Preface to the Second Romanian Edition

An Orthodox Perspective

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**1. THE SEED OF HOPE**

It is not by chance that I find myself writing this preface to a theological work that presents itself as pioneering initiative[[1]](#footnote-1) directed towards a dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelical believers. In fact, according to a Christian saying that has deep roots in the biblical text (Luke 12:7), “nothing in life happens by chance”.

Many years ago, in an entirely providential way, I made the acquaintance of Danut Manastireanu. I had been invited to an academic colloquium at the Emanuel Baptist Institute in Oradea. It was there that we met. I do not know whether we spoke to each other very much on that occasion. I do not think we did. I no longer remember. But what I do remember is what I felt then: I must meet this person again!

I did not know when or why. I had nothing in common with him: we neither came from the same place, nor had we studied together, nor did we belong to the same confession. What we did however have in common could only be felt, not seen. It was a sense of good intention whose fruits were at that time still hidden in the future. I believe that we read each other well on that first encounter and quickly understood all we needed without having to put it into words.

Thus it was that the first time an opportunity arose, Danut Manastireanu suggested that I should coordinate and deliver a spiritual programme under the aegis of CAPA Finance (World Vision). The programme was approved, and I was able to conduct a genuine Christian mission, within CAPA, for seven years – which was much appreciated and of significant spiritual value. Then, thanks to this programme, the way opened up for me to have a very large number of meetings with World Vision staff in various places in Romania where, together with Danut, I gave talks on themes concerned with the Bible and with Christian spirituality. The spiritual benefit for those attending went beyond what can be expressed in words. It was here and from these meetings, in part, that the idea of initiating an unofficial Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue originated.

Thus, we cannot yet speak of an official dialogue between the two ecclesial communities. But small step have nevertheless been made along this route. For this reason we could term them ‘steps towards an intermittent dialogue’. We know that these are small beginnings, but a little is always better than nothing. And to this ‘little’ hopes may attach. Of course, both at the individual level and in one-off initiatives, the need for such a dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelicals, whether in Romania or internationally, has been highlighted on countless occasions.

**2. THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF ORTHODOX-EVANGELICAL DIALOGUE**

Dialogue is the first and most fundamental means by which people can come together, communicate and exchange information with the purpose of reaching mutual knowledge and understanding. In a sense dialogue does away with the distance that separates us. For this reason, Christian witness in a pluralist world calls for involvement in a dialogue with people of different confessions, religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22-28).

In some contexts, in which a period of tension and conflict has created deep suspicions and had undermined trust both within and between communities, only inter-religious dialogue can offer new prospects for conflict resolution by re-establishing justice, healing the painful memories of the past, bringing reconciliation and establishing mutual trust.

Although, in certain circumstances, it is difficult to live and proclaim the Gospel, particularly when this is restricted or even forbidden, Christ the Redeemer commands all Christians to continue to faithfully, courageously and in solidarity one with another, bear witness to Him and His Gospel (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:44-48, John 20:21, Acts 1:8).

With reference to dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelicals, this needs to be characterised, in the first place, by a practical theology of ecclesial and missionary experience and not by an abstract and conceptual theological approach. It is true that we are predisposed – as is becoming ever more clear, and sometimes even aggressively so – to interpret the situation around us, the Christian *bona* *fides* of the other, and the religious landscape, through the lens of our own history, of the truth in which we believe we have been standing firm for a thousand years, and this interpretation is also shaped by our educational, cultural and religious context and the way we have grown up within the framework of a particular denomination and religious tradition. The problem is that this kind of interpretation of the tradition of the other, lacking as it does the flexibility that would make it possible for us to understand the fact that the other, too, lays claim to the same truth, leads to religious intolerance and consequently to the development of an aggressive, proselytising kind of mission that suffocates any dialogue or attempt at it, or any venture at communication.

In such a religious context, dialogue becomes nothing more than a way of placarding your own exclusivist truth, your own religious and ecclesial identity, to which the other can have no access unless he admits that his own truth is no truth and that his own religious and confessional identity is but a fragment of identity. Sadly, Christian inter-confessional dialogues have tended to take place in this kind of frame of reference.

