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DOCTORAL THESIS

Postwar Religious Diplomacy
The Orthodox Churches and International Relations
- Continuities, Permanences, Ruptures.

From the Pan-Orthodox Conference in Moscow (1948)
to the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016)

(ABSTRACT)

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ABSTRACT

The Novelty, Timeliness, and Importance of the Topic

The theme of religious diplomacy in the Orthodox world is not entirely new; however, the systematic interest of researchers in this subject has taken shape only in recent years. In this context, the present thesis seeks to offer a modest contribution to the understanding of certain mechanisms and actions within the sphere of foreign policy, which are often conducted far from the public arena, in the discretion of negotiations carried out behind closed doors. The approach thus aligns, even if only in a limited manner, with the effort to respond to an observation formulated by the French thinker Jean-Claude Eslin, according to which the Eastern model of the relationship between politics and religion remains, within the Western intellectual sphere, both insufficiently known and frequently interpreted through conceptual frameworks that are less suited to its historical and institutional specificity.

This reality contrasts with the centuries-old tradition – also present in the Orthodox world – of interactions between the religious and political factors in the sphere of international relations. It is true that papal diplomacy has attracted by far the greatest share of interest within historical research, and the specialized literature fully reflects this orientation, which is indeed justified.

Nevertheless, *the novelty of the present work* may be appreciated through at least three considerations. First, the approach differs from that of previous studies: the analysis includes the majority of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, without limiting itself to the case of a single institution. Second, the primary sources examined – largely declassified

in the last two decades – provide previously unknown information that lends freshness to the historical analysis and, in certain cases, rewrites chapters of history less familiar to the general public. Third, the use of at least five external archival sources (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, and Greece), together with internal sources and documents of certain international organizations (the World Council of Churches – WCC, the United Nations – UN), has sought to enhance the accuracy of the reconstruction of events. Although demanding, this documentary cross-referencing contributes to the crystallization of a more solid analysis of the events and circumstances that shaped Orthodox religious diplomacy in the postwar period.

The timeliness and importance of the topic derive from the increased visibility of religious institutions, both in the public sphere and at the international level, over the past three decades. On the one hand, this reflects the growing freedom enjoyed by many of the Orthodox Churches examined, which had previously been under strict state control; on the other hand, it reflects the accelerated process of globalization which, alongside its positive effects, has also contributed to the intensification of secularization in the Orthodox world (the dilution of traditional values, spiritual impoverishment, etc.), features characteristic of the modern age. Under these conditions, the transition of the Churches from the status of "social actors" – often instrumentalized or merely tolerated – to that of intelligent institutional partners, integrated and vocal at the international level, underscores the relevance and necessity of this research.

In order to understand the complexity of these developments, it is necessary to adopt a historical perspective. Religious diplomacy in the Orthodox space – the principal focus of our research – evolved during the period under study under the influence of a constantly changing geopolitical context, as well as of an internal dynamism within the Orthodox Churches marked by persistent crises and challenges. The significant differences among the countries analyzed further enhance the relevance of this study, illustrating the manner in which local and international contexts interact.

Within the arena of contemporary history, the **USSR/Russia** once again consolidated itself as an Orthodox power with imperial tendencies, combining a universalist religious message with its national interests (see the theories of "Moscow – the Third Rome" and Russkii mir / "the Russian World"). By contrast, **Greece** and the Ecumenical Patriarchate assumed the role of strategic mediators and, at times, pioneers of inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian dialogue. Athens benefited from the intellectual strength of Greek theology professors, from its diplomatic capacity, and from its geographical position, which enabled

it to closely monitor developments in the Middle East (including the Greek communities and their pastors in the Orthodox patriarchal sees in Turkey, Palestine/Israel, Syria, and Egypt) and to cultivate relations with circles of power in North America. Constantinople relied on the moral authority derived from its historical roots, while maintaining strong ties with the Western sphere of influence, with the central figure of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras during the period under analysis.

Romania, traditionally balanced, followed a middle path between East and West, without expansionist claims. Nevertheless, the religious policies of the year 1948 were strongly influenced by Soviet decisions, affecting both the Orthodox Church and the clergy and laity of other religious denominations (see the cases of the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches). Despite these constraints, Romania became an important vector of pan-Orthodox dialogue, sending delegates to all pan-Orthodox assemblies and contributing decisively to the consolidation and development of inter-Orthodox relations.

At the same time, **Serbia/Yugoslavia** and **Bulgaria** oscillated between pan-Orthodox loyalties and the affirmation of their own autocephaly. All these developments unfolded under Soviet pressure, visible in the organization of the pan-Orthodox "front" in the years 1947-1948 (*Moscow I*). Subsequently, the pan-Orthodox process continued under the canonical leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, passing through significant stages: the early 1960s (*Rhodes I*), 1986 (*Chambésy IV*), the overcoming of the deadlocks of the 1990s, maturation in the first decade of the 2000s (*Chambésy V*), and consolidation at the beginning of 2016 with *the Synaxis of all Orthodox Primates of the world* in January 2016 at Chambésy, Switzerland, which preceded Crete I five months later.

