

## Article

# Theological Valorization of the Other from an Orthodox Christian Perspective: Dorin Oancea's Model of Theology of Religions in Relation to Social and Theological Developments of Modernity

Alina Patru 

Orthodox Theological Faculty, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 550024 Sibiu, Romania; alina.patru@ulbsibiu.ro

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the model of theology of religions elaborated by the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dorin Oancea and highlights the possibilities for openness towards other religious realms and for real theological validation of non-Christian religions. It focuses both on the modern premises of this model and on the ways in which the author ensures its continuity inside the Tradition and its acceptance within the Orthodox-Christian world. Dorin Oancea's construct, a unique system of pluralistic inclusivism, elaborated by an Orthodox theologian who wants to remain aligned with the Eastern Orthodox patristic and traditional theological thinking while still addressing current topics by means of contemporary instruments and present-day language, is a valuable example of religious change that takes place within Orthodoxy, which is regarded as a traditional branch of Christianity. This paper identifies forms of theological newness in Dorin Oancea's manner of addressing the challenges of present times in relation to the dynamics of the field of theology of religions and of Orthodox theology.

**Keywords:** theology of religions; religious philosophy; neo-patristics; religious pluralism; religion and modernity; salvation in Christ; salvation of non-Christians; inclusivism; pluralistic inclusivism

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## 1. Introductory Remarks

Religious pluralism is a current issue that poses new challenges to Christian thinking and self-understanding. Religious plurality has not existed in comparable diversity in Europe since antiquity. The mosaic of faith (Rémond 1992, p. 439) challenges theologians to put their own beliefs in a new light and to think about them in such a way that the validity of other claims to truth and loyalty to one's own have a place alongside one another. From a theological point of view, this attitude is new, even if some authors point to individual predecessors from the patristic period and the theological tradition that followed (see e.g., Oancea 2010b). The theology of religions, which has established itself as an independent discipline within theological reflection since the 1960s, is the fruit of these changes (Dupuis 1997, pp. 1–2).

Models of theology of religion consider two fundamental aspects (the claim to truth and effectiveness of one's own religion, and the recognition of several claims to truth and their effectiveness) in different ways. Theologies of religions have started to emerge in different religious traditions (see Knitter 2005); in the Christian world, however, the process has a long history and takes on very elaborate forms (see e.g., Schmidt-Leukel 2017b). Among these theologies, those which insist on salvation through Christ alone and deny the efficacy of all other forms of belief are classified as exclusivist. At the other end of the spectrum there are the pluralistic models, which in some cases go so far as to disregard the Christian requirement of salvation in Christ to posit equal opportunities for all, and thus uphold the image of the righteous God (see Danz 2005, pp. 51f, 92f; Schmidt-Leukel 2017a, p. 58f). The many intermediate or additional positions do justice, to varying degrees,

to the two opposing theological postulates (see [Knitter 2002](#)). The attitude according to which salvation is only in Christ but is also accessible for all, is rightly classified as a logical impossibility ([Schmidt-Leukel 2017a](#), p. 136).

However, logical impossibilities have been encountered several times in the Christian formulation of teaching and eliminated in an antinomial way. The dogma of the three-in-one God is also a logical impossibility. Logically, it is impossible to conceive of a reality that is three and one at the same time; even more so, when it is a personal reality, i.e., one personal God and three divine persons simultaneously. The same is true with regard to the Christological dogma, which asserts that there is a man who is also, at the same time, God. It is impossible for human reason to conceive of a being that is simultaneously creator and creature, God and man. Nevertheless, Christians accept these concepts as dogmas of the Christian faith, which overcome human reasoning, calling them antinomies. Could such a solution also be found for the two postulates mentioned above, that salvation is only possible in Christ, but is still equally accessible for everyone?