**3. WHAT DO WE HAVE TO LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER?**

Of course, we often ask ourselves, not without some degree of self-assurance (as we must acknowledge), whether we have anything to learn from one another, Orthodox from Evangelicals and Evangelicals from Orthodox. If we are honest with ourselves, there can only be one answer: Yes! We have many things to learn from one another! But among these benefits I would like to highlight just a few, which, I judge, would be useful to us along the ‘path of dialogue’ if we do indeed wish to walk it together.

*a. Orthodox have to learn from Evangelicals:*

* ***How much work they still have to do to make the Gospel of Christ much clearer and much more central in the lives of Orthodox Christians than it has been up to now***[[2]](#footnote-2). The Orthodox Church needs to overcome a huge disadvantage, namely the so-called phenomenon of ‘biblical illiteracy’, and Evangelicals are, here, an example for what needs to be done for us to escape from this impasse. This example is not one to be ignored. A year ago I initiated, at the Transfiguration Orthodox Church in Cluj, a biblical programme with the title “Let’s read and learn the Bible together!” Many attend. Half the time is devoted to interaction with those present. But I was very surprised to discover two things:

1. Many Evangelical Christians too participated in person in the programme – or listened to the live radio broadcasts (the programme being broadcast on Radio Renasterea [Rebirth] which is under the patronage of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Vadu, Feleacu and Cluj).

2. As for online reactions, whether they were requests for additional clarification, or intended to express reservations about some of the affirmations made (there being fewer in this second group), or asking for a private discussion in connection with the topics debated, these did not come from the Orthodox but from Evangelicals. And I have to recognise that behind all these questions one could discern in-depth bible knowledge or spiritual interest.

The fact that the Book of the Gospels[[3]](#footnote-3) is to be found, at particular liturgical moments, in the centre of the Church, and that Orthodox believers bow before it and kiss it, does not mean that they have also understood its message or that they have appropriated it. The fact that it is said of Orthodox Christians that they “kiss the Gospel but do not read it”[[4]](#footnote-4) is not a positive evaluation. It is a somewhat unpleasantly-intentioned joke, but one behind which there lies a truth: the distinctly evident absence from Orthodox church services of explanatory preaching of the holy Word. It is true that the Gospel contains the Word of God, as a work of His which is identified with its author, the work being inseparable from the person who created it[[5]](#footnote-5). This is the reason for this act of bowing to and venerating the Gospel, but, beyond the action, there remains the sad truth of the lack of knowledge or, at least, of a poor knowledge of the Holy Word.

* ***The example of the bringing together of the Life of Faith and day to day living***. Evangelicals are not above criticism in this regard, but they express this integration, at least outwardly, to a greater extent than is the case with Orthodox Christians. The consequent dubbing of Evangelicals, by the Orthodox, with the expression “Pharisees” is but a sign of the recognition of a sense of dissatisfaction connected with the identity of the latter and is in no sense a value judgment. We must not for one moment forget the fact that we are all called to show consistent behaviour that is full of generosity, compassion and humility and to put aside all traces of arrogance, condescension and disparagement towards our neighbour irrespective of the way that he expresses his faith (cf. Galatians 5:22).
* ***The emphasis on mission as a personal and collective aim***. People in the ultra-secularised society in which we live need to be ‘re-evangelised’ and ‘re-christianised’, not by a repetition of Baptism but by a new birth through the Word of God. The Orthodox Church is conscious of the need for a renewed interpretation of the Word of God for each generation in the life of the Church. This means that the Spirit enlightens every Christian generation through the language and circumstances of its time in order to lead believers into “all truth”. This activity presupposes individual and collective mission. It is true that Evangelicals carry out this kind of mission but they most often do so with the aim of proselytism, which generates a reaction of rejection from the Orthodox.

We have said so many times that the Church of this millennium cannot but be a ‘missionary’ one, rather than a mere reactive-contemplative one. I believe that only a Church of that kind will ever be taken seriously in the very near future, a Church which will challenge people’s consciences and will itself go out into the world rather than waiting for the world to come to it.

