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SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

APPROACHES AND DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY. THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE SPIRITUAL PROFILE OF EUROPE

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The objective of our research is in the direction that the current theological research has developed, to connect to the cultural and spiritual realities of the world in which we live, in order to decipher them in the light of Christ, the Dead and Risen. This effort-prophetic calling (vocation) materializes in several directions: the programs of formal and non-formal theological studies; the efforts to translate important theological works published in other languages; international, multi-denominational and multi-religious meetings, etc. The constant note of all theological efforts of this prophetic connection to the realities of the world in which we live, is the constant attention and vigilance for the theological effort to be authentic, in order to be an extension in the world and for the world of the word of Holy Scripture and the writings of the Saints and the Fathers of the Church. The object of our research is also based on these premises, in which we want a theological encounter-assumption of a reality with an increasing impact for the actual European Christian world: Islam and Islamization in Europe.

The reasons for this research are to be found in the concrete reality of the historical time we are going through and in which we are called to throw away the seeds of theology or knowledge of God. The immediate context, the historical concrete, in which we are living the gift of our existence, due to the accelerated process of globalization, knows unprecedented specifications. The technological advancement and the level of material well-being provided by the Western world, on the one hand, and extreme poverty, the threat and insecurity of one's life in other parts of the world with poor countries, on the other hand, generated an unprecedented social dynamic worldwide, synthesized in the literature through the phrase already well known by the **migration** phenomenon. The transfer of populations generates the most unexpected consequences. If from an economic-social point of view, homogenization through globalization is a process with a high degree of predictability and success, economic-social policies and mechanisms, often generating the expected effect, the same cannot be said when analyzing aspects related to the cultural and religious side, dimensions with a high degree of resistance to homogenization projects, designed by the social engineers of the ideological program which will be implemented. Globalization uses economic and social reasons and levers, because only they can be sensitive to the actions of incorporation undertaken through the mechanisms polished by the ideology which are being applied. However, it is proven that encouraging migration for economic reasons also means the transfer of culture and spirituality, which in most cases are not

inhibited in the host economic-social spaces, on the contrary, there is a strong tendency to exhibit, meeting with the foreign generating a high degree for the activation of identity antibodies. The need for religious identity is exacerbated by the imposition of a program of social – economic - cultural homogenization. As a result, today, in Europe, we are witnessing a surprising phenomenon of the return of the religious in the public space, where, due to the secularization process, the dominant cultural paradigm was one of religious neutrality, in whose vision the legitimate area of manifestation of the religious was only the private space. Certainly, one of the factors that determined the exit from the aggressive secularization of the old continent, was the religious attitude of the newcomers to Europe, mostly followers of Islam.

In Europe, the concern for religious life has increased due to the large number of followers of Islam who, starting with the end of the Second World War, came to Europe. Initially they came for a better life, with the thought of returning home, but few have left Europe. Today, Europe is home to the third generation of Muslims. For the time being, the Romanian space does not know and does not directly feel the consequences of the direct encounter with a consistent community of Muslims. The old Muslim community in the Dobrogea area, quite small in number, is an active part of that appreciable cultural and spiritual *modus vivendi* created throughout history, between the traditional communities in that area and new communities, created as a result of the latest waves of emigrants, did not appear. However, Europe is facing a phenomenon, whose protagonists are the European Muslims or those who have recently come to Europe, which force it to develop a paradigm answer, with direct consequences in the dialogue between European identity and Islamic spirituality. Muslims have been and are a very well represented reality in Europe. To ignore their presence, not to think of ways to integrate them into the great European family, to stand in a state of denial, is an attitude that involves negative consequences, in time, difficult to manage for the Christian culture and spirituality, dominant, for now, in Europe. In this great challenge for Europe, Christians are called to be an active part in the dialogue with the Islamic culture and spirituality.

For Georges Khodr, Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, "the Christian must seek in all human realities the traces of Christ, he must awake the sleeping Christ in the night of religions."

The presence of Christians in history is a prophetic one, in the sense of identifying the mysterious presence of God in the mists of times, cultures and civilizations in which and through which humanity has lived. As a prophet, the Christian cannot turn his back on history, but must assume it and recapitulate it in himself through his participation in the Mysterious Body of Christ, which is the Church. Paul Evdokimov synthesizes and creatively renders in perfect harmony with the Church's mind the attitude that the Christian must manifest towards the mysterious presence of God in people belonging to other religious traditions.