Dorin Oancea is a Romanian Orthodox theologian who strives for such a solution, along with other representative theologians from the Catholic and the Protestant world, such as Jacques Dupuis ([Dupuis 1997](#)) and Mark Heim ([Heim 1985, 1995, 2001](#)). Oancea develops his own religious-theological model, which on the one hand demonstrates his modern struggle for the full valorization of the other, but on the other hand, is rooted in the Orthodox tradition and in its claims that salvation is possible only by consciously and willingly accepting Jesus Christ as the only redeemer of mankind. Dorin Oancea defends his undertaking from Orthodox readers who may be outraged at the thought of development within Orthodox theology, as they represent the equally modern view that nothing has changed in Orthodoxy since the beginning of the Christian Church. On the other hand, Oancea argues, in unison with other Orthodox theologians, that it was the concern of the highly respected Church Fathers of the patristic period to take a stand on the problems of their time and to illuminate and answer them using the means of Christian theology. Therefore, those theologians who act in this sense with courage and Christian humility are in line with the Fathers, and not those who just memorize their preformed wisdom ([Stăniloae 1964](#), p. 105).

The way in which Oancea places himself in connection with the old ecclesiastical tradition is as modern as the Neo-patristic movement itself and all the movements that aim to break with the recent past in order to draw nourishment again from older sources. The rupture with the recent past is, according to Eisenstadt, the common denominator of multiple modernities ([Eisenstadt 2000](#)). This kind of rupture has already been accepted in the Orthodox world. Nowadays, it is a commonly accepted stance that the more recent past was too much theologically determined by influences from the Catholic or Protestant Christian West and that its theology no longer corresponded to the self-understanding of the Orthodox view. Thus, through neo-patristic mediation, one should revert to the actual Orthodox mindset. Oancea places himself in this line, and through such argumentation he ensures the acceptance of his discourse within the Orthodox world ([Oancea 2013](#), p. 4).

However, what Oancea proposes is a new model of thinking, even if it draws on fundamental notions of Orthodox theology. It is a model that grants to the members of all religions the same chance of salvation through Christ and emphasizes the equality of all before God. In support of this modern postulate, Oancea employs Orthodox beliefs and draws new conclusions from them, but he also develops new arguments where these are absent in compliance with the condition that new arguments must not conflict with established beliefs.

This paper proposes to analyze Oancea's model, by paying special attention to the dialectics between the traditional and the new. This shall be looked at both inside the model and by considering the model as a whole in relation to the present-day challenges to theology of religions and to Orthodox theology. As a final step, the construct shall be evaluated against the background of modernity, so that its value as an indicator of change inside religion can be properly worked out.

## 2. Traditional Orthodox Beliefs in Oancea's Argument

The view that communion with God is constitutive for the human being is traditional. It states that humans and all creatures only exist due to their constant relationship with God. Existence, then, is a gift, a life-giving gift that pours forth from God upon creation every moment. According to Orthodox theology, from the perspective of creation, there is no separation between that which is created and the creator, between God and the human being, or between nature and grace (Todoran and Zăgrean 1981, p. 241). Human existence, like the existence of all creation, is existence that is in constant communion with God (Stăniloae 1996, pp. 266–70).

If, from the moment of its creation, the created world does not lead an autonomous existence, but one made possible at every moment by the grace of God, every human being is called to infinitely increase their existence by growing in life-giving communion with God. This can also be inferred from the empirically perceptible inability of the created to elude movement or change and to remain insensitive to the effects of various stimuli. The standstill is impossible. Therefore, giving up the effort of approaching God inevitably leads to a gradual detachment from God. The dynamism inherent in the creature is regarded as a vocation to grow and perfect oneself. It is the growth from the image to the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–27) that, in this understanding, represents the traditional Orthodox doctrine (Stăniloae 1996, pp. 270–77).

The fall, from the same perspective, is not an erasure of communion with God or of the purpose to grow from image to likeness. It is only a weakening of this communion. After the fall, the human being does not lead an existence separate from God. No matter how gravely men may have fallen into sin, grace never leaves them completely, for in the absence of it, they could not continue their lives. Accordingly, sin is interpreted as illness (Agathokleous 2019). The fallen state of the human being is thus determined on the one hand by the commandment to grow, but on the other hand also by the newly introduced factor, sin, which gives the whole process an increased complexity, just as a disease weakens a body and introduces a dynamic of its own into the complex fabric of life (Stăniloae 1996, pp. 331–34).