*b. What do Evangelicals have to learn from the Orthodox?*

* ***Fundamental aspects of the faith which are deeply rooted in the doctrine and in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church***.
* ***The richness of the spiritual legacy of the Church Fathers***. The patristic literature is indispensable for an understanding of the spiritual experience of Christendom down the centuries, and also for understanding the spiritual message of the Scripture. *Theoria[[6]](#footnote-6)* as a patristic principle for interpreting scripture ought to be studied more seriously by Evangelicals to help them to also understand the sacred text in a way that goes beyond “*Scriptura Scripturae interpres*”.
* ***An understanding of sanctification as a progressive process of becoming completely holy, culminating in theosis***[[7]](#footnote-7).
* ***A greater emphasis on the communal aspect of salvation rather than on individual salvation***.
* ***The value of a hierarchical institutional-ecclesial pattern of organisation***. It is seriously difficult for the Orthodox to understand who their partners in dialogue are when Evangelicals are concerned. Evangelicals needs to define their institutional-ecclesial identity more precisely. It is well known that the Evangelical movement is a complex phenomenon, but in order for a well-articulated thematic dialogue to be able to develop, the ecclesial identity of the partners in the dialogue needs to be very well defined. The Orthodox do not really know who they should be discussing with in a possible official dialogue.
* ***The Church – the most suitable forum for the interpretation, preaching and liturgical celebration of the Word of God***. Although personal interpretation of Scripture is welcome and to be encouraged, it somehow loses its right to authority if it is detached from any connection with the ecclesial Body and with the Tradition of the Church. This does not mean that the exegete’s deductions and reflections are pre-determined by the doctrine of the Church. Nevertheless, Orthodox exegetes sustain the absolute necessity of submitting one’s reflections to the *phronema* *ekklesias*, that is, to the “thinking of the Church”[[8]](#footnote-8).

And in order that we may be able to learn from one another, I believe that we ought to reflect more on the two bold analogies put forward by Bradley Nassif: concentric circles, and the tree and the seed. In the first we have the smaller circle (the Evangelicals), which includes within it fundamental doctrines, essential and common to the two entities, and the larger circle (the Orthodox), which includes those doctrines considered essential by the Orthodox but frequently ignored by Evangelicals. With reference to the second analogy, with the seed representing Evangelicals and the large, developed tree representing the Orthodox, Bradley Nassif states: “There is great theological potential in that seed of the Evangelical movement, which has almost (but not quite) everything it needs in order for it to become the tree of life and of Orthodox thinking”.

**4. POINTS IN COMMON AND POINTS OF DIVERGENCE**

Within the ambit of theoretical issues there are a number of points of convergence and divergence on which I would like to comment. Under the heading of disagreements, I will list several topics which can in no way be neglected when the foundation of a future dialogue comes to be laid:

* ***Ecclesiology***. From the Orthodox point of view, it is impossible to speak about the Church without dealing with the mysteries and the priesthood, on the one hand, and the significance of the cross as its foundation, on the other. In an ecclesiology of this kind, what becomes paradigmatic is the ontological union of the Christian with Christ, in His mystical Body, by means of the sacraments.
* ***Mariology and the veneration of the saints*** (including, here, also the veneration of icons) – important areas that distinguish the spirituality and piety of Orthodox Christians.
* ***Theosis*** – as the culmination of the process of sanctification.
* ***The authority of the Fathers in the interpretation of Scripture***.

Points in common:

* ***Scripture understood as the written part of Tradition***. The Orthodox accept this formulation, but it does not exclude Tradition in its non-written form, understood as the second means of the transmission of Revelation. The scriptural basis of the affirmation of Tradition can be a point of reflection for the understanding of a Biblical hermeneutic that sets out to interpret the text from other coordinates as well. Indeed the Orthodox reject the notion of scriptural *autarkeia* or “self-sufficiency”, as expressed in the syntagm *Sola Scriptura*, but accept unreservedly the canonical and normative role of Scripture in settling issues of faith, discipline or individual or collective behaviour.
* ***Belief in the Triune God***.
* ***A history and a shared acceptance of the Ecumenical Councils, with the exception of the Seventh, in their major dogmatic definitions***.

