

Article

Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: An Overview of Their Relationship from the Perspective of Moral Values

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Abstract: Orthodox–Evangelical relationships are dominated by proselytism (at least in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union). This is understood as church conversion practiced through unfair means among people who are already Christians, belonging to so-called “historical churches.” However, beyond it, there is a real potential for cooperation using moral values as a starting point. As there is an increasing disagreement between the Orthodox and mainline Protestant on moral values, the Orthodox and Evangelicals might increase their cooperation as they witness traditional values of Christianity. This kind of cooperation might be partially contextual, but it is based on Biblicism, which both Orthodox and Evangelicals share as a core value. As this cooperation, based on shared moral values, certainly has real potential, and has to be used for the good of Christianity, it might also have its limitations. Orthodox Christians and Evangelicals have shared common moral values, but each one of them might interpret the content of these values differently. One of the differences in interpreting and explaining the content of moral values might be given by the different interpretations of what is called church tradition.



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1. Introduction

Orthodox–Evangelical relationships are sometimes described as being tense and unfriendly, mainly due to what Orthodoxy regards as unbridled proselytism practiced by Evangelicals among their believers or in their canonical territories. In particular, after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, predominant Orthodox countries were perceived, at least by some Evangelicals, as *terra missionis*. These complaints from the Orthodox are based (at least partially) on real facts, which are recorded in countless reports submitted to the World Council of Churches, and are well documented in several pieces of research. From the Evangelicals' point of view, they are legitimized to engage in missions wherever there are people with little (or no) knowledge about Jesus Christ and his salvation. In particular, in the 1990s, Evangelicals complained that their missionaries were disturbed (or even persecuted) by clergy of the Orthodox Church and other historical churches, as well as by state representatives who understood, in that time, religious freedom exclusively as freedom of already existing Christian confessions and religions as a means to recover after decades of oppressive communism. Therefore, apparently, there seems to be little space for Orthodox and Evangelicals to really cooperate. This short essay will attempt to prove the opposite, arguing that there are enough reasons to believe that the Orthodox and Evangelicals will increasingly cooperate in the future, having as a starting point their common ground on moral values.

Before building this argumentation, I will remark on the issue of proselytism, which doubles as the main burden for the Orthodox–Evangelical relationships. In this section, I highlight examples of good practices in the mission field, which could replace divisive proselyte actions. Afterward, I dedicate a chapter to the role of moral values in the recent

dynamics within the ecumenical movement, arguing that they play a key role in building or de-constructing trust and unity between churches and Christian traditions. Another section will deal with reasons and facts that are, in my opinion, the basis for the increasing cooperation between Orthodox and Evangelicals having moral values as common ground. In other words, I attempt to prove that their mutually-shared perceptions of moral values hold significant potential for closer cooperation. Another section presents the possible limitations of this cooperation based on moral values. In any case, Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue has potential and a future (Grass 2010) from the perspective I discuss in this paper. The final section presents the Orthodox–Evangelical relationships in Romania, my native country, focusing on the main issues described in the previous chapters. In other words, the final section of this paper is an attempt to review how Orthodox–Evangelical relationships, at the global level, apply in Romania, from the perspective of moral issues.

Some terminological clarifications are necessary in this introduction. When referring to “Orthodox” and “Orthodox churches” I understand it as, primarily, Eastern Orthodox church(es) to whom I belong. However, most of the affirmations and situations described or analyzed in this article also apply to Oriental Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. “Evangelical” is used in the classical sense, defining those people or groups who are known under this term in global Christianity. An “Evangelical”, in my opinion, seeks a kind of relationship with the Orthodox and other historical churches, while “evangelicalists” are those who reject any kind of ecumenical relations and, therefore, define themselves as the only Christians, and practice a wild proselytism. When referring to “moral values” I understand, in this article, those anthropological aspects that became reasons of division between the Orthodox and mainline Protestant churches, and are witnessed by Orthodox and Evangelicals. However, I am fully aware that the spectrum of “moral values” is much wider and includes other aspects, such as social and economic justice, ecology, etc., which could also be keys for reflecting on Orthodox–Evangelical relationships.