Salvation comes from Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, who restores the human condition from within and offers all the possibility of entering into and growing infinitely in the state of a well-functioning communion with God, by opening themselves towards Him and by accepting His soteriological gift (Stăniloae 1997, p. 129f).

## 3. Elaboration of Traditional Contents of Faith by Oancea

Oancea draws on the traditional contents of faith, but he also adopts the modern systems theory, as formulated by Günther Ropohl (see Ropohl 2009), and current communication theories (Oancea 1997, p. 12). He speaks of a communication dynamic between God and man, which proceeds in direct and indirect ways (Oancea 1993, p. 484). In a deeper understanding, every human act that is primarily addressed to another creature is an act of indirect communion with God. Through their actions and thoughts, people touch the lives of other creatures. In this way they fulfill the command of God and thus cultivate an indirect communion with God—the result of their work is ultimately aimed at God. This ideal-typical situation was at the same time the reality of life before the fall (Oancea 2002b, p. 89f; Șimonca-Oprîta 2019, pp. 57–59).

Oancea understands the fall as a fragmentation of communion. He describes this reality by using the term partialization, by which he means that the communication flow is reduced. Partialization is joined by false valorizations, another central concept of Oancea's construct (Oancea 1993, pp. 490–500). In the postlapsarian situation, which is our own reality, any communication content that no longer flows in direct or indirect ways between the human being and God is redirected to a different course. This has consequences: some creatures are given an honor that is not due to them, but to God himself or to another creature. The fall of men is thus interpreted as a new relational setting, as a multiplication of forms of communication. If, before the fall, all communication was geared towards

God in a direct or indirect way, after the fall there are also forms of communication that are aimed at other contents. According to Oancea, men are still in search of God, because communion with God is constitutive for them. However, these efforts usually go wrong because men no longer have all the information, so they can no longer perceive things in the light of God. Therefore, they seek fulfillment in the world of creatures and this is how false sacralizations arise, which are the most significant forms of false valorization (Oancea 2002a, pp. 142–54).

The dynamic of growth from the image to the likeness of God persists after the fall and develops on two tracks, both of which must be considered. In the first, there are all the efforts of humankind to get closer to the divine, and in the second, there are all the misdirected energies aimed at falsely sacralized realities. God also intervenes in this process and acts to restore communion with creation. God does this by first creating suitable living conditions for men—God gives them clothes made of leather after the fall, because they are suitable for their new situation. God reveals knowledge as soon as he finds humanity, or a part of it, capable of handling that knowledge. God intervenes through special people who make others aware of what it means to be in a well-functioning communion with God. Finally, God intervenes by becoming Man himself, so as to heal creation from within (Oancea 2002a, pp. 99–111).

Great steps in the restoration of the communion between God and creation are the successive covenants. The theory of the successive covenants is widely used in Judaic and Christian theology, and it states that the agreements between God and man have drawn them closer in a series of steps. While there are covenants that are mentioned in each version of the theory, such as those with Adam, Noah and Moses, others may vary from version to version. Oancea's source is another contemporary Christian Orthodox author, Anastasios Yannoulatos, who mentions only four covenants (with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and in Jesus Christ), but who clearly states their applicability to all people who lived afterwards historically (Yannoulatos 2003, pp. 141–43). Oancea expands this scheme and arrives at seven covenants, which are: the prelapsarian covenant with Adam, the postlapsarian covenant with Adam, the covenant with Cain, who receives a sign on his forehead so that no one may do anything evil to him, the covenant with Noah, that with Abraham, that with Moses and the complete covenant in Jesus Christ (Oancea 2013, pp. 86–94; Pătru 2019, p. 78). Inspired by Yannoulatos, he regards each covenant as applicable to all people who lived after the conclusion of it. A covenant marks profound changes in structure and relationship, i.e., men's relationship with God and their environment is embedded in a new setting. Every covenant also means a legitimation of the *condicio humana*—this can be seen most clearly in the covenant with Cain, which involves God's encouragement of a man who has fallen even deeper than Adam by murdering his brother. It shows that every human being, no matter how deeply caught up in sin, is still in constitutive communion with God and is to grow in the dynamic towards the likeness of God. (Oancea 2013, p. 87).

