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ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND ECUMENISM – AN OVERVIEW

Abstract. Although, called together with the all the other Eastern Orthodox Churches to join World Council of Churches in 1948, the Romanian Orthodox Church will come later, in 1961 in the Movement, together with all the other Churches from the Communist countries. Their arrival will change even the carta of the WCC, which will become from this moment a Trinitarian one. Still, the history of the road of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical field starts earlier, with the conferences of Nathan Soderblom. Noticing these aspects we will try in the present research to see which were the main aspects that defined the role of it in the Ecumenical and which were its major contributions. Theologians like Fr. Ioan Bria, who travelled in „Faith and Order” commission of WCC, or Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, recently declared Saint by his Church come to speak about a deep concern and a honest commitment in the ecumenical pilgrimage. Also, starting from his activity as a professor in the Ecumenical Institute of Geneva (1980-1988), Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, who is today the Patriarch Daniel, had an important word to say in this field.

Keywords: *Nicolae Bălan, Daniel Ciobotea, Dumitru Stăniloae, Romanians, Ecumenism, Communism*

Introduction

The way how the Romanian Orthodox Church understood the ecumenism and become involved in organisms like World Council of Churches has constituted until now a topic of research exploited by historians and theologians. Both scholars who tried to provide an overview of the dynam-

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ics of the relationships², or investigated the life or the biography of important people who had a contribution in the field³ provided valuable information on the topic. In the same time, the topic was sporadically approached also by people who did not had the intention to work on it, but they came in relationship with different aspects of the problem. Thus, for example, Macarie Drăgoi provides information about the relationship between Nathan Shoderblom and Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania in the moments of the beginning of Ecumenism and also publishes a part of the

² See, for example: Alexandru Moraru, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română între anii 1885–2000. Dialog teologic și ecumenic*, (Bucharest: The Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2006); Mihai Săsăujan, „Romanian Orthodox Theologians as Pioneers of the Ecumenical Dialogue Between East and West: The Relevance and Topicality of Their Position in Uniting Europe,” In: Bremer, T. (eds) *Religion and the Conceptual Boundary in Central and Eastern Europe. Studies in Central and Eastern Europe*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 146–165 (<https://doi.org/10.1057/97802305900217>); Paul Ladouceur, „Ecumenism Begins at Home: Orthodoxy and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church”, *Ecclesiology*, 19:3 (2023), 296–311; Lucian N. Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War. Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947–65*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009); Nifon Ploiesteanu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement: An Assessment of 25 Years of Membership in WCC,” *The Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987): 352–355; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „The Romanian Orthodox Youth in the Ecumenical Movement: History and Potential Future”, in Joy Eva Bohol Benjamin Simon (eds.), *Let the Waves Roar Perspectives of Young Prophetic Voices in the Ecumenical Movement*, World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva, 2021, pp.147–156; Cristian Sonea, „Between Hope and Disappointment: A Short Evaluation of the Romanian Orthodox Church Involvement in Ecumenism in the Post-Communist Era”, in *Reshaping Ecumenism in Times of Transformation*, (Leuven: Brill, 2021), 34–54. (DOI: 10.30965/9783657760152_004); Valer Bel, “Poziția Bisericii Ortodoxe Române față de mișcarea ecumenică în General și față de Consiliul Mondial al Bisericilor în special,” in *Ortodoxia Maramureșeană* 2 (1997): 230–238. In the Orthodox handbook on ecumenism there can be also found some chapters dedicated to the Romanian Orthodox Church, that we will use there. See, for example: Aurel Pavel, „Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Romanian Orthodox Church”, *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 365–373.

³ Like: Constance J. Tarasar and Irina Kirillova, eds., *Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church. Report on the Consultation of Orthodox Women September 11–17, 1976, Agapia, Romania*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977); Ciprian I. Toroczka, ‘Father Dumitru Stăniloae and the Ecumenical Dialogue: Between Disproof and Acceptance’, *Review of Ecumenical Studies (Sibiu)* 5:3 (2013), 362–371; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Andre Scrima’s openness to dialogue as reflected in the Romanian Securitate Archives”, in Viorel Coman, Alexandru Tofan, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Culture of Dialogue. The legacy of Andre Scrima (1925–2000)*, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2024), 293–307.

correspondence between the two ones.⁴

Noticing these aspects, based on the information provided in different articles, monographs or other research, we will try there to emphasize the way how the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church, the majority one in the Romanian space and the ecumenism took place during the decades of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st one. The research will be a qualitative one and will try to answer to the question: which were the particularities of the aforementioned relationship during the years? In order to provide a detailed perspective on the topic, we will not only emphasize and critically investigate the main moments that defined this relationship, but we will also take into attention the role played by notorious Orthodox personalities like Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Fr. Andre Scrima or Fr. Ioan Bria, which activated in this area.