Apart from the indicated bibliography, the vision of this essay is based on my own experience as an employee of the World Council of Churches, Department of Church and Ecumenical Relations, and Commission on Faith and Order, between 2009 and 2019, and as an Orthodox priest and professor, active, first of all, in my national context of Romania. Therefore, it is my hope that this essay captures and describes aspects that are rarely reported by the scholarship dealing with moral issues in the ecumenical movement nowadays. I perceive this article as being, at first level, based on my ecumenical, academic, and pastoral experience. It exposes realities I experienced on the ground, more than theoretical analysis. I totally agree that my personal opinions expressed in this article, especially those on Evangelicals, might not be accepted as such by other colleagues of different confessions, including the Orthodox or Evangelicals.

2. Proselytism: Main Burden for Orthodox–Evangelical Relationships

I do not intend to present here a review of proselytism as a hindrance to Orthodox–Evangelical cooperation, as it is well known and properly documented. I would like to stress that, in the last two-three decades, there were increasing Orthodox–Evangelical relationships, as several dialogue initiatives were taken (Nassif 2014). As proselytism remains a serious issue between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism, there are examples of finding ways to cooperate in this field, by transforming proselytist actions from the Evangelical’s side into meaningful support for the Orthodox mission. An example in this direction was via Billy Graham, perhaps the most famous Evangelical figure, who evangelized on five continents (Fitzgerald 2017, p. 169); he had good relationships with the Orthodox. He understood that it did not make sense to try to convert the Orthodox, who just escaped communism, but rather support the local Orthodox churches in building their own missions. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, head of the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (Morgan 2011), listed Billy Graham as an example of “good practice” of someone who cooperated in the mission field. Moreover, there are other examples of good practice.

If such isolated examples will become general good practice, Orthodox–Evangelical relationships may significantly improve in the future. Unfortunately, for the time being, the Orthodox–Evangelical agenda of dialogue remains dominated by the issue of proselytism. Progress in this field could, at any moment, be broken, as evangelicalism is in no way a monolithic movement. There will always be, somewhere, a small group that could be called “evangelical”—one that is able to conduct proselytist actions among the Orthodox, and bring in this way, again, the persistent issue of proselytism.

Recently, several ecumenical documents that were, in a way or another, signed or recognized both by Orthodox and Evangelicals, condemned proselytism in any form. These could only reduce proselytism as a dividing issue between them. A document signed in 2011 by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and by the World Evangelical Alliance contained recommendations for conducting appropriate ways of witnessing the gospel to non-Christians ([Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World 2011](#)). Another WCC document of mission reaffirmed that “proselytism is not a legitimate way of practicing evangelism” ([Together Towards Life 2012](#), p. 30). In 2017, the Global Christian Forum issued a document called *Call to Mission. Perceptions of Proselytism*, which condemned different facets of this phenomenon ([Call to Mission 2017](#)).

3. The Role of Moral Values in the Ecumenical Movement Today

Those involved in ecumenical work shall agree that the issue of *moral values* is playing an increasing role in the ecumenical dialogue. Historically speaking, the issue of moral values is quite new in the ecumenical movement. It did not exist, or it played a marginal role in the history of the efforts for Christian unity (up until recently). As the modern ecumenical movement emerged, its main role was defined as being the one to overcome the doctrinal differences between different churches and traditions. If one takes the year 1948 as a milestone, i.e., the foundation of the World Council of Churches, one may affirm that, after decades of ecumenical efforts, in spite of some remarkable progress in reaching an agreement on several doctrinal differences, there are still divisive doctrinal issues between churches and traditions. At the same time, a second, and in my opinion, a more visible and perceivable divisive issue emerged: moral values.