Despite the differences and misunderstandings that have arisen over time, all Orthodox Churches share the same doctrine and the same teaching of faith, established at the first seven Ecumenical Councils (fourth-eighth centuries), and they strictly observe the two-millennia-old patristic and canonical tradition. This unity has made cooperation possible in crucial moments, from the formulation of common resolutions within the Ecumenical Movement to pan-Orthodox gatherings. At the same time, each Church has had to respond to the challenges of modernity and secularization, seeking to maintain its public relevance, and religious diplomacy has proven to be an essential instrument in this process.

The Concept and Dynamics of Religious Diplomacy

The present research is not a history of diplomacy in the strict sense, but rather a history of a particular type of external relations, in which the actors are both religious personalities and institutions, as well as political leaders, diplomats, and national or international institutions. The analysis emphasizes the identification of reciprocal interests and the policies that accompany them.

Considering that religious diplomacy represents the intersection between the religious sphere and the practice of international relations, it may be understood as the set of mechanisms through which a state or a religious institution employs the religious factor in foreign policy actions (including cooperation with international organizations or institutions), either for the promotion or defense of its own interests, or for the mediation of conflicts. In other words, this type of diplomacy involves the use of institutional resources, ideas (moral principles, biblical exhortations, etc.), and religious symbols as instruments of *soft power* – and, more recently, even of *sharp power* – in international relations.

It should also be noted that the specialized literature employs other expressions to designate this phenomenon, such as “faith-based diplomacy”, “divine diplomacy”, “confessional diplomacy”, “ecclesiastical diplomacy”, or “papal diplomacy”.

From a conceptual perspective, religious diplomacy is related to cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy, highlighting the role of religious actors in the dialogue among nations and in fostering rapprochement between them. Analysts of contemporary international relations emphasize that the revitalization of religion in the public sphere and its continued rise in the international arena, particularly after the Cold War, have brought once again to the forefront the *soft power* derived from spiritual values in politics.

Most studies on the history of the Orthodox Churches indicate that, after the Second World War, they followed a common trajectory (with minor exceptions, such as Greece and the Oriental Orthodox patriarchates): from forced submission and isolation during the Stalinist years to emancipation and the reaffirmation of their missionary vocation after 1989. At the end of this period, however, the Orthodox world once again finds itself at a critical juncture: if the Council of Crete (2016) represents the culmination of a tendency toward unity, the years immediately thereafter have brought new ruptures, such as the conflict concerning Ukraine between Constantinople and Moscow.

In *geopolitical and cultural terms*, the Orthodox world refers to the ensemble of countries and communities in which Orthodox Christianity (of Eastern tradition) constitutes the majority religion or the central identity-forming factor. This area – found in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, extending toward Eurasia and the Middle East through diaspora communities and through the historic patriarchates (Constantinople, headquartered in the Phanar district of Turkey; Jerusalem, Palestine/Israel; Antioch, headquartered in Damascus, Syria; and Alexandria, headquartered in Alexandria, Egypt) – appears as a distinct entity, though not a monolith, defined by the historical and spiritual heritage that underlies the ethos of the Orthodox world, by interconnected ecclesiastical structures, and by the perception of an Orthodox spiritual solidarity, both within communities and at the external level.

From an *institutional perspective*, the Orthodox world crystallizes around a family of autocephalous Churches (self-governing, fully autonomous), administratively independent yet united in communion of faith and observing the same canonical norms (a common juridical corpus). There is no single center of authority equivalent to the papacy; the governing principle is that of *synodality*, exercised through the assembly of titular bishops under the leadership of a protos or primate (usually a patriarch), with decisions taken by consensus. At the pan-Orthodox level, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is recognized by all Orthodox primates as *primus inter pares* ("first among equals"). This status grants him an honorary role of initiative and coordination, visible in the efforts to convene pan-Orthodox conferences during the twentieth century, intended to restore pan-Orthodox unity.

The Ecumenical Patriarch thus exercises a primacy of honor, which legitimizes many of the initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including the issuance of *the synodal tomos* or the decision to recognize an Orthodox Church as autocephalous – an issue sensitive in inter-Orthodox relations and frequently debated within the pan-Orthodox process. In his well-known dialogues with the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, published at the end of the 1960s, Patriarch Athenagoras clarified this position of coordination and presidency, emphasizing the balance between moral authority and the principle of synodality.

After 1945, the Iron Curtain descended over the Orthodox world, profoundly influencing its geopolitical dynamics. Countries with Orthodox majorities, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia (within socialist Yugoslavia), entered the Soviet sphere of influence, while Greece remained under Western influence. This political rupture generated

a corresponding religious divide: the Orthodox Churches under communist regimes aligned themselves with the policies of their respective governments, while the Churches of the "free world" (the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Churches of Greece and Cyprus, and the diaspora in the West) sought to preserve religious freedom and canonical tradition under difficult circumstances, in the absence of effective pan-Orthodox solidarity.

