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# **Faith and Secularization: A Romanian Narrative**

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*Edited by*  
*Wilhelm Dancă*

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## INTRODUCTION

*WILHELM DANCĂ*

During November 22-23, 2013, the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, University of Bucharest, with the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy from the Catholic University of Washington D.C., organized an International Conference on “Faith in a Secular Age”.

Secularization is a complex spiritual, cultural and socio-political phenomenon, constantly expanding in some parts of the world through mass media and globalization. It involves a specific mentality and life style, with virtually no reference to Transcendence. To some, secularization is synonymous with the “death of God” announced by Nietzsche and other modern thinkers. To others, secularism is a banishment of faith, a radicalized freedom, where truth is rendered relative and material wealth praised, while the quality of human interaction is neglected and fundamental human values are degraded. In a secularized context God is no longer referenced in the public discourse of former Christian communities, and the inherited values of the Church’s tradition are no longer important. Many Christians seek and improvise new ways of living, and authentic faith is no longer at hand. Some get scared and some even give up hope. Yet some regard secularization as a providential challenge to be dealt with optimistically and bravely, and seek new ways to bring their faith and scriptural values up to date.

Generally speaking, the approximately sixty participants in this conference focused their main attention on the sources of secularization: the political ideologies of the last two centuries, globalization, the Church’s self-secularization following the Second Vatican Council, liberation theology, the philosophy of resentment, etc. But seen from inside, the participants were divided in two parts: one part tried to explore fresh directions in conceptualizing faith as well as in living it in a secularized context, so that faith can cease to be further diluted and can be authentically and integrally experienced; the other part dedicated their contributions to the project “Disjunctions between Church and People”, a project initiated by Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean.

The authors are eight professors working in different Universities, Churches and Christian communities of Romania. The volume is divided into two parts. The first starts with the presentation of the disjunctions between Church and people within the Roman Catholic Church of

Bucharest. In order to understand this spiritual and ecclesiastical challenge, another three papers introduce us to the Romanian religious context which is dominated by the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The second part continues the discussion already initiated in the first part and shows us what “secularization” could mean within the Romanian religious construct. The volume ends with an epilogue. The author of this final paper tries to say in a personalistic way and according to the phenomenological method that the priest plays an important role regarding the relation between Church and People.

***Part I. Disjunctions between the Catholic Church and the People in the Romanian Orthodox Context***

Chapter I, “Wellness” in Religion, a Way of Emptying Churches?, by Wilhelm Tauwinkl, helps us to jump directly into the Roman Catholic Church of Bucharest, and to gain an idea about the level of the disjunctions between Church and People from the local point of view. His contribution is based on interviewing 100 young people aged between 18-30, practicing Roman Catholics in the parishes of Bucharest, who were asked to answer questions regarding the frequency of religious practices, basic religious culture and catechetical knowledge, adhesion to the Church official teaching of faith, ethical views, attitude towards the Church, and the motivation of religious behavior. By analyzing the answers, he concludes that the group of practicing young Catholic people reveals the emerging buds of three types of disjunctions, which will probably manifest themselves in the future, if pastoral work will not succeed to take measures: disjunction between the present-day religious convictions and Tradition, disjunction between the clergy and the faithful, while the disjunction between the Catholics and the rest of the population is only partial and may disappear in time. The break with Tradition is already manifesting itself by the fact that the motivation of young people’s religious behavior is, to a large extent, based on some sort of religious “wellness”: peace of mind, the nice feeling of being “OK”, taking interest in common activities with other young people. All these are good in themselves, but not specifically Christian. A motivation based on “feeling” can disappear any time, for instance, at any moment young people would be able to satisfy the same (spiritual) needs elsewhere than in their Catholic parishes. This could lead to an emptying of churches, wherein only those having strictly religious motivations, such as eternal salvation, will remain. For Wilhelm Tauwinkl, a solution would be to reconnect catechesis and Christian formation to the Tradition of transmitting faith, based on Scripture and its interpretation by the Church Fathers and Doctors.

Chapter II, “Contradictory Sign of What is Missing: A Narrative of Romanian Postcommunist Religiosity”, by Violeta Barbu, starts with an analysis of the high level of religious practice among the Romanian people and the question about the “binding agent” of the present-day Romanian social, political and religious construct. From the outside, this construct seems to correspond to a pattern of post-secularization. Within the horizon of this pattern, the religiosity of Romanian Christian believers is shaped by the tradition and liturgy of the Romanian Orthodox Church, therefore we could speak about it in terms like “ethno-religion” (David Martin), neo-Durkheimian religiosity, “social sacred” (Charles Taylor), or “vicarial religion” (Gracie Davis). From the inside, the Romanian post-secularization phenomenon has numerous advocates and few critics. The advocates differentiate between the level of the public life of the Romanian Orthodox Church as institution and the level of the individual beliefs and behavior. The critics underline that the Orthodox Church in Romania has had in the long run a history of difficult relationships with modernity and is responsible for the tardiness, the delay, the resistance or the passivity shown by Romanian society to modernity. So, the “binding agent” is the Romanian Orthodox Church that has passed unaltered through the transition from communism to democracy. After 1989 there was put into practice a new strategy meant to assure a re-enforcement and a stronger legitimization of the Orthodox Church within the public space. Finally, Violeta Barbu asks herself whether it could possibly constitute a wall against secularization. The history of the Romanian transition shows that to be possible. In fact, in more than two decades the Romanian Orthodox Church succeeded in reshaping itself optimally according to the new democratic order, while retrieving and gradually consolidating its presence within the public space.

Chapter III, “Coming Back to Religion. The Imaginary Visit of a French Canadian to Today’s Romania”, by Gabriela Blebea Nicolae, challenges all of us with an important question: how was it possible to build or to re-build in Romania, after 1990, so many churches, monasteries and religious educational institutions? One church in 15 was built after 1990 and the number of new monasteries is equal to that of monasteries built between the 13th century and the beginning of communism. Even though the above data refer only to the Orthodox Church, the same holds true for the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic Churches. Following immediately after 1990, religion was introduced in primary and secondary education. Indeed, religious education (regardless of denomination) nowadays has faculties, seminaries, colleges and schools in an exponentially higher number than before the fall of communism. By all accounts, this is a picture of the “return to religion”. For Gabriela Blebea Nicolae this “coming back to

religion” could be a “compensation” effect for the communist period during which churches used to be demolished, though many of them were “invaluable monuments”. Then some old churches were demolished and the construction of new churches was forbidden. But does the “return to religion” involve an authentic engagement of faith or it is just a compensatory effect of the communist restraints? Unfortunately, no “correct” answer can be given as long as *believer identity* is only determined from the inside. As external observers we can only judge if someone seems to be a good or not so good believer than our own standards dictate. The abundance of pilgrimages to read “acatiste”, to touch the relics of saints or to meet the *charismatic priests*, all goes to show that Romanians, especially Orthodox Romanians, put their trust in God. But except for these punctual moments, when the power of miracles seems to be the strongest conviction related to faith, the average Romanian's life does not seem to be cadenced by the rhythm of faith. However, the identity of a believer is something that Romanians hold dear. It is a valorizing identity, most likely deeply rooted in history. Because of this, the respect shown for the clergy was until recently beyond any criticism. In recent years, especially through the voices of sociologists and political analysts, priests have been removed from divine protection and their gestures have become a subject of public debate.

Chapter IV, “Becoming Secular? Dynamics of Teaching Religion and Ethics in Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparative Study Focusing on Romania”, by Raluca Bigu, tries to explain how the fall of communism re-installed Religious Education (RE) into school curricula, and the secularization affecting Western Europe shaped the way in which religion was taught in Central and Eastern Europe in the last 20 years. While a complex puzzle of factors has to be taken into account when evaluating the different approaches concerning RE in Central and Eastern European countries, there has been a development, the paper argues, towards limiting RE in public schools, and thus the role of religion in public life. This trend can be seen both as a reflection of a West-imported secularism and of a more preminent role assumed by local civic societies, developed in these states after the fall of communist regimes, in the debate concerning the place of RE in public schools. The paper identifies and discusses two features of that perceived trend in several former communist Central and Eastern European countries: the widespread optional character of teaching RE and the study of ethics as an alternative subject to religious instruction. Still, challenging this secularization trend, one can also notice signs of a different approach in an Orthodox-dominant country like Romania, where religion is taught in a confessional manner without offering an alternative subject. Raluca Bigu is thus concerned to place Romania into the broader Central and



Eastern Europe context of teaching RE in public schools, while also analyzing the particular cultural, social and historical context that gave way to the specific formula adopted for religious instruction in public schools.

## ***Part II. “Secularization” and Public Religious Life in Romania***

Chapter V, “Is Nationalism a Form of Secularization for Orthodoxy?”, by Gelu Sabău, follows the hypothesis of French author Olivier Clément, according to which nationalism is a form of secularization of Orthodoxy. But the starting point is the analysis of the three meanings of secularization proposed by Charles Taylor and the discord between Taylor’s sense of the significance of secularization and Romanian religious realities. Two hypotheses regarding the impact which modernity had within the Romanian religious life are inquired into by Gelu Sabău: 1) given the way in which state and Church relations are built, once the modernization of the state begins, the Church becomes an instrument of consolidation of the national state; and 2) religious nationalism is stimulated in modern Romania, thus becoming an important ideological instrument and a vector of national identity. As introduction to the first hypothesis, Gelu Sabău has drawn a short history of the evolution of the relations between state and Church during three important periods for Romania’s modern history: from Alexandru Ioan Cuza to the First World War, the interwar period, and the communist period. During Cuza’s reign, the bases of relations between Church and state were established in modern Romania, but after the Union from 1918, a compromise was reached between the model of the relations between state and Church from the Old Kingdom, and the one from Transylvania. Regarding the second hypothesis, Gelu Sabău has looked into the relation between religious nationalism, Orthodox space and modernity, starting from the theory proposed by American political scholar Philip Barker. Although religious nationalism is not specific to the Orthodox space, Gelu Sabău has considered that in Romania’s case religious nationalism became stronger during the modern era. This aspect means that for Romanian believers, the religious nationalism was, simultaneously, a paradoxical form of adaptation and resistance to modernity.

Chapter VI, “Secularization under Communism. Romanian Legislative Measures”, by Marius Silveșan, focuses attention on the legislative measures taken by the communist regime in Romania (1948-1989), which minimized the role of faith in public life. M. Silveșan distinguishes “general legislation” which did not have specific religious environment applicability, from “particular legislation” which did. Specifically, in the first category he includes the three constitutions of

the communist regime in Romania (1948, 1952, 1965), education law, the Criminal Code; in the second one, the general law of religious denominations, the religious denominations statutes drawn up under the supervision of the “guidance” of the State, the organization and functioning law of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Decree on organization and functioning of the Department of Religious Affairs, as well as other decisions unpublished in the Official Gazette or the Official Bulletin. The most important secularizing laws were the regulation of religious services in 1952, a decision aimed at reducing religious services in evangelical or protestant denominations (Adventist, Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostal). No doubt the decisions regulating religious life, the assignation decision affected other churches too, not only evangelical churches known as neo-protestant, but M. Silveșan underlines their effects on the religious life of neo-protestant peoples.

Chapter VII, “The Impossible Secularization”, by Mihai Maci, sustains that in present-day Romania, secularization is impossible, because it is not ahead of us, but behind. But this spiritual and religious process is complex and two decades after the Revolution of 1989, Romania seems to be a secularized society as in the West. All surveys affirm the exaggerated trust that the population has in the Church, but neither the religious knowledge, nor the attendance at the services reflect this trust. The impression that the data generated is that people excessively exaggerate the value of the Church, as much as they draw away from it. In order to understand the way that the Romanians relate to the Church – particularly to the dominant one in number: the Orthodox Church – M. Maci considers a short history of the relationships between that and the State in the Communist time and in the decades that followed. After this historical analysis, he tries to offer a panoramic view of the evolution of Romanian society in the last century and to underline the impact of the related social mutations had over religiosity manifested in public life. In short, this paper gives an overview of the forms that secularization manifested in contemporary Romania. Its perspective is social in that elements of anthropology and sociology are combined with religion and psychology of peoples.

### *Epilogue*

“The Priest’s Temptations and the People’s Escape from Church”, by Wilhelm Dancă, offers a personal reflection on Disjunctions between Church and People, focused on the role played by the priest in relation to God and people. Following the phenomenological method, the paper starts with an overview of the local ecclesiastical context, where there emerge three important challenges: the problematic meaning of priestly ministry, a great importance given to the governing structures, and the

materialistic pressure to reduce the role of the spiritual life. In this context, the Catholic priest is the preferred object of some old and new temptations. The old ones are known, but still relevant in our context: the temptation to minister in a way that serves his own interests, clericalism and democratism. The new ones are inspired by Pope Francis' *Evangelii gaudium* of which three have special importance: relativisation of priestly identity, isolation from the people, and embracing a spiritual worldliness. In response, there are two ways: either to resist through prayer, meditation, conversation, spiritual friendship, dialogue, or to escape from serving the Lord or from the people, and find refuge in political life, as very often happens. Behind the priest's escapes is the main root of all temptations: the neglect of a relationship with God. From the beginning to the end, the paper is intended to confront two figures of relationships with God: Jonah who ran away from the face of the Lord, and Job, who, after having himself revolted against God, came to peace with Him. The main goal of the paper is to propose to priests and their supporters to choose Job's style of life and his capacity to dialogue with friends, enemies, and God.



**PART I**

**DISJUNCTIONS BETWEEN  
CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PEOPLE WITHIN  
THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CONTEXT**



**CHAPTER I**

**“WELLNESS” IN RELIGION,  
A WAY OF EMPTYING CHURCHES?**

*WILHELM TAUWINKL*

The present study is based on a survey focused on religious interests, and conducted among the young people involved in youth activities in the Roman Catholic parishes of Bucharest, Romania.

In recent years, various surveys were conducted in Romania regarding the religious motivations of Christians. These included that of Lucia Iorga, concluded in 2002,<sup>1</sup> which targeted the entire population of Romania with all Christian denominations. It sought to establish some connections between religious behavior and various regions of the country, denominations, sex, occupation, etc. Our survey took up some of the questions of this study.

The research of Emanuel Cosmovici was based on a questionnaire handed out at the national meetings of the Catholic youth (in 2003 at Oradea, and in 2006 at Șumuleu-Ciuc), under the aegis of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Geneva, and the Greek Catholic Bishopric of Oradea, by permission of HE Bishop Virgil Bercea. This research aimed at producing a “Christian profile of the Catholic youth”, and obtaining useful data for pastoral activity.<sup>2</sup>

The present research did not aim at measuring the level of personal commitment in practicing religion, though it includes questions about the frequency of practice. Based on interviewing several committed Christians and studying their answers to the questions about religious practices and their motivation, it sought whether their religious experience contains the buds of a break with Tradition, of a break between the clergy and the faithful, or of one between Christians and the rest of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Lucia Iorga, *De la ateism la sfințenie. O abordare psihologică a motivației comportamentului religios [From Atheism to Holiness. A Psychological Approach to the Motivation of Religious Behavior]* (Bucharest: Elena Francisc Publishing, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> The questionnaires and their results are published online only: Cultura persoanei. Situl Asociației Programele Bunavestire Bucharest. *Sondajele INTC [The Culture of Person. The Website of the Annunciation Programmes Association of Bucharest. The Surveys of the National Meetings of the Catholic Youth]*, accessed on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013. <http://www.culturapersoanei.ro/index.php?action=sondaje>.

## THE INTERVIEWED GROUP

The interview was addressed to a group of 100 young people with ages between 18 and 30, involved in the activities of the Roman Catholic parishes of Bucharest. According to the results of the Population and Housing Census of 2011, the population of the capital city is approximately 1.8 million inhabitants, of whom about 26,000 are Catholics. Taking into account the structure of the population according to age, we can approximate that of this number, there are about 4,600 Catholic youths in Bucharest, between the ages of 18 and 30.<sup>3</sup> If we also consider that the percentage of practicing Catholics in Bucharest does not exceed 25% (1,150 persons), then the 100 young people interviewed represent about 8.7% of the total of the target group.

Keeping in mind the purpose of the present research and the small number of the target group, we did not think it important to also take into consideration the structure of the representative group in terms of civil status, studies and occupation.

## METHODOLOGY

The present survey is not a Gallup poll, but an interview containing questions usually present in such polls. It has been first multiplied on paper, containing only questions with open answers, and pre-tested on a group of 20 students of the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology within the University of Bucharest. After the pre-testing, we came to the conclusion that several questions can be formulated as multiple-choice.

The interview has been subsequently worked out as an anonymous online questionnaire, its results being centralized in a file to which the author alone has had access. The link to take part in the questionnaire was made public within the youth organizations of the Roman Catholic parishes of Bucharest.<sup>4</sup>

Answers received that did not comply with the required criteria were omitted, such as:

- age outside the established interval (18-30);

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<sup>3</sup> The results of the most recent census are, for the time being, available only online and in Romanian: Institutul Național de Statistică [National Institute of Statistics], *Recensământul populației și al locuințelor 2011 [Population and Housing Census 2011]*, last modified July 4, 2013. <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2>.

<sup>4</sup> We owe thanks to Mr. Petru-Ciprian Bradu for his help in disseminating the questionnaire.



- affiliation to another denomination than the Catholic one;
- desire to create a good image of oneself;<sup>5</sup>
- answers given by the clergy.

The answers of the clergy were not taken into consideration in the present study, as these should be analyzed in a differently structured interview. The questionnaire did not require any mention about the respondent’s occupation, yet the occurrence of some answers that seemed to be taken out of theological text books or biographies of saints was taken as a clue that the respondent could be a clergyman, a monk, or sought to promote a vision much more optimistic than reality.

The results were collected between the 5<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> of October 2013. The online questionnaire was closed upon receipt of derisive answers, taken as an indication that the link accidentally reached persons outside the aimed-at circle, who did not relate to the purpose of the questionnaire.

#### **STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND THE ANSWERS PROVIDED**

The questionnaire contained 40 questions of various types (multiple-choice and open answer questions) and covering various subjects, in an order that alternated the themes in such a way as to elicit spontaneous answers, instead of answers prepared by reflecting on other questions belonging to the same category. Nevertheless, in what follows we shall present them grouped according to the themes to which they pertain, in order to facilitate understanding.

Some questions are similar to those in Lucia Iorga’s and Emanuel Cosmovici’s questionnaires, although, in general, are formulated from a different perspective. These retakes proved useful in analyzing the possible break between the group of Catholic young people and the whole of the population (see further down).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Visible by means of specific questions; see below.

<sup>6</sup> In what follows, the correspondence between our questionnaire and that of Lucia Iorga will be signaled by the abbreviation “LI”, followed by the question number in Annex 2, see Iorga, *De la ateism la sfințenie*, pp. 231-243. Questions that are similar to those in Emanuel Cosmovici’s survey are signaled by the abbreviation “EC”, followed by the question number of the 2003 questionnaire, see *Cultura persoanei, Sondajele INTC – Oradea 2003*, “Chestionarul distribuit” (*The Culture of Person. The Surveys of the National Meetings of the Catholic Youth – Oradea 2003*), “The Distributed Questionnaire”, accessed on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013: <http://www.culturapersoanei.ro/index.php?action=chestionar2003>).

The personal experience based on inside knowledge of the life of the Catholic Church of Bucharest was also of great use when choosing the themes on which the questions were based.

#### *Data about the Respondents*

The final questions of the questionnaire aimed at circumscribing the respondents to the category of persons of interest to us.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Sincerity Test*

The interview contained three questions referring to acts that are innocent in themselves, but which are usually hidden by those wanting to present themselves to others as perfect. We have thus left aside those questionnaires whose answers betrayed such tendencies.

#### *Frequency of Religious Practices*

Question 2 is looking for a confirmation of working with a target group made up of committed young people, who attend the Church. The correlations between the answer to this question and the frequency of other religious acts (the other questions above), as well as other religious and spiritual aspects, looked into by means of questions from other fields (see below), will prove useful here.

- 2. How often do you go to Church? (cf. LI 28; cf. EC 9)
- 8. How often do you take Communion?
- 10. How often do you go to confession? (cf. LI 34; cf. EC 10)
- 25. How often do you read the Bible? (cf. LI 32; cf. EC 36)
- 26. In which circumstances do you pray? (cf. LI 38; cf. EC 6)
- 28. In which situations do you give alms? (cf. LI 42)
- 32. In which circumstances do you resort to a priest? (cf. LI 30)

Of the persons interviewed, 83% answered that they go to church every Sunday and on every feast or more often; this percentage confirms the fact that the interview was addressed to committed Christian young people. For better consistency, we shall report in what follows only the answers of this percentage of fervent practicing Christians.

About half of these do not take Communion every time they take part in the liturgy, but much more rarely (monthly, a few times a year or

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<sup>7</sup> In what follows, the questions are grouped thematically and not following the order in the questionnaire; the latter can be deduced from numbering.

even less); the frequency of taking Communion with these persons corresponds to the frequency of taking part in the sacrament of penance.<sup>8</sup>

Of the fervent practicing Christians, all answered that they pray daily or at least occasionally, and that they resort to a priest in different situations. Only 10% asserted that they never give alms.

More unusual is the fact that almost half of those who go to church every Sunday or more often never read the Bible, or read it very rarely, or did not answer this question.

### *Catechetical Knowledge and Religious Culture*

These three questions seem to be quite simple and we would expect that any committed Christian would know the answers. But we chose to check this, given the generalizing lack of interest in any type of study or cultural and professional formation in Romania nowadays, a situation from which we suppose Catholic young people are not exempt.

