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Peter De Mey, KU Leuven



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Between September 2014 and February 2015, he received an Erasmus scholarship from the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. In the academic year 2015-2016, he graduated the Research Master: Master of Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion, Catholic University of Leuven. Since August 2017, he is Osijek Doctoral Colloquium Alumnus student. He attended the Doctoral School of Orthodox Theology “Saint Nicodemus”, University of Craiova, where he obtained the title of Doctor in Theology, specialization Missiology and Ecumenism (September 2016 - November 2021).

Since September 2017, he started his activity as a pre-university professor at the Orthodox Theological Seminary “Saint Gregory the Theologian”, Craiova. Since March 15, 2020, he was ordained deacon in the Romanian Orthodox Church by His Holiness Dr. Irineu, Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan of Oltenia. He is also married with Marga-Elena and has a son named Spiridon-Grigorie.



Doru Marcu

A Critical Analysis of the Theological Positions and Ecumenical Activity of Ion Bria (1929-2002)

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Published with the Blessing of † **Dr. IRINEU**,
Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan of Oltenia

Foreword by **Prof. Dr. Peter De Mey**

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FOREWORD

The monograph *A Critical Analysis of the Theological Positions and Ecumenical Activity of Ion Bria (1929-2002)* is the master's thesis defended by Dr. Marcu Doru at the KU Leuven's Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in 2016 under my supervision. The monograph is an important piece of research to the field of ecumenism in the second half of the past century, with particular focus on the work of a Romanian Orthodox theologian who acted as a staff member of the World Council of Churches and served the cause of Christian unity.

The relevance of Dr. Doru's monograph is twofold. Firstly, it fills an important gap in the literature on contemporary ecumenism by focusing on a largely and unfairly neglected Orthodox protagonist in the movement for Christian reconciliation. Therefore, this monograph, which draws on previously unknown material from the archives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, constitutes a valuable resource for theologians, researchers, and students interested in the contribution of Ion Bria to rapprochement between Christian churches. Secondly, Bria's theology, which is the central topic of this monograph, is an important source of inspiration for the revitalization of the culture of dialogue in our churches and societies, which have lately been confronted with the phenomenon of polarization on religious and non-religious

issues. What Christian churches need today are voices from within to rekindle and strengthen their dialogical spirit and willingness to listen and learn from one another.

Undoubtedly, the publication of Marcu Doru's doctoral dissertation will inform further discussions on the Romanian Orthodox Church's contribution to ecumenism. The work is well written, and the chapters of the monographs develop gradually the arguments put forward by the author. Informative and insightful throughout, the originality of this monograph lays in the combination of sources and the ability to systematize a whole range of bibliographical material. With all this in mind, I am convinced that Dr. Doru's research work deserves a wide and critical reading, especially by theologians and scholars interested in ecumenism, missiology, Orthodox theology, and contemporary church history.

Prof. Dr. Peter De Mey,

KU Leuven,

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies,

6 June 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On the second of July, two decades will be marked since the passing to the eternal ones of Fr. Ion Bria. As a tribute, I dedicate the publication of this master's thesis to the memory of our theologian and priest. The work was presented in 2016 at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. This version presents short modifications and additions, and this is due to my intention to publish the doctoral thesis - *The relationship between mission and ecclesiology in the vision of Fr. Prof. Ion Bria* - defended in November 2021 at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Craiova, Romania.

This Master's thesis came to an end because I had important persons who helped me to work on it. In this way I want to express my gratitude for some special persons.

I begin, first of all, to thank to our God, who gave me courage to study in Leuven. I felt his protection during my studies so I am grateful for this real help.

I am honored by the blessing of His Holiness Irineu, Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan of Oltenia, to publish this work. I would also like to thank Father Prof. Dr. Boldișor Adrian, the Director of 'Mitropolia Olteniei' Publishing House.

Then, I express my profound esteem to my promoter, Prof. Dr. Peter De Mey. I warmly extend to him all my gratitude. I discovered in him not just a professor but a real friend. His guidance and commentaries were very helpful for my research and I would say I finished thanks to him.

Equally important, I want to express my acknowledgement for all those who, in various ways, helped me during my studies in Leuven and also for writing this thesis: Fr. George Vălcu, priest for the Romanian Orthodox community in Antwerpen, where I found more than a church, precisely a warmly family; Bogdan-Gabriel Drăghici, who assisted me to correct my English vocabulary; Dr. Viorel Coman, who had an important role to study on Bria's theology; Fr. Mihai-Mario Dorin, my Romanian friend with whom I studied in Bucharest and Leuven; Prof. Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece; Fr. Antoine Lambrechts, from Chevetogne Monastery; Anne-Emmanuelle Tankam and Hans Rütte, the archivists of the World Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva; Kim Valérie, librarian of the World Council of Churches, The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey; Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka, Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva.

Last but not least, my thanks go also to my dear parents, Ion and Maria, and to my sisters, Gina, Viorica and Sorina, whose words of encouragement and prayers contributed in a unique way to the fulfilment of this stage in my research studies. In particular, I would like to thank my wife, Marga Elena, and my son Spiridon-Grigorie, who supported me in publishing this work.

Doru Marcu,

The Feast of Pentecost,

12 June 2022

SUMMARY

The Orthodox Churches are part of the ecumenical movement with the inner wish to clarify the theological elements which keep the whole Christianity divided. For this goal, every Church is represented somehow in discussions by her theologians who are training to carry a theological dispute at this level. The Romanian Orthodox Church was indirectly represented in the World Council of Church by professor *Ion Bria* (1929-2002), who had worked officially at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva for more than 20 years.

This theological research has the aim to speak to us about Bria's personality and ecumenical activity. In order to accomplish this goal, I will expand my research in three chapters. In the first one, I will present his biographical life. Until this moment he remains the most important Romanian theologian involved in the ecumenical dialogue. The second chapter deals with the history of the modern ecumenical movement and also with Bria's perspective on the dialogue between Orthodoxy and ecumenism, which are for him two correlative elements. Bria comes to confront the anti-ecumenical part within the Orthodox Church who does not accept the Christian dialogue being afraid of heresy. Bria explain how through dialogue, the line between Orthodoxy and the other Christians can be overrun. In the third chapter I explain the missionary concept 'liturgy

after the Liturgy', both historically and theologically. Being aware that there are some uncertainties around this concept I decided to clarify it in a proper way. Bria is known as the promoter of this concept, so I will search to find out who is the originator of this expression as such. In the same chapter I will analyze the ecclesiological elements from Bria's writings. The ecumenical dialogue is interpreted of being an ecclesiological problem *par excellence* so I will outline Bria's position regarding the teaching of the Church. In conclusion I will present in a synthetic way the results of this study.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In our globalized context, the dialogue of Christian Churches should not be avoided. More than ever, Christians and even non-Christians, want to know more about what we call the ‘divisions of Christianity’ in the history and in the present day. The efforts of ecumenical theology moved and keep moving for this sole purpose. It is trying to clarify what we inherited, namely a Christianity divided by schisms and heresies. Of course, to these we have to add the non-theological factors, which all had their part in this unhappy story. Today the dialogue is focused on analyzing the main theological problems while holding the inner conviction that the past unity can be restored. But in order to accomplish this, more people need to be committed to this goal.

Modern ecumenical dialogue gathered many theologians who left their marks upon the discussions. One important person within the ecumenical movement was professor Ion Bria, a theologian and a priest belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church, a person who dedicated almost his academic entire life to the ecumenical theology.

As already announced by the title, this study focuses on his theological and ecumenical activity. Consequently, the objective of my research is to reflect in a critical way on the personality of Ion Bria. I felt that his experience, and especially his theological ideas, could help to revitalize the ecumenical debate of our time.

Especially for the Romanian context, Bria's perspective can be a good bridge between what we know about ecumenism and what we should know. It must be said from the beginning that Romanian theology was monopolized by Dumitru Stăniloae, another Romanian theologian, and unfortunately, close to no attention is given for other theologians. The fact that only one theologian stands out can be damaging in numerous ways. For example, before his death in 1993, Stăniloae criticized the ecumenical dialogue, so that in Romania, because of his preeminence, this type of discussions is not very well promoted. Paradoxically, Bria was Stăniloae's disciple and friend, but because of this critique regarding ecumenism, Bria's theology is not promoted in the Romanian faculties.

The limits of my research are: (a) it does not deal with all of Bria's works. There were some articles in Greek, in Italian and in German which I did not have access to, but I have read almost all his writings in English, French and Romanian; (b) it does not analyze the new theological developments within the ecumenical dialogue. I just make some particular references to the new works or events but the study is focusing on Bria's theology.

Since the thesis attempts to study Bria's ecumenical activity and theological ideas, my methodology involves a mix of historical, analytical and comparative approaches. I have the intention to publish this study for the Romanian audience in order to help the younger theologians to

overcome the preconceptions regarding the ecumenical dialogue so it contains many historical details, which normally would not be mentioned.

In the first chapter I will sketch important moments of Bria's life. I think it is very important to know who we talk about when we are making an analysis of his theology. The historical context is also an important element for understanding the theological perspectives.

In the second chapter I will make a presentation on the wider ecumenical dialogue. I will begin by presenting what we need to know about the modern ecumenical movement. Then, I will write in short about the Orthodox Church in this dialogue, both theologically and historically. The next section will deal with the presence of the Romanian Orthodox Church in this dialogue. It should be known that Ion Bria is a Romanian national, baptized within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The historical context helped him to work in the World Council of Churches (WCC) immediately after the Romanian Church was received as an official member. In the last part of the chapter, I will analyze Bria's vision on ecumenism. Many voices criticize the presence of the Orthodox Church within this structure and dialogue. Because of this I will explore Bria's opinion regarding ecumenism and how the Orthodox people should act in accordance with our beliefs regarding the development of the ecumenical discussions.

For the third chapter, I will focus in the first part on the missionary perspective of Bria through the concept of the 'liturgy after the (Divine) Liturgy'. In this section I will unravel who formulated this concept and the context in which it was defined. There are many ambiguities regarding the paternity of this expression, so I will make an attempt to clarify this dilemma. I will also make an analysis on Bria's theological vision of this concept. In the second part of the chapter, I will make an appreciation about the ecclesiological elements from Bria's ecumenical theology. The ecumenical problem has to do with how we define the Church so this part of the chapter has its role. We know that the Orthodox understanding on the Church is a stumbling block for the other Christian Churches. In this situation Bria's perspective can be used either to keep this stone or to remove it.

The overall conclusions of the study will outline a final statement on the personality and theology of Ion Bria. Also, I will add a few theological reflections about the problem of ecumenism today.

CHAPTER ONE

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

I. Introduction

The importance of offering a summary albeit essential presentation of Ion Bria's life is given by two clear reasons. First, it is important for the readers to know the origins of the analysed author. I consider knowing the place, time and context in which a person was born, raised and developed his theological insights to be very important. As Bria was a Romanian theologian, biographical elements are preserved only in his native language. This leads us to the second reason which imposes upon us this short biography: the inaccessibility of foreign readers to these documents. Consequently, a short English biography is welcomed. Nevertheless, the most important elements about his past are to be found in his Romanian post-mortem autobiography¹.

¹ Complete reference: Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez: itinerarele unei credințe și teologii de deschidere* (Alba Iulia: Editura Reîntregirea, 2005). Also to be consulted: Nicolae Moșoiu, ed., *Relevanța operei părintelui profesor Ion Bria pentru viața bisericească și socială actuală: direcții noi de cercetare în domeniul doctrinei, misiunii și unității bisericii* (Sibiu: Editura Universitatea Lucian Blaga, 2010), 9-17. This work represents the result of the international conference dedicated to Ion Bria which took place at the Sibiu Faculty of Theology in May 2009 to which distinguished foreign professors were invited. Unfortunately, the volume is available only in Romanian. However, there are a few articles in English as well as a short biography. See also: Nicolae Moșoiu, "Omagiu Pr. Prof. Ion Bria," in *Revista Teologică* 10, no. 1 (2000): 113-157.

I. 1. The Origins of Bria

Ion Bria was born on the 19th of June 1929 in a Romanian village called Telega (Prahova district) as the second of ten children of Ion Gheorghe and Maria Bria. His father was the one who ensured the family's economic stability as he worked as an engineer in the oil industry and later, starting with 1948, as director of the "Muntenia" Oil Company from Câmpina. His mother, Maria, took care of the children's upbringing and education as she was considered as „the family throne which gave to each of her ten children their own destiny”².

As a child Bria went to primary school in his village (1936-1940). The settlement passed through a social transition starting with the interbellum, namely from the agrarian to oil and forest exploitation. With the beginning of the Second World War another change was brought, this time in the religious life of the village. The memory of this change Bria carried all his life especially because it foretold what was going to happen under the communist regime. More precisely, because of the war situation, the Christian community had to gather in the houses of certain faithful as it was difficult to reach the church. In this context, his family put a bigger room at the priest's disposal in order to become a small domestic chapel (*ecclesia domestica*)³.

² Ion Bria, *op. cit.*, 22.

³ Id., "My pilgrimage in Mission," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (2002): 74.

Here, they organized religious meetings and most of the times the priest offered confession and even communion to the children. There was also a small lay group called “Oastea Domnului” (Army of God)⁴ which used this location for its religious gatherings.

He made a transition from village to city during his gymnasium years (1940-1944) and with the enrollment in the “Spiru Haret” High School from Ploiești (1944-1948). During this time, he met with his parents especially during the vacations. Also, the fact that during this period Bria entered in contact with the nuns of the Zamfira Monastery needs to be mentioned. He was housed there for a short period of time. Bria frequented the Sunday and feast day communal services and managed to already know both the songs of the Liturgy and the life rhythm of a monastic community. Later, one of his sisters, Zenobia, entered this monastery.

I. 2. University Studies

After graduating and obtaining the Bacculaureate diploma he wanted to enroll into university. After being admitted to two universities from Bucharest (The Faculty of Oil and Gases and the Faculty of Agronomy) he

⁴ The Army of God is a spiritual movement of the Romanian Orthodox Church which was founded in 1923 at the initiative of a priest named Iosif Trifa. It presently functions as an Orthodox religious association.

decided to take the road of theology. This was because the influence of the time spent into Zamfira Monastery. This moment meant a great shift for him. The Theological Institute of Bucharest was reopened in December 1950. Here Ion Bria started his theological education as he was admitted receiving a scholarship from the Archdiocese of Bucharest. After a few years he said that for him:

The Bucharest Faculty of Theology meant, above all, a college where great university professors taught and conquered me with the amplitude of their science, through the essential treating of the subjects, through their passion for theology *per se*.⁵

⁵ Ion Bria, *op. cit.*, 56. The Bachelor courses gave him the opportunity to enter into contact with the great Romanian theology professors from the first half of the 20th century such as Ioan Coman, Teodor M. Popescu, Justin Moiescu, Ene Braniște, Liviu Stan, Dumitru Stăniloae and many more. The relation of apprenticeship and friendship with the great Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae started with Bria being admitted into the Theological Institute in 1950. At the end of the fourth year, he was assigned by his colleagues to give a gratitude speech for father Stăniloae who responded with a gesture of fatherly gratitude and hugged him. Bria's relationship with father Stăniloae continued for the rest of the latter's life. It is a well-known fact that when he was working for the World Council of Churches, he promoted father Stăniloae abroad and insisted on him participating to certain conferences. A few letters exchanged between the two are preserved. For more details, see: Emanuel Răzvan Fibișan, "Reflectarea teologiei părintelui Stăniloae în gândirea teologică, misionară și ecumenică a părintelui

Ion Bria graduated the courses of this Theological Institute with distinguished results (1950-1954). He wrote a bachelor thesis with the title: “The Infallibility of the Church – Dogmatic Basis of Union” coordinated by Professor Nicolae Chițescu⁶.

Shortly after finishing his bachelor studies, as advised by rector Ioan Coman, he enrolled in the Master courses at the same Theological Institute (1954-1957). He was part of the Dogmatic Theology Department which was coordinated by Professor Dumitru Stăniloae. Evidently his acceptance for these studies represented a new stage in his training. It was „a radical registry change”, as our theologian considered it.

I. 3. Ion Bria *the Professor*

Truly provocative for him was the moment when he started teaching, after obtaining the degree of Master.

Ion Bria,” in Nicolae Morar and Daniel Lemeni, eds., *Analele Universității de Vest din Timișoara. Seria Teologie* 19 (Timișoara, 2014), 49-64; Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez*, 345 - 352; Id., “Homage au Père Dumitru Stăniloae,” in *Contacts* 31, no. 105 (1979): 64-75; Id., “Pour situer la théologie du Père Stăniloae,” in *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 112, no. 2 (1980): 133-137; Id., “The creative vision of Dumitru Stăniloae. An introduction to his theological thought,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 33, no. 1 (1981): 53-59. See also: Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: SPCK, 2015), 127-142.

⁶ The summary of this thesis was published in: Ion Bria, “Infailibilitatea Bisericii-temei dogmatic al unirii,” in *Ortodoxia* 12, no. 3 (1960): 494-504.

This was done at the insistence of father Stăniloae who recommended Bria for the vacant position at the Theological Seminary “Chesarie the Bishop” from Buzău. The teaching activity that took place between November 1957 and October 1962 had a positive impact on him as a theologian. In this context he met Ecaterina Pungoci. She was the daughter of a priest and a student at the Buzău Nursing School. She became his wife on the 22nd of July 1963.

In 1960, although under communist regime, the Orthodox Church still had a busy agenda. More precisely there were three important international Church policy events, namely: the participation at the Rhodes inter-Orthodox conference⁷, the Romanian Orthodox Church being accepted into the World Council of Churches at the General Assembly that took place in New Delhi (1961) and the General Assembly of the Christian Conference for Peace held in Prague. For these events special commissions formed by young theologians were created in order to help formulate some points of view regarding these events. Bria was proposed to take part of the commission that debated the acceptance of the Romanian Church in the WCC. He defined this moment the beginning of his ecumenical journey.

⁷ See: Viorel Ioniță, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. The Decisions of the Pan – Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, trans. by Remus Rus (Friedrich-Reinhardt-Verlag-Basel: Institute for Ecumenical Studies-University of Fribourg, 2014), 38-43, 131-133.

His first participation in an international theological and ecumenical context was represented by the Christian Conference of Prague that took place in June 1961. The Romanian delegation was led by Justin Moisescu, the Metropolitan of Moldavia and future patriarch of Romania (1977-1986)⁸. Here Bria had the chance to meet some of the most prominent figures of the time such as Emilio Castro, Josef Hromadka, Georges Cassalis etc⁹.

His professorship in Buzău ended in 1962 when he managed to be transferred to the Bucharest Theological Seminary for the department “Catechism, Dogmatics, Homiletics and Canon law” where he will be a part-time professor until December 1964.

I. 4. Postgraduate Studies in the Occident

The encounter with the Ecumenical Occident took place immediately after the Romanian Church was accepted in the WCC. More precisely, after New Delhi (1961), the general secretary of the WCC, W.A. Visser ’t Hooft¹⁰, made a visit to Romania. As he was impressed

⁸ See the article of Ion Bria, “Patriarhul Justin al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române,” in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 86, no. 7-8 (1986): 13-15. See also: “Visit of the Romanian Patriarch to the World Council of Churches,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 34, no. 1 (1982): 77-80.

⁹ He also participated at the next two Conferences for Peace organized in Prague (Czech Republic) in 1964 and 1968.

¹⁰ Bria admired the activity of General Secretary ’t Hooft and wrote an article *in memoriam* when he passed away: Ion Bria, “Dr. W.A. Visser ’t Hooft (1900-1985),” in *Ortodoxia* 28, no. 3 (1986): 154-

by the vitality of the Church, he granted three scholarships for “special ecumenical studies” to the Romanian theologians. The destinations were: the United Kingdom, France and Switzerland. As proposed by Metropolitan Justin Moisescu, Bria went in October 1962 to England, to the Anglican College “Saint Augustine” from Canterbury where he remained until June 1963¹¹. Here he followed the postgraduate classes in Anglican missiology. In April 1963 the three young Romanian students were summoned for an ecumenical formation class which was organized by the WCC and for an Orthodox seminary on the cult which was organized by the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey¹², which also belonged to the WCC.

After his return to Romania, he continued his didactic activity. In January 1965 Bria was appointed assistant for the Bucharest Theological Institute. In the same year he was ordained deacon, and later, in 1972 Bria was ordained priest by Patriarch Justinian himself (1948-1977).

160. See also: Id., “The Eastern Orthodox in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 38, no. 2 (1986): 216-227.

¹¹ More details about this scholarship can be found in: “Tineri teologi români în străinătate,” in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 81, nos. 7-8 (1963): 717-723, where the three young Romanian students who received the three scholarships to study abroad are named: Constantin Drăgușin, Ilie Georgescu and Ion Bria.

¹² About the Ecumenical Institute see: Hans Ruedi-Weber, *A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life: The Story of Bossey 1946-1996* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

A new chance for studying abroad arose at the beginning of 1966, when he was asked to accept a new ecumenical scholarship in the United Kingdom. Consequently, between March and June 1966, Bria went to the Faculty of Theology in Durham. It must be noted that this scholarship was offered as a result of the intensive dialogue carried by the Romanian Patriarchy and the Anglican Church, which also entailed a student and professor exchange. The collaboration included a visit of Patriarch Justinian to England which took place in June 1966 with Bria being the one who accompanied the Romanian delegation throughout the visit. Furthermore, due to this dialogue, the Romanian Patriarchy received paper from the Biblical Society of London so that it could print 100,000 bibles, which happened in 1968. For this event, Bria had the task of translating the correspondence between the Patriarchy and the Biblical Society and receiving the delegation from London in order to verify the reality of the printing and distribution of the Bibles to parishes around the country¹³.