The proof that, for several decades, moral values did not exist as a divisive issue for member churches from the World Council of Churches, is the fact that it does not have a moral or ethical basis, only a doctrinal one (WCC Constitution). They appeared for the first time, clearly, as a divisive issue for WCC member churches in the 9th Assembly, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998. The Orthodox Churches, both Eastern and Oriental, portrayed themselves as defenders of traditional values of Christianity. Already before the Harare Assembly, probably based on the agenda prepared for it, representatives of Orthodox churches gathered for a meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece, from 29 April–2 May 1998, and issued a document called *Evaluation of New Facts in the Relations of Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement*. It mentions “certain developments within some Protestant members of the Council that are reflected in the debates of the WCC and are regarded as unacceptable by the Orthodox.” ([FitzGerard and Bouteneff 1998](#), pp. 137–38). Among them are mentioned “the rights of sexual minorities.” ([Buda 2014](#), p. 131). Moreover, the pre-assembly meeting for the Orthodox delegates to participate at the Harare Assembly, held at St. Ephraim Theological Seminary near Damascus, Syria, 7–13 May, 1998, affirmed in its final statement that the relationships of the Orthodox to the WCC “became a matter of serious study” ([FitzGerard and Bouteneff 1998](#), pp. 9–10). Among the reasons for this affirmation is the reality that the Orthodox are “victims of proselytism,” but also “value crisis” and “the moral stances taken by certain Christian groups” ([Buda 2014](#), p. 131).

The crisis within WCC after the Harare Assembly and the creation of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC were also caused by the increasing ethical differences between WCC member churches. In spite of the fact that the “Final Report” ([Final Report 2004](#)) dealt in an acceptable way the issues raised by the Orthodox, including the ethical issues ([Bouteneff 2003](#)), WCC programmatic work continued to approach the

sensitive topic of moral issues in such a manner that the pre-assembly meeting for the 10th WCC General Assembly gathered in Kos, Greece, from 11–17 October 2012, formulated the following critical remarks:

We (i.e., the Orthodox) often hear comments about the crisis in the ecumenical movement . . . To a greater extent, this is a consequence of the fact that the idea of visible unity is seen as unrealistic by many ecumenical partners, the Orthodox among them. We see this as a consequence of the developments taking place in some member churches over the last years (e.g., the ordination of women, different approaches to moral and ethical issues etc.)". ([Communiqué 2013](#))

The statement also proposes a solution for this crisis: "to go back to the theological and moral teaching and practices of the early Church." ([Communiqué 2013](#)).

The 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea, October–November 2013, offered a sample of how divisive moral issues can be for the WCC and its member churches. At the beginning of the assembly, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, presented a paper called *The Voice of the Church Must be Prophetic*. Metropolitan Hilarion firstly identified two challenges for the Christian world today: militant secularism and radical Islamism. In his opinion, militant secularism targets today "fundamental aspects of the everyday life of the human person," aiming for "the straightforward destruction of traditional notions of marriage and family." ([Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014](#)). He explains further:

This is witnessed by the new phenomenon of equating homosexual unions with marriage and allowing single-sex couples to adopt children. From the point of view of biblical teaching and traditional Christian values, this testifies to a profound crisis . . . Under the pretext of combating discrimination, a number of countries have introduced changes in family legislation. Over the past few years, single-sex cohabitation has been legalized in a number of states in the USA, a number of Latin American countries, and in New Zealand. This year homosexual unions have attained the legal status of "marriage" in England, Wales, and France. . . . The notion of parents, that is, of the father and the mother, of what is male and what is female, is radically altered. . . . The family in its Christian understanding is falling apart to be replaced by such impersonal terms as "parent number one" and "parent number two." . . . Children who are brought up in families with "two fathers" or "two mothers" will already have views on social and ethical values different from their contemporaries from traditional families". ([Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014](#))

After this exposure, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the following question to whom he proposed a response:

What is the response of the Christian Churches? . . . this response can be none other than that which is based on the divine revelation as handed down to us in the Bible. . . . We may have significant differences in the interpretation of Scripture, but we all possess the same Bible and its moral teaching is laid out quite unambiguously. ([Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014](#))

Regarding the church's response to the challenge of militant secularism, Metropolitan Hilarion observed that:

Unfortunately, not all Christian churches today find within themselves the courage and resolve to vindicate the biblical ideals by going against that which is fashionable and the prevalent secular outlook. Some Christian communities have long ago embarked on a revision of moral teaching aimed at making it more in a step with modern tendencies". ([Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014](#))

Metropolitan Hilarion acknowledged that the division of Christians into liberals and conservatives was a reality. He argued that the witness of the Orthodox Church could not be reduced to mere conservatism. He stated that:

“We see how in a number of Christian communities a headlong liberalization is occurring in religious ethics, as a rule under the influence of processes taking place in secular society. . . .

