

## THE RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES\*

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**ABSTRACT.** My paper deals with the necessity of existing cultural, social and religious dialogues between the leaders of the messianic Judaism movement and the metropolitan Orthodox Church, based on an honest, reverent and respectful approach, in order to present to this marvelous Jewish Christian community, the spirituality of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Body of Christ, that is the Orthodox Church. The elimination of the dichotomy fundamentalism vs. liberalism is a goal that has to be accomplished, so we can develop a constructive ecumenical dialogue that promotes our Holy Tradition of the Apostolic Orthodox Church. Last part of my research contains several suggestions regarding means of improving the dialogue while accepting the fact that both messianic Judaism and Orthodox Christians inherited specific authority, doctrines, practices and above all, a complementary Christian Tradition.

**Keywords:** messianic Judaism, Orthodox Church, religious dialogue, fundamentalism, new improvements.

### Introduction

The target of each dialogue is to develop a motivational system of mutual trust based on polite questions and answers, with the purpose to discover new information about the interlocutor<sup>1</sup>. The interreligious dialogue wishes to develop solid relationships between the Christians of different confessions, based on understanding and respect, it wishes to build a peaceful climate which is able to avoid the potential ideological, social or political

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Niemann, "Some Special Problems of Speech Communication", in *Text, Speech and Dialogue*, 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference, eds. Václav Matoušek, Pavel Mautner (Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2007), 11.

conflicts. Above all this, the dialogue with other religious communities aims directly to break down all the prejudices and stereotypes that bring no contribution and maintain a tensed atmosphere. For this reason our religious dialogue, in order to be a constructive one, will not focus on the fragile theological areas that may lead to arguments and attacks. Our purpose is not to come to the same beliefs since our religious communities have a historical tradition which is very different from one another, but we need to identify common points that may lead to an efficient dialogue. Also, we don't want to convert anyone to Orthodoxy, because we don't want to risk becoming proselytes, but we do believe with all our heart in the apostolicity and holiness of the Orthodox Church, that is why if someone is convinced by the truth of the Orthodoxy and wants to experience Christ in this way, we praise the Lord.

Within our interactions it is highly important to take into account the fact that the dialogue is not the final means to consolidate relationships, since we all know the shortcomings of each religious discourse, we will never be able to express only in words the mystery of our person Created in God's image. This truth was suggested by Augustine when he told his followers to sharpen their minds because of the sterility of his language: "*Stretch your minds, please...help my poverty of language*"<sup>2</sup> (Sermon 119.3).

Regarding the dialogue with the Jews who converted to Christ, it is of capital importance because the Messianic Jews do not often participate in the main international theological events, as one of their theologians admits it<sup>3</sup>, and their affiliation to an authentic Christian tradition is truly necessary for their status as Christians. But this uncertain status offers them a privileged position, because it is rather difficult to establish whether the results of the dialogue must remain confidential, meaning to eliminate a third party from the discussion<sup>4</sup>, or they can be released for the public with the approval of both parties. Along with the Second Vatican Council, a new missionary paradigm appears on the religious scene, one which is built on respect and tolerance towards all the other religious communities of the world. In this new situation, starting with the years 1960-1970, the international dialogue between Christians and Messianic Jews develops, together with the emancipation of the black people and the liberalization of the feminist movement, a new challenge which put under question the conventional hierarchies that promoted a single gender, a

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<sup>2</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the logic of Incarnation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 114.

<sup>3</sup> David J. Rudolph, "Messianic Jews and Christian Theology: Restoring an Historical Voice to the Contemporary Discussion", *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 2.

<sup>4</sup> David Blaikie, Diana Ginn, *The Legal Guide for Religious Institutions* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 167.

single race and a single religion. From this historical moment on the bases of a new honest dialogue are set, which aims to respect the differences of opinion, to embrace the religious pluralism and the equality of values<sup>5</sup>.

In this respect, L. Minnema<sup>6</sup> suggests that in order to achieve a constructive dialogue, one has to choose one of the three standard patterns: the traditional style of communication which identifies the interlocutor with the tradition he belongs to and to which he remains faithful<sup>7</sup>; the modern style of communication through which a renewal of tradition and society is asserted, dialoguing from positions of equality with all the other existing traditions; the post-modern style of communication is identity egocentric, always looking to proliferate its own religious profile, presenting it as the only valid option.

In this paper, we chose a traditional communicative approach, in order to observe and respect the tradition of the Christians coming from Jews, a Mosaic tradition, focusing especially on the factors that led to the separation of the paths, because only in this way we will be able to propose an exercise of mutual closeness based on trust and respect for the eternal values.