¹³ See: Ion Bria, "Vizita patriarhului Justinian la Biserica Angliei și la Consiliul Ecumenic al Bisericilor," in *Mitropolia Olteniei* 18, nos. 9-10 (1966): 883-889. The visit of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch is remembered by theologian Vasil T. Istavridis, "The Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement 1948-1968," in Harold E. Fey, ed., *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 2, 1948-1968* (London: SPCK, 1970), 294-295. See also: Patriarch Justinian of Rumania, "Evangelical Humanism and Christian Responsibility," in Constantin G. Patelos, ed., *The*

The two postgraduate scholarships managed to open the ecumenical vision of Bria as theologian as he had the chance to listen to professors who had an ecumenical perspective, to meet certain Orthodox theologians open towards the ecumenical movement and to have access to the libraries of those theological institutes. This last aspect became evident in his PhD bibliography.

I. 5. *Doctor of Divinity*: Ion Bria

Bria was already enrolled for a PhD since November 1960 and the period in which he went to study abroad gave him the opportunity to research as he had access to the libraries of the respective faculties. However, he was allowed only on the 18th of June 1968 to defend his thesis. This was one of the first defense at the Theological Institute after 1948 when the communist regime was established in Romania. The dissertation entitled “Dogmatic Aspects of the Unification of Christian Churches¹⁴”, dealt with the theology of the ecumenical movement around 1965. This was already after the integration of the Romanian Church into the WCC, but also after the lifting of the anathemas between

Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements 1902-1975 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1978), 248-250.

¹⁴ The PhD. thesis was published in Romanian in one of the Romanian Patriarchy’s reviews. Complete reference: Ion Bria, “Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericii Creștine,” in *Studii Teologice* 20, nos. 1-2 (1968): 3-170.

the Eastern and Western Churches from 1054 by the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI¹⁵. The defense took place in the Great Hall of the Theological Institute. After reading his central report, Bria was promptly subjected to a series of critical questions referring to the theme, the way in which he debated the subject and the research bibliography. Father Stăniloae was part of the commission and at the end of the defense he admired Bria's research, pointing out both the rich and qualitative bibliography and the theological direction of the thesis which rediscovered the ecumenical dimension of Orthodoxy, open towards the other Christian confessions¹⁶. Thanks to this performance, Bria was reinstated as assistant at the Theological Institute, after he was forced out because of a conflict of hubris in 1965. As a consequence, he was sent to work as a redactor of the Patriarchal magazine (September 1966 - June 1969).

In July 1968, the forth General Assembly of the WCC took place in Uppsala. Bria was not registered on the list of participants on behalf of the Romanian Church. However, he was called to be a member of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute committee. It seems that he did not make it to this Assembly¹⁷. It is quite self-evident that his

¹⁵ The text is to be found as an appendix in: Id., *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition: The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 115-116.

¹⁶ Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez*, 125.

¹⁷ Related to this moment I can say that although one might understand from his autobiography that he participated at the Uppsala Assembly, based on my research, his name does not appear

PhD title and his dynamic personality had an impact on those with whom Bria was in contact, as he was a devoted participant to the ecumenical conferences on behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

I. 6. Staff Member of the World Council of Churches

The departure of Bria's family to the West is quite an interesting story. The Romanian theological-ecclesiastical landscape was under the pressure of the communist regime which managed to interfere into the Church's affairs. Being aware of all these problems and having a gateway to the West, Bria took advantage of the opportunity to leave Romania when he was offered a job in the staff of the WCC. This occasion arose in the context of the World Missionary Conference from Bangkok, Thailand that took place between 31st of December 1972 and 7th of January 1973. As a delegate of the Romanian Patriarchy, he had the occasion of meeting

on the list of participants, which meant that he did not take part on behalf of the Bossey Institute according to Norman Goodall, ed., *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala July 4-20, 1968* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1968), 407-444. One year later, Ion Bria was included on the official list: *Board of the Ecumenical Institute: Appendix XXII: Divisional and Departmental Committees of the World Council of Churches as Approved by the Executive Committee in: Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Third Meeting, University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, Great Britain, August 12th-22nd, 1969* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1969), 285.

distinguished theologians of his time among which were Anastasios Yannoulatos, Jürgen Moltmann, Philip Potter, Jacques Rossel and others¹⁸. The World Commission on Mission and Evangelization (CWME) of the WCC founded a new office called “Orthodox Studies and Relations”. It was coordinated by bishop Yannoulatos who wanted to step down in order to lead the Missionary Studies Center of the University of Athens¹⁹. Bria was compelled to take the leadership of this office which happened in April 1973. At this date he left the country with his wife, Ecaterina, and his son, Alexandru²⁰, and settled in Geneva²¹.

¹⁸ *Bangkok Assembly 1973: Minutes and Report of the Assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, December 31, 1972 and January 9-12, 1973* (Geneva: WCC, 1973), 48.

¹⁹ Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission* (Brookline, Massachusetts and Geneva: Holy Cross Orthodox Press and WCC Publications, 2000), 95, 288. See also: *Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Third Meeting, University of Kent*, 154 and *Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Fourth Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 10th-21st, 1971* (Geneva: WCC, 1971), 284.

²⁰ The boy was almost three years old, being born on the 6th of July 1970. Father Bria spoke about this moment of the birth of his only child as being the most special event of the life of his family. The boy benefited from a good education ending up being a medical doctor in Geneva.

²¹ See: Appendix I: Participants-Central Committee, in *Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Sixth Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 22-29 August 1973* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1973), 120. See also: George

His departure and employment by the WCC had to be done with the approval of Patriarch Justinian, who encouraged Bria to leave, with an unofficial notice on behalf of the Department for Religious Affairs which supervised the religious activity of the cults permitted by the Romanian state. His status as an employee of the WCC imposed certain clarifications regarding his situation related both to the Romanian Patriarchy and the Romanian state, as his status of cleric of the Romanian Orthodox Church. More precisely, at that time it was considered that his professorship at the Theological Institute would be kept until his return. Moreover, that in Geneva he would not be allowed to exercise other function than that written down in his work permit, namely of employee of the WCC. As priest, Bria was allowed to celebrate the services and sacraments of the Orthodox Church, but did not have the legal right of taking into care a parish. That is to say, it had to be made clear that Bria would not have the quality of representing the Romanian Patriarchy (only the Ecumenical Patriarchy and the Patriarchy of Moscow had official representatives at the WCC) and that he was not sent there with a certain mission²².

This moment would stamp father Bria's theological progress, as he found himself in a context and a position which offered him the access to great ecumenical gatherings, and much more. He participated

Lemopoulos, ed., *Your Will Be Done: Orthodoxy in Mission* (Geneva and Katerini: WCC Publications and Tertios, 1989), 1-3.

²² Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez*, 132-138.

at the following four General Assemblies of the WCC in Nairobi (1975)²³, Vancouver (1983)²⁴, Canberra (1991)²⁵ and Harare (1998)²⁶, occupying different posts and having various tasks. For about half a century, his theology was shaped through dialogue with numerous theologians, with theological ideas from the country and especially from abroad. After his initial training at the Bucharest Theological Institute, after a period of studying ecumenical theology abroad, especially in the Anglican context, the period which allowed him to reach his theological peak followed as he found himself in a multi-cultural and multi-confessional context.

I. 7. Activity in the WCC (1973-1994)

It is self-evident that one cannot present in such research the whole activity of the Ion Bria in Geneva as it

²³ See the list of participants from the fifth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches: David M. Paton, ed., *Breaking barriers: Nairobi 1975* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1976), 354-381.

²⁴ David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life: Official Report VI Assembly of World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July-10 August 1983* (Geneva and Grand Rapids: WCC Publications and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 279-323.

²⁵ See: Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report-Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991* (Geneva and Grand Rapids: WCC Publications and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 287-327.

²⁶ If in the aforementioned General Assemblies Bria participated as a delegate of the WCC staff, at the 8th Assembly in Harare, he participated as an advisor. See: Diane Kessler, ed., *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eight Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999), 282-339.

spans over approximately 21 years²⁷. It might be considered that his involvement had two main directions which weave harmoniously. He especially took care of coordinating and implementing in the ecumenical movement an Orthodox missionary current convening different consultations. Here I mention the concept *the liturgy after the Liturgy*, which will be discussed in the third chapter of this study. At the same time, he had activities parallel to him being in the staff of the WCC which consisted in teaching, participating at different theological congresses and seminaries as well as publishing numerous articles, books and even theological dictionaries²⁸.

Regarding the different positions that he held in the staff of the WCC, Bria had a few important roles. He occupied the position which consecrated him as *Executive Secretary* for “Orthodox Studies and Relations” between April 1973 and the end of 1986. At the same time he substituted the *Deputy Director* of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism between

²⁷ More precisely, Bria worked on the basis of a contract in the World Council of Churches for no less than 21 years and three months, the period between April 1973 and June 1994. The information is taken from: *Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Minutes and Reports of the Forty-First Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 25-30 March 1990* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 104.

²⁸ Bria wrote and co-authored around 32 books, more than 15 university courses and lectures and of more than 280 articles and studies. A list can be consulted in: Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez*, 311-337.

1982 and 1986²⁹. In January 1987 Bria was asked to take the lead of the sub-unit “Renewal and Congregational Life”, and starting with 1991, when the structures of the WCC modified, he was named *Interim Director* for the new Unit I: Unity and Renewal³⁰. From 1993 until June 1994 Bria was the *Executive Director* of this unit. He withdrew from this office at the age of retirement.

As Executive Secretary of the “Orthodox Studies and Relations” department of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelization of the WCC, Bria was assigned to coordinate and implement an Orthodox missionary theology in the ecumenical context. The need was felt that before every WCC general meeting the Orthodox position to contribute to the ecumenical theology would be drafted. In this sense Bria convened a few Orthodox consultations which gave him the chance of getting to know and engage in dialogue with well-known Orthodox theologians. Amongst the most important consultations and seminaries that organized at the Cernica Monastery, near Bucharest stands out. It took

²⁹ See: *Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Thirty-First Meeting, Kingston, Jamaica, 1-11 January 1979* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1979), 89; *Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Thirty-Second Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 14-22 August 1980* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980), 93; *Minutes and Reports of the Forty-First Meeting, Geneva*, 104.

³⁰ *Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Forty-Third Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 20-27 September 1991* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 168, 176, 199.

place between the 4th and 8th of June 1974 and had the general theme of “Confessing Christ today”. Notable theologians participated: Nikos Nissiotis (head of consultation), John Zizioulas, Boris Bobrinskoy, Anastasios Yannulatos, Emilio Castro, Emilianos Timiadis, W.A. Visser ’t Hooft, and Dumitru Stăniloae. The report of this consultation was part of the final folder of the World Assembly in Nairobi (1975)³¹. Likewise, Bria was the one who secured the practical arrangements for the WCC Consultation from Agapia Monastery, Neamț county (Romania) which took place in 1976 and adopted a series of guidelines for the churches, regarding the integration of women in the Church’s mission³².

The period between 1974 and 1980 was marked by various Orthodox meetings which focused on diverse themes and that took place in several venues such as: Etchmiadzine

³¹ Ion Bria and Constantin Patelos, eds., *Orthodox Contribution to Nairobi* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1975). This text is also available in French: “La réflexion orthodoxe pour Nairobi,” in *Contacts* 27, no. 92 (1975): 361-433. Bria also published an article about this consultation: “Confessing Christ Today,” in *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 253 (1975): 66-74. The official text of this consultation was published with the title: “Confessing Christ today: reports of groups at a consultation of Orthodox theologians,” in *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 253 (1975): 74-94.

³² See: “Report of an Inter-Orthodox Consultation “Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church”, Agapia, Romania, 11-17 September 1976,” in Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 60-65. See also: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “La femme dans l’Eglise Orthodoxe,” in *Contacts* 29, no. 94 (1977): 285-326.

(Armenia)³³, Prague³⁴, New Valamo³⁵, Paris³⁶, Amba Bishoy Monastery (Egypt)³⁷. At all of these meetings Bria participated as theologian and even organizer.

Another important moment on his ecumenical path was the participation to the World Missionary Conference in Melbourne, Australia from 1980 which was called “Your Kingdom Come³⁸”. Here, Bria had the chance of meeting various Orthodox theologians. With the help of some he edited after the conference a volume named: *Martyria-Mission: The Witness of Orthodox Churches Today*³⁹. It was accepted that the term *mission*

³³ “Confessing Christ through the Liturgical Life of the Church today”, Etchmiadzine, Armenia, September 16-21, 1975,” in *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 256 (1975): 417-423.

³⁴ “The Role and Place of the Bible in the Liturgical and Spiritual Life of the Orthodox Church”, Prague, Czechoslovakia, September 12-18, 1977,” in *International Review of Mission* 66, no. 264 (1977): 385-388.

³⁵ George Tsetsis, ed., *The New Valamo Consultation: The Ecumenical Nature of Orthodox Witness* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1978), 7.

³⁶ “Contribution to the theme: *Your Kingdom Come* (CWME, Melbourne, Australia, 1980)”, Paris, France, September 25-28, 1978,” in *International Review of Mission* 68, no. 270 (1979): 139-147.

³⁷ “The Place of the Monastic Life within the Witness of the Church Today”, Amba Bishoy Monastery, Egypt, April 30-May 5, 1979”, in *International Review of Mission* 68, no. 272 (1979): 448-451.

³⁸ *Your Kingdom Come. Mission Perspectives: Report on the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Melbourne, Australia 12-25 May 1980* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980), 273.

³⁹ Complete reference of this synthesis: Ion Bria, ed., *Martyria-Mission: The witness of Orthodox Churches Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980).

would be translated as *martyria*, which clearly references the reality of martyrdom in the history of Orthodox mission. It is to be noted that after this conference the concept “liturgy after the Liturgy”, which was picked up and promoted by Bria, was accepted as explaining the Orthodox missionary typology, which had positive consequences for ecumenical missiology in general⁴⁰.

After this important year for missionary and ecumenical theology, other meetings and conferences at which Bria had a particular role followed. I mention here only a few: the consultations of Zica Monastery⁴¹, Sofia⁴², Lima⁴³, Damascus⁴⁴, Kiev⁴⁵, Sofia⁴⁶, Monastery of Lovnica⁴⁷ etc.

⁴⁰ I will theologially analyze this concept in the third part of this research paper when I will be speaking about the directions of Bria’s theological thinking. For the time being, I have to mention the fact that Bria, after the Melbourne conference described this concept which was included in the abovementioned volume. See: Ion Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy”, in *Ibid.*, 66-71; Id., *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

⁴¹ “Preaching and Teaching the Christian Faith Today”, Monastery of Zica, Yugoslavia, September 20-25, 1980,” in *International Review of Mission* 70, no. 278 (1981): 49-58.

⁴² “Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches”, Sofia, Bulgaria, May 23-31, 1981,” in Georges Tsetsis, ed., *Orthodox Thought: Reports of Orthodox Consultations organized by the World Council of Churches, 1975-1982* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), 67-75.

⁴³At this conference from Lima, Peru (January 1982) of the Faith and Order Commission, the text “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” was approved. See: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982).

In 1987 Bria was proposed as director of the unit “Renewal and Congregational Life” which took in consideration the cultic and spirituality dimension of the WCC as it was accused of focusing only on the horizontal dimension of mission while the vertical dimension of Christian mission and morals was being completely ignored. The influence over this concept and current named “cult and spirituality” can be noted in the theme of the General Assembly organized in Canberra in 1992: “Come, Holy Spirit-Renew the whole creation”. Likewise, the continuation of the common prayer in the ecumenical community was taken into consideration as well as promoting monastic and charismatic spirituality. Amongst the initial programs coordinated by Bria as director of this unit one should remind “Ecumenical life in the great metropolis” which was composed as short reportages on local ecumenism in the large cities of the world⁴⁸, as well as meetings with spiritual thematic: the

⁴⁴ The texts of this meeting from Damascus, Syria (5-10 February 1982) were edited by Bria himself in the volume: Ion Bria, ed., *Jesus Christ-the Life of the World: An Orthodox Contribution to the Vancouver theme* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982).

⁴⁵ “Just Development for Fullness of Life: An Orthodox Approach”, Kiev, USSR, June 10-30, 1982,” in Georges Tsetsis, ed., *Orthodox Thought*, 89-96.

⁴⁶ “Report of the CWME Orthodox Advisory Group”, Sofia, Bulgaria, October 21-26, 1985,” in *International Review of Mission* 75, no. 298 (1986): 158-160.

⁴⁷ “Report of Monastic Spirituality Consultation”, 6-13 October, 1986, Monastery of Lovnica, Yugoslavia,” in *International Review of Mission* 76, no. 302 (1987): 267-270.

⁴⁸ Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez*, 175.

Chevetogne (Belgium)⁴⁹, Praga⁵⁰, Creta⁵¹, Aleppo⁵² or even Bucharest⁵³ consultations.

As I have already mentioned, shortly before his retirement Bria occupied a last office in the WCC, that of executive director of Unit I: Unity and Renewal (1993-1994). His official activity concluded in June 1994, as it was established at the January 1994 Central Committee of the WCC meeting:

The Unit I Committee noted with harm appreciation the work that had been done for the WCC over many years by Professor Ion Bria, and in particular more recently as Unit I Executive Director. The Committee wished to place on record its gratitude to Father Bria for his untiring dedication to the service of the WCC and his able leadership of Unit I.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ "Renewal through Iconography", Monastery Chevetogne, Belgium, 26-31 October, 1987," in Ion Bria, ed., *People hunger to be near to God* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 49-55.

⁵⁰ "People of God and Renewal of Community" Prague, Czechoslovakia, 21-27 November, 1988," in *Ibid.*, 56-66.

⁵¹ "New Ecumenical Perspectives on Laity", Crete, 11-16 February, 1990," in *Ibid.*, 67-73.

⁵² "The Role of the Pastor/Priest/Minister in the Congregation", Aleppo, Syria, 9-16 May, 1990," in *Ibid.*, 80-93.

⁵³ "Renewal in Orthodox Worship", Bucharest, Romania, 21-27 October 1991," in Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, 180-185.

⁵⁴ *Central Committee of World Council of Churches: Minutes of the Forty-Fifth Meeting. Johannesburg, South Africa, 20-28 January 1994* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 95.

After this, Bria's position was occupied by another Orthodox theologian named Thomas Fitzgerald from the United States who represented the Ecumenical Patriarchate⁵⁵. Nevertheless, Bria continued to collaborate with various units of the WCC and even represent them at various meetings⁵⁶.

I. 8. The Period after Retirement (1995-2002)

Perhaps unexpectedly after his retirement, Bria and his family did not opt for returning to Romania. On the contrary, they chose to obtain Swiss citizenship which they received in 1997. The real reason for which he chose to remain in Switzerland was the integration and

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 141. It seems that the theologian Thomas was in office only until 1998 when he left Geneva. Later, he wrote a remarkable synthesis about the Ecumenical Movement and about the involvement of the Orthodox Churches in this process. See: Thomas E. Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

⁵⁶ I have already mentioned his participation as advisor at the General Assembly in Harare. Likewise, Bria participated at the conference that took place in Ethiopia in 1996. The volume of the conference was later published: Ioan Sauca, ed., *Orthodoxy and Cultures* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996). In October 1996 the WCC organized in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology from Sibiu a seminary in Braşov, Romania entitled: "The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the regeneration of cities". Here, Bria gave a lecture called: "The Regeneration of Christian Mission in the Urban Context". The full text can be read in: Nicolae Moşoiu, ed., *Relevanţa operei părintelui profesor Ion Bria*, 33-45.

consolidation of his family in a safe social and economic environment.

From a theological point of view, Bria had the opportunity to become an associate professor of the “Andrei Şaguna” Faculty of Theology (1995-1999)⁵⁷. He was invited by the dean of this institution, friend and professor Mircea Păcurariu, who considered Bria to be the specialist in ecumenical studies⁵⁸. Professor Ion Bria, holding a PhD. in theology (1968), being doctor honoris causa of the Preshov Theology Faculty, Slovakia Kosice University (October 1990), author of numerous books and studies with an ecumenical thematic, a real apologist for the ecumenical movement, came back to Romania in October 1995 as professor of Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology⁵⁹. Of course, his family remained in Geneva, while he traveled a few months in a year to teach his courses. There he was involved in a few projects amongst which: teaching a class of Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology which would present Orthodox theology with an ecumenical openness towards other Christian confessions, dialogue with the new generation of

⁵⁷ Father Bria’s wish to teach as an associate professor in Sibiu came from a pure wish of sharing his theological and ecumenical experience. This follows from the fact that the sum he received as salary was symbolic.

⁵⁸ See: Mircea Păcurariu, *Dicţionarul teologilor români* (Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică, 2002), 65-66.

⁵⁹ Because this class was called Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology, the first change that Bria made as professor was to replace “Symbolic” title with “Ecumenical”.

theologians which would be capable to apply a new theological methodology from an ecumenical point of view⁶⁰ and promoting Dumitru Stăniloae's theology⁶¹.

In other words, this period of his life was a moment of analysis of the ecumenical situation from Sibiu, but also an opportunity to share his ecumenical experience both through publishing books and articles in theological reviews and especially through his energetic presence. Unfortunately, the collaboration with the theological school from Sibiu was finished at the end of the 1998-1999 academic year. However, he remained in contact with a group of theologians-apprentices amongst

⁶⁰ Bria named the Sibiu program: "The recovery of the student's theological education and of the continuous formation of priests". This was concretized in publishing the volumes: *Tratat de Teologie Dogmatică și Ecumenică*, first edition Sibiu in 1996, the second in 1999 and the third in 2009. However, in the current study I will use the third edition: Ion Bria, *Tratat de Teologie Dogmatică și Ecumenică*, 2 vols. (Sibiu: Editura Andreiana, ³2009), and *Hermeneutica Teologică: dinamica ei în structurarea tradiției* (Sibiu: Editura Andreiana, 2009), initially available only for students; it was later published through the care of Nicolae Moșoiu and of Ciprian Iulian Toroczka.