**5. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN CONCRETE TERMS IN ROMANIA IN REGARD TO DIALOGUE?**

In terms of events that have given concrete expression to the concern for dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelicals in Romania, a number of initiatives may be mentioned.

In 2009, the Babes-Bolyai University, through the Centre for Lifelong Learning, the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, the Centre for Biblical Studies, World Vision International and the Iasi-based Adoramus publishing house, held a conference at Cluj-Napoca with the title *The Paschal Mystery and the Liturgical Life of the Church*, at which Dr Bradley Nassif, professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at North Park University, Chicago, was an invited speaker.

The conference was followed by the launching of the Romanian translation of the book *Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. Three Perspectives*. Those who spoke on this occasion were Professor Nassif, Dr Danut Manastireanu and the Revd Professor Stelian Tofana. All three speakers stressed, in their addresses, the book’s significance for non-official theological dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelicals in Romania.

Following these two events, and on the same day, there was also a round-table discussion on the subject “Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. Perspectives in Dialogue”, which took place at the university staff club. Those who attended this discussion were priests and teachers from the Cluj-Napoca Faculty of Orthodox Theology and a number of Evangelical pastors and believers from Cluj and from other Romanian cities.

The discussion focused specifically on the need for the official establishment of such a dialogue in Romania, with the prospects and challenges involved being very openly expressed. I cannot say that the discussions were of much encouragement in allowing us to be more hopeful than we had been previously in terms of Orthodox interest for such a dialogue. The Evangelicals were much more open. I do not know if they stayed just as optimistic after the event as well. The dialogue-discussion had rather the effect of showing us the distance, still a very long one, which we would still have to travel before we could find a common language in which to identify points of doctrinal agreement and shared worship.

The unity of which the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, spoke shortly before His death, and which He expressed as His last will and testament, and as a Christian *desideratum*, is still expressed in different and frequently conflictual terms both by Orthodox and Evangelicals.

Besides these events, we could also include among the efforts made towards concrete dialogue between the two ecclesial communities the participation of both sides at various national and international symposia held by the Bucharest Pentecostal Institute, the Emanuel University, Oradea, and the Cluj-Napoca Centre for Biblical Studies. It is true that the Orthodox side is much more reserved in the way it issues invitations to the Evangelical world to participate in these kinds of academic events. Of course such a manner of relating to the Evangelical world is not at all positive. But we may hope for a change of paradigm in the future.

**6. OBSTACLES, PROSPECTS, SOLUTIONS, CHANCES FOR DIALOGUE**

Obstacles arise, of course, from an incorrect approach to and understanding of ecumenism, on the one hand, and of dialogue on the other. Personally I cannot regard as effective the kind of ecumenism and dialogue that moves from the centre to the periphery rather than in the opposite direction. A mountain cannot be seen from close up but only from a certain distance away. It is only from there that we can see properly what it looks like and how many steps we still need to take before we reach it. In other words, we need to move from the bottom towards the top, that is, to start from the concrete missionary situations that characterise our communities, and not try to go from the ideal to the concrete. It is true that in such a kind of hazy dialogue the results can just about be made out somewhere on the distant horizon, but we need to have more confidence in small steps than in seven-league boots.

As for the prospects for dialogue in the immediate future and the medium term, it is hard to make definite judgements. What is certain is that, in the absence of dialogue, we will never come to know each other, and each group will continue to regard the other as its old enemy as we run on our parallel tracks, with the Orthodox characterising the Evangelicals in a “brotherly” manner as “heretics”, while the Evangelicals similarly call the Orthodox “non-Christians”. But these descriptions have no basis in reality. The Evangelicals are not hopeless heretics, nor are the Orthodox non-Christians in need of being made into Christians. We are all brothers and sisters awaiting the love of the other. Likewise, without dialogue we will not know either where we have gone wrong or where we have been right.

For this reason, if we start with what unites us, I believe that the first more concrete step to be undertaken would be the setting-up of two working groups. They would be tasked with deciding what are the common and divergent points that unite and divide the two ecclesial bodies and with making the preparations for a Romania-wide inter-confessional conference on a shared theme, to be held in the near future. The results of this would then be brought to the notice of the Orthodox hierarchy and discussed with theologians who relate in good faith to this dialogue.