Paul Evdokimov says "The orthodox conception knows no ruptures; there is a plurality of plans and eons, but always with a mysterious continuity and a close correspondence. It even sees in history a religious phenomenon, because the pagan is liturgically called a *barren church*, yet a church. A very familiar image to the Fathers, when they speak about the fall, is the integrity shattered into pieces by sin. But in His boundless patience, God puts a new beginning, gathering the scattered particles to reconstitute the original unity. This gives the Fathers a provoking idea for the history of religions and missiology. They speak of the visits of the Word before the Incarnation, in the religious worlds foreign to the Christian revelation; The word is thus manifested more kenotic, more hidden, in the unseen church, the pagan church".

For Christians, the theological significance of other religions can also be deduced from their understanding as "theologies of the expectation of Christ, the one who transfigures cultures, being at the same time above all cultures." The interpretive paradigm of other religions is integrated in the area of certainty given by the Orthodox ecclesiology, the unavoidable landmark in the action of welcoming those of other religions. Starting from this premise, dialogue should not be understood as a substitute for evangelization, but as a necessary precondition for evangelization, which is articulated on the Good News that Christ remains in a state of sacrifice for the suffering of each individual until the end of the ages. Because the whole creation secretly carries in it the presence of the Logos - "all things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made of what was made" (John 1: 3) - dialogue is the concrete way in which the Church, the Mysterious Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God actively present in history, reveals to Christ the One who is hidden, mysterious, in a state of kenosis, like a "treasure hidden in the earth" (Matthew 13, 44-46) of this world, waiting for the one who wants to bring it to light, to enlighten the world.

The dialogue must take place on the scriptural and patristic coordinates grounded by Christology, a criterion that the Church from the beginning used it both for the internal issues, especially for the delimitation of heretical teachings, but also for the external issues, especially for the dialogue with those of other faiths.

Christology, which the Church through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit formulated in the Ecumenical Councils and which is lived as a truth of faith celebrated in a sacramental way, is another obligatory element in the dialogue with those of other faiths. The disregard of Christology, understood as the truth of faith that explains the ways of Christ's presence and redemptive work through the Holy Spirit in man and in creation, leads the dialogue to an area of doctrinal relativism, sterile for both Christianity and other religions with which Christianity is called to dialogue.

Another theological component necessary in the composition of an authentic dialogue, often invoked in the literature, is the certainty that the glory of God - linked to His providence - penetrates and sustains the world through His uncreated energies, through which all creation and especially all mankind is called, to deification, to which is added, as a direct and organic extension, the truth that all human beings have a common origin, a single human nature, and the same final destination. The glory of God that the whole creation manifests is identified in the Orthodox theology with the uncreated energies of God, present in the whole creation.

God creates the world by His will, not by His nature, and enhances it transcendently through His uncreated reasons, which send directly to the Christ-Logos, mysteriously present in His reasons. The discovery of the hidden glory of God, concealed, in other religions, is, therefore, the revelation of Christ, Who, beyond the bounds of human understanding, stands in a state of humility, waiting to be glorified by His creatures.

The Church, being the Mysterious Body of Christ prolonged in history, by which the history becomes partaker of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, must maintain the same state of vigilant hospitality which Christ the Lord Himself manifested to those of other faiths with whom he dialogued, dialogue often completed with the recognition of the Divinity of Christ. Jesus Christ did not exclude believers from other religions from His concern. As it is presented in the Gospels, He communicated with people from different religious traditions, such as the Canaanite woman, the Samaritan woman, the Roman centurion, and so on. And referring to the end of the world, the Righteous Judge identifies with the lowest of this world (Matthew 25: 35-40), regardless of race or religion. Another

emphasis that must be placed in the theological reflection on other religious experiences, in extension with the mentioned Christological from above, is related to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Pneumatology, which is only methodologically separated from Christology, but not outside a relationship of mutual integration, as presented by Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church, opens a wide horizon, of great theological precision, in relation to the religious experience of those of other faiths.