⁶¹ In this sense, Ion Bria coordinated the first Romanian Dogmatic Theology PhD. dissertation about Dumitru Stăniloae, by Nicolae Moșoiu, entitled: *Dezvoltarea teologică în Tradiție. Viziunea Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae. Sinteze moderne și contextul lor*, at the Sibiu Faculty of Theology, June 1999. The Symposium "Dumitru Stăniloae" organized by the Bucharest Faculty of Theology between the 2nd and 4th of October 2000 should be remembered. Here, Bria presented the essay entitled: "Impactul teologiei lui Dumitru Stăniloae asupra hermeneuticii ecumenice".

which professor Nicolae Moșoiu occupies an important place.

Before entering the new millennium, Bria participated at an important ecumenical event, namely the visit of Pope John Paul II in Romania (7-9 May 1999). He was invited to assist at the session of the Synod (8th of May) and the Liturgy (9th of May) at which the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Teoctist and Orthodox hierarchs were present.

The autobiography of Ion Bria ends with a short prayer taken from the songs of the Vespers for Pentecost Feast: “We thank Thee for all: for our entrance into this world and for the exit from it,”⁶² words which seem to have foretold the unexpected end of his worldly life. Ion Bria died following a heart-attack on the 2nd of July 2002 in his Geneva apartment. His body was buried in the cemetery of the Cernica Monastery, near Bucharest on the 8th of July 2002. The service was officiated by His Eminence Daniel (Ciobotea), Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina and current Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and was attended by his family and close friends⁶³.

⁶² See: *Penticostar* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1999), 335.

⁶³ See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-mourns-death-of-former-colleague> [accessed December 8, 2015], and Nicolae Moșoiu, “In Memoriam. Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria (1929-2002),” in *Revista Teologică* 12, no. 3 (2002): 57-76.

I. 9. Conclusion

Our theologian has a life story very interesting. I preferred to nominate just a few elements from his activity in order to understand the context in which he lived and worked. His openness has to do with the fact that he was involved directly in the ecumenical movement in Geneva, where he discovered a multi-confessional world. Indeed, he obtained during his life an immense experience about Christianity, being in touch with so many theologians. I do not know to nominate another Romanian theologian who worked in WCC so many years. Bria had this opportunity and used it for becoming an important theologian within the modern ecumenical movement.

In the next chapter I will analyze some historical details on the ecumenical dialogue in the twentieth century. The Orthodox Church played an important role when the World Council of Churches was founded in 1948, so I will explore a little more this historical story. The chapter deals also with Bria's vision on the relation between Orthodoxy and ecumenism.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF MODERN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT. BRIA'S ECUMENICAL ORTHODOXY

II. Introduction

For this part of the research, I am going to analyze the key moments of the ecumenical movement, beginning with the modern period until the present day. This chapter will be divided into four sections: highlights in the history of the ecumenical movement, the situation and involvement of the Orthodox Church in this movement in general, and that of the Romanian Orthodox Church in particular and the position of Bria in this context. Here, I will be focusing on how Bria understood the ecumenical movement, both doctrinally and socially, the latter being the consequence of the first.

Before analyzing the theological directions proposed by Bria, I consider it to be necessary to present a brief history of the ecumenical dialogue. One cannot understand certain theological proposals if the historical basis is missing. One can say that the course of the Church is closely related to humanity's general historical journey. Particularly, the theologian tried to respond to the challenges of the world, weaving an answer based on his experience and theological capacity against the background of the broader understanding of his Church.

Bria wrote down his thoughts and related to the theological realities of his time. By studying his theological concerns, I could understand that his writings have always been connected with the broader context of current theology and social issues. Moreover, as an active member of the World Council of Churches, he was a pioneer in the Romanian space by bringing information and reflections concerning the discussions and decisions taken in the ecumenical dialogue.

II. 1. Modern Ecumenism. History and Understanding

In this section I will present an analysis of the historical elements of so-called modern ecumenism based with the desire to better understand the whole context in which Bria entered as an active participant starting with the second half of the 20th century. The starting point of modern ecumenism is considered to be 1910. This year is directly connected with the World Missionary Conference that was organized in Edinburgh⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ See: W. H. T. Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910); *The History and Records of the Conference together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meeting* (Edinburgh, London, New York, Chicago and Toronto: Oliphant, Anderson, Ferrier and Fleeming H. Revell Company, 1910). It should be known that in 2010 it was celebrated Edinburgh 1910's Centenary so many works were published about it, as: Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission* (Pasadena, California: William Carey International University

After this conference, convened on the initiative of Protestant Churches, many other movements with ecumenical character were constituted. The Continuation Committee of Edinburgh Conference formed in 1921 the *International Missionary Council* (IMC). In parallel two other important groups were composed, respectively the “Life and Work” and the “Faith and Order” movements.

The Movement *Life and Work* had two important meetings at Stockholm in 1925⁶⁵ and at Oxford in 1937⁶⁶. The aims of this movement defined by the International Executive Committee in 1923 and approved at this conference were:

To unite different churches in common practical work, to furnish the Christian conscience with an organ of expression in

Press, 2010); Mary Tanner, “Celebrating Edinburgh 1910. Reflections on Visible Unity,” in *Theology* 113, no. 876 (2010): 403-410; Jeremy Morris, “Edinburgh 1910-2010: A Retrospective Assessment,” in *Ecclesiology* 7 (2011): 297-316.

⁶⁵ G. K. A. Bell, ed., *The Stockholm Conference 1925: The Official Report of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work held in Stockholm, 19-30 August, 1925* (London and Humphrey Milford: Oxford University Press, 1926).

⁶⁶ J. H. Oldham, ed., *The Churches Survey Their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community, and State* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937). See also: W. A. Visser 't Hooft and J. H. Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937); Graeme Smith, *Oxford 1937: The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work Conference* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2004).

the midst of the great spiritual movements of our time, and to insist that the principles of the Gospel be applied to the solution of contemporary social and international problems.⁶⁷

On the other hand, the Movement *Faith and Order*, planned to be formed immediately after Edinburgh, had its first important meeting at Lausanne in 1927⁶⁸. There it was affirmed that:

This is a Conference summoned to consider matters of Faith and Order. It is emphatically not attempting to define the conditions of future Reunion. Its object is to register the apparent level of fundamental agreements within the Conference and the grave points of disagreements remaining; also to suggest certain lines of thought which may in the future tend to a fuller measure of agreement.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ G. K. A. Bell, ed., *The Stockholm Conference 1925*, 1.

⁶⁸ H. N. Bate, ed., *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927* (London and New York: Garden City Press, ²1928).

⁶⁹ Edward S. Woods, *Lausanne 1927: An Interpretation of the World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lausanne August 3-21, 1927* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1927), 33-34.

The second important meeting was held at Edinburgh in 1937, one month after the Life and Work Conference in Oxford⁷⁰.

Until 1937, these two important movements - *Life and Work* and *Faith and Order* - worked in cooperation but with different aims. A decisive step in uniting them was the meeting at Westfield College, Hampstead (London) in July 1937 where the Committee of Thirty-Five proposed to form a World Council of Churches⁷¹, proposal submitted and accepted by the two movements gathered few weeks after in Oxford and Edinburgh. This Committee was composed from persons involved in these movements⁷².

The important act decided at these two last meetings mentioned, Edinburgh and Oxford 1937, was the decision to form together a Committee of Fourteen⁷³ who would analyze the idea of a World Council. Much more, in Utrecht (1938, May 9-12), a Provisional Committee which included also the members of the Committee of

⁷⁰ Leonard Hodgson, ed., *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order, held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1938).

⁷¹ It seems that the name World Council of Churches was first suggested by Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert (1888-1976).

⁷² For more details see: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), 39-42; 104-106.

⁷³ The list with them can be seen here: David P. Gaines, *The World Council of Churches: A Study of Its Background and History* (Peterborough and New Hampshire: Richard. R. Smith, 1966), 163.

Fourteen was formed and the Constitution of the World Council of Churches was drafted⁷⁴. In January 1939 at St. Germain, the Provisional Committee established the date of the first meeting of the World Council, but because of the Second World War the meeting was canceled. Finally, in 1946, February 21-23, the Provisional Committee gathered and the year 1948 was proposed for the first assembly of the World Council of Churches⁷⁵, which indeed will be held in Amsterdam⁷⁶ where “on the morning of Monday, 23 August 1948 the World Council of Churches came into existence.”⁷⁷

From a theological point of view two important aspects need to be mentioned. The first refers to the theological foundation proposed and accepted by the founding Churches. This was:

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 166-169.

⁷⁵ See: *The World Council of Churches. Its Process of Formation: Minutes and Reports of the meeting of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches held at Geneva from February 21st to 23rd, 1946* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, n. d.).

⁷⁶ See: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held at Amsterdam August 22nd to September 4th 1948* (London: SCM Press, 1949); H. G. G. Herklots, *Amsterdam 1948: An Account of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1948).

⁷⁷ W. A. Visser't Hooft, “The Genesis of the World Council of Churches,” in Ruth Rose and Stephen Charles Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (London: SPCK, 1954), 720.

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.⁷⁸

The second referred to what one should understand when we speak about a World Council of Churches. The explanation was given at the opening of this first general assembly:

We are a council of churches, not *the* Council of the one undivided Church. Our name indicates our weakness and our shame before God, for there can be and there *is* finally only one Church of Christ on earth. Our plurality is a deep anomaly. But our name indicates also that we are aware of situation, that we do not accept it passively, that we would move forward towards the manifestation of the One Holy Church. Our Council represents therefore an emergency solution -a stage on road -a body living between the time of complete isolation of the churches from each other

⁷⁸ This basis was unsatisfactory for many Church-members and it was complemented in the so-called Toronto Statement, prepared during the meeting of the Central Committee in 1950. See: David P. Gaines, *op. cit.*, 1011; W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961* (London: SCM Press, ²1962), 152, 158.

and the same-on earth or in heaven - when it will be visibly true that there is one Shepard and one flock.⁷⁹

To conclude the part regarding the *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work* movements, it should be remembered that from the Utrecht meeting the *Life and Work* movement identified with that Provisional Committee, and after Amsterdam 1948 with WCC itself. The *Faith and Order* movement was also integrated into the structure of WCC as a Commission on Faith and Order, keeping its identity on doctrinal problems. In other words, it could be said that at this first Assembly these two important ecumenical movements were officially united and, in this way, a new important phase in the history of the ecumenical movement was open. This represented the starting point of the World Council of Churches⁸⁰. Until this moment, there were 10 General Assemblies as follows: Amsterdam 1948⁸¹, Evanston 1954⁸², New Delhi 1961⁸³, Uppsala 1968⁸⁴, Nairobi

⁷⁹ Id., *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, 28.

⁸⁰ See: Adrian Boldișor, *Importanța și actualitatea dialogului interreligios pentru lumea contemporană: istorie, perspective, soluții* (Craiova: Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, 2015).

⁸¹ *Ibid.* The theme of this first assembly was *Man's Disorder and God's Design*.

⁸² For this assembly the theme discussed was *Christ-the Hope of the World*. For more details, see: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1954* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1955),

1975⁸⁵, Vancouver 1983⁸⁶, Canberra 1991⁸⁷, Harare 1998⁸⁸, Porto Alegre 2006⁸⁹ and Busan 2013⁹⁰.

4-10. Also see: *Evanston Speaks: Reports from the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, August 15-31, 1954* (London: SCM Press, 1954); *Response to Evanston: A Survey of the Comments sent in by the Member Churches on the Report of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held at Evanston, Illinois, in August 1954* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1957).

⁸³ Here the general theme was *Jesus Christ-the Light of the World*. For more information see: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report*, 1-55; *Evanston to New Delhi 1954-1961: Report of the Central Committee to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1961), 20-21.

⁸⁴ For more details about the theme *Behold, I make all things new*: Normann Goodall, *op. cit.*, 7-9; Kenneth Slack, *Uppsala Report: The Story of the World Council of Churches Fourth Assembly, Uppsala, Sweden 4-19 July, 1968* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 1-8.

⁸⁵ I mentioned already that at this assembly and also at the three next assemblies, Ion Bria was present. The theme of this meeting was *Jesus Christ Frees and Unites*. See: David M. Paton, *op. cit.*, 10-24.

⁸⁶ Also, for this assembly the thematic was a Christological one, namely *Jesus Christ-the Life of the World*. See: David Gill, *op. cit.*, 21-29.

⁸⁷ Starting with this assembly, the thematic was changed. Here they discussed around the theme *Come, Holy Spirit-Renew the Whole Creation*. See: Michael Kinnamon, *op. cit.*, 14-16; 27-47.

⁸⁸ For this meeting the theme was *Turn to God-Rejoice in Hope*: Diane Kessler, *op. cit.*, 28-41.

⁸⁹ For this assembly there is available an official website: <http://wcc2006.info/> [accessed July 8, 2016]. The main theme was *God in your grace, transform the world*. See also: Luis N. Rivera-Pagan, ed., *God in Your Grace: Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 55-101.

⁹⁰ The last assembly of World Council of Churches until this moment was held in Busan, where they discussed the theme *God of life, lead us to justice and peace*. More details can be found here:

By contrast with the decision to form one ecumenical body, the *International Missionary Council* had another perspective. Some important meetings of the *International Missionary Council* should be noted: Jerusalem 1928⁹¹, Tambaram 1938⁹², Whitby 1947⁹³, Willingen 1952⁹⁴, Ghana 1958⁹⁵. Even so the two bodies – WCC and IMC – will come in contact many times. At the third Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in New Delhi in 1961 it was accepted that the *International Missionary Council* be integrated within the WCC as

<http://wcc2013.info/en.html> [accessed July 8, 2016]. See also: Erlinda N. Senturias and Theodore A. Gill Jr., eds., *Encountering the God of Life. Report of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014).

⁹¹ See: *Messages and Recommendations of the Enlarged Meeting of the International Missionary Council held at Jerusalem, March 24th-April 8th, 1928* (London and New York: International Missionary Council, n. d.).

⁹² *The Authority of the Faith. International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras, December 12th to 29th, 1938*, volume I (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

⁹³ *Minutes of the Enlarged Meeting of the International Missionary Council and of the Committee of the Council, Whitby, Ontario, Canada, July 5-24, 1947* (New York and London: International Missionary Council, n. d.). See also: *The Witness of a Revolutionary Council: Statements issued by the Committee of the International Missionary Council* (New York and London: International Missionary Council, n. d.).

⁹⁴ *The Missionary Obligation of the Church. Willingen, Germany, July 5-17 1952* (New York, London: International Missionary Council, Edinburgh House Press, 1953).

⁹⁵ See: Ronal K. Orchard, ed., *The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, 28th December, 1957 to 8th January, 1958* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1958).

*Division on World Mission and Evangelism (DWME)*⁹⁶. At this moment, WCC gained three important dimensions: the doctrinal dimension (*Faith and Order*), the social dimension (*Life and Work*) and the missionary dimension (*International Missionary Council*).

II. 2. The Orthodox Churches and the Ecumenical Movement

The historical analysis of the events that led to the creation of the WCC proves that two key moments stood at the foundation. Namely, the Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) and the Encyclical given by the Ecumenical Patriarch (January 1920), on behalf of the Orthodox Churches. I already presented the 1910 Edinburgh conference and its aftermath. It has to be added that the discussions before 1910 were quite rare and ambiguous and did not help founding an ecumenical conscience. In other words:

Earlier ecumenical activities were spasmodic, isolated, and lacked continuity. Individuals, groups, movement, and

⁹⁶ See the Act of integration in: *Minutes of the Assembly of the International Missionary Council, November 17-18, 1961 and of the First meeting of the Commission on World and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, December 7-8, 1961 at New Delhi* (London, New York, Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, n. d.), 20-28.

Churches contributed ideas concerning the Church or concerning unity, taking action on them often in regrettable separation. Yet they built better than they knew towards the time when they would begin to build together. Each movement contributed something to the growth of the ecumenical idea, and was associated with these emergence of some emphasis which later became formative in the ecumenical movement.⁹⁷

In this subsection I will be presenting the moment of 1920 and the involvement of the Orthodox Church in the modern ecumenical movement. Likewise, I will attempt to analyze the Orthodox participation when the WCC was founded. Lastly, I will mention the key-moments after 1948.

Even though there are two encyclicals of the Ecumenical Patriarchy from 1902⁹⁸ and 1904 which address the relation of the Orthodox Church with the other Christian churches, namely the Catholic and

⁹⁷ Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (London: SPCK, 1954), 219.

⁹⁸ In this encyclical, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim III invited the autocephalous churches to express their opinion regarding the relation with the Western Churches. For more details, see: George Florovsky, "The Orthodox Churches and the ecumenical movement prior to 1910," in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, 211-212.

Protestant Churches⁹⁹, the following encyclical of 1920 was more important in grounding the ecumenical movement¹⁰⁰. This encyclical which was addressed “Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere” and which invited for the formation of League (Koinonia) of Churches, following the model of the League of Nations, was considered a “remarkable change of mind”¹⁰¹. It was signed by Dorotheus, Metropolitan of Brussa, Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Ecumenical Throne, and by eleven other Metropolitans. It is believed that it was influenced by another great Orthodox theologian, Archbishop Germanos, later Metropolitan of Thyateira and Exarch of the West and one of the first presidents of the World Council of Churches¹⁰². Unfortunately, this

⁹⁹ Nicolae Moșoiu and Ștefan Tobler, eds., *Biserica Ortodoxă în dialogul ecumenic: documente oficiale, vol. 1: 1902-1986*, Documenta Oecumenica 2.1 (Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu: Presa Universitară Clujeană and Editura Andreiana, 2014), 43-50; 57-63.

¹⁰⁰ The English text of this letter can be read here: “Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 12, no. 1 (1959): 79-82. It was republished in other works as: Constantin G. Patelos, ed., *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Document and Statements, 1902-1975* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1978), 40-43; W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, 94-97. For the Romanian translation, see: Nicolae Moșoiu and Ștefan Tobler, *op. cit.*, 70-74.

¹⁰¹ Nicolas Zernov, “The Eastern Churches and the Ecumenical Movement in the twentieth century,” in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, 654.

¹⁰² See: W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, ed., *La première assemblée du Conseil Œcuménique des églises. Rapport officiel*, vol. 5 (Neuchatel, Paris: Delachaux, Niestlé, 1949), 285.

encyclical was not sufficient received by the Orthodox Churches, as there was no official response to this proposal. I personally asked myself why this encyclical was not received by the other Orthodox Churches. One reason would be that in that moment there was no Patriarch, only just a deputy. Perhaps the initiative would have been received differently if it came from an elected patriarch. However, in the ecumenical circles it is remembered as a symbolic encyclical for the constitution of broad ecumenical dialogue as it truly proposes the rapprochement towards other Churches and enumerates certain practical solutions. The disappointment towards the negative reception of this encyclical was expressed by Archbishop Germanos:

In the midst of their many problems, which had arisen after the war in each of the Christian churches, very little attention was given unfortunately (especially in the West) to the above Encyclical, and no answer of the Church eager to recognize the necessity of understanding and collaboration reached Constantinople.¹⁰³

The participation of Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement was intensified after this moment.

¹⁰³ Archbishop Germanos, "The Oecumenical Patriarchate," in *The Ecumenical Review* 1, no. 1 (1948): 87-88.

Even if there were no discussions on the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarchy, Orthodox theologians were invited to participate to the most important conferences which led to a better knowledge of the other. However, no one denies that the initiative came from the Protestant world. In this way,

The ecumenical movement as we here know it had its main impulse and its main achievements in what has organizationally been the most divided branch of the Church, Protestantism, but in one fashion or another it reached out to other forms of the Faith, notably to the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, and drew into its fellowship many, even though a small minority, from these bodies.¹⁰⁴

The Orthodox Church was not invited to the Missionary Conference of 1910. Probably even if it would have been invited it would not have accepted the proposal. Likewise, the Catholic Church was absent. However, for the conference organized by the movement *Life and Work* (1925), the Orthodox Church decided to

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council," in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, 401.

send representatives. It must be remembered that this conference did not deal with doctrinal matters, but only with the analysis of contemporary social problems. In the message of the conference, it was clearly stated that:

Leaving for the time our differences in Faith and Order, our aims has been to secure united practical action in Christian Life and Work.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, the Orthodox Church participated at the next conference of 1937. Visser 't Hooft made a realistic analysis of Orthodox participation in this dialogue. He said that:

The attitude of the Orthodox Church to other Churches is characterized by a combination of two convictions. On the one hand, the Orthodox Church is the true Church, the one holy catholic and apostolic Church which is confessed in the creed. On the other hand, it recognizes other Churches as real, though imperfect parts of the Body of Christ.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ G. K. A. Bell, ed., *The Stockholm Conference 1925*, 711.

¹⁰⁶ W. A. Visser 't Hooft and J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its Function in Society*, 35.