Romanian Orthodox Church and Ecumenism
– landmarks of a complex topic

Although it was not allowed by the Communist regime to join World Council of Churches since its foundation in 1948 (fact that happened to all the Orthodox Churches from the Communist countries)⁵, and has become part of it only in 1961, Romanian Orthodox Church had was involved in ecumenical dialogue even before the foundation of this organism. As Mihai Săsăujan shows it since the encyclical letter of the Patriarch Joachim the 3rd of Constantinople sent the letter about the need to get involved in the ecumenical dialogue to the Orthodox Churches⁶, the Romanian Orthodox Churches proved their interest in the field. While some were sceptical and concerned about a potential threaten to the faith, other were interested to

⁴ See: Macarie Drăgoi, ed., *Artisan of Christian Unity between North and East: Nathan Soderblom. His Correspondence with Orthodox Personalities, 1896–1931*, (Stockholm: Felicitas Publishing House, 2014).

⁵ Rastko Jovic, “Creștinismul ca o contracultură: speranța unei alternative”, in *Altarul Reîntregirii*, Serie nouă, XIX (2014), no. 3, 121. Despite of the fact that did not joined the WCC at that moment, the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented there: Athanasios Basdekis, „Introduction To Major Ecumenical Organizations With Relevance For Orthodox Churches”, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 42.

⁶ Mihai Săsăujan, „Romanian Orthodox Theologians as Pioneers of the Ecumenical Dialogue Between East and West: The Relevance and Topicality of Their Position in Uniting Europe,” 146-147.

know the others and develop a dialogue with.

Later, in 1920, at the Romanian Orthodox Church agreed with the invitation to become part of the „League of the Churches” that was to be created at the invitation of the Constantinople Patriarchate⁷ and as a delegate of the Romanian Patriarchate, Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan from Sibiu had a correspondence with bishop Nathan Soderblom,⁸ one of the pioneers of ecumenism and of the promotion of the conscience of European value.⁹ Despite of these aspects, there still are Romanian scholars who, until nowadays, consider the period between 1920 and 1948, one of non-involvement. Thus, for example, speaking about the history of the involvement of Romanian Orthodox Church in the ecumenical Movement, a Romanian theologian shows that:

„We can identify three distinct situations: 1920-1948 period, including the years of “stagnation” or “non-involvement”, 1948-1961, 2) 1961-1989 Period and 3) From 1990 until today.”¹⁰

1918 will be a year that will bring changes in the administrative structure of Romania. Among the later consequences of the union of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina with the former Kingdom, there will arrive in 1925 also the foundation of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. With this statute, the institution will become more interested in the field. Summarizing the activity from the beginning of the Patriarchate, there could be said that:

„The creation of Great Romania in 1918 would be followed by the re-organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church through a new statute written in 1925 (when it was raised to the rank of Patriarchate). Even though the Romanian Orthodox Church did not take part in the Assembly of Edinburgh (1910) it would be involved in the ecumenical movement. Thus, it sent a delegation to the preparatory meeting

⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸ For more information see: Bengt G. M. Sundkler, *Nathan Soderblom. His Life and Work*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Company, 2023) and: Nicolae Bălan, *Texte alese*, (Bistrița: Arcade Press, 2004).

⁹ Lucian N. Leuștean, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Making of the European Community*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26.

¹⁰ Aurel Pavel, „Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Romanian Orthodox Church”, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 365.

for the formation of the World Council of Churches, held in Geneva during 9-20 August 1920.

It is worth mentioning Romanian participation within the Commission "Faith and Order": a Romanian delegation took part in the first general meeting (3-31 August 1927, in Lausanne).¹¹

Unfortunately, in 1948, due to the fact that Romania was under the pressure of the Russian Communist regime, like all the other Orthodox Churches from the East-European part. It will be only in 1961 when it will be possible to join it, moment that will mark the cooperation of the two blocs¹². The fact will be related, in the Romanian space, with the fact that, starting from 1958, the Romanian Communist authorities will adopt a line of national autonomy (un-Sovietisation)¹³. To a general level, after Delhi Assembly there will be also a change in the WCC, namely the Trinitary base.

