



# THE FUTURE OF MISSION COOPERATION

The Living Legacy of the International Missionary Council



Editor: RISTO JUKKO

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**World Council  
of Churches**  
Publications

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Editor: Risto Jukko

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# CONTENTS

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<i>Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Introduction: Reflecting Together on Being Together in the Mission of God</i> <i>Michael Biehl</i>	<i>xi</i>
<b>Part I Regional Reports</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Report from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, China <i>Wang Jiawei</i>	3
2. Report of the Aizawl Theological College, the United Theological College, and the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies Conference, India <i>H. Lalrinthanga, Chongpongmeren Jamir, and Michael Biehl</i>	23
3. Report from St Paul's University Study Centre, Kenya <i>Paul Mwangi and Esther Mombo</i>	35
4. Pretoria Report of an IMC/CWME Ecumenical Consultation on Race, Racism, and Whiteness in South Africa <i>Cobus van Wyngaard and Louis van der Riet</i>	49
5. Middle East IMC Study Centre Thematic Report, Lebanon <i>Wilbert van Saane</i>	61
6. Mapping Cooperation in Mission Today: A Preliminary Report from Latin America and the Caribbean <i>Karla Ann Koll</i>	87
7. Profetas del Sur: el impacto de Luis Odell y otros en el movimiento ecuménico en Latinoamérica <i>Sidney Rooy</i>	111
8. Contextual Report of the Central and Eastern European Region <i>Cristian Sonea, Pavol Bargár, Piotr Kopiec, Doru Marcu, Stefan Zeljković, Leş Adrian, and Iustinian Creştu</i>	137

9. Report of the IMC Study Process from the German Study Group <i>Anton Knuth and Eckhard Zemmrich</i>	165
<b>Part II Transnational Mission Networks</b>	181
10. Council for World Mission: A Global Transnational Partnership in Mission Serving as a Model of Cooperation between Mission Agencies and Churches <i>Roderick R. Hewitt</i>	183
11. Cooperation in Mission in the Present Time: A Strategic and Forward- looking Approach of the Community of Churches in Mission <i>Timothée Bouba Mbima</i>	193
12. Creating a Third Space: A History of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies amid Evangelical-Ecumenical Tensions <i>Al Tizon</i>	201
13. Reflections on Transnational Orthodox Networks and their Role in Mission in Kenya: Past, Present, and Future <i>H. E. Archbishop Makarios of Nairobi and Exarch of all Kenya</i>	219
14. SEDOS: Together as Mission Partners <i>Peter Baekelmans and Stephen Bevans</i>	223
15. Conclusion: Fresh Inspiration <i>Kenneth R. Ross</i>	237
<i>Further information</i>	251

## PREFACE

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This book—like its sister volume, *A Hundred Years of Mission Cooperation: The Impact of the International Missionary Council 1921–2021* (WCC Publications, 2022)—is the fruition of an 18-month study process related to the centennial of the International Missionary Council (IMC), which was established at Lake Mohonk, USA, in the autumn of 1921. The IMC had a unique role in the formation of the ecumenical movement and world mission. In fact, it has been said that until the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, the IMC represented *de facto* the ecumenical movement. And even after this creation in 1948 of two global ecumenical bodies “in association,” the IMC continued its work. It was not until 1961 at the 3rd Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi, India, that it was integrated into the structures of the WCC, becoming the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).

The CWME inherited from the IMC the legacy of fostering mission cooperation and unity, organizing world mission conferences (roughly one per decade falling between the WCC assemblies), and putting out the missiological journal of the IMC, the *International Review of Mission(s)*. The CWME has kept these three legacies, knowing its past and looking toward the future. This volume is a concrete proof of that legacy.

The 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe, Germany, with its theme “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” was originally planned to be held at the end of the summer of 2021, which would have offered the CWME an excellent platform to celebrate world mission and the one hundred years’ legacy of the IMC. However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the plans, and the assembly was postponed to September 2022. The WCC assembly affirmed the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity. All these dimensions are included in the mission pilgrimage of world mission.

In the production of this book, a global IMC centenary study process has been conducted in the manner that the IMC, and later the CWME, has followed: by fostering reconciliation, unity, and mission cooperation. Theologians and practitioners of various institutions and mission actors have come together to cooperate and create unity locally, and in some cases regionally, even nationally. Not all the regional study centres or groups were already existing bodies. Denominationally, these study groups have often gone beyond the member churches of the WCC. In the study process, the steering

committee nominated by the CWME to lead the study process was pleased to note how mission creates visible unity and practical cooperation.

This volume is divided into two parts. After the introduction by Michael Biehl, steering committee member, the first part provides nine regional reports produced by the study centres or groups during a second phase of the world-wide IMC study process. The study centres have chosen different approaches and reporting styles, even if the common factor has been to describe the current situation and reflect on the future of mission in their respective regions. The reports paint a vivid picture the joys and challenges facing churches and mission actors in today's world.

The second part of the book contains five studies of transnational mission networks. They also bring into light some theological developments that may not have been well-known in academia. Mission has contributed significantly to a growing movement of the establishment of Christian churches in the world, especially in the 20th century—what scholars call “World Christianity” or “Global Christianity.” This could not have come into existence without mission.

The first text of transnational mission networks, Chapter 10, deals with the Council for World Mission, established in 1977. It is the historical successor of the London Missionary Society, originally founded in 1795. The second text, Chapter 11 is about the similar development of the concept of mission in the French-speaking Protestant world, leading the Society of Evangelical Missions of Paris, established in 1822, to become the Evangelical Community of Apostolic Action in 1971, today known as the Community of Churches in Mission (CEVAA). The third text on transnational mission networks, Chapter 12, describes a more recent endeavour, the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (established in 1983), trying to create a “third space” between ecumenicals and evangelicals. The role of transnational orthodox networks is described in Chapter 13 from a Kenyan and African perspective, and Chapter 14 informs the readers that the Roman Catholic Church has a central office for mission actors, Service of Documentation and Study of Global Mission (SEDOS), based in Rome, with the article describing its role as well as its relation to the CWME/WCC. The concluding chapter by Kenneth Ross, another steering committee member, gives a clear idea of how mission is perceived through the living experience of the churches and mission actors in World Christianity today.

In the pages of the reports and texts describing transnational mission networks, it becomes clear how diverse and multifaceted mission has become in the world through the ten decades of the existence of the ecumenical mission movement in the form of the IMC-CWME. Based on the regional reports



and texts on transnational mission networks, three items could be further explored. The first relates to the fact that for some 30 years now, the majority of Christians have lived in the global South. Their faith is the same as those living in the global North, and yet there are different nuances, in many cases due to the historical burden of colonization with the negative effects it has had. What is the understanding of mission for those Christians in today's world in crisis, and what will it be in the years to come, in light of healing the legacies of colonization? How do they do "mission from the margins"<sup>1</sup> in a decolonizing way? The second item relates to the fact that many of these Christians live in dire conditions that threaten their existence today. Mission theology has talked of options for the poor. What hope can the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—give to those who are the poorest, the most vulnerable, and often wounded? And the third theme concerns the mission networks. The IMC originally can be said to have been a transnational mission network, or a "council of councils and mission networks," creating a model that many have followed since 1921. What role can transnational mission networks play in fostering mission cooperation and visible unity? How can they provide models and methods for mission, justice, reconciliation, and unity for the years to come? Transnational mission networks create huge potential for churches and mission actors in their day-to-day work in a world that is facing many new and unexpected challenges today and in the near future.

The steering committee of the IMC centenary study process owes a lot to all those who have participated and contributed to the study process related to the IMC centenary. We are aware that the celebration has been one modest attempt to understand and concretize the prayer of Jesus "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

*Risto Jukko, Editor*

*Director, WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*

*Chair of the steering committee of the IMC centenary study process*

*Geneva, November 2022*

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1 See the WCC mission document *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (2012), §§ 36–54, [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together\\_towards\\_Life.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together_towards_Life.pdf).

## CHAPTER 8

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### ***Contextual Report of the Central and Eastern European Region***

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*Cristian Sonea, Pavol Bargár, Piotr Kopiec,  
Doru Marcu, Stefan Zeljković, Leş Adrian,  
and Iustinian Creţu*

“Central and Eastern Europe” is a geopolitical name for a geographic area, somewhat ambiguously delimited, that includes several countries, including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia. Geographically speaking, this territory has played a critical historical role due to its position as a link between the Western European and Asian worlds. Due to the large number of people who had to pass through it to move from one socio-economic area to another, this part of Europe has experienced different cultures and religions, acquiring a multifaith and multi-ethnic character. Many people who entered this region settled here permanently, such as the Bulgarians and Hungarians. In contrast, others remained temporarily, bringing about profound changes in the ontological structure of the natives. From a confessional point of view, Central and Eastern Europe have been under the influence of two major religions: Christianity and Islam. Thanks to its incorporation into the Roman Empire from the 3rd and 4th centuries onward, Christianity systematically penetrated the lands of the peoples settled here by various means.

In contrast, others, such as the Bulgarians and Serbs, received the Christian faith through the efforts of Byzantine missionaries. Over time, the confessional and religious picture in these areas diversified, with political and economic influence shifting from the Byzantine to the Ottoman Empire and disagreements within Christianity. After the two world wars and the establishment of the communist regime, especially the Russian socialist regime, migration intensified and many ethnic minorities in these areas, such as Jews, Germans, or Armenians, suffered. This situation led to a process of nationalization which, in most Central and Eastern European countries, was politically driven. After the fall of communism and the establishment of a democratic system of government in the former Soviet bloc countries,

the number of ethnic minorities fell sharply, with some disappearing altogether because of freedom of movement.<sup>1</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the change of socialist regimes led to a reconfiguration of the geographical map of Central and Eastern Europe. Not only have whole nations disappeared, and others emerged or re-emerged, but migration to and from these regions has also increased significantly.<sup>2</sup> Some studies mention that the political, economic, and social transformations in the late Soviet period and numerous ethnic conflicts created migration flows immediately after the 1990s, estimated at around 25 million people.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon of migration has always existed, but the 20th century has contributed significantly to its intensification thanks to the development of technology and engineering science. The intensification of the movement of people worldwide directly influences the religious landscape of the territories where migrants settle by bringing an entirely new religion to a country or taking over the existing religion in that area.<sup>4</sup> Such a process creates what can be called a *religious diaspora*.<sup>5</sup> Although they have a long history, religious diasporas have been particularly intense in recent decades and in light of current migration trends. This trend looks set to continue into the 21st century.<sup>6</sup>

Todd Johnson and Gina Bellofatto say that growing religious diversity is underlying the reality of a changing religious landscape. According to the two researchers, religious diversity includes two levels: intra-religious and inter-religious. The former encompasses the diversity within a particular world religion, for example, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism within Christianity. The second level describes the diversity of distinct religions within a given population.<sup>7</sup>

Given the expected growth in the number of religious diasporas worldwide, it is essential to consider how missionary action should be rethought.

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- 1 Vasilios Makrides, "Southeast Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
  - 2 Ulrike Ziemer and Sean Roberts, *East European Diasporas, Migration and Cosmopolitanism* (United Kingdom: 2012), 96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2015.1029715>.
  - 3 Andrey V. Korobkov, "Post-Soviet Migration: New Trends at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," in *Migration, Homeland and Belonging in Eurasia* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), 69.
  - 4 Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Bellofatto, "Migration, Religious Diasporas, and Religious Diversity: A Global Survey," in *Mission Studies* 29:1 (January 2012), 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338312X637993>.
  - 5 Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas* (London: Routledge, 2008), 26, doi:10.4324/9780203928943.
  - 6 Johnson and Bellofatto, "Migration, Religious Diasporas," 3–4.
  - 7 Johnson and Bellofatto, "Migration, Religious Diasporas," 15.

Viewed from a Christian perspective, the data presented above illustrates the need for a new perspective on the global missionary movement: “Reaching a Buddhist with the Gospel is no longer necessarily a life-threatening journey across the ocean to an unknown land. Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims are now neighbours, collaborators and friends of Christians around the world. Increasing religious diversity through migration means that Christians in the West are increasingly likely to have friends and even family members of other religions.”<sup>8</sup> That is why Todd Johnson and Gina Bellofatto believe that a deeper awareness of world religions is the first step for a Christian mission. Living with compassion for your neighbour is difficult if you know little about their traditions and beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

Considering these realities, we will explore ecumenical collaboration for the sake of mission in the 21st century in this region. In this sense, we will consider ecumenical relations, theological education, migration and diaspora, and present challenges, and will try to identify the vision of the future. We will do this by focusing on four countries from the region as critical studies: the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, and Serbia.

## **Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic is commonly referred to as one of the most atheistic countries in the world. Research has revealed, however, that this claim falls short of reality. The 2021 EU-wide census, for example, shows that only 555 people identify as atheists out of around 10.5 million. Though it is realistic to expect that there is a substantial proportion of “practical atheists,” as some 48 percent of the Czech population said to be “without a religious faith,” it is significant to note that only a very tiny fraction of people felt the need to declare their atheism explicitly. Rather than atheism, therefore, the contemporary religious landscape of the Czech Republic is characterized by indifference and a “lukewarm” approach to organized religion. In this regard, it is very telling that the same census indicates that the single most populous religious group, amounting to around 9 percent of the population, consists of those people who self-identify as believers without any religious affiliation (alternatively, sociology of religion also speaks of irreligious spirituality concerning this category). With an increase of some 250,000 people since 2001, religiously non-affiliated persons (or “nones”) are followed by

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8 Johnson and Bellofatto, “Migration, Religious Diasporas,” 21.

9 Johnson and Bellofatto, “Migration, Religious Diasporas,” 21.

the adherents to the Roman Catholic Church with a membership of just under 750,000 people. Significantly, the other Christian churches registered in the Czech Republic, including mainline Protestant, Orthodox, evangelical, and Pentecostal/charismatic, are much less numerous in their membership, with the second largest denomination, the (mainline) Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, counting less than 33,000 members.

This situation establishes a fascinating context for ecumenical relations. First, even though the Roman Catholic Church is the most substantial denomination in the country, both numerically and traditionally, it does not constitute a majority church in the Czech context. Power dynamics are not substantially tilted in favour of any single religious player or Christianity. Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, such a constellation makes excellent or good and constructive ecumenical relations. With all churches and faith communities sharing a minority status in Czech society, none of them can afford to live and minister without others (although, admittedly, some individual organizations and circles think and try to prove otherwise). There are numerous examples of ecumenical fellowship and cooperation at the interpersonal, congregational, and national levels. While encounters and joint action between high-ranking church representatives remain influential, there is a willingness to go beyond this plane to engage in everyday common witness and various projects, such as chaplaincy.

Furthermore, despite (or perhaps one should rather say because of?) their minority status, churches across the ecumenical spectrum enjoy a high degree of respectability in society due to their engagement in education, social and humanitarian services, and counselling (pastoral care—or chaplaincy). Long-term and experienced providers of these services and ministries, churches are esteemed and appreciated even by people who are non-churchgoers and identify as non-believers. Even though many of these initiatives are pursued on denominational grounds, there are instances of projects that over-cross denominational boundaries.

### **Theological education**

The churches in the Czech Republic, by and large, realize the need for good-quality theological education. Formal (i.e., institutionally organized and provided) theological education saw its numerical heyday in the early 1990s with enrolments of those who had been prevented from studying theology during the communist era. Since then, the number of students at theological schools has been dropping—or, more recently, keeping steady at relatively modest numbers. In the Czech Republic, five theological faculties

are established as part of university settings—in addition to three Roman Catholic faculties. There is also a Protestant and a Hussite theological faculty.

Furthermore, there is an institutionally independent evangelical theological seminary and a handful of Bible and theology schools run by some free Evangelical or Pentecostal/charismatic churches. While mainline churches require their clergy to hold a master's degree in theology, some (free church) evangelicals and Pentecostals/charismatics do not insist on such a requirement. It can be asserted that the institutions of theological education in the Czech Republic generally acknowledge the need to go beyond the “traditional menu” (i.e., study programmes designed for adepts for the ministry), diversifying their offer both in terms of content and format. As such, a student at a theological faculty can pursue a degree not only in theology but also in social and pastoral work, psychotherapy, history of art, philosophy, religious studies, etc. There are programmes at all levels—bachelor, master, and doctoral—that can be done full-time or part-time. In addition, theological faculties and schools often offer courses for the public. Also, studying theology in English at a Czech university is now possible. This option seeks to advance broader ecumenical and international exchange further. Finally, it should be noted that the favourable situation in ecumenical relations is reflected through the fact that there are both teaching staff and students from various churches at the faculties that are nominally affiliated with one denomination (Catholic, Protestant, Hussite).

## **Diaspora**

Though significant Czech diasporic communities had been formed due to mass migration in the 19th and 20th centuries, emigration does not seem to be a significant challenge today (though, admittedly, there continues to be a flow of people on an individual basis). Conversely, some diasporic communities are living in the Czech Republic today, notably Ukrainian, Slovak, Russian, Vietnamese, and Roma (Gypsy). Because some of these have trained clergy to their spiritual needs (mainly Russian, predominantly Slovak), the track record of the Czech churches ministering to different ethnicities is somewhat ambivalent. It can be argued that the Czech churches (like the Czech population in general) have modest experiences with otherness. This has proven to be a stumbling block in the discussions on refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan some years ago (and, to a certain extent, also concerning Ukraine) as some Christians let themselves be manipulated into the populist rhetoric of so-called “Christian values.” On the other hand, there have been a host of examples of constructive Christian (both denominational

and ecumenical) cooperation in addressing the theme of migration and helping refugees/migrants.

### **Challenges and vision for the future**

Still, the challenge of misuse of religion (or, more precisely, religious rhetoric and symbolism) for nationalist-populist agenda remains real and significant. Faith and nation are often inseparable in the theological imagination of not only ordinary churchgoers but, not uncommonly, clergy and academic theologians. This not only causes internal tensions within various churches but also gives a distorted image of the Christian faith and witness.

Secularization represents a somewhat different challenge. As described above, the Czech churches have long been used to living and witnessing to the gospel in a context that is highly secularized, both in terms of low church affiliation, diversity, and heterodoxy of belief (both outside and within the church), and separation of church and state (although there have recently been some instances of new rapprochement as our brief mention on religion and nationalism indicates). The churches will need to further develop a *modus vivendi* for such a context to be both faithful and creative in their witness to the gospel. Developing intelligible public theologies/missiologies and providing categorical pastoral care (chaplains) in hospital, prison, university, and military settings stand out as examples of Christian missions in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, the churches cannot shy away from reaching out to those who were marginalized by most of society (such as Roma, people with disabilities, refugees, older adults, and people with debts). Finally, it seems a significant challenge for Christians to learn how to respectfully bring the good news to the people who will likely never become members of institutional churches.

## **Poland**

### **Ecumenical relations**

One must outline a broader socio-cultural and religious context when approaching ecumenism in today's Poland since Polish society is undergoing a profound transformation in many fields. The changes also affect the Christian life and, thereby, ecumenical relationships. Indeed, Poland is no longer a mono-Catholic country; instead, it is a country of an intense worldview debate with a vocal contribution of the Catholic Church. When considering the tenets of sociologists on the changes in the contemporary world, there are at least three crucial processes to be mentioned. First, it is a growing religious

indifference within society, mainly in the youngest generations. Second, it is the Catholic integralist, which has the Protestant and Orthodox counterexamples. Third, it is an erosion of the church's authority in society, brought about by both the church's links with the governing party, moral scandals within the church and a negative image of the church within the mainstream mass media. All of them set a background for the ecumenical relationships in Poland. Thus, ecumenism in Poland is apathetic, likewise everywhere in Europe. The ecumenical events attract only a few partakers, mainly those who remember the ecumenical enthusiasm of the 1980s and 1990s. Even the term "ecumenism" is often misunderstood when linked with interreligious dialogue or merely a secular attitude of tolerance. Moreover, the ecumenical idea seems to be in decline among younger Catholics, who usually do not see the point of the interconfessional dialogue and who instead seek a solid confessional identity. A glimpse of social media discussions reveals that theologians who long for the pre-Vatican II church and employ an integralist language speak to many devoted Catholics (however, it also refers to the Protestants and Orthodox communities, respectively). Nevertheless, despite these rather disappointing observations, Polish ecumenism still has something to propose, both for Polish and universal Christianity. For better systematization, one might distinguish two dimensions: the ecumenism of the official relationships of the churches and grassroots ecumenism, often performed as evident cooperation of Christians.

### **Achievements**

The history of official interconfessional relationships traces back to the 1920s; however, only after World War II did ecumenical orientation become more prevalent. Nevertheless, there were many crucial moments in the development of Polish ecumenism. Indeed, one must mention the inception of the Polish Ecumenical Council in 1946, a body gathering main non-Catholic Churches in Poland, the first ecumenical initiatives of the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1960s, and the establishment of the joint commission for the relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish Ecumenical Council in 1974.

The commission has many ecumenical achievements. Over the last two decades, it issued four important ecumenical documents, which later were discussed in the Churches and Polish society. First, it was the declaration on the recognition of baptism entitled "Sacrament of Baptism—A Sign of Unity," signed on 23 January 2000 by the churches gathered in the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, Polish ecumenism produced such an agreement earlier than most other European



countries. Second, the report on interconfessional marriages, “Christian Marriage of Persons of Different Confessions,” tackled one of the most controversial issues in interdenominational relationships. It is worth mentioning that the commission followed the solutions conceived in the bilateral ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Waldensian Church in Italy. Both sides approved the declaration in 2011, and it is still waiting for official recognition by the Holy See. Third, the joint agreement on the ecological issues entitled “Appeal of Polish Churches for the Protection of Creation” was signed on 16th January 2013 and reflected the ecumenical paradigm “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.” Finally, it was the joint document “Appeal of Churches in Poland for the Preservation of Sunday,” in which the Churches countered a deprivation of Sunday of its festive dimension due to economic reasons.

The promulgation of the ecumenical translation of the Bible, eventually signed in 2018, became a further sign of the official inter-church cooperation. Either the works of the Polish Christian Forum and the country chapter of the Global Christian Forum, since 2016, have contributed to the development of interconfessional friendship. Moreover, the Churches collaborate in diaconal actions, such as Christmas Eve’s Help to Children. Also, common prayer meetings and worship during official state and religious events are taken for granted in interchurch life. There are ecumenical chapels in the hospitals, airports, prisons and other public buildings in the country, ecumenical pilgrimage and celebrations, for instance, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. All these ecumenical facts, though not numerous, make ecumenism familiar and “well-established” in the church and society’s life.

## **Challenges**

Regardless of the more universal tendencies that heavily affect Christianity and, thereby, ecumenism on the world level—such as secularization, anthropological crisis, egoistic consumerism, precarious economy and work, conflicts around the green revolution, voices about a decline of the Western civilization, and challenges of migration—there are also factors more specific to today’s Poland. Therefore, even though some of them were alluded to above, it is worth listing them in a more systematic way.

First, like other European countries, Poland is immersed in a profound worldview conflict that, in turn, polarizes Polish politics. The churches and ecumenism are at the very centre of it since they (especially the Roman Catholic Church) take a clear position regarding crucial ethical issues. Moreover, the clash of values, linked with the political fight, imprints on the ecumenical relationships, as the common opinion often places the churches

on opposite sides of the conflict. Even though it is a rather deceiving media image, it may impede interchurch relationships.

Second, there are new challenges brought about by migration. For the first time in modern history, Poland is both an immigration and emigration country. Of course, both cases change the social structure and bring in new cultural patterns and new ways of thinking; both also impact the churches in Poland, and, thereby, both raise interconfessional and pastoral problems. It is about, for instance, the Polish Catholics who return to Poland after many years of economic migration in one of the Western European countries and who attended a Protestant church there. It is also about mixed marriages when one spouse is of different confession or religion or is an unbeliever. All these situations require churches' pastoral cooperation.

On the other hand, there is a growing number of Ukrainian and Belarusian communities of economic emigrants and war refugees. Ukrainian and Russian languages are heard in the daily life of Polish cities. The migration from the Eastern neighbourhood countries has two faces: partly, it is the swinging migration of those who come to Poland for several months only; partly, it is a huge number of those who decide for permanent settlement. Since some of them are Orthodox and Greek Catholics, the churches face specific pastoral problems, such as an increasing number of interconfessional marriages, a growing need for the religious education of children, or, last but not least, the need for places of worship for the Orthodox communities in the regions where there is no Orthodox church. The last point offers an opportunity for ecumenical cooperation, and in many Polish cities, the Catholic dioceses appoint Catholic churches or chapels where Orthodox communities may celebrate the liturgy.

Nevertheless, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought about new challenges. First, Poland has become the main country of arrival for millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war. Some of them have already returned to Ukraine; however, many have remained in Poland. It also intensifies previous interconfessional problems and causes new ones. On the one hand, churches (also in ecumenical cooperation) are involved in the aid for war refugees, organizing material support and psychological and pastoral assistance; on the other, ecumenical tensions arise due to a strong critique raised by the Polish Orthodox Church against pastoral activities of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine done in Poland.

Third, likewise, in other countries, there is a growing number of Pentecostal communities in Poland; however, the pace of growth is not as quick as for instance in South American countries. Yet it reflects in the intense Catholic debate on the so-called pentecostalization of Polish Christianity. The critical

voices, raised mainly from the traditionalist circles, point out the dynamism of the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church. At times they link pentecostalization with the protestantization of Catholicism; however, the latter is variously comprehended. On the one hand, both terms are equated; on the other, the protestantization is being linked with the liberal tendencies in the church and deemed as one of the most serious threats to Catholic integrity. Moreover, the traditionists in Poland, who are often close to the political anti-systemic political parties, discredit the significance of the ecumenical healing of historical memory. For instance, the commemoration of the 500 years of Reformation offered them many pretexts to draw the picture of Martin Luther according to the patterns from the deepest confessional wars. Obviously, even though taken by rather narrow circles, such actions may overshadow Poland's ecumenical relationships.

Nevertheless, the approval of women's ordination in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (Lutherans) causes another conflict in Polish ecumenism. It is reflected in the reactions of some churches belonging to the Polish Ecumenical Council.

### **Hallmarks**

The ecumenism in Poland, especially in the Catholic Church, draws from the legacy and authority of John Paul II, even though Polish Orthodox Church ambiguously appraise the role he played in interchurch relationships. The authority of the pope and his very clear ecumenical orientation still is a driving force for many ecumenical initiatives, mainly on the Catholic side.

Moreover, the ecumenical activities are rather a matter of a theological elite. The reception of the ecumenical agreements and ecumenical pastoral guidelines is relatively poor, even among the clergy. On the other hand, the interdenominational relationships of the ones involved in ecumenism are very promising and friendly and seem to be a good starting point for future cooperation.

## **Romania**

### **Ecumenical relations**

The multiconfessional situation in Romania is marked by the presence of 18 religious denominations recognized by the Romanian state: Orthodox churches (the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Bishopric from Timisoara, the Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church of Romania—the Lipovians), Catholic churches (the Roman-Catholic, Romanian Church United with Rome—Greek-Catholic), Eastern Orthodox churches

(Archdiocese of the Armenian Church), Protestant churches (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania, Reformed Church in Romania, Unitarian Church in Transylvania), evangelical neo-Protestant churches (Baptist Christian Cultus–Union of Baptist Christian Churches from Romania, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Pentecostal Christian Cultus–Apostolic Church of God, Christian Church according to the Gospel from Romania–Union of Christian Churches according to the Gospel, from Romania, Romanian Evangelical Church), the Federation of Jewish Communities from Romania, the Muslim Cult, the Jehovah’s Witnesses Religious Organization. All this is legally recognized by Law no. 489/2006 regarding the regime of cults and religious freedom.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, the ecumenical dialogue in the Romanian area is not a very visible one.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, one can argue that in the international ecumenical space the collaboration is much stronger due to the presence in ecumenical fellowships, such as the World Council of Churches (WCC)<sup>12</sup> and Conference of the European Churches.<sup>13</sup>

However, we recall the moment of the organization of the Referendum on the definition of marriage.<sup>14</sup> The initiative belonged to the Coalition for the Family, but the Consultative Group of Religious Denominations came together to support this effort. The Consultative Council of Cults in Romania is an ethical, autonomous, apolitical, non-governmental organization without legal personality and non-profit, made up of the 13 recognized cults. Beyond the fact that the Referendum did not pass, there remains the collaboration of religious cults, including the Orthodox Church.

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10 See: *Statul și cultele religioase* (București: Litera, 2014).

11 See: Rev. Dr. Adrian Boldișor, “Aspecte ale educației religioase în România. Asemănări și deosebiri cu modele europene,” in *Paradigma creștină a unei Europe unite. Educația religioasă – valori, exigențe, finalități*, ed. Lucian Dindirică (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 2017), 116–13.

12 Reformed Church in Romania, Romanian Orthodox Church, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Romania.

13 Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania, Reformed Church in Romania Kiralyhagomellek (District), Romanian Orthodox Church, Transylvanian Reformed Church.

14 See: “Consiliul Consultativ al Cultelor din România susține referendumul pentru definirea căsătoriei ca uniune între un bărbat și o femeie,” *Lumina*, 3 October 2018, <https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/stiri/consiliul-consultativ-al-cultelor-din-romania-sustine-referendumul-pentru-definirea-casatoriei-ca-uniune-intre-un-barbat-si-o-femeie-137661.html>

The history of ecumenical dialogue in Romania must be analyzed, considering the communist period<sup>15</sup> but especially the period after the exit from communism in December 1989.<sup>16</sup> We do not go into the details of the communist period when, under internal political control, the Romanian Orthodox Church became a full member of the ecumenical dialogue, especially promoted by the WCC.<sup>17</sup> We have been interested in the post-December period until now. In this period of more than 30 years, the Orthodox Church in Romania, the majority in terms of the number of declared Christians, won a place of honour in the inter-Orthodox and inter-ecumenical dialogues. We must not forget some names of those who were actively involved in promoting ecumenical relations, starting with Rev. Ion Bria,<sup>18</sup> Rev. Dumitru Stăniloae,<sup>19</sup> Rev. Viorel Ioniță,<sup>20</sup> Metropolitan Nifon of Târgoviște,<sup>21</sup> and Rev. Ioan Sauca, who led over a decade the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey and currently acting General Secretary of WCC.<sup>22</sup> Also, here we should remember that the current Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, studied in the West and taught as a lecturer at the same Ecumenical Institute in Bossey.<sup>23</sup>

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15 See: Kaisamari Hintikka, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Church, 1961–1977*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 48 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2000); Lucian N. Leustean, ed., *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945–91* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010).

16 Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also: Rev. Dr Cristian Sonea, “Between Hope and Disappointment: A Short Evaluation of the Romanian Orthodox Church Involvement in Ecumenism in the Post-Communist Era,” *Reshaping Ecumenism in Time of Transformation. Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, ed. Roberts Svatoň (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2021), 34–54.

17 “Intrarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în Consiliul Ecumenic al Biseriilor,” in *Ortodoxia* 1-2 (1962), 250–55.

18 See: Doru Marcu, *A Critical Analysis of the Theological Positions and Ecumenical Activity of Ion Bria (1929-2002)* (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 2022).

19 Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

20 Viorel Ioniță, ed., *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2014).

21 See: “Metropolitan Nifon, New WCC Vice Moderator: “Pray and Act Concretely to Alleviate the Sufferings in the world,” WCC Website, 20 June 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/metropolitan-nifon-new-wcc-vice-moderator-pray-and-act-concretely-to-alleviate-the-sufferings-in-the-world>.

22 “Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca confirmed interim WCC general secretary,” WCC Website, 3 June 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/rev-prof-dr-ioan-sauca-confirmed-interim-wcc-general-secretary>.

23 Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, “Minutes of the Thirty-Ninth

Another important ecumenical collaboration for Romania remains the existence of the Ecumenical Research Center in Sibiu.<sup>24</sup> Within this centre, Romanian theologians belonging to different Christian traditions meet and work together on different research projects. Unfortunately, the current situation at the centre is uncertain that we hope will be resolved as soon as possible.

Currently, the Romanian Orthodox Church is actively involved in ecumenical relations but always maintains a balance regarding the internal situation within the inter-Orthodox communion. Unfortunately, this communion is provoked by the decisions of the Holy and Great Synod, but especially by the tension between Moscow and Constantinople following the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Moreover, the armed conflict in Ukraine also has consequences for inter-Orthodox and implicitly inter-ecumenical relations.<sup>25</sup>

The documents approved at the Holy and Great Synod of Crete in June 2016, especially *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World* and *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*,<sup>26</sup> but also the one approved by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in March 2020, *For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*,<sup>27</sup> represent the new chapter of the Orthodox Church in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

### Theological education

Theological education in Romania has been facing constant transformations over the past few years. From the traditional Orthodox seminaries to religious education in public schools and theological higher education, all these forms of instruction are marked by a certain tension between the church's need to prepare theologians for its own clerical organizations and the more general purpose of raising awareness for the social role played by the

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Meeting, Hanover, Federal Republic of Germany, 10-20 August 1988" (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989),155.

24 See <http://ecum.ro/>.

25 See: Evangelos Sotiropoulos, ed., *The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Ukraine Autocephaly: Historical, Canonical, and Pastoral Perspectives*, Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2019; Radu Bordeianu, "The Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine: Its Impact outside of Ukraine," in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 3-4(2020), 452-62; Cyril Hovorun, "The Case of Ukrainian Autocephaly," in *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, Elizabeth A. Clark and Dmytro Vovk, eds. (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 180-91.

26 See the official documents here: <https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents>.

27 See the document here: <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>.

church in society, by educating young people from various domains, other than those related to the ecclesiastical space.<sup>28</sup>

As a form of religious formation, Romania has several types of education: confessional religious education in public schools and theological formation in universities. Confessional religious education is a form of instruction based on moral and religious principles, preached by a confession. Theological formation represents an essential work through which the experience of the church gets transmitted from one generation to another. Ecumenical education is part of this theological formation and is understood as a learning process to abandon confessional competition, mistrust, and misunderstanding, to give the common witness in the world and to achieve the visible unity of the church.

In the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church, this theological or religious education is carried out in two directions: in the pre-university educational system<sup>29</sup> and in the theological education of young seminarians and students through theological seminaries<sup>30</sup> and faculties.<sup>31</sup> Analyzing critically, as far as theological faculties are concerned, their high number lowered the level of training. Undoubtedly, shortly the Romanian Orthodox Church will need a new theological reform, especially regarding the accreditation of these theological institutions.<sup>32</sup> Obviously, this restructuring must take into account the administrative structure of the dioceses in such a way that for each metropolitan area, there should be only a faculty for the training of future priests and theologians.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, access to various European scholarships offered the possibility for many theological students to have training in Western universities. Some of them returned to Romania and were involved in the existing educational structures, which brought freshness to the Romanian theological system.

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28 See: Rev. Dr Cristian Sonea, [https://misjologia.uksw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/10\\_Sonea\\_Summarypercent20Warsawpercent202017.pdf](https://misjologia.uksw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/10_Sonea_Summarypercent20Warsawpercent202017.pdf)

29 <https://patriarhia.ro/religia-in-scoala-178/>.

30 Within the Romanian Patriarchate, there are 27 theological seminaries and 9 Orthodox theological high schools with different specializations. See the list here: [https://patriarhia.ro/images/Educational2020/Lista\\_Seminariilor\\_si\\_Liceelor\\_Teologic\\_Ortodoxe\\_din\\_Patriarhia\\_Romana.pdf](https://patriarhia.ro/images/Educational2020/Lista_Seminariilor_si_Liceelor_Teologic_Ortodoxe_din_Patriarhia_Romana.pdf).

31 In present, within the Romanian Patriarchate, 14 faculties of Orthodox Theology function. See the list here: <https://patriarhia.ro/lista-unitatilor-de-invatamant-teologic-universitar-541.html>.

32 See: Cristian Sonea, "The Missionary Formation in the Eastern Orthodox Theological Education in Present Day Romania," in *Transformation* 3 (2018), 146–55.

33 See <https://patriarhia.ro/organizarea-administrativa-763.html>.

## Migration and diaspora

The phenomenon of migration and the formation of the Romanian diaspora is not a new one, but the current high level far exceeds the figures known in the past. Currently, according to recognized statistics, around 5 million Romanians are temporarily or permanently settled in different areas of Europe and beyond.<sup>34</sup> Considering this massive migration, the Romanian Patriarchate decided to establish some Romanian parishes in the diaspora to offer moral and spiritual support to these Romanians who belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>35</sup> It is considered that the Romanian Orthodox diaspora is one of the most important now, obviously at the expense of the social, cultural, economic and spiritual stability of Romania.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the organization of Romanian parishes in the diaspora became a model of a Christian witness. Numerous cases of conversions are known due to the encounter with the tradition and liturgical life of Eastern orthodox Christianity. Currently, it is accepted that the Orthodox Romanians from the diaspora are much more present in the life and work of the church. With certainty, in the coming years, we will observe the same effervescence of those who live outside Romania's borders.<sup>37</sup>

Labour migration as a phenomenon can be looked at from at least four different perspectives. We must first consider the emigrant, the one who leaves his country, city or village, placing a mark on his or her family but also on society in general. The cities and villages are depopulated, and Romania becomes subject to a constant demographic decline. In such circumstances, especially in a rural area, the mission of the church consists simply in aiding the elderly or in performing funerals.

A second perspective is the one regarding the immigrant, the person who enters a country for a longer or indefinite period. Such a person entering a new world is forced to go through a stage of adaptation which is often very painful. Pastoral work involving immigrants is difficult but may prove to be a chance for the church. Orthodox priests from the diaspora say that

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34 See: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/>; <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/istoria-recensamintelor.pdf>.

35 See <https://patriarhia.ro/organizarea-administrativa-763.html>.

36 See: Răzvan Brudiu and Alexandru Ciucurescu, "The Orthodox Diaspora: Analysis, Nuance and Redefinitions," in *Icoana Credinței* 15 (2022), 24–33.

37 See: Maria Hämmerli, "Orthodox Diaspora? A Sociological and Theological Problematisation of a Stock Phrase," in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 2-3 (2010), 97–115. Also, the situation of the Orthodox diaspora, in general, was analyzed at the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in 2016. See the official document here: <https://www.holycouncil.org/diaspora>.



they manage to build very active Christian communities. A lot of Romanians who, while at home, were not religious once abroad discovered the life of the church. Romanian Orthodox churches in the diaspora are also meeting points or places where one can find information about jobs, for example. All this is not very common in Romania, but in the diaspora, all contributes to attracting many believers to participate in the services. Also, in such a church, one may find believers coming from various social backgrounds and from different regions of Romania. Therefore, the priest is forced to adapt and be creative about the local traditions.

A third perspective is that of the active migrant, those who change their jobs and homes regularly. For a priest, this is probably the most problematic situation. How can one work with someone who remains part of a community for only a short period of time? With someone the priest practically does not know. In such a case, we can only rely on each believer's conscience. They can search for the closest Orthodox church around, or, sometimes, they may never get into contact with the local church or the priest.

The final aspect regarding migration is that of mixed marriages and converts to the Orthodox Church. As expected, Romanians living abroad entered marriages with people of different nationalities and religious confessions. In such circumstances, they must learn to live with people who have different beliefs. An ecumenical education in such cases is vital.

Also, the number of converts to the Orthodox Church grew considerably in the last century compared with the previous ones. Converts represent the subjects of very delicate missionary work, and our priests, as well as the rest of the believers, are not always prepared for it. The phenomenon is present in many Orthodox churches, not only Romanian, but if we ask ourselves why not all the converts remain in the church, the answer may be that we are not fully prepared to receive them and to offer them appropriate help and attention.

## **Challenges**

As for the current challenges that should attract our attention, we mention the secularization of the spiritual life of Romanians. Secularization can be seen in Romania after the fall of communism, but as a broad social phenomenon, it was identified before the 1990s, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. It has also been noted that "secularization at the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization at the level of individual conscience. Certain religious institutions have lost their power and influence in many societies. Still, old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional

forms and sometimes leading to great bursts of religious fervour.”<sup>38</sup> Although the “secularization theory” appears as such in several works from the 1950s and 1960s, the critical idea of the theory can be traced back to the Enlightenment period. This idea is simple: modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals. And it is precisely this critical idea that has been proven wrong. Certainly, modernization has had some secularizing effects, more so in some places than others. But it has also provoked counter-secularization solid movements.”<sup>39</sup> For Peter Berger, “the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false. Today’s world . . . is as furiously religious as ever, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists, loosely called secularization theory, is essentially wrong.”<sup>40</sup> Beyond the fact that secularization has not penetrated, as Berger argues, at the deep level of society, there are other causes of de-secularization identified by José Casanova, Timothy A. Byrnes, and Peter J. Katzenstein in “the large influx of non-secularised populations into Europe through immigration,”<sup>41</sup> as well as “supply-side” theories. According to these theories, when post-socialist Romanian Orthodoxy challenged secular worldviews and secular life, this generated a competitive religious market and thus created a religious revival.

Romania seems to confirm both theories in that we are witnessing a religious return of Romanians starting from an individual/personal level, which proves that not all social strata have been influenced by the communist secularist policy. Still, we can also observe the phenomenon of choosing faith as a reaction to communist ideology, an ideology understood as a secular religion. As a general observation, we note that in Romania, we are simultaneously witnessing a process of secularization, challenged by religious leaders and supported by secularist organizations, and also a process of de-secularization facilitated by the still unaltered preservation of faith in Christian individuals/persons and communities. But this process is also facilitated by a horizontal legitimization of the presence of the church in society, which can very easily slide toward secularization of church life itself.

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38 Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 2–3.

39 Berger, “The Desecularization of the World.”

40 Berger, “The Desecularization of the World.”

41 Julia Mourão Permoser, “Religion in European Migration Studies,” *SSRC The Immanent Frame*, data accesării 12 martie 2022, <http://tif.ssrc.org/2014/02/18/religion-in-european-migration-studies/>.

What we can observe in the Orthodox media in Romania are the discourses that point to the dangers of secularization, the challenges that it brings, and the church's attempts to react to it. At times, crises in Christian communities have the effect of clearing things up: just like the litmus solution used to determine the acidic or basic character of various substances, crises can also clarify the attitude of the church towards one issue or another. Regarding secularization, we can notice both an attitude of rejection and a realistic evaluation of the situation. The obviously conflicting attitudes reveal an Orthodox nostalgia for a pre-modern model of society in which society was oriented towards God and faith occupied a central place. It is a longing feeling for an idealized past, especially the Byzantine imperial era and its legacy in the Balkans, as well as in Romania.

The problem of nationalism was also exacerbated in other Orthodox cultural spaces.<sup>42</sup> From our perspective, the Orthodox Romanians do not suffer from nationalism, contrary to other positions.<sup>43</sup> Maybe at most, some political leaders but also religious ones, use the theme of nationalism to refuse certain changes or to get different positions. Unfortunately, those who use the theme of nationalism are, at the same time, those who change the value of ecumenical dialogue.

Even so, nationalism is a danger in Romania if it is not critically analyzed. According to Violeta Barbu, who offers an overview of David Martin's analysis in the context of an Eastern European model of secularization, Romanian religiosity can be explained by the fact that the church proved to be, even during communist times, "the one vehicle to continuing Romanian identity."<sup>44</sup> Martin catalogues Romania with all its cultural and historical particularities within a pattern typical for several other East European countries (Greece, Poland, Romania, Serbia), which is *ethnic religion*.<sup>45</sup> That perceives "the Church as a vehicle of identity and a continuing holistic cultural tradition,"

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42 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Holy Lands and Sacred Nations," in *Concilium* 1 (2015), 115–23; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Church and Nation in Eschatological Perspective," in *The Wheel* 18 (2019), 52–61.

43 Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "Political, National Symbols and the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral," in *Europe-Asia Studies* 7 (2006), 1119–39. See also: Daniel P. Payne, "Nationalism and the Local Church: The Source of Ecclesiastical Conflict in the Orthodox Commonwealth," in *Nationalities Papers* 5 (2007), 831–52.

44 Violeta Barbu, "Contradictory Sign of What Is Missing: A Narrative of Romanian Post-Communist Religiosity," in *Faith and Secularisation: A Romanian Narrative. Romanian Philosophical Studies, IX Christian Philosophical Studies, VII*, ed. Wilhelm Dancă (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014), 35–39.

45 David Martin, *On Secularisation: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 81.

different from the one in which “the Church is conceived as a distinct institutional entity, teaching specific doctrines.”<sup>46</sup> Evaluated from the standpoint of Charles Taylor’s understanding of the relation between religion and state, in Romania the church protects the nation and is almost synonymous with it.<sup>47</sup> From the perspective of Gracie Davie, we could say that the Romanian pattern of religiosity appears as a regional variant of the “vicarious religion.” “This indicates the willingness of the population to delegate the religious sphere to the professional ministries of the state churches,” with Europeans glad that “churches perform, vicariously, a number of tasks on behalf of the population as a whole.”<sup>48</sup>

Olivier Clément noted that in Eastern Europe, Christians are witnessing the collapse of the culture their faith had inspired, seeing the art of living together brutally destroyed by money, individualism, and often gross hedonism. Nearly a century or half a century of the communist regime has transformed the church into a liturgical ghetto, in which believers are “liturgized” rather than evangelized. Orthodoxy thus becomes a sign of prideful religious belonging rather than a compassionate personal belief. Hence the identity reactions and the exaltation of what remains when everything collapses: the blood or so-called “ethnic” community, sealed with a certain “religious” folklore. Anaesthetized by tyranny, the real wounds begin to bleed again. “*This religious nationalism is the orthodox form of secularisation.*”<sup>49</sup>

Clément’s thesis is confirmed by Gelu Sabău, who observes that religious nationalism in the case of Romania is “*simultaneously a paradoxical form of adaptation/resistance to modernity.*”<sup>50</sup> It is a form of adaptation because the establishment of the national state needed the powerful instrument of nationalism and a form of resistance because, in this process of creating a modern national state, religious nationalism also hinders the advent of democratic values and the actions of several typically modern institutions. Furthermore, because Romanian religious nationalism equates national with religious

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46 Barbu, “Contradictory Sign of What Is Missing,” 35–39.

47 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2018), 455.

48 Grace Davie, “Is Europe an Exceptional Case?,” *International Review of Mission* 95:378-379 (2006), 247–58, doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.2006.tb00562.x.

49 Olivier Clément, “Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa,” in *Gândirea socială a Bisericii: fundamente, documente, analize, perspective*, ed. Ioan I. Ică jr. și Germano Marani, Civitas christiana (Sibiu: Deisis, 2002), 511.

50 Gelu Sabău, “Is Nationalism a Form of Secularisation for Orthodoxy?,” in *Faith and Secularisation: A Romanian Narrative. Romanian Philosophical Studies, IX Christian Philosophical Studies, VII*, ed. Wilhelm Dancă (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014), 104.

identity, it can be seen as a form of secularization because religious discourse can easily morph into an ideological discourse, thus pulling theological thinking down into the secular realm. The church thus runs the risk of self-secularization because even as it claims to fight against secularization, some of its social actions have political grounds rather than theological bases.<sup>51</sup>

### **The vision of the future**

Projecting a future of missionary challenges in the Romanian Orthodox Church is not a simple one.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, some of the challenges mentioned above will increase, and others will decrease. In any case, the religious situation in Romania will not be independent of political and economic changes. At the same time, the institutional position of the Romanian Orthodox Church remains quite important for the social life of Romanians. We need a theological and administrative educational reform to provide a safe space for the development of religious life. Clearly, the Orthodox Church must continue the reorganization that started immediately after the fall of communism. Today's opportunities and challenges far exceed the situation in the communist era. It remains to respond authentically to future situations and problems if we remain in the continuity of the Orthodox experience.

## **Serbia**

Serbia is officially a secular state, yet religion plays a significant role in terms of informing the cultural values and national identity of many Serbians. Indeed, throughout Serbian history, there has been a close association between ethnic identity and religious affiliation. For example, Serbs (the largest group in Serbia) mostly identify with Eastern Orthodox. Regarding the total population, 84.6 percent identify as Eastern Orthodox, while 5 percent identify as Catholic, 3.1 percent identify as Muslim, and 1.0 percent identify as Protestant. Of the remaining population, 0.8 percent identify with some other religion, 1.1 percent identify as atheists, and 1.5 percent do not declare their religious affiliation.

Although Serbia does not have an official religion, Eastern Orthodox Christianity plays a large and influential role in society. In Serbia, Eastern Orthodox is often referred to as Serbian Orthodox, and the national identity is often linked to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Established in 1219, the

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51 Sabău, "Is Nationalism a Form of Secularisation," 104–105.

52 Mihai Himcinschi and Răzvan Brudiu, eds., *Biserica Ortodoxă și provocările viitorului* (Alba Iulia, Cluj-Napoca: Reîntregirea, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020).

Serbian Orthodox Church is often understood as the institution that links contemporary Serbia with its long historical past. Since the breakup of former Yugoslavia, the church has again seen a strong revival. Since much of Serbian identity is linked to religious history, e.g. an attack on a church building is often interpreted as an attack on an individual Serbian or the collective. While the Serbian Orthodox Church is important to many Serbians, there are many people who have alternative spiritual beliefs. Thus, beliefs stemming from the Serbian Orthodox Church need to be considered on an individual basis. Many older Serbians see the church as an important part of their religious, social, and cultural life. Regardless of spiritual beliefs, visits to one's local church during major events such as Christmas and Easter are common.

When it comes to ecumenical relations, ecumenism is often characterized as something negative in society. The reason can be found in the events of the past century. Very conflictual relations with Catholics during the entire Serbian history have led to the fact that hostility is still quietly present today, although efforts are being made to reconcile and build bridges. Some of the leading Serbian Orthodox theologians of the 20th century, such as Justin Popovich and Nikolaj Velimirovich, often had a negative attitude toward ecumenism in the later years of their work, often associating it with the socio-political situation in Europe. Serbia is among the few Orthodox countries, if we can say so, which have been largely opposed to the pope's visit. Also, relations with the Roman Catholic Church by the official Orthodox Church are often viewed through the prism of the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in neighbouring Croatia in the dark events during World War II, when Croatia was a puppet state of the Third Reich, especially because of the role of Aloysius Stepinac (1898–1960), the Archbishop of Zagreb and a Croatian cardinal, whose canonization the Serbian Orthodox Church strongly opposes today. For this reason, the Vatican established a mixed Orthodox-Catholic commission to investigate this case involving the prelate of Zagreb in the Nazi regime. However, the commission's work was stopped due to the pandemic and was rather fruitless work. On a less official level, relations between Catholics and Orthodox are friendly, although the lower clergy also do not have much cooperation.

For the countries from Southeast Europe, like Serbia, one of the significant objectives of ecumenism would be “the need to purify memory . . . especially in the Balkan area.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, in the area of former Yugoslavia, many theologians

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53 Bogdan Dolec, “Ecumenical Dialogue in a New Europe: Steps towards a Purification of Historical Memories in the Balkans,” in *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe: Realities, Perspectives, Trends*, Volume 34, ed. Corneliu Constantineanu et al. (Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, 2016), 594–95.

representing the theological faculties in Ljubljana (Slovenia), Zagreb (Croatia) and Belgrade (Serbia) organized a series of ecumenical symposia (1972–90). This series of ecumenical meetings were resumed on a larger scale in 2014 with the interreligious and ecumenical conference in Maribor (Slovenia).

The Serbian Orthodox Church has begun to show more gestures of ecumenical goodwill since the election of the new Patriarch, Porfirije, in 2021. Also, the still vivid memory of the war in Yugoslavia largely prevents people from freely entering closer relations or mixing with members of other nations and religions. In this context, Catholics and Orthodox (but also Protestants, although a minority, but a present minority) in Serbia, the neighbouring countries of what we call the Yugosphere, still have a long way to go, which requires joint efforts in unravelling the past, personal identity, and opening to others. It should also be noted that the Serbian Orthodox Church is a member of the WCC, that in 2018 it hosted the assembly of the European Conference of Churches and is very active in the international ecumenical movement.

In Serbia, there is currently one Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade, with about 1,500 students. The condition for all students is that they have a recommendation from an Orthodox bishop for admission to studies. Because of this, there are no students of other denominations on the faculty, and other churches educate their students abroad. Thus, Catholics and minorities study in neighbouring Croatia and Hungary. It can be mentioned that there is also an Adventist Theological Faculty in Belgrade, with a very small number of students and in considerable isolation since it does not belong to the university, unlike the Orthodox Faculty. Theological education is also available to all people through primary and secondary schools in the form of religious classes taught by religious teachers appointed by the churches. Religious education in Serbia is an optional subject along with civic education, while, for example, in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is a compulsory subject.

Like most Balkan countries, Serbia is facing a rapid emigration of its population. This process is somewhat slowed down by the fact that Serbia is not part of the EU, nor are neighbouring countries Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania. On the other hand, Croatia is experiencing greater emigration due to EU membership. And yet, the Serbian diaspora is numerous. According to statistics, between 300,000 and half a million Serbs live in Austria alone. The situation is similar in America and Australia. And yet, here we are talking about people who left the country.

On the other hand, the number of people who came to the country is small. This also applies to migrants from the Middle East because they do not stay in the country. Nevertheless, we can say that, especially in the northern

parts of Serbia, national diversity provides a good example of good coexistence. Here we have different religions and nations (Serbs, Romanians, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, etc.) who settled on this territory during the past and today proudly emphasize their religious and national identity with great respect for others.

When we talk about today's challenges for the churches in Serbia, it is difficult not to mention the historical events of the past decades. Those relations are still heavily burdened by these events. Since the Serbian Orthodox Church is the main Christian community, the biggest challenge for minority churches is to survive and not dissolve in society. Mixed marriages or lack of interest of their members are often why these minority churches lose believers and thus disappear. On the other hand, the Serbian Orthodox Church often suffers from pressure from the state due to social and political circumstances. During the period of communism, the church lost its freedom, but today it has regained it, and it is often not clearly defined what this freedom includes, what questions the church should or must answer, and where the limits of its freedom today are. Likewise, all churches face their members' nominal membership, which is often far from actual attendance at religious services and active participation in religious life.

That is why it is often heard that the re-evangelization of the members, the deepening of their theological education and, thus, a stronger attachment to their churches on a practical level is needed. This is a very complex challenge since, especially for young people, their church is often far from their interests, digitalization, gaining momentum, and contemporary ideas in society.

Finally, regarding the future vision, it is difficult to talk about rapid changes, especially since the institutional churches are very slow in this field. The public discourse of the Serbian Orthodox Church always remains close to the state and its historical discourse. For this reason, since Serbia is getting closer to the EU, there are increasingly loud calls for the church to show more liberal attitudes toward those who feel discriminated against in society, such as the LGBT population. Minority churches continue to follow instructions from their headquarters located outside the country's borders, but their primary goal remains to preserve the national Serbian identity of their communities. The future vision seems challenging and hazy, especially in the modern world, because it is becoming increasingly obvious that it is very challenging for the church to bear witness to the gospel in the right way and always be consistent.



## Common Challenges in the Central and European Region

Apart from the specific challenges identified in the above key studies, there are some common challenges in the region. We will mention here the Roma issue and the war in Ukraine.

Despite political persecution, there is one minority, among many others, who has refused to yield to pressure and has remained in the Balkan area, the Roma communities. On the other hand, there are new immigrants in Southeastern Europe. People who used to have a hard time getting here nowadays are considered diasporas: Asian people, Chinese, Japanese, Thais, and Koreans. They all bring a change to Southeast European countries' cultural and religious landscape and represent missionary challenges rarely seen before.

For example, according to the latest censuses, Romania is the country in Southeast Europe where the Roma community has the largest number of members, about 700,000 people. It is the second largest minority group after the Hungarians. Unofficially, however, the number is thought to be almost three times as high. Religiously, the Roma do not have a uniformly accepted religion. As a rule, they take on the religion of the community they live in, but this adherence is often formal, and they do not become part of that denomination. Although Romania is officially a majority Orthodox country, with more than 80 percent of the population declaring themselves Orthodox, in recent years, more and more Roma are declaring that they belong to the Pentecostal Church. Many are leaving the Romanian Orthodox Church to become part of the Pentecostal Church.<sup>54</sup> In addition, on a social level, research has shown that the Romanian population hardly accepts Roma.<sup>55</sup> A 2020 IRES poll shows that 70 percent of Romanians do not trust Roma, and attitudes toward them are similar to those toward immigrants rather than a national, ethnic minority.<sup>56</sup>

The same is true in Bulgaria, where the Roma community numbers around 350,000 members (5 percent of the country's population), the third largest ethnic group after Bulgarians and Turks. However, there are major conflicts

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54 Kiss Dénes, "The Roma of Herculian and the role of the Pentecostal Religion in Their Community," in *Incluziune și excluziune. Studii de caz asupra comunității de romi din România*, Kiss Tamás and László-Fleck Gábor, eds., 2009, 19-23.

55 Daniela Albu, "Perception on the Roma Minority in the Romanian Society: From Serfdom to Emancipation," *Drepturile Omului / Human Rights*, 2021, 17, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/drtom2021&id=204&div=&collection=>.

56 "Poll IRES: 7 out of 10 Romanians Do Not Trust in Roma," Societate, 5 July 2020, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/sondaj-ires-7-din-10-rom-percentC3percentA2ni-nu-au-percentC3percentAEncredere-percentC3percentAEn-romi/30707320.html>.

with their social inclusion. In 2017, the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister himself addressed insulting words to Roma in an official speech. Since the 1950s, Bulgaria has been in the process of incorporating Roma people into mainstream ethnic communities. Thus, more than 130,000 people were forced to change their nationality from Roma to Turkish through a state administrative procedure. This way, a process of Islamization of the Gypsies in this territory began. However, the identity of Roma converts to Islam can be unstable and dependent on different ethnic-social positions. The dominance of religious identity creates stability and self-confidence for some of them. However, for the rest of the target population, there remains a problem of association of the Roma community with the spread of Islamic teachings whose adherents do not identify with this ethnic group. Between 2003 and 2010, there were cases of Roma converting from Islam to Protestantism. But since, according to Slavkova, the identity of “Gypsy” was attributed only to evangelised Turkish Roma, the phenomenon of re-Islamization emerged: children or young people who had changed their religious affiliation to evangelical Christianity converted back to Islam. However, this should be viewed with some caution, as there is a clear discrepancy between what is declared and the non-religious, everyday ethno-cultural practices.<sup>57</sup>

In 2016, Michael O’Flaherty noted in the “Second Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in the European Union, Roma” that around 80 percent of Roma surveyed live below the country’s risk-of-poverty threshold, one in three Roma lives in a home without running water, one in three Roma children live in a household where a member has gone to bed hungry at least once in the last month, and 50 percent of Roma aged 6 to 24 do not attend school. This report highlights a disturbing reality: the largest ethnic minority in the European Union continues to face intolerable discrimination and unequal access to essential services.<sup>58</sup>

Looking at the situation of the Roma as a whole, they are one of the groups most at risk of social and labour market exclusion. According to Adrian-Nicolae Dan, the rate of exclusion among the Roma is substantially higher than for the majority population. This is primarily due to the low level of education and lack of professional qualifications. However, prejudice and discrimination play an important role in the social and economic exclusion of Roma. At the same time, the Roma are employed mainly in the informal or household sector, not contributing and therefore not benefiting from social

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57 Yelis Erolova, “Cases of Contemporary Re-Islamization among Roma in Bulgaria,” *Romani Studies* 31:2 (2021), 211–30, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/841006>.

58 See: “Second survey on minorities and discrimination in the Union European. Roma - results selected” (Agency Pentru Rights Fundamental for Union European, 2016).

security. For many Roma families, social benefits and childcare allowances are the main sources of income. Public policies to include Roma in the labour market have not proved effective so far, nor have measures in other areas, as the sectoral nature of interventions does not cover the complexity of the problems of Roma communities facing multiple vulnerabilities.<sup>59</sup>

All these realities are a great challenge for the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe, but also an opportunity for Christian communities to show their love and initiate missionary programmes to promote human dignity.

Another big challenge in Eastern Europe that affects the whole world is the war in Ukraine. Besides the geopolitical stakes, the conflict is deepening existing rifts between Orthodox in Russia and Ukraine and throughout the Eastern world. The war has made the relations between Orthodox in Ukraine and Russia more tense. Before the war, there were three Orthodox churches in Ukraine: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Because of its recognition of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Patriarchate of Moscow unilaterally broke communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church unilaterally interrupted eucharistic communion with Bartholomew on 15 October 2018, before the signing of *the Tomos* of recognition of autocephaly on 5 January 2019. After the Church of Greece and the Patriarchate of Alexandria recognized the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church unilaterally broke communion with these two churches as well.

About three months after the start of the war in Ukraine on 27 May 2022, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, hitherto affiliated to Moscow, announced that it would break away from Russia after the latter invaded Ukraine, declaring its “full independence” from the Russian spiritual authorities. It disagrees with the position of the Patriarch of Moscow and All of Russia on the war in Ukraine. The Synod also stated that it opts for the unification of all Ukrainian Orthodox Christians in a secure ecclesial structure and is ready to hold discussions on this matter with the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

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59 Adrian-Nicolae Dan, “Economia socială și comunitățile de romi – provocări și oportunități,” in *Programul Națiunilor Unite pentru Dezvoltare*, ed. Cătălin Șerban, [https://www.academia.edu/54952009/Economia\\_social\\_percentC4\\_percent83\\_percentC5\\_percent9Fi\\_comunit\\_percentC4\\_percent83\\_percentC5\\_percentA3ile\\_de\\_romi\\_provoc\\_percentC4\\_percent83ri\\_percentC5\\_percent9Fi\\_oporunit\\_percentC4\\_percent83\\_percentC5\\_percentA3i](https://www.academia.edu/54952009/Economia_social_percentC4_percent83_percentC5_percent9Fi_comunit_percentC4_percent83_percentC5_percentA3ile_de_romi_provoc_percentC4_percent83ri_percentC5_percent9Fi_oporunit_percentC4_percent83_percentC5_percentA3i).

This situation, in addition to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and the grief caused by the deaths of thousands of soldiers and civilians, creates a difficult situation within the Orthodox community globally. How can a Christian community be credible in the world if there is no real internal communion? Unfortunately, this is the situation currently at the Pan-Orthodox level.

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This book is a must for academics, pastors, or mission practitioners interested in how Christianity expanded in the 20th century through mission work, how this has transformed into World (or Global) Christianity, and what mission looks like in the 2020s and beyond.

The first part answers two questions through nine regional reports. These reports came from an international study process led by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches for the centenary of the commission's predecessor, the International Missionary Council:

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- Many of these Christians live in conditions that threaten their existence because of war, poverty, and the effects of climate change—such as droughts, floods, and famine. What hope can the good news of Jesus Christ give to those who are most vulnerable and often wounded?

The second part of the book contains five studies of transnational mission networks. The International Missionary Council was originally a “council of councils and mission networks,” creating a model followed by many since 1921. Transnational mission networks offer a huge potential for churches and mission actors in their work in a world that is facing many unexpected and overwhelming challenges. How can these networks foster mission, justice, reconciliation, and unity?



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