Analogously, as mentioned before, another movement called *Faith and Order* dealt with doctrinal matters. The first conference was organized in Lausanne in 1927 where the position of Orthodox theologians was considered to be rigid, albeit they were appreciated for stating their point of view. In the opening message the object of the conference was mentioned, that they wished for reaching a fundamental level of understanding. However, the Orthodox delegation refused to vote the reports of the conference, save for the Message of the Church, considering that there are inconsistencies with its theology and faith. Furthermore, the need was felt for drawing up a declaration which was read before all the participant members¹⁰⁷. However, the sensible problem was, and still is, the apostolic succession and the validity of sacraments:

The Orthodox Church, regarding the ministry as instituted in the Church by Christ Himself, and as the Body which by a special charisma is the organ through which the Church spreads its means of grace such as the Sacraments, and believing that the ministry in its threefold form of Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons,

¹⁰⁷ The text was entitled *Declaration on behalf of the Eastern Orthodox Church* and was read by Archbishop Germanos. It can be read here: *Ibid.*, 382-386.

can only be based on the unbroken apostolic succession, regrets that is unable to come in regard to the ministry into some measure of agreement with many of the Churches represented at this Conference, but prays God that He through His Holy Spirit will guide to union even in regard to this difficult point of disagreement.¹⁰⁸

History repeated itself at the next conference of 1937, but at least the dialogue went on. Archbishop Germanos of Thyateira affirmed in the name of the Orthodox delegation the following:

A careful study of the Reports which are now before the Conference will show that they express many fundamental agreements which exists between us and our Christian brethren on many important points. On the other hand, they contain a long series of statements in regard to which significant differences exist [...]. We Orthodox delegates further stress the

¹⁰⁸ H. N. Bate, ed., *Faith and Order*, 447. This text is an extract from the Notes when were discussed the Reports of Section V (The Church's Ministry), Section VI (The Sacraments), and Section VII (The Unity of Christendom and the relation thereto of existing Churches).

necessity of accuracy and concreteness in the formulation of the faith and are convinced that ambiguous expressions and comprehensive expressions of the faith are of no real value [...]. We desire, as you, that the members of the one Body of Christ may again be reunited, and we pray, day by day in our congregations for the union of all mankind [...]. For in spite of all our differences, our common Master and Lord is One – Jesus Christ who will lead us to a more and more close collaboration for edifying of the body of Christ.¹⁰⁹

What was the attitude of the Orthodox Church when the establishment of a World Council of Churches was decided? Did they unanimously participate at the first general assembly or did they reject this idea? Before answering these questions, the fact that the Orthodox Churches were not foreign to this plan, needs to be mentioned. Furthermore, that the Orthodox theologians were aware of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's proposal (1920). Moreover, they had theologians who were members of the two movements' committees – *Life and Work* and *Faith and Order* – which decided in favor of

¹⁰⁹ Leonard Hodgson, ed., *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order*, 155, 156, 157.

founding a World Council. An important personality on behalf of the Orthodox Church for that moment was Archbishop Germanos. As already mentioned, he was proposed as one of the future World Council of Churches presidents. Notwithstanding, in 1948 many Orthodox Churches refused to participate. In this case, I consider that the Churches faced a communication problem. However, the situation was more complex.

The relation with the Orthodox Churches was constantly under the attention of those who proposed the founding of a Council of Churches because it was important for this initiative to become credible. At that time, the Catholic Church was clearly against the plan, but a rapprochement towards the Orthodox Church was not an impossible desiderate. Visser 't Hooft said that:

Our largest unresolved problem is that of the participation of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Although several of them participated and continue to participate in the ecumenical movement, none of the larger Orthodox Churches has yet accepted the invitation to join the World Council. On the other hand many leaders of the Orthodox churches are close friends and active collaborators of the World Council [...]. In any case it should be made unmistakably clear to all Orthodox

churches, that the World Council desires their full participation and considers its memberships as incomplete as long as they have not come in.¹¹⁰

Evidently, the most problematic case was that of the Russian Orthodox Church both because of its greater number of faithful and because its influence over other Orthodox Churches, such as the Romanian and Bulgarian Churches. There were also political problems as these countries were under a communist regime. Nevertheless, the Provisory Committee of the World Council tried to meet with representatives of the Russian Church who initially accepted the proposal, but later refused to participate further.

In these conditions, shortly before August 1948 (July 8-18), the Russian Church convened a conference in Moscow under the pretext of celebrating 500 years since gaining autocephaly. On this occasion they discussed the problem of participating to what today we call the first general assembly of the World Council of Churches¹¹¹. Even though this initiative was contested by

¹¹⁰ *The World Council of Churches. Its Process of Formation*, 77-78. These words are from the Report given by the Dr. Visser 't Hooft to the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches on February 21st, 1946 entitled *The Task of the World Council of Churches*.

¹¹¹ See: *Actes de la conférence des Eglises Orthodoxes*, vol. 1 (Moscou: Editions du Patriarcat du Moscou, 1950); *Actes de la*

the Ecumenical Patriarchy, Archbishop Germanos, the Exarch of Constantinople in the West, was present at this conference. Unfortunately, the Russian Church decided not to go to Amsterdam which influenced the position of other Churches. Several reasons were brought to the table amongst which:

The purpose of the Ecumenical Movement, as expressed in the organization of “the World Council of Churches” aiming ultimately to organize “an Ecumenical Church” in its current plan of action, does not correspond with the Christian ideals and the goals of the Church of Christ, as the Orthodox Church understands them.¹¹²

In other words, they wanted to mention the fact that, for the time being, the participation is not possible as long as the proposals are different from the vision of

conférence des Eglises Orthodoxes, vol. 2 (Moscou: Editions du Patriarcat du Moscou, 1952).

¹¹² See: “Annex III: The Resolution in Connection with the Issue: “The Ecumenical Movement and the Orthodox Church,” in Viorel Ioniță, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia, trans. from Romanian by Remus Rus (Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag Basel: Institut for Ecumenical Studies, University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 2014), 117.

the Orthodox Church's vision¹¹³. This decision was considered to be a setback for what was achieved previously:

The decisions taken in Moscow can be described as a halt in the movement of rapprochement which began in 1920 [...]. Further participation of the Orthodox in the ecumenical movement was discouraged on the grounds of its departure from the search for dogmatic

¹¹³ The official response of the Moscow Patriarchate to the invitation received to participate at the first assembly of the WCC signed by Metropolitan Nicholas is available: Visser 't Hooft, "The Moscow Patriarchate and the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches," in *The Ecumenical Review* 1, no. 2 (1949): 188-197. I quote here a part from this answer: "In accordance with the decision of the Church Conference, the Russian Orthodox Church, while expressing to you its appreciation for the invitation which it received, declines to take part in the Ecumenical Movement with its present tendencies. In view of this, it does not authorize the presence of any representative at the Amsterdam Assembly either as a delegate or as an observer [...]. However, this refusal on our part does not mean that we shall not be interested in the activities of the Ecumenical Movement [...]. In view of this, we would ask you to continue to keep us informed regarding the activities of the World Council of Churches, sending to us suitable literature, reports on the assemblies and conferences, papers on all questions, and so forth" *Ibid.*, 188, 189.

unity and its concentration on social and political questions.¹¹⁴

Whilst the final verdict was negative, four Churches decided to participate. These are: the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Orthodox Church of Greece, the Orthodox Russian Church in exile and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate in America¹¹⁵. It must be mentioned that 85 seats were reserved for the Orthodox in Amsterdam, however only 24 were occupied. Evidently, the presence of these Orthodox Churches had a significant role, especially because the Roman-Catholic Church firmly refused the invitation. The same problem of the Protestant character of the Council was debated and a minority Orthodox presence brought an added credibility. An Anglican theologian, George Bell said straightforwardly that:

The full participation of the Orthodox Churches is a matter of great moment to the World Council of Churches. On no account ought the World Council to be

¹¹⁴ Nicolas Zernov, "The Eastern Churches and the Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century," in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, 666.

¹¹⁵ See the complete list with all Churches present at this Assembly: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *La première assemblée*, 301-307. A declaration was made on behalf of the Orthodox participating delegates at this assembly: *Ibid.*, 291-292.

allowed to give the impression of being, either an organization of Protestant Churches, or largely a Western, and, more specifically, an Anglo-Saxon organization, which identifies itself, consciously or unconsciously, with the concerns and interests of Western nations.¹¹⁶

At the Second General Assembly in Evanston (1954), the Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky spoke about the differences that separate the member Churches of the World Council, but which need to find a common direction. In his words,

Christians still meet each other as strangers. The ecumenical movement has done much to break down barriers of misunderstanding but it has been confined rather to an advanced minority [...]. While it is true to say that everything historical will be surpassed at the end of the history, yet what is being done by men in history has its own status in the story of salvation. A new discovery of the historical church tradition is needed. Full knowledge and understanding are reserved for the Day of

¹¹⁶ G. K. A. Bell, *The Kingship of Christ: The Story of the World Council of Churches* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), 57.

Judgement, but a knowledge of *direction* is available for the Church in her earthly pilgrimage. To recover this *sense of direction* is the first task of the ecumenical movement at the present.¹¹⁷

In the same spirit, the Orthodox delegation reaffirmed the statute of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogue promoted by the WCC:

The whole approach to the problem of reunion is entirely unacceptable from the standpoint of the Orthodox Church. [...]. From the Orthodox view-point, re-union of Christendom with which the World Council of Churches is concerned can be achieved solely on the basis of the total, dogmatic Faith of the early, undivided Church without either subtraction or alteration [...]. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church cannot accept that the Holy Spirit speaks to us only through the Bible [...]. It is through the Apostolic Ministry that the mystery of Pentecost is

¹¹⁷ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The Evanston Report*, 33, 34. Also see: *L'Espérance chrétienne dans le monde d'aujourd'hui: Message et rapports de la deuxième assemblée du Conseil œcuménique des Eglises, Evanston 1954* (Neuchatel, Paris: Delachaux, Niestlé, 1955), 97-98.

perpetuated in the Church. The Episcopal Succession from the Apostles constitutes an historical reality in the life and structure of the Church and one of the pre-supposition of her unity through the ages. The unity of the Church is preserved through the unity of the Episcopate. The Church is one Body whose historical continuity and unity is also safeguarded by the common faith arising spontaneously out of the fullness (*pleroma*) of the Church [...]. In conclusion, we are bound to declare our profound conviction that the Holy Orthodox Church alone has preserved in full and intact <the faith once delivered unto the saints>. It is not because of our human merit, but because it pleases God to preserve <his treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God> (2 Cor.4:7).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The Evanston Report*, 93, 94, 95. This text is extract from the *Declaration of the Orthodox Delegates concerning the Report of Section I: Faith and Order: Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches*. In fact, this was seen as an official response on behalf of the Orthodox Churches. For more details see: *Response to Evanston*, 12-18. Also see: "Appendix 8: A Statement of the Eastern Orthodox Delegates concerning the main theme of the Assembly," in W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The Evanston Report*, 329-331.

Another important moment for the relationship between the Orthodox Churches with the World Council of Churches was represented by the Third General Assembly scheduled to be held in New Delhi, India (1961). The dialogue especially with the Russian Orthodox Church continued after 1948. As such, in 1959 the General Secretary of the WCC went with a delegation to Russia in order to discuss a possible integration of the Orthodox Church in the WCC¹¹⁹. The discussions were not without consequences. Concretely, “the Geneva office made public on April 27, 1961, its receipt of an application for membership in the WCC from the Russian Orthodox Church,”¹²⁰ which was signed by Patriarch Alexius. One of the main actions undertaken by the Third General Assembly of the WCC was admitting four Orthodox Churches as members with full rights. These were: Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Polish Churches. From a political point of view the fact that the requests for being admitted were sent in this order remains interesting. The question raised is the following: if Russia did not opt for its integration into the WCC, would the other Churches still have had the same option?¹²¹

¹¹⁹ The speeches of both Patriarch Alexius and the General Secretary, Visser 't Hooft, were published in: “The World Council of Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 12, no. 3 (1960): 347-350.

¹²⁰ David P. Gaines, *op. cit.*, 802.

¹²¹ See: Michael Bourdeaux, *Opium of the People: The Christian Religion in the U.S.S.R.* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1965), 223-231; David P. Gaines, *op. cit.*, 1032-1036.

Nonetheless, this was indeed an important step for the integration of the Orthodox Churches within the structures and the life of WCC. Visser 't Hooft mentioned that:

The coming of the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Bulgaria, Rumania and Poland into the membership of the WCC affords a lively hope that the Christian community can transcend the political and economic divisions of the world to a greater extent than most people have believed possible. Nothing that has happened in recent times has been so potent a witness that the universal Church of Christ is not tied to any national culture but can have a corporate life of its own and be a reconciling force.¹²²

After the 1961 Assembly, a productive dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the WCC followed:

The presence of Orthodoxy in the ecumenical movement is a witness of Orthodox faith and worship made available for others. She presents to the western world the dimensions and

¹²² W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report*, 54-55.

experiences of a Christianity which goes back through an historic continuity and a living tradition to the beginnings of the Faith. The western world has shown a keen interest in the concept of dogma, the liturgical life, the patristic spirit, the religious, mystical, and ascetic concepts of Christian experience, and the work of scholarship to be found in Orthodoxy.¹²³

Because of the limited space for this research, I can only mention the fact that the Orthodox Churches strove to actively participate in the activities of the Council. I already mentioned the numerous Orthodox consultations which had as a main purpose formulating the Orthodox position regarding the diverse themes in question.

Before speaking about the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement and the WCC, two tensioned moments in the dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the WCC need to be mentioned.

The first one is related to the General Assembly of Canberra (1991). An inclusive language was insisted

¹²³ Vasil T. Istavridis, "The Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement 1948-1968," in Harold E. Fey, ed., *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 2, 1948-1968* (London: SPCK, 1970), 309.

upon, even related to the sensible subjects such as the Persons of the Holy Trinity. There was a suggestion of using the term of ‘mother’ when referring to God the Father. Evidently, this was rejected by the Orthodox theologians¹²⁴. The answer of the Orthodox theologians was a firm one:

We should not substitute inclusive language for the time-tested language of the Bible or the fathers. Female imagery has been prevalent within the Orthodox tradition (e.g., in iconography), but the Trinity cannot be subjected to female language.¹²⁵

Moreover, the need of a reflection over the participation of Orthodox Churches in the WCC was felt. In that document a few problems related to the new directions of the Council were indicated as it was considered that they are foreign to the common basis of dialogue. I quote only a few ideas from that text:

The Orthodox churches want to emphasize that for them, the main aim of the World

¹²⁴ See: Elisabeth Raiser, “Inclusive Community,” in John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and George Tsetsis, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 3, 1968-2000* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004), 244-277.

¹²⁵ Michael Kinnamon, *op. cit.*, 94.

Council of Churches must be *the restoration of the unity of the church* [...]. *Visible unity*, in both the faith and the structure of the church, constitutes a specific goal and must not be taken for granted. The Orthodox note that there has been an *increasing departure from the Basis* of the World Council of Churches. The latter has provided the framework for the Orthodox participation in the World Council of Churches [...]. We must, therefore ask ourselves: *Has the time come for the Orthodox churches and other member churches to review their relations with the World Council of Churches?* We pray the Holy Spirit to help all Christians to renew their commitment to visible unity.¹²⁶

The second tensioned moment, which was clearly related to the first, was at the next general assembly of the WCC in Harare (1998). Already before this meeting two Orthodox Churches decided to withdraw from the Council, namely the Georgian Church (starting with 1997) and the Bulgarian Church (in 1998, little before the Harare assembly). The problems raised by the Orthodox theologians were diverse. Amongst the most important

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 279, 280, 282.

stand: inclusive language, ordination of women, the rights of the sexual minorities, certain tendencies to religious syncretism. The creation of a special commission formed of members of the Executive Committee of the WCC and Orthodox theologians was decided. Its purpose was to offer a framework for them to discuss together the current situation of the Orthodox Church in the WCC¹²⁷.

In the following subsection I will be analyzing the link between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement, focusing especially on the link with the WCC. I chose to summarily present the relationship of the Orthodox Churches with the WCC until the Eight General Assembly in order to understand the broader context in which Bria activated as a theologian. Important moments took place after this, but they do not directly regard the present research. I will proceed likewise related to the following subject, namely, then I will only focus on the events that took place while Bria activated in the WCC.

¹²⁷ Diane Kessler, *op. cit.*, 6, 24, 68, 152, 161. There was written a doctoral thesis on this topic which is indeed very pleasing: Elina Hellqvist, *The Church and Its Boundaries: A Study of the Special Commission on the Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2011).

II. 3. The Romanian Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches

In this subsection I am going to summarily analyze the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement. I will be focusing also on the already mentioned ecumenical groups, *Life and Work* and *Faith and Order*. It is important for us to understand that Bria was the Romanian theologian most involved in the WCC. However, we have a few theologians with an ecumenical vision preceding him. Before this, I will succinctly describe the situation of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the period in question.

One can speak about the Orthodox Church both in singular and plural. When one chooses the latter, we have in mind the autocephalous or autonomous Churches which belong to the Orthodox Church as a whole. There is communion between them, but each has the duty to organize itself depending on their particular context. In this situation we have a Greek, Russian, Romanian Orthodox Church, and so on.

The Romanian Orthodox Church, to which Bria belonged, recommends itself as being an Apostolic Church. It seems like Andrew the Saint Apostle christened the territories from this part of Europe. Mircea Păcurariu asserts that:

In the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea, the new teaching of Jesus Christ was propagated by St Andrew [...]. According to recent findings, St Philip might have preached in the same territory [...]. Romanian Christianity should be considered of ‘apostolic origin’.¹²⁸

The Romanian Orthodox Church celebrates Andrew the Apostle as protector of the country, in remembrance of precisely this event¹²⁹. While not entering into too many details, which are beyond the reach of the present research, one needs to know that the Romanian Orthodox Church gained its autocephaly only in 1888 and it was recognized as a Patriarchy in 1925 with its first patriarch being Miron Cristea (1925-1939).

Passing on to the subject of the matter, in the *interbellum* representatives of this Church took part in the ecumenical movement. At the first conference of the *Life and Work* movement, the delegates of the Romanian

¹²⁸ Mircea Păcurariu, “Romanian Christianity,” in Ken Parry, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 186, 187.

¹²⁹ The Troparion of the Saint: “Son of Galilee and brother of Peter, from amongst the fishermen to the council of the Apostles you were called, Andrew the wonderful; and from your grave in Patra, you call all people to God and then you filled us with joy when in Romania you again came, where the Lord Christ you preached” *Mineiul pe Noiembrie* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2005), 465.

Orthodox Church were: Nicolae, Metropolitan of Transylvania, Nectarie, Metropolitan of Bucovina, Vartolomeu, Bishop of Râmnicul Vâlcea, Archimandrite Julius Scriban, Professor Dr. G. Ispir, Mrs. Ispir, Rev. Dr. I. Lupas, Rev. T. Scolobet. Together with them went, on behalf of the Romanian Reformed Church, H.E. Stephen Ugron and A. Stephen Toth¹³⁰. In the official report of this conference, the discourse of Prof. Ispir from Bucharest was noted. Amongst others, it was affirmed that:

The spirit of our times is for co-operation of the Churches, if possible for a reunion, because (1) it is absolutely needed in the mission field, (2) it is wanted for international relations, (3) it is necessary for the internal life of Christianity [...]. But we must not be exclusive, we must be open-minded people. You may be free to follow the ideal of your own communion, but have always before your eyes ‘an open-air catholicity’. I mean by open-air catholicity that kind of attitude of mind which is the result of walking on an April morning through the gardens full of flowers and perfumes [...]. The time has come when we shall all forget the

¹³⁰ The full list of the participants at this conference can be read here: G. K. A. Bell, ed., *The Stockholm Conference*, 21-37.

confessional differences and be attentive to the great problem of Christian cooperation which will give us the power to do good works and to be true brothers one to another, that is to say, to love one another.¹³¹

At the following conference, the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented again, but this time its delegation was composed of: Rev. Archimandrite Iulius Scriban, Prof. Șerban Ionescu, Prof. C. Iordăchescu, Prof. Vintilă Popescu and Prof. Dr. Vasile D. Ispir¹³².

Unfortunately, at the conference of the Faith and Order movement from 1927, the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented by only one delegate, Nectarie Archbishop and Metropolitan of Bucovina. However, he came forth presenting a message on behalf of the Romanian Patriarchate¹³³. While the prospects of the Romanian Church for the conference from 1937 (Edinburgh) seemed better, as it accepted the invitation and chose two delegates for it, because of reasons yet unknown, they did not participate. Interestingly enough, they did participate at the Oxford conference which took place only a month before.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 642, 643, 644.

¹³² J. H. Oldham, ed., *The Churches Survey Their Task*, 296, 299, 301, 303, 306.

¹³³ See: H. N. Bate, ed., *Faith and Order*, 215, 519.

For the Council's General Assembly in Amsterdam (1948), the Romanian Church decided to adopt the attitude of the Russian Church. This came after Patriarch Justinian participated in July at the conference in Moscow where the decision of not taking part was made. In this context, I should remind the pro-ecumenist position of Prof. Ioan Coman, who was considered to be one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement in Romania¹³⁴.

While it is clear that the position of the Patriarchate was influenced by the gathering in Moscow, one needs to know that it was due to the political context. The communist regime was by 1947 already instated in Romania, and this obliged for a close relation with Russia, both politically and theologically. Moreover, while a delegation on behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric from America was present in Amsterdam, it did not subordinate to the Romanian Patriarchy¹³⁵. On the contrary, it was a bishopric established uncanonically, and evidently without the right of representing the Romanian Orthodox Church.

At the beginning of the 1960s the situation changed a little and Romania tried to distance itself from

¹³⁴ Ioan Coman, "L'Eglise orthodoxe et le mouvement œcuménique," in *Actes de la Conférence des Eglises Orthodoxes*, vol. 2, 5-86. See also: Ion Bria, "Ioan Coman (1902-1987)," in Ion Bria and Dagmar Heller, eds., *Ecumenical Pilgrims: Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 63-66.

¹³⁵ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *La première assemblée*, 304.

Russia's policy. Evidently, Romania was still under the political control of the communist regime which influenced the religious life, at least until the fall of the regime in December 1989.

As this was the political context, there are a few hypotheses related to why the Romanian Orthodox Church joined the WCC. Lucian Leuștean says that Patriarch Justinian nevertheless submitted the candidacy¹³⁶. Another opinion is that,

Moscow's decision was seen in Bucharest as granting permission for the Romanian Church to take further actions on applying for the World Council of Churches' membership.¹³⁷

Whatever the truth, the Romanian Orthodox Church applied to join the WCC after the Russian Church did. More precisely, the Russian Orthodox Church applied in April 1961, and the Romanian Church in September 1961¹³⁸. Officially, the two Orthodox

¹³⁶ Lucian N. Leuștean, "Between Moscow and London: Romanian Orthodoxy and National Communism, 1960-1965," in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 85, no. 3 (2007): 495-497.

¹³⁷ Kaisamari Hintikka, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Church, 1961-1977*, *Scriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* 48 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2000), 42.