Within this complex historical context, the present work focuses on a single aspect – perhaps the most important – present in the foreign policy concerns of all Orthodox Churches and of political authorities alike. This aspect concerns *the discussions and interactions related to the pan-Orthodox synodal process*, which marks the mid-twentieth century (1948, *Moscow I*) and the beginning of the twenty-first century (2016, *Crete I*). By the pan-Orthodox synodal process I understand the ecclesiastical and diplomatic efforts undertaken by countries with predominantly Orthodox populations in order to convene a Holy and Great Council (Η Αγία και Μεγάλη Σύνοδος) of the Orthodox Churches, the highest authority whose decisions are taken by consensus and become universally valid for the whole of Orthodoxy.

For the purposes of delimiting the research, the present analysis focuses on the period 1943–1961, which coincides with the restoration of the Russian Patriarchate (4 September 1943) and with the first pan-Orthodox conference (24 September – 1 October 1961). These moments are directly linked to the events considered turning points in the synodal process: *the Pan-Orthodox Conference of Moscow* (1948), whose roots lie in Soviet efforts to instrumentalize the Russian Orthodox Church beginning in 1943 (the visit to Moscow of the delegation of the Church of England) and continuing with the "pilgrimage" of Patriarch Alexei to the Middle East in 1945; and *the Holy and Great Council of Crete* (2016), whose origins lie in the efforts of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, the founder of the modern pan-Orthodox synodal process, initiated with the first pan-Orthodox conference at Rhodes (1961, Greece).

The studies published on this subject are, for the most part, theological in nature, with a few recent exceptions. In this context, our research focuses primarily on the political dimension: the organization, the participants, and the theological discussions are addressed only incidentally, while the emphasis is placed on the relations between the Churches and secular authorities and on the diplomatic support that facilitated the achievement of each Church's objectives, some of which reflected broader interests of the respective governments.

The Main Objectives of the Research

In principle, the research seeks to present the historical truth faithfully, an essential endeavor for countering the falsification of the past through distortion, omission, or bias, as well as its instrumentalization for manipulative purposes, whether through identity myths or propaganda. The analysis consistently keeps in view the relationship between prejudice and historical reality – that is, the distinction between perceptions formed prior to knowledge of the facts – preconceived opinions, generalizations, or simplifications – and knowledge grounded in sources and scientific methods, a complex and often tense relationship, yet indispensable for understanding the past.

The research does not claim to provide definitive or absolute answers; many of the issues require further documentation. Through a self-critical approach, the results are continually questioned and reinterpreted in order to extract solid and verifiable historical meanings, grounded in facts and circumstances.

The central interest of the study is not limited to the mechanisms through which states or the Orthodox Churches employ the religious factor in foreign policy. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the direct interactions between these two spheres, as well as on the relationships involving international organizations or institutions – religious or secular – in the promotion or defense of interests and in the mediation of conflicts.

From this perspective, the principal objective of the thesis is the reconstruction of the historical framework of pan-Orthodox cooperation in the period 1943-1961, a process that involves all Orthodox Churches as well as the diplomatic institutions of countries with predominantly Orthodox populations.

The research also pursues five secondary objectives: highlighting the influence of religious institutions on the foreign policy of the countries concerned, including through the advising of political leaders; analyzing the manner in which the Churches assume, voluntarily or under pressure, the role of supporters of classical diplomatic relations; defining them as autonomous actors in inter-Orthodox relations; examining the implications deriving from their status as custodians of the national religious and cultural heritage, which is also utilized in the diplomatic sphere; and evaluating the impact of international events and initiatives – such as theological congresses and regional humanitarian assistance – on the climate of external relations.

The analysis confirms *the research hypothesis*: the close or conflictual relations between Church and State significantly shape the foreign policy actions. In the

international arena, the Orthodox Churches position themselves as relevant actors with an implicit – though not always clearly defined – geopolitical agenda and the capacity to influence the dynamics of both interstate and inter-Orthodox relations.

Research Methodology, Justification of the Chosen Methods, and Sources Used

Although the subject reflects a high degree of interdisciplinarity, the research adheres to the methods and rigor of historical scholarship. The sources were critically analyzed by applying a multiperspectival approach and by cross-referencing documents from different archives, while significant events were contextualized and interpreted on the basis of the available data.

The thesis adopts a historical discourse that combines elements of social and cultural history in order to understand and interpret the past through the lens of an integrative and contextual framework, in accordance with the theory of international relations advanced by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle. The research reconstructs the "narrative canon" of the postwar period, emphasizing the chronology of events, the biographies of the principal personalities, and the themes that shaped religious diplomacy and the foreign policy of Orthodox states. The analysis goes beyond a simple factual narrative, integrating structures and socio-historical mechanisms and, where the available data allow, contextual interpretations, employing – within a limited framework – interdisciplinary methodological instruments and the deductive method.