Archbishop ANASTASIOS (Yannoulatos) says “A reflection on other religious experiences from a pneumatological perspective opens new horizons in our theological approach. Orthodox theological thought regards the activity of the Holy Spirit as beyond definition and description. Along with the “economy of the Word,” it also looks—filled with hope and humble expectation—to the “economy of the Spirit.” Nothing can limit its energy: “The Spirit blows where it wills.” (John 3:8) The action and the cohesive strength of the love of the Trinitarian God work in a way that surpasses all human thought and understanding. Everything noble and good can be considered an energy of the Holy Spirit. Wherever we witness an expression or reflection of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness” (Gal. 5:22)—it may be possible to discern traces of the energy of the Holy Spirit. And many similar experiences can be found among people belonging to other religions.”

In the lectures of Archbishop ANASTASIOS (Yannoulatos), the phrase “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” (outside the Church there is no salvation) was born in the West. It never constituted the center of Eastern theological thought, even if it was adopted in a limited and specific sense. On the contrary, both older and recent Orthodox theologians stressed that the grace of God acts “even beyond the limits of the visible Church.” A renowned theologian and academician, the late Prof. John Karmiris, boldly expressed the following view: “Not only Christians but also non-Christians, unbelievers, and pagans can become ‘fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the same promise in Jesus Christ.’ (EPH. 3:6); even heathens and heterodox can belong to the Church invisibly on the basis and because of their faith and the gift of divine grace, which is granted to them and bears a quasi-ecclesiastical character.

As a sign and image of the Kingdom of God, the Church is the unifying axis of the whole process of recapitulation. Just as the life of Christ, the New Adam, has global consequences so does the life of His Mystical

Body, the Church, has universal consequences. Prayer and her concern embrace all of humanity. The church offers the Holy Eucharist to the whole world, acting in the name of the whole world and pouring out the glory of the Lord over all creation.

Another reason is the proliferation of Sufi literature in our country, especially through the Herald Publishing House, which published in a few years 12 titles of Sufi works, through which Sufi writings and personalities are imported and delivered to the Romanian public, too little trained to go beyond the sweetened, pacifying and inner peace message of the Sufi perspective. On the Sufi chain, Islam is much more tempting and tender, at the same time.

The above considerations constitute the motivational palette of our approach, which is intended, through the methods of the theological research, a different application of the attitude of seeking the sleeping Christ in the night of religions.

Christianity and Islam know 14 centuries of coexistence, with moments of tension, but also of relaxation and good coexistence. In this sense it is known the benevolent attitude of the Abbasid caliphs towards Christians, which, due to the high degree of culture they had, placed them in key positions of the administrative apparatus. Christianity has reacted theologically to Islam from the beginning of contact with it to the present day. In the first phase, the reaction was disrespectful. One could not anticipate the extent of the recent religion through the message conveyed by a character with a dubious spiritual authority to some tribal populations. John of Damascus, the first to theologically confront Islam, did not see it as a serious matter. To him it was a Christian heresy, easy to dismantle, suitable only for primitive peoples.

A more elaborate answer was given by Bishop Theodor of Haran in his work *Against the Heresies of the Jews and the Saracens*, in which, in the form of dialogue, all criticism of Muslims against Christians is well argued.

The theological dialogue shows more consistency at the beginning of the XV century, through Saint Gregory Palamas, who, being in captivity, has apologetic dialogues with various interlocutors of the Islamic religion. He keeps two letters he wrote while in captivity and an account of a theological discussion with a Muslim representative. Writing to the Asian Church, the Saint interpreted his period of captivity as follows:

“it seems to me that through this economy God the Most High (Romans 9: 5) wanted the things of our Lord Jesus Christ to be shown to the most barbarous of all barbarians, so that they would be speechless (Romans 1: 20) to His most fearful tribunal which is now near”.

During his captivity, being in the city of Nicaea, he sees part of the funeral rite of a Muslim. Asking to speak with one of the officiants, St. Gregory addresses himself as follows:

“I saw that the rite celebrated by you outside the walls is beautiful. Your cry was for the dead and for God, for to whom else could it have been? I would like to know what you said there to God?”

There are kept the theological discussions that Saint Gregory had with a delegation of scholars from the Muslims, called *chioni*, in which the Saint, without any hesitation, affirms both what unites and what distinguishes the two faiths.