¹³⁸ The letter addressed by Patriarch Justinian as President of the Romanian Orthodox Synod to the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches on the 15th of September 1961 can be read in

Churches along with those of Bulgaria and Poland were accepted as members at the Third General Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi (November-December 1961). I already mentioned this moment when I presented the relation of the Orthodox Churches with the WCC.

After this moment, the Romanian Orthodox Church was seen in the ecumenical circles as a bridge between Western and Eastern Christianity¹³⁹. However, only in 1973 did the Romanian Church have a representative in the WCC in the person of Ion Bria. At that moment there were only three orthodox theologians directly employed by the WCC, namely: Fr. George Tsetsis and Prof. Nikos Nissiotis (both representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Fr. Vitaly Borovoy (Russian Orthodox Church). In his autobiography, Bria refused to consider himself as representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the WCC¹⁴⁰. However, according to my research it is quite evident that he was all the time in touch with the Romanian Patriarchate. In other words,

Romanian in: Ion Bria, *Destinul Ortodoxiei* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1989), 156-160.

¹³⁹ Kaisamari Hintikka, "The Pride and Prejudice of Romanian Orthodox Ecumenism," in Jonathan Sutton and Wil van den Bercken, eds., *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe*, Eastern Christian Studies 3 (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003), 460-461.

¹⁴⁰ Ion Bria, *Al doilea botez*, 204-205.

Bria tended to convey direct information from the World Council of Churches to his church, and especially to explain the background of various World Council of Churches study programs to the Patriarchate.¹⁴¹

It is not the aim of my study to research the political involvement in the life and activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist period. I take into consideration the diverse speculations made in relation to Bria. It is supposed that in order to travel during the communist period, one needed to have the approval of the Department for Religious Cults in order to travel abroad. To what extent Bria was involved politically or not, I cannot say at this stage of research. However, it partly stands that:

During Ceaușescu's regime, the *Securitate* was one of the harshest security services in the Eastern bloc. The extent of collaboration between hierarchy and the *Securitate* remains unclear, although it is highly probable that all clergy abroad were vetted and integrated in its structures.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Kaisamari Hintikka, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 140-141.

¹⁴² Lucian N. Leuștean, "The Romanian Orthodox Church," in Lucian N. Leuștean, ed., *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War*,

The activities undertaken by Bria in the WCC represented a boost for the image of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which had the opportunity of hosting different consultations organized by the various programs of the WCC.

A last episode regarding the relation of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the WCC needs to be mentioned, namely the liberation from under political control right after the fall of the communist regime at the end of 1989. Freedom of expression and the possibility of a broader ecumenical dialogue became possible after this important moment for Romania's social and religious life.

I end here this subchapter which had the role of briefly presenting the historical map of the Romanian Orthodox Church before Bria became an active member in the ecumenical dialogue promoted by the WCC.

II. 4. Bria's Vision on Ecumenism. Some Critical Reflections for Today

As the historical elements help one to know the most important moments of modern ecumenism, I will

1945-91 (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 52. For more details on this topic, see: Cristian G. Romocea, "Church-State Relations in Post-1989 Romania," in *Journal of Church and State* 53, no. 2 (2011): 247-250; Kaisamari Hintikka, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 123-127; Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan, "The Romanian Orthodox Church," in Lucian N. Leuştean, ed., *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 95-98.

now turn my attention for this last section of the chapter to analyzing Bria's ecumenical vision. Because I was educated in a theological system which did not seriously analyze ecumenical theology, I wished to find out more about this subject from a person who activated for a long period of time in the ecumenical movement. In the following lines I will present how Bria understood this way of doing theology.

Before going further, I need to clarify one aspect related to the term *ecumenical*. The term stems from the Greek word *oikoumene*, and along history held multiple meanings. Its primary connotation refers to the whole inhabited earth, however, in the church's interpretation it refers to the universal, ecumenical Church¹⁴³. In the Orthodox world, the designation has on one hand a negative connotation, as there is currently somewhat of a repulsion towards the modern ecumenical movement. On the other hand, it has a positive value, or even triumphant when one refers to the historical past and, more precisely, to the Ecumenical Councils¹⁴⁴. The negative feelings are stronger towards an Orthodox theologian who defines

¹⁴³ See: "Appendix: The Word "Ecumenical"- its History and Use," in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, 735-740.

¹⁴⁴ "The adjective *ecumenical* received a few interpretations, but when it was used with the substantive *synod*, with the form: *ecumenical synod*, it was always understood as that gathering of the Church Fathers, that decided in the spirit of catholicity, decisions which were valid for the whole church" Ion Bria, "În legătură cu sinodul al II-lea de la Vatican," in *Ortodoxia* 14, nos.1-2 (1962): 278.

himself as ecumenist or, as an advocate of ecumenism. Remaining on the level of theologians, there are some who speak about an *ecumenoclasm*, i.e. a struggle against ecumenism. The term is referring to the iconoclast theology of the 8th century. Bria was himself, as it is already clear, an *ecumenodule* who claimed that the Orthodox Church should not isolate itself behind the wall of anti-ecumenism.

Returning to ecumenism, a satisfactory definition of the ecumenical movement is:

The ecumenical movement promotes the restoration of the seen unity of the Churches which were divided during the centuries (because of theological and non-theological factors), by way of agreements and theological dialogue, common testimony, cooperation and mutual inter-church assistance.¹⁴⁵

In its essence, the purpose of ecumenism is to retrieve the Eucharistic foundation for the visible unity.

As such, the ecumenical movement comprises all means that help the development of Christian dialogue. The World Council should not be mistaken to represent the ecumenical movement as a whole. On the contrary,

¹⁴⁵ Ion Bria, *Tratat de teologie dogmatică și ecumenică*, vol. 2 (Sibiu: Editura Andreiana, ³2009), 60.

the Council should be seen as a platform amongst others which together form what we call “the ecumenical movement”. I have identified this distinction also in Bria’s writings. In his words:

The Ecumenical Council of Churches must not be identified with the Ecumenical Movement. Even if the latter would come to include all Churches, the Ecumenical Movement would always remain as something inclusive. The Ecumenical Council is a fruit, an instrument of the Ecumenical Movement, an effort to visibly and more structurally express the communion discovered by the Churches in the Ecumenical Movement. But the ecumenical movement extends farther than the Ecumenical Council.¹⁴⁶

I have already specified in the biographical chapter that Bria was a staff member of the Council for approximately 21 years. To this the activity between 1994 and 2002 is added, a period when he was appointed by the Council to represent it at certain conferences, ecumenical gatherings, etc. Simultaneously, he was involved in other ecumenical structures, such as the

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

bilateral dialogues¹⁴⁷ and he also represented the Romanian Orthodox Church at certain pan-Orthodox conferences, some of which had an ecumenical connotation¹⁴⁸. All of these contributed to his great significance as a theologian specialized in ecumenism. In his case, it is what I called “to live ecumenism from the inside”. One thing is to read about ecumenism and another is to take part in the activities.

If in 1995 Bria edited a book about the pioneers of the ecumenical movement¹⁴⁹, he was righteously included in the list of 20th c. Orthodox pioneers for the ecumenical dialogue, in a new volume entitled: *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, edited by Prof. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and other important theologians, such as Thomas FitzGerald and Cyril Hovorun¹⁵⁰. While the list is made out of 33 theological personalities, there are only

¹⁴⁷ Bria participated at some ecumenical meetings which took place within the pale of Roman-Catholic – Orthodox dialogue. For more details, see: Irimie Marga, *În dragoste și adevăr: dialogul teologic oficial ortodox-catolic, de la Rodos la Balamand*, Colecția Cartea Religioasă, Seria Studii Teologice (Pitești, Brașov and Cluj-Napoca: Editura Paralela 45, 2000), 22, 23, 265; Patrice Mahieu, *Se préparer au don de l'unité: la commission internationale catholique-orthodoxe 1975-2000* (Paris: Les Editions du CERF, 2014): 81-117.

¹⁴⁸ Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor pan-ortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009: spre sfântul și marele sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe* (București: Editura Basilica, 2013), 112, 118.

¹⁴⁹ Ion Bria and Dagmar Heller, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁰ Complete reference: Pantelis Kalaitzidis *et al.*, eds., *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, Regnum Studies in Global Christianity (Oxford: Regnum Books International, Oxford, in cooperation with WCC Publications, 2014).

two Romanian representatives: Ion Bria¹⁵¹ and Dumitru Stăniloae¹⁵². I personally believe that Bria's nomination cannot be contested, while the position of Stăniloae towards the ecumenical movement remains ambiguous¹⁵³. It stands true until today that Bria

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.¹⁵⁴

I consider it important to specify that Bria, as an Orthodox theologian, advocated the Orthodox thesis about the Church. It claims the integrity of the Orthodox Church and its identification with the historical Church

¹⁵¹ Nicolae Moşoiu, "Fr. Ion Bria," in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *op. cit.*, 194-200.

¹⁵² Ştefăniţă Barbu, "Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae," in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *op. cit.*, 248-251.

¹⁵³ See: Nicu Dumitraşcu, "A Romanian Perspective on Ecumenism, Patristics and Academic Theology," in *The Ecumenical Review* 63, no. 2 (2011): 169-176. Reverend Dumitraşcu starts his article with a compromising affirmation as footnote, saying: "Ecumenism is regarded with confidence by some and skepticism by others. Father Dumitru Stăniloae, after a long analysis of the ecumenical phenomenon itself and of decisions adopted within the WCC assemblies, said in the latter years of his life that "ecumenism is the pan-heresy of the 20th century".

¹⁵⁴ Nicolae Moşoiu, "Fr. Ion Bria," in Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *op. cit.*, 194.

of Christ. In other words, Orthodoxy represents the true image of Christ. Precisely this belief offers the theological foundation which allows the Orthodox Churches to participate in the ecumenical movement. More precisely:

The ecumenical problem is not represented by the unity of the Church *per se*, which is given by God and kept historically and in a visible manner in the Orthodox Church – Una Sancta, but in the historical disbanding of Christians. The schism is not situated inside the Church, but in the separation of Christian confessions from the undivided Church, which still finds itself in direct continuity with the Apostles and Patristic Tradition.¹⁵⁵

In itself, the problem of ecumenism is ecclesiological. I will analyze this in the second part of the next chapter. In the same time, the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement is related to its ecclesiological nature, and thus does not represent an option, but even a necessity. The universality of Christ, to which Orthodox theology refers, must be continuously updated and in any context. Bria was among the first Romanian theologians who clearly endorsed that Orthodoxy and ecumenism are

¹⁵⁵ Ion Bria, *Tratat de teologie dogmatică și ecumenică*, vol. 2, 67.

two correlative and not contradictory realities¹⁵⁶. In this perspective, Bria backed the ecumenical dialogue, analyzing the two main directions of ecumenism, on a doctrinal and missionary plan¹⁵⁷.

A first remark of Bria's theological views on ecumenism remains its positive character. I did not even find in his writings one affirmation which was against the ecumenical dialogue, and I also can say that he had an excessively ecumenical openness. Even if he was aware of certain deficiencies of this dialogue, he tried to ascribe a positive note on them. He even spoke about a new understanding of ecumenism depending on the needs of today's Church, about a more exigent ecumenism. This, for me, represents a sign that he identified some of the ecumenism's flaws. He considered that the ecumenical enthusiasm from the beginning of the 1960s lost some of its consistency. Still, this dialogue cannot be a useless one, and must create new links/relationships in order to continue the ecumenical relations. In other words,

The Orthodox Church cannot ignore its
ecumenical context, cannot ignore the fact

¹⁵⁶ Id., "Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericii Creștine," in *Studii Teologice* 20 (1968): 3-170.

¹⁵⁷ See: *Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, 1980); Jean Stromberg, ed., *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983).

that there is an irreversible ecumenical movement to which almost all Christian Churches subscribe, a movement of unity for the Universal Church and of renewal of the world. On the contrary, she must strongly reaffirm that the *unification of all* stands at the center of the faithful's liturgical prayer.¹⁵⁸

There are positive aspects of being involved in the ecumenical movement. One must realize that Orthodoxy remains, even up to our days, unknown in the Western world. Even if something is known, it is superficial or fragmentary. As Bria was the director of a program which dealt with the dialogue of the World Council with the Orthodox world, he had the opportunity to publish and edit numerous works that describe Orthodox theology. This effort of publishing as many studies as he could or of organizing Orthodox consultations was permanently sustained by the World Council.

Bria published a few articles, both in Romanian and foreign languages, in which he encouraged the involvement of Orthodoxy and Orthodox people in the ecumenical dialogue. To publish articles as *Ecumenism-*

¹⁵⁸ Ion Bria, *Destinul Ortodoxiei*, 362.

*the Responsibility of the Orthodox*¹⁵⁹, presumes that one has an open perspective on the ecumenical movement.

Withal, Bria considered that some problems from Orthodox history and theology had the chance of being analyzed and interpreted in the context of dialogue. Bria believed in the fact that,

Engaged in the ecumenical debate, modern Orthodox theology is in a position to reformulate its traditional language and to discover some aspects of its confession of faith which were neglected or even lost during history.¹⁶⁰

He fought to change the archaic image of Orthodoxy, defined most of the time through its rite/ritual. Through its entry into the ecumenical movement, Orthodoxy was subjected to outside critiques which helped it to redefine itself. For example, this dialogue led to the rediscovery of its missionary dimension, its social involvement, and even of the

¹⁵⁹ Id., “Ecumenism-responsabilitatea ortodocșilor,” in *Vestitorul*, no. 90 (1993): 10. This article was republished in Id., *Ortodoxia în Europa: locul spiritualității române*, Colecția Biserică și Societate 4 (Iași: Editura Trinitas, 1995), 141-143.

¹⁶⁰ Id., “Contribuții ortodoxe la teologia ecumenică de azi,” in *Studii Teologice* 31, nos. 5-10 (1979): 358.

ecumenical dimension of the Orthodox Church¹⁶¹. He refused to assign to Orthodoxy the image of a confession which would differentiate itself from what the Catholic and Protestant Churches propose.

If some Orthodox theologians militated for the involvement of Orthodoxy in the ecumenical movement, I have to mention the fact that unfortunately there was a very powerful anti-ecumenical voice. Personally, before having access to the western and ecumenical cultures, I did not have a certain opinion regarding this subject. However, I met people who define themselves as being anti-ecumenical. I remember a conversation with a student from the Orthodox Theology Faculty of Bucharest who was quite surprised by the fact that I was going to study at a Catholic theology faculty. My experience proves that one is completely influenced by the context in which one lives. To this, one should add, theological incompetence, lacking Christian love, love which should bring us closer and not divide us in Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants.

Bria was aware of this anti-ecumenical movement present in the Orthodox world, especially in Romania, and tried to identify which are its problems. He considered that this reaction against the ecumenical dialogue originates in a scarce theological culture. In his words,

¹⁶¹ See: Id., "Ortodoxia și semnificația ei azi," in *Studii Teologice* 44, nos. 1-2 (1992): 3-17.

The anti-ecumenism which makes itself manifest today must be linked with the conflict between the diverse existing currents, but especially with the degradation of theological university education, incapable to the questions brought up by post-modernity. This education, in many Orthodox Churches, suffers from provincialism and is practicing a theology of complacency, under the pretext of expressing ‘the Orthodoxy from the depths’, hence the intransigency for heterodox who commit heresies. The lack of ecumenical information of young theologians is destructive because they can be manipulated by fundamentalist groups (some originate from the monastic world), which suffocate in prejudices: Orthodoxy has no place in Europe, ecumenism has no place in Orthodoxy.¹⁶²

Because I graduated from an Orthodox faculty of theology and I lived the experience of this education system which does not try at all to analyze the problems of ecumenism, I have some rhetoric questions which reveal the current state of academic theology. I totally

¹⁶² Id., *Hermeneutica Teologică*, 136-137.

agree that the lack of theological education brings a set of prejudices, which, most of the time, are groundless and can become dangerous.

I participated in a contest course named *Missiology and Ecumenism*, however the line of the competition was one of sectology, presenting the Orthodox position in contrast with other theologies. Whether the debate about ecumenical theology was deliberately overlooked I cannot say. Nevertheless, it needs to be known that proselytism is practiced in an un-ecumenical situation; i.e. the Churches who resort to proselytism are not part of the WCC. It is certain that after this class, nobody came into contact with this type of theology. Even if the professors would have had a clear anti-ecumenical position, it would have been better to speak about it, rather than ignoring it.

My questions are related to the Romanian context, but they could be valid for other Orthodox areas. I already mentioned that the Romanian Orthodox Church participated in the ecumenical movement and then it decided to become a member of the WCC starting with 1961. At the same time, they opened bilateral dialogues with different Churches. Of course, the discussions with the Catholic Church occupy a special place.

The first question relates to this ecumenical memory which seems to have erased¹⁶³. What I mean is

¹⁶³ Id., “Biserica Ortodoxă Română și Consiliul Ecumenic al Biseriilor (1961-1991),” in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 109, nos.

that everything built in the past today became unimportant. Bria spoke about the ecumenical flame which risks to be extinguished in the current context. I would dare say, evidently with regret for the efforts made by these theologians as Bria, that it almost has been extinguished. The most significant problem is refusing the reception of the results of the ecumenical dialogues which were carried out for long, and sometimes impressive time spans. I am not aware of the situation in other Churches, but am only referring to the Romanian Orthodox environment. At that particular time, the appropriate attention was not given and for today's theologians, these agreed statements are almost unimportant and sometimes even unknown. Differently put, we do not find ourselves in them. The most eloquent example is the agreed statement *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*¹⁶⁴, which touches the essence of ecumenism and of the fight for Christian unity. I read this text only at the beginning of my research for this theme. If these texts are not to be studied in a faculty of theology, where do they belong then? In the current situation, this “diplomatic ecumenism” remains a failure and only a theoretical activity, with no practical application¹⁶⁵.

10-11 (1991): 66-82. See also: Id., “The Eastern Orthodox in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 38, no. 2 (1986): 216-227.

¹⁶⁴ See footnote no. 43.

¹⁶⁵ For this process of reception see: Id., “La Réception des Résultats des dialogues,” in *Les Dialogues Œcuménique Hier et Aujourd’hui*,

Another question is related to the protagonists of ecumenical dialogue as representatives of Romanian Orthodoxy. What was their attitude when they came back to their home structures? Perhaps it is worth mentioning that we were represented, most of the times, by certain hierarchs and priests who, because of pastoral reasons, were quite reserved towards promoting the ecumenical movement. Would it not be good to raise young theologians, free of certain influences, who are to study ecumenical theology and represent us in this dialogue? However, in order to prepare these youth, one needs professors who would actually teach such topics and not hide behind a formal title. The most eloquent example is Bria whom, when he came back to Romania as associate professor at the Faculty of Theology from Sibiu (1995-1999) changed the method of teaching dogmatic theology. The class was named, until then: *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology*, but he changed it into: *Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology*. This course was later published and it represented a shift of paradigms from a vague presentation of other theologies to a historical and theological analysis of other Christian traditions.

One must not forget the possibility of accessing scholarships abroad, which helps students study the theology of other denomination in those native environments. However, there are also problems in this

situation. When young Orthodox theologians come to the West and study, after they specialize on different branches of theology, these students prefer not to return to the old structures which would need them. This, contrary to the way in which those scholarships were planned, namely for the newly formed theologian to return home.

If we would have a theological system in which the ecumenical problem would be discussed, it could then expand to the local level. Only in these conditions we could speak about reconstructing local ecumenism¹⁶⁶. The problem of ecumenical dialogue in Orthodox Churches is that it remains only at the institutional level, it is restricted to the official discussions and does not reach the lower, local level. In Romania, in order to have a unitary perspective, ecumenical theology needs to be submitted to general debates. This subject must not be confiscated by the specialists, but needs to be of interest for the whole community. We insist abundantly on theology of reception when we are confronted with teachings foreign to Orthodoxy, arguing that they were not received by the community and therefore cannot be accepted. While one speaks of this, does this process really exist in current Orthodox practice? Or, in other words, how can the community reject perspectives from the ecumenical dialogue if it is not informed about these

¹⁶⁶ See: Id., "Reconstruirea ecumenismului local în România," in *Vestitorul*, nos. 143-144 (1995): 6, 13.

debates? If this discussion about ecumenism would have existed, the people would not have been so confused now. These people live, in fact, in compound Christian communities in which dialogue becomes a way of life. At the same time, the influences coming from anti-ecumenical environments speak about canons from the past which consider the dialogue with those outside of Orthodoxy to be a betrayal. Moreover, the diaspora brought on a new challenge. In the case of the Romanian community abroad, they live in Western Europe but most of the time, return home. Evidently, the reality of the ecumenical dialogue abroad is not cultivated also in their home country, so opposing perspectives emerge. A clear example is the relation with the Catholic Church. In the diaspora, the Orthodox communities are allowed to have services in Catholic churches, which represents an act of ecumenicity. In Romania, during the communist regime, the Greek-Catholic Church was outlawed and its properties were given to the Orthodox Church. After the democratic revolution, they were reclaimed, but the Orthodox communities refuse to give them back or even share. Even if Bria was entirely against Uniatism, he clearly declared that,

To do justice to the Greek-Catholic Church from Romania is more than a moral obligation for the Romanian Patriarchy.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Id., *Hermeneutica Teologică*, 147.

If the Orthodox Church did no efforts of promoting the ecumenical dialogue, problems that arise ask for answers. Bria spoke about the new ecumenical perspective which is to respond to modern situations, perspective which should be sustained by the programs of faculties of theology, priests in their parishes, but also by the whole community, which needs to be permanently kept up to date with ecumenical problems.

There are especially social problems for which a common action is more than necessary. An example from Romania, which asked for the involvement of more Churches was that of religious education in schools. There were persons who tried to remove this class and replace it with a certain type of sexual education. There was a process of gathering signatures on behalf of the parents which still want their children to be taught religious education in state schools. The result was a positive one, however, one needs to notice that Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant families had the same option. The campaign was organized by the Romanian Orthodox Church, but the involvement of Christians of other denominations was important. I think that this common act could be considered one of ecumenism *par excellence*.

