By analyzing the problem of salvation as postulated by non-Christian religions, the Orthodox theology views it in correlation with that of the connection between human nature and divine grace. This, due to the fall of Adam and Eve in sin, the human nature has not completely degraded. The image of God in man has not been destroyed, so even the fallen man tends to God and seeks Him permanently. From this perspective, non-Christian religions represent the human being in the search for God, expressing man's continued aspirations for salvation<sup>39</sup>.

A special case regarding the position of Christian theology on the issue of the salvation of non-Christians is represented by St. Cyprian of Carthage. He clearly states that there is no salvation outside the Church: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, since the Church is “the bride of Christ, it is

<sup>35</sup> C. SĂRBU, “Poziții principale ale ortodocșilor”, p. 512.

<sup>36</sup> N. ACHIMESCU, *Religii în dialog*, p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilia la Psalmul XLVIII”, 1, in: *Scrieri, partea 1. Omilii la Hexaemeron, Omilii la Psalmi, Omilii și cuvântări*, traducere de Pr. prof. D. FECIORU, București, 1986, p. 310.

<sup>38</sup> Pr. prof. P. REZUȘ, “Teologia contemporană a istoriei mântuirii”, in: *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, XLIV (1968) 9-10, p. 521; Pr. prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. I, București, 1978, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> C. SĂRBU, “Poziții principale ale ortodocșilor”, pp. 516-517.

pure and unrighteous [...]. It keeps us alive, it reserves the kingdom of the Lord for its sons”<sup>40</sup>.

Of course, this axiom has been raising over time debates and controversies over the possibility of interreligious dialogue. In principle, all contradictory discussions start from the answer to the question of whether the grace of God is actually present and can also act outside the boundaries of the Church.

Although controversial, Orthodox theology also maintains the formula of St. Cyprian, but does not confer an exclusive, restrictive character on God’s ability to save anyone, anywhere, anytime, and in any form, than that of receiving the baptism of Christ<sup>41</sup>. In turn, Orthodox theologian Ioan Karmiris points out that God’s grace acts “beyond the bounds of the revealed Church” and for this reason, not only Christians, but non-Christians, and pagans can be “together-heirs (with the Jews) but of the same Body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus”. This, through the intercession of the Church, to which pagans and heterodoxies can also belong, unseen, because of the power of their faith and the saving grace that leads them.

## VI. Conclusions

In an increasingly open world like it is now, the Orthodox Church can no longer live in isolation, ignoring any contact with the representatives of other religions, or losing in sterile polemics, often unknowingly, with the theologians of other religions or other cultures Christian. Moreover, there is a need for a sustained concern in order to know the universal values present in all religions, in order to promote and defend them together. There are many billions of followers of other cultures and religions than the Christian one who seeks salvation on altogether other paths than the one indicated directly by the revelation of God. Nothing and anyone in this

<sup>40</sup> Sfântul CIPRIAN, “Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice (*De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*)”, in: *Apologeți de limbă latină*, traducere de Prof. N. Chițescu, note și indici de prof. N. Chițescu, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, pp. 436-437.

<sup>41</sup> Diac. prof. E. VASILESCU, “Cadru și perspectivele dialogului interreligios”, in: *Orthodoxia*, XXIII (1971) 1, p. 136.

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world does not legitimize us to despise or despise them. On the contrary, we have an obligation to seek to identify all those positive elements that unite us; always in our dialogue and proximity to all those who feel, think and believe otherwise than ourselves, we must seek and cultivate, first of all, what unites us, not what differentiates and separates us.

For this we have the duty, first of all, to know them, to understand their traditions and values, to study their doctrine, morals, and worship, without fear that we will betray our own belief in any way, or your own identity. On the contrary, by approaching and communicating with other religions and cultures, we testify to others about our own religious values and our own culture. By opening up to others, we lose nothing, but we win and we all enrich spiritually.