7. What is the role of the baptism of children? (cf. LI 15)

16. What does “Holy Trinity” mean?

20. Who uttered “Our Father” for the first time? (LI 17)

According to the answers, it appeared that it is not self-evident that the young people who go to church every Sunday know the answer to these simple questions. Almost half of the respondents answered nothing, gave a non-religious answer (“to become Christian”) or a fanciful one (such as, “in order to receive the name of the guardian angel”, “in order to nourish our soul”) to the question about the role of children’s baptism.

Equally, 40% of them did not give any answer to the question about the significance of the Holy Trinity, or gave a fanciful answer (for instance, “a united family that sustains our life”).

35% of the young people attending church every Sunday answered the question about the author of the “Our Father” prayer that they do not know, which is understandable, given the high percentage of those who never read the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> We will show below how this situation can be interpreted within the context of our theme, as well as those presented next.

<sup>9</sup> We considered the answer “Jesus Christ” to be correct, just as it results from the canonical text of the Gospels. In fact, we did not receive any answers related to uncertainties of New Testament exegesis.

### *Adhesion to the Church Official Teaching of Faith*

The next questions aim at the likely divergence between personal beliefs and the official teaching of the Magisterium. We tried to formulate questions whose answers do not result directly from listening to the Sunday sermon.

1. What happens, in your opinion, to a man's soul after death? (cf. EC 13)
4. Do you believe in the existence of angels? (cf. EC 13)
5. Why does God allow evil in the world?
6. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "The only Saviour of all times is Jesus Christ"?
24. Do you believe that the Bible is the product of divine inspiration? (LI 25)
31. Does a person have to know Church teachings in order to reach eternal life? (cf. LI 19)

Almost all practicing respondents believe in the existence of angels, and 90% totally agree with the statement that "the only Savior of all times is Jesus Christ". Three quarters are absolutely convinced that the Bible is inspired by God; this answer is provided by more than half of those who never read the Bible.

Yet, one third of the practicing respondents gave an answer that parts with the official Church teaching to the question regarding the fate of the soul after death (namely, that it goes up to heaven, to hell, or to the purgatory) and they preferred one frequently encountered answer in the contemporary "spiritual non-religious" literature, as well as in movies ("it reincarnates itself", "it rises to heaven").

Concerning the reason why God allows evil in the world, 35% gave the classical answer in the theological tradition (man's free will). For the rest, very frequent was the explanation that God wants to teach people a lesson or to test them.

Over 40% of the persons interviewed do not consider the knowledge of the Church teachings as necessary for salvation.

### *Ethical Views*

These questions had to be formulated in such a way that the respondents could express their opinion, even if they had not been through the situations referred to by the questions. Similarly, we tried to avoid suggesting an "OK" answer, from the viewpoint of Christian ethics, in the way the question itself was formulated.

For what is true, question 23 does not *stricto sensu* pertain to an ethical view, but rather to a political one, concerning the utility of acknowledging a life-style by means of an institution. We can however include it in this category, knowing that for the committed Christians, the opinion about this political step could take heed of the Church traditional teaching which, though not condemning inborn homosexual inclinations, still considers homosexual acts as such, a sin.<sup>10</sup>

18. What advice do you give to a friend who complains that he/she is asked to do things that harm others at his/her work place?

19. What is the optimal solution for an incurably sick person in unbearable pain? (cf. EC 50)

21. Do you consider that it is natural nowadays to resort to abortion? (LI 21; cf. EC 50)

23. Do you consider that marriages between same-sex persons should also be celebrated in the Church? (cf. EC 50)

27. What do you do when someone close to you, whom you do not want to upset, asks you to do something you consider immoral?

34. What do you answer a relative or a friend who discloses to you his/her intention to get a divorce? (cf. EC 50)

Only 2% consider that euthanasia would be a solution to the incurably sick; the result does not necessarily spring from religious beliefs, keeping in mind that in Romania this alternative is considered acceptable by only about 3.3% of the population only.<sup>11</sup>

8% consider that it is not appropriate to celebrate the marriage of same-sex persons in the Church. Around 15% consider abortion acceptable, and if so, depending on each situation. These results do not spring from religious beliefs either, but are specific to Romania; it is to be noticed that they reveal, among the Catholic practicing young people, attitudes that are in fact more lenient than the average of the Romanians who consider homosexuality (2%) and abortion (4%) justified, according to the statistics.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. CCC, nos. 2357-2359.

<sup>11</sup> Joachim Cohen et al., “European Public Acceptance of Euthanasia: Socio-Demographic and Cultural Factors Associated with the Acceptance of Euthanasia in 33 European Countries”, *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 63 (2006), p. 748.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ilsa L. Lottes and Tapani Alkula, “An Investigation of Sexuality-Related Attitudinal Patterns and Characteristics Related to Those Patterns for 32 European Countries”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, vol. 8 (2011), p. 82. However, in the case of abortion, statistics offer an annual average of 600 abortions per 1,000 live-births for the period 2005-2010 (cf. National Institute

Almost 40% would advise their friend to refuse to do things at work that might harm others or to change his/her working-place, but only 8% would advise a friend considering to get a divorce not to do it. The most frequent answer coming up is “to think it over again”, which does not clearly reflect one’s attitude towards divorce, and which could imply either an urge to give up this intention, or an urge to a last attempt of making things up.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Attitude towards the Church*

These four questions regard the way in which the Christian young people perceive themselves within the Church or in relation to it. Question 22 seeks to gather information about the concrete commitment of Christians within the community they are part of; the personal, real contribution means more than the theoretical knowledge of belonging to a society of people. One single detail, as the one included in question 37, is usually ignored or overlooked by persons who belong only in name to a certain community.

22. In what circumstances do you donate money to the Church?

35. Give a few examples of the Church’s positive influences within society.

36. Give a few examples of bad things for which the Church is responsible. (cf. EC 22)

37. What is the name of the bishop to whose diocese/eparchy you belong?

All respondents answered that they donate money to the Church, at least at the collection during liturgy.

Of the young people who go to church weekly, 28% could not find one single example of a positive influence exerted by the Church in the society; the other answers mention aspects from very disparate fields.

Two thirds did not find any examples of bad things the Church would be responsible for. Those who answered mentioned the clichés present in the anti-religious propaganda ever since the Communist time

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of Statistics / Institutul Național de Statistică, *Romanian Statistical Yearbook / Anuarul statistic al României*, Year 2011, vol. 2: Population, p. 62).

<sup>13</sup> According to the polls, general opinion disapproves of divorce in Romania, being justified only by about 4.5% of the people (cf. Lottes and Alkula, *ibid.*). Between 2005-2010, for an annual average of 146,000 marriages, an annual average of about 34,000 divorces was recorded (23%), cf. National Institute of Statistics, *Yearbook 2011*, vol. 2: Population, p. 43.

(Inquisition, the crusades etc.), or contemporary mass-media clichés (pedophilia and so forth). Few answers seem to look in a concrete way at the present-day situation of the Church in Romania, mentioning the pursuit of material gains, the pride of the priests or the luxury they display. Yet, none of the answers considers the respondent’s own contribution, as a Christian, to the possible negative image of the Church within the society.

During Communist times, the (Catholic) Church was mentioned in the school text-books only in conjunction with the Inquisition, the crusades, corruption and so on, keeping silent about any positive influence it had in the society. It is at least interesting that the echoes of this type of education can still be heard, even in the case of the practicing Christian youth. Very strangely, among the positive influences, one of the answers mentions “fight for peace”, a slogan related to one of the diversions whereby the Communist regime was trying to push the Catholic Church towards breaking from the Holy See, and accepting the leaders imposed by the government back in the 1950’s.<sup>14</sup>

One quarter of the young people going to Church every Sunday cannot tell the name of their own bishop; probably some of them do not know what a bishop or what a diocese is, because they indicated the name of a parish priest when answering this question.

#### *Motivation of Religious Behavior*

Questions 3, 9, 11 and 33 are concerned with the motivation of religious practices, whose frequency was inquired about in questions 2, 8, 10 and 32. The other questions seek to unveil the presence of a spirituality molded by living Christian life within the community and, possibly, by spiritual direction.

3; 9; 11; 33. Why? – after questions 2, 8, 10 and 32 (cf. LI 29, 35, 31; cf. EC 5);

15. What is the main purpose of your life?

17. What do we have to do in order for our prayers to be heard? (cf. LI 40)

29. Is it useful to repay evil with good? (LI 44)

30. Why? (LI 45)

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<sup>14</sup> Francisca Băltăceanu et al., *Vladimir Ghika, profesor de speranță [Vladimir Ghika, Teacher of Hope]* (Bucharest: Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice, 2013), pp. 324-325; French ed.: *Vladimir Ghika, professeur d’espérance* (Paris: Cerf, 2013), pp. 326-328.

Over 60% of the practicing respondents consider it useful to repay evil with good; yet, only 15% indicate a Christian religious reason: the Gospel, the example of Jesus, glorifying God. The other answers could have been formulated by anyone who thinks of the common good in the society or, similarly, by persons who believe in the influence of some kind of *karma* in order to prevent doing more harm or not to become “negatively charged”, etc.

Eternal salvation represents the purpose of life for a third of those who go to church on a weekly basis. The others provided answers one would expect from anyone, not only from Christians: personal fulfillment, family, happiness, finding true love...

Of the answers of practicing Christians, none mentions the fact that the answer to a prayer depends on God’s will. Some answered, “I do not know” or did not answer at all, while the majority considers that the answer to a prayer depends on personal endeavor (“to utter it with your entire being”, “to trust it will be listened to”).

As regarding the motivation of religious behavior, inquired about by questions 3, 9, 11 and 33, less than 50% of the answers make reference to faith. Most of the respondents justify participation in the liturgy in terms of “feeling”: “I feel it is good this way”, looking for “peace of soul” or because it is “pleasant” (with reference to the songs listened to in church or organized youth activities). They take part in Communion out of the same reason, for “the peace of the soul”.

In the case of confession, no answer mentions contrition for one’s sins; God’s forgiveness for sins is mentioned in about 25% of the answers, but seen as being freed from under a burden (or even of regrets); once again, frequently mentioned is reference to “feeling forgiveness”, to the desire to have a reconciled and peaceful heart.

An interesting reason is “ritual”: receiving absolution as a way of gaining access to communion. The motivation is compliant with the correspondence existing between the frequency of confession and that of communion (see below). Motivation is once again confined to the need for inner peace: this is sought when taking part in the liturgy and in the Communion; considering that in order to receive the latter, confession is necessary, the reason for this is reduced to the need for a nice feeling.

## **DISJUNCTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE ANSWERS TO THE INTERVIEWS**

The answers received in our interviews suggest some disjunctions indeed, at least at an initial stage.



*Disjunction between Contemporary Religious Beliefs and Tradition?*

In order to verify such a disjunction, the free answers to the questions regarding the motivation of religious behavior prove to be of help. One standard is represented by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Drawn up in accord with the teachings of Scripture, and interpreted at the school of the Church Fathers and Doctors, it is, therefore, a systematic presentation of Christian teaching, in light of the centuries-old Tradition of transmitting the faith.<sup>15</sup> Intended as a reference text for other specific and local catechisms,<sup>16</sup> we should assume that the Christian teaching, that the interviewed young people took part in, is inspired by this text that seeks to deepen the Christian mystery.

According to the Catechism, the sacraments of the Church are necessary for salvation,<sup>17</sup> which can be considered as the motivation for taking part in them. The fact that the answers of those interviewed make very little reference to this reason (or not at all, on some of the questions), suggests that they have not taken part in a catechesis inspired by the biblical and patristic Tradition of the Church or, if they have, they have not assimilated it or do not agree with it. This conclusion is confirmed by their poor religious culture and catechetical knowledge (see above).

Admittedly, “the pleasure” of taking part in the sacraments could be a clue to the fact that this behavior has become a virtue.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately however, the answers to our questionnaire do not suggest this: it is not about the joy of a good moral behavior, but about attraction to details: Church music or other activities within the parish, such as meeting other young people. Certainly, there is nothing wrong about this, but these things do not pertain to a specifically Christian behavior, and can also be encountered in the case of a cultural or sports association, for that matter.

Especially the motivations indicated in the case of confession, related to acquiring peace of mind and being freed of a burden, also confirm that they are not related to the joy given by virtue. Such motivations are not themselves specifically religious (they can also be present through psychological counseling), and they are far away from the traditional teaching of the Church, which regards the participation in

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum* (11 October 1992), no. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Fidei depositum*, no. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. CCC, no. 1129, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, 68, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. CCC, no. 1804.

the sacrament of reconciliation as one form of repentance and conversion in Christian life.<sup>19</sup>

The emphasis on “feeling” when motivating the participation in religious activities and the absence of including one’s own religious experience in the tradition of Christian formation suggest a vision of the Church as an organization providing spiritual services for the purpose of a religious “wellness”.

*Disjunction between the Clergy and the Faithful?*

As shown above, the examples of bad things the Church is responsible for were always pointing at mistakes made by the clergy, leaving oneself and other lay people out. This might suggest the identification of the Church with the clergy in the minds of the young practicing Christians of Romania.

The view about the Church as an organization providing religious “wellness” (see above) also reveals a disjunction between the faithful and the priests: the latter are not seen as members of the same community, next to the faithful, but rather as officials of this organization, to whom the faithful resort when they need their services.

*Disjunction between the Catholics and the Rest of the Population?*

In many regards, the views and attitudes of the Catholic young people do not differ from those of the majority of population in Romania (see above, ethical views).

There is however a significant difference in favor of the Catholics, resulting from Lucia Iorga’s survey, as compared to most of the Orthodox population of Romania, in terms of religious knowledge and the motivations of religious behavior. This is explained by the participation of Catholic children and young people in catechetical classes within the parishes, which does not usually take place in the Orthodox parishes.<sup>20</sup>

The above-mentioned survey addressed the population of all ages and all areas of the country. Our survey, made ten years later and focusing on the views of the young people, does not contradict this difference, but only nuances it: interest in religious activities appears to be lessening, being, in many cases, motivated by external and not specifically Christian or religious elements (songs, recreational activities). This may point to a breaking-away from what Catholicism meant in Romania several years ago.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. CCC, nos. 1434-1439.

<sup>20</sup> Iorga, *De la ateism la sfințenie*, p. 180.

Instead, there is similarity to the tendencies of pastoral activity in the European German-speaking countries, with, in many regards, a practical application of Herbert Braun’s thesis. According to this, the sense that God is “a certain form of humanism (*Mitmenschlichkeit*)” is gaining ground.<sup>21</sup> Parish activities lay emphasis on this human sympathy, which can arouse the interest of some persons, but are no longer specifically religious or Christian.

## CONCLUSION

The drawbacks we have discovered so far are not generalized; we must be aware of the percentage resulted within each theme.

The tendency to look for a kind of “wellness” in religion – already present in a good number of the young Catholics – is, in our opinion, a way of leaving churches empty. Creating a pleasant environment in parishes is certainly useful and praiseworthy; but if the reference to what is specifically Christian disappears (the lack of rooting the catechesis in the traditionally biblical and patristic teaching, as was mentioned above), the remaining motivation is reduced to a mere interest in recreational activities.

In Romania, as compared to the Western European countries, for instance, these recreational youth activities are, at present, hard to find in other places than in the Catholic (and Protestant) parishes. The moment they gain ground, for instance in schools, or when more and more youth (sport, cultural etc.) associations emerge, they will probably compete successfully with the activities within the parishes. Those motivated by seeking “peace of mind” could give up religious practice when they can find it somewhere other than in the Church.

If this scenario comes true, certainly a discernment of motivations will take place and those really motivated by the religious aspects (such as, eternal salvation) will stick to the Church, rather than looking for spiritual “wellness” by means of religion. Taking into account their percentage (see above), we could witness the phenomenon of churches becoming empty of people. This can be certainly prevented, starting from resuming contact with the tradition of teaching and the Christian formation of the young.

For more information and a more detailed overview, it would be useful to enlarge this study to address more aspects of Christian life and more categories of Christians.

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<sup>21</sup> Herbert Braun, “Die Problematik einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments”, *Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr / Paul Siebeck, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1971), p. 341.

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**CHAPTER II**

**CONTRADICTIONARY SIGN OF  
WHAT IS MISSING:  
A NARRATIVE OF ROMANIAN  
POSTCOMMUNIST RELIGIOSITY**

*VIOLETA BARBU*

The transition phenomenon, which was experienced and is still being experienced by the former communist East European countries – now members of the European Union – represents an unprecedented historical experience, for which there is no recipe. It was preceded by a discontinuity in transmission, equally violent as that which had accompanied the installation of the communist regimes at the end of the World War II. This transmission crisis was generated by the fact that the new values could hardly penetrate beyond the obstinate survival of the identity ethos, of collective anxieties, of the obedience and subordination reflexes, of the absence of responsibility, of the ideological power and the loss of credibility on the part of the political sphere. There is no wonder that the confusion felt by these societies after the Fall of the Wall have affected in their turmoil not only institutions and systems of thinking, but social relationships as well.

In spite of the social common feeling that “the past should be left behind”, it can be easily noticed that after more than two decades, a society cannot survive without a “binding agent” of collective wisdom and beliefs, which have been passed down from one generation to another, and which keep a society functioning and confident about its future. Without this “binding agent”, the social construction comes to pieces and democracy itself, as the best modality of living together, becomes unable to offer meaning, a standard and an identity to the younger generations in search of hope and freedom.

The Romanian people have come out of the totalitarian catastrophe, with a mournful sentiment triggered by the humiliations endured under a horrid dictatorship and, afterwards, somehow unable to assume a past that refused to pass away. After the fall of communism, they have immediately sunk into an economical, social and moral crisis. Despite tremendous hardships, they still nurtured the hope of living better than their parents had lived or at least of enjoying more dignity and freedom. This society was coming out of an overwhelming past as one comes out of a hollow space over which bridges need to be built. Having rather hastily been assimilated to the standards and procedures

required in the process of adhering to the European Union, all the ideals of democracy and of European values that could otherwise have stimulated powerful beliefs, merely looked like a kind of feeble ontology – to employ Giani Vattimo’s words – even if this was and still remains the only social project embraced by the Romanian society with steadfast enthusiasm, as statistics show.<sup>1</sup> The key word was “reform”: the reform of the state institutions, the reform of the justice system, the reform of education etc.

### THE UNCERTAIN PAST OF A GLORIOUS PRESENT

The only institution that remained unaltered throughout this transition process, except for a few unsuccessful attempts to shake its credibility made in the first months after 1990, was the Greek-Orthodox Church. Therefore, religiosity is the only value that does not seem to have suffered a major transmission crisis during the change of the regime. At least, this is what statistics show. In 2012, the barometer “*Win-Gallup Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism*”, placed Romania among the first 10 most religious countries,<sup>2</sup> as being the 6<sup>th</sup>, as 89% of the adult population considered themselves to be religious and described themselves as such when answering the survey question: “*Irrespective of whether you attend a worship place or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious person or a convinced atheist?*” By far the most surprising fact was that among these 10 countries, Romania was the only member of the European Union.

Further series of data offered by the *European Values Survey* (EVS) and the *World Values Survey* (WVS) as the result of various surveys carried out in 1993, 1999, 2005 and 2008<sup>3</sup> indicate the same position at the question: “*How important is God in your life?*” In 2005, Romania was on the first place in Europe with a rating of 9.2 on a scale from 1 to 10, ahead of other countries such as Poland and Italy. In 2008,

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage reflecting the trust of the Romanian people in the European Union (about 45%), has been decreasing since 2007 (65%), when the process of adhering was taking place, until 2013, but remained however within the average of the other European countries. [http://ec.europa.eu/romania/documents/press\\_releases/11\\_07\\_eb67romania\\_presentation.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/romania/documents/press_releases/11_07_eb67romania_presentation.pdf); Vasile Puscas, *România de la preaderare la postaderare* [Romania from Pre-Adhering to Post-Adhering] (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> <http://redcresearch.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/RED-C-press-release-Religion-and-Atheism-25-7-12.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Results published by the Romanian group for the study of social values under the signature of Madalina Voicu: <http://www.iccv.ro/valori/newsletter/newsletter%202020religiozitatea.pdf>, see also Eadem, *România religioasă* [The Religious Romania] (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Institutului European, 2007).

the rating for Romania had dropped to 8.6. As the religious practice is concerned – “the average of going to church per month”<sup>4</sup> – according to WVS and based on surveys carried out in the context of a Greek-Orthodox majority, Romania had a percentage of 46% in 2005, which places it at the top of the chart of European countries after Poland and Italy.

These data offered by sociological indicators, data that are most amazing for a European country at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have in great measure justified the lack of a public debate with respect to whether Romania is or is not secularized. The question of secularization or of its absence within a society such as the Romanian one represents a difficult intellectual enterprise, as there are no adequate patterns and no suitable instruments of analysis. Possible key questions are themselves prone to pitfalls, of either historical or statistical nature. Is the present day Romanian society a post-secular one, whose resistance to the decrease of religiosity, to the shrinking of its significance within the individual life and the public space, have made possible these indicators of religious adherence present in the international surveys and national statistics? If so, which are those “anti-bodies” that have defended the social organism against secularization? Or maybe, on the contrary, these statistics are merely *un trompe l’oeil*, which covers a slower but inescapable process of secularization of which its social actors (believers, institutional Churches, the society as a whole) are still unaware?