From a methodological perspective, the pan-Orthodox gatherings were coded through a specific system based on the place of their convening and their consecutive order, regardless of type or format (*Moscow I*, *Rhodes I*, etc.). This system, which differs from that frequently used in the secondary literature, allows the avoidance of excessive explanatory parentheses regarding terminological differences. Only gatherings with a decision-making character were included, while preparatory and special commissions were excluded because of their technical role.

With regard to *the sources* used, the relevant secondary literature on the subject is briefly presented in the subchapter dedicated to the state of research, to which many other specialized works and scientific studies may be added. These bibliographic resources were consulted in libraries in Romania (the Library of the Romanian Academy; the "Carol I" Central University Library in Bucharest; the Library of the Holy Synod; the Library of the

"N. Iorga" Institute of History of the Romanian Academy; and the Library of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), as well as abroad (the British Library and Lambeth Palace Library in London, United Kingdom; the libraries of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches in Geneva; the Library of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland; the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., United States; the Bibliothèque nationale de France, "François-Mitterrand" site, in Paris, France; and, not least, the National Library of Greece in Athens).

With regard to primary sources (diplomatic documents, reports, official acts, etc.), a series of files were examined in archives in Romania (the National Historical Central Archives; the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the personal archive of Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală of Transylvania; the Archive of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives; and the Archive of the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs). In addition, several research visits were carried out in archives abroad: London, United Kingdom (The Parliamentary Archives, Palace of Westminster; The National Archives, Kew Gardens; The Lambeth Palace Archives, Lambeth, the Church of England; the British Broadcasting Corporation Archive, Reading; and The Royal Archives, Windsor Castle); Geneva, Bern, and Bossey, Switzerland (the United Nations Archive, the World Council of Churches Archive, and the Swiss Federal Archives); Washington, D.C., and New York, United States of America (the National Archives and Records Administration – NARA, College Park, Maryland – and the United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York); Paris, France (the Archives of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France); and Athens, Greece (the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece), among others.

Structure of the Thesis

Religious diplomacy in the Orthodox sphere represents a complex phenomenon, influenced both by secular factors (political regimes, conflicts, negotiations) and by religious factors (doctrine, canons, tradition). It may be understood as a practice of cooperation between the State and religious institutions in the international arena, pursuing objectives such as the promotion of peace, the protection of diaspora communities, the affirmation of national identity, the support of common values, or the defense of conjunctural interests.

From this perspective, the study is structured into *five main chapters*, preceded by an *introduction* and followed by *conclusions*, tracing the evolution of postwar Orthodox religious diplomacy from the restoration of the Russian Patriarchate under Stalin (1943) to the first pan-Orthodox conference at Rhodes (1961).

Chapter One

The first chapter, entitled "**All Roads Lead to Moscow. Preparations for the Postwar Reconfiguration of the Orthodox World**", analyzes the period 1943–1945, when the Russian Orthodox Church was rehabilitated by Stalin, under the tutelage of the Soviet state, and transformed into an instrument of his foreign policy. The role of the *Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church* and its "military" leadership (G. G. Karpov), ensured by officers of the security services (NKVD, NKGB), is examined. The chapter also follows the first interchurch contacts and diplomatic initiatives that consolidated Moscow's influence in relation to the West, including the election of the Patriarchs Sergius (Stragorodsky) and Alexei I (Simansky), the Local Council of 1945, and the exchanges of visits with the Church of England. The analysis also includes more subtle aspects of the postwar reconfiguration of the Orthodox world, based on what I have termed the "diplomacy of visibility", through which *internal legitimation* – grounded in symbolic and operational reconstruction – and *the externalization of influence* (the Russian diaspora, inter-Orthodox contacts, etc.) made possible the delineation of a "geography of alignment" with Soviet priorities, including anti-Vatican and anti-Western orientations.

Chapter Two

The second chapter, entitled "**The Orthodox World after 1945. Political and Diplomatic Premises**", extends the analysis to the reactions of the other Orthodox Churches in the period 1945-1947. The first part of the chapter highlights the Ecumenical Patriarchate as an actor placed under geopolitical pressure between Ankara, Athens, and Washington. The diplomatic documents analyzed reflect the Anglo-Soviet competition for symbolic control of the Phanar, situating the Patriarchate between canonical imperatives, Turkish sensitivities, and geopolitical rivalries. In the Moscow-Phanar competition,

Moscow relied on the *recentralization of authority* – including through the proposal of a "synod in Moscow" – while Constantinople sought to *reconstruct its legitimacy* through the election of a new Ecumenical Patriarch and through *jurisdictional adjustments*. On the eve of the celebration of five centuries of autocephaly (1448-1948), the geopolitical rise of the Moscow Patriarchate, supported by the Soviets, generated concern within the Orthodox hierarchy of the Phanar. In the first postwar years, neither the Ecumenical Patriarch Benjamin I (Psomas) nor Patriarch Maximus V (Vaportzis) succeeded in limiting the expansionist ambitions of the Russians. The balance in the competition for influence began to be restored with the election of Patriarch Athenagoras I (Spyrou) in 1949, reflecting the transfer of political rivalries between the communist East and the democratic-liberal West onto the Orthodox hierarchy within the context of the Cold War.