Another significant moment of the dialogue has as protagonist on the part of Christians the emperor Manuel II the Palaeologus (1350-1425) with the work entitled *Dialogues with a Muslim*, in which punctually and systematically are discussed, on the one hand, all the theological points that bring the two beliefs closer together, and on the other hand, with a maximum of acrimony, the theological points through which Christianity distances itself from the Islamic religion are argued.

Ghenadie Scholarios, the first patriarch elected after the fall of Constantinople, at the request of the Sultan drafted a text entitled *Confession of Faith*, in which, in a very calm tone, the truths of faith of Orthodox Christianity "are presented responsibly by a theologian and church leader sovereign all-powerful. Consequently, the polemical and mocking phrases were removed". The fall of Constantinople sends the dialogue into a phase of silence.

The contemporary era is experiencing an intensification of dialogue, especially at the level of interreligious dialogue commissions. A detailed presentation of the institutionalized theological dialogue between Christianity and Islam was recently made by Professor Adrian Boldișor in his doctoral dissertation, entitled: *The importance and timeliness of interreligious dialogue for the contemporary world: history, perspectives, solutions*, published in 2015 by Metropolitan Publishing House of Oltenia.

At the international level, on behalf of the Orthodox Church, there are two great theological personalities who have been intensely involved in the dialogue with Islam: Metropolitan Anastasios Yannoulatos and Georges Khodr, Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon.

Contemporary theological research in Romania has contributed to the highlighting of the theological richness of encounter between Christianity and Islam, the works being the basis of our research, focused primarily on observing and highlighting the spiritual components through which, on the one hand, Christianity influenced the development of Islamic spirituality, and on the other hand, it affirmed and unequivocally defined the essential distinctions, by which Christian spirituality, in this Eastern case, distances itself from Islamic spirituality, represented by Sufism.

We recall the work of the distinguished professor Remus Rus, *The History of Islamic Philosophy*, published in Bucharest in 1994, in which he reviewed all the philosophical currents in Islam, and also the most representative Islamic thinkers and philosophers, founders of philosophical schools or mystical. An important chapter of this paper is devoted to the Sufi movement and its main representatives.

A major contribution on this field of research is brought by the worthy Father Prof. Nicolae Achimescu in the work of his holiness: *The religious universe in which we live*, Bucharest, 2013, a collection of articles, in which the relationship between Christianity and Islam is consecrated a consistent part, being signaled important points of historical and spiritual interference between the two religions. Prof. Emanoil Băbuș enriched the field of research with a consistent historical contribution, through two essential works: *Byzantium and Islam in the Middle Ages*, Sofia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, and *Byzantium between the Christian West and the Islamic East (VII-XV centuries)*, Sofia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, in which, through a very rigorous and well-documented research, the different levels of the history of Islamic-Christian relations are detailed. Also Father Caius Cuțaru, through the work *Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages. The first attempts at interreligious dialogue in the Christian East. Period I. Saint Anastasius of Sinai, Saint John of Damascus & Theodore Abū Qurra, Second Period. Samona de Gaza*, ASTRA Museum Publishing House, Sibiu, 2015, offers documents from the first period of Islamo-Christian cohabitation, which reflect the different theological attitudes that Christians had in the face of new Islamic rule.

Our attention is directed towards a level less exploited in the Romanian theology, that of a spiritual dialogue, developed to a much greater extent in the foreign theological research, especially that of French origin. This can be explained by the presence of a large segment of the Islamic population in the western part of Europe. In the field of theological research in our country, one of the reference works for our subject is the doctoral thesis of the priest professor Dan Sandu, *One God? Christian monasticism and Islamic Sufism: interferences*, Panfilus Publishing House, Iași, 2002, in which Sufism is analyzed, primarily as a product of Islam, belonging exclusively to it, but which, as the historical documents invoked, deposit a significant heritage of Christian influences, assimilated in the first centuries of the emergence of Islam and Sufism.

These influences were the object of our research using a rich investigation, started in the western space, where, in the analysis of the encounter between Christianity and Islam, in addition to the factual inventory, are targeted the fine areas of spiritual interference. Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos believes that a dialogue between different denominations and religions, in order to have positive results and lead to a right orientation, beyond fanaticism and manifestations in the spirit of secularism, must be carried out given the mystical, hesychastic dimension of each religion and confessions.