Seen from the outside, Romania seems to correspond to a pattern of post-secularization. Most unexpectedly, “the Romanian situation” has been the study object of a brief analysis made by David Martin, in the context of an East European model of secularization. According to his point of view, the case of Romania, which pretends to be “one of the two or three most religious countries in Europe”, can be explained by the fact that the Church proved to be, even during communist times, “the one vehicle to continuing Romanian identity”.<sup>5</sup> It is again David Martin who classifies Romania with all its cultural and historical particularities within a pattern characteristic for several other East European countries (Poland, Serbia, Greece, Romania), an *ethno-religion* that perceives “*the Church as a vehicle of identity and a continuing holistic cultural tradition*”, unlike the pattern in which “*the Church is conceived as a*

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<sup>4</sup> By this it is understood, as forms of Orthodox religious practices, the visiting of a church, the lighting of a candle, saying or writing a prayer; it doesn’t necessarily mean attending the religious service on Sundays.

<sup>5</sup> David Martin, *The future of Christianity. Reflections on violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 145.

*distinct institutional entity, teaching specific doctrines*<sup>6</sup>. According to Charles Taylor, like Greece, Romania provides an example of a neo-Durkheimian religiosity,<sup>7</sup> in which the Church is the guardian of the nation and coextensive to it.

From the perspective of Gracie Davis, we could say that the Romanian pattern of religiosity appears as a regional variant of the “vicarial religion”.<sup>8</sup> Similar to the significant numbers of Lutherans from the Northern Europe, the Greek-Orthodox believers in the Balkan area, especially those from Romania, belong to their traditional Churches only because of their attachment to the rituals of passage (baptism, wedding, burial) or as part of a certain national or denominational identity, without being personally and really implied in a continuous and significant manner in the religious experience. Within the historical construction of these identities, the cultural heritage plays an important role, as well as the importance given to the historical role played by the Church in preserving that which is referred to as the “national ethos”, a status also shared by several other lesser peoples from the Eastern Europe, historically shaped by the “existential theme of perishing”, peoples located at the crossroads of various empire borders.<sup>9</sup> Briefly, this appears to be the general situation of the average believer belonging to the Romanian (Greek-) Orthodox Church, reflected in the overwhelming statistics under the aspect of a sense of institutional belonging to the national majority Church, which itself is passing through a rapid process of internal secularization. On what can this sense of belonging be based, except for the adherence to an ethos, which from a historical and identity point of view is embodied by the Church, and except for the belief in a transcendental identity that is hardly consistent with the Evangelical values?

Seen from the inside, in Romania the post-secularization phenomenon has numerous advocates and few critics. Thus, from the latter group, only singular voices dare to claim – against the main stream of thinking – that the religious practice in Romania is not far from the European average and, in terms of individual behavior, from a statistical

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146; idem, *On Secularisation. Towards a Revised General Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today, William Jones Revisited* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 71-75.

<sup>8</sup> *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without Belonging* (Oxford-Cambridge: Blackwell), 1994; eadem, “Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge”, Nancy T. Ammerman, (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 21-35.

<sup>9</sup> The thesis belongs to the Hungarian historian István Bibó, *Misère des petits États d'Europe de l'Est* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).



point of view, that Romanians live in a secular age.<sup>10</sup> The arguments are generated by a historical perspective, which separates in the long term the level of the public revelation of the Orthodox Church as institution (the majority denomination), from the level of the individual beliefs and behavior. Obviously, the Orthodox Church in Romania has had in the long run of history a somewhat more difficult relationship with modernity,<sup>11</sup> than the Roman Church had. In comparison with other significant institutional vectors of Romanian society, it is more responsible for the tardiness, the delay, the overt resistance or the passivity shown towards those factors of modernity (individualization, privatization, urbanization, liberalism) which we commonly acknowledge as characteristic for the installment of secularization in the Latin West. Paradoxically, all those conservative and anti-modern features of the Romanian Orthodox Church, tightly interconnected in a self-regulating system dating back from the Middle Ages and which still functions even at present, pertain in a large measure to the secular sphere and not to the spiritual mission of this institution: its mainly patrimonial character, its symbiosis with the secular power,<sup>12</sup> the comparatively low standards of the believers, except for the rituals of passage and of a common ethic – a significant gap manifested in the institutional model of the Church itself.

For instance, when attempting to illustrate this last feature from a historical point of view, it is enough to draw a brief comparison between the three historical provinces that form Romania at present: Transylvania attached to the Hungarian Kingdom until 1526, Moldavia and Wallachia, countries which from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were both tributary to the Ottoman Empire. In Transylvania, the Catholic Church has promoted the cult of the saints beginning with the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the network of parishes and chapters with notary role was established. In the other two Romanian provinces, the cult of the saints begins to be shaped as a public religious practice during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the network of parishes and Church tribunals (offices) being established even later on, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In opposition to this type of analysis, the opinion largely shared by the majority, explicitly present in the statements of certain

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Barbu, “The Geopolitics of the European Spirit in Post-Secular Romania”, Justine Lacroix and Calypso Nicolaidis (eds.), *European Stories. Intellectual Debates on Europe in National Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 247.

<sup>11</sup> Iuliana Conovici, “L’orthodoxie roumaine et la modernité”, *Studia Politica*, 2004, vol. IV, no. 2, pp. 414-418.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Barbu, *Rome, Byzance et les Roumains. Essai sur la production politique de la foi au Moyen Age* (Bucarest: Editions Babel, 1998).

predominant groups of orthodox intellectuals, but also in those of the establishment of the majority Church, is that Romania is a deeply religious country. At the level of orthodox intelligentsia, a certain alliance between religion and culture took place even since the interwar period, an alliance that meant to promote an image of orthodoxy as a spiritual alternative to the Western Europe perceived as excessively secularized.<sup>13</sup> If, on the one hand, this tendency which has inherited the theory of “resistance through culture”<sup>14</sup> from the communist times, has still remained active up to these days, on the other hand, the official position of the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding a political act such as the adherence of Romania to the European Union has been repeatedly fluctuating during the last two decades. In their official statements, after a first stage of prudent reserve, the Romanian Orthodox Church acted as an open advocate of the European integration, especially after Romania had entered the phase of pre-adherence negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Besides the fact that this religious, nationalistic, cultural and ethnocentric tendency is not necessarily original, in comparison with Greece – another orthodox country which is an “older” member of the European Union – or in

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<sup>13</sup> These ideas have already been supported within the public space by representatives of the right fascist party during the interwar period: Nichifor Crainic, *Ortodoxie și etnocratie* [*Orthodoxy and Ethnocracy*] (Bucurest: Roza vânturilor, 1938); from a politically correct perspective of the values of democracy, a new approach of these ideas in Alexandru Duțu, “Political Models and National Identities” *Orthodox Europe* (Bucharest: Babel Publishing House), 1998; Theodor Baconsky, *Decadenta etatismului și renasterea ortodoxă*. [*The decadence of etatism and the revival of orthodoxy*], Ioan I. Ică Jr. and Germano Marani, (eds.), *Doctrina socială a Bisericii: Fundamente, documente, analize, perspectivă* [*The social teaching of the Church: Fundamentals, documents, analysis, perspectives*] (Sibiu: Deisis, 2000), p. 355.

<sup>14</sup> One of the theoreticians of the resistance through culture was Mircea Eliade in his essay written in 1953, “Destinul culturii românești” [The Destiny of Romanian Culture], idem, *Împotriva deznădejdii. Publicistica exilului* [*Against Despair. The Journalism of Exile*] (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1992), pp. 28-37; Constantin Noica, *Modelul Cultural European* [*The European Cultural Pattern*] (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1993); see also Gabriel Andreescu, *Spre o filosofie a dizidentei* [*Towards a Philosophy of Dissidence*] (Bucuresti: Editura Litera, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Iuliana Conovici, “Etapetele asumării unui proiect. Discursul public al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române despre integrarea europeană” [The Stages of Assuming a Project. The Public Discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church With Reference To the European Integration], Radu Carp (ed.), *Un suflet pentru Europa. Dimensiunea religioasă a unui proiect politic* [*A Soul for Europe. The Religious Dimension of a Political Project*] (București: Anastasia, 2005), pp. 311-323.

comparison with other countries from the Balkan area,<sup>16</sup> it should be noted that, despite the important place it occupies within the public space, this point of view lacks a really well-articulated political correspondent. Nurtured on the superiority complex fed by statistics and out of a rather “revanchist” attitude against the “corrupt and anti-religious” Western world, the pan-orthodox tendency promotes a moderately anti-European view.<sup>17</sup> Recently, several characteristics that make this tendency seem legitimate have been brought into discussion by its Romanian advocates in the context of certain debates that have lately taken place within the Romanian public space. Since the outburst of the economic-financial crisis in 2008, there could be noticed a return to ideas such as national protectionism with respect to resources, the exalting of an organic solidarity and of a traditional, anti-modern, orthodox, ecologist and community ethos, accompanied by the revival of national myths. What seems to feed this tendency is the lack of trust in the autonomy of politics,<sup>18</sup> whenever this relies exclusively on reason, as well as a real absence of adherence to the individualistic liberalism.

A minimal rigor of research should pretend, first of all, enough reasons for accrediting the indicators suggested in the first part of this study, in relation with the decades that preceded the fall of the communist regime. As we can easily imagine, the lack of quantitative data about the communist period, similar to those collected after 1990, makes any comparison impossible, still it does not completely close the horizon of this question. On the other hand, it is equally true that this does not offer any solid basis, but can only sketch certain tendencies which have been noticed in the general context of the Romanian society, behavior patterns that differ from the ones in other communist countries, both from a cultural, historical and a denominational point of view.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> George Pagoulatos, Xenophon A. Yataganas, *Europe Othered, Europe Enlisted, Europe Possessed. Greek Public Intellectuals and the European Union*, in *European Stories. Intellectual Debates on Europe in National Contexts*, pp. 183-202; Olivier Gillet, *Ousia “Mythes Religions”* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Horia-Roman Patapievică, *Omul recent. O critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării “Ce se pierde atunci cind ceva se câștigă”* [The Recent Human. A Criticism of Modernity from the Perspective of a Question: “What Is Lost When Something Is Gained”] (București: Humanitas, 2001), passim.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Barbu, “The burden of politics: Public space, political participation and state socialism”, in *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, 2012, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 329-346.

<sup>19</sup> See the secularist and anti-clerical tendencies in Czechoslovakia in comparison with the Catholic resistance or that of the Evangelical Church in Poland or Eastern Germany, René Rémond, *Religion et société en Europe. Essai*

Such a social behavior regarding major tendencies during the communist times, behavior about which we are sufficiently documented – even if not by means of exact data – is the overwhelming frequency with which the rituals of passage (baptism, wedding, burial)<sup>20</sup> were celebrated within the Church. After 1990, the religious practices related to these essential rituals did not suffer significant modifications, except for an obvious increase in the number of middle-class couples that prefer a partnership status rather than a religious or civil marriage. The high degree of consistency with the religious norms whenever baptism, weddings and funerals are concerned on the part of the largest partition of society before 1989 can be explained, on the one hand, through the ritualistic character of these sacraments – baptism and wedding – in the context of orthodox spirituality, sacraments closely interconnected with various forms of customs and traditions,<sup>21</sup> about which the social actors have always manifested a massive and incontestable attachment. This success of ritualism and its persistence<sup>22</sup> can again be explained by the fact that it offers the believers an opportunity for a higher degree of socializing within the Church, to the detriment of individual personal faith. On the other hand, despite the effort to impose by force a certain type of modernity, communism did nothing but emphasize and promote – by the various means of its ritualistically conceived propaganda<sup>23</sup> and through its public policies – a characteristic feature of the Romanian society, i.e. its collective character, both traditional and communitarian, conservative and homologative. From this perspective, the association of the two types of ritualism can be understood in the phenomenon defined by David Martin as “the social sacred”<sup>24</sup>. In consequence, the religious norms of these rituals of passage has been assimilated to a social norm

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*sur la sécularisation des sociétés européennes aux XIXe et XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 232-233.

<sup>20</sup> Even the members of the Communist Party used to baptise their children or to celebrate a religious wedding clandestinely, i.e. at home where the priest officiated the ritual of baptism or wedding.

<sup>21</sup> Gail Kligman, *Calus: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual*, forward by Mircea Eliade (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); eadem, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press Series), 1988.

<sup>22</sup> The interaction of ritual and religion can still be seen today in parts of Europe (ex. gr. Sicily-Italy) that have managed to retain their old tradition Henry Kamen, *Early Modern European Society* (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> About the communist Romanian ritualism, see Mary Ellen Fisher, “Idol or Leader? The Origins and Future of the Ceausescu Cult”, Daniel N. Nelson (ed.), *Romania in the 1980s* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 118-119.

<sup>24</sup> Martin, *The Future of Christianity*, pp. 184-185.

that was powerful enough and which proved to be resistant both against the attempts made by the atheistic propaganda to remove it, and to the offensive of the post-modern consumerism culture, adopted by the Romanian society during the last two decades. In other words, the Orthodox Church used to furnish under communism, and still continues to furnish even during the capitalist democracy a package of services relevant for the lives of the members of society. This assures it a stable position in the top of the tertiary sector, wholly integrating it in this category of entities, while removing it from the sphere of civil society.

### INSTITUTIONALISM AND PROVISIONALITY

Once this essential element of continuity that has passed unaltered the transition from communism to democracy has been identified, it becomes obvious that most of the changes that took place in the life of the Orthodox Church after 1989 have only consolidated its predominant position in the public esteem. None of the strategy elements that characterize the accommodation of the Church with the democratic state has altered the above-described profile. On the contrary, the prestigious position of the Church institution within the Romanian society, accredited with a maximum of trust in comparison with the institutions of democracy (parliament, government, presidency etc.) has strengthened, under various aspects, the social imperatives of religion, maintaining the orientation of religion towards a rapid “internal secularization”. This phenomenon could be easier understood if set in relationship with the “reactionary super-naturalism” of Peter Berger.<sup>25</sup> According to Berger, the religions, that have accommodated themselves to the values of modernity, failed, while the ones which remained anchored in the past continued to flourish. After ages of implacably standing untouched by the progress of modernity, the present accommodation of the institutional strategies of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the illegitimate requirements of the world results in an accentuated homologation, almost an identification of the Church with the rest of the institutions of the Romanian state.

Within the last two decades, the conformist attitude towards religious social norms has opened the way to a *sui-generis* type of *civil*

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<sup>25</sup> Klaas Runia, “The Challenge of the Modern World to the Church”, *Europäische Jahrbuch für Theologie*, 1993, Vol. 2, no. 2, p. 149; Peter Berger, (ed.), *The Desecularisation of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Ethics and Public Policy Center (Washington DC and Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999), p. 4.

*religion* – in the sense defined by Marcel Vauchez<sup>26</sup> – in a kind of weak and insignificant competition with the interior beliefs that define personal faith. Therefore, the religious consistency of the believers is assumed and sustained, in its collective and practical dimension, by various representatives of the local authority, Members of Parliament, prosperous business people who direct private or public resources towards the Church, in exchange for certain benefits either of a symbolical nature, or concerning their image and their electoral campaign. Behind most of the impressively numerous churches and monasteries newly erected between 1990 and up to the present, there are funds granted from the State budget, obtained by various representatives by means of their electoral wards or illegal incomes, expiated now through donations made towards a sacred destination.

From this perspective, there have appeared elements of a new strategy meant to assure a re-enforcement and a stronger legitimization of the Orthodox Church within the public space. These could be grouped in two categories: some are measures taken by the state and applied with the aim of restoring the public position once held by the Church and afterwards lost either during communist times or as a consequence of the Law for Cults enacted in 1948; while others are the initiative of the clergy, no less significant in the context of opposing resistance to secularization.

Among the measures belonging to the *restauratio* type promoted by state policies, I will further enlist the most representative ones, which have resulted in that the presence of the majority Church has been ever more felt within the public sphere and, in consequence, its role as a vital pillar of the state and nation edifice was better consolidated. Briefly, it concerns an attempt to re-assume the historical vocation that the Orthodox Churches have had in relation with the forming of the state and of the nations, a relationship inherited from the Byzantine tradition and known in the field of political theology as caesaro-papism or “the symbiosis between throne and altar”.<sup>27</sup> Paradoxically, this cohabitation with democracy in a climate of unrestricted freedom of religious expression failed to provide the necessary context for a process of separation between Church and state, while it rather strengthened – leaving aside the half century of communism – their historical and traditional relationship of fusion, which had existed before the installment of the popular-democratic regimes.

Restoring the public status of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in conditions even better than those in the inter-war period, has been a

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<sup>26</sup> Marcel Vauchez, *La religion civique au Moyen Age et à l'époque moderne* (Roma : Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Rémond, *Religion et société en Europe*, p. 46.

constant preoccupation of all the majorities that have held the power during the last two decades, regardless of their ideological orientation. Sheltered from any attempted criticism concerning its tacit or explicit complicity with the nationalist-communist regime<sup>28</sup> as briefly and sporadically had happened during the first several months after 1989, the majority Church has come out well – due to the same political support – from the conflicts generated by the question of the Greek Catholic patrimony, a Church whose clergy and faithful had suffered incredible persecutions during its dissolution in 1949. Essential influence factors in any electoral campaign, the Orthodox clergy and hierarchy insisted on making the most of the symbolical capital they have in society, although the political support they offer – always negotiated – is almost never transparent for the public. In relationship with the institutions of democracy and with the state, as fragile, as little valued in surveys by the society as a whole,<sup>29</sup> the majority Church proved to be the institutional performer that has mostly benefited from the transition phenomenon, succeeding to recover its traditional privileges and, more recently, assuming the leading position of a movement both nationalistic, conservative, and skeptic in its attitude towards Europe, a trend ever more acclaimed due to the economic crisis that has been afflicting Europe since 2008.

While in the European West, secularization was passing through an almost century-long process of transition from the ecclesiastical to the secular state independent of the Church, in post-communist Romania, immediately after the violent movements which resulted in the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu, the Government and the Parliament decided to resume the denominational religious education as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of the public educational system, at secondary school level. In 2007, by a Decree of the Ministry of Public Education, the theory of evolution could no longer be taught in public schools. Such measures meant a return to the circumstances from before 1945, the only difference being that the parents could in advance agree or not to their children attending these courses.<sup>30</sup> The training of the teaching staff, required for teaching religion classes, imposed that certain special

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<sup>28</sup> Olivier Gillet, *Réligion et nationalisme. L'idéologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> In 1996, the rate of trust in the Church was 83%, compared to that in the Parliament which was only 23%; in 2003, the percentage was 85% and respectively 14%, see Florin Frunză, “Biserica Ortodoxă Română și laicizarea”, *Un suflet pentru România* [The Romanian Orthodox Church and Secularization, in A Soul for Romania], p. 285.

<sup>30</sup> Article 9 from Law no. 84/1995 stipulates the facultative and optional character of moral and religious education classes.

didactic departments were established within state or private Universities, but still most of the classes remained in the care of priests, paid as teaching staff by the Ministry of Education. An equally significant fact is that the educational institutions that train the future clergy are a constitutive part of public universities, the students having thus access to tax-free education, again financially supported by the state. Since 1990, the Orthodox theological education (Priest Seminary) has been exclusively conducted as a constitutive part of 11 state Universities.

In the same time, religious symbols (icons, crosses, the Bible<sup>31</sup>) were re-introduced in public educational institutions, as well as in various other public institutions: Senate, Parliament, ministries, classrooms, hospitals, trial courts, military barracks, institutions for elderly people, orphanages etc. For the spiritual assistance of the sick, of prisoners, of students or of military staff, in hospitals, prisons, universities and barracks, there have been constituted chaplaincy that are financially supported out of public funds. Another tradition which had been suspended during communism and revived after 1989 was the presence of the clergy and the hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the occasion of the President's taking the solemn vow at the Parliament Hall, at the opening of parliament sessions, at national feasts, and at other events organized by state institutions, especially at those connected to education (the opening of the school year) or the army.

Moreover, the massive subventions which the Government but also the Parliament or various local authorities have been continuously granting for Churches and Cults after 1990, succeeded in strengthening a relation of complicity which proved beneficial both for the political sphere – as much as the elections were concerned – and for Churches as well. According to the Law for Cults no. 489/2006, the salaries of the ecclesiastical staff of historical Churches are 60% covered from the public budget, while the building of new churches for the Romanian Orthodox Church<sup>32</sup> is supported from the same public resources or by

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<sup>31</sup> Taking the vow on the Bible has been re-introduced for trial court witnesses and for the investing of new ministers, without having a compulsory character, see Frunză, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>32</sup> See the documentary made by the journalist Tessa Dunlop, broadcast by BBC on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013, according to which at every three days in Romania a new church is built, although it is the poorest country in Europe. The Press communicate of the Romanian Patriarchy from August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, claims that since 1989 and up to the present – in order to satisfy the religious needs of the population – the Romanian Orthodox Church has built about 2,000 new places of worship; according to official statistics, within the territory of the Romanian Patriarchy, in 1990, there were 10, 500 ecclesiastical units, in 2003, 13,808, and



the local communities. The frequency with which new places of worship are being erected, new parish churches but monasteries as well, reaches proportions far superior to the rate of public utility buildings, such as hospitals, kindergartens or schools. However, the most controversial project remains that of the People's Cathedral, a gigantic and extremely expensive design, placed close to the People's House – the dimensions of which it almost exceeds – and which is intended as the future Cathedral of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch.

Last but not the least, by virtue of the same Law for Cults enacted in 2006, as all Churches and Cults were classified as being subjects of public utility, they have been exempted from any taxes on rents, on financial compensation, on donations, including various profit-making activities. By far, the most privileged is the Orthodox Church, whose properties, trading companies listed at the stock exchange, agricultural farms, forestry operations,<sup>33</sup> pensions, dental surgeries and any other profit-making activities have immensely flourished, having thus brought extremely profitable economic benefits, relentlessly revealed in the mass-media especially since Patriarch Daniel Ciubotea<sup>34</sup> became the head of the Orthodox Church (2007).