The second part of the chapter offers an analysis of *Soviet religious interests in the Balkans* and in other states of Central and Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary). In the postwar political context, the Orthodox Churches were gradually subjected to the pressures of communist regimes, as Soviet influence penetrated local political structures and progressively affected the autonomy of the autocephalous Churches. This pressure was exercised according to the model established in Moscow in 1943 and formalized through the Local Council of 1945, by which Moscow consolidated its influence, including in the religious life of the peoples of Eastern Europe. At the end of the chapter, I included a case study on the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC), illustrating how an autocephalous Church negotiates and defends its autonomy within a context of Sovietization. During the period 1945-1947, the ROC attempted to preserve its institutional independence, and Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu protected its autocephaly by refusing to submit to political pressure, thus avoiding the establishment of a precedent of explicit subordination that could have affected the Church's legal status.

Chapter Three

The third chapter, entitled "**Moscow: 'The Fortress of All Orthodoxy.' Between the Middle East and the Balkans under the Influence of the USSR**", examines the expansion of the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Middle East (1945: Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch) and in the Balkans (1946: Bulgaria; 1947: Romania), highlighting the external dimension of Soviet religious policy. Particular emphasis is

placed on the manner in which Russian ecclesiastical property was used as an instrument of religious diplomacy, not only for the recovery of assets lost as a result of the wars – especially in the Middle East – but also for the consolidation of a broader strategy of external presence. An important role in this process was played by the so-called Orthodox "embassy churches" abroad, around which stable ethno-confessional communities were formed. These gradually became centers of influence among the Russian émigré population and, by extension, within the host societies of the West, performing functions comparable, up to a certain point, to those of Western cultural institutes.

Since it is directly related to the research objectives of the thesis, the case of Palestine is presented as a model study, as it allows the detailed documentation of negotiations and of the manner in which Western diplomacy perceived these developments. In reality, the Moscow Patriarchate targeted a far greater number of regions, each with its own cultural, historical, and legal particularities, involved – with the direct support of Soviet diplomacy and with Stalin's approval – in an extensive process of negotiations, some of which remain unresolved to this day.

The second part of the chapter examines the same external dimension of Soviet religious policy, but from a more empirical perspective, through an analysis of how it was perceived by Western diplomacy. The analysis follows the interpretations formulated by French and American diplomats, who regarded this policy as a form of religious *soft power*.

The French diplomatic apparatus, concerned with anticipating "possible intentions" and "various tendencies", and supported by a strong institutional memory – shaped by the tradition of protecting Eastern Christians and by the experience of the mandate in Syria and Lebanon – offered, during the years 1945-1948, a reading distinct from American and British correspondence and, even more so, from Soviet documents. French diplomats observed relatively early that, beyond the liturgical language, pilgrimages, and the invocation of ecclesiastical property, a clear political interest was taking shape: the Kremlin was using these elements as instruments of prestige and influence, integrating the Moscow Patriarchate into a broader strategy of external legitimacy. In attempting to understand the actual status of *the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church* (CAROC), French diplomats compared it with the "Holy Synod" of the tsarist period and likened Georgii Karpov to the former Procurator of the Synod, while also noting that the institution's role in the internal affairs of the Church remained insufficiently defined and depended to a considerable extent on the personality of the Russian patriarch.

American diplomacy approached the same issue in a more direct and analytical manner, seeking to formulate clear conclusions for decision-makers. In this regard, American documents emphasized that the restoration of ecclesiastical relations between the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and those of other countries could not be explained solely by spiritual motivations, suggesting that the Soviet authorities supported these initiatives because they also served political objectives.

In order to highlight the implications of the instrumentalization of the Moscow Patriarchate in the postwar period, the final section of the chapter compares these two Western perspectives – French and American – emphasizing the differences in interpretation regarding the mechanisms of influence, the instruments employed, and the results achieved within Soviet religious diplomacy. This comparison contributes to a better understanding of the paradigm within which, in particular, the Orthodox Churches of the Balkans operated while adapting to the new geopolitical context.

Chapter Four

The fourth chapter, entitled "**Religious Diplomacy and the Cold War. The Positioning of the West and the Formation of Blocs**", examines the pivotal moment of 1948, marked by the *Pan-Orthodox Conference in Moscow*, or *the Consultation of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches*, during which an "Orthodox front" under Soviet influence was consolidated. This development was followed by the reaction of Constantinople and by subsequent efforts to restore the pan-Orthodox balance, a process symbolically concluded with the *Council of Crete* (2016).