Arent Jan Wensinck in the *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, Amsterdam, 1923, was among the first authors to compare the Syriac mysticism of Isaac of Nineveh (Sirius) with the degrees of purification in the Sufi path. This author, translating the mystical treatises of Isaac, far from being limited to the influences of Syriac mysticism on ancient Sufism, showed profound analogies that could constitute a common platform for Christian and Sufi spirituality.

Margaret Smith, in her book *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, London, 1931, is another prolific author for the meeting point between the Christian and Islamic spirituality and imposes herself through the effort to identify the influential relations between Sufism and Christian mysticism, of Syrian origin.

Andrae Tor, interested in the exchanges of influences between the two mystics, Hellenistic and Christian, also studied the influence of Nestorian monasticism in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula, where Islam saw the light of day in *Les Origines de L'Islam et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1955.

Miguel Asin Palacios, Spanish priest and specialist in the mystical philosophy of Ibn Arabî, in the work *L'Islam christianisé. Étude sur le Soufisme d'Ibn Arabî de Murcie*, Paris, 1982 defines Ibn's works as a study of Christianized muslim mysticism. Its purpose is to present the Christian origin of Ibn Arabi's Sufi mysticism.

Alberto Fabio Ambrosio, a Jesuit clergyman, in *Soufisme et christianisme. Entre histoire et mystique*, Paris, 2013, manages a unique approach of the main mystical notions that can constitute up to a certain level a common area of mutual interpellation for the two spiritualities, Christian and Islamic. At the same time, the author does not show any hesitation in affirming the basic elements by which Christianity is delimited from Sufism.

One of the very prolific authors in the theological and mystical interpretation of Islam through the filters of Christian theology and mysticism, is the Jesuit priest Henri Sanson, a Frenchman who lived for a long time in Algeria and established himself in the research area of the relationship between Christianity and Islam. His books, have become a benchmark for this field of research: *Dialogue intérieur avec l'islam*, Paris, 1990; *Christianity in the mirror of Islam: an essay on the meeting of cultures*, Paris, 1984; *Islam in the Mirror of Christianity*, Paris, 2001; *Islam and Christianity mirror each other. Approches d'un chrétien d'Algérie*, Paris, 2008. In his books he addresses the relationship between Christianity and Islam on theological and spiritual coordinates, identifying similarities, continuities and distinctions, which are analyzed in the light of Christian theology. Another author, Robert Caspar, a Roman Catholic priest, missionary in Africa, specializing in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, presents some of the results of his research in *Pour un regard chrétien sur l'islam*, Paris, 1990. The work highlights certain spiritual concordances found in the way of life of the first and most famous Sufis.

Roger Arnaldez, professor of Islamic studies, born in Paris, published in 1989, in Paris, *Réflexions chrétiennes sur la mystique musulmane*, in which the entire theological and mystical scaffolding of Islam is analyzed in terms of reference to the Christian theology, pointing out influences, approaches and distinctions, through which the two spiritualities have related and relate to each other. His reign discusses in more detail the influence that Eastern Christian mysticism had on the practice of incessant mention of God's name, known in Sufi literature as the Dhikr.

The concern for the significance of Islam in Europe is also reflected in the doctoral research projects in our country in the field of theological research, where for the year 2020 are listed 12 titles of research projects that address various aspects of the impact that Islam has on the culture of the European Union. The subject is also of interest for other fields of research, such as: history, political science and philosophy. Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, and its links with Christian spirituality, the subject of our investigation, is found in a single position in the list of research projects published for 2020-2021: Sufism and Christian mysticism. A comparative theology, in the field of research History and philosophy of religions.

Our approach is to investigate the possibility of building a dialogue with the Islamic spirituality, using points of convergence of doctrinal and spiritual nature, which have been identified in specialized studies, especially those signed by Roman Catholic theologians, but processed in the light of Orthodox theology, using as a working method the recourse to the personalist-liturgical perspective of the Orthodox spirituality, as the main landmark in the evaluation of the Sufi perspective. We use as a substantiation note the opinion of Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, exposed in his work: *Old and New Rome*. From the Orthodox Tradition to the Western traditions, in which he argues that a fruitful encounter with Islam can be achieved only by exploiting the resources offered by the inner dimension of the faith, namely Sufism for Islam and Hesychasm for Orthodox Christianity. We render *ad litteram* the opinion of Metropolitan Hierotheos, who presents in a very concise way, the purpose and limits of our research approach.