The premise of this economic prosperity was ensured by the retrocession of their former patrimony (lands, buildings, forests, schools, hospitals, various other establishments etc.),<sup>35</sup> which had been previously confiscated by the state, in accordance with the Law for Nationalization after the establishment of the regime. In time, due to juridical decisions all traditional Churches in Romania (the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, and the Reformed Churches) have benefited from certain return actions. Imposing an interpretation of the law that was actually going beyond its legal limits, some of the Orthodox Dioceses (Bishoprics) have taken possession of various real estates that had been expropriated as the result of the Law for Confiscating monastic properties enacted in 1863.

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in 2013, the number of churches was 13,527 although meanwhile various churches had been given back to the Romanian Greek Catholic Church.

<sup>33</sup> According to the official site of the Romanian Patriarchy, this possesses 2% out of the country's forests.

<sup>34</sup> The world-renowned protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann dedicated him the book *God for a Secular Society. The public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Daniel Ciubotea was influenced by Moltmann's "the rights of the earth" Moltmann, *The public Relevance of Theology*, pp. 129-133.

<sup>35</sup> Law no. 501/2002.

## REWORKING TRADITION: OLD AND NEW SUBCULTURES

The second category of changes that have occurred after December 1989 and which can be counted among the factors responsible for the particularities of the religious dynamics in Romania, could be referred to as a strategy for reviving religious life, promoted by the pastoral strategy of the historical Churches (the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Catholic Church). Most characteristically, this strategy does not aim at counter-balancing the secularization phenomenon or the consumerist culture, but rather it only proves to be another constitutive part in the process of retrieving one's former tradition. First, it implies the revival of certain collective religious practices that had been suspended under communism because of their public character. Hence, the vast proportions and the frequency of these devotional events on the part of the majority Church, events that outrun by far those organized by Catholics (in minority). For instance, after 1989, hundreds of thousands of believers regularly take part in pilgrimages organized for the worshipping of local relics (St. Parascheva, St. Dimitri Bassaraboff) or relics brought from other regions with the same purpose, pilgrimages to miracle-working icons, pilgrimages on the occasion of the dedication day of certain churches, or to the tombs of various highly esteemed confessors. The constant amplitude of these events of *popular religion (folk religiosity)* intensely exhibited in the mass-media and unusual in Romanian history of pilgrimages or processions,<sup>36</sup> is the result of the tireless zeal and creativity of ecclesiastical authorities, who promote, support, organize and instrumentalize these events for the sake of their own image and even for material benefits. Processions and pilgrimages are also favored by the paradoxical growth, after 1989, of the rural population in Romania,<sup>37</sup> a phenomenon caused by the return of former factory workers, who – during the regime of Ceausescu – had been compelled to move from their villages to industrial cities.

Even if the initiative of these devotional acts mostly belongs to clergy and hierarchy, with the co-operation of the laity, their repetitive

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<sup>36</sup> For a historical perspective, see Violeta Barbu, *Purgatoriul misionarilor. Contrareforma în țările române în secolul al XVII-lea* [The Missionaries' Purgatory. The Counter-Reformation in the Romanian Countries during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century] (Bucuresti, Editura Academiei, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> It is estimated at about 46% of the total population of the country, living mainly out of subsistence farming, see Béatrice von Hirschhausen, *Les nouvelles campagnes roumaines. Paradoxes d'un «retour» paysan* (Paris, 1997); this phenomenon is politically used by the ecologist movement which appeared on the political scene in 2013 by means of organising street demonstrations.

but discontinuous dynamic only engages a lesser part of the religious field. It would be oversimplifying to believe that in Romania the religious interest is manifested exclusively through social forms of collective experience set in conventional normative frames, recently re-discovered and re-employed. Quite the contrary, the forms in which an authentic personal spiritual experience is sought amidst a predominantly rational culture, an experience based on the interpersonal relationship of the subject with a trustworthy and charismatic witness comes forth from the depth of Oriental spirituality, of the patristic early age, crosses the Byzantine world and remains persistent even during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eagerly sought in their monastic isolation, where they used to live inconspicuously, received and obeyed with utmost devotion, the voices of these emblematic characters, confessors<sup>38</sup> and abbots, were still drawing and fascinating even during the dark period of communism. In Romania, for instance, the esteem in which several great Orthodox mystics were held persisted in communist times, despite the manifold hardships and impediments, and it continues up to the present. The image of such characters whose “charismatic force”<sup>39</sup> includes either an imprisonment experience during the repressive communist times, or – less frequently – acts of resistance against the communist regime or against the consumerist and relativist culture. Instances of prophetic and healing charisma are equally present, but usually these characters are perceived as being endowed with an uncommon spiritual force and moral standards, which enable them to act as spiritual directors, often requiring of their disciples a radical and coherent commitment to the Evangelical virtues. As already suggested, the successful and widespread character of such a charisma is understandably the outcome of all the attributes that make this type of experience different from the mainstream churches. Where they diverge most from the profile of the classical institutional religion is the primacy of personal experience over the other collective devotional forms encouraged by the Church, and the unrestricted freedom in which it can be exercised. This free-floating group strongly linked to a *starets* equally claims an exigency of authentic moral models that ought to be followed.

During the last two decades, any observer of the religious life in Romania would certainly remark the vigorous re-birth of these figures that polarize the spiritual energies and the search for meaningfulness, even if some of them are no longer alive. Being the question of a perennial spiritual tradition, historically repeatable, we could wonder:

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<sup>38</sup> Ioanichie Balan, *Il mio padre spirituale Cleopa di Sihastria* (Lipa, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Danielle Hervieu-Léger, Françoise Champion, *Vers un nouveau christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), pp. 343-344.

Which is the actuality of this active minority? Before 1989, the followers who considered themselves as disciples used to reject the restrictions of any organized form, either of being recognized as such within the group, or of bearing any kind identity for those outside it. Historically consolidated and emphasized by the necessity of surviving during the repressive communist times, this distinctive feature has been greatly modified after 1989. In a fast rhythm of evolution, the charismatic expansion took a complex shape within the socializing networks, making use of association instruments, as well as of various mass-media means intended to spread these messages born out of the witness of charismatic figures.

In terms of social effects, such a compromise as employing the most modern resources for an initiation in the force of attraction of certain emblematic figures of contemporary Romanian Orthodoxy, as one of the most refractory at secularization, modernity, occidental values and permissiveness, results in a cultural homologation of these charismatic characters. As the life and witness of these charismatic priests, monks and lay people is concerned, not only traditional devotional acts (individual pilgrimages, personal devotions) are being organized but also public debates, conferences, documentaries etc., a vast literature is being published and various public events are held with the purpose of keeping their memory alive. In most cases, these initiatives belong to people who had the privilege of meeting them in person and who now have the role of a mediating authority between a certain charismatic figure and his new followers. Stimulated and made legitimate especially by some of these exceptional personalities (Gheorghe Calciu,<sup>40</sup> Arsenie Boca,<sup>41</sup> Ilie Cleopa, Arsenie Papacioc,

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<sup>40</sup> Gheorghe Calciu (1927-2006), priest and political prisoner between 1948-1964 and 1970-1984, well-known dissident at international level for his protests against the atheist indoctrination and against the campaign of demolishing churches in Bucharest between 1977-1979. In 1979, together with other dissidents he founded the first Free Syndicate in communist Romania. He was released from prison by Nicolae Ceausescu at the insistence of several personalities such as Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionesco and John Paul II, and of certain political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan; see Gheorghe Calciu, *Christ is calling you. A course in catacombs pastorship* (California, Platina, 1997). See the obituaries in the newspapers Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/11/25/AR2006112500783.html>; and The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/jan/10/guardianobituaries.religion>.

<sup>41</sup> Arsenie Boca (1910-1989), monk, arrested and cross-examined for several times by the communist regime during 1951-1956; he was marginalized by the authorities, but very esteemed by the believers: his tomb has since

Iustin Parvu, Ilarion Argatu etc.), the vehicles of an impressive experience of resistance under the communist regime and the victims of its repression, the “culture of charismatic figures” offers itself as a type of culture alternatively critical not only against the majority consumerist culture – the commonplace of secularization – but also against the establishment of the Orthodox Church. Thus, the “Orthodox sub culture of charismatic figures” frequently places itself in contradiction and collision, from the position of an authority entitled to denounce the hierarchy’s political subversion<sup>42</sup> and corruption of Christian values.

From a different perspective, that of a new Christianity, the source of which are the charisma, within the Catholic minority, which represents 4.6 % of the total population (2011), ecclesial and charismatic movements have emerged in Romania. Some of them have entered clandestinely in Romania during the very last decades of the communist regime. For instance, the example of certain ecclesial movements from the new-evangelizing wave active on the territory of Romania within the Catholic minority, but which bears a certain influence also on the majority denomination. The two components of the lay Catholic movements (large international pontifical ecclesiastical movements) and the new movements (international charismatic movements, local communities of prayer and apostolate), according to the categories suggested by John Paul II,<sup>43</sup> under whose pontificate this phenomenon has flourished immensely, have a different genesis. The former appeared between the '50s-'60s as the result of their founders' charisma,<sup>44</sup> founders who responded to a calling of apostolate exercised within the lay society already affected by the process of secularization. They have each adapted new methods for communicating the message of the Gospel specific to their own charisma, or have resorted to the revival – adapted to modernity and post-modernity – of certain forms already experimented in the tradition of the Catholic Church. The explosion and

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become a favorite place of pilgrimage which on the anniversary of his death count between 30,000-40,000 believers.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 188-210.

<sup>43</sup> The discourse of John Paul II on the occasion of meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and the new communities, Pentecost 1998. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_spe\\_19980530\\_riflessioni\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jpii_spe_19980530_riflessioni_en.html).

<sup>44</sup> The most important ecclesial movements were invited, in the person of their founders, to draw near the Holy Father John Paul II during the Pentecost meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1998: Chiara Lubich, the founder of the *Focolare Movement*, Luigi Giussani, founder of *Comunione e Liberazione*, Kiko Arguello, founder of the *Movement of Neo-Catechumens*, Jean Vanier, founder of *Arche*.

the success of the new charismatic movements and of the prayer and apostolate communities have been facilitated by the New Evangelization proclaimed at the beginning of the pontificate of John Paul II and continued afterwards by his successors. Pope Paul VI and John Paul II identify the separation (disjunction) between the Gospel and the culture as the main factor of secularization, while interpreting the enculturation of the Gospel (*Evangelii nuntiandi*) within a society marked by a predominant non-Christian culture as the major aim of the Catholic Church. This is together with encouraging the laity to participate in the evangelizing mission (*Christifidelis laici*) and the re-composing of the Christian social texture within secularized societies. The recognition of the manifold charisma inspired by the Holy Ghost, without a programmatic character on the part of the Church, took place at Pentecost in 1998 when the Pontiff blessed these movements (1,000,000 participants). The attempt to create a theology of ecclesiastical movements has never been encouraged, lest it should restrict the freedom of action of the Holy Ghost by establishing conventional forms. The only statement made in this respect was that which characterized them as being “coextensive” with the Church. Seen from outside the Church – from the perspective of political analyses and sociologists of religion, that interpret them by virtue of various typologies – the ecclesiastical movements appear either as a fundamental radicalisation of certain groups and communities in an internal attempt to obstruct and slow down the implacable desertion of religious values, or as “tools” attached by absolute loyalty to the person of the Pope,<sup>45</sup> or as an expression of religious emotionalism aroused by the charisma of certain founders, in reply to secularization, to the psychedelic culture and to a society in crisis. Despite the enormous diversity of these charisma, Danielle Hervieu-Léger<sup>46</sup> can summarise a few features: the increasing sentiment of urgency specific to this age, hence the tremendous dynamic of these movements; the role of affection in modelling one’s conscience, conversion through personal encounter; the primacy of experience over knowledge; personalising one’s belief within the dimension of a community; the crucial role of credible witnesses; and charismatic apprenticeship. The variants range from various types of normative contexts integrally in accord with the traditional requirements of the Church, to informal connections, of a subjective nature (narrative Catholicism), detached from any norms and rites.

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<sup>45</sup> Gordon Urquhart, *The Pope’s Armada: Unlocking the Secrets of Mysterious and Powerful New Sects in the Church* (Bantam Press, 1995), pp. 66, 100.

<sup>46</sup> Danielle Hervieu-Léger, *Vers un nouveau christianisme*, p. 349-360.

How did the activity and the presence of these ecclesiastical movements and of the new charismatic communities challenge post-communist Romania? This is the first question that I wish to answer, briefly and on the basis of several empirical surveys. What is different between this presence and the one in occidental Catholic countries, which are well studied from the point of view of secularization?

The spirituality of unity, characteristic to the Focolare Movement had already reached Romania, by different ways, before the Fall of the Wall in Berlin. During the '70s, various Romanian Orthodox monks, nuns and priests – by means of study scholarships offered by the Ostkircheinstitut (The Institute for Oriental Churches) in Regensburg, an institute belonging to the Conference of German Bishops, led by a Focolarin priest, Ph.D. Albert Rauch – came into contact with the Focolare Movement in Germany. This would afterwards prove providential, for the Movement became known to the Romanian Orthodox Church<sup>47</sup> before its actual dissemination in Romania, as a reviving spiritual trend based on living the Gospel, born within the Roman Catholic Church. As the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, the first to learn about the spirituality of the Focolare Movement was the Hungarian Bishop of Alba Iulia (Transylvania), Marton Aron, who – during a visit to the Vatican in the years that followed after the Council Vatican II – when told that unity was the charisma of the Focolare Movement, exclaimed: “From now on I will pray that this *virus* should infest Romania and spread throughout our country”.

However, the actual dissemination of the Focolare spirituality began in the Roman Catholic Theological Seminary in Alba Iulia in 1980 through a Focolarian priest and theologian, Ph.D. Tomka Ferenc. Several years later, the first contacts with the seminary students in Iasi took place. During the '80s the spirituality of the Movement came to be known even by certain clandestine priests of the Greek Catholic Church, who in their turn passed this knowledge to others. Despite the hardships which the Greek Catholic Church was enduring at the time and despite the impediments it encountered, and also because some of these persons had been imprisoned for years and afterwards continued to be followed by the Information Services, they constituted the first seeds implanted in the Greek Catholic medium. They used to assemble and to exchange written materials in utmost secrecy. At present, Focolare centres in

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, the Superior of the Agapia Greek-Orthodox Monastery, which at the time counted 350 nuns, Sister Eustahia, after personally meeting Chiara Lubich during the '70s, used to read in front of the nuns the Meditations of the founder of the Focolare Movement. Certain monks, with scholarships at Regensburg, have later become bishops or superiors of various orthodox monasteries.

Romania are one masculine and two feminine. There are over 600 members belonging to this Movement, out of which 30 are Orthodox and several are from Reformed Churches. There are about 6,000 followers, but their spirituality is widely spreading from priests to various other persons. Throughout the country there are different groups of families that periodically gather together and various initiatives of “the economy of gift”.<sup>48</sup> Out of the members of this Movement there have been recruited missionaries who left Romania in order to work in the USA, Croatia, Italy, or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Beginning with the year 1975, in a similarly clandestine manner, members of the Movement “Comunione e Liberazione”<sup>49</sup> from Switzerland and Italy came to Romania. Their mission, which was also developing in other communist countries (Poland and the Czech Republic), was directed by CSEO (Centro Studi Europa Orientale), a research institute co-ordinated by one of the leading members of the Movement, Rev. Francesco Ricci. The purpose of these missions was to gather information about the situation of the Churches in the Catacombs and to support the believers living in those countries. Until 1989, tens of persons succeeded in making such missionary visits, learned about the unofficial ecclesiastic reality, about the religious dissidence in Romania, and came into contact with lay people from all denominations (Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Calvinist). After 1990, one of the main purposes of the Movement “Comunione e Liberazione” was to support the Greek Catholic Church which was just coming out of clandestinity and completely lacked any pastoral means. Communities with numerous followers, both catholic and orthodox, were founded and houses were opened for consecrated persons recruited out of the Romanian population.

After 1990 many other ecclesiastic or charismatic movements (Communauté Emmanuel, Charismatic Renewal) have been established in Romania. Their presence is due to a dynamic somewhat different from the orthodox charismatic culture and their relative success when compared with other occidental countries can be explained by the fact that the community life style promoted by their adherents better corresponds to the social and cultural data of the Romanian society. The capacity to inspire people from a lay medium and to engage in a dynamic movement persons who are seekers of meaning, and whose

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<sup>48</sup> Luigino Bruni, *Le nuove virtù del mercato nell'era dei beni comuni* (Roma: Citta Nuova, 2012), pp. 174-190.

<sup>49</sup> Salvatore Abruzzese, “Religion and Modernity: The Case of Comunione e Liberazione”, *Social Compass*, 1989, vol. 36, pp. 13-32; *Comunione e Liberazione. Dalle aule del liceo Berchet al meeteng di Rimini: sotira e identità di un movimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).



need of authentic belief experiences cannot be satisfied anymore by the institutional Church, is another major asset, as well as their ecumenically open character essential for a catholic movement within an orthodox majority.

Especially the two movements previously discussed have benefited from the qualities of their founders but also from the credibility they had acquired due to the solidarity shared during times of religious persecution under the communist regime. Moreover, unlike the situation in the occidental countries, where the Catholic hierarchy had met the missionary activity of the ecclesiastical movements with distrust, suspicion or at least with lack of enthusiasm, the Romania hierarchy encouraged these communities to settle on its territory and supported their enculturation, especially as most of them – despite their religious diversity and novelty – have been manifesting an obedient attachment towards the hierarchy and the norms characteristic of the teachings of the Church.

A final question to be asked is in what measure this charismatic expansion will be able to revive the institutional Churches in Romania or even more to constitute itself as a force of social change by virtue of its novelty and its disjunction from a tradition that reproduces social order? By returning to these questions regarding the power of charisma, questions about which Max Weber had been himself wondering and to which he was able to find clear answers, one therefore has to inquire into the still confusing complexity characteristic of the relationship between secularization and a religiosity institutionally organized and socially rooted into one of the Orthodox countries of the Eastern Europe. Perhaps one might conclude by a brief final consideration, that the indicators brought into discussion, when supporting the thesis of post-secularization in Romanian society, reflect an association between the *vicarious* character of most believers and the monopolizing position that the Orthodox Church in Romania holds within society. Summarizing, we ought to ask ourselves about the nature of this monopoly and whether it could possibly stand as a wall against secularization. The history of Romanian transition shows that in more than two decades the Romanian Orthodox Church succeeded to reshape itself optimally according to the new democratic order, while retrieving and gradually consolidating its presence within the public space. The benefit it had reserved for itself was that – in the turmoil of institutional dismantling that followed the Fall of the Wall, and afterwards of the ceaseless reforms to which other institutions of the State had been compelled in the process of adhering to the European construction – the Romanian Orthodox Church has preserved intact its hierarchy structures and its corporate cohesion. It has never faltered from this essential aim, allying itself with the state – without political preferences and regardless of the

political orientation of the Government. With this fundamental aim in mind – the first on its institutional agenda – it further shaped its strategies, afterwards so perseveringly applied. Thus, the increase of its patrimony resources and that of the clergy, the multiplication of the hierarchy, the obstinate pressure whenever privileges and concessions on the part of the state are concerned, have all aimed at the consolidation of its institutional structure. Simultaneously with the accomplishing of this design, its gradual integration within the social corpus took place, by means of influence networks, complicity, exchange, all interwoven and negotiated at local levels in accordance with the same principle of prepossessed transversality. However, as this domination system was progressively being established, the society has never been addressed or questioned by any tentative of moral or spiritual monopoly on the part of the Orthodox Magisterium, its Patriarch and its Synod. In the interval of the two decades since the fall of communism, the public position of the Romanian Orthodox Church on ethics or values – among which we could also count those exposed to the process of secularization – have been extremely rare and somewhat conditioned either by certain insignificant effects of secularization, or by the attitude towards homosexuality. Unlike the Russian Orthodox Church which has published in 2008, *The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights*,<sup>50</sup> the Romanian Orthodox Church has left the struggle against modernity, post-modernity and secularization in the care of a cultural elite. The ambiguity of this position proved fruitful enough especially when symbolic benefits are concerned. Allying itself with the only project able to arouse the society – European integration – the Romanian Orthodox Church accepted in 1998 (under the pressure of political forces) the historical visit of Pope John Paul II. With this opportunity, it acquired for itself an incontestable certificate of public legitimacy, sealed with the very foundation stone of the People's Redemption Cathedral, which was laid by John Paul II together with Patriarch Teoctist. The gigantic project – to which the present Patriarch obsessively dedicates the institutional force and the disposition of the believers and of the authorities to adhere by means of donations – strangely reminds of the age of indulgences inaugurated by Pope Julius II for the sake of erecting St. Peter's Cathedral. This analogy renders inevitable the question whether, from among those charismatic movements which flow as an underground stream regardless of the

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<sup>50</sup> Kristina Stoeckl, "The Human Rights Debate in the External Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church", *Religion, State and Society*, 2012, vol. 40, nr. 2.

occult monopoly held by the Romanian Orthodox Church,<sup>51</sup> a force will ever raise and succeed to fissure its massive credibility, equally proportional to its internal secularization.

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Froese, *The Plot to kill God. Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkley-London: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 254-264.

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## CHAPTER III

# COMING BACK TO RELIGION THE IMAGINARY VISIT OF A FRENCH CANADIAN TO TODAY'S ROMANIA

GABRIELA BLEBEA NICOLAE

I dedicate this text to the Romanian Greek Catholics, believers whose Church was forbidden during the communist period, especially, to my family from Făgăraș. The example of my cousin Lucian Blaga is for me the *model* of dignity, understanding, modesty and perseverance in faith.