We are not speaking about conservatism but of fidelity to divine revelation, which is contained in scripture. And if the so-called liberal Christians reject the traditional Christian understanding of moral norms, then this means that we are running up against a serious problem in our Christian witness. Are we able to hear this witness if we are so deeply divided in question of moral teaching, which are as important for the salvation as dogma?” (Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014)

I was in the plenary hall of the Busan Assembly when Metropolitan Hilarion delivered this paper. The participants were instantly divided into two groups those who agreed with the message of the paper and those who disagreed with it. None of the participants who were asked to put forward questions, or to react, could keep their emotions under control. Personally, I have never witnessed a more divided ecumenical gathering. Then, I realized once again how divisive moral issues can be for the ecumenical movement and how counterproductive it is to deal with such issues in an improper way. The entire assembly was, in one way or another, dominated by the challenge of Metropolitan Hilarion. Participants debated extensively this specific speech in their particular meetings. Some of the Orthodox speakers, such as Metropolitan Nifon of Tirgoviște (Romanian Orthodox Church), openly supported Metropolitan Hilarion’s speech:

For a better understanding of what ecumenism means, we have to explain thoroughly what we do in our meetings, to assure our people that nothing of our precious traditions are lost, changed, or watered down. We always remind them, and we should remind ourselves too, that we should defend our traditional moral values, particularly the value of the Christian family. (Nifon of Tirgoviste 2014, p. 94)

Moral values are generally perceived as being *divisive* as churches that are members of different ecumenical organizations might have different positions on moral values. Moreover, it is often affirmed that the divisive potential of moral values is ever greater, as they increasingly divide not only churches of different traditions, but also churches of the same tradition, and even members and groups of the same church. I do not intend to criticize these affirmations or dilute their value. Instead, I would like to argue that the challenge of moral values in the ecumenical movement brings a new sense of unity. Some of them are to be expected (e.g., the fact that several theologians belonging to different church traditions reflect on the issue and articulate clearly their positions on moral values). Others are rather a surprise. In this last category, in my opinion, belongs the potential of increasing Orthodox–Evangelical relationships based on the common ground of moral values.

4. Orthodox–Evangelical Relationships Based on the Common Ground of Moral Values

The 7th WCC Assembly in Canberra, Australia, 1991, which approached for the first time in the history of the WCC a pneumatology theme—“Come Holy Spirit renew the whole creation”—brought serious tensions within WCC fellowship. They were caused by different attitudes around a presentation of the Korean female professor Chung Kyung-Hyung, who associated some “spirits” with the Holy Spirit. Orthodox and Evangelical raised similar concerns that emerged in a desire to establish a dialogue “as soon as possible” (Pirri-Simonian and Beek 2012, p. 7).

The potential for closer cooperation between the Orthodox and Evangelicals, based on the common ground of moral values, was already perceived during the 9th WCC Assembly in Harare, 1998, when the differences in moral values between the Orthodox and representatives of some mainline Protestant churches broke up in a shocking way for the Orthodox. In this sense, already in that time, one spoke about an “evangelical–orthodox alliance.” The atmosphere in that assembly was described by an observer as the following:

Both Orthodox and mainline evangelicals are unhappy with the liberal Protestant ethos they say dominates WCC debate on issues such as feminism, inclusive language in Bible translation, same-sex unions, the ordination of homosexuals, abortion, environmentalism, and population control. (Finger 1999)

In a similar manner, Metropolitan Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Church, who spoke about some common points between Orthodox and Evangelical, stated that “many evangelicals share conservative positions with us (i.e., the Orthodox) on such issues as abortion, the family, and marriage” (Morgan 2011).