Starting from this moment, Romanian Orthodox Church will take part to all the assemblies of the WCC.¹⁴ Moreover, authors like Fr. Ion Bria even coordinated different books containing the Orthodox perspective on the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹² Lucian N. Leuștean, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Making of the European Community*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 88-89.

¹³ Aurel Pavel, „Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Romanian Orthodox Church”, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 366.

¹⁴ „The Romanian Church has participated since 1961 in all the studies and consultations, promoting the search for unity in faith and witness, for solidarity in justice and service, for participation in education and renewal. The themes of the Assemblies: “Jesus Christ, the Light of the World,” New Delhi, 1961; “I Make All Things New,” Uppsala, 1968; “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites,” Nairobi, 1975; “Jesus Christ, the Life of the World,” Vancouver, 1983, were well prepared by the Romanian theologians and specialists. The above themes were first discussed and elaborated in the country in the framework of the interconfessional conferences (an informal national ecumenical structure), and then presented to the working committee of the respective Assemblies. Not for the sake of statistics, but for underlining the sense of responsibility felt by the Romanian Church we mention that the findings of these conferences met with the appreciation of many ecumenical theologians and thinkers.” Nifon Ploiesteanu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement: An Assessment of 25 Years of Membership in WCC,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 39 (1987): p. 353. In Vancouver meeting, for example, Fr. Aurel Jivi, from Sibiu Orthodox Theological Institute offered a lecture on the Orthodox and took actively part to the debates. See: Aurel Jivi, “Orthodox Participation at Vancouver” in *Ecumenical Review* 36.2 (1984), 177.

topics approached there¹⁵ and theologians like Fr. Stăniloae contributed to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of ecumenism by bringing into debate topics like „open sobornicity”¹⁶ and overwhelming the challenge of writing theology in English language.¹⁷

Moreover, despite of the attitude of the regime towards the Church, there were a few important moments related with the role played by the Romanian Orthodox ecclesial structure in the field. The fact that Dr. Dan Ilie Ciobotea, who will later become Patriarch Daniel of Romanian taught at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey between 1980 and 1988¹⁸, together with the activity of the aforementioned Fr. Bria are sure to be mentioned. At his turn, Fr. Bria will bring Fr. Stăniloae, the most important Romanian theologian of the Romanian space into the ecumenical field and this will enrich the dialogue¹⁹ The ecumenical institute will also become a space of formation for future leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church, both as bishops and as scholars²⁰. Six future bishops will graduate it during the

¹⁵ See for example: Ion Bria (ed.), *Jesus Christ – the Life of the World. An Orthodox contribution to the Vancouver theme*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982); Ion Bria (ed.), *Martyria/ Mission. The witness of the Orthodox Churches today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980), where different authors from the Eastern Orthodox space provided an approach on different topics.

¹⁶ Cristian Sonea, „Between Hope and Disappointment: A Short Evaluation of the Romanian Orthodox Church Involvement in Ecumenism in the Post-Communist Era”, in *Reshaping Ecumenism in Times of Transformation*, (Leuven: Brill, 2021), 34-35. (DOI: 10.30965/9783657760152_004).

¹⁷ Marian Gh. Simion, Daniel Buda, „Terminological Orientations - a Short Introduction Into an Ecumenical Glossary”, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 50.

¹⁸ Paul Ladouceur, „Ecumenism Begins at Home: Orthodoxy and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church”, *Ecclesiology*, 19:3 (2023), 297-298. For details about his activity there, see also: Maxim Morariu, „Aspecte ale activității PF Părinte Patriarh Daniel la Institutul Ecumenic din Bossey (Aspects of the activity of His Beatitude Daniel at the Ecumenical Institute from Bossey)”, in *Renașterea*, 28: 10 (2017), 2.

¹⁹ For details see: Ciprian I. Toroczkai, „Father Dumitru Stăniloae and the Ecumenical Dialogue: Between Disproof and Acceptance”, in *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 5 (2013), no. 3: 362-371.