I thank for the visit in this text, which was thus made possible, and for the reality I discovered on this occasion, a reality which I had already sensed and yet I couldn't make out what exactly – from my own point of view – gave it substance:

To Professor Rev. Wilhelm Dancă, whose calling as a priest contains in itself, in the most convincing way, both vocations, of a father and of a brother, vocations that he convincingly expresses in the careful and protective attitude of friendship.

To the journalist Rev. Michel Kubler, the Director of the Ss Peter and Andrei's Center, a lucid and efficient believer, whose eye, sensitive to diversity, cannot be misled by the appearances made legitimate by "temporary" authorities.

To Professor Ioana Iliescu, a faithful and reliable colleague, responsible for the English version of this text.

To Professor Wilhelm Tauwinkl, my friend without whom my texts would never reach the printing house. His solidarity, professionalism and solicitude are certainly part of his being a true believer.

To my colleague Florin Silaghi, whose cinematographer's eye made possible a part of the photographs in this text.

### BEFORE THE VISIT

This text bears in itself a disputable possibility: I imagine the visit of a person, for whom I decide the itinerary and the program. Moreover, I am the one asking the questions, that I suppose would have been of some interest for him, trying to guess what might seem to him intriguing or uncommon.

This situation, though, is no pure fantasy, for, after several years spent in Canada, I believe I might be able to perceive our “reality” through the eyes of a Canadian, who obviously tries to compare it to his own reality. Moreover, the Canadian of which I am thinking is a real person.<sup>1</sup> He is interested in what happens under various political regimes. In what happens in general and in particular in the religious sphere, as he used to say “as the relation between immanence and transcendence”.

This situation is neither real, nor pure fantasy, and as the ontological consequence of any “guided visit”, when the “eye” of the tourist fatally ends by having the same “diopter” as the eye of the guide. In the case of my own “sight defects”, my curiosity and my amazement in front of the Canadian reality becomes inevitably part of this etiology. I was in Canada for courses and libraries, but I constantly wondered how the people there lived, what marks more dominantly their thoughts, their emotions, and their values. I say all this because, most probably, I will tend to dress my French Canadian in these very clothes. His visit won’t provide him with any business opportunity, any court trial, and hopefully with any visit to a dentist, who might offer him a lower-price treatment. While being in Canada, I was trying to understand what happened that a “true Roman Catholic” society “almost suddenly” turned into a “true secular” society. In consequence, I expect him to be equally interested in what I call the “coming back to religion” in Romania. I have enough reason to believe he won’t have any objection against this itinerary.

### **CHURCHES ARE BEING BUILT IN ROMANIA**

Anywhere in this world, a believer looks for a church. A faithful Romanian, arriving in Quebec, would be astonished to find that, except for the churches belonging to the immigrants, the rest of the churches are either empty, or transformed into clubs or libraries.

The other way round, if a French Canadian arrives today in Romania, he will be astonished to see how many churches there are and how many churches are being built.<sup>2</sup> When coming across the first church under construction he might imagine that it is an unusual case, an exception. He would be wrong. The Orthodox Church, the majority Church in Romania, states on the official site of the Ministry of Culture

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<sup>1</sup> His name is Gilles Labelle, professor at the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Tessa Dunlop, “Romania’s Costly Passion for Building Churches”, *BBC News Magazine*, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23420668>.

and Cults that on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, “the founding stone was laid for 92 *new churches*, the building works were continued at another 755 *new churches which had begun to be constructed during the previous years*, and 190 *newly built* were already completed...”<sup>3</sup> Without being able to identify what precisely these “previous years” mean, it can be inferred that after 1990, 1037 Orthodox churches were built or were still being in construction. At least.

The building-site of religious architecture encompasses more. We further learn from the same site that on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, “172 places of cult are being consolidated or re-constructed; the repair and restoration works continued at 507 churches; 423 churches are being painted or re-painted; 273 churches were re-consecrated; and 58 ecclesiastical edifices are being repaired or restored.”<sup>4</sup> Briefly, during these years, 1,433 places of cult – “which *are not* historical monuments”<sup>5</sup> – were revived.

As figures in themselves do not mean much, in order to better understand their significance, we should make a comparison with the total number of Orthodox churches. Therefore, it results that by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, “within the country borders and belonging to the Romanian Patriarchy, there have been functioning a number of 14,648 church units”,<sup>6</sup> one out of 15 churches is a new church and one out of 10 churches has been re-built, consolidated, painted or re-painted. 15.000 Orthodox churches for 17 millions Orthodox people (of all ages) if we take into account that the population of Romania is, after the last census, 20 millions and the Orthodox people represent 86.5%.

I cannot be wrong when supposing that a Quebecois would wonder how such an “abundance” of churches could be possible. The answer could be manifold. One could be the “compensation” effect for the communist period during which churches used to be demolished, many of them “invaluable monuments”. Some old churches were demolished and the construction of the new churches was forbidden. The Orthodox Church did suffer in communist times. It suffered as a great part of the Romanians. And similarly to many Romanians, the Orthodox Church was bereaved of a large part of her patrimony, which meant that the land formerly occupied by churches could become vacant land used

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-ortodoxa-romana>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Organized as follows: 1 Eparchial Center, 6 Metropolitan Sees, 10 archdioceses, 13 dioceses, 1 vicariate, 176 deaneries, 11,394 parishes, 2,360 filial churches, 493 monasteries, 184 hermitages, 10 succursale monasteries. <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-ortodoxa-romana>.

for building blocks of flats, with standard apartments, depersonalized and of reduced dimensions, meant for the “new man”.<sup>7</sup>

The Orthodox Church suffered at a patrimonial level, but nevertheless, her suffering cannot be compared with that of the Greek Catholic Church (the Romanian Church United with Rome), a Church forbidden at the order of Stalin, as it was the case of all Greek Catholic Churches in this area. In 1948 (according to the Decree from December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948), it became “unlawful”, after it had been declared in the Constitution of 1923 as a “national Church”. “Its possessions were taken over by the State, while the churches and the parish houses were given over to the Orthodox Church”.<sup>8</sup> After the fall of communism, the Greek Catholic Church “was given back 190 worship places”. A rather small number. Today “280 new churches” are being built.<sup>9</sup>

The Quebecois sees that in Romania, after the fall of communism, new churches are being built. Most of them are for the Orthodox Church, because 86.5% of the population is Orthodox. As one coming from a country with a Roman Catholic tradition, the French Canadian wants to know whether the Roman Catholic Church has also built its own churches after 1990. Well, I do not know the exact total number, but in the Archdiocese of Bucharest 30 new churches have been built and another 95 churches in the Diocese of Jassy.<sup>10</sup>

For the sake of a complete image, the French Canadian may ask himself whether the other 15 cults<sup>11</sup> in Romania build their own new

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Juliana Maxim, “Socialist Mass Housing in Bucharest, 1950-1970”, *SAH News*, October 16th, 2013, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://www.sah.org/about-sah/sah-news/2013/10/16/socialist-mass-housing-in-bucharest-1950-1970>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-romn-unita-cu-roma-greco-catolica>

<sup>9</sup> According to the same official site, the Greek Catholic Church has 760 parishes for its 191,566 Greek Catholic believers (according to the census made in 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Jassy, Romania, image accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CatolicCatedral.Iasi-Romania.JPG>. The construction of St. Queen Mary’s Cathedral in Jassy, began in 1990 and was completed in 2005.

<sup>11</sup> The Law for Cults (No. 489/2006) officially recognizes in Romania 18 religious cults: the Romanian Greek-Orthodox Church and the Serbian Greek-Orthodox Church (dominant), the Roman Catholic Church, the Calvin-Reformed Church (protestant), the Greek Catholic Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Adventist Church of the Seventh Day, the Unitarian Church, the Muslim Cult, the Christ Gospel Church (the Church of Christ), the Religious Organization of the Witnesses of Jehovah, the Evangelical Church of Augustan Confession, the Christian Cult of Ancient Rite (the Lipovan Church), the Evangelical (Synodal Presbyterian) Lutheran Church, the Romanian Evangelical Church, the Mosaic Cult, the Armenian Church.



churches. Instead of a direct investigation, of a dialog with the representatives of each cult, reading the official site of the State Secretariat for Cults, the answer could be a negative one, which could either mean that they are not declared, or that, indeed, they aren't being built. If the real answer is the second one, an explanation could be that their patrimony was not affected, and that the churches they already possess are enough for the number of their believers, a number relatively small,<sup>12</sup> sometimes decreasing because of the emigration process.<sup>13</sup> There are cults that do not build churches, but there also are cults that build with discretion, prudent about being made public and official, although the architectonic dimensions are impressive. Such is the case of "independent Churches" (for instance, a Church that identifies itself as being Pentecostal, although it is not recognized by the Pentecostal Union)<sup>14</sup> or the churches of cults, which in Romania are not officially recognized yet (the Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days).

### MONASTERIES ARE BUILT

Any foreign tourist inquiring about the religion life in Romania would surely be impressed by the Romanian monasteries. The Quebecois could even visit monasteries as ancient as the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> There are one or two dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but quite a few from the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Wherever he goes in Romania, he would surely be astonished by the frequency of signs reading "towards Monastery..." Having to choose between them, trying to learn at least something about the history of these monasteries, he would find out that in the patrimony of the Orthodox Church there are –

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<sup>12</sup> The Serbian-Orthodox Diocese of Timisoara: 20,000 believers, the Archdiocese of the Armenian Church: 16 churches for 700 believers, the Russian Christian Church of Ancient Rite: 57 places of worship for 38,000 believers, the Romanian Evangelical Church: 220 churches for 20,000 believers.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-evangelica> The Evangelical Church has 250 parishes for the 8,761 believers recorded at the census made in 2002, compared with the 250,000 believers in 1944. <http://www.culte.gov.ro/cultul-mozaic>. In the case of the Jewish Communities: 124 temples, synagogues and houses of prayer for 6,000 believers.

<sup>14</sup> The pastor of this Church is Răzvan Mihailescu.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., "Manastirea Prislop", *Crestin ortodox*, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/biserici-manastiri/manastirea-prislop-67979.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, "Sucevita Monastery (16<sup>th</sup> century): "Sucevita Monastery", *Romanian Monasteries*, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://www.romanianmonasteries.org/bucovina/sucevita>.

according to certain statistics – 520 monasteries, or – according to others – 637.

As any “modern person” searching the Internet sites,<sup>17</sup> apart from the patron saint of each monastery, apart from its size and geographical setting, he would discover that almost half of the total number of monasteries have been built after 1990. Most of them, 155 out of 196, were precisely built during 1990-2000. I say “precisely”, because for some of them (about 25) the only specification given is “recently”, without any further details about what this “recent” might refer to. The number is impressive not only through the proportion it represents (as I said, almost half of the monasteries were built after 1990!), but also because of the conclusion to which it leads: between 1990-2000, there were built almost as many monasteries as there have been built in 6 centuries (from the 14<sup>th</sup> century up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century included), five times more than they were built during the flourishing age of Romania, i.e. during the time of the Monarchy (between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were built about 25 monasteries). It is obviously less surprising that it was built 30 times more than during the almost 50 years of communism. Actually, the 6 monasteries built during communism either had a historical character,<sup>18</sup> or although built during communist times they remained unused until 1990,<sup>19</sup> or one of them was built by certain influential intellectuals during the communist regime.<sup>20</sup>

The French Canadian, as actually any other tourist, would find it impossible to visit all the 520 Orthodox monasteries. He could make some selections according to place (in the northern part of the country there are over 100 monasteries divided in three counties: in Neamț 58, in Jassy 36, in Suceava 33), according to their grandeur and dimensions (for instance, the Sâmbata de Sus Monastery built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, <http://www.orthodox-monasteries.com/romania>.

<sup>18</sup> The Mihai Viteazu Monastery in Caraș Severin, built in 1976, and the Radu Negri Monastery in Călărași built in 1980.

<sup>19</sup> The Marcus Monastery in Covasna and the Holy Trinity Monastery in Breaza, Maramureș, the Tet Monastery in Village Susag built by father Ghenadie.

<sup>20</sup> The Oasa Monastery built in 1983 by Ionel Pop and Mihail Sadoveanu in the Alba County.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., “Manastirea Sambata de Sus (Brancoveanu)”, *Romanian Monasteries*, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://www.romanianmonasteries.org/ro/alte-manastiri/manastirea-sambata-de-sus-brancoveanu>.

the Râmeț Monastery from the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>22</sup> the Rohia Monastery from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>23</sup> or according to antiquity.

Interested also in the monasteries of other denominations, the French Canadian would be – I am sure – astonished by the Roman Catholic monasteries, monasteries built after 1990, of unprecedented dimensions in our history: the St. Agnes' Monastery in Popești-Leordeni, Bucharest, the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelite Brothers in Cioflăceni,<sup>24</sup> the Holy Virgin's Franciscan Monastery in Oradea, the Monastery of the Jesuit Brothers in Cluj Napoca.

The churches and monasteries that any tourist can visually “record” are accessible to anyone. No one could be familiar with the history of every church and of every monastery, but the contact with them is an “open” one. Less public is the information regarding the denominational education system, even if one might “come across” some of their buildings – faculties, seminaries, high schools, schools, and kindergartens – opened after 1990. If he wants to learn about the denominational education, especially the one developed after 1990, the French Canadian would find the following.

## DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION

“The Orthodox Church had today 30 theological seminaries”<sup>25</sup> compared with the 6 seminaries it used to have before 1989. “To these there have been added 11 theology faculties and 4 departments of theology included in the structure of other faculties. In 2011, the total number of students was about 7,000”.<sup>26</sup> During communism there were no denominational high schools: “today there are 8 Orthodox theological high schools (about 5,000 students)”.<sup>27</sup>

Not all the cults in Romania have organized their own denominational educational institutions of such proportions. Not all of them because some of the other 17 cults have a relatively small number of members.<sup>28</sup> The number of Orthodox educational institutions is

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., “Ramet Monastery”, *Turism-Transilvania*, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://en.turism-transilvania.ro/location/ramet-monastery>.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., “Rohia”, *Maramures. Romania. Gatekeepers of History*, accessed on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014: <http://www.visitmaramures.ro/index.php?task=page&page=Rohia>

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-g6cQm0\\_qJvA/TINFy4ednI/AAAAAAP0/4RL07P3glYI/s220?P1010016.JPG](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-g6cQm0_qJvA/TINFy4ednI/AAAAAAP0/4RL07P3glYI/s220?P1010016.JPG).

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-ortodoxa-romana>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserici-culte> The Serbian Greek-Orthodox of Timisoara: 20,000 believers; the Archbishopric of the Armenian Church: 700

impressive. The Roman Catholic Church, which according to the census of 2002 had 1,026,429<sup>29</sup> believers,<sup>30</sup> is the second largest Church in Romania (4.6%), and has today “9 institutions of high education, 3 theological seminaries, 3 after-high school institutions, 9 high schools, 2 educational groups, 3 primary and secondary schools, and 20 kindergartens....”<sup>31</sup> About the denominational educational system of the Reformed Church (3.8%) I can’t say anything, because I couldn’t find anything on their official sites. The other cults that have a percentage over 0.4% of the total number of believers,<sup>32</sup> have a well-organized denominational educational system.

The Pentecostal Church (1.92% of believers) has a Theological Institute, 3 theological seminaries (high schools) and 2 post-high school establishments. The Greek Catholic Church (0.79%) has 2 faculties of

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believers; the Russian Christian Church of Ancient Rite: 38,000 believers; the C.A. Evangelical Church: 20,000 believers; the Jewish Communities: 6,000 believers; the Lutheran Evangelical Church: 8,761 believers; the Romanian Evangelical Church: 20,000 believers; the Christ Gospel Church in Romania – the Union of the Christian Churches following the Gospel in Romania: 44,476 believers; the Unitarian Church: 70,000 believers; the Muslim Cult: 67,000 believers.

<sup>29</sup> At the census in 2011, their number decreased to only 870,774.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-romano-catolica> “1,026,429 believers out of whom 587,000 are Hungarian, 345,557 Romanians, 36,040 Germans and 11,580 Slovaks.”

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> After the census in 2011, today there are many controversies about the correct percentage of each denomination. Some statistics start from the number of inhabitants of Romania, others – which seem more relevant – start from the high number of persons who do not wish to declare their religious identity. For instance, following the census in 2011, the National Institute for Statistics stated that, “These percentages do not take into account the population segment that did not wish to reveal their religious orientation to the census staff. More precisely, out of 20,121,641 inhabitants of the country, almost 1,259,741 did not declare their religious identity. This means that over one million Romanians refused to declare anything about their religion. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that the percentage obtained by the various denominations in Romania would also look different if they were set in proportion to the total number of inhabitants. Thus, Roman Catholics are 4.32%, Reformed are 2.98%, Pentecostals – 1.80%, “without religion” or atheists – 0.19%. The other denominations mentioned in the report have a percentage of 0.74% – Greek Catholics, 0.56% – Baptists, and 0.40% – Adventists.”

theology<sup>33</sup> and 8 theological high schools. The Baptist Church (0.59%) has at least 4 institutions of academic education.<sup>34</sup>

Coming from a world in which the Faculties of Theology have either been closed, or have an incredibly low number of students, the French Canadian would certainly wish to know whether there is any dynamic of the denominational educational system, whether it belongs to the state or to the private line of educational establishments, whether the religious formation has or hasn't any impact on the society as a whole. I wouldn't be able to answer him completely, for a more precise answer should imply a better-documented research than the one in this imaginary dialogue. I could still tell him that – what seems to me as the most impressive thing – immediately after 1990, Religion was introduced in schools as a discipline. “A first formal step in the process of introducing Religion in state schools was the signing of a protocol shortly before the beginning of the school year 1990-1991, between the Ministry of Education and the Orthodox Church. Through this protocol moral-religious education was officially introduced in the curriculum of public schools throughout the country as a facultative and optional subject, having an ecumenical character, taught by the graduates from theological institutes in our country.”<sup>35</sup> Although Law no. 84/1995, which makes the teaching of religion in schools official, does not mention the compulsory character of attending classes of religion, in primary and secondary schools it is practically compulsory, on the one hand because neither parents nor children are informed about the facultative character of these classes, and on the other hand because no other alternative is offered, so that religion could become an optional subject.

The denominational education belongs – in my opinion – up to 90% to the state educational system. I guess this is the approximate percentage because the whole Orthodox education belongs to the state, all the Greek Catholic institutions, a significant part of the Roman

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/biserica-romana-unita-cu-roma-greco-catolica> A Faculty of Theology in Cluj (with departments in Cluj, Blaj and Oradea) and another one in Baia Mare.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.culte.gov.ro/uniunea-bisericilor-crestine-baptiste>. The Baptist Theological Institute in Bucharest, with a specialization of Baptist Pastoral Theology, and the Emanuel University in Oradea with the following specializations: Baptist Pastoral Theology, Baptist Didactic Theology – Social Assistance, Musical Pedagogy and Management of Organizations. Moreover, within the University of Bucharest, there also is a faculty of Baptist Theology – Letters and Social Assistance, while within the University of Oradea there is the specialization Baptist Theology – Letters.

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.proeuropa.ro/norme\\_si\\_practici.html](http://www.proeuropa.ro/norme_si_practici.html)

Catholic ones, and some of the Baptist institutions. I did not check all the data, but I expect this picture to be almost accurate.

### **A FIRST MOMENT OF REFLECTION**

After a passage so dense with data, it's time to sit down together with my French Canadian friend and to reflect on their meaning. Most probably we won't grasp all the significance of this obvious "coming back to religion". However, as neither did my French Canadian friend make me thoroughly understand the issue of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, a revolution during which over a brief span of time the Quebec's society became completely secularized; he won't be reproachful if I fail to make him see a clear picture of religion in Romania; above all because a well-grounded analysis demands time for a retrospective view and the time necessary to a well-structured research.

Therefore:

I say that in a great measure the explosion of religiousness was the expression of the freedom that the Revolution in 1989 made possible. Freedom was its formal frame; still its inner motivation is one that pertains to the identity of a Christian. For, obviously, freedom did not necessarily mean also a "coming back to religion". I say "also" because immediately after the Revolution, Romania was the site of various outbursts: an overwhelming number of newspapers and magazines, of television channels, of publishing houses, of private universities, for instance. I mention them because they could weigh as a counterpart. During communism, there were only two or three newspapers (all of them under the supervision of the Communist Party), two television channels, which used to broadcast for only several hours a day. Access to academic education was restricted through a small number of places, which meant that the entrance examination often implied a competition of between 20 and 50 candidates for one place, especially at faculties with humanist, artistic or scientific profile.<sup>36</sup>

During communist times the constitution "guaranteed" religious freedom. However, even in the absence of a clear interdiction as in the case of the Greek Catholic Church or the Witnesses of Jehovah, the pressure of atheism was overwhelming. Those who held a leading position or intended to have one could not publicly attend church services. The reports of the "Securitate" (the Secret Police)<sup>37</sup> reveal that

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<sup>36</sup> At the Faculty of Plastic Arts or at Theater and Cinematography there could be up to 100 candidates competing for one place.