### **Saint Apostle Paul – the Christian Jew in dialogue with other Jews (Acts 9:20-25)**

A few days after his great conversion on the road of Damascus (*Acts* 9:3-6), Saint Apostle Paul was at the synagogue from Damascus in front of the most important teachers of the Law and preached the faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, the One he used to persecute just several days before, killing all the Christians who stood in his way. This stunning episode in the history of Christianity, that comes to show us the power of God, places the main enemy of Christians in dialogue with the Jewish religious leaders. Apostle Luke calls them *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* (“Jews”), a common name in the book of Acts, used to separate the Jews who were against the Gospel of Christ from the ones who converted<sup>8</sup> (12, 3; 13, 45; 14, 4; 17, 5; 18, 12; 19, 33; 20, 3 etc).

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<sup>5</sup> Katharina von Kellenbach, “In Our Time: Civil Rights, Women’s Liberation and Jewish-Christian Dialogue Fifty Years After *Nostra Aetate*”, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 10 (2015): 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Lourens Minnema, „Correlations between types of culture, styles of communication and forms of interreligious dialogue”, *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 70 (2014): 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> The life of the tradition and even that of the dialogue resides in some sort of a game of understanding so long as a text or a dialogue is “mute”, its understanding has not yet begun. In order to avoid this “dialogue of the deaf”, we must start a dialogue using the language of our interlocutors, and this cannot be achieved as long as one does not care for the tradition of the interlocutor. What we say to someone must be intercepted so that he may find answers from his cultural, social and religious background that is to find the words of his own language. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Adevăr și Metodă* (București: Editura Teora, 2001), 458.

<sup>8</sup> Lane T. Dennis, Wayne Grudem, *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008), 2101.

Unfortunately, what could have been a constructive dialogue for the conversion of the rabbis and of the Jewish people from Damascus to the faith in Jesus Christ, transforms into “a dialogue of the deafs”, because the man they used to trust, the persecutor Saul developed an apology contrary to the expectations of the Jews with profound Messianic accents, calling Jesus, the One they considered to be an insurgent, with the name of Son of God<sup>9</sup> (*1 Thessalonians* 1:10; *Galatians* 1:16; 2:20 etc). The dialogue was impossible because Saul who converted to the faith in Jesus Christ defeated them in dialectics, cutting all forms of argumentation that the rabbis presented. Saint John Chrysostom said that Saint Apostle Paul did not speak of the death and resurrection of Christ, but of the fact that He is Messiah, the Son of God, presenting this fact very rigorously based on many quotes from the Old Testament that fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>10</sup>. This dramatic repositioning of Saint Paul as great preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will contribute to the incredible script in which the persecutor becomes persecuted himself (14:22) for the love of Christ<sup>11</sup>. The impact of this dialogue on the Jews must have been shocking since they knew Paul came to Damascus to fulfill completely different objectives. The answer of the Jews to this form of dialogue is easy to anticipate, but we think that Luke, the author of this book, is the one who put into the mouths of the Jews the expression: ὁ πορθήσας (“to destroy”<sup>12</sup>), precisely to nuance the astonishment of the listeners from the Jewish synagogue. But what the combatant Jews from the synagogue could not understand was the fact that their opposition encouraged the zeal of the newly converted, because they did not succeed in arguing their position according to which Jesus was not the Messiah that the Jewish people waited for so long<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> O. Béguin, J. Bosc, A.M. Carré, G. Casalis, P.Ch. Marcel, F. Refoulé, R. Ringenbach, *La Bible: traduction oecuménique* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988), 2638: „Sauf dans la variante 8, 37, ce titre de Jésus n’apparaît dans les Actes qu’ici et, si l’on veut, en 13, 33; dans les deux cas, il est attribué à Paul – qui l’utilise souvent dans sa correspondance (1 Th 1, 10; Ga 1, 16; 2, 20 etc.). Ici son emploi en parallèle avec *le Messie* (v. 22) souligne sa signification messianique”.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 11, Philip Schaff (ed.) (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, in *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, R.R. Reno (ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2005), 127: „This question calls dramatic attention to the unique position of Paul and to the total reversal of his life through divine intervention, from persecutor to persecuted”.

<sup>12</sup> This verb in the participle πορθέω may also be translated with “pillage, annihilate” as it is used in 9:21 or in *Galatians* 1:13. 23. F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1979), 165.

<sup>13</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, in *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 186.