Each covenant thus opens up a space of legitimacy. Oancea calls it a theocosmic space, which points to its fundamental orientations towards God and towards the rest of the world. However, the legitimacy of the different theocosmic spaces is relative. On the one hand, it is based on the legitimization of the precariousness of the human condition and thus on God's benevolence to accept creation even in its fallen state, and on the other hand, it is based on the promise of a redeemer, who would elevate the theocosmic space from an imperfect state to perfect communion with God (Oancea 2013, pp. 58–59). This promise is already given in the second covenant that was made with Adam after the fall. Therefore, it has a universal extension since Adam is the forefather of all human beings. The covenants with Cain and Noah are also universal in their extension—they cover all the existing religious situations, since, from a biblical perspective, all people are descendants of Noah. The covenant with Abraham is more intense, i.e., it carries a richer content, but it extends only to the three monotheistic religions. Following the same logic, the covenant with Moses is even richer and less extensive, while that in Jesus Christ brings the fullness of communion, but only extends to Christianity (Oancea 2013, pp. 89–94).

Different religions are therefore carriers of a different number of covenants. The first four covenants, up to and including Noah, apply to all religions. This is a common ground, which means that all religions are accepted by God and are in a positive growth dynamic, but it also means that all religions are directed towards one redeemer. The expectation of a redeemer may be completely obscured or unclear, but it is part of every theocosmic space (Oancea 2013, p. 84).

Beyond these four covenants, each religion has pursued its own twofold dynamics, which have run on both of the aforementioned tracks. On the one hand, false valorizations have increased and multiplied; on the other hand, the respective religions had their own positive dynamic with God and have been able to reach new steps of restoration, including newly revealed insights. The Bible continues to describe only one of these developments, the one that runs through Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. But in the same way, other religions have thwarted their own positive developments and everything that is good in them. What helps people and brings them closer to the divine is a sign of God's presence and of the well-functioning communion with God (Oancea 2013, p. 64).

Yet, Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of all mankind, so salvation must necessarily come through Him. For people who live outside the Christian theocosmic space, having been placed there by God, access to His salvation must therefore be accessible from other paths. Oancea is aware that the Christian message does not reach people in a pure religious form but is embedded in cultural and political garb that make it difficult to access. Postcolonial insights call for a solution that does not suppose a formal conversion to Christianity.

Thus, the history of the reception of Christian doctrine presupposes that one willingly and consciously accepts Jesus Christ as one's Savior. Inclusivist models that propose a subliminal community between members of other religions and Jesus Christ are therefore unsatisfactory for Oancea (Oancea 2013, p. 79). He resorts to the solution of an eschatological encounter with Christ, in which the personal, conscious acceptance of Christ as redeemer can be possible. He finds a biblical foundation for it in 1 Peter 3:19–20, a text that talks about Jesus descending into hell. He notes that verse 20 talks about Jesus preaching to the spirits who were disobedient while Noah was preparing the ark. Two important remarks should be noted here. First, it is about preaching, not just about a push from hell to heaven. That is, the addressees of the preaching are expected to understand it and accept the message. Second, the addressees of this preaching are not only the righteous of the Old Testament or even the bearers of the covenant with Noah, but also the disobedient and those who lived before the covenant with Noah. From this, Oancea concludes that there is a universality of possibilities to access salvation, which are open to all theocosmic spaces, i.e., to the bearers of any number of covenants. All the people there are expected to open themselves up to the message of Christ. But what allows them to achieve this opening? According to Oancea, it can only be living according to the principles of one's own theocosmic space. In other words, every religion leads to salvation if it is lived and taken seriously, but this salvation comes through Jesus Christ, who is consciously and voluntarily accepted as the universal redeemer (Oancea 2013, pp. 98–101; Oancea 2010a, p. 402f).