The first part of the chapter focuses on the Soviet initiative to convene a pan-Orthodox meeting in Moscow and on the ecclesiastical and geopolitical implications of this project, highlighting the manner in which religious diplomacy became an instrument of the ideological competition between East and West. The project of a pan-Orthodox consultation had already been discussed in January 1947 between Patriarch Alexei I and Georgii G. Karpov, chairman of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC), its origins lying in the decisions of the Local Council of the Russian Church in 1945. Soviet documents show that the initiative was not exclusively ecclesiastical but developed in close coordination with the state authorities, receiving the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR (Vyacheslav M. Molotov) and the

support of the Soviet political leadership (Andrei I. Vyshinsky and Kliment Voroshilov). In the conception of its promoters, the meeting was intended to constitute a preliminary step toward the possible convocation of a pan-Orthodox council and, at the same time, to consolidate the position of the Moscow Patriarchate within the Orthodox world.

The reserved reaction of certain Orthodox Churches, especially the patriarchates of Greek tradition and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, led to the postponement of the initial 1947 project and to its reformulation as a consultation or pan-Orthodox conference organized in Moscow in July 1948. Although participation was not unanimous, the gathering brought together delegations from most Orthodox Churches and from the diaspora, becoming a significant moment in the affirmation of the Moscow Patriarchate within the international Orthodox sphere.

The analysis of Soviet documents also reveals that this initiative possessed a pronounced geopolitical dimension. The conference was conceived as a counterweight to Western religious initiatives, particularly in the context of the founding of the *World Council of Churches* in Amsterdam in 1948. In this sense, the Moscow consultation aimed not only to highlight the unity of Orthodoxy around the Russian Patriarchate but also to integrate ecclesiastical discourse into a political rhetoric compatible with Soviet positions regarding opposition to "the colonial system of Western imperialism" and to the risk of the outbreak of a new global conflict.

Consequently, the chapter demonstrates that Soviet religious diplomacy employed Orthodox institutions and discourse in order to project international influence and to legitimize, at the symbolic and cultural level, the strategic objectives of the Soviet Union within the emerging international system of the Cold War.

In the first part of the chapter, therefore, I analyzed the context in which the Moscow conference of 1948 (*Moscow I*) took place, emphasizing the influence exerted by the Soviet authorities on the initiative of the Moscow Patriarchate to convene a pan-Orthodox gathering. The difficult negotiations that preceded the proceedings were examined, as were the tactics adopted by the Orthodox Churches of Greek tradition – which initially rejected the Russian invitation, accepting it only reluctantly and shortly before the opening of the conference – and their sudden change of position, which contemporaries attributed to Western pressure. The analysis also highlighted the active role of secular diplomacy in this process, as correspondence between the Churches was often mediated or influenced by governments interested in the matter, particularly those in Athens, Ankara, Cairo, Damascus, London, and Washington. These elements, however, represent only part of the

complex picture of the relationship between politics and ecclesiastical life in the postwar context.

The second part of the chapter follows the resumption of the pan-Orthodox process within a framework different from that established in Moscow in 1948. The election of the new patriarch, in the person of the Archbishop of New York, Athenagoras I (Spyrou), as head of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (1 November 1948) represented an important moment in this development. Already during his journey to Constantinople, while stopping in Paris, Athenagoras had discussed with representatives of the Church of England the possibility of relaunching pan-Orthodox dialogue in a form capable of addressing the issues left unresolved at *Moscow I*, among which the relationship of the Orthodox Churches with the Ecumenical Movement occupied a central place. The installation of the new patriarch in Constantinople (in spring 1949) led to a reconfiguration of the policy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including in its relations with the Church of Greece. In certain respects, the Synod of Athens adopted a more reserved attitude toward the ecumenical orientation of Patriarch Athenagoras, whose openness to dialogue with Roman Catholics and with the Ecumenical Movement was viewed with some reluctance. These tensions would also be reflected in the non-participation of the Church of Greece in the first pan-Orthodox conference at Rhodes.

At the beginning of the 1960s, in a context marked by significant changes in the Orthodox world and by renewed pressures exerted by the Soviet authorities upon the Russian Orthodox Church after the death of Stalin, the Ecumenical Patriarchate initiated a new cycle of pan-Orthodox conferences under the guidance of Patriarch Athenagoras. The announcement of the organization of a first meeting, scheduled between 24 September and 1 October 1961 on the island of Rhodes – a territory politically under the sovereignty of Greece but canonically under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – was made by Metropolitan Maximos of Sardes at the beginning of 1961, in statements given to journalists in Geneva.

The conference at Rhodes in 1961 represented one of the most important moments of pan-Orthodox cooperation in the postwar period. Bringing together delegates from fourteen autocephalous Orthodox Churches, the meeting was perceived as a significant moment in the reaffirmation of Orthodox unity and in the restoration of a synodal balance after the experience of a more directed form of unity characteristic of the Moscow meeting of 1948. The conference opened a series of preparatory pan-Orthodox meetings – four preliminary conferences (*Rhodes I-III* and *Chambésy I*) and five pre-synodal conferences

(*Chambésy II-VI*) – intended to prepare the future *Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church* (*Crete I*).