The reaction of the Jews is of complete ferocity: Ὡς δὲ ἐπληροῦντο ἡμέραι ἱκαναί, συνεβουλεύσαντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀνελεῖν αὐτόν· (“*When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him*” – 9: 23), through this description Apostle Luke presents them for the first time as a hostile group, plotting to overthrow Saul and his ministry. And the intensity of their wish is also underlined by Saint Luke with the words: παρετηροῦντο δὲ καὶ τὰς πύλας ἡμέρας τε καὶ νυκτὸς ὅπως αὐτὸν ἀνέλωσιν· (“*they were watching the gated day and night in order to kill him*”<sup>14</sup> – 9: 24). The preaching of the Gospel in the synagogues was almost always followed by a painful experience for Apostle Paul, as he confesses once: “*Five times I have received at the hands of Jews the forty-less-one, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned...*” (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). At least for the first case we have in the Old Testament the legal procedure for the application of this punishment: “*If there is a dispute between men and they come to court, and the case is heard, and they acquit the innocent party and condemn the guilty one; then, if the guilty party deserves a flogging, you shall make him lie down before the judges and they shall flog him before them according to the number fitting for his offence. Forty times they shall flog him, they shall add no more; for if they continue to flog him beyond this number of strokes, your brother will be put to shame before you*” (Deuteronomy 25:2-3).

“The hostility with which Saint Paul was received in almost all the synagogues was due to his Christian missionary programme amongst the Gentiles and the Jews from the diaspora, of which he spoke later on: “*The Jews persecute us and displease God and oppose all people by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved*” (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16). The hate of the Jewish communities against Saint Paul was supplied by the perspective of the perversion of the Law and of the Judaic religion through the preaching of the Gospel<sup>15</sup>, but this very resistance against the Gospel would transform the Jews from defenders into enemies of God, thus estranging more and more from Yahweh, by the fact that they did not accept the deity of His Son Jesus Christ”<sup>16</sup>.

The official break between the Christians and Jews did not happen in 70 AD as it would seem, but immediately after, in a period of time between the two Jewish revolts (66-70 and 132-135), and after the last revolt the separation between Christianity and Judaism becomes definitive and universally valid. The

<sup>14</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, D.A. Carson (ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 314.

<sup>15</sup> Despite all these rivalries, rabbis kept in contact with the Christianized Jews, at least with respect to the decision either to consider the Christian books of the New Testament as inspired, and thus introducing them into the Judaic Canon, or to declare them heretic and eventually burn them in public. R.T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1903), 146-157.

<sup>16</sup> Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 79-80.

rabbinic Judaism is organized around the Law and its traditions and with Rabbi Rabban Gamaliel at Yavneh (around year 80) this separation is perfected even further, declaring heretics all the Jews converted to Christianity. But the problem of separation must be discussed in the terms of estrangement between the Christian Jews and all the other Christians and not between Christianity and the Rabbinic Judaism, as Biblicist J.D.G. Dunn states<sup>17</sup>. And this was because for several centuries this wing of Christianity lost some of its importance, the Christian Jews being absorbed completely by the Rabbinic Judaism on the one hand and on the other hand by the universal Christianity. Also, other causes were the lack of their successors.

In a short analysis one may observe that the main reason for the separation between Jews and Christians was the preaching of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Son of Yahweh, because the first believed that through this the Covenant with God is trespassed and the importance of the Law and of the Mosaic cult is perverted. Recent studies speak about the fact that the Apostolic Council held in Jerusalem (around 50 AD) generated theological disputes regarding the inclusion of the Christians coming from the Gentiles into the Judaic religious tradition. Here Saint Apostle Paul comes into conflict with the Judaizers from Galatia, also with the bishop of the Church from Jerusalem Apostle James, as we may conclude from the background of *Galatians 2*, and which is clearer in *Acts 21* and *James 2*<sup>18</sup>. Jesus Christ was the stumbling stone for the Jews as psalmist David prophesized (*Psalms 118:22-23*), they considered our Lord Jesus Christ to be an apostate and the writings of the New Testament as a dangerous and heretic material which had to be avoided unyieldingly<sup>19</sup>.

But once this “stumbling stone” was eliminated by the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Messiah by the Judaic communities, a constructive dialogue can be initiated with these newly converted, based on mutual respect and the identification of a common tradition, especially since the cult of the early Church borrowed many elements from the Judaic cult. It is an orthodox Christian imperative to reunify the paths, and to consider Christians and Jews no longer enemies and strangers. Indifference and opposition must be turned into cooperation and goodwill; discrimination, insults and ideological persecution must be stopped, so that Jews and Christians meet not as enemies but as cherished and respected friends. In order to do so, ecumenical dialogue needs to eliminate that official

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<sup>17</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: scm press, 2006), 312-314.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric and Theology*, in *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 115 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 172-186.