²⁰ For details, see: Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Story of Bossey: A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life*, Updated by Robert K. Welsh, foreword by Rev. Dagmar Heller, (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2016); Anu Talvivaara (ed.), *50 Years 1952-2002 of Ecumenical Formation at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey part of the World Council of Churches attached to the University of Geneva*, (Orthodruk: Bialystok, 2003), 38-39; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Studenti ortodocși români la Institutul Ecumenic din Bossey între anii 1963-2002

Communist period and some of the others will come there to take part of conferences or provide lectures on different topics (like the future Patriarch Justin Moisescu, or Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală of Transylvania).

In the context of the discussions regarding the role of the women in the Orthodox Church the Romanian Patriarchate organised in 1968 in Agapia the meeting of the ladies and a fruitful debate on the topic.²¹ Here, together with names of notoriety in the field, like Elisabeth Behr-Sigel²², the attendance counted also Romanian feminine names like Anca Manolescu, who at the time, was preparing a PhD thesis under the supervision of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae.²³

After 1990, there were difficult times for the relationship between Orthodoxy and ecumenism. The fact that, under certain conditions, of the Georgian Patriarchate (1997) and of the Bulgarian one (1998) put under discussions the need for ecumenical dialogue and the role of the Orthodox Churches there. The problems started earlier and aspects like the idea of „intercommunion”, already discussed in Vancouver meeting and considered as foreign to the Eastern Orthodox tradition²⁴ together with the increase of the number of ultra-conservators in the Orthodox space were part of the discussion. Despite of the wave that appeared also in the Romanian Orthodox space, the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to not leave the ecumenical space and contributed to the building of dialogue bridges.

Nowadays, after more than three decades since the fall of Communism, there are different realities. From two Theological institutes that existed between 1952 and 1989 (in Bucharest and Sibiu), now there are 16 ones and two extensions (one in Rome, Italy and one in Chişinău, Moldavian

(Romanian Orthodox students at the Ecumenical Institute from Bossey between 1963-2002)”, in Nicolae Dumbrăvescu, Gheorghe Dumbrăvescu, eds., *Tinerii istorici și cercetările lor*, 5th volume, (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut Publishing House, 2018), 183-192.

²¹ For details, see: Constance J. Tarasar and Irina Kirillova, (eds.), *Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church. Report on the Consultation of Orthodox Women September 11-17, 1976, Agapia, Romania*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977).

²² For more information about her life and activity, see: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *En marche vers l'unité. Point de vue d'une théologienne orthodoxe (On the road to unity. The point of view of an Orthodox theologian)*, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2017); Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day: The Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

²³ Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu, „Feminine Authorities in the Romanian Orthodox Theology of the 20th Century”, in *Revista Teologică*, Serie nouă, CI (2021), no. 2: 75-77.

²⁴ Daniel Buda, „On the Critical Role of Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement”, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 128.

Republic), all of them have the chair of *Missiology and Ecumenism* and they have an ecumenical character.²⁵ Professors who studied abroad, know ecumenical realities, speak several languages and are also scholars come to teach the students about the way how ecumenism can contribute to the development of the theology and can provide solutions to the contemporary problems. Despite of the scepticism of some of the ultra-conservative faithful and clergyman, encouraged by the bishops and the theologians, ecumenism has known both a qualitative and a quantitative increase and the relationships between different backgrounds both in Romania and outside have developed. In the last decade, the increase of immigration of Romanians has contributed to the development of the relationships between Romanian Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants also outside of the Romanian borders. Among the important initiatives there must be mentioned common projects related with the social and religious initiatives, but also moments of common prayer like the week of prayer for Christian unity that takes place every year both in Romania, like in other countries.

Romanian Orthodox Church and ecumenism
– case studies: Fr. Ioan Bria and Fr. Andre Scrima

The activity of an institution is related also with the way how some of its member chose to represent it. It is also the same in our situation. The role of the Romanian Orthodox Church increased due to the contribution and work of theologians like Fr. Ioan Bria, Fr. Andre Scrima, Dr. Dan Ilie-Ciobotea, who later has become the Patriarch of Romania, or Fr. Ioan Sauca (b. 1954), who worked under WCC since 1994 and until his retirement²⁶ and was for a couple of years acting General Secretary of WCC. Due to the limits of the present research, we will focus there only on two

²⁵ Aurel Pavel, „Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Romanian Orthodox Church”, *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 368.