Although no major decisions were adopted at Rhodes I, the conference played an essential role in establishing a list of themes to be discussed at future pan-Orthodox meetings and, in the longer term, at the Holy and Great Council. An important particularity of this meeting, in contrast with the Moscow conference of 1948, was its openness to inter-Christian dialogue. Observers from other Christian traditions were therefore invited to the proceedings, including representatives of the non-Chalcedonian Churches, the Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Old Catholics, as well as delegates of the World Council of Churches. Shortly after the conference, several Orthodox Churches would join this organization at the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in New Delhi (19 November – 5 December 1961). The Roman Catholic Church did not send official observers to Rhodes I; nevertheless, the conference was followed by Catholic journalists and theologians involved in promoting ecumenical dialogue, such as Pierre Duprey (*Proche-Orient Chrétien*), Joseph Dumont (*Istina*), Jean Van Druyven (*Irénikon*), Antoine Wenger (*La Croix*), and E. Yungklausen (*Una Sancta*).

Chapter Five

The final chapter, entitled "**At Caesar's Gates. Religious Denominations in Romania and the Revalidation of the Most Favored Nation Clause (1987)**", proposes a case study concerning an external mission of religious denominations from Romania to the United States of America, carried out in 1987. The analysis of this episode aims to illustrate the manner in which the Romanian communist regime employed the religious factor as a diplomatic instrument at a sensitive moment in Romanian-American bilateral relations, marked by the debates regarding the revalidation of the *Most Favored Nation* clause (MFN). Within this chapter, attention is drawn to the stage reached, toward the end of the 1980s, in the involvement of representatives of religious denominations in activities connected to foreign policy, offering a significant example of the way in which the communist authorities attempted to utilize the religious dimension in dialogue with the West.

Although this episode does not represent a typical case for the overall conduct of Romanian foreign policy and is not directly linked to the developments of the pan-

Orthodox process analyzed in the preceding chapters, its context and implications render it relevant to the theme of the study. The mission of the Romanian religious delegation was conceived as an instrument of persuasion in dialogue with the American authorities, at a moment when Washington's criticisms concerning the observance of human rights and religious freedoms in Romania had become increasingly visible. Within this framework, the regime in Bucharest resorted to representatives of religious denominations in order to convey conciliatory messages and to suggest the existence of a certain degree of internal religious freedom, in the hope of preserving the economic advantages associated with MFN status, which at that time was still enjoyed by states such as Hungary and China. For the American administration, however, the issue of revalidating the clause had become, as Rozanne Ridgway, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, remarked in 1987, a genuine "moral dilemma".

Viewed retrospectively, this episode makes it possible to observe distinct stages in the evolution of relations between the Orthodox world and the major political dynamics of the postwar period. In 1948, at the conference in Moscow, the official discourse of Orthodoxy was strongly marked by the context of ideological confrontation, being directed against the Vatican, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Ecumenical Movement, under the direct influence of Soviet policy. Two decades later, through the pan-Orthodox conferences at *Rhodes* and *Chambésy*, the theological and diplomatic climate gradually began to change, and confessional tensions were tempered by the emergence of a new openness toward inter-Christian dialogue. This process would be symbolized by the rapprochement between the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI, within the broader context of the transformations that took place in the Catholic world as a result of the *Second Vatican Council*.

Two decades later, shortly after the pre-synodal conference at Chambésy in 1986, a delegation of religious denominations from Romania was sent to the United States, in the midst of an authoritarian regime, on a mission intended to influence Western perceptions of the situation of religious freedom in the country. During the visit, the delegation held meetings with American officials and with members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, while its presence at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York conferred considerable visibility on the initiative. In this context, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală referred to the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in ecumenical dialogues and in relations between Orthodox and Catholics, presenting an image of Romanian Orthodoxy markedly different from that of the early postwar years.

Only after the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe were the Orthodox Churches able to carry out their activities within a framework of genuine freedom. Nevertheless, the experiences and compromises of the communist period left deep marks on institutional life and on the mentality of predominantly Orthodox societies, the consequences of which, in certain cases, remain visible to this day.

Through this structure, the thesis follows a broad evolution – from the political reconfiguration of Europe in the first years of the postwar period (1945-1947) to the recovery of a certain pan-Orthodox synodal equilibrium, illustrated by the conference at Rhodes in 1961, held under the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras. Within this trajectory, the profound transformations of the relations between the Orthodox Churches and the international political environment are examined, highlighting the manner in which religious institutions were integrated, at different moments, into the strategies of influence of the major powers of the period. If the first chapters analyze the geopolitical context of pan-Orthodox initiatives and the role played by the Moscow Patriarchate in the early years of the Cold War, the fifth chapter brings the analysis to a later stage through a case study concerning the use of the religious factor in Romanian diplomacy during the 1980s. This episode illustrates how, within a political context different from that of the early Cold War, representatives of religious denominations could be mobilized in foreign policy actions, confirming the persistence of a complex interaction between religion and diplomacy in the Orthodox sphere of the twentieth century.