<sup>37</sup> Under the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Securitate employed some 11,000 agents and had a half-million informers for a country with a population

there were officers who recorded – obviously as an extremely unfavorable fact – participation in the religious service. Therefore, as usually happens, people anticipated the possible negative effects which the expression of one’s belief could have and, consequently, tried to conceal it. Faith, by its very nature, could escape the control of the Communist Party, which meant that in certain cases permanent “supervision” was necessary. Theoretically, all believers were aimed at, but people were more severely supervised if they belonged to other Churches<sup>38</sup> than the official Church, or to monasteries, or if certain priests or consecrated persons were famous and thus became “enemies of the regime”. When it came to priests, the communist regime made no difference. They imprisoned priests of any denomination.<sup>39</sup> These were considered to be “enemies of the people”, because, making use of their popularity, they could induce an attitude hostile to the regime, and if not explicitly hostile, at least through the courage with which they refused to be manipulated. For instance, because the regime suspected that the children of a priest could be less manipulated, or, rephrased in communist terms, they “lacked a proper education”, during communist times children of priests were not admitted to the entrance examination at faculties with an ideological profile of any kind, such as the faculties of law and philosophy. They were under the same interdiction as the children of former political prisoners. At the beginnings of the communist period, the children of priests used to be excluded from most faculties. “To be of an unhealthy origin” meant among others also being the child of a priest.

Obviously, this repression varied in intensity according to the various stages of communism. The initial exterminating forms were substituted by more sophisticated versions of manipulation, such as being compelled to denounce and to co-operate. Or, the resistance against communism frequently meant assuming one’s belief in God, assuming one’s faith and the courage, often the heroism, not to deny it. Not everyone living the times of communism was dramatically confronted with the dangers which could have resulted from declaring their faith, but most of them felt that changing the perspective may help them to face the terrors of communism: shifting from their own immediate defenselessness to the almighty power of God. Most explicit was the case of those condemned and deported. There are countless

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of 22 million by 1985. Craig S. Smith, 2006, “Eastern Europe Struggles to Purge Security Services”, *The New York Times*, December 12, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, various members of the Pentecostal or Baptist Church report a constant attitude of intimidation.

<sup>39</sup> Between 1950-1965, over 500 Orthodox priests were imprisoned, and some of them were sentenced to heavy labor.

witnesses of people who survived imprisonment only by placing their trust in God. The same can be said of their families. And, don't forget – I would tell my French Canadian friend – that in Romania almost every family had one relative imprisoned for political reasons or deported.

Therefore, I am certain, that while expecting the contrary, communism actually strengthened the faith of Romanians. In a similar way, the goal to favor the proletariat was as result a higher appreciation of the intellectuals. And further on, the difficulties with which books were printed and the scarcity with which they were distributed led to a huge thirst for knowledge and a deep admiration for books.

### **A FURTHER STEP BACKWARDS IN HISTORY**

I have been referring to this conversation between my Quebecois friend and myself as the “coming back to religion”, not only because of this picture of the years that followed the chute of communism. If it were only for this picture, I could have thought of a more temporally restricted title, for instance, *Religion in post-communist Romania*. I could have, thus, drawn a connection – which I thought necessary – between what had happened with religion during the communist regime, in order to better understand what has happened during the post-communist period. However, I think it is more important to take a step further backwards in history. One step, at least. That means reversing to the times before communism.

Without entering into details, I still have to mention that for a long time our national identity was strongly associated with that of Christianity. To be Romanian was almost similar with being a Christian. That is not being a pagan, a Muslim. The Romanian history that one is taught in school is a long series of battles (almost all of them successful) against the Ottoman conquerors. “Defending one's land” was synonymous with “defending Christianity”, by extension, in recent history, with defending Orthodoxy. Hence, a set of effects which can be still sensed nowadays under various forms. However, this is a different topic.

The aim of my suggestion to take a step backwards was to manage a logical connection between – as the title itself suggests – the history of post-communist Romania and Romania before communist times. A country in which religion, sometimes in a dangerously pathetic way (as the case of the Iron Guard), was a significant trace for auto-identifying. Precisely this is why I said the *coming back* to religion.



### **DOES THIS COMING BACK TO RELIGION IMPLY A COMING BACK TO FAITH?**

For several reasons, this question may seem unreasonable. First of all, it is impossible from an ontological point of view to speak about returning to religion, while excluding the realm of faith. Secondly, I myself am inclined to admit – as I have already said – that the religious explosion which occurred after the fall of the communism, is in itself a token of a deepening of the people’s faith during the communist decades. In other words, coming back to religion could be perceived as an accord with a previously existing state of belief.

However, when attempting to imagine what a French Canadian would be interested in, I wonder how far this coming back to religion is nurtured by a deeply underlying state of faith. Or, differently put, is the life of those who declare themselves as believers really consistent with the faith? An “external observer” would say that it doesn’t seem to be. It rather looks as if the identity of a believer, acknowledged as a valuable identity, were stated without a convincing correspondence in one’s behavior. Nevertheless, the identity of a believer cannot be given by an “external” diagnosis. When judging from outside, it can only be said that one seems to be more faithful or not. A person cannot be declared as being faithful, even when acting in the most Christian way, if he/she does not perceive himself/herself as such. Similarly, one cannot decide from the outside, that a person is not a believer, as long as he/she has an inner faith in God. However, from the outside, one can still be suspicious about somebody else’s faith as being only a matter of appearance. An appearance only, because in Romania is very “fashionable” to be a believer. On the contrary, it looks very, very disadvantageous not to be one.

Even if most of the times one may be left with the impression of a merely feigned belief, a kind of forming an alliance with faith for the sake of things most inconsistent with it (power, money, fame, pleasure), one cannot be touched when, coming from a country as Canada, one sees the large number of people queuing from the first hours of the morning at the entrance of churches, in order to have their prayers read by a priest – for instance, at St. Anthony’s the Great Church in Bucharest.<sup>40</sup> Every Tuesday, inside the church, there are at least four priests who read continuously, from morning till night, thousands of prayers (acatiste) through which people ask for health, jobs, money, a better family life...

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<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., [http://www.biserica-sfantul-anton.ro/media/biserica-sfantulanton/foto/500/original/dsc\\_0338.jpg](http://www.biserica-sfantul-anton.ro/media/biserica-sfantulanton/foto/500/original/dsc_0338.jpg).

All these people put their trust in God. Even when attempting various sociological interpretations, such as “only their trusting in God was left to them” as a consequence of all the constant deceptions they suffer from the part of politicians, of the medical system, of the justice..., even if speculating about the fascination of miracles, one cannot fail to admit that “these people place their hope in the power of God”.

This act of faith may be punctual. For several minutes during one Tuesday, they ardently pray to God, after which they continue their lives as if God wouldn't even exist. Similarly, on the feast day of certain saints, when the holy relics of those saints are displayed outside the church, they queue sometimes as early as the previous day, in order to have the chance of touching them. Two days of piety, after which hatred, vanity, hypocrisy, indifference, division, perfidy...again.

It is as if God is present in the heart of the Romanians, of certain Romanians, only on moments of distress, while otherwise absent.

I might be exaggerating, or I might be wrong, but I have seen so many “faithful Romanians”, who after coming out of the church lie, steal that – it is also possible – that I extend their example to a general image. Do not think – I should tell my French Canadian friend – that I have absurd expectations of them to be “irreproachable”, I don't expect all of them to be “model believers”, but – I admit – I rarely have the opportunity to see loving believers, attentive toward others, generous, earnest, sincere; hence the feeling of a Pharisee rhetoric.

I must add a few more remarks, which you should take as extremely subjective. My feeling is that in the minority Churches I happen to know (Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist), there is a better accord between the faith they proclaim and the lives they lead, and that the melody of their lives is marked by lesser dissonance. Nobody is perfect, but maybe also motivated by their status as a minority, these “minority believers” are more concerned with living a Christian life. It is my own impression, I repeat, an impression fatally incomplete and restricted by the limitations of my personal experience. Obviously, the Orthodox believers form the majority, so in this Church there is a larger place for error, for “sin”. Still, it may be something more than that.

This harmony, which haunts me, can become the lens through which we contemplate the life of a certain believer or that of a priest. I do not enter here into the field of consecrated life, for it demands a space of its own. I only mention that the number of consecrated men and women in post-communist Romania is – again – impressively large, several times larger than those in the communist decades.

About the clergy, it is useless to say that their numbers have also increased several times.

## **THE CHURCH IS THE CHURCH AND THE PRIEST IS THE PRIEST**

After witnessing the many new churches that have been built or are still being built in Romania, one would think it unnecessary to wonder which is the true relation between the Romanians and the Church. The coming back to religion would normally imply being in good terms with the Church. Unfortunately, this is not all the time the case. Frequently, the relation with the Church is one thing and the relation with the clergy is another. It may happen that the priest is identified with the Church to which he belongs, but not necessarily. There are certain priests famous for their charisma, there are churches visited for the sake of a wonder-working icon or for certain holy relics.

Immediately after the Revolution this disjunction – theoretically inconceivable – between clergy and Church (as God’s House where the priest is meant to celebrate) did not exist. The clergy was one with the Church. Moreover, pilgrimages made to charismatic priests, perceived as “foreseers” (such was the case of Iustin Pârnu<sup>41</sup>) – a token of absolute trust in the holiness of a priest – seemed to unconditionally encompass the whole clergy. I mean the Orthodox priest. Therefore, during an initial phase, the admiration towards priests was independent of any judgment. It went so far that, when it was made public that some of the priests had co-operated with the Secret Police,<sup>42</sup> initially – I repeat – the Romanians did not dare to “condemn” them. The priests remained sacred. Gradually, people began to make abstraction of their divine status and tended to judge them as human beings.

Gradually, again, mainly through the voices of sociologists and political analysts, remarks began to be heard against the ever-more conspicuous opulence of the Orthodox Church, i.e. of the clergy, against their “business affairs”, against the discrepancy between their status of state employees and the protection which they enjoy when coming to explain the money they receive as donations, or as taxes for administering the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Matrimony, or for funeral services. For the first time these days a member of the Parliament dared to insist that Court of Accounts should also investigate the BOR (Orthodox Romanian Church). The immunity of the Orthodox

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<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., [http://roncea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Pelerinaj-la-Petru-Voda-pentru-Parintele-Justin-Parvu-19.06.2013-coada-zi-Roncea.Ro\\_.jpg](http://roncea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Pelerinaj-la-Petru-Voda-pentru-Parintele-Justin-Parvu-19.06.2013-coada-zi-Roncea.Ro_.jpg).

<sup>42</sup> The Securitate was, in proportion to Romania’s population, one of the largest secret police forces in the Eastern bloc. The first budget of the Securitate in 1948 stipulated a number of 4,641 positions, of which 3,549 were filled by February 1949: 64% were workers, 4% peasants, 28% clerks, 2% persons of unspecified origin, and 2% intellectuals.

Church has become an issue, her credibility more and more uncertain. If immediately after the Revolution the Church together with the Army were at the top of the list as the most trusted institutions, today its reliability has dramatically decreased. From about 90% during the first years after the Revolution it fell to 63.9% in August 2013. Most probably because the discrepancy between the opulence of the Orthodox Church, thought as unreasonable by many, and the poverty suffered by a consistent part of the population. This disagreement is complex. One point is the People's Salvation Cathedral.<sup>43</sup>

The Cathedral, when completed, will be the largest Orthodox Church in the world, and rank among the largest church buildings in the world, with a length of 137 meters (449 ft.). With an overall height of 127 meters (417 ft.), it will be the tallest Orthodox Christian Church in the world, surpassing the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, at 103 meters (338 ft.), and the bell towers of Peter and Paul's Cathedral in Saint Petersburg, at 123 meters (404 ft.). It will be the second tallest building in Romania, after the Floreasca City Center.<sup>44</sup>

The cost estimated in 2006 by *Evenimentul Zilei* at more than € 500 million (including the price of the land), while *Le Figaro* estimated it in 2008 at € 1 billion. Patriarch Daniel estimated in 2007 the cost of the building (excluding the land) at around € 400 million. The Government announced it will donate 30 million Lei (€ 8 million) and the Romanian Parliament enacted a law that further will pay half of the cost of the Cathedral from the state budget.

At the beginning of the 1990's few would have dared to make any objections against the Cathedral. Gradually, people began to compare the costs demanded by this building with the budget meant for schools or hospitals. In a country where the average salary of the employees in the educational and medical fields is, according to the National Institute for Statistics, of about €350, people feel justified in reacting to the way in which the budget of the State is being distributed.

## THE END OF THE VISIT

Visits do not end with the moment when one leaves, no matter if one wishes to have stayed longer, or to have left earlier. The feelings, the impact follow you. Even more when the difference between your

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<sup>43</sup> See, e.g. <http://img836.imageshack.us/img836/5629/catedrala1.php.jpg>.

<sup>44</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanian\\_People's\\_Salvation\\_Cathedral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanian_People's_Salvation_Cathedral).

own country and the one you have been visiting is considerable. I cannot know what would be in the mind of a French Canadian after leaving Romania. Neither can I guess what precisely he thinks about the coming back to religion in our country. I believe, nevertheless, that he would be passionate about finding out more on the relation between religion and politics – a relation which in Romania is not as secularized as is officially stated – about the modern character of Romania, about the role religion plays in education and in social life. I could bet that the most fascinating aspect would be the divorce between communism and religion, and the marriage between democracy and religion, more precisely, between the birth of Romanian democracy and religion. Which elements belonging to the two political regimes make possible a certain positioning in relation to religion – I am certain – will be a question haunting him long enough.

As far as I know him, sensitive at “cultural differences”, interested in the *alterité*, he will be impressed by the religious attitude seen in Romania. As an intellectual he will ask himself questions and seek answers beyond appearances.

For myself, I should thank him for everything I have learned while acting as his guide. As it often happens, I have discovered this facet of Romania together with him. His questions have since become mine, as much as I have also shared my interests with him.

We will probably discuss again about all these. Then, I will definitely insist on the *identity of a believer*.

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## CHAPTER IV

# **BECOMING SECULAR? DYNAMICS OF TEACHING RELIGION AND ETHICS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY FOCUSING ON ROMANIA**

*RALUCA BIGU*

### INTRODUCTION

The fall of communism re-installed Religious Education (RE) back into school curricula, but the secularization affecting Western Europe shaped also the way in which religion was taught in Central and Eastern Europe in the last 20 years. While a complex puzzle of factors has to be taken into account when evaluating the different approaches concerning RE in Central and Eastern European countries, there has been a development, the paper argues, towards a limiting of RE in public schools,<sup>1</sup> and thus of the role of religion in public life.

This trend can be seen both as a reflection of a West-imported secularism and of a more preeminent role assumed by local civic societies – developed in these states after the fall of communist regimes – in the debate concerning the place of RE in public schools.

The paper identifies and discusses two features of that perceived trend in several former communist Central and Eastern European countries: the widespread optional character of RE and the study of ethics as an alternative subject to religious instruction.<sup>2</sup>

Still, challenging this secularization trend, one can also notice signs of a different approach in an Orthodox-dominant country like Romania, where religion is taught in a confessional manner without offering an alternative subject.

The paper will, thus, be concerned to place Romania into the broader Central and Eastern Europe context of teaching RE in public schools, while also analyzing the particular cultural, social and historical

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<sup>1</sup> The generic term “schools” will be used in this article only in connection with pre-tertiary public educational institutions.

<sup>2</sup> The research focuses only on states that are traditionally conceived within the Central and Eastern European bloc, now part of the European Union, as these states shared a communist legacy and their approach to RE can prove relevant for the Romanian context.

context that gave way to the specific formula adopted by this country for religious instruction in public schools.

### **TEACHING RE AND ETHICS IN A CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN CONTEXT: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

At first glance, approaches to religious education in public schools throughout Central and Eastern Europe reveal a complex puzzle, caused by the very different and specific situations that evolved in every state after the return to democracy. This view is supported by the fact that, albeit these countries shared an initially common starting point – a religious landscape heavily affected by the restrictions imposed by the communist regimes – each of these states, due to historical and social circumstances, developed a specific path concerning RE, based on the way the relation between church and state evolved after the fall of the communist regimes. This relation is of particular importance when we are dealing with RE in Central and Eastern Europe, as the vast majority of pupils in these states are still enrolled in public schools. Thus, teaching RE in schools becomes a subject of permanent debate between the state, the denominations and the civil society, and is prone to changes each time the circumstances or the opinions may vary.

Still, RE in Central and Eastern Europe can be grouped according to several criteria, such as its confessional/ non-confessional character, its place (compulsory/ optional) in the curricula, or the possibility to choose an alternative subject to RE. Furthermore, RE can be analyzed in relation with the authority that provides the RE courses (the denominations, the state, or a cooperation between the two), the status of the RE teachers (state or church employees) or whether it is conceived as a special subject or is integrated in other subjects (such as history or literature).

A review of the present situation<sup>3</sup> will show, in the following paragraphs, that, in what concerns religious instruction in public schools, most states adopted approaches that “tame” the traditional monopoly that the churches have enjoyed for centuries in what concerns the religious and moral upbringing of children.

Beginning alphabetically with **Bulgaria**, RE is an elective-compulsory subject, in the group of “Social Sciences, Civic Education and Religion”, elective for students, but mandatory for the schools to

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<sup>3</sup> This overview follows Luce Pepin, *Teaching about Religions in European School Systems* (London: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2009), pp. 20-22 and Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Church, State and Democracy in Expanding Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 206-207.



include in the curriculum.<sup>4</sup> It consists in a course about the “world religions” (whose materials are provided by the Ministry of Education), covering mainly Christianity and Islam, with an accent put on Orthodox teaching. Moving on to **Czech Republic**, where more than half of the population describe itself as having no religion (according to 2001 census), RE courses are again elective-compulsory, but in this case, organized by the confessions, with the teachers paid by the state, but approved by the denominations. It must be said that, unsurprisingly, that RE courses are quite unpopular among the students. In **Estonia**, RE is an elective-compulsory subject, taught in an ecumenical manner that includes some ethical elements. Although the teachers are paid by the state, the schools are in a certain degree free to establish their own curriculum for teaching RE. As for **Hungary**, from the academic 2013, RE, while previously an extracurricular subject taught after school on the school premises, became a mandatory subject that all schools have to offer, with ethical instruction (under the name “moral teachings”) as an alternative. In **Latvia**, students can choose between Christian faith (ethics) – taught in a confessional manner by teachers trained by the denominations – and (secular) ethics. Also, in **Lithuania**, students can opt between elective religious instruction and ethics. As in most of the countries in the region, the teachers are paid by the state, but authorized by the denominations. The situation is similar in **Poland**, where students can choose between religion instruction – taught in an ecumenical manner, as an elective-compulsory subject, by teachers paid by the state, but approved by the denominations – and ethics. In **Romania**, RE is an elective-compulsory subject, to whom there is no alternative offered. The teachers are paid by the state, but licensed by the denominations. Moving to **Slovakia**, RE and Ethics are considered “compulsory optional” subjects that all parents have to make a choice between. RE is taught in a confessional manner, by external teachers chosen by denominations, but paid by the state. The situation is very different in **Slovenia**, where an optional course of “Religion and ethics”, provided by teachers paid by the state, is offered in the grades 7, 8 and 9. There is no confessional education in public schools.

More than two decades after the fall of the communist regimes, it seems that most states Central and Eastern Europe see RE as a specific elective subject, taught in a confessional manner, with ethics as an alternative, by teachers paid by the state, although licensed by the denominations.

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<sup>4</sup> By an “elective-compulsory” subject, I will understand, from now on, a subject that is elective for students, but mandatory for schools to offer in the curriculum.

This current picture, I argue, while failing to acknowledge the particular differences that make each state unique, proves to be of particular importance when we talk about the growing secularization of the European society, understood here as the process of retreat of religion from the public into the private sphere. In education, this secularization trend can be observed in several important educational decisions these states approved concerning RE in public schools. In this sense, we can advance the notion of an “imposed” (or “forced”) secularization – as opposed to a process gradually affecting the whole society and felt at the level of individuals – that consists in specific measures imposed by the authorities, with the effect of restricting the religion’s role in public life.

One such decision was to make RE an optional subject for students, albeit compulsory offered by the schools. Another important educational decision concerning RE was to offer an alternative to a RE taught in a confessional manner, in most cases by offering ethics as an alternative subject. By this measure, the states not only restricted the possibility to attend religious instruction in public schools, but also proposed a competitor in the morality field, thus affecting the monopoly the denominations enjoyed for centuries in this respect. The reasons beyond this proposal – albeit not an uncontroversial one – seem to relate ethics to a cluster of humanistic values, seen in competition with the religious ones. By proposing a competitor, the State – I argue – risks drawing a questionable and sometimes false distinction between the religious students (those who attend RE classes) and the non-religious ones (those enrolled in the ethics course). Still, the problem seems far more nuanced, and any approach implies a broader debate about what kind of education should be given in public schools and how the state should be placed in relation to the moral education of students.

Still, given the relative uniformity of using the term “ethics” as an alternative to the RE, we can reasonably suspect a western-mirrored imported practice, rather than a decision, at the end of a detailed debate, at the level of each individual Central and Eastern European state. On the other hand, to see the current situation in these countries as a direct import phenomenon from Western Europe seems equally simplistic. To some, proposing ethics as an alternative to RE, only two decades after the returning of religion in public space, can seem strange, given the initial enthusiasm that accompanied this return in some countries (as Romania). Still, while this initial enthusiasm was sufficient to put religion back into the schools curricula, it couldn’t face, in time, the growing anti-clerical feeling that developed in some of these countries, as the denominations became more powerful and rich in the post-communist world. Thus, at the pressure of both local civil societies and educational influences and practices from abroad, each country

developed a RE teaching formula that could keep a balance between the stances formulated by different actors in society.

#### A “REVERSED” TREND TO RE TEACHING IN ROMANIA?

If we look into the case of Romania, the two secularization features observed in the rest of the countries are only partially met, as the public schools offer no alternative to RE. Moreover, as indicating a possible “reversed” trend in Romania, the powerful Romanian Orthodox Church imposed in the last years its view about teaching RE in public schools. Thus, in 2010, the Orthodox Church succeeded in removing from the draft of the Education Law the proposal to have alternatives course to RE, such as history of religions, history of culture and arts or others courses useful for establishing an ethical, social and communitarian behavior. More recently, the same church succeeded in convincing the authorities to have RE studied for one more year in public education (in preparatory class), bringing the total number of years to study RE in Romania to 13.