²⁶ Paul Ladouceur, „Ecumenism Begins at Home: Orthodoxy and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church”, *Ecclesiology*, 19:3 (2023), 297-298. For more information about his life, activity and work, see: https://oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Sauca_bio_publications_Bossey.pdf, accessed 15. 11. 2024; Ioan Sauca, „The church beyond our boundaries: the ecumenical vocation of orthodoxy,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 56 (2004), no 2: 211-225; Ioan Sauca, „Ecumenical formation in Bossey: the holistic and inclusive model of academic study and research, life in community and shared spirituality,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 57(2005), no 1: 66-81; Ioan Sauca, „The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: An

of the profiles of the important Romanian theologians that activated in the ecumenical field, namely the first two of the aforementioned ones. Both of them started to get involved in the ecumenical life during the communist period, but in different context. Therefore, while Fr. Bria came there from Romania and was part of the Council both after 1989 and Fr. Scrima was a representative voice of the exile, fact that sometimes placed him in contradiction with people representing the official position of the Romanians during that period.

Fr. Ion Bria (1929-2002)

During the years, Fr. Bria has already benefited by different monographs, studies and articles dedicated to him.²⁷ Moreover, ideas like the one

Ecumenical Paradigm for Our Times: An Orthodox Viewpoint,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 66 (2014), no. 2: 168-178.

²⁷ See, for example: „Doru Marcu, Contemporary Critical Reflections on Ion Bria’s Vision for Ecumenical Dialogue,” in *Religions*, 15, 3, (369), (2024) 10.3390/rel15030369; Nicolae Moșoiu, (ed.), *The Relevance of Reverend Professor Ion Bria’s Work for Contemporary Society and for the Life of the Church: New Directions in the Research of Church Doctrine, Mission, and Unity*, (Sibiu: Andreiana Press, 2010); Daniel Buda, “The Relevance of Reverend Professor Ion Bria’s Work for Contemporary Society and for the Life of the Church,” *Ecumenical Review* 62:4 (2010), 433–35; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „A Romanian Contribution to Contemporary Ecumenism Father Ion Bria: 1929–2002,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, LXXI (2019), no. 1-2: 205-215; Doru Marcu, *A Critical Analysis of the Theological Positions and Ecumenical Activity of Ion Bria (1929-2002)*, (Craiova: Craiova Metropolitan See Publishing House, 2022); Mircea Păcurariu, “Bria, Ion.” in *Encyclopaedia of Romanian Orthodoxy*, coordinated by Mircea Păcurariu, (Bucharest: Press of Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2010), 104-105; Valentin-Ionuț Moșoiu, *Dimensiunea filantropică a expresiei „Liturghia după Liturghie” în gândirea părintelui profesor Ion Bria*, (Sibiu: Agnos, 2020); J. C. van der Merwe, „Bria, Ion 1996 – The Liturgy after the Liturgy, Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective”, *HTS Theologies Studies / HTS Theological Studies*, 53 (1997), no. 4, 1542; Nicolae Moșoiu, „Fr. Ion Bria”, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 194-200; Doru Marcu, *Relația dintre misiune și eclesologie în viziunea Pr. Prof. Ion Bria*, (Craiova: Craiova Metropolitan See Publishing House, 2022); Ioan Tulcan, Cristinel Ioja, *Omagiu. Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria (1929-2002). The reception of his theological thinking and its relevance for the overpass of the ecumenical & missionary deadlock*, (Arad: „Aurel Vlaicu University Press, 2009); Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez: itinerarele unei credințe și teologii de deschidere*, (Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2005).

of the „liturgy after the liturgy”, developed both in an article and in a book²⁸ has already constituted the topic of research and discussion for several research in the ecumenical area. Despite of this and of the fact that his works²⁹ are until nowadays referred, not many people know who was Fr. Bria.

He was born on 19th of June 1929 in Teleaga village, Prahova County, Romania. He started to study theology in Bucharest in 1950, influenced by his sister, who decided to become a nun. Previously, he studied in his native town, and later he will graduate the highschool in Poliești. After the graduation of the high school he would be admitted to the faculty of Oil and Gases and at the one of Agronomy in Bucharest, but, unfortunately, for political reasons he will have to give up with and start with theology, that he will graduate in 1954. Here, as a student, he will meet Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, with whom he will later become a friend. Between 1955 and 1957 he will also graduate the Magisterium in Bucharest. It will be this period when he will start to publish his first articles.³⁰ Recommended by Fr. Stăniloae he will become a teacher in Buzău Theological Seminary, where he will stay between 1957 and 1962. In 1961 he will be part of the Romanian delegation to Prague conference together with the future Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Justin Moisescu. Later, between 1962 and 1963 he will

²⁸ Ion Bria, „Liturgy after the Liturgy”, in Nicholas Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 705-706; Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996); Ion Bria, „Liturgy after the liturgy”, in *International Review of Mission*, 87: 265 (1) (1978), 86-90.