This potential cooperation in the field of moral values between the Orthodox and Evangelicals becomes more attractive as the Orthodox (surprisingly and increasingly) see how mainline protestant churches, especially from Europe and North America, together part of WCC, depart from the traditional ethical values. Naturally, the Orthodox looks for other partners who share the same moral values. The traditional partner in this regard is the Roman Catholic Church. As the Orthodox–Roman Catholic partnership involves a series of other complex historical aspects, the Orthodox are interested in seeking new ways of developing partnerships with other emerging Christian groups, such as the Evangelicals. Recent (rather confusing) statements of Pope Francis on homosexuality can only make the Orthodox determined to seek closer cooperation with Evangelicals.

Cooperation with Evangelicals in the moral field brings some particular dynamics. I would like to briefly discuss this potential relationship with the WCC. In this organization, Orthodox and Evangelicals discovered that they have common points, especially in the field of moral values. I experienced several WCC Central Committees where Orthodox and Evangelical members formed a common front when moral issues were discussed. I remember a tense session of the Commission on Faith and Order, which took place in Romania (Faith and Order Paper No. 222 2015), in which Orthodox and Evangelical members of the Commission had the same opinion on how moral discernment should be understood and used in future Commission work. During the coffee break, I talked with an Evangelical brother and expressed my gratitude for his support, but at the same time, I told him my thoughts that he could be more vocal in expressing his opinion. His response was simple and clear: “I felt well represented by my Orthodox brothers and sisters.”

This reality was observed by all sides. As it is obvious that discussions on moral values will play a more important role within the fellowship of WCC, special attention is paid to which new member churches are accepted in. This is how I would explain the reservations of some historical Protestant churches to accept churches with an evangelical flavor into WCC (Buda 2018). As a staff member of the World Council of Churches, I was in charge of dealing with applications for membership in the global fellowship for 10 years. Even if the criteria for acceptance in WCC do not include any reference to the approach of the applicant church, regarding moral values, any application implied this aspect in an indirect way. Officially or unofficially, I was asked by Central and/or Executive Committee members how “Evangelical” applicant churches were. On the other hand, while visiting applicant churches, I was often asked by their representatives what was the approach of WCC on moral values, as they heard that WCC encouraged a liberal, moral attitude. I remember a visit to an African Instituted church in Kenya, which had a strong Evangelical flavor, where the above-mentioned question was raised as a matter of concern. I responded that WCC as a global ecumenical organization does not have an official position on moral values, but its member churches may have a more liberal approach, like some mainline protestant churches, or a moral traditional approach, like the Orthodox. After my explanation, the head of that church concluded: “In this regard we are Orthodox”.

The common ground on moral values between the Orthodox and the Evangelicals is not mere contextual, i.e., it is not determined exclusively by the new constellations formed around moral values. The Orthodox and the Evangelicals share the same attitudes on ethical–moral issues, first of all, because both use the Bible as a primary source of revelation. Therefore, biblical understanding of moral values, and not the context of global Christianity, is the primary source for such cooperation.

5. Potential and Possible Limitations of Orthodox–Evangelical Cooperation Based on Moral Values

What is the potential of Orthodox–Evangelical cooperation based on moral values? Cooperation in this field emerges primarily from the Bible as the primary source of revelation, as well as in the field of ethics, and not from the context of new arrangements in the complexity of global Christianity. With this in mind, such cooperation may play a genuine prophetic role for the future of Christianity: Orthodox and Evangelicals (Roman Catholics could also contribute to it!) could strongly witness a return to biblical–ethical values. It is very important that Orthodox–Evangelical cooperation should not be built against other traditions, but rather for the sake of witnessing values for the entirety of Christianity. This increasing cooperation between Orthodox and Evangelicals needs to have an explicit *ecumenical* dimension. I envisage it as another way of practicing ecumenism. As in recent years, the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations were very receptive to new ways of expressing modernity and emancipation, which clearly conflicted with core biblical values; Orthodox and Evangelicals may be a strong voice for keeping traditional values of Christianity as a basis for developing a strong Christian witness to the world.