Meetings of this kind should be points of departure aimed at defining the common effort over the medium term. For the moment, I do not think we can hope for more than this. In fact the difficulties which will be encountered along the way are both institutional and connected with mentalities.

The hierarchy is not fully persuaded of the need for such a dialogue. Critical voices, some of them coming from outside Romania, from the wider world of Orthodoxy, are still putting pressure on the hierarchy and causing it to be timid. The Orthodox side needs to put greater emphasis on the fact that the making official of this kind of Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue would not mean any capitulation of Orthodoxy but rather the promotion of its values at an academic level. Conservative feeling does not always take the legitimate form of caution but often manifests as fear. And fear, in this context, stems more from ignorance than from any genuine threat.

An Evangelical theology cultivated and produced in prestigious universities abroad can no longer be ignored by the Orthodox. There are voices, increasingly weighty ones, which demand a hearing. A familiarisation with this theology can involve nothing but gain in terms of knowledge of that other tradition which we share at many points. But in order for steps to be taken along this road there is need of courage, of skill, of mutual respect, of people who will understand that truth is not what you obstinately propagate but what you do not need to defend.

Solutions do exist, and neither are they far from us. A return to origins, to “orthodoxy” as it was defined in correct doctrine before the great historical ruptures – first the great Christological controversy of the fifth and sixth centuries, which led to the appearance of the Eastern or non-Chalcedonian Orthodox churches, and then the culminating events of the Great Schism (1054 – the division between the East and the West) and the Reformation (1517 – the appearance of Protestantism) – constitutes the only shared basis from which it is possible to set out on the long road of dialogue.

The appeal made by the Orthodox should be centred more on the idea of “non-Orthodox” returning not to the Orthodox Church but to genuine orthodoxy. Once we reach that place, both groups will see what we need to leave behind, if we have made additions, and what we need to add, if we have omitted it. If we fail to do this, we will be speaking two completely different languages, with the Evangelicals accusing the Orthodox of cosmeticising “genuine orthodoxy” by importing Tradition into it and by laying excessive stress on the authority of the hierarchy of the Church, and the Orthodox charging the Evangelicals with mutilating “genuine orthodoxy” by filtering its assimilation and interpretation through one sole court of final authority, Scripture, and of instituting lay authority in the Church. It will be understood that I cannot include here all the arguments “pro and contra” that would add the necessary nuances to what has been stated. All I am considering here are the general principles on which the reciprocal “characterisations” that lie behind the “friendliness” of the dialogue are based.

There is a need for greater clarity in the definition of terminology that seems to be keeping differences alive. This too appears to be a way forward that offers hope for the future. In this context Bradley Nassif is correct when he states that “it is a risky ecumenical exercise when Orthodox and Evangelical theologians, experts in their own traditions, embark upon dialogue without defining their terms or without possessing a responsible understanding of the theological vocabulary of the other camp and of the diversity of opinions that exist within it”.

It is only in an academic climate of this kind that we can speak of the chances of dialogue and of the possibility of concrete results. The chances of success are real, but what is less well founded is a hope for communion or for full doctrinal convergence between the two ecclesial communities.

What we need to highlight now are the steps that need to be taken in order to give a realistic prospect of a fruitful dialogue. Here are a number of relevant suggestions:

* efforts made at the individual level are less likely to be able to transpose into reality a vision that should be a shared one;
* Evangelicals need to speak the language of shared values rather than one of proselytism;
* the holding of joint conferences and symposia;
* the facilitation of the involvement of Evangelical theologians in research into Eastern spirituality, with its concrete results in the form of doctoral theses, dissertations, monographs, etc.;
* the Orthodox need to encourage initiatives of this kind. The results will be positive ones for both churches. We are well aware of Romanian Evangelical theologians who have studied in an Orthodox context and have given final form to their work in impressive doctoral theses. I might mention Emil Bartos, Danut Manastireanu, Danut Jemma and Ciprian Terinte, and these are not all;
* the encouragement that has come, in our days, from only a few professors (Vasile Mihoc, Ioan Sauca, Stelian Tofana, Ioan Ica) who have grasped that doctorates conferred on Evangelicals are not weapons turned against the uniqueness of their faith but rather routes via which Evangelicals may come to access Patristic spirituality, so characteristic of Orthodoxy, needs to be redoubled by other Romanian Orthodox theologians coming to hold this point of view;
* outdated mentalities need to be abandoned. You cannot make your theological treasures known by keeping them hidden. The Orthodox are still suffering from this mentality;
* shutting the truth of the faith and the spiritual inheritance up in an ivory tower means you are not protecting them but concealing them.

**7. ORTHODOXY AND EVANGELICALISM. THREE PERSPECTIVES – A WAY TOWARDS DIALOGUE**

This book has been written by people who have had genuinely “stirring” experiences in the two traditions (conversion, abandoning one’s tradition, education in a theological environment, involvement in leading services in a church completely different from the one in which one received one’s theological formation, etc.). This is what makes their way of dealing with the issues discussed so unique. Each position is well argued from a theological point of view. As James J. Stamoolis rightly says, “If you are in search of theological arguments to support each of the positions, you will not be disappointed”.

Evangelicals need to know, however, that the journey towards Orthodoxy with the aim of entering into dialogue with it is no easy one. The danger of becoming bogged down in a precipitate judgement and consequently giving up the journey dogs every step. But the Orthodox too need to know that the same danger lies in wait for them also as they move towards becoming acquainted with the other tradition, the Evangelical one. In fact, the differences between the two ecclesial communities are essentially founded on different interpretations of theological paradigms.

The present volume helps, in a way, towards an understanding of these differences of paradigm, on the one hand, while on the other it facilitates the passage over these ‘chasms’ that are created particularly by differences of language. The interaction between the authors in the way they express their positions is strongly personalised by each of them, with the result that there is of course no danger of monotony in either the argumentation or the experience of reading.

The book provides a working *vade mecum* for the task but also a pattern for any future Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue, which, in order to be viable, will have to take account of both the formal and the essential aspects of the differences between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism.

This volume does not however deal, except in an extremely schematic and occasional way, with such major doctrinal themes as Christology, eschatology, pneumatology, the sacraments of the Church, the hierarchy of the Church, and so on. It could not have done so, nor did it need to do so, if one takes account of the purpose for which it was put together, namely to put down some markers that would allow readers to grasp the fact that renewal and regrouping are *desiderata* of both ecclesial communities, Orthodox and Evangelical, and that there are still also people who are interested in moving beyond parochial fanaticism or bigoted, exclusivist zeal.

The way certain biblical texts are exegeted in the book leaves something to be desired in regard to the understanding and rendering of the message of the text and the doctrinal, disciplinary or apologetic context in which it was written. We do not have the right to force the meaning of texts by interpreting them, either doctrinally or homiletically, in such a way that they lend support to our ideas. It is our ideas that should find their *raison d’etre* in the sacred text; the sacred text must not be made to owe its legitimacy to our ideas and conceptions. We cannot afford to “confessionalise” Scripture. We need to be more careful about this – Orthodox and Evangelicals alike – if we do not want to turn that which represents the essence of our agreement, that is, Scripture, into a wall that will prevent us from reaching even the anteroom of dialogue, let alone the debating table itself. A minimalist approach to Scripture is a real danger, especially when it comes from the ranks of the dogmatists.

For the rest, I can but salute, in the most respectful way, the initiators of this project for translating *Three views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, ed. James Stamoolis, Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., 2004, and then for republishing it in a new and improved edition. I am referring to Danut Manastireanu and his fellow-initiators.

The book is truly an orientative guide, aimed not so much at helping people to find their way among the issues of compatibility or incompatibility between Orthodox and Evangelicals, but rather at familiarising them with an effort made, it is true, by just a handful of sincere people to initiate a dialogue that would be an impossibility for the ignorant or the arrogant of both ecclesial communities, Orthodox or Evangelical, but which is fascinating for those who believe that the impossible can become possible and that naivety can sometimes even turn into a virtue.