<sup>19</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, “Reflections on Reflections: Jesus, Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations”, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 8 (2013): 2-3.

break between the Christians and Jews happened two millennia ago, and rediscover our common tradition that flows from the Person of Jesus Christ.

### **The necessity of an honest dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Jewish messianic communities and the risks of the religious fundamentalism**

In the last decades of the past centuries, religion dominated the social and political environment but not without negative connotations increased by the two directions: the New Religious Movements under the generic term of “cults” and the so-called religious fundamentalism, as Professor M. Leone<sup>20</sup> calls it, which pretends that it represents the historic religious traditions. A new challenge of the century was the identification of the religious fundamentalism with terrorism (September 11, 2001; Charlie Hebdo<sup>21</sup>) about which W. Laqueur<sup>22</sup> predicted in an article, that this situation will develop in the form of a “sectarian fanaticism”. The very name of “fundamentalism” is obscure because of the use of the term in all sorts of social and religious contexts and we forget too often the fact that this label appeared in the American Protestantism of the past centuries, defining its opposition against the so-called “Modernist Controversy”. The Protestant denominations divided into two groups: the modernists or the liberals who promoted the need of the involvement of science within the religious life and the other party called the conservative or traditionalist fundamentalism which militated for the preservation of the historical and conservative version of the Christian faith<sup>23</sup>. The problem is not to differentiate fundamentalists from non-fundamentalists, as M. Barkun says, but to eradicate the violent fundamentalism that enlivens the new religious movements, and also to identify the causes that

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<sup>20</sup> Massimo Leone, *Sémiotique du Fondamentalisme Religieux: Messages, Rhétorique, Force Persuasive* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 29-30: „Cette perspective, toutefois, **omettant de considérer le fondamentalisme comme phénomène intrinsèquement religieux**, et donc comme manifestation du sens et du langage, est incapable d'en comprendre la nature anthropologique, et par conséquent de développer une connaissance adéquate des raisons profondes pour lesquelles les fondamentalismes sont capables de faire l'objet d'une contagion communicationnelle et sociale”.

<sup>21</sup> Jamil Khader, „Repeating Fundamentalism and the Politics of the Commons: The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy and the Contradictions of Global Capitalism”, *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 3 (2015): 15: „The Charlie Hebdo massacre also plays out the contradictions between the democratic and republican ideals and the resurgence of global empires in this new stage of the metastasis of neoliberal global capitalism. Indeed, these terrorist attacks cannot be addressed without taking into account the colonial and post/neo-colonial contexts in which they have unfolded”.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24–36.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph W. Hood Jr., Peter C. Hill, W. Paul Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* (New York, London: The Guilford Press, 2005), 47-51.

lead to such an aggressive type of behavior<sup>24</sup>. The danger of fundamentalism consists of the fact that along the years it proved to be an ideology that offers no credit to the generally valid principles of the human rights, it has an anti-feminine agenda<sup>25</sup> most often and it is too dogmatic when it comes to accepting the others, especially those of a different religion<sup>26</sup>. The term of fundamentalism associated to religion is an "eclectic" word that reunites three domains of interest: from a perspective the term expresses the exclusivity or distinctiveness of a moral rigor; understood as theological background it refers to the opposition against the cultural and religious liberalization and from a social point of view, fundamentalism denotes an ideological organizational uniqueness different from all the other types of religious movements<sup>27</sup>.

According to T. Eagleton<sup>28</sup>, the supporters of the religious fundamentalism are basically fetishists and their greatest fear is nonexistence; they fear that history will swallow them definitively and irrevocably. And they struggle to fill this void with dogmas and the main dogma is: only their religion contains intrinsically, fundamentally, essentially, univocal the truth about humankind and divinity, and this fundamental truth is opposed by the evil forces that must be countered with extreme virulence<sup>29</sup>. According to them, the truth of the religion must be subjected to the unchanged practices of the historical past and only those who act as such have a truly special relationship with the divinity<sup>30</sup>. Fundamentalists

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Barkun, "Religious Violence and the Myth of Fundamentalism", in *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism*, Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur (eds.) (London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2004), 58-61; Jonathan Githens-Mazer, Robert Lambert, „Why conventional wisdom on radicalization fails: the persistence of a failed discourse”, *International Affairs* 86 (2010): 889-901.