²⁹ For more information about his work, see: Ion Bria, „The Eastern Orthodox in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Ecumenical Review*, 38 (1986), no. 2, p. 216-227; Ion Bria, „L'espérance du Grand Synode Orthodoxe,” in *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, 8 (1977), no. 1: 51-54; Ion Bria, Philippe Chanson, Jacques Gadille, Marc Spindler (eds.), *Dictionnaire ecumenique de missiologie. Cent mots pour mission*, (Paris: Cerf, 2001); Ion Bria, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă – A – Z*, (Bucharest: Press of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of Romanian Orthodox Church, 1981); Ion Bria, *Romania. Orthodox Identity at a Crossroads of Europe*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995); Ion Bria, „Reflections on Mission Theology and Methodology”, in *International Review of Mission*, 73 (1984), no. 1: 66-72; Ion Bria, *Ortodoxia în Europa. Locul spiritualității românești* (Iasi: The Metropolitan seat of Moldavia and Bucovina, 1995); Ion Bria, *Destinul Ortodoxiei*, (Bucharest: The Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1989); Ion Bria, „Dynamics of Resurrection in the Church's Tradition and Mission,” *International Review of Mission*, 98 (2003), no. 2, p. 261-265; Ion Bria, „Widening the Ecclesiological Basis of the Ecumenical Fellowship,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 56 (2004), no. 2, p. 199-210.

³⁰ Doru Marcu, *Relația dintre misiune și eclesiologie în viziunea Pr. Prof. Ion Bria*, 22.

study in St Augustine's College in Canterbury, and in 1966, in the theological faculty of Durham University, in Northern England.³¹ Meanwhile he will also prepare his PhD thesis in Bucharest Theological institute, that will be partially published in *Theological Studies*, the journal of the Romanian Patriarchate and will focus on aspects like the unity of the Churches.³² Meanwhile he was also a professor in Bucharest Theological Institute from 1962, editor of the Biblical Institute Press (1966-1968) and since 1973, he worked for the WCC. He was appointed there to coordinate the Orthodox Missionary studies in the Commission for Mission and Evangelization and he stayed there until his retirement in 1994.³³ There he authored or co-authored 32 books, 18 collections of courses and academic lectures and more than 280 studies and articles.³⁴ As a contemporary scholar underlines it:

“He is the Romanian theologian who published the most books and studies abroad, who delivered the most conferences outside the country, and who attended the most international ecumenical meetings, including the General Assemblies of the WCC: Nairobi (1975), Vancouver (1983), Canberra (1991) and Harare (1998).”³⁵

Topics like „synergy”, „work of grace”, „liturgy”, „Baptism”, „communion” or „diakonia” constitute the keywords of his ecumenical and interdisciplinary work.³⁶ Thorough concepts like „liturgy after the liturgy”, that he developed from Yannoulatos³⁷ he managed to create bridges among different churches and in the same time to enrich the ecumenical dialogue

³¹ Morariu, „A Romanian Contribution to Contemporary Ecumenism Father Ion Bria: 1929–2002,” 206.

³² See: Ion Bria, „Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericii (teză de doctorat)” [Dogmatic aspects of the union of churches (PhD Thesis)], *Studii Teologice* 20:1 (1968), 3–170. Partial conclusions of the thesis will be published also in: Ion Bria, „Orient et Occident,” *Istina* 14:2 (1969), 193–250. Previously he also published a part of the thesis in: Ion Bria, „Infailibilitatea Bisericii”, in *Ortodoxia* 12:4 (1960), 494–504.

³³ Morariu, „A Romanian Contribution to Contemporary Ecumenism Father Ion Bria: 1929–2002,” 207.

³⁴ Nicolae Moșoiu, „Fr. Ion Bria”, 194.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 194.

³⁶ Morariu, „A Romanian Contribution to Contemporary Ecumenism Father Ion Bria: 1929–2002,” 207.