This continuous pressure from the dominant Church is, by no means, an isolated phenomenon in Romania. In Bulgaria, for example, another Orthodox-dominant country, in 2008, the Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church proposed the introduction of a confessional RE course, based on splitting classes into three groups: the Orthodox confession, Muslims and atheists (who were supposed to learn only ethics); in support of the idea, after the opening of the school year 2010/2011, 10.000 persons from all over Bulgaria marched in a procession on the streets of the capital, Sofia.<sup>5</sup>

This last paragraph prompts us to take a closer look at the Romanian case, in order to see what features and actors can stand against the secularization trend identified in most other Central and East European countries mentioned above.

*The Romanian Context.* Romania is an overwhelmingly Orthodox country, where 86,45% from a population of approximately 20 million people (according to the 2011 census) declare themselves Orthodox and where the Constitution expressly guarantees religious education in state schools (Article 32, par. 7). While 18 religious denominations are officially recognized by the Romanian state, the Orthodox faith is usually considered an essential part of the “Romanian identity” through the centuries, and thus often invoked in nationalistic rhetoric.

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<sup>5</sup> This information appears in Hristo Berov, “Religion in the Public Education System of Bulgaria”, in Gerhard Robbers (ed.), *Religion in Public Education* (Trier: European Consortium for Church and State Research, 2011) p. 74.

Since the fall of the communist regime over two decades ago, the Romanian educational system, along with other former communist ones, underwent several reforms, most significantly by introducing private education along with public schools. After more than two decades since the fall of communism, the overwhelming majority of pupils (96%) are still enrolled in public educational structures, while the private ones are concentrated at the kindergarten and at the tertiary level. Furthermore, the Romanian education system is still heavily centralized, especially in what concerns the curriculum and the funds received, with few powers left to schools or local authorities.

This post-communist educational landscape differs significantly from the pre-communist one, in which confessional schools dominated the educational offer in Romania. These confessional schools were firstly established in Transylvania (one of the three main historical provinces of Romania) during the Middle Ages, especially by Orders of Catholic priests. In the 19th century, a study showed that private confessional schools were considered the best schools in Transylvania. Still, in nowadays Romania, enrolling children to private confessional schools remains a very limited and somehow eccentric option for parents, even within the private educational system. Moreover, these schools were established in most cases very late after the fall of communism, after approximately 10 years, and their number remains very limited.

The reinstatement of RE in public schools was the one of the first requests asked by the churches in post-communist Romania and, in 1995, religion classes were introduced by the previous Education Law (Law 84/1995), later amended in 1997.

The current legal framework for teaching RE in public schools is Education Law No. 1/2011, which states that RE is an elective subject (integrated in the field “Man and Society” within the core curriculum), that schools have to offer compulsory, for one hour a week. Thus, in Article 18 (par. 1), the law states, “The framework curricula for primary, lower secondary, high school and professional education include the subject Religion as a part of the core curriculum. Students who belong to state-recognized religious denominations are ensured, irrespective of their number, their constitutional right to attend Religion classes in accordance with their own religious faith.” While students can opt out, at the written request of the parents or legal tutors, no alternative is offered. Thus, according to the law, “At the written request of students of the age of majority, or of the parents or legal guardians in the case of minors, students are able not to attend Religion classes. In such cases, the overall average mark is computed without said subject. A similar procedure is applied for students for whom, for objective reasons, the conditions

necessary for the attendance of Religion classes could not be ensured” (Art.18, par.2).

But the “opt out” clause proved to be one of the most problematic issues regarding teaching RE in schools, as the article assumes that students are enrolled by default in Religion classes, instead of opting before enrolling. Thus, while the current wording seems to run against international and Romanian legislation protecting the freedom of conscience, the 1995 Education Law, according to which the pupils (or parents/legal tutors) have the right to choose students' religious instruction, did not seem to bear the same consequence.<sup>6</sup>

While denominations are responsible for drawing up the curriculum, the textbooks and licensing the RE teachers, the final approval in each of these cases belongs to the Ministry of Education. The law states that “the subject Religion may be taught exclusively by qualified teaching staff, as provided by this Law and under the protocols concluded between the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports and the officially recognized religious denominations” (Article 18, par. 3).

In practice, these legal provisions prove to be insufficient for respecting children's right to freedom of conscience. While the Education Law states that the children have the possibility to opt out, there are numerous cases when schools do not inform parents that their children are entitled to that option, and thus the vast majority of students end up learning about the Orthodox faith. Moreover, in certain cases, as RE classes are sometimes scheduled in the middle of the school timetable, the children who opt out remain unattended, and thus prone to risks, as the schools are not offering any alternative. So, instead of leaving their children unattended, some parents prefer them staying in the classroom during the RE class, without taking part in the activities. One interesting consequence – that also justifies the high attendance of RE classes – is that some children from other faiths actually prefer to attend Orthodox RE classes, because, usually, Religion teachers give them the maximum grade, so their overall average mark will be higher.

But the public debate concerning RE in Romania was less concerned about the deficiencies perceived in the provisions of the Education Law, but more on the content of Orthodox textbooks in public schools. According to several NGOs, in their present form, some of these textbooks have passages that lead to religious indoctrination and xenophobia.

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<sup>6</sup> The problem is also mentioned in Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Church, State and Democracy in Expanding Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 145.

Thus, for example, while the framework curriculum for RE in Romania states, for all denominations, the objective to teach the children in order to understand, accept and respect other beliefs and convictions, the Orthodox textbooks dedicate little space to other world religions, while being more preoccupied with the detailed descriptions of the rites in the Orthodox Church. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that, even the Minister of Education at the time admitted that a change in Orthodox RE textbooks was needed, the preferred partner to discuss such “modernization” – as it was called by the Minister – was thought to be the Orthodox Church. But the Church did not agree that the information presented in the Orthodox textbooks were inappropriate, but only that the textbooks should be made more “appealing to children” and “the wordings of some phrases should be reformulated”.<sup>7</sup> One year after the row erupted and the Ministry of Education promised a renewed debate and new textbooks, the problem remained unsolved, but people are assured that new textbooks are underway.

Another source of discontent, as perceived by the same representatives of civil society, is the confessional character of teaching RE in Romanian public schools. Several proposals were advanced, most commonly involving a non-confessional RE course, focusing on history of religions, or an ethics course. Still, each time, these proposals faced the fierce opposition from the Orthodox Church. In the clearest case, at the request of the Orthodox Church, the proposal of an alternative course to RE, covering subjects related, among others, to history of religions was eliminated from the 2011 Education Law bill.

In what concerns the introduction of ethics as an alternative to RE, the current situation has little chance to change, given the fact that the Orthodox Church is a powerful social actor, whose support is sought by every party in power, and which succeeded in imposing its views in the way the educational policy concerning RE in school evolved in post-communist Romania. Or, given the fact that several Orthodox clerics referred to the traditional “enmity” between religion and philosophy, ethics, seen as a branch of philosophy, is thus automatically associated with non-believers and with humanistic values.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning the public opinion of RE in Romania remains divided over teaching RE in schools and apparently content with part of the status quo. According to a 2011 study by Soros Foundation Romania (“Religion and religious behavior”), 86% of the Romanians think that Religion should be taught in schools.

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<sup>7</sup> The declaration of the spokesman of the Romanian Orthodox Church, father Constantin Stoica, is cited by *Evenimentul Zilei*, 2012. “Face Changing of the Religious Education Textbooks”.

Moreover, 50% believe that Religion should be a compulsory subject for student, while 40% thinks it should be optional. In the same time, 52% affirm that the children should learn only about their denomination, comparing with 32% who prefer them learning about other denominations as well. Still, 46% would prefer to have the RE taught by teachers specialized in history of religions, while 38% think the teachers should be priests.<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Given the situation exposed so far, the secularized tendency identified in other Central and Eastern European countries have few chances to be replicated soon in Romania. Synthesizing, the reasons seem to be manifold. One reason is a powerful Orthodox Church (whose percent of believers remains virtually unchanged since the fall of the communism)<sup>9</sup> that succeeded in imposing its views in the Education Law, and which will probably continue to do so, if a new law should be drafted. Another reason is the current 2011 Education Law, still not yet fully implemented, which by its controversial “opt out” clause favors a default enrolling in RE Orthodox classes. A third reason regards the way Romanian civil society can make its voice heard in the debates concerning teaching RE in Romania. While the initiative to drop some RE textbooks remains an important step in the debate, real progress was actually very limited, given the continuous postponement of presenting new RE textbooks. Last but not the least, as an important part of the Romanian public seems content with the status quo, there is little chance that an initiative to change the way RE is taught in public schools would gain broad public support. Very likely, such an initiative will prove unpopular, although the trust in Church has declined over the years and there is a widespread discontent about the generous funds received by the Orthodox Church from the state, as well as about the behavior of some clerics. It seems that for the Romanian people, religion and religious instruction continue to play an important role in their lives and tend to be separated from the current anti-clerical feeling that gave way to a crisis in Church credibility.

In this context, the current situation in Romania concerning RE in public schools offers little incentive to talk about developing or importing features that characterize a more secular approach in other Central and East European countries. Therefore, even RE is an elective-

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<sup>8</sup> Soros Foundation Romania, 2011. “Religion and Religious Behavior”.

<sup>9</sup> According to data offered by the National Institute for Statistics, 86.81% of Romanians declared themselves Orthodox in the 1992 census, 86.79% in the 2002 census, and 86.45% in the last census in 2012.

compulsory subject in Romanian public schools curriculum, as in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This feature proves to be insufficient, when compared with other developments that prove that the dominant Church still has an important role to play in what concerns the place of religion in the public sphere in Romania. Thus, while most former communist states adopted, in a relatively short time since the fall of the communist regimes, educational policies that limit religious instruction in public education, the local historical and social circumstances in Romania can be considered responsible, not for a “reversed” trend, but for a situation that leaves little room in the near future for a more secularized approach towards RE in public schools.

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**PART II**

**“SECULARIZATION” AND  
PUBLIC RELIGIOUS LIFE IN ROMANIA**



## CHAPTER V

# IS NATIONALISM A FORM OF SECULARIZATION FOR ORTHODOXY?

GELU SABĂU

In the present study I wish to discuss several aspects specific to the phenomenon of secularization, and the way it appears within the Romanian society. The idea of this research started from the evidence that, although the Romanian society is a modern one, its realities do not fully correspond to the criteria established by classical theories of secularization and modernization.<sup>1</sup> Before actually starting this investigation, I will give some terminological explanations, in order to eliminate the ambiguity of the terms I am employing here.

### SECULARIZATION AND LAITY. TERMINOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS

#### *Secularization*

In his vast work dedicated to the secularization phenomenon, *A Secular Age*, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor defines three possible meanings of the term “secular”: 1) In a first sense, secularization means the absence of religious references in the public place. This phenomenon is linked with the separation between the political and the religious and also with the fact that various spheres of human activity are leaving the tutelage of religious norms and principles, and becoming autonomous. In the modern age, economy, politics, culture, education, etc., become independent fields, with their own functioning rules, without referring to the religious ambit. Secularization, thus understood, is not a synonym for losing religious faith, but, on the contrary, it is compatible with the existence of a large number of practitioners or believers. 2) The second sense of secularization refers to a decrease of influence in society of the faith and the religious practices. From this point of view, secularization is a phenomenon that might be studied by principally using the instruments

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<sup>1</sup> The most influential authors for the classical theories of secularization and modernization are the authors from the end of XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth (S. Freud, A. Comte, M. Weber or E. Durkheim). These theories were prevalent until the '60-'70s and had many proponents such as Peter Berger, David Martin, Brian Wilson, Steve Bruce, Karel Dobbelare etc.

of sociology. 3) For a secular society, in this sense of the word, religious faith or metaphysical conviction are not implicit matters, but rather problematic situations that are shaped by the personal choice of each individual. In this sense, a society isn't secular because there are few who believe, but because in that society there exist a plurality of faiths. For example, America is a secular society in this third sense, but not in the second, because the majority of the Americans are believers, as belief is a matter of individual choice. A traditional Islamic society is not secular in any of the two senses, because the number of believers is high, all being Muslims by birth.<sup>2</sup>

Among the classic theories of secularization, the term is employed for designating the processes of modernization, rationalization and industrialization that have occurred in Western societies. From this point of view, secularization becomes the equivalent of modernization.<sup>3</sup> In Romanian society the term "secularization" doesn't enjoy this polysemy, elaborated by various theories of secularization. Most of the time, the term refers to the local tradition in order to designate the passing of the monasteries' estates into possessions of the state, during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, an act also known under the name of *secularization of the monasteries' estates*.

### *Laïcité*

Other significant terms for this field are *laic* and *laïcité*. The word *laic*, of Greek origin,<sup>4</sup> has come to the fore as a consequence of the process that led to the separation of the Church from the state, which took place in France, after the French Revolution. In the Middle Ages religious vocabulary, the laity were baptized Christians, but who were not involved in the official administration of faith. So, unlike the clergy, the laity are believers from outside the Church's institutional frame.<sup>5</sup> Beginning with this term, we speak, in the modern period, of *laïcité*, which defines the process of separation of the political from the religion, but also of *laicism*, which designates the ideology calling for the

<sup>2</sup> For the meanings of the term see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> "The basic idea behind secularization and modernization, and one that still holds much attention in the social sciences, is that religion loses its importance as countries develop or become more modern". (See Philip W. Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe* [London and New York: Routledge, 2009], p. 17).

<sup>4</sup> In Greek language *laos* means meeting, crowd or mob.

<sup>5</sup> According to Simona Nicoară, *O istorie a secularizării. Avatarurile creștinismului și triumfalismul mesianismelor noilor ere (sec. XIX-XX)*, vol. II (Cluj Napoca: Editura Accent, 2006) p. 64.

elimination of religion from the public place and from public institutions.<sup>6</sup> Because this terminology lacks its equivalent in several other languages,<sup>7</sup> or because it is too specific to the realities of the French historical context, some authors are hesitant to use it generally.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, there are authors who generally employ this terminology, but make the distinction between *political laïcité* and *philosophical laïcité*,<sup>9</sup> Political *laïcité* refers to a state neutrality in matters of religious or philosophical convictions, a neutrality that implies the separation between politics and religion, whereas philosophical *laïcité* implies a particular philosophical adherence, which refutes the existence of some revealed truth or of a transcendent truth. Though an individual may be the advocate of both types of *laïcité* (both political and philosophical), when it comes to a state this is not possible, because the philosophical *laïcité* of a state (its adherence to an atheist vision of the world, like in the case of communism) excludes the political *laïcité* (the state is no longer neutral in matters of religious and philosophical convictions).

## SECULARIZATION AND THE ROMANIAN SPACE

### *The Three Meanings Proposed by Taylor*

In the present study I will use the term secularization, both for its general application, and because of the fact that this term is settled in Romanian language since Cuza's reforms. If we keep in mind the three meanings of the term as drawn by Charles Taylor, and refer it to the Romanian society, we can notice that Romanian modernity has a pretty sinuous relation to the secularization phenomenon.

1) According to the first sense, that concerning the presence of religious symbols in the public place, we notice a different evolution as the political regimes change. Up to World War II, within the predominantly rural Romanian society (about 80% of the population live in rural areas), with a strong traditionalist mentality, the problem of

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<sup>6</sup> According to S. Nicoară, *O istorie a secularizării*, "Glossar", p. 343.

<sup>7</sup> The French term *laïcité* has its equivalents in Mexican language (*laicidad*) and Turkish language (*laiklik*). The English language has the term *secularity* and the German language *weltlicher Charakter* (S. Nicoară, *O istorie a secularizării*, p. 63).

<sup>8</sup> René Rémond affirms that *laïcité* is definitely marked by the peculiarity of French history (R. Rémond, *Religie și societate în Europa. Secularizarea în secolele al XIX-lea și XX, 1780-2000*, trad. Giuliano Sfish [Iași: Editura Polirom, 2003], pp. 17-19).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M. Jacquemain & N. Rosa-Rosso, *Du bon usage de la laïcité* (Bruxelles: Editions Aden, 2008), pp. 5-7.

excluding the religious symbols from the public place did not arise. After the end of the war and with the instauration of the communist regime, the religious symbols were forbidden from the public place, and replaced by representations of the communist leaders and symbols of the newly emerged power. Religion classes were banned from schools and some churches were demolished in cities in the name of urban systematization. After the fall of communism in 1989 a recurrence of religious references in the public place happens. There are Orthodox icons in schools and religion classes are reintroduced, high representatives of the Church participate in political ceremonies of great impact (the National Day, the opening of the Parliament's sessions of work, taking the oath of the president etc.), and politicians are keen on being present to the most important religious celebrations. One can also note an intense pace of church building, within the twenty years that have passed since the 1989 Revolution: a number of 2000 churches have been built, the majority being Orthodox churches.<sup>10</sup> In short, one can note a strong recovery of the Orthodox Church in the public place.

If what is definitive for the emergence of political modernity in the West is the withdrawal of the religious from the public place, and politic neutrality towards religion, in the Romanian space, modernity brings about the reverse phenomenon. Religion does not withdraw from the public place, for, at least until the instauration of communism, religion is openly and legitimately manifesting itself in the public place. So religion is not, in modern Romania, a matter of individual conscience in the strict sense of the word. The modern Romanian state, although formally neutral, does manifest a predilection towards the dominant religion. This predilection is manifest in the statute that the Orthodox Church enjoys in various modern Constitutions,<sup>11</sup> in the various legislative measures concerning the cults that the state is enacting, in the functions taken by high hierarchs of the Church, or in the way by which politicians relate to the institution of the Church.<sup>12</sup> The state's

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<sup>10</sup> There does not exist an official statistic for the number of churches built in Romania after 1989. The approximated number of 2000 churches is often given in the mass media by the different specialized NGO.

<sup>11</sup> In Romania's Constitutions, the Orthodox Church holds the status of "dominant Church" (Constitution from 1866, Art. 21; 1923, Art. 22; and 1938, Art. 19) and "Romanian Church" respectively (Constitution from 1923, Art. 23; and 1938, Art. 19).

<sup>12</sup> The first minister of Carol the Second's government, after the disintegration of political parties, was Patriarch Miron Cristea. The state's religious politics in this period followed the direction of the Orthodox Romanian Church's ideology, namely fighting against the Protestant cults and nearing the state to the Orthodox Church. The Church's representatives enjoyed this political context, thinking that the time had come for the Church to play the

predilection for the Orthodox Church will find a similar answer on the other side, coming from the Church's representatives who, by the *theory of symbiosis*, which asserts an intimacy between the orthodox faith of the Romanians and their national identity,<sup>13</sup> provide important support for the ideology of the national state.

This type of discourse has been defended ever since the 19th century, by representatives of the Church, and by important men of culture, some of them being close to the Church.<sup>14</sup> It was such an ideology which led, in the inter-war period, to a nearness of the state's politics to the Church, a fact which culminated in appointing patriarch Miron Cristea as prime minister, and which had created, during the communist period, a bridge between the communist-atheist state and the Orthodox Church within the ideology of national-communism.<sup>15</sup> The effect of this was that not even in the communist period was the Church ever separated from the state. After the 1989 Revolution the theory of symbiosis represents one of the reference points for the Church's relation to the new democratic state, and the Orthodox Church is using this doctrine in an attempt to reconquer the public place. The Romanian Orthodox Church's most evident actions in this direction are linked with the official recognition of St. Andrew's feast<sup>16</sup> and the initiation of the

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central role it deserved within Romanian society. The political leaders as well appealed to the Church's institution and to the "ancestral faith", as religious means of legitimizing their power (see Costel Coajă, *Relația stat-biserică în perioada 1938-1948. Cazul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* [Iași: Princeps Edit, 2007], ch. "Politica religioasă a statului", pp. 15-62).

<sup>13</sup> For more details on this theory see Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România postcomunistă: reconstrucția unei identități publice*, vol. 1 (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2009), pp. 304-339.

<sup>14</sup> The cases of Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, Nichifor Crainic, Dumitru Stăniloae, Mihai Eminescu and Nae Ionescu were analyzed in Gelu Sabău, "Religion and modernity. Instruments of ideologizing the religious discourse", *Cogito. Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. IV, no. 4, December 2012, pp. 113-132.

<sup>15</sup> See Olivier Gillet, *Religie și naționalism. Ideologia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române sub regimul comunist*, trad. Mariana Petrisor (București: Editura Compania, 2001), pp. 139-142.

<sup>16</sup> Saint Andrew, one of the twelve Apostles, contributed to the expansion of Christianity in Dobroudgea, a province from the southeast of Romania. The acknowledgment, on the state's part, of Saint Andrew's day as an official feast, is of great significance for the Romanian Orthodox Church. The fact that Saint Andrew Christianized the populations from this territory, even before the Romanian people was formed, is an important clue for the historiographical perspective of the Romanian Orthodox Church, according to which *Romanians were born Christian*.

project of building the Cathedral of National Redemption.<sup>17</sup>

2) If we refer to the second sense of secularization that Taylor proposes, concerning a decrease of the influence that faith and religious practices have in society, we can notice that the majority of Romania's population declares itself orthodox and the percentage of atheists or faithless is insignificant.<sup>18</sup> Also, after the fall of communism, the pilgrimages organized by the Orthodox Church on the occasion of important feasts enjoy a real success, thousands of pilgrims taking part.<sup>19</sup> We can thus reach the conclusion that within the Romanian society faith and religious practices do retain an important influence even after the fall of the communist regime.