Before closing this chapter, it needs to be said that Bria did not consider ecumenism as a danger for the integrity of the Orthodox faith; on the contrary, he saw it as a chance of Orthodoxy to affirm its Apostolic

tradition. For those who reproached certain Orthodox theologians for their involvement in the ecumenical movement as they would betray Orthodoxy this way, Bria clearly said that,

Ecumenism does not propagate doctrinal confusion and it must not be felt as a threat or effacement of particular dogmatic or cultural identity.¹⁶⁸

In his last published article, Bria confessed:

The impression in Harare was that the World Council of Churches would tolerate a spoiled ecumenism and was not determined to heal the causes of divisions, historical and present-day, among the churches.¹⁶⁹

Even so, the new problems that arose, such as inclusive language and consecration of women can be topics for discussion, and even the postponing of the

¹⁶⁸ Id., “Rolul și responsabilitatea Ortodoxiei în dialogul ecumenic,” in *Ortodoxia* 32, no. 2 (1980): 369. See also: John S. Romanides, “Presuppositions of Orthodox Ecumenism,” in Todor Sabev, ed., *The Sofia Consultation: Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), 65-68.

¹⁶⁹ Ion Bria, “Widening the Ecclesiological Basis of the Ecumenical Fellowship,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 56, no. 2 (2004): 200.

initial project of the WCC which had as a purpose the final union of the Churches, but Bria did not consider them as reason to break the relationships. However, he also stated that the Orthodox Churches have the liberty of retreating from the Council when this wish exists, but it would be too costly for what was already accomplished in the past:

The Orthodox, however, have to recognize that the ecumenical movement had undeniably affected their church, her life, mission and theology.¹⁷⁰

II. 5. Conclusion

This was a historical chapter on the modern ecumenical movement which I found very helpful in order to understand Bria's implication in dialogue with other Christians. His openness can be understood if we keep in mind his context presented in the first chapter. Because of this, his theology was influenced by the ideals of the ecumenical dialogue.

As a real conclusion I very much welcome the characterization for Bria made by an unknown person, written on the last page of one of Bria's works, which says that he

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

represents a strong voice among the Orthodox thinkers who look for a new presentation of Orthodoxy by interpreting its heritage in the ecumenical community, based on the actual experience of Christ in the Christian world.¹⁷¹

In the following chapter I will analyze two main themes of Orthodox theology to which Bria gave special attention. In the first part I will analyze the Orthodox missionary perspective expressed by the concept *liturgy after the Liturgy*. In the second part I will be reflecting on the ecclesiological elements of Bria's thinking.

¹⁷¹ Id., *Orthodoxy and Ecumenism: A New Theological Discourse* (Geneva: WCC, Unit I-Unity and Renewal, 1994).

CHAPTER THREE

ORTHODOX MISSION AND ECUMENICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

III. Introduction

This present chapter is divided into two themes. The first one analyzes the Orthodox mission expressed through the concept *liturgy after the Liturgy*. Bria defined himself as missiologist as he wrote on the theology of Orthodox mission extensively. The concept *liturgy after the Liturgy* which he promoted summarizes the essence of his missionary theology. That is why I am going to analyze this concept while making a theological display of how Bria understood this missionary concept. The second theme of this chapter is related to ecclesiological elements of Bria's writings. As already mentioned, ecumenism remains an ecclesiological problem. The debates around this subject have seized 20th century theology, which means that the existing literature is impressive. Bria came into contact with it and treated in different articles and even books the teaching about the Church both from an Orthodox and ecumenical point of view. What I managed to grasp from his writings I will expose in a critical and synthetic way.

III. 1. The History of the Expression *liturgy after the Liturgy*

From the beginning it needs to be said that this typology of mission within the Orthodox Church came into existence within the ecumenical framework. To be precise, within the ecumenical discussions, after the 1970s, Orthodox theologians were provoked to define the Orthodox identity regarding mission and pastoral activity. In these intensive discussions this model was formulated to express the Orthodox mission in the present.

When the *International Missionary Council* was integrated into the WCC in 1961, as I have already mentioned, the Orthodox Churches were against this decision. They were afraid of the WCC taking on a Protestant character of mission. But there were discussions and the Orthodox theologians gradually became convinced that the integration of the IMC would reduce the risk of proselytism. Indeed, the act of proselytism was and still remains a problem for many Orthodox Churches. For this reason, in New Delhi a document in which proselytism was defined as a distorted Christian witness was approved¹⁷².

¹⁷² See: "Appendix VIII: Revised Report on "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches," in *Evanston to New Delhi*, 239-245. This Report was approved at the New Delhi Assembly: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report*, 151. See also: Vasil T. Istavridis, *art. cit.*, 297.

In 1971 a proposal was made to restructure the WCC from a divisional structure into programme units. Consequently, from this moment on and officially from the fifth Assembly of the WCC, there were three important programs, namely: Unit I: Faith and Witness (Sub-units: Commission on Faith and Order, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, The Working Group on Church and Society, Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies); Unit II: Justice and Service; Unit III: Education and Communication¹⁷³.

Now, because we know the position of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in the structure of the WCC, it is necessary to mention its important meetings in order to be able to speak about the Orthodox consultations within this structure. These consultations helped Orthodoxy to reflect on and express its missionary identity. In 1963 the first Missionary Conference of CWME was held in Mexico City¹⁷⁴ and

¹⁷³ See: "Appendix III Revised Report of the Structure Committee approved by Central Committee 1971," in *Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Fourth Meeting, Addis Ababa*, 136-186. With a few changes, this new structure was approved by the Nairobi Assembly. See "Appendix 11: The Rules of the World Council of Churches," in David M. Paton, *op. cit.*, 322-340. Also see: *Work Book: For the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, Kenya, 23 November-10 December 1975* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1975), 78-110.

¹⁷⁴ See: *Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Mexico City, December 8th-19th 1963* (London & New York & Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, n. d.).

was followed by: Bangkok (1973)¹⁷⁵, Melbourne (1980)¹⁷⁶, San Antonio (1989)¹⁷⁷, Salvador (1996)¹⁷⁸, Athens (2005)¹⁷⁹ and Arusha (2018)¹⁸⁰. Since the integration of IMC and more concretely after the 1970s Orthodox theologians were provoked between these conferences to work in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. In order to accomplish it, two important steps were made. Firstly, a special desk for Orthodox Studies and Relations was created. It was coordinated in the beginning by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and from April 1973 by Ion Bria, as I already explained when I presented the functions of Bria within the WCC. When the creation of this desk was proposed, it was said very clearly that,

The purpose of the programme is two-fold. On the one hand, it endeavors to introduce into the ecumenical discussion

¹⁷⁵ *Bangkok Assembly 1973*, 3-9.

¹⁷⁶ *Your Kingdom Come*, xi-xviii.

¹⁷⁷ See: Frederick R. Wilson, ed., *The San Antonio Report: Your Will Be Done, Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

¹⁷⁸ Christopher Duraisingh, ed., *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998).

¹⁷⁹ Jacques Matthey, ed., *Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile! Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities. Report of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, Greece May 9- 16, 2005* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2008).

¹⁸⁰ Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit. Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, 8-13 March 2018, Arusha, Tanzania*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019).

on mission and evangelism the contribution of the Orthodox churches. This was notably the case [...]. On the other hand, the programme seeks to foster closer relationship and association of the Orthodox churches with the totality of the ecumenical concern for mission.¹⁸¹

Secondly, the Orthodox theologians were encouraged to publish articles and even books on the missionary perspective and recent activity of the Orthodox Churches.¹⁸²

In other words, the Orthodox Churches were accused of being non-missionary Churches so they started to work and to give a response to this accusation. In this framework the phrase *liturgy after the Liturgy* came into play to express the Orthodox understanding on mission and witness throughout the history and also in the present. Of course, this concept received many interpretations which I will present in the next part of the chapter. However, for this section I will focus on when this concept/phrase was

¹⁸¹ David Enderton Johnson, ed., *Uppsala to Nairobi 1968-1975* (New York and London: Friendship Press and SPCK, in collaboration with WCC, 1975), 86.

¹⁸² A good example is the Journal *International Review of Mission* where many articles by Orthodox authors were published. Also, one of the important books published as a contribution to the ecumenical thought on mission and evangelism was: Ion Bria, ed., *Martyria-Mission: The Witness of Orthodox Churches Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1980).

proposed as such for the first time and by whom. And from this point the uncertainties begin.

In his book *Mission in Christ's Way*, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos dedicated a few pages in which he gave a few details on the history of this concept under the title *Clarification of the Phrase: "The Liturgy After the Liturgy (1975)"*. More concretely, he assumed the paternity of this expression which was used by him for the first time in a sermon given in 1963 and later proposed in the missionary meeting of Etchmiadzin, Armenia (1975). This was an Orthodox consultation on "Confessing Christ through Liturgical life" organized by the desk Orthodox Studies and Relations which was coordinated by Bria. Yannoulatos mentions that:

In Etchmiadzin, at the end of the Conference, I used part of this sermon as a "Meditation" in order to promote further what the Committee was seeking, and I emphasized the need to continue the Liturgy in daily life (using the phrase "liturgy after the Liturgy").¹⁸³

Indeed, in this Report of the Consultation an Appendix entitled *Note on Continuation of Liturgy in Life* is retained in which this idea is very clearly stated,

¹⁸³ Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 94-96.

but the expression as such is not noted¹⁸⁴. Archbishop Yannoulatos asserts that, consciously or not, Bria repeated after the consultation this phrase as being somehow his original idea. For example, in 1977 at the New Valamo Consultation in which Bria participated, I found this expression being used in the Official Report. Almost two years after the Etchmiadzin Consultation we read:

The dynamics of the liturgical reality (Eucharistic community) as expounded here is rooted in the experience of the Trinitarian life in Christ which continuously saves and illuminates man and history [...]. In each culture the Eucharist dynamics leads into a “liturgy after the liturgy” i.e. a liturgical use of the material world, a transformation of human association in society into a Koinonia, of consumerism into an ascetic attitude towards the creation and the restoration of human dignity.¹⁸⁵

In this situation, because it started to be used in different consultations and discussions, Archbishop Yannoulatos confessed that he asked Bria to publish a

¹⁸⁴ “Confessing Christ through the Liturgical Life of the Church today”, 420-421.

¹⁸⁵ George Tsetsis, ed., *The New Valamo Consultation*, 20.

paper in which he would mention him as the creator of the expression. Consequently, Bria wrote a paper entitled “The liturgy after the Liturgy” in which he quoted the Appendix of the Etchmiadzin Report under the name of Archbishop Yannoulatos saying that,

One comment which in fact summarizes the original debate was sent by Bishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, professor at the University of Athens.¹⁸⁶

In view of this, one needs to admit that this phrase is the original idea of Archbishop Yannoulatos. In order to enforce this assertion, I bring into discussion two more arguments which are in accordance with Bria’s position.

The first one, in his book *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, Bria does not directly say that he is the creator of this expression. However, he did not say that the concept as such belongs to Archbishop Yannoulatos. Here his remark is at the same level, the general one, that it was the idea of Yannoulatos to underscore,

¹⁸⁶ Ion Bria, “The liturgy after the Liturgy,” in *International Review of Mission* 67, no. 265 (1978): 86-87. In the quotation given by Archbishop Yannoulatos appears a little change which cannot be unobserved, mainly because before this he speaks very clearly about the restoration of the truth of the origins of the phrase, saying immediately: “An idea, truly summarizing the original discussion, was formulated by Bishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, Professor at the University of Athens” Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ’s way*, 95.

the necessary link between taking part ‘in the great event of liberation from sin and of communion with Christ’ and making evident ‘this transfiguration of our little being into a member of Christ’ in daily life.¹⁸⁷

However, in the same year 1996, Bria wrote a book in Romanian, which was in fact an expansion of the English volume for the Romanian audience. In this writing he dedicated the first chapter to the origins of the notion *liturgy after the Liturgy* saying that the Orthodox reflections from the Etchmiadzin Consultation “were summarized right here in the expression liturgy after the Liturgy”¹⁸⁸ and in a footnote he says something very important: “for the formulation of this concept, the commentaries of Bishop Anastasios Yannoulatos were decisive.”¹⁸⁹ We have to observe that the connection between the expression as such, the Etchmiadzin Consultation and Archbishop Yannoulatos was made.

The second argument is taken from Bria’s autobiography where he spoke about the missionary current specific to the Orthodox ethos which will be called *liturgy after the Liturgy* “constituted through

¹⁸⁷ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, 20.

¹⁸⁸ Id., *Liturghia după Liturghie: misiune apostolică și misiune creștină-azi* (București: Editura Athena, 1996), 22.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 237, footnote 12.

missionary consultations and publications.”¹⁹⁰ Once again, Bria refused to award the original idea of this typology. The only mention made in this work related to Archbishop Yannoulatos is somehow strange having in mind the whole story of the concept. He says the following:

At Harare, in 1998, Anastasios Yannoulatos, participating as Primate of the Albanian Church, retook the expression “liturgy after the liturgy” in its meditation on Anamnesis.¹⁹¹

Indeed, in his paper presented at Harare Assembly, Archbishop Yannoulatos used this expression referring to the consultation where the concept was formulated as such:

All of us who share consciously in the liturgy, the remembrance of the cross and the resurrection of Christ, must return to our daily routine in order to continue another type of liturgy, ‘a liturgy after the liturgy’ (a motto proposed in Etchmiadzin in 1975) on the daily altar of our personal responsibility, to perform our duty in the

¹⁹⁰ Id., *Al doilea botez*, 146.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

local setting, looking with a universal perspective.¹⁹²

Having said that, Ion Bria promoted this concept avoiding directly to assume its paternity. Contrary to this reality, because he published many articles and books under this title¹⁹³, he was seen as the father of the expression¹⁹⁴ and as the theologian who explained it much better. Many other theologians used this concept in their works and quoted directly from Bria's works without taking Yannoulatos into consideration¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹² Diane Kessler, *op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁹³ Here I enumerate a list of his articles and books in connections with this concept: Ion Bria, "The liturgy after the Liturgy," in *International Review of Mission* 67, no. 265 (1978): 86-90, article republished in many others works as Ion Bria, ed., *Martyria-Mission*, 66-71, Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, 216-220, Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 365-368; Ion Bria, "Celebrating life in the liturgy," in Ion Bria, ed., *Jesus Christ-the Life of the World*, 85-88; Id., *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 38-46; Id., "Dynamics of Liturgy in Mission," in *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327 (1993): 317-325; Id., *The Liturgy after the Liturgy* (written in 1996), and the second chapter of this book *The liturgy after the Liturgy* republished in Petros Vassiliadis, ed., *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013): 46-59; Ion Bria, *Liturghia după Liturghie* (also written in 1996).

¹⁹⁴ See: David Pestroiu, "Părintele Prof. Ion Bria-misionar al Ortodoxiei," in Nicolae Moșoiu, ed., *Relevanța operei părintelui profesor Ion Bria*, 446.

¹⁹⁵ Leon Howell, *Acting in Faith: The World Council of Churches since 1975* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), 25-26; James J.

Undoubtedly, he was the one who took it upon himself to promote the concept within ecumenical circles and we can say that if we speak about this typology even today we owe to him. I give one example, in the new edition of the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* into which this concept was accepted as expressing an Orthodox contribution to the ecumenical discussion on mission, Bria was the author of this section¹⁹⁶. What is important here is the fact that in the first edition of this dictionary this expression was not retained and promoted¹⁹⁷. We know that

Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Maryknoll and New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 94-101; Emmanuel Clapsis, "The Eucharist as Missionary Event in a Suffering World," in George Lemopoulos, ed., *Your Will Be Done*, 161-171; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll and New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 206-210, 385, 517; Archbishop Aram Keshishian, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 26-29; Myra Blyth, "Liturgy after the Liturgy. An Ecumenical Perspective," in *The Ecumenical Review* 44, no. 1 (1992), 73-79; Birgitta Larson and Emilio Castro, "From Missions to Mission," in John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, George Tsetsis, *op. cit.*, 135-136; Lewis S. Mudge, "Ecumenical Social Thought," in John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, George Tsetsis, *op. cit.*, 279-321; Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll and New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 86; Valentin Kozhuharov, *Orthodox and Inter-Christian Perspectives in Mission* (Veliko Tarnovo: Vesta Publishing House, 2015), 188, 208.

¹⁹⁶ Ion Bria, "Liturgy after the Liturgy," in Nicholas Lossky *et al.*, eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002): 705-706.

¹⁹⁷ Id., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva & Grand Rapids: WCC Publications and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

in 1996 Bria wrote his book *Liturgy after the Liturgy* and probably because of his influence we find this concept explained in the second edition of the dictionary on behalf on the Orthodox and ecumenical heritage¹⁹⁸.

III. 2. The Theology of the Expression *liturgy after the Liturgy*

At the second conference of the CWME organized in Bangkok (1973) the theme “Salvation Today” was discussed. Here the centrality of Christ was again assumed¹⁹⁹. Before this conference, an Orthodox meeting was held in Athens. It took into consideration the theme “Salvation Today” and the participants used the patristic notion of *theosis* or *deification* to speak about the Orthodox interpretation of the meaning of salvation in Christ:

¹⁹⁸ See also: Ion Bria, “Liturgie et Mission,” in Ion Bria *et al.*, eds., *Dictionnaire œcuménique de missiologie: Cents mots pour la mission* (Paris, Genève, Yaoundé: Les Éditions du Cerf, Labor et Fides, Les Éditions CLE, 2001): 190-193.

¹⁹⁹ “The centrality of Christ is fundamental because it obliges us to associate the church not only with that “great mystery” (Eph. 5: 32) in which Christ invites to himself all those whom God has chosen, but also with the concrete realization of the Christian community at Pentecost, and the eschatological reality of the body of Christ. The form of this continuous history is the building up of the church growing towards the fullness of Christ” Ion Bria, “Orthodoxy and Mission,” in *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 352 (2000): 53-54.

Theosis takes place in the Church through the priesthood and the sacraments as well as by the life of discipline and struggle against evil.²⁰⁰

Of course, Christological theology was connected with Trinitarian theology. Bria would say that:

A proper understanding of this mission requires, in the first place, an application of Trinitarian theology. Christ's sending of the apostles is rooted in the fact that Christ himself is sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit.²⁰¹

In other words,

The origin of mission is God – the Holy Trinity – principle of any communion, fullness of persons in communion. The life of the Trinity itself is communion in a continuous revelation and communication. Mission is part of this revelation because God speaks, communicates, shares God's glory.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ "Salvation in Orthodox Theology", in *International Review of Mission* 61, no. 244 (1972): 403.

²⁰¹ Ion Bria, ed., *Go Forth in Peace*, 3.

²⁰² Id., "Mission and Secularization in Europe," in *International Review of Mission* 77, no. 305 (1988): 124.

In 1974 there was another Orthodox consultation which analyzed the topic of Section I on Confessing Christ Today of the Nairobi Assembly programed for 1975. They outlined that for the Orthodox Churches Eucharist is

The focal event of the Church community, and as such must be seen as the springboard, the starting event of Christians for confessing Christ in today's world.²⁰³

In other words, for doing mission you have to start from the Church as a living liturgical reality. For Orthodox life, preaching the Gospel and the Liturgy are two essential elements which connected are used to announce the Good News of the salvation in Christ. Much more, as I already mentioned, in 1975 a consultation was convoked to analyze the role of Liturgy in confessing Christ. In that report it was stated that:

Liturgical worship is an action of the Church and is centered around the Eucharist. Although the sacrament of the Eucharist, since the very origin of the

²⁰³ "Confessing Christ today: Reports of Groups at a Consultation of Orthodox Theologians," 75.

Church, was a celebration closed to the outsiders, and full participation in the Eucharist remains reserved for the members of the Church, liturgical worship as a whole is an obvious form of witness and mission.²⁰⁴

At this consultation the concept *liturgy after Liturgy* was formulated, expressing that the Divine Liturgy has to continue outside the Church, in the life of the participants, in all dimensions of life. Without this continuation the Liturgy is half finished.

What are the theological contributions of Bria related to this concept? How did he understand it? What are the connections between mission and Church in this sense? These are just a few questions which I will try to explore in the following lines.

In his book “The Liturgy after the Liturgy”, Bria tried to summarize the theological ideas of this concept. However, explanations can be found in different articles which are helpful to understand his general perspective.

From this expression *liturgy after the Liturgy* we can outline two important parts of the Orthodox understanding on mission, according with Bria’s texts as follows:

Firstly, for the Orthodox Churches the act of worship through the Divine Liturgy is very important. It

²⁰⁴ “Confessing Christ through the Liturgical Life of the Church today,” 417.

is an act accomplished within the Church of Christ. Bria says that the original meaning of this notion is that of a Eucharistic gathering in which the whole spiritual and social life of Christians, in the perspective of God's Kingdom, is organized²⁰⁵. In line with this, he reserved the first chapter of his book to speak about the world of the Divine Liturgy, to explain the structure of the celebration. The goal of the Divine Liturgy is that in the liturgical experience we truly receive the Body and the Blood of the Risen Christ. For Orthodoxy Holy Communion,

represents the maximal and sublime closeness to Christ because through it He lives in us and we live in Him.²⁰⁶

Secondly, the Liturgy has to continue outside the building of the Church. Before this concept came into existence, Bria said very clearly that,

Union with Christ in the Holy Liturgy is not an act which does not affect the life of Christians outside of the Church. It must show its fruits beyond the liturgical moment and past the door of the church. Communion with Christ, with our fellow

²⁰⁵ Ion Bria, "Biserica și liturghia," in *Ortodoxia* 34, no. 4 (1982): 481.