Elements of Innovation in Terms of Sources, Interpretation, and Methodology

By adopting a *multiperspectival approach*, I cross-referenced a wide range of historical sources originating from various domestic and international archives, employing a three-dimensional analytical model: *categorial* (organizing the facts, situating them within their context, and structuring historical understanding within intelligible frameworks), *axiological* (seeking the moral dimension underlying actions, through inquiry and discernment, and probing the motivations that animated the recent past), and *interpretative* (penetrating the symbolic layers of the fabric of events, strongly marked by cultural and ethnic imprints, in order to discern the translucence of history – that which is

not stated explicitly, yet is allowed to be glimpsed). At the same time, I avoided categorical judgments and insurmountable conclusions.

The attempt to harmonize the epistemological and methodological foundations of historical analysis with a vision structured along three constitutive axes (a vertical axis of values, a horizontal axis of categories, and a depth-oriented, interpretative axis) helped ensure that the analysis did not depart excessively from the hermeneutical framework proposed by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and his theory of international relations, thus remaining marked by the idea of "expansion" (in time, space, thematic scope, motivations, and analytical depth).

Concretely, the study is neither a purely event-centered analysis nor a genuinely speculative one, and even less a reflective-theological approach. By employing the methodological combination outlined above, I pursued two simple objectives: a deeper and clearer understanding of the past and the strengthening of our critical awareness. This allows for a more discerning distinction between the essential and the secondary, between truth and ideology, between identity and narrow-mindedness, without renouncing the cultural and religious values that nourish us – values that must, on the contrary, be assumed with maturity as a point of departure for an authentic openness toward the other.

In conclusion, historical knowledge thus grounded can invigorate critical thinking; it can become a reliable guide, a school of lucid fidelity, in whose portico one's own heritage (cultural, political, religious, or ethnic) encounters the alterity of the "other". Ultimately, this transformative experience represents a form of discernment that learns to judge without condemning and to listen without losing itself.

Conclusions of the Thesis

The study examined Orthodox religious diplomacy between 1943 and 1961 within a geopolitical context shaped by the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War. Its *principal objective* was to identify continuities, permanences, and ruptures in the manner in which the Orthodox Churches participated in international relations, with particular emphasis on the pan-Orthodox dynamic between *Moscow I* (1948) and *Rhodes I* (1961). The analysis demonstrates that the Churches functioned both as instruments of states and as autonomous actors, navigating between geopolitical pressures and pan-Orthodox solidarity. The Moscow Patriarchate was integrated into the foreign policy of the

USSR, while the Ecumenical Patriarchate was supported by the United States as a pro-Western counterweight. National Churches (Romania, Greece, Serbia, among others) adopted oscillating diplomatic strategies, negotiating between internal autonomy and external pressures.

The research offers several original contributions. First, it *integrates diplomatic and ecclesiastical sources* (Soviet, American, and Western documents that enable the reconstruction of the decision-making context of the Churches). Second, it *correlates ecclesiastical and political sources* (the parallelism between ecclesiastical communications and the reactions of states highlights the ambivalence of religious diplomacy as both an instrument of propaganda and a space for negotiation). Third, it *proposes a typology of diplomatic models* (the Soviet model – subordinated to the state; the Constantinopolitan model – based on moral and ecumenical authority; and national models – characterized by identity-based negotiation). The study also establishes a connection with the contemporary pan-Orthodox process: the conferences at *Rhodes* and *Chambésy* influenced *the Council of Crete* (2016), demonstrating the continuity of the impact of external pressures on pan-Orthodox organization. The thesis thus shows that postwar Orthodoxy constituted a subtle yet constant factor within the diplomatic architecture of the Cold War.

Orthodox religious diplomacy functioned both as an indicator and as an instrument of foreign policy. *Moscow I* (1948) illustrated the use of religion as a response to the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, thereby legitimizing Soviet initiatives. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, supported by the United States, became a pro-Western counterbalance, while the national Churches expressed both their internal and external positions. Documents of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches reveal their involvement in dialogues concerning peace, human rights, and disarmament. In this sense, the study of Orthodox religious diplomacy offers an essential perspective on postwar foreign policy, demonstrating that religion functioned both as a geopolitical instrument and as an indicator indispensable for understanding the international relations of the twentieth century.

The final conclusion is that Orthodox religious diplomacy cannot be understood either as a mere appendage of states or as an exclusively ecclesiastical expression. Rather, it proves to be a complex phenomenon in which *geopolitical logic*, *religious tradition*, and *international pressure* intersect. From this perspective, the present research offers not only a historical understanding of the period 1943-1961, with ramifications extending to subsequent developments in the pan-Orthodox process between 1963 and 2016, but also

possible interpretative keys for the present and the future. In a world in which religion is once again becoming a major factor in global conflicts and negotiations, the postwar Orthodox experience represents an indispensable reference point for contemporary diplomacy, within which the horizon of its potential role may be the restoration of geopolitical balance: *peace*.

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