Such a witness would be a wonderful translation of dialogue into action or a meaningful activism. Political activism, in the sense of witnessing Christian values to international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, etc., or to different governments in order to keep traditional values on which national states are built upon, is another concrete way of possible cooperation based on common moral values.

Personally, I strongly believe that the fact that the Orthodox and some Evangelicals are part of the World Council of Churches brings great potential. This potential shall be even bigger if members of some mainline Protestant churches with an Evangelical approach would be more vocal within their churches and as representatives in WCC. Their common witness on common moral values may reshape the direction of this global ecumenical organization. The same may apply to regional ecumenical organizations, the national councils of churches, and even the Global Christian Forum. Unfortunately some of these organizations do not have clear criteria for taking new members and are skeptical in accepting, in their fellowships, any churches that might be defined, in one way or another, as “Evangelical.” (Saydat El Jabal 2012). As a former staff member of WCC who was responsible, for 10 years, for the applications for membership in WCC, I can witness that many churches with Evangelical approaches would have more interest in WCC if this organization would place more emphasis on traditional moral values and on concrete evangelism and mission.

In my opinion the Global Christian Forum offers great potential in witnessing traditional moral values, as the Roman Catholic Church is also present.

We also need to speak about the possible *limitations* of this cooperation. Here, I can only briefly formulate its main elements. The main limitation might come from two sources:

(1) The different understandings that the Orthodox and the Evangelicals have on the role of tradition in explaining and understanding biblical ethical values;

(2) The great imbalance or asymmetry (Cole 2019) of historical experience in dealing with biblical–ethical values. While the Orthodox have a bi-millennial experience in living according to the Bible, in the church, evangelicals have a much shorter historical experience. This may create differences and perhaps tensions in explaining and experiencing moral values.

Keeping in mind these two elements, one may surprisingly realize that the Orthodox and the Evangelicals agree with what are the main biblical–ethical values they share, but they might disagree on how their content is perceived and explained to the world. However, I would like to end this essay on an optimistic note: Evangelicals (or at least some of them) are increasingly interested in the way in which moral issues are perceived in other Christian traditions (Greenman 1994), and in researching new ways of building moral content with extra-biblical support (Simmons 2009). Efforts from the Evangelical side, conducted in the last decades to present their ethical values in a systematic and more explicit way, based on

their own traditions and experiences, are appreciated in the Orthodox world (Sider 2015). In particular, the increasing Evangelical interest for Patristic writings, and their ethical approach in dialogue with the complex world, is highly appreciated by the Orthodox (Steward 2008; Williams 2005).

Finally, I would like to stress that, for a mutual and constructive relationship, it is equally important that the Orthodox show interest in the way Evangelicals perceive the same matters. I am confident that such a mutual interest and learning exists, as, according to an old and widely accepted Patristic principle, a wise human being is ready to learn from nature, from plants, and animals and, therefore, even more from other human beings.

6. Orthodox–Evangelical Relationships: The Case of Romania

In this section, I briefly describe how Orthodox–Evangelical relationships are designed from the perspective of the main issues raised in this article: proselytism, common moral values, and their common public witness. Regarding proselytism, the Romanian Orthodox Church is a typical case of one raising constant complaints against evangelicals—that they practice sheep stealing in a programmatic way. The beginning and rise of the evangelical mission in Romania in the second part of the 19th and first part of the 20th century was perceived by the Orthodox Romanians as a real threat against the very existence of the Orthodox Church and of the Romanian ethnic identity, as the Orthodox Church and Romanian nation are perceived, then and even today, as inseparable. There are very different perceptions of the beginnings and the history of evangelicalism in Romania. Evangelical historians speak about a promising beginning and a great reception of their message among people, and a series of threats, violence, and persecution from the Orthodox Church, and other historical churches in Romania and from the Romanian state (Dobrincu and Mănăstireanu 2018, pp. 113–35). The Orthodox speak about an assault of foreign missions with no understanding for the Orthodox and for the Romanian context which they entered. A simple look at the theological literature produced in the first part of the 20th century provides an image of how these new missions were perceived. As they ignored the fact that they were evangelizing people who were Christians, and part of a rich tradition since the first centuries of the Christian era, they attacked, in an improper manner, some core values of Orthodoxy and local spirituality, such as the veneration of the saints and of the Holy Mother of God, the spirituality related with the Cross, prayers for the late forefathers, etc. In the eyes of the Orthodox, this foreign mission was pointless and dangerous. Therefore, manuals of missiology from that time put all evangelicals in one category: “sects” (Ispir 1928, p. 9). Newer manuals of “sectology” did not significantly change this perception (David 1999).