The reasoning regarding Noah's contemporaries, which applies also to the righteous of the Old Testament, can be extended to those who lived after the coming of Christ in any space and at any time. Christ's descent into hell is not to be understood as an isolated event in time. Christ is permanently in heaven with the Father, but is also permanently human, permanently in a state of sacrifice, permanently in a state of kenosis, and permanently descending into the hell of human souls with open arms to receive all who open up to him in faith. On the other hand, in all the religions of the earth there are righteous people by virtue of their participation in one of the covenants which God has made with men. The righteous ones, to whom the Lord Jesus Christ preached during his descent into the lower parts of the world, were thus those who fulfilled the specific laws of their covenants. After the coming of Christ, no other rule can be applied to those from other theocosmic spaces



than the one that was applied to the righteous of the theocosmic spaces before Christ. This argument also applies to the end of the world. All who carry out the religious duties of their own theocosmic spaces are the righteous who will be able to give the right answer to Christ in the afterlife (Oancea 2013, pp. 97–98).

The model elaborated by Oancea has the merit of ensuring the equality of all religions regarding their ability to intermediate salvation, while keeping salvation bound to the person and activity of Jesus Christ. It is a well-articulated model of “pluralistic inclusivism” (Heim 1994, p. 355), which aims to overcome the logical impossibility noticed by Schmidt-Leukel (Schmidt-Leukel 2017a, p. 136). It is therefore an important contribution to the field of theology of religions, offering a perspective for the simultaneous fulfillment of different conditionings (see more in: Pătru 2019, pp. 84–86).

#### 4. Theology as a Philosophy of Religions

At the beginning of his series of lectures, Oancea defines his endeavour as a form of philosophy of religions. For him, philosophy of religions, as he understands it, is to be located both in the realm of philosophy and in that of theology. It is a philosophical attempt “because it deals with the analysis of the religious in relation to the problem of truth and because it analyzes the religious act as such, evaluating the measure of truth in religious statements, according to the criteria of internal coherence, combined with the investigation of their correspondence with the actual religious reality, in order to identify common elements that converge and allow statements about the essence of religion to be made” (Oancea 2013, p. 3). At the same time, it is also a theological attempt due to its object of study, more precisely, due to the fact that “it is the theological reflection which is constituted with the help of philosophical reflection” (Oancea 2013, p. 4).

The eschatological solution for the salvation of all in Christ was elaborated by Oancea during his lectures and in dialogue with his students. It is the fruit of reflection based on the content of the Christian book of Revelation, as known from the Bible. It has also been verified by him in relation to patristical thought, as theologians should always ensure the theological grounding of their work and avoid the danger of becoming mere philosophers. Careful to remain anchored in tradition, Oancea always looks for patristic references to sustain his ideas. His courses are full of such references, especially to St. John of Damascus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Justin the Martyr, Athenagoras from Athens, St. Cyprian of Carthage, and St. Ephrem the Syrian (Oancea 2013). The paragraphs dealing with the descent into hell are also patristically grounded: he refers to *The Catecheses* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Sf. Chiril al Ierusalimului 2003, pp. 113–14), to *The Dogmatics* of St. John of Damascus (Sf. Ioan Damaschin 1943, pp. 273–74) and to liturgical hymns sung in the Easter period in Orthodox churches (Oancea 2013, pp. 98–99). All of these texts speak about Christ descending into hell as the redeemer, with St. John of Damascus highlighting his preaching to all (Oancea 2013, p. 99). By looking for patristic references to sustain his ideas, Oancea closes the circle and ensures once again that the developments proposed by him are in accordance with the voice of the church.