²⁰⁶ Id., "Aspectul comunitar al dumnezeieștii Euharistiei," in *Studii Teologice* 11, nos. 7-8 (1959): 417.

humans, is not limited to the building of the Church and to Sunday prayer, but it permeates with its power the whole of Christian life.²⁰⁷

For Bria this means *the liturgy after the Divine Liturgy*. It was called the post-liturgy²⁰⁸, the liturgy of the neighbor:

The very communion with the Eucharist Christ: “Eat this bread, drink this cup” is the way to communicate the Gospel. Every space liturgy becomes a space and time for sending the faithful into the world to proclaim: “Christ is risen!” It implies the extension of the Eucharist liturgy – moving the liturgy from the sanctuary to the market (St. John Chrysostom) – in a variety of “liturgies”: personal prayers, family life, men and women, religious and secular

²⁰⁷ Id., “Aspectul dogmatic al sfintei Liturghii,” in *Ortodoxia* 8, no. 3 (1957): 427.

²⁰⁸ I found two book reviews of Bria’s book, the first theologian using this expression of post-liturgy: Xavier Kochuparampil, review of *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, by Ion Bria, in *Exchange* 26, no. 2 (1997): 209-210 and James J. Stamoolis, review of *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, by Ion Bria, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23, no. 2 (1999): 84.

communities, sharing the resources, solidarity with the poor and suffering. The whole life of Christians is seen as a great *leitourgia*, which reveals the love of God for the community at large.²⁰⁹

Bria understood the Western model of mission of sending out specialized missionaries and tried to explain the Orthodox mission as being centered on the Eucharist, on the Liturgy. It was called a centripetal mission with the liturgical worship as the starting point (mission from inside), contrary to the centrifugal model where the accent is put on its sending aspect and where very often mission is not connected with the Church²¹⁰. In the same time, Bria was aware of the fact that this model of mission promoted by him was influenced by history. I have in mind the Ottoman dominion and the communist regime which made the life of these churches very problematic. In these conditions the missionary activity was limited to the national borders²¹¹. Bria defended this

²⁰⁹ Ion Bria, "Postmodernism: an Emerging Mission Issue," in *International Review of Mission* 86, no. 343 (1997): 420.

²¹⁰ See: Birgitta Larson and Emilio Castro, *art. cit.*, 135. See also: Ion Bria, "Eucharist and Evangelism," in *A Monthly Letter on Evangelism*, nos. 3-4 (1981): 1-6.

²¹¹ "Not having the possibility to develop their institutional life and missionary outreach, they concentrated on private spirituality, monastic centers and worship synaxis. Instead of building cathedrals and printing Bibles, they preferred to move the temple into the house, and to reserve a corner full of icons for family prayer. Each

classification of non-missionary churches with the liturgical life which is *par excellence* an act of witness or even *martyria* in most of the cases, accusing in the same time the act of proselytism of the Western missionaries who came in Orthodox countries for re-evangelizing them:

Too often the “word” mission implies for the Orthodox proselytizing”, and therefore is viewed with great suspicion. Over the centuries in many Orthodox churches “mission” has meant penetration by the non-Orthodox agencies into the traditional Orthodox territory in order to convert Orthodox believers [...]. “Foreign missions” simply denotes non-Orthodox faith, and a Catholic or Protestant mission working in an Orthodox area is considered by the Orthodox as an ecclesiological contradiction.²¹²

home became a domestic church, which finds its stability and comfort in the stream of tradition, transmitting the “faith which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) from generation to generation” Id., “Mission and Secularization in Europe,” 125. See also: Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, *op. cit.*, 200-221; George Valcu, *The Orthodox Mission in Russian America: An Orthodox Perspective on Mission* (Unpublished Master dissertation, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, 2011), 1-26; Ion Bria, “Orthodox Mission in the ninth century: The Witness of St. Methodius,” in *International Review of Mission* 74, no. 294 (1985): 217-218.

²¹² Id., *Martyria-Mission*, 3. Bria will say that “the Orthodox should recognize now that the concern for membership and for mission in

Our author insisted on the Church's missionary vocation starting from the Eucharistic understanding of the Church. Through the Liturgy mission begins. It starts with the Liturgy itself:

The Orthodox concept of mission depends entirely on the understanding of the nature of the Church. Simply stated, it is the ecclesiology which determines missiology [...]. Eucharist is the source of the Church life and Mission, the inner stimulus which motivated the community for mission.²¹³

Of course,

The liturgical – sacramental model is not absolute, but within this context the church creates new culture, ethos, and spirituality of receiving and sharing the gospel.²¹⁴

The center of Bria's theology of *liturgy after the Liturgy* consists of the divine act of Resurrection. The Orthodox theologian insisted for a return to "the pastoral

all places is a missing element in their missiology" Ion Bria, "Symbolic values in the contemporary experience of Orthodoxy," in *International Review of Mission* 75, no. 299 (1986): 274.

²¹³ Id., *Martyria-Mission*, 8, 10.

²¹⁴ See Id., "Liturgy after the Liturgy", in Nicholas Lossky, *op. cit.*, 705.

and evangelistic message par excellence of the early Church: ‘Christ is Risen!’²¹⁵ More concretely, as Bria stated,

The centre and content of the mission of the church is to proclaim the salvation of humankind as a gift of God, given in the Cross and Resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. Mission is an essential part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His commandment in Matthew 28: 18 – 20²¹⁶ or Mark 16: 15²¹⁷ is the basis of the apostolic vocation of the church [...]. The church’s mission is *missio Dei*, “mission in Christ’s way”. The vision, the hope of mission, is one: God’s purpose to reconcile all humanity into unity in Christ.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Ion Bria, “Dynamics of Resurrection in the Church’s Tradition and Mission,” in *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 258.

²¹⁶ “Jesus came to them and said, “All authority has given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” Amin.”

²¹⁷ “He said to them, Go into the whole world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation.”

²¹⁸ Ion Bria, “Orthodoxy and Mission,” 53.

In other words, Bria thought that it is very important to recognize our Orthodox Church as the Church of Resurrection *par excellence*, because the Liturgy is a continual Easter²¹⁹. The act of celebrating the Pascal Liturgy outside the Church on Easter night connects the Church with the World. Here the Christian community receives the Eucharist which is the Pilgrim Bread²²⁰ and the priest gives God's blessing for its journey into the world: *Go Forth in Peace*. In Bria's words:

Our ecumenical vocation is to make our own heritage and message better known, and to share all we have. It is a blessing of God for the whole Christianity to have in its midst a tradition which underlines the paschal mystery of Christ: the revelation of God himself in Christ's victory over death as the centre of church mission and life.²²¹

In order to conclude this part of the chapter on the theology of the Orthodox typology of mission which emerged, as I said, within the ecumenical discussions, I

²¹⁹ See also: Id., *Spre plinirea Evangheliei: dincolo de apărarea Ortodoxiei-exegeza și transmiterea tradiției* (Alba Iulia: Editura Reîntregirea, 2002), 42-51.

²²⁰ See Section III of Melbourne Conference where this expression was accepted within the ecumenical understanding of mission as *the liturgy after the Liturgy: Your Kingdom Come*, 205.

²²¹ Ion Bria, "Dynamics of Resurrection in the Church's Tradition and Mission," 264.

will quote Bria's words which summarize the main theological ideas of his analysis:

There is a *liturgy after the liturgy* because Christians pursue their witness and vocation outside the temple, in the street, in social halls, in the wider society. Nourished by the Eucharist, the pilgrim bread, the food for missionaries and evangelists, Christians are sent out – “Go forth in peace, in the name of the Lord” – to witness in faithful discipleship in the common round of daily life. Their authority flows from their liturgical sending, which becomes fruitful through personal authenticity.²²²

Beyond the historical highlights of this concept remains one important question. How can we apply this concept of *liturgy after the Liturgy* nowadays in our Church? I will answer in some points.

First of all, we need to reflect on the local Church which needs to rediscover the missionary aspect of the Church. When I say local Church, I have in mind the Christian parish. In doing this, it needs the contributions of all its members, clergy and lay persons. I have the feeling that we lost without notice what Bria defined as

²²² Id., *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, 87.

the liturgical mind of the community. Christ's Church is not divided in two parts: clerics and laity but all the Christians are called to become messengers of Christ's resurrection. The local Church should be the locus *par excellence* for doing authentic mission in this double movement, receiving and giving the Christian life and joy.

Second, for a renewal in the Christian sense, we have to be aware of two things. First one, our Church needs to live in a continual repentance -*metanoia* - because without it we cannot hope in real renewal. We need Christians who truly assume the life in Christ and with Christ. Secondly, the revival of the parish is not possible without the Eucharist revival. Hopefully, the Romanian Orthodox Church shows a real interest for this aspect, especially within the Orthodox Romanian diaspora. It is not acceptable for a community to participate at the Divine Liturgy and to refuse to receive Holy Communion. We lost this understanding of the Eucharist as the Pilgrim Bread for our life and for others. Instead of accepting the repentance and meeting Christ through the holy mysteries every Sunday when the Easter is celebrated, we prefer to limit this just to four times in a year in the best case and to delegate the ordained persons to accomplish our baptismal engagement. The liturgical *diakonia* which emerges from Liturgy is lost if we participate at the divine service as spectators and not involved participants.

Third, accepting our important role within the *oikoumene* we need to witness today and to transmit the message of Christ in our daily life. We need to rediscover step by step our missionary vocation and duty. This sense of urgency of the Christian witness has to be done as an ecclesial movement. We have this understanding of mission concentrate in *come and see* but in this case, we limit others to enjoy the good news of Christ's resurrection. This concept of the *liturgy after the Liturgy* is an important expression of the catholicity of the Eucharist. It is our duty to dialogue with other Christians and to surpass the theological differences for an integral Eucharistic communion. Through this model of mission, we come to understand the missionary vocation of the Orthodox Church within the *oikoumene*.

III. 3. Bria's perspective on ecumenical ecclesiology

A retrospective analysis of 20th century theology reveals an uncontestable truth: this century was marked by ecclesiological discussions, both in the WCC and in bilateral dialogues. The central question was the following: What is the Church? Certainly, the answers were diverse and, unfortunately, the dilemma was not solved. Better said, nobody managed to get over their own vision. It remains to be seen if our century would continue on the same line or not. Some theologians already assert that we have come out from the

ecclesiological paradigm and we situate ourselves in the anthropological one²²³. Even so, the two directions are not distinctive, but on the contrary, they are very close. In the Church, the human is defined as being the most beautiful creation of God, which is meant for deification in and through the Church of God.

One of the main reasons for the discussions regarding the identity of the Church, or of Churches was the Christian immigration from the Orthodox Church to the western world, especially from Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, but even after this moment. Today, this is more than evident. Western Europe became a second home for Orthodoxy. An important step for deepening the discussions was made when the WCC was founded, as previously mentioned. The purpose of the ecumenical movement in general, and of this Council in particular, is or should be the unification of Christian Churches. It is worth mentioning that, from an Orthodox perspective, the purpose of participating in the ecumenical movement is not the unification of Churches, the Church being *Una Sancta*, but the unification of Christians: *Undivided Church*,

²²³ Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century*, Doxa & Praxis Series (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 25-28. Also see: Id., "Orthodox Theology Today: Trends and Tasks," in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 12, no. 12 (2012): 105-121, esp. 116-117.

*divided Christians*²²⁴. When the expression the *unification of Churches* is used, it considers the common language of union accepted in the ecumenical dialogue. As such, union remains in itself, a problem of teaching. Doctrinal consensus must precede union, which presupposes sacramental and Eucharistic communion.

Immediately after the founding of the WCC, already in 1950, the Central Committee of the Council adopted a text which analyzed the ecclesiological signification of this Council, which gathered different Christian Churches and which held different ecclesiological theories. This document entitled *The Church, The Churches and The World Council of Churches* is known under the name the *Toronto Statement*²²⁵. At that point, it was clearly established through this document that:

The World Council of Churches is not and
must never become a Super-Church. It is

²²⁴ “The Orthodox Church in all humility believes itself to be ‘one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’, of which the Creed speaks: such is the fundamental conviction which guides Orthodox in their relations with other Christians. There are divisions among Christians, but the Church itself is not divided nor can it ever be” Id., *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997, new edition), 307.

²²⁵ *Central Committee of World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Third Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Toronto, Canada, July 9-15, 1950* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1950), 84-90; W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, 112-120; Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, *op. cit.*, 463-468.

not a Super-Church. It is not the World Church. It is not the *Una Sancta* of which the Creeds speak.

Moreover, each Church keeps its ecclesiological vision. Accepting the dialogue with other member Churches of the Council does not mean betraying your own teaching about what the own Church confesses it is.

As for the ecclesiological texts formulated in the WCC, the most important texts need to be mentioned: *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982)²²⁶, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998)²²⁷, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005)²²⁸ and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013)²²⁹.

²²⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982).

²²⁷ *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998).

²²⁸ *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005).

²²⁹ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013). For more details about these texts see the following MA thesis: Stanley Jayakumar Yesudass, *That They May All Be One: A Study on the Evolving Ecclesiology in the Documents of Faith and Order* (Unpublished Master dissertation, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, 2014). See also: Radu Bordeianu, "The Church: Towards a Common Vision. A Commentary in Light of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation at Agia Napa in Cyprus," in *Exchange* 44, no. 3 (2015): 231-249; Peter De Mey, "The Missing Link between *The Nature and*

The Orthodox Church considered the document approved in Toronto to be very important for the continuation of ecumenical dialogue, especially in the context in which the Orthodox thesis presents itself as:

The Universal Church is the Orthodox Church. The universal Church is one, but it is embodied in local Churches. There are not two universal Churches, neither two parts of the Universal Church: Orient and Occident. For the Orthodox, the ecumenical movement is not called to build a new Church, a super-Church, as ecumenism does not aim to convert all to a model of unity which lacks a biblical basis and a historical sense.²³⁰

In other words, the Orthodox Church,

Confesses its faith in the oneness of the Church. Therefore can be no churches (in the plural) except as manifestations of the one true Church. The unity of the Church does not mean creating a worldwide organization, often called structural unity.

Mission of the Church (2005) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013),” in *Exchange* 44, no. 3 (2015): 250-269.

²³⁰ Ion Bria, *Destinul Ortodoxiei*, 181.

The one Church cannot be created by putting all the local churches and individual denominations into one world structure. The unity of the church is the unity in Christ, by the Spirit, with the triune God. The church is Christ's body, and there is only one body, as there is one Christ and one Spirit.²³¹

The ecclesiological elements from Bria's theology are not very structured and direct²³². I have already mentioned that he did not define himself as ecclesiologist, but as a missiologist. He saw the involvement of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement only from a missionary perspective, as an active witness. However, he analyzed also this ecclesiological aspect. In the next pages I will shortly present and criticize his ecclesiological views as he developed them in an ecumenical spirit.

In 1968 Bria defended his PhD. thesis entitled: *Dogmatic Aspects of the Union of Christian Churches*. In this work he kept the principle of Orthodoxy when speaking about the union of the Churches, namely that of unity of faith. Unity of faith is for him also the condition

²³¹ Ion Bria, ed., *Jesus Christ-The Life of the World*, 12.

²³² See: Cristinel Ioja, *Dogmatică și dogmatişti: prolegomena privind aprofundarea teologiei dogmatice ortodoxe în România în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea și începutul secolului al XXI-lea* (Timișoara: Editura Marineasa, 2008), 182-187.

for Eucharistic communion. The problem of the union remains in itself a problem of teaching, of dogmatics. As a simple Christian, I asked myself what is the role of this principle and the answer is this that the Orthodox Church,

Defended the dignity of the ecumenical tradition and kept to the Christian law, not for the sake of appearances, but also with the conscience that the dogmas direct spiritual life and that modifying the dogma this life gets another direction.²³³

In other words, it is not without importance how we believe and especially, in whom we believe. In one way or another, heresy splits from the truth in which we believe:

The body of Christ cannot be divided, and who divides from the Church, divides from Christ.²³⁴

The Orthodox ecclesiological paradigm as it was formulated during Bria's life was marked by what we name today Eucharistic ecclesiology. The principle of unity of faith comes to correct this vision which

²³³ Ion Bria, "Infailibilitatea Bisericii-temei dogmatic al unirii," in *Ortodoxia* 12, no. 3 (1960): 495.

²³⁴ Id., "Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Biseriilor Creștine", 64.

considers that the teaching has a secondary role in the context in which the most important aspect is having the Liturgy in a local Church. This theory was formulated by the Russian theologian Nikolai Afanassieff. He defined the Church through the Eucharist, an idea taken from Saint Ignatius Theophorus, and that the common faith which the local Churches should hold becomes secondary²³⁵. Criticizing Afanassieff, Bria said that there is no authentic Eucharist where the truth of faith was altered²³⁶. Metropolitan John Zizioulas took Afanassieff's idea further and said that there is a complementary link between the universal and local Church through the unity of faith, which gives validity to the Eucharist. The perspective of the Greek metropolitan gives a central role to the bishop who presides the Liturgy and is in communion with the other bishops of the local churches²³⁷. On the same line of thought, Bria considered the episcopacy

²³⁵ About his life see: Marianne Afanassieff, "Nicolas Afanassieff (1893-1966)," in *Contacts* 21, no. 66 (1969): 99-111. On his theology see: Nikolai Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," in *Irenikon* 36, no. 4 (1963): 436-475; Aidan Nichols, *Theology in the Russian Diaspora: Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolai Afanas'ev (1893-1966)* (Cambridge: University Press 1989), 94-134.

²³⁶ Ion Bria "Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericiiilor Creștine," 57.

²³⁷ See: John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).

The center of Church life, it being the expression of Apostolic succession in the Church. He must balance Church organization, harmonizing its constitutive factors.²³⁸

If one formulates the teaching of their own Church, evidently one reaches the question which involves the other Churches that are not part of the Orthodox Church. The dilemma-question is this: what are the limits of the Church, and in our case, of the Orthodox Church? In a theological discussion between students, someone affirmed that this question is without resolve. In other words, the answers are quite sensible. You either have a rigid perspective and only recognize the Orthodox Church and everything outside of it is schism or heresy, or you adopt a more flexible perspective and accept certain ecclesiological elements from outside the Church²³⁹. Theologically speaking, it is related to the canonical and charismatic limits of the Church.

²³⁸ Id., “Infaibilitatea Bisericii-temei dogmatic al unirii,” 501.

²³⁹ There is also a third option, called ecclesiological agnosticism, which states that we cannot really know what is outside of the boundaries of the Church: “generally the Orthodox avoid giving precise definitions of the ecclesial status of non-Orthodox Christians and churches, not because they are indifferent to doctrinal matters but because they feel that the soteriological consequences of heresy and/or schism should be left to the judgement of God. They concentrate on maintaining the positive witness to the truth for which they feel responsible” Ion Bria and Constantin Patelos, *op. cit.*, 98.

Georges Florovsky analyzed this problem of the limits of the Orthodox Church and asserted, contrary to the perspective proposed by Saint Cyprian, that the charismatic limit of the Church is not defined through its canonic limit²⁴⁰. Bria accepted this position and affirmed that, in the context of the ecumenical dialogue, pneumatologic theology is essential for attaining the ideal of union. In his words,

pneumatology is going to become the doctrine *par excellence* of ecumenism, because it offers a basis for a dynamic relational interpretation of the Churches.²⁴¹

The anti-ecumenical position adopts a more rigid stance. They think that the charismatic Church needs to coincide with the canonical church. Otherwise, there would be no objective principle for defining the teaching about the Church's identity. However, for Bria, the belief that there is a work of God also outside of the canonical Church creates place for dialogue. Even if the Orthodox Church identifies with the historical Church of Christ, as

²⁴⁰ See: Georges Florovsky, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, volume 13, (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 36-45; Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation: Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 114-126.

²⁴¹ Ion Bria, "Contribuții ortodoxe la teologia ecumenică de azi," in *Studii Teologice* 31, nos. 5-10 (1979): 363-364.

One²⁴², Holy, Universal²⁴³ and Apostolic, one cannot limit the work of the Spirit in the world, nor in these Churches. Bria was influenced by Stăniloae's perspective – considering them as incomplete Churches²⁴⁴ – and went even further by considering that accepting,

²⁴² “Orthodoxy is an alive principle of ecumenism precisely because it did not lose this fundamental relation in which the Church is involved, namely it does not search for ‘the lost unity’: ‘The Unity we are looking for’ is for us a given unity, which was never lost and, as a godly gift and essential sign of Christian existence, it could not be lost. This unity in the Church of Christ is for us a unity in the Church of Christ, in the plenitude of faith, in the plenitude of continuous sacramental life. For us, this unity is embodied in the Orthodox Church” Id., “Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericii Creștine,” 123.

²⁴³ In Bria's initial writings, the term ‘universal’ (catholic) was replaced with that of *sobornost*, a word adopted from the Russian. In order not to make a confusion between the Western Church, which defines itself as being Catholic, Russian theologians, starting with Aleksei Khomiakov, proposed the term *sobornost*. In his last writings, Bria came back to the term ‘universal’. See: Ion Bria, “Infailibilitatea Bisericii-temei dogmatic al unirii,” 497. About the theology of this term *sobornost*, see: Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, “Sobornost and Eucharistic ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his successors,” in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, nos. 2-3 (2011): 216-235.

²⁴⁴ Stăniloae said: “At the same time, the Church, in the sense mentioned above, is the unique Church in the full sense of the word ‘Church’. For the Christian formations that do not have Christ intimately dwelling within them can be neither the body of Christ nor His Bride. In addition to this, Christ cannot have more than one body organically extended from His personal body, nor more than one bride. Any full union of the faithful with Christ can only mean His intimate, full, and working presence within them. And only this union represents the Church in the full sense of the word. But then the questions is raised: What are the various Christian denominations

The existence of other Christians and churches is not a threat for the Orthodox. The Orthodox must recognize the distinct realities and signs of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of other confessions.²⁴⁵

As already stated, Bria was very much influenced by missionary theology. Analyzing uniatism and proselytism, he made a statement through which he somewhat accepted the quality of ‘Churches’ for other Christian communities from outside the Orthodox Church:

that do not confess such an intimate and working presence in them of the full Christ? We consider that they are incomplete churches, some closer to fullness, others farther away from it” Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: The Church-Communion in the Holy Spirit*, volume 4, translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012), 66.