The relationships between Romanian Orthodox and Evangelicals were certainly complicated by the fact that local split groups of Evangelical flavors emerged within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The so-called Tudorists (Romanian: Tudoriști) were founded by a former Orthodox priest named Tudor Popescu, after he started teaching against the veneration of the saints and against the sacraments. (David 1999, pp. 64–66). The movement, called Lord’s Army (Romanian: Oastea Domnului), was founded as a renewal movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church using obvious Evangelical means. Several groups separated from Lord’s Army and joined Evangelical churches already in the early history of this movement. This is the main reason why Orthodox theologians used to have positive (Dehelianu 1948, p. 41) and negative (David 1999, pp. 290–94; Ică 1996, VI) opinions about it. Those having a positive opinion on the Lord’s Army consider it an efficient tool for defending Orthodoxy in Romania, while those opposing this movement perceive it as having an Evangelical flavor, too foreign to Orthodox spirituality.

One may affirm that, in recent years, the issue of proselytism was not damaging the Orthodox–Evangelical relationships so much anymore. That does not mean that proselytism decreased. It rather took other forms, or was oriented in other directions (Rițișan and Constantinescu 2018) Ecumenical organizations have very little influence in this matter, as no evangelical church from Romania is a member in any regional or

global ecumenical organization. Regarding the common moral values, they are not yet a factor for bringing the Orthodox and Evangelicals together, as all historical churches in Romania, including mainline Protestants, openly witness traditional values of Christianity. A referendum organized in 2018, which was initiated by a Christian based association, attempted to define family in traditional terms, as a union between a man and a woman. This initiative was openly supported by the Consultative Council of Officially Recognized Religious Communities in Romania through an official statement (Andrei 2018). This consultative Council has, as members, some Evangelical Churches. One may expect that some similar initiatives that intend to promote traditional values in Romanian society or reject initiatives of humanist–atheistic circles aimed at making Romanian society more secular will bring Orthodox and Evangelicals closer together in Romania. This already happened in 2014, when an initiative of such circles, aimed at complicating the process of registering children for the religious class, was opposed by the same Consultative Council.

However, in terms of common activism in Romanian society through more elaborated common projects and common public witness, it seems that, for the time being, this is not possible. I have seen public demonstrations pro vita (for life and against abortions) organized by the Orthodox, and similar demonstrations organized by Evangelicals separately. This separation in public witness is, for the time being, comfortable for both sides. Evangelical public witness and profiles in Romania are still “under construction.” It seems to me that “homo evangelicus”, as presented in a new (and in many ways, remarkable) publication (Dobrincu and Mănăstireanu 2018), is ready to be a patriot, in Romanian context, a public figure that witnesses to other people and to Romanian society, and, last but not least, a figure that has both past (i.e., history) and future in Romania.

7. Conclusions

New, emerging discussions within global Christianity, on what one refers to as moral values, creates new divisions, but also new opportunities for cooperation. As the division between the Orthodox and mainline Protestants increases due to the liberal approach of the latter, new opportunities are open for cooperation with the Evangelicals. Only the future will tell how these relationships will develop. In any case, the hope is that common ground on moral issues will develop in common witness, for the sake of the entirety of Christianity.

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