<sup>25</sup> The American fundamentalism proposed only the male gender for the key positions of the society, and attributed women only household problems and not the status of a professor with authority. The emancipation of women was considered to be a bad thing, which brought apocalyptic anxiety, the fundamentalists being the main opponents. Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Timothy Larsen, *Christabel Pankhurst: Fundamentalism and Feminism in Coalition*, in *Studies in Modern British Religious History*, Stephen Taylor, Arthur Burns, Kenneth Fincham (eds.) (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 103-104.

<sup>26</sup> Claudia Derichs, Andrea Fleschenberg, "Religious Fundamentalisms and Their Gendered Impacts in Asia", in *Religious Fundamentalisms and Their Gendered Impacts in Asia*, Claudia Derichs, Andrea Fleschenberg (eds.) (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2010), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Lenshie Nsemba Edward, Johnson Abel, "Religious Fundamentalism and Problem of Normlessness: Issues in Value System in Nigeria", *Global Journal of Human Social Science* 12 (2012): 44.

<sup>28</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 208.

<sup>29</sup> Hal Marcovitz, *Religious Fundamentalism* (San Diego: ReferencePoint Press, 2010), 77-78.

<sup>30</sup> Jason S. Wrench, Michael W. Corrigan, James C. McCroskey, Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, „Religious Fundamentalism and Intercultural Communication: The Relationships among Ethnocentrism, Intercultural Communication Apprehension, Religious Fundamentalism, Homonegativity and Tolerance for Religious Disagreements”, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 35 (2006): 29.



consider themselves warriors and defenders of their God, and their virulent actions are considered to be beneficial for humanity, verging on the ridiculous through the undermining of the cruel reality that proves the contrary<sup>31</sup>.

Of course, the Orthodox Church will avoid the fundamentalism in the dialogue with the Messianic Jews, as done before, because of the useless risks that such a presumption may subject to, but we will underline whenever is necessary the four attributes of our Church that history and tradition validates continually: the uniqueness, holiness, sobornicity and apostolicity. We also believe that it is truly necessary to avoid within our interreligious dialogue tracing the canonical limits of the Orthodox Church, since the canonical boundaries don't always coincide with the charismatic boundaries, as the Orthodox theologian G. Florovsky says<sup>32</sup>. The Church acknowledge the validity of the Mysteries performed outside its canonical jurisdiction, and readmitting many of those who parted from the Church, without Baptism, only with Chrismation. But is very important to underline that the danger of fundamentalism may affect both parties, either orthodox apologists or messianic Jews. In order to avoid that, both churches need to understand the risks of an fundamentalism attitude, that can crush any religious separation, and be opened to listen and even borrow the good side of his neighbour.

For an efficient combat against the fundamentalist attitude, the same professor M. Leone<sup>33</sup> proposes the elimination of the barriers that separate the fundamentalists from the rest of the world, by using a corporatist discourse that discards prejudices and makes them understand that isolation is not in their advantage, because they belong to the same society. That is why, the main concern of the Church in its dialogue with the fundamentalists, of any parties, should be, we say in agreement with professor Leone, the cultivation of the feeling of belonging to the same society that follows the same common target: serving God and humanity. The risk to become fundamentalist in expression is yet real, that is why it is highly necessary an actualization of the teachings of father Dumitru Stăniloae, who in the light of the fact that the Orthodox Church comprises in it all the confessions separated from it, since they could not separate completely from the Holy Tradition, as well as due to the fact that the Holy Spirit is not absent from any being that received reason<sup>34</sup>, we may speak of the so-called "open sobornicity"<sup>35</sup>. This is the key concept that synthesizes the

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<sup>31</sup> R.H. Hindery, "The anatomy of propaganda within religious terrorism", *Humanist* 63 (2003): 16.

<sup>32</sup> Georges V. Florovsky, "Les limites de l'Eglise", *Le Messager Orthodoxe* 37 (1961): 30-31.

<sup>33</sup> Massimo Leone, "Pour une Lutte Efficace contre les Discours Fondamentalistes", *Fellows: le regard de chercheurs internationaux sur l'actualité* 5 (1<sup>er</sup> avril 2016): 2.

<sup>34</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* 2 (București: EIBMBOR, 1997), 267-268.

<sup>35</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, "Sobornicitatea deschisă", *Ortodoxia* 23 (1971): 165-180.

availability of the Orthodox for the members of the other Christian confessions based on the principle “unity in diversity”. This means that all the other “incomplete Churches”, even the Messianic Jews, are called through this “open sobornicity” to give up the excessive focus on only one part of the faith of the Apostles on which they are founded historically and doctrinary, and to receive the ecclesial completeness of the Orthodox Church which is open for everybody, thus living according to the whole within the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church<sup>36</sup>.