³⁷ Pavel Aurel, “Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos’ Contribution to the Development of Orthodox Missionary Theology,” in *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 6:1 (2015), 73. Cf. Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes with a Practical Guide* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 9. 17 See also: *In-*

by providing an Orthodox perspective on some of its key aspects.³⁸ Therefore, for example, he identified a few ecclesiological theses with ecumenical implications, as Nicolae Moşoiu shows:

„Father Bria identifies also seven ecclesiological theses with ecumenical implications: the concept of visible, historical unity; *vestigia ecclesiae* (tangible signs of apostolicity and catholicity preserved in a variety of forms and structures); the “boundaries” of the Church (some Orthodox theologians refer to the “charismatic boundaries” of the Church); *oikonomia* as an ecumenical typology; the reception of theological convergences which arise from ecumenical dialogues; uniatism; and the use of the Byzantine rite.”³⁹

During the time, his work was rewarded by different distinctions all around the work. The fact that, until nowadays his work are refereed in the ecumenical field and their author constitutes both the topic of discussion of several studies and articles, doctoral thesis, conferences of monographs comes to speak about their value and about the work developed by the Romanian theologian in the ecumenical field.

Fr. Andre Scrima (1925-2000)

Compared with Fr. Ion Bria, Fr. Scrima has a different profile. He is not an employee of the World Council of Churches, but rather a representative voice of the Romanian exile from France and a clergyman with a special ecumenical vocation. According to the scholars, he will manage to illustrate in his life the power of the spiritual ecumenism⁴⁰

ternational Review of Mission 64:256 (October 1975), 417–21, for the report of the consultation where the term was used for the first time.

³⁸ Thus, as a contemporary researcher underlines: „Concerning the Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement, Father Bria underlines that in the period 1948 to 1980, the Orthodox elaborated ecclesiological criteria and principles of positive collaboration with the World Council of Churches. The main point is that the ecumenical issue is not the unity of the Church per se, which is God’s gift and is preserved in a historic and visible way in the Orthodox Church – *Una Sancta* but the historical divisions between the Christians. The schism does not lie within the Church, but in the separation of the Christian confessions from the undivided Church, which directly continues the apostolic and patristic Tradition.” Nicolae Moşoiu, „Fr. Ion Bria”, 194.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴⁰ According to the formula of fr. Nicu Dumitraşcu. See: Nicu Dumitraşcu, “Andre Scrima and the Power of Spiritual Ecumenism,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 68 (2016): 272-281.

Born in Gheorgheni (today city in Covasna Department), he graduated Faculty of Philosophy in Bucharest and has become Anton Dumitriu's assistant in Bucharest University. Later he will graduate also the Romanian Orthodox Theological Institute in Bucharest and will serve for a few years also as a professor in the Neamț Monastic Seminary (where he will also receive the monastic tonsure) and in the Romanian Patriarchate Library. Here, he will be sometimes used by the Patriarch Justinian as a translator. In this context, will impress the vice-president of India Radjihistan with his Sanskrit knowledge and will receive a scholarship in Benares university, where he will write a PhD thesis dedicated to the relationships between Orthodox Theology and Buddhism. Once he left Romania in 1956,⁴¹ he will refuse to return. On the road to India he will visit the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, where he will give some lectures about Orthodoxy, he will visit Mount Athos and after defending the thesis in Benares, he will return to Paris. Here, he will receive the French citizenship and will meet Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras,⁴² who will make him the Archimandrite of the Patriarchate and send him as his personal delegate in the Second Vatican Council.⁴³ The impression that Scrima will make on the participants of the event will be a very positive one. Later he will organize the meeting between Pope and Patriarch in Jerusalem and will draft the document for the enlivenment of the Anathemas between the two churches.⁴⁴ Later as a professor in Benares, Le Saulchoir or Brussels, or as an Abbot in Deir-el-Harf monastery in Lebanon, he will also practically contribute to the development of the ecumenical dialogue. His visits in countries like Israel or the fact that he offered lectures in different universities among the world and was considered a respected scholar⁴⁵ raised also the interest of

⁴¹ Andrei Pleșu, *Prefață [Foreword]*, in: Andrei Scrima, *Timpul Rugului aprins [Time of Burning bush]*, (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 1996), 9.

⁴² Virgil Gheorghiu, *Life of Patriarch Athenagoras [Viața Patriarhului Atenagora]*, (Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea Press, 2009).

⁴³ Jean Puyo, *Une vie pour la vérité, Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar*, (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1975), 144-148. Teodor Baconsky, *Turn înclinat. Fragmente de arheologie profetică*, (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2007), 158-159.