3) Concerning the third sense, which regards the individual's possibility of choosing his own faith, we can observe that Romanian realities are compatible with this particular sense of secularization. Even though the majority of the Romanian people are born orthodox, the freedom of conscience, which is a certified right for every citizen, and the fact that the state doesn't explicitly interfere in religious matters, offers to each individual the possibility of choosing another faith, should he want to do so.

#### *The autochthonous sense of secularization*

As I have said, the Romanian term of secularization does not imply the polysemy developed by theories of secularization in the West. Most of the times, what is meant by secularization is Cuza's *act of passing the monasteries estates into the state's possession*. Also, given

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<sup>17</sup> The project of the Cathedral of National Redemption was proposed for the first time in the inter-war period by Miron Cristea, the first Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (see I. Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România*, pp. 329-338).

<sup>18</sup> "The 1992 census indicates that Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe: 99% Christians, 86.67% of the population declared itself Christian Orthodox, 0.04% atheists. The same situation has been registered in 2002: 99% Christians, 86.81% Christian Orthodox, 0.05% atheists. Again, the level of confidence in the Orthodox Church has been constantly high – 70-90%, in polls and surveys after 1990". (Dan Dungaciu, "Alternative Modernities in Europe. Modernity, Religion and Secularization in South-Eastern Europe", The CENSUR 2003 International Conference, organized by the Center for Religious Studies and Research at Vilnius and New Religious Research and Information Center, Vilnius, Lithuania, April 9-12, 2003. The conference is accessible online at the address [www.censur.org/2003/vil2003\\_dungaciu.htm](http://www.censur.org/2003/vil2003_dungaciu.htm); Accessed at 10.30.2013).

<sup>19</sup> The number of pilgrims published by the mass media for the most important pilgrimages in Romania is between 30.000 and 150.000 pilgrims.



that the communist regime's politics was officially against religion, secularization is often the synonym of *atheism* or *lack of faith*. The fact that the communist regime had fallen was seen by many as a sign of a failure of such secularizing politics. Therefore, immediately after 1989, a series of Church representatives considered that secularization was a Western phenomenon, denying its significance for the Romanian society or trying to minimize its effects. High members of the church's hierarchy or orthodox intellectuals didn't bother explaining the phenomenon of secularization, taking it as rather a modern invention against which the Church was supposed to be fighting.<sup>20</sup>

A question mark concerning the conformity between the theory of secularization, as stated in the Western academic ambit, and the way in which secularization happened in the east of Europe was raised by sociologist Dan Dungaciu, during a conference held in Lithuania. The author thinks that the classic theory of secularization is shaped by the historical experience of Western Europe, and that it doesn't apply to realities from the East, especially not to the orthodox area:

The secularization thesis contains a major risk: to be a sort of methodological or theoretical pair of glasses through which we observe and consequently depict a reality – the Orthodox area – that, basically has nothing to do with the *construction* of the theory as such. In other words, what should be remembered here is the *secularization thesis* has been assembled and developed starting from empirical material collected in investigations carried out in Western Europe.<sup>21</sup>

The main argument by which the author sustains this disaccord consists in the large numbers of those who declare themselves believers in Romania, unlike the rest of Europe. Still, even if the author claims that he doesn't wish to give us the theory of secularization in Eastern Europe, he does not use sociological instruments to support the hypothesis of Eastern Europe's peculiarity. When referring to Romania, the lecturer makes a cultural exposition of some peculiarities of the conditions in which modernization occurred in this side of Europe. This are: 1) the particularity of orthodox culture, which assumes a continuity with the pre-modern era and that of the Orthodox Church, which is *involved* in the modernization process, without actually taking part *in*

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<sup>20</sup> I. Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România*, pp. 182-190.

<sup>21</sup> D. Dungaciu, "Alternative Modernities", *art. cit.*, accessed at 10.30.2013.

it;<sup>22</sup> 2) the contribution which religion, especially Greek Catholicism, had in shaping a national identity; and 3) the particularity of the relations between the state and the Church, especially during the communist period, when the Church undertakes compromises in order to save the liturgical life.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, the author of this conference claims that we cannot speak of *one single* European modernity, and that we must find alternative explicative models in order to identify the different impact of modernity in Europe:

we cannot talk about a *European* modernity as such, because, from the point of view of religion, there are at least *two* models of modernization – and modernities – in Europe: the first one is typical for the Western Europe, the second one for the South-Eastern Europe (the Orthodox area). The process of modernization in *Mitteleuropa* could be a third model, although it is rather an intermediary model between the two.<sup>24</sup>

Considering all these questions regarding the consonance between the classic theory of secularization and the Romanian realities I think that some other hypotheses should be advanced in order to investigate the meanings which secularization receives in this space. In this sense, I found that one hypothesis is relevant, although undeveloped yet, that of Olivier Clément, a Frenchman converted to orthodoxy, who thinks that in Eastern Europe religious nationalism is “the orthodox form of secularization.”<sup>25</sup>

A similar interpretation of the impact between modernity and orthodoxy can be found in the works of the Romanian professor Alexandru Dușu. The professor thinks that, once secularization had been imposed by the modern state, the Church, a dominant institution in Romanian society, transformed into an institution that served the ideal of the national state.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, politologist Daniel Barbu affirms that

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<sup>22</sup> “The Orthodox Church has not been *part* of the process of modernization – it has been *involved* in it, but not *part* of it.” (*Idem*).

<sup>23</sup> “This *solution – compromises for sacraments* – has been adopted, in fact, everywhere in Eastern Europe: Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox areas”. (*Idem*).

<sup>24</sup> D. Dungăciu, “Alternative Modernities”, *art. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Olivier Clément, “Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, în Ioan I. Ică jr. & Germano Marani (coord.), *Gândirea socială a Bisericii. Fundamente – documente – analize – perspective* (Sibiu: Editura Deisis, 2002), p. 511.

<sup>26</sup> “If the Church was not isolated, on the Jacobin model, it was enslaved by the national ideology who proclaimed that the Church was and it is a

Romania's modernization and the proclamation of the national state brings in a process of "etatization of orthodoxy",<sup>27</sup> manifest in the proclamation of the Orthodox Church as "dominant Church" or "Romanian Church". This privileged statute would absolve the Church from advancing a point of view over the modern secular state, or from advancing a criticism of liberalism or, later, a criticism of socialism.<sup>28</sup>

Given these short observations, I intend to further investigate two hypotheses about the secularization and modernization of the Romanian space: 1) the one referring to the *etatization of orthodoxy and transformation of the Church into an instrument of the national state*, and 2) that of the *emergence of religious nationalism after the impact which secularization had within the orthodox space*.

## MODERNIZATION AND THE STATE-CHURCH RELATION

### *From Cuza to First World War*

After the double election of Al. I. Cuza and the Union of the two Provinces (1859), the new prince started a vast process of reforms, among which there are religious reforms. Their major purpose concerns the elimination of the Greek influence from our religious life and a greater closeness of the Church to the new state. One of the most difficult problems was the situation of monasteries dedicated to holy places. If, in the beginning, these monasteries were beneficences of the Romanian princes, as marks of their affiliation to the Byzantine world and of their support for the orthodox faith, now, the situation of these monasteries was a matter of internal politics and, at the same time, a complicated diplomatic problem for Europe's high chancelleries.<sup>29</sup> The relevance of this problem was that the dedicated monasteries were administered by Greek monks, and their income was directed towards the Patriarchy of Constantinople. Given that these monasteries held 25% of the Romanian territory, a redirection of the respective resources towards the state's budget would have meant a significant increase for the economic consolidation of the young state. Also, the respective areas

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'national bulwark'..." (Alexandru Duțu, *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței europene* [București: Editura All Educațional, 1999], p. 192).

<sup>27</sup> See Daniel Barbu, *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România postcomunistă* (București: Editura Nemira, 2004), ch. "Ortodoxia, o morală a națiunii", pp. 277-295; The expression "Etatization of Orthodoxy" is the title of one chapter.

<sup>28</sup> D. Barbu, *Republica absentă*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>29</sup> Coman Vasilescu, *Istoricul monastirilor închinat și secularizarea averilor lor (Contribuție la studiul istoriei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române)* [București, 1932], ch. II, pp. 34-60.

were important resources that later helped the enactment of the agrarian reform and the impropriation of the peasants. The diplomatic dimension was given by the fact that, besides the Patriarchy of Constantinople, this conflict also involved Turkey (as suzerain power), and Russia (as protective power), and, indirectly, other great chancelleries of Europe. So the question of dedicated monasteries was one of prime importance.

The solution to this problem will come in December 1863, with the prince's decree:

Art. 1: All the estates of Romania's monasteries are and will remain of the state;

Art. 2: All the income of these Church fortunes is part of the ordinary incomes of the State's budget.<sup>30</sup>

The holy places will be indemnified by the Romanian state, and the money will be spent, under the state's supervision, for the purpose of maintaining the orthodox places of cult from the East.<sup>31</sup> As this comes from a memoir written in 1860 by M. Kogălniceanu, President of the Council of Ministers and Ministry of the Cults. The purpose of this measure was eminently political: "Must it that dedicated monasteries be a state within a state, in the middle of the United Provinces? Or that these monasteries and their income be regarded as national fortunes?"<sup>32</sup> So, the passing of the monasteries' estates in the state's propriety is the equivalent of an act of nationalization, mean to strengthen the autonomy of the new state by eliminating that "state within a state" of the Greeks, to which Kogălniceanu refers.

Besides the internal significance of the act, it also justifies itself when seen from the secular perspective that dominated civilized Europe of that time:

Inspired by the precepts of this century's civilization, and by its true interests, which can no longer allow that a fifth part of Romania's land be still a fortune dedicated monasteries, in usurped possession of some foreign religious communities, which have been infringing the conditions of the respective dedication for centuries, the Romanian Nation, following the example given by

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<sup>30</sup> C. Vasilescu, *Istoricul monastirilor*, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> According to the articles 3-6 of the same Decree (*Ibid.*, pp. 85-86).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Europe's greatest nations, claims the secularization of the dedicated monastery's fortunes.<sup>33</sup>

Simultaneously, the secularization of undedicated monasteries will also take place.<sup>34</sup> The prince justifies the necessity of such action, otherwise the Greeks might have considered themselves discriminated and would have brought arguments against the Romanian state in front of the European states.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the law regarding the secularization of the monastery's fortunes, Cuza enforced a series of other legislative measures: the attempt of modernizing the state's institutions and a greater closeness between the Romanian state and the Orthodox Church. A decree from 1863 provided that religious services from Romania's church be no longer held in Greek, but only in Romanian. *The Law of Communes* from 1864 passes the act of marriage, which until then belonged to the Church, to the mayor's office. The same law provides that churches be attended by communes and that the income of priests be completed from local budgets. The central budget provides sums for the attendance of churches the fortunes of which had been secularized by the state, and for the payment of priests.<sup>36</sup> By the *Law of monkhood*, adopted in 1864 as well, the election of monastic personnel will be done through the Ministry of Cults, monastic life being financed by the state through the same Ministry. At the end of 1864 there appears the *Decree for founding the central synodal authority*, which provides that "The Romanian Orthodox Church is and will remain independent from any foreign church authority, in all that concerns organization and discipline".<sup>37</sup> Although the authority of the new synod is contested,<sup>38</sup> this decree lays the foundations of the Romanian Orthodox Church' autocephaly (acknowledged by the Patriarchy from Constantinople in 1885). One last important religious measure taken by Cuza is the *Law for appointing metropolitans and bishops in Romania*. The law only has three articles, which are essential for the new relations between the Church and the state:

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<sup>33</sup> Communication of M. Kogălniceanu on the secularization of dedicated monastery's fortunes, read in Legislative Assembly, on December 13/25, 1863 (*Ibid.*, p. 84).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (secolele XIX și XX)* (București: Editura IMBOR, 1994), vol. 3, pp. 115-116.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117.

<sup>37</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>38</sup> The new Synod had gathered in three work sessions, but he was contested by some hierarchs and declared non-canonical and anti-orthodox (*Ibid.*, pp. 120-121).

1. Metropolitans and bishops in Romanian are appointed by the prince, after a presentation from the Ministry of the Cults, following the deliberation of the Council of Ministers; 2. Metropolitans and bishops are appointed from the Romanian monastic clergy, metropolitans being at least 40 years old, and bishops at least 35 [...]; 3. Metropolitans and bishops can be judged for spiritual crimes by the country's synod, and for any other crime they will be sent before the High Court of Law.<sup>39</sup>

So, this law introduces a complete dependence from the state of the high hierarchs of the Church. They are appointed by the state's authority and answer to civil justice.

If Cuza's measures were controversial at first, being perceived as a brutal interfering of the political power in the Church's life,<sup>40</sup> they did trace the line for the future relations between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian state. Thus, the *Romanian Orthodox Church's organic Law*, enacted in 1872, provided that metropolitans and bishops be chosen by a college in which there participated, besides the member of the Synod, all deputies and senators of the Parliament, which shared an orthodox faith.<sup>41</sup> If we add that in this college there was no representative of the priests or monks, it is evident that politicians came to have much more to say in choosing the high hierarchs, than men of the Church had.<sup>42</sup> Also, half of the members of the Holy Synod were appointed by the Government, after being proposed by the Holy Synod and confirmed by the head of the state.<sup>43</sup> Such an organization of the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121.

<sup>40</sup> The patriarch from Constantinople condemned, in 1865 the intrusion of the Romanian state in the Church's affairs. There were also protests from the Romanian hierarchs. A famous case is that of Moldavia's metropolitan Sofronie Miculescu who, because of having opposed the prince's reforms, was first arrested and then forcibly retired (see C. Vasilescu, *Istoria monastirilor*, p. 72 and M. Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii*, pp. 121-123).

<sup>41</sup> M. Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> To rectify the deficiency of the law from 1872, in 1909 was adopted the *Law of Superior Consistory of the Church*, an organism with an advisory function, composed of members of the Holy Synod, theology professors and representatives of the priests and of the monks. The foundation of this organism had initiated a crisis in the Church, between 1909-1911, a crisis with a deep echo in political and public life. (*Ibid.*, pp. 138-139);

<sup>43</sup> The Holy Synod was composed of two metropolitans and six bishops. Further the government appointed eight titular hierarchs without episcopal siege, a procedure contested as anti-canonical in Orthodox Church (*Ibid.*, p. 127).

highest institution of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and of its elective instruments, had as side effect a certain instability of the Church, caused by political games. The election of many metropolitans in this period was rather the result of the political vote and not of the needs the Church confronted. The Church comes thus to be in the middle of political games and interests. This reality is acknowledged as such by Mircea Păcurariu, the “official” historian of the Romanian Orthodox Church:

The Church life after the year 1865 and until the end of First World War has known great convulsions and deficiencies. This situation was created because of the unceasing interference of political parties (conservative and especially liberal) in our Church’s affairs [...]. Under these circumstances the members of the Holy Synod themselves – beginning with the most important metropolitans –, as chosen by the ruling political parties, were no longer a moral authority and they never raised to the eminence of their predecessors.<sup>44</sup>

#### *The Church and the state in Great Romania*

If this was the situation following Cuza’s reforms, at the end of the First World War we are dealing with a new political configuration: Transylvania unites with the territory of Old Kingdom, to which two other historical provinces: Bukovina which had belonged to Habsburg Empire and Bessarabia, which had belonged to Tsarist Russia. The circumstances being that the Romanian Orthodox Church is an autocephaly church, talks about the union of the four Orthodox Churches will begin. These churches had belonged to different political regions: the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church from Transylvania, the Orthodox Church from Bukovina, which had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Orthodox Church from Bessarabia, which had belonged to the Tsarist Empire. Given that this implied four different models of the state-church relation (Old Kingdom, Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia), which had to be brought to a common denominator, discussions were long and difficult, lasting from 1919 to 1925, the year in which the Parliament enacts the *Law for the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church*.

The models of the state-church relation that contributed decisively to shaping the new architecture of the relations between the two powers in Great Romania, were those from Transylvania and from the Old Kingdom.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

The Orthodox Church from Transylvania was organized according to the *Organic Statute* elaborated by metropolitan Andrei Şaguna, in 1868. This *Statute* was conceived following the laws enacted by the Hungarian parliament in 1868, which decided to give religious autonomy to churches from the Hungarian territory.<sup>45</sup> The şagunian *Statute* provides three basic rules for the organization of the Orthodox Church from Transylvania: *autonomy*, *synodalism* and *constitutionalism*.

*Autonomy* refers to the relations that the Church develops with the state, but also to the internal life of the church. Thus, the Hungarian state retrocedes to the Church four funds that had belonged to the Transylvanian episcopacy, so that it may self-sustain itself.<sup>46</sup> There where it was needed, the state would supply for the priests, reserving its right to control the way in which the Church was spending the money. This right had never been used.<sup>47</sup> The Church is thus autonomous in what concerns financial and administrative matters, but also those of religious education. The *internal autonomy* refers to the right which every parish had to self-administrate financially, without the interference of superior church members, and to the episcopacy's right to function by their own rules, without intervention from the metropolis.<sup>48</sup>

*Synodalism* provides that all instruments of collective administration be formed of 1/3 men of church and 2/3 laymen. This way citizens were given the possibility of getting involved in the life of the parish, something essential for the life itself of church activity and cohesion of the community.

*Constitutionalism* provides the separation between organs of administration on each level of church organization. Thus, from the lowest to the upper levels (parish, rural district, episcopacy, metropolis) there exists a legislative assembly, an executive organ and a judicial organ (outside the parish), and the legislative organs have the right to control the executive ones.<sup>49</sup> This constitutional mechanism was conceived precisely in order to allow the self-control of the church activity, as instrument of exerting the autonomy the Church. As Şaguna himself points out, it had been inspired right from the political realities of the modern states.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Brusanowski, *Autonomia și constituționalismul în dezbaterile privind unificarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (1919-1925)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007), pp. 16-17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> "Like a constitutional state runs its business, and decisions are being made in Parliaments, likewise in our Church canons are established, like all matters, the election of bishops, hegumens, protopopes and priests, good



As we can note, A. Şaguna's *Organic Statute* includes stipulations that structure church life on some very different bases than had been conceived in the Old Kingdom, through the *Law from 1872*, a law that gave an important power to the political factor in the Church's matters. This is the reason why Transylvanians would fight so that the new *Law of organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church* be enacted by closely following the basic rules from Şaguna's *Statute*. Their pleading was only partly successful because, after the difficult discussions over union that followed, a compromise was reached, by which the state still kept an important influence over the Church.

Thus, the autonomy that the Transylvanian Church enjoyed was acknowledged by the new law, but within certain limits. According to the *Law* enacted in 1925 the state had the obligation to add up the priest's incomes and, by virtue of this fact, they reserved the right to control the Church's financial and administrative activity at any time, through the employees of the Ministry of Cults. Some critics of this project of law have thought that this right of control, which the state had, contradicted the autonomy of the Church, and also damaged its dignity.<sup>51</sup> Then, considering the way bishops were chosen, according to the new law, we are dealing with the intercession of political factors, just as happened in the Old Kingdom. This is caused by the fact that the elective colleges are formed, apart from members of the National Church College, by the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Cults, the president of the Senate, the president of the Deputy Chamber, the president of the High Court of Law, the president of the Academy, the rectors of the Universities (as long as these were orthodox), and the deans of the Faculties of Orthodox Theology. Also, the chosen bishops became senators for life in Romania's Parliament.<sup>52</sup> We are thus dealing with interference by politics in the church's life, and with a type of bond between the two powers that was new and foreign to the Church from Transylvania, but clearly traditional for the Old Kingdom.

Other criticism of the new project of law referred to the fact that it was lacking the democratic spirit, which had been one of the keys of success for the şagunian *Statute*. The new law did not stipulate that the collective organs of the parishes be formed by 1/3 men of church and 2/3 laymen, but only specified that senior men, and those "who could supply

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management of the churches' fortunes, the improvement of priesthood, parishes and monasteries, and sharing gifts for the poor, through synods and assemblies" (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>52</sup> According to the *Law of organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, art. 12 (*Ibid.*, p. 365).

for themselves”<sup>53</sup> could also take part in it. This stipulation, which restricted the implication in the Church’s life according to one’s income, made some say that it was a way of introducing census in the Church, something which could not be accepted.<sup>54</sup> Another controversial point is the right to put a veto on, which the bishops held in episcopal assemblies. It was considered that this right, which gave priority to high hierarchs over collective organs, in administrative, and not spiritual matters, was a severe distortion of the synodal principle imposed by Şaguna’s *Statute*.<sup>55</sup>

As we can note, although the new project of law departs from the precepts of Şaguna’s *Statute*, it represents a compromise with the Old Kingdom’s realities. For some, this compromise was so big that the spirit of the old statue was lost. No doubt, this compromise was reached because the Church needed to play a role in the consolidation of Great Romania’s unity. This is why the new statute did not give full autonomy to the Orthodox Church. The political role that the Church is playing in this new configuration can also be seen in the fact that, in 1925, the Metropolis of Bucharest becomes the Patriarchy. This fact aims at underlining the regional importance of the new Romanian Orthodox Church and Romania’s prestige among other states from the Eastern Europe.<sup>56</sup> Also, the fact that Transylvanian Miron Cristea is appointed as patriarch is not at all accidental. Miron Cristea is one of the orthodox Transylvanian priests that had maintained connections with Bucharest even before the Union from 1918.<sup>57</sup> His election as prime metropolitan was done in three days only, with the active involvement of political factors.<sup>58</sup>

The purpose of Miron Cristea’s election was the administrative unity between the Old Kingdom’s Church and that from Transylvania. Then, his election also signifies the compromise of the two Churches within the new theological-political