“Personally, I believe that a dialogue between different denominations and religions, in order to have important, positive results and to lead to a right orientation, beyond fanaticism and manifestations in the spirit of secularism, is the one regarding the mystical, hesychastic dimension of each religions and denominations, without overlooking that of Orthodox teaching. We are talking about that state of affairs which is usually the expression of a certain dogma, since we know that dogmas are related to the lives of people who embrace a religion or a denomination. Dogma is the expression of revealed truth and is what is lived in worship and in people's personal lives.”

The note of originality consists in identifying the points of interference of the two spiritualities, Christian and Islamic (Sufi), and their evaluation through the filter of the Eastern Christian tradition. Why is such a work relevant in the field of Moral Theology and Spirituality research, and not only in the field of History and Philosophy of Religions, as it may seem more appropriate? We answer by stating that the subject of the relationship between Christianity and Islam has become very complex, especially in the light of modern research, which, deepening the subject, has generated a much broader problematization. Behind the factual dimension of this subject are a multitude of social, cultural, economic and especially spiritual factors that have profoundly influenced it. As a result, this subject began to enter the sphere of concern of several fields of research, such as: missiology, history of philosophy and patristic, history and philosophy of religions, history and spirituality of Byzantium, political science, literature, philosophy, each field using its own method and own research tools. Then, the history of deeds, in the thinking of the Church, cannot have meaning without a connection to the spiritual dimension that deeply determined the deeds. A historical fact is the embodiment of an idea or a spiritual movement, understanding by this that history is par excellence the place of the presence and intervention of God, who wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2: 4). Theological research has the duty to lean prophetically on history in order to detect, using the tools of academic research, through which and in which the charism of discernment can be manifested, the mysterious presence of God. A history that is not interpreted theologically is abandoned to the secularist and secularizing currents.

The paper is structured on 5 chapters, designed to develop the theme in an organic way, the chapters being made in a connection of continuity, with ideas and arguments that flow from each other, supporting each other.

In the first chapter, entitled Religious Dialogue. Fundamentals and limits, we made a brief overview of the main features that currently define and shape globalization, focusing mainly on what is found in the literature, the rise and gradual assertion of plurality. Globalization has not had an equalizing effect, the global world becoming rather the space in which identities, especially those of a spiritual nature, do not annihilate, but assert and counteract each other. We have shown that religious plurality is an objective reality, which can no longer be ignored, and the solution of the frown is not appropriate, history legitimizing the solution of

dialogue, in which identities meet hospitably and are challenged by respecting each other. Fundamentals but also scriptural and patristic limits of interreligious dialogue were presented, emphasizing the idea that dialogue does not involve diluting doctrinal identity, but is an extension of Christ's attitude to meet those of other faiths to tell them the truth, and not to impose the truth to them.

In the second chapter, entitled *The Decline of Europe's Identity and the Rise of Islam*, we present, through the thinking of Robert Schumann, one of the founders of the European Union, the Christian foundations of the European democracy, in relation to the significance of the idea of transcendence and secondary relationship, the structure of Europe's spiritual identity, an identity undermined by what Joseph Weiller, the famous professor of constitutional law, called the attitude of *Christophobia* - a direct attack on the basic structure of Europe's spiritual identity. We have shown how *Christophobia* is legitimized by the concept of political correctness, based on which any reference to Europe's Christian identity must be inhibited. Against this spiritual background, Europe is invaded by a strong spiritual identity, Islam, which, as we present in the last subchapter, is not compatible with the Western model of democracy and is not caught in the logic of inhibiting beliefs and behaviors that manifest faith.

In the third chapter, *The Pillars of Islam*, we presented the significance of the main landmarks of the Muslim faith and practice, insisting on the concept of monotheism in Islamic perspective, with an attempt to evaluate from the perspective that Christianity has on monotheism. Islamic monotheism, the basis of the entire faith structure of Islam, does not allow direct and personal access to God. God can be worshiped, but not lived, a belief that over time has generated the development of legalism in excessive forms. In the face of this exacerbated and impersonal legalism, Sufism rises, a reaction with deep spiritual accents, which arises within the Islamic world.