I would like to close by saying that it has frequently been stated that changing the course of history is neither very much to be recommended nor very comfortable, irrespective of the realm in which it takes place. It may be so! But I wish, and even stubbornly dare, to believe in the need for the course of history to be changed as far as we as a Church are concerned. Maybe we have had enough of merely cosmeticising it.

The times in which we are living invite the Christian churches, more than ever before, to a twofold task of reflection. We need to look both back and forward as we focus on the past, present state and future of Christianity and consider all the aspects of its existence in history and time during these millennia: intellectual-theological, social-institutional, and cultural-philosophical.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Christianity (in fact, the Church in its entirety and in all its confessional forms) is called today to reflect on its spiritual identity in all its dimensions and on its sense of its presence in the world, especially in a society that has long been drifting off course. No less challenging is the call to reflect on all the answers, often accompanied by the most evident and intentional ambiguity, that it has given over the course of two millennia and that it will be obliged to give in this third millennium too, but in a different way from up to now, to the problems and challenges that face humanity as it tries with might and main to find its original identity in a world become more post-Christian than Christian under the influence of modernity and of dizzying globalisation.

Schisms between confessions, however major or minor, have raised and continue to raise serious questions as to the relevance of the presence of Christian witness in the contemporary world and contemporary society. And all these disagreements attest not so much to the uselessness of only-too-human efforts to re-establish Christian unity as to the deficiencies and precariousness involved in the way all Christians constantly (fail to) match up to the complex and inexhaustible catholicity of the mystery of divine Revelation entrusted to the Church.

In this situation, the paradoxical and ever-needed solution, Ioan Ica Jr believes, is “the theoretical assumption and practical outworking by Christians of the catholicity and orthodoxy of Revelation through a creative sense that is permanently connected to the springs of this Revelation as found in Scripture and the Tradition of the Church”.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Will our initiative be the beginning?

Cluj-Napoca, August 29 2014 (English translation by Stuart & Dorothy Elford.)

1. Page references given in parentheses show cross references to, or citations from, the book, *passim*. [Ed.] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a discussion of the theme of the centrality of Christ and His Gospel in the life of Christians, see Stelian Tofana, “ ‘Evanghelizare’ sau ‘centralitatea’ lui Hristos intr-o societate secularizata” [‘Evangelism’ or ‘the centrality of Christ’ in a secularised society] in *Dimesiunea sociala a Evangheliei* *[The Social Dimension of the Gospel]*, theological supplement to the journal *Pleroma*, Bucharest, 2011, pp 15-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The writer has “the Gospel” here, using the accustomed Orthodox expression. This has been rendered in English to convey the liturgical practice of lifting up a book containing the four scripture Gospels in the presence of the congregation. [Tr.] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. John Breck, *Sfanta Scriptura in Traditia Bisericii [Holy Scripture in the Tradition of the Church]*, trad. Ioana Tamaian, Cluj-Napoca, Patmos, 2003, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See the relevant details in Dumitru Staniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului [Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man]*, Sibu, 1943, pp 219-224. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Vasile Mihoc, “Actualitatea exegezei biblice a sfintilor parinti” [The relevance of the Holy Fathers’ biblical exegesis] in *Revista Teologica*, VII, (79), 1997, no.2, pp 52-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Romanian word is literally ‘holiness’ but it has been rendered ‘sanctification’ because of how it is described here as a gradual process. Whether this would equate to the usual Evangelical usage of the term sanctification would be something discussion might need to clarify. [Tr.] [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For further explanations and details on this subject, see John Breck, *op. cit.*, pp 61-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a relevant handling of the issue of renewal in contemporary Orthodox theology see Ioan Ica and Ioan Ica Jr, *Preface* to Karl Christian Felmy, *Dogmatica experientei eclesiale. Innoirea teologiei* *ortodoxe contemporane [Dogmatics of ecclesial experience. The renewal of contemporary Orthodox theology]*, tr. Ioan Ica, Deisis, Sibiu 1999, pp 5-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. *Preface* to Karl Christian Felmy, *op. cit.*, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)