⁴⁴ Morariu, „The Romanian Orthodox Youth in the Ecumenical Movement: History and Potential Future”, 154.

⁴⁵ Among his publications, see: C. J. Dumont, «Pour un dialogue sur la piété hesychaste», in *Istina*, an 5 (1958), nr. 3, 293-294. Cf. Andre Scrima, «L'avenement philocalique dans l'Orthodoxie roumaine», in *Istina*, an 5 (1958), nr. 3 p. 295-398; Andre Scrima, «L'avenement

the Romanian Securitate who followed him all the time after his departure⁴⁶ from the native country. Moreover, the fact that he contradicted directly in some of the ecumenical meetings the officials of the Romanian Orthodox Church, constituted an important reason for the representatives of the Romanian Secret Policy to try to compromise him.

Conclusions

As we have tried to show there too, despite of some of the social and cultural aspects that were not favourable to the ecumenical dialogue, the Romanian Orthodox Church was interested, both to an institutional and particular level, to be in contact with the Ecumenical field. It took part on the meeting organised by Nathan Soderblom, joined WCC in 1961, when this was possible and sent important theologians to study in the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey (like the future Metropolitan Nestor Vornicescu, the future Archbishop Timotei Sevcicu, the bishop of Oradea Ioan Mihălțan and s. o.), or to teach there (like Dr. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea who will later become the Patriarch of Romania, or Fr. Ioan Sauca, who will be for more than two decades the director of the institute and for a while he will be also the acting General Secretary of WCC). In the same time, thorough the fact of sending delegates to all the Assemblies of WCC, hosting some of the meetings (like the one of the women in Cernica Monastery, in the seventh decade of the 20th century), or sending theologians like Fr. Ion Bria to work there, the Romanian Orthodox Church proved the commitment to the dialogue and the interest to share its values and to know and understand the

ment philocalique dans l'Orthodoxie roumaine», în *Istina*, an 5 (1958), nr. 1, p. 493-416; Andre Scrima, «L'avenement philocalique dans l'Orthodoxie roumaine», în *Istina*, an 5 (1958), nr. 4, p. 443-474. Cf. Teodor Baconsky, *Darul desăvârșit. Gânduri despre civilizația creștină*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2018, p. 77-84.

⁴⁶ For details, see: Iuliu-Marius Morariu, Ecumenism and Communism in the Romanian Context: Fr. Andre Scrima in the Archives of the Securitate”, in *Religions*, 12 (2021), no. 9: 719. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090719> (WOS:000702024400001); Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Elements of Father Andrei Scrima’s Ecumenical Activity as Reflected in File No. 0005468 from the “Securitate” Archives”, in *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 12 (2020), issue 3, p. 497-511. Ioan Alexandru Tofan, *Omul lăuntric. André Scrima și fizionomia experienței spirituale (The inner man. André Scrima and the physiognomy of spiritual experience)*, (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2019); Ioan Alexandru Tofan, *André Scrima, un „gentleman creștin“. Portret biografic (André Scrima, a “Christian gentleman”. Biographical portrait)*, (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2021).

values of other. Despite of some of the problems regarding the belonging to the Ecumenical Movement after 1990 and the withdrawal of the two Churches, namely the Bulgarian and Georgian one, the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to remain in the council and to contribute to the pilgrimage hosted by it. In the same time, when it was necessary, theologians, like the aforementioned Fr. Bria, Fr. Stăniloae, Fr. Aurel Pavel or others, also underlined the disagreement of some of its ideas with the Orthodox tradition and spirituality. Moreover, Fr. Bria identified ecclesiological and Christological topics with ecumenical implications and created bridges of dialogue, while Fr. Scrima, thorough his work established relations and developed a real dialogue with people having other theological backgrounds and promoted,⁴⁷ as he called, a „centered openness,”⁴⁸ meant both to invite the others to share their values, but in the same time, based on the honesty and on the clearly defined background of his or her interlocutor.

⁴⁷ Cf. Mihai Iulian Dancă, *Experianța apofatică a unității în opera lui Andre Scrima*, (Oradea: Ratio et Revelatio Press, 2024), 9.

⁴⁸ Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, *Despre Destin. Un dialog (teoretic și confesiv) despre cea mai dificilă temă a muritorilor*, (*About the destiny. A dialogue (theoretical and testimonial) about the most difficult topic of the mortals*), (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020), 92.