### **Reflections regarding contemporary relations with Non-Orthodox Jews and the pillars of an honest interreligious dialogue**

The educational factors from the American Jewish communities (high schools and universities) provide at least at a pedagogical level, a sustainable interreligious dialogue based on respect and trust. The orthodox professors (by this we refer to the conservative Judaic party) teach that a correct approach of the texts, rituals and Judaic beliefs will never come into conflict with the views of the other Jewish communities assimilated to the Christian traditions. The community schools are built on the following premise: the body of the students must be comprised within all the other various Jewish communities which form the contemporary Jewish community as a whole. The same pattern is used for the constitution of the faculties of Judaic profile in North America. The renowned Marc Kramer, the head of the Jewish school community – Jewish Community Day School Network (*Reshet Batei Sefer Kehilatiim*), describes at least four philosophical orientations of the Jewish contemporary schools: adoption of the pluralism as religious ideology; accepting the denominations with the purpose to populate their institutions but only from a social perspective, not from a religious one as well; some schools are non-ideological meaning non-denominational; schools that are entirely under the auspices of Orthodoxy remain open to the entire community. This educational climate manages to equilibrate all the Jewish communities, always trying to avoid possible conflicts between the various points of view, through a uniform and synchronic presentation of the positions of all the denominations regarding a certain topic or academic subject. Hence, neutrality within debates is intensively promoted<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Aurel Pavel, Ciprian Iulian Toroczkaï, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism. Perspective ortodoxe asupra dialogului dintre creștini* (Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2010), 146-147.

<sup>37</sup> Jack Bieler, “Orthodox Educators in Non-Orthodox Jewish Educational Settings”, in *The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews*, Adam Mintz, Robert S. Hirt (eds.) (New York: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 2010), 58-59.

The fact that there is such an education and accessibility on the side of the Jewish communities for the religious pluralism may be really useful for the Christian Orthodox environment. They will have to elaborate a persuasive interreligious dialogue with the help of which to present the Orthodox Christianity as the only Church completely apostolic that may reunite the contemporary Jewish Christians at the heart of a common tradition. In the nowadays interreligious dialogue important voices from the contemporary Jewish communities, acknowledge the fact that the debate on vulnerable topics ceased representing a purpose in itself a long time ago, but they are rather concerned to cooperate in a positive spirit, except for those from the Jewish conservative wing, who follow unyieldingly to legitimate themselves as the triumphalist party. Although many of these *klal Yisrael* know nothing of the requirements of the *shema Yisrael*, as rabbi Michel Feinstein confesses<sup>38</sup>.

An important topic of the dialogue may be developed from the exploitation of the official position of the Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), who states that holiness is not only the appanage of Israel, but it can be obtained by every person who practices the good deeds in agreement with God's will<sup>39</sup>. This attitude comes on the background of the critiques brought by Heschel both to Judaism and to Christianity for their individualist ideas regarding holiness, and with respect to the relationships between Christians and Jews he accepts both the principle of communication and tolerance and that of separation, presenting a dualist attitude. Only through the preservation of the uniqueness and of their identity perception with respect to God's will, both Christians and Jews are able to fulfill their call and their sanctifying mission into this world<sup>40</sup>. Hence, any attempt to mix and impose a certain tradition to the detriment of the other may be a harmful exercise for the consolidation of the relationship between the messianic Jews and the Orthodox Christians. The Jews that acknowledged Christ are called to embrace the apostolic Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church, in order to be integrated into the Body of Christ, thus fulfilling Saint Apostle Paul's prophecy regarding their return (*Romans* 9-11), but we must not ask them to give up completely their traditions that define them as a unique and non-recurring people except for the instructions adopted by the Church in the year 50 on the occasion of the first ecumenical Council from Jerusalem (*Acts* 15). Mutual respect also means acknowledging the other's sacrality, because in the New Testament

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<sup>38</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, „Beyond the Pale? Reflections Regarding Contemporary Relations with Non-Orthodox Jews”, in *The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews...*, 195-196.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Even-Chen, “On the Holiness of the People of Israel in the Thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, in *A Holy People: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Religious Communal Identity*, Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz (eds.) (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 361.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Even-Chen, “On the Holiness of the People of Israel...”, 365.

the call to holiness is addressed by God to the whole community (*Matthew* 5:48<sup>41</sup>) and not to isolated individuals, thus holiness having a profound ethical character fixed within a very well defined social climate<sup>42</sup>.

Another linking point may be constituted by the official acknowledgement of the three fundamental principles regarding the messianic Jews that R. W. Jenson<sup>43</sup> proposes: the first considers them to be a gift from God for the Church; the second refers to the acknowledgement of the volatility of the status of Jew, it tends to spread amongst the Christian communities coming from the Gentiles, which means that they don't resist in the climate proposed by the Church; and the third one refers to their obedience to Torah, as a divine instrument that assures their continuity as nation. I think that the first two may be considered practical realities that result from the meeting of the two civilizations (Judaic and Christian), but the third principle needs some additions. The obedience to Torah may be considered to be beneficial as long as its ritual requests do not contradict the decrees established in the Orthodox Church at the Council from Jerusalem (50 AD) and at the seven Ecumenical Councils, that define the main dogmas of the Church.

Another request is to eliminate prejudices. Many researchers interpret *Romans* 14 and the problem of "the weak" from the point of view of the Messianic Jews and of the Gentiles that continue to maintain the prescriptions on the pure aliments and the calendar distinctions<sup>44</sup>. Here the term "weak" is a pejorative one and portrays the deficiencies of the faith of those it refers to, which results into their failure to become perfect in Christ, according to the Pauline model (*Ephesians* 4:13). I think that this attitude of superiority and self-sufficiency from the part of these researchers may be overcome if we insist on the main motif of the Pauline debate that is on the imperative not to judge

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<sup>41</sup> The starting particle **οὕτως** serves both as transitional and inferential conjunction, proving the fact that what follows is in fact a logical consequence of what was stated before. This argument shows the fact that the inadequate interpretation of the imperative from *Leviticus* 19:18 leads to the elusion of all ethical value, an action which comes into contradiction with God's intention from the Law. Once this new argument is accepted the value is given by the opposition: surpassing the popular morality and legal conventions is obligatory in order to be able to work righteousness according to God's will. Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 542; Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, in *Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 320-321.

<sup>42</sup> Kent E. Brower, Andy Johnson, "Introduction: Holiness and the *Ekklesia* of God", in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, Kent E. Brower, Andy Johnson (eds.) (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), xxii.

<sup>43</sup> Robert W. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism", in *Jews and Christians: People of God*, Carl E. Braaten, Robert W. Jenson (eds.) (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 9-11.

<sup>44</sup> David J. Rudolph, "Messianic Jews and Christian Theology...", 5.

anyone and not to become you yourself a stumbling rock for others (14:3-4. 10.13), as the same D. J. Rudolph states in his study quoted in the following. We believe that the problem of the identification of “the weak” must be removed at all costs, this stereotype being a dike in the attempt to consolidate the relationship, especially since neither the modern exegesis reached a common point<sup>45</sup>. The main preoccupation should be finding common points in Christ that unite us in the same Body (*Ephesians* 1:22-23).

One last problem that needs to be solved within the interreligious dialogue is the following: did Saint Apostle Paul encourage the baptized Jews to maintain their Mosaic rituals<sup>46</sup>, or did he advise them to integrate within the community according to the Christian teachings? Because we believe that on the solution of this problem depends the future of the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the contemporary Messianic Jews. The answer resides, if we want to acknowledge it, in the text from *Galatians* 3:10-14: “Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν·

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<sup>45</sup> Biblicist M. Reasoner states that the phrase “the weak” meant for Saint Paul a literary construct based on the situation from Corinth, since the Apostle couldn’t have known the exact situation of the Christians from Rome. But the German theologian E. Käsemann states that it speaks only about the Jewish faithful, and the Biblicist C. K. Barnett proposes the hypothesis according to which this group of the weak most probably comes from a gnostic-Jewish fusion, for which an Orthodox Jewish background is impossible to recover. A. J. M. Wedderburn states that the identification of the members of the parties of “the weak and strong” is not clearly done according to the distinction Jew non-Jew, because within the Church some of the Jews considered themselves free from the Mosaic Law and of the traditions that it imposed, and in the same time, others, non-Jew Christians, might have been drawn to the Judaic practices of the synagogue from Rome. Another perspective is offered by M. D. Nanos who says that “the weak” are practicing Jews from outside the Church, Apostle Paul speaking in fact to the Christians that were an integrating part of the Synagogue, and who often interacted with the Jews. And in this context, says Nanos, Saint Paul uses the word “weak” with a pedagogical meaning, with the purpose to force the Jews to become “strong”. Finally, Biblicist C. H. Dodd acknowledges the fact that on the dimensions from Rome, no one knows exactly the perennial factors, which imposes an agnostic attitude. Another researcher that joins this honest register from an interpretative point of view is J. P. Sampley, who tries to argument the thesis according to which Paul uses several oversized words and expressions with the purpose to gain the attention of both types of audience. Hence, he says, Apostle Paul did not believe that there were active vegetarians amongst his audience, but wishing to address the problems caused by the nutritional rules of the Judaic cult, he widens the area and addresses a more general problem, that of vegetarianism. Mark Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14: 1 – 15: 13 in context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 369; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 257-258; A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 32-34; Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 154-157. C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 211-212; J. Paul Sampley, „The Weak and the Strong: Paul’s Carefull and Crafty Rhetorical Strategy in Romans 14: 1 – 15: 13”, in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honour of Wayne A. Meeks*, L.M. White, O.L. Yarbrough (eds.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 40-43.

<sup>46</sup> David J. Rudolph, “Messianic Jews and Christian Theology...”, 7.

γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά. ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται· ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς. Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα, ὅτι γέγραπται· ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὁ κρεμᾶμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου, ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως<sup>47</sup>. Apostle Paul brings into discussion Abraham's bloodline (3:6-29) because the Judaizing who tried to convince the Christians that they must respect the Mosaic rules, seem to have chosen their own path<sup>48</sup>, in opposition with that of the great Apostle, which is based not on the practice of the Law, which is curse, but on the faith in Jesus Christ's Sacrifice – the only way through which we become righteous before God. The Jews were boasting with their knowledge of Law hold oneself more superior than any other Christian group, and the possession of the Law demonstrates that Israel is inalienably the people of true God<sup>49</sup>. Apostle Paul answer is what he already just strengthens in his epistle to Galatians: anyone who believes that through the Law can be righteous before God, it is in a big glitch, because his attitude draw the wrath of God (3: 10-12). The solution of Paul concludes that a man is justified by faith and grace and not by the Law, an universal truth that has to animate our interreligious dialogue.

All this proposed tasks (the exploitation of the official position of the Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel; the official acknowledgement of the three fundamental principles regarding the messianic Jews that R. W. Jenson proposes; the dismissal of prejudices and the attitude of Saint Paul regarding Jews Christians), tinted in a way or another, the big idea from the title, it is our proposal to achieve an proper religious dialogue with Christian Jewish Communities.

## Conclusions

The interreligious dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Messianic Jews needs to be reanalysed and reconceived based on equality and mutual respect. A stringent task is also the elimination of fundamentalism from the religious discourse, a key factor in the failure of a possible future cooperation. Including the Jews who returned to the faith in Jesus Christ into an authentic Christian tradition is highly necessary for their status as Christians, and from this

<sup>47</sup> Aland Barbara and Kurt, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, *The Greek-English New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 1164-1166.

<sup>48</sup> J. Louis Martyn, „A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles”, in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*, Mark D. Nanos (ed.) (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 357.

<sup>49</sup> N.T. Wright, „Law in Romans 2”, in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), (Tubingen: JCB Mohr, 1996), 139.

perspective the Orthodox Church may have an important role, because its apostolic tradition is the most compatible with that of the Messianic Jews given the fact that there was a time in history when these two worlds cohabitated in the body of the same Church.

Also, avoiding the “dialogue of deafs” remains another request equally important as the first one, because as long as we wish to come to a point where all of us have the same beliefs and doctrinary convictions, we will do nothing else but to promote this harmful form of dialogue in which the dumb is speaking to the deaf.

The result of this research is that I noticed how important it is, in the equation of a fruitful dialogue, to identify the essential points that stood at the base of the separation of these two worlds (Judaic and Christian). I noticed the availability that most of the Judaic communities from America have for the religious pluralism, as well as their wish to cohabitate with the Christian congregations. This availability must be valued immediately by the authorities of the Orthodox Church, with the purpose to present these Messianic Jews the apostolic completeness of our Church.

The pillars on which constructive dialogues can be built, as I systematized them previously (acknowledging the sacrality of the other; the Messianic Jews are a gift from God for the Christian world; elimination of the prejudices regarding the past of the Jews and last but not least understanding the view of Saint Apostle Paul regarding the respect given or not to the law and to the Judaic duties of the cult) are only a few leads of research that we propose to the considerations of the specialists, with the final purpose to underline the necessity of the unity of faith and the impartation of the grace of the Holy Spirit for us, all the Christians, to give our lives to Christ the Lord.

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