By paying attention to the aforementioned aspects, Oancea believes himself to be in line with the Fathers, in other words, to be a neo-patristician. He notes:

A closer look at the theological act in its exemplary form from the era of the Holy Fathers and the authentic resumptions of those paradigmatic achievements, always sees it as a synthesis reality, in which the divine revelation is combined with the modalities of philosophical expression (not only, but this is of particular interest especially because of its essential character), so that the former may be authentically experienced at the level of each age. Therefore, it can be argued that the philosophical dimension is an indispensable component of any theological act. When the reflective aspect acquires a special weight, it is even spoken of as Christian Philosophy. (Oancea 2013, p. 4)

The recourse to the new is thus justified by the need to facilitate the authentic experience of divine revelation at the level of the present age with its findings and is believed to be a traditional attitude. It is defined as a philosophical approach, which means that it offers space for reflection on the basis of other theoretical insights, which has to be carried out in accordance with the rules of coherent and reality-close philosophical reflection. While being a philosophical approach, it is at the same time a theological one by means of the main research interest, and, more precisely, a neo-patristical one, due to the numerous references to the Fathers and to the intention to act as they would.

### 5. Framing inside the Orthodox Theology

When writing about the theological currents present in Christian Orthodoxy in the 20th century, Viorel Coman identifies three such directions: “the old school of the manualist tradition”, which offers a “scholastic approach to theology”, the Russian school of religious philosophy, and the Neo-patristic movement. He shows how the Neo-patristic movement has become dominant during the second half of the 20th century, pushing away the other two directions (Coman 2020; see also Toroczka 2008, p. 29f).

While the old school is now widely disregarded within the Orthodox world, the two other directions are compatible with the present-day theological mindset, at least in their intentions. These are defined by Coman as follows: “the major difference between the two movements lies in the fact that the Russian school of religious philosophy did not consider the Church Fathers as the absolute norm for all subsequent theological developments: in order to grapple with the challenges of the modern world, either social, political or economic, Orthodoxy—while keeping its patristic foundation—has to go beyond the patristic Hellenic heritage and transpose its entire theology into 20th-century philosophical frameworks” (Coman 2020). As tendencies and ways of understanding, both directions are still current today and do not even need to be opposed. “Despite the many tensions and frictions between them, the Neo-patristic movement and the Russian school of religious philosophy must not be seen as completely opposite to each other; they have much more in common than normally considered” (Coman 2020).

Moreover, Coman shows that after the second half of the 20th century in which Orthodox theology was dominated by the Neo-patristic movement “to the extent that [ . . . ] it looked to many people as if it was synonymous with Orthodox theology”, after the year 2000, “more and more theologians started questioning both its monopoly in Eastern Christian world and the basic tenets of its agenda”. Among the criticized aspects, Coman mentions “the Neo-patristic movement’s claim that Hellenism is the perennial philosophical category of Christianity, which leaves little room for inculturation and for the transposition of Christian truth into the language of contemporary philosophy” and “the Neo-patristic theology’s weak engagement with the many challenges brought by modernity and postmodernity” (Coman 2020).

Oancea also seems to have apprehended these problems, although he does not mention them. On the contrary, he does his best to ensure the acceptance of his system by a neo-patristically dominated Orthodox world. He is not in conflict with neo-patristic claims, but he recognizes the need to address actual problems and transpose the Christian truth into different philosophical languages. He works hard in order to keep religious philosophy and neo-patristic theology together and to bridge them. Indeed, it is not necessary to see a gap between them, as relating properly to contemporary challenges and preserving a loyalty to the past are the two aspects that every Orthodox theologian deals with. It is a matter of weight, of pondering the importance of the two principles and, in the more creative cases, a matter of holding both principles antinomically together. This is what Stăniloae suggests, and what Oancea tries to transpose. In his case, the modern challenge is the new recognition of the irreducibility of religious plurality and the theological exigence that salvation is only in Christ.