²⁴⁵ Ion Bria, *The Sense of the Ecumenical Tradition*, 87. Again, one needs to remark the influence of Stăniloae on Bria, who took his vision on the concept of *open sobornicity*, in contrast with what other call *closed sobornicity*. The concept of *open sobornicity* proposed by Stăniloae, considers that there are theological values in other Christian traditions which need to be assumed. Bria considered that these elements could become common points in the documents of theological convergences. For more details, see: Dumitru Stăniloae, “Sobornicitate Deschisă,” in *Ortodoxia* 23, no. 2 (1971): 165-180; Lucian Turcescu, “Eucharistic Ecclesiology or Open Sobornicity,” in Lucian Turcescu, ed., *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Iași, Oxford, Palm Beach, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 83-103; Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 27-30.

One of the attitudes which generates missionary proselytism is that of radically refusing to another Christian Churches the status of Church, or seeing it exclusively as a heretic or un-churchly community, in which its members cannot attain salvation as long as they remain in it. On the contrary, on the basis of the common profession of Jesus as God and Savior, the Churches need to admit one to another their state of “Churches”, starting also from the assumption that, from a missionary point of view, the fact of being a member of another Church is preferably to that of not being a Christian.²⁴⁶

The period in which I analyzed the ecclesiological perspective of Bria, who proposes to accept the status of Church, and implicitly of Christians, for those outside the Orthodox Church, in virtue of a pneumatological and missionary theology, coincided with the period in which in Crete the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church took place (18-26 June 2016). As such, I was surprised by the anti-ecumenical attitude of some participants, in the dispute whether or not to accept the document entitled: *Relations of the Orthodox Church*

²⁴⁶ Ion Bria, “Un obstacol în calea ecumenismului: prozelitismul confesional,” in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 88, nos. 9-10 (1970): 1058.

with the Rest of the Christian World. This synod, scheduled since 1961 and reunited this year in the absence of four Orthodox Churches, mentioned that:

The Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her, and believes that her relations with them should be based on the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession. Thus, she was favorably and positively disposed, both for theological and pastoral reasons, towards theological dialogue with other Christians on a bi-lateral and multi-lateral level, and towards more general participation in the Ecumenical Movement of recent times, in the conviction that through dialogue she gives a dynamic witness to the fullness of truth in Christ and to her spiritual treasures to those who are outside her, with the objective aim of smoothing the path leading to unity.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ The official documents adopted by the Council are available online here: <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents> [accessed on July 18, 2016].

We are now in the time of the synod's reception. It is to be seen what would be the reaction inside each autocephalous church. Without being a pessimist, from what I have noticed in Romania, the situation does not seem very promising. To recognize the historical name of Churches outside of the Orthodox Church does not mean very much, but it is at least a step forward and not backwards in the ecumenical dialogue. Surely, Bria would have agreed with this decision, but would have wished for more.

For Bria, accepting this ecclesiological reality in other Churches is an important step for attaining the purpose of the ecumenical movement. The next step would be accepting the texts of theological convergence, such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit outside the canonical Church, Bria considered that there is only one simple step in order to accept the Baptism performed in the name of the Holy Trinity, validated thus through economy²⁴⁸. As for accepting the sacrament of Baptism, Bria clearly argued that there is no clear rule in Orthodoxy, many practices being in place. Evidently, he was not for re-baptizing other baptized Christians who wanted to join the Orthodox Church, opting for the unicity of Baptism, as

²⁴⁸ About the principle of economy see: Sorin Șelaru, *Biserica-laborator al învierii: perspective asupra eclesiologiei părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae* (București: Editura Basilica, 2014), 169-219.

stated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Here, the analysis of Vlassios Phidas is very important. He stated that, in accordance with the tradition of the Church Fathers, the baptism performed in the Christian communities, other than in the Una Sancta Church, must be recognized especially when the recognition targets the restoration of unity, thus it is a clear pastoral situation²⁴⁹. He even assesses this practice from a canonical point of view (Canon 95 of Trullo) and concludes that

Indeed the recognition of the existence, or even the validity, of the baptism of the Christian Churches or confessions which are not in communion with the Orthodox Church is not only consistent with the ecclesial identity of the Orthodox Church, but is also a duty-bound practice of the Orthodox Church because, while the church is not harmed in any way by this recognition, she projects by this means, and to those near and far, the necessity of the restoration of unity within the church.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ See also: Ion Bria, “Biserica-Una Sancta în lumina tradiției ortodoxe. De la convergențe teologice ecumenice spre comunitatea conciliară,” in *Revista Teologică* 7, no. 3 (1997): 3-68.

²⁵⁰ Vlassios Phidas, “Baptism and Ecclesiology,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 54, no. 1 (2002): 47.

In the ecumenical dialogue, Bria considered it to be necessary to know that “there is no reiteration of baptism in view of Eucharistic communion (the chrismation is not a re-baptism)”²⁵¹ and that,

Accepting the universal validity of Baptism would be the only 'economical' act on behalf of the Orthodox Church, in view of recognizing a certain fundamental ecclesial element in the structure of the communities and Christian Churches and in the interest of its charismatic catholicity.²⁵²

The ecumenical openness of Bria cannot be misunderstood. He considered that it is important for theologians to find this way of Christian unity and to be animated without reservations. For example, in the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches there was a mutual recognition of Baptism. What Bria did not understand and critiqued, was the lack of Eucharistic communion in the given situation. He thought that,

²⁵¹ Ion Bria, “Widening the Ecclesiological Basis of the Ecumenical Fellowship,” 209.

²⁵² Id., “Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericii Creștine”, 77. Also see another important analysis regarding the theology of baptism: John H. Erickson, “The Church in modern Orthodox thought: towards a baptismal ecclesiology,” in *International Journal for the Study of Christian Church* 11, nos. 2-3 (2011): 137-151.

Once baptism is recognized, refusal of communion is an anomaly. Christ receives at his table those who become his disciples through the confession of faith which is at the heart of the sacrament of baptism.²⁵³

A few years later, Bria applied the same principle of accepting the Baptism outside of the Church and said that,

It is the priest's responsibility to encourage all people who take part in the offertory and the anaphora to come for holy communion. At his discretion he may give communion to members of Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Old Catholic churches without formal conversion to the Orthodox Church. Of course, the way for full Eucharistic communion needs solid preparation.²⁵⁴

For Bria a consensus on the creed is indispensable and would help with the diminishment of the line between Orthodoxy and heresy. Simultaneously, considering the situation of the ecumenical dialogue during his time – not very different from what we

²⁵³ Ion Bria, *The Sense of The Ecumenical Tradition*, 101.

²⁵⁴ Id., *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, 29.

experience today – Bria critiqued in his last article, published post-mortem, the ecclesiological system proposed by the Orthodox. That, not because it would not represent the tradition of the Orthodox Church, but because he was aware that this way, the process of union would not reach a final end²⁵⁵. Even the attitude of the WCC of focusing more on the social problems rather than on the doctrinal confirms that the aim of union went into a secondary plan, which, in a way or another, would annul the Orthodox participation to the Council. He stated that,

An ecclesiology for the 21st century must be open to correction and renewal [...]. To articulate this vision exclusively in the theological terms of the “undivided church” of the first millennium is too heavy a burden. The postulate of the undivided church leaves too little room for all particular tradition and confessions, which claim elements of universality and do not want to be treated as marginal.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Id., “Widening the Ecclesiological Basis of the Ecumenical Fellowship,” 199-210.

²⁵⁶ Id., “Looking Anew at Orthodox Theology: Three Recent Consultations,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 52, no. 2 (2000): 255-60, esp. 257, 258.

Before critiquing these theological positions, it must be said that the inability of proposing final solutions must not stop the endeavor of the ecumenical dialogue. Bria knew this even from the beginning, but never gave up this ideal. Before his active involvement in the ecumenical movement, even though he sometimes had quite a harsh language vis-à-vis the other churches, he would affirm what is true up to our days, namely:

Without a doubt that we must not be skeptical, but the union asks for many sacrifices. The union of Churches is a difficult problem, but not impossible. Because between the Churches there is a separating wall, which cannot be easily demolished. Throughout history each confession had a dogmatic content somewhat proper to the specific tradition. Furthermore, each believer has interests which only his confession can satisfy. As such, there are confessional demands and interests. Thus a sectarianism, which concentrates and isolates the faithful, was formed. This sectarianism does not allow for one to pass from a sect to the ecclesia or to a catholic conscience.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Id., “Infailibilitatea Bisericii-temei dogmatic al unirii,” 503.

Bria's vision cannot be entirely accepted, but at the same time, it cannot be rejected. When I read his ecclesiological ideas, I remembered a text addressed by the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchy, Archbishop Athenagoras, to the participants at the Faith and Order Conference (1952), which is fundamental for the Orthodox Church. I quote only a part of this because of lack of space. He said that:

In the Greek Orthodox Church the individual theological opinions have no value whatsoever in themselves. It is the whole Church, clergy and laity, and above all Her Hierarchy, the totality of her Bishops, not as individuals but in Holy Synods, that express the teaching of her faith. [...]. We do not come to criticize other Churches but to help them, to illumine their mind in a brotherly manner by informing them about the teaching of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which is the Greek Orthodox Church, unchanged since the apostolic era.²⁵⁸

Bria knew this and did not shelter from making statements which depend on the decision of a Pan-

²⁵⁸ Oliver S. Tomkins, ed., *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 125, 126.

Orthodox Synod. In the situation that Orthodox Churches meet with so much difficulty, I think it is already understood that such theological ideas need to be proposed.

As for the problem of also recognizing the quality of ‘Churches’ to the communities that have split from the Ecumenical or Orthodox Church, the proposal of Stăniloae to name them as incomplete churches can be a middle one. It remains true that Christian Churches, if we recognize them this status, were formed in one way or another, in a link with the Primary Church of the first Millennium. Here, Bria does not explain very profoundly what exactly should one understand by “Church”, mentioning only common faith in Christ both Human and God.

The next problem remains the acceptance of Baptism outside the canonical Church. Personally, I consider that the universality in Christ and faith in the Trinitarian dogma, provides space to the Orthodox Church to recognize the Baptism of Christians outside of the Orthodox Church. Evidently, if one does not accept traces of ecclesiality in their structures (*vestigia ecclesiae*), then one also does not accept the quality of Christian. But how should all these people be named? I think only of the term “Christian” which clearly refers to Christ, i.e. we are named in his name. For these conditions, it depends on myself to consider somebody to be of Christ or not? Clearly, I cannot do such a thing. Without seeming absurd, it needs to be said that there are Orthodox who affirm that everything which is outside of

the Orthodox Church is not saving, and who practice re-baptizing those who wish to enter the Orthodox Church. Stăniloae took note of this sensible problem and stated that he is convinced that there are faithful people being born in different structures from the Orthodox one, but probably,

Their incomplete participation in Christ—and this is, to a great extent, not their fault—may consequently result in an incomplete participation in Him in the life to come as well.²⁵⁹

Here I disagree with his opinion which leads, one way or another, to a kind of confessional predestination. I believe that Orthodoxy represents the real and complete face of Christ, and exactly this must be enough to make our presence felt in an ecumenical dialogue. This perspective of a plenary Church, which I do not deny, brings with it the risk of a triumphalism and of a state lacking the perspective of testimony. In the end, recognizing Baptism outside of the Church cannot be accepted only in the context of a well-defined ecclesial structure, as long as we speak about accepting a Baptism of desire or blood, or even about the baptism done in the absence of a priest. Our Orthodox counter-testimony of re-baptizing became a bad example to be followed for

²⁵⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, 68.

those who proselytize inside our church. If there would have been a clear and accepted rule at the level of the ecumenical movement, we would not have misled the believers of Christ, and not of the Orthodox Church, or of the Roman-Catholic Church and so on. It is a true pity that the Great and Holy Synod in Crete did not analyze this problem also. In fact, the text on the relation with other Christian Churches does not propose any principles, but speaks only about what we already knew before the drawing of this document. And I say this regretfully.

As for the Eucharistic communion, Bria's affirmation remains personal and isolated. It stands true up to our day that regarding the administration of sacraments outside of the canonic Church, only a Pan-Orthodox Synod can decide if a Christian from the Oriental or even Catholic Church can receive communion in the Orthodox Church. I disagree with Bria, that the decision belongs to the individual priests. This because, firstly, the priest ministers only with the blessing of a local bishop, and not because he wishes to. As such, the bishop has to decide this aspect. Secondly, because disorder would follow if an Orthodox priest in a certain church would accept this, and another in a different church would not. It is either a conciliar decision, or we keep to the present practice. Internal unity remains, for the time being, of the utmost importance. Personally, I have participated at Catholic Liturgies, but did not dare

receive communion, even if I knew that nobody would have stopped me. This, precisely because I have the conscience that the whole Church must decide when and if this moment would be possible.

What is to remain of the ecumenical dialogue which is fighting for the unity of Churches under the same umbrella of the Ecumenical Church? Is there still a chance for union? Does the Ecumenical Council still fight for Christian unity? It is to be seen whether theological discussions will advance. I remember a saying of a theologian who considered that, before uniting, we Christians have to learn to love one another²⁶⁰. This remains valid for modern Christianity. Especially in the Orthodox area a current against other Christians was established, current which has nothing to do with what Christ urged us, namely to love one another. We have reached a situation in which Orthodoxy is mistaken for *Orthodoxyism*, Tradition with *traditionalism*, hence the derailments of today's *Christians*. To end up hating in the name of Orthodoxy

²⁶⁰ Metropolitan Kallistos Ware uses this Christian idea in his Conferences, taken from Nikolai Afanassieff who considered that “by an effort in Love, the Orthodox Church could re-establish communion with the Catholic Church, the dogmatic divergences notwithstanding and without demanding that the Catholic Church renounce the doctrines that distinguish her from the Orthodox Church” Nikolai Afanassieff, “Una Sancta,” in Michael Plekon, ed., *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time: Readings from the Eastern Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), 25.

seems to me a deviation from the truth which is more than evident. Slogans such as *Orthodoxy or Death* have nothing in common with Orthodox faith and I cannot identify myself with these people who consider themselves to be members of the Orthodox Church.

III. 4. Conclusion

This chapter dealt with two important aspects of theology, namely the mission and the ecclesiology perspectives. Bria wrote much more on the missionary activity of the Church and promoted the concept *liturgy after the Liturgy*. As we already saw, he took over this concept and promoted within the ecumenical circles. Also, he made some ecclesiological references in his work. I can say that Bria had a brave ecclesiological discourse, although he was convinced that until a common ecclesiological perspective a lot of work needs to be done. His proposals were clearly influenced by the ecumenical context in which he lived, but they also followed the theological effort in which he engaged. The rediscovery of these ideas could help today's theology to pass climb the wall which divides the traditional ecclesiological views of Churches, a process without which ecumenical reconciliation is impossible.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Before enumerating them in some points, I want to express my inner feelings after I worked for couple of months to write this theological paper. In other words, I was not unaffected by this research. When I decided to write about the ecumenical activity of Father Ion Bria, I thought that my task was more or less to explore his writings, and to formulate a critical perspective based on them. But when I started to read, I observed that my knowledge about the ecumenical movement was poor and highly preconceived. So, I decided to expand my research. In order to understand Bria's involvement in the ecumenical dialogue, I read many important works on the modern ecumenical movement. This was the new first step for doing my research. When I finished it, I had the impression that I could write a Master thesis on the history of the ecumenical dialogue. For this reason, I proposed to my coordinator to introduce some historical sections within the study. In connection with this first level, the next steps were much easier to accomplish, namely reading almost all of Bria's writings, in Romanian, French and also English, and to produce this present critical paper. In this manner I came in contact with the ecumenical ideas and ideals. In the same time, reading about this kind of theology also helped me to integrate within another context, the Belgian one, which is both multicultural and multi-confessional.

The first conclusion has to do with Bria's personality. After writing his biography, I can conclude that he indeed was a great theologian. He had the opportunity to study abroad during his studies where he met many important theologians of his time. The experience obtained in the Romanian context helped him when he decided to leave for Geneva in order to work for the World Council of Churches. Here, he was still an Orthodox theologian, but had the added role of representing Orthodoxy in person, both with his life and his vision. It needs to be said that no other Romanian theologian worked for the Council so many years as he did. Unfortunately, he is not promoted, as many others; however, I hope this research is a new step towards rediscovering his personality.

The second conclusion is related to his theological ideas in general. Reading his writings, I observed that he was much more preoccupied with writing articles than books. In the same time, his position in the WCC requested time to edit many books for promoting the ecumenical dialogue. Overall, there was an evident evolution in his ideas, a process which had to do with the context. Bria exemplifies for me that when one lives in a multi-cultural context, one's own vision is affected and enriched. If before establishing in Geneva he just published a few articles in foreign journals, after that moment the opportunity came, and he wrote for many important journals. Luckily, now a part of his work is being translated into Romanian in order to be studied.

The third conclusion deals with his perspective on ecumenism. What is important when someone reads Bria, is not to disconnect his Orthodox theology from the ecumenical one. For me it was fascinating to understand that Orthodoxy and ecumenism are two very connected parts, and that the dialogue is not a betrayal, but is indicative of a proper understanding of Orthodoxy. About that so-called double discourse, I can say that it is not applicable for Bria. He had the courage to stand up for his ideas. Moreover, in his writings before his death, I felt his disappointment regarding the indifference of the Orthodox people, especially theologians. Unfortunately, there is a misconception regarding how we should confess our Orthodox faith, both in an inclusive manner and with Christian love. Bria's perspective on ecumenism can be an important tool for ecumenical theology. He is one of the Orthodox theologians who recognized that we lack good theological training and for this reason we reject to discuss with the other Christians. I express my belief that this situation will change somehow in our present time.

At the beginning of this theological research, I contoured that in these general conclusions I will offer some theological reflections for what we call the ecumenical dialogue today. I confess that before reading Bria's theology I was not too much interested by how we relate with other Christians in a proper way. In the same time, I was not affected by those anti-ecumenical

positions within the Orthodox Church. But when the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was announced to be held in Crete in June 2016, many voices criticized one of the six texts proposed to be promulgated, the document mentioned in the third chapter. Both the experience with Bria's ecumenical ideas and this *orthodox* rejection of the text on the relations with other Christians requested my inner attention. I will outline in a few lines my reflections.

First, there is an internal problem for Orthodox Churches. It seems to me that there is an urgent need to redefine our internal unity. I would say that it is so important for us to find a common language when we want to express our faith in relation with the others. The autocephalous system created the feeling that every Orthodox Church can have its own direction without taking into consideration the others. The Holy and Great Council is a bad example for our witness within the whole Christian world. I agree that differences in theological ideas are unavoidable, but not to participate to the Council and claiming the Orthodox tradition and faith is something unacceptable. In other words, the decision of the Russian, Bulgarian, Georgian and Antiochian Churches not to be present at the Council can be classified as a political gesture, and not at all as a theological one. In the Orthodox context, the monastic influence has its role. Unfortunately, there are big problems when everyone can contest the whole hierarchy

calling them apostates. I was wondering how Bria would have reacted to this if he had lived until this day. Consequently, we have to rediscover the communitarian life of the Orthodox Churches, the so-called *koinonia*.

Second, being aware of this anti-ecumenical wave, I think we should redefine the steps for our dialogue. It should start not from above, but from below. Personally, I observed that I have changed my mind regarding the other Christians when I came into direct contact with them. In this multi-cultural context of Leuven, no Catholic or Protestant tried to convert me. To my surprise, I noticed that we do not know what the others believe. And for this we need a more local dialogue. I am sure that there are Orthodox who are against the other Churches, but they never met a Protestant or a Catholic Christian. Bria himself is a good example in this direction. Before living in an ecumenical context, he wrote some articles against, for example, the Catholic theology on the papal doctrine. In his new context he tried to understand the other's historical context, which in a way or another, urged him to revise his former theological positions. Of course, my observation is a simplistic one because we live separately and we do not have access to other cultural forms of life and theology. So, what should we do in this case? Maybe this new globalized system will help the Christians to overcome their misconceptions. In the same time, as Bria insisted, we need a younger generation of theologians

who must help the Orthodox Church to redefine its identity in this new world. Another solution, a complementary one, is to promote theologians who truly believe in this dialogue of truth and love. For the Romanian context, Bria's ideas can help theologians to read the ecumenical dialogue through another lens.

Third, we all forget to have a Christian life, a life in and with Christ. Someone said that in the past the Church had a more intensive rhythm of prayer. I recognize that I have a problem with this divorce between academic theology and practical theology. In other words, in academic theology we discuss so many details, most of the time unknown to almost all believers. I give just one example: the stumbling block between Orthodox and Catholic theology, which is the proceeding of the Holy Spirit both from the Father and the Son (the *Filioque* dilemma). There were numerous discussions around this subject, which for me is a mystic one. If I would not be Christian, and I would analyze the actual situation of Christianity, I would say that there are so many other problems to be fixed which we do not pay attention to. I do not say that *Filioque* is not a problem of truth which indeed is important for our spiritual direction, but in the same time, our academic discussions keep believers in division. How do we understand the Liturgy when we meet Christ in a Eucharistic way, but we are in conflict with the others? Where is the practice of what Bria called the *liturgy after the Liturgy*? I am not for an

ecumenical theology, or for an Orthodox one, but for a Christian one. My belief in Christ does not let me be indifferent to the Christian separation. And indeed there are people who discover God not through our apologetic endless discussions, but just when they see the holiness in the life of the Christians.

I end up this research with the belief that I made important remarks on the personality of Ion Bria, in order to revitalize the Orthodox discussions with other Christians. At the same time, I am aware of the fact that much more work is to be done in order to illuminate the story of this remarkable person. As such, I express my requirement for other researchers to give their attention to this theologian who indeed had an open-minded Orthodox vision.

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