In the fourth chapter, *Sufism*, a natural mystical reaction to Islamic legalism and its relationship to Christianity. Interferences and delimitations, the most extensive in our work, we have approached punctually some of the aspects of Sufi spirituality, whose appearance and development, says the literature, is directly or indirectly related to the strong influence of Christian mysticism in the area where Sufism appeared initially. The sources of Sufi mysticism are inventoried - the Qur'an, the Hadith, the Holy Scriptures, Jesus -, then the contribution of

Christian mysticism is identified and evaluated. An important moment is Isaac of Nineveh (Sir) whose teaching can be easily found in the first Sufis in the history of Islam, also considered the fathers of Sufism. I approached the practice of constantly mentioning the name of God (Dhikr) known as a replica of Jesus' prayer in the Eastern Christian spirituality, highlighting the similarities, especially those related to form, and the differences, especially those related to the background or doctrinal content of the prayer.

The chapter continues to develop by assessing the implications of prayer on the relationship between mind and heart, the work of grace in the act of prayer, and the type of presence the prayer maintains during prayer. In the Sufi perspective, the human presence does not intensify, but is diluted, grace does not work in man through transfiguration, but through replacement, therefore the state of ecstasy is characterized by a complete unconsciousness, and not as an intensely conscious experience, as in the orthodox spirituality.

Following is the analysis of the mechanism of doctrinal relativization, one of the constants of Sufism in its history, and its consequences, to which I responded through the Orthodox perspective on the relationship between the truth of faith and spirituality, which in Orthodoxy is by excellence liturgical, the truth of faith being liturgically experienced in and through the Sacrament of the Church, a condition by which the truth can no longer be exposed to human manipulation.

In the last chapter, Person and personalism from a Sufi perspective. A natural aspiration, but without a doctrinal foundation, I made a case study, focused on the attempt of a famous Muslim, Muhhammad Laziz Lahbabi, to design a personalism of Islamic origin, after the model of humanist personalism of Emanuel Mounier, appeared in France after the World War II. Lahbabi's attempt to demonstrate that there is compatibility between Islam and personalism, even in the humanist version, which is ultimately articulated on Christian principles, strikes at the fundamental dogma of Islam, Tawhid, which proclaims the absolute uniqueness of Allah. In his absolutely transcendent uniqueness, Allah cannot communicate to man, and therefore cannot speak of a personalism based on revelation.

The given subject being a novelty in the area of theological research in our country does not benefit from a very generous bibliography, being necessary to identify and investigate foreign bibliographic resources, which directly or not treated our subject. The bibliographic resources

identified and consulted are largely the result of Islamic research, in which the points of interference and distinction, are chosen subjectively and overexploited, requiring another type of resources. There are needed bibliographies that scientifically temper the Islamic attitude and provide an objective and relevant response to the situations of interference or distinction identified. The solution came from the Roman Catholic research environment, which was very consistently involved in the dialogue with Islam.

Our research aimed to identify the themes of spirituality in which Christian and Islamic spirituality have interferences, which have generated a set of similarities, which we tried to visualize in the light of differences. Christianity and Islam, due to the intense and consistent cultural and spiritual contacts, occasioned by historical circumstances, cannot ignore each other, especially in the current historical and cultural conditions. Changes in the social fabric, caused by the massive invasion of Islamic faith populations in Europe, predominantly inhabited historically, spiritually and culturally by Christianity, force Christian-host and Muslim populations to share the same space, and thus to develop a model of coexistence. Therefore, religious pluralism is not just a matter of sociological speculation, which would artificially and forcibly provoke the concerns of theologians, but is the living reality in Europe, which is tacitly, sporadically and noisily (through terrorist attacks) growing. The phenomenon, for the time being, is tempered by political decisions, which, however, not infrequently generate irritation among both camps. In the face of this phenomenon to which Europe is exposed, we have concluded that it is pertinent to activate the huge potential for the dialogue that Christianity has, which is now happening, especially at the formal-institutional level, by organizing dialogue commissions, in which an open dialogue is encouraged, with the affirmation of the foundations that theology provides for interreligious dialogue, but also of theological limits, because a dialogue in which a religious identity is challenged to be inhibited will have no effect of improvement in the spiritual, cultural, cultural and social domains. Europe, through the clearly anti-Christian gestures taken and assumed both politically and culturally, is vulnerable to the strong religious current aroused by the arrival of waves of immigrants, and has developed its vulnerability by resorting to the re-signification of its history under the auspices of political correctness, the blame for the period of colonization, and especially of the Christophobia, understood as the fear of public assumption of the Christian identity, on which, moreover, Europe is culturally and spiritually supported. The