The result is therefore new not only from the point of view of theology of religions, where Oancea succeeds in building his own theologically well-founded model of pluralistic

inclusivism, but also from that of the Orthodox theological debates of the 20th century. His model is a philosophy that is much closer to the patristic norm, and he takes great care to establish it in accordance with the exigencies of the Neo-patristic movement. The philosophy proposed here differs from the Russian religious philosophy, whose freedom from the landmarks of the Tradition was much greater. The emergence of syntheses of this kind between religious philosophy and neo-patristic theology is, in itself, a new proof of the dynamism and vitality, i.e., the capacity for change inherent in Orthodox theology.

## 6. Forms of the Newness. The Omnipresence of Modernity

Oancea's system marks several changes. The first to mention is the change in attitude towards the other religions registered in the Eastern European, Orthodox-Christian world. It should be noted that such a valorization of the other religions and their soteriological effectiveness is specific to the post-war, postcolonial mindset, which accepts religious plurality in itself, not only as a step prior to the conversion to Christianity. This understanding is seconded by the finding, supported by constructivist and deconstructionist approaches, that the religious message is accompanied by other conditionings and does not reach the recipient in its pure form. Such findings are relevant for the whole world; therefore, it is important that non-Western theologians understand and integrate them into their thinking. There are very few Orthodox authors who acquire a comparable mindset—another notable exception being the Romanian theologian and monk André Scrima, who did not develop his views systematically (see [Boicu 2021](#), p. 309; [Şimonca-Oprița 2019](#), pp. 61–68). Oancea's model shows that such considerations do not remain alien to the Orthodox world and to parts of Europe who have not been directly involved in colonialism, nor faced religious plurality to an extent comparable to Western Europe, and that the Orthodox world has the ability to develop them as a system as well.

Oancea's model shows that in the field of theology of religions there is still room for newness. The emergence of an Orthodox model which looks for a complete solution to the problem of recognizing the value of all and ensuring that the salvation of all takes place only through Christ, grounding the whole reflection inside the established Orthodox theological tradition, is a new and different plant in the soil of religious-theological reflection.

The attempt to harmonize the finding of the permanence of religious plurality with the Christian soteriological imperative leads to the adoption of the eschatological solution—the backup solution for all religious desiderata that is irresolvable here and now. It consists of introducing the eschatological plan as a plan in which cultural aspects do not have a conditioning function any longer, in which the veil is removed and the truth is looked at in the face as it is. By resorting to this solution to the problem of all people's adherence to Christ, Oancea is a modern theologian. The approach is legitimate, only if the eschatological model is well-articulated, rests on a solid biblical foundation, and is well-anchored in tradition. Oancea's model meets the requirements of internal coherence and the assurance of fundamentals.

Thirdly and paradoxically, the change within Orthodox theology is also to be mentioned. Oancea can be regarded as the forerunner of a group of younger theologians who seize the need to address present-day problems by using forms of expression that are intelligible to their contemporaries and by adopting new philosophical systems, without departing from the patristic foundation. The effort to bridge neo-patristic and reflective philosophical insights, and to reach a synthesis between religious philosophy and neo-patristics, is a new step further in the Orthodox Tradition.

All this allows some more general assertions about the universality of modernity, which is equally present in neo-patristic theology and in all other currents found in religions which strive to address contemporary problems by restoring the minds of wise men from the early past in discourses about absolute continuity and unchangeability inside a religion, as well as in those which search for adaptation to the contemporary realities at any cost (see more in [Pătru 2021](#)). The concept of *multiple modernities* covers the realities present in religions as well as it covers other developments in the broader cultural and social scene.



The three tendencies mentioned, together with the attempts to overcome such differences, are omnipresent in religions and testify to the dynamics of religion and, ultimately, the dynamics of life.

Rising on the cautious ground of Orthodox theological reflection, a land in which new seedlings are rare both because of skepticism towards the new and because of reduced the exposure to Western scientific discussion, the exposure to the confrontation with the problems of advanced modernity and the postcolonial world, and fulfilling both rational-discursive and theological-traditional requirements, the model elaborated by Oancea has the merit of proving the dynamism of Eastern theology and the ability and the naturalness of religion to adapt to changes, even when faced with the severe requirements of internal continuity.

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