spiritual and, especially, cultural premises of the current European context do not have the power to directly neutralize the spiritual assault triggered by the phenomenon of progressive migration of Muslim populations from their countries of origin to Europe, a phenomenon in full swing, according to Frontex reports, which predicted a wave of 500,000 Afghans to Europe with the withdrawal of the US military. But Europe has something left. I have come to the conclusion that one of the levels that Christianity, in its attempt to dialogue with the Muslim world can exploit, is given in the spiritual and cultural constraint that Christianity, par excellence a religion with predominantly spiritual values, implicitly exercises over Islam, a religion with both spiritual and political values. In Europe, for the time being, Islam cannot be established politically, and those areas where it is predominantly numerical, and, implicitly cultural and spiritual, are under the supervision of the European democracy. Then, Europe is still refractory to the idea of a politico-religious authority, the dissociation between the two domains being affirmed, supported and defined with great precision by both secular and religious authorities. The secular state is very well consolidated and delimited by the religious field, but with which it relates through what in the literature is known as the principle of subsidiarity, a principle conceived in the Protestant world, according to which state intervention in the type of social, cultural or religious organization the citizens they represent must be minimal, avoiding the grabbing and centralization of power. This principle, although violated by certain gestures of power at the central level to the detriment of the centers of power and decision in the territory, still works within the countries of the European Union and optimally regulates power relations between different state institutions and between state and the religious field. We believe that this is an asset that Europe can use in its encounter with the Islamic society, leading it to modulate its public presence according to the limits of the principle of subsidiarity, which, among other things, completely limits the possibility of any religion to seize political power. For this reason, European Islam, in order not to cause a high degree of irritation among Europeans, still faithful to democratic values, will have to focus on a spiritual presence and manifestation, without political pretensions. This is the vulnerability that Christianity can exploit, because as Daniel J. Sahas, one of the Orthodox theologians concerned with Christianity's dialogue with Islam, says, the best and most constructive moments in the relationship between Christianity and Islam were those in which Christian monasticism and Sufism met and influenced each other. As far as we are concerned, we have been concerned with several points of interference between Christianity and Islam, especially the way in

which Christianity has influenced Sufism, as well as the assertion of the distinctions by which Christianity delimits itself from Sufi spirituality. The existing literature on this subject has not yet generated a clear theme, the research being, at least in our country, at the level of academic testing, but some consensus can be observed for certain common points, which mark both spiritualities, such as:

- the notion of the mystical path by which the soul tends towards God, shares in the divine, and participates with this richness in the purpose of the world;
- a distinction made between the spiritual and the material body, without abrogating each other: the goal is not the extinction / destruction of the physical body, but the emphasis is rather on the spiritualized body;
- the center of the spiritual body is the heart, not the intellect; the intellect dwells in the heart, not in the brain; grace passes through the heart and from the heart spreads throughout the human composition; the intellect / mind is differentiated from reason;
- the common emphasis on praxis and theoria, theoria being a view as an experience of the divine, and not a mental construct;
- the concern for the development of the inner life and the existence of the spiritual war (jihad), through which man breaks away in order to unite with God;
- the spiritual life is a matter of continuous struggle in the light of the revealed teachings and counsels coming directly from the personal guide and indirectly from the forerunners who shone in the practice of virtue;
- special attention to the theme of light;
- the end of the spiritual path consists in theosis.

We conclude by stating that each point stated is a challenge for current theological research, which is obliged, by prophetic calling, not to send the analysis of the experience of meeting the other brother, in which is the image of God, in the area of indiscriminate affirmation of common points, the specific theological consistency, through which the common elements distance themselves theologically, but not even in the area of a sterile theological triumphism, in which the experience of meeting the other is quickly dispatched, through a sad process of theological classification, which shows not so much prophetic calling as unwanted intellectual and theological laziness.

The time we are in, when Europe is fully experiencing the encounter with Islam, is the time to confess through lucid and realistic theological research that Christ died and rose for the whole world and that Christ is in a state of sacrifice for the world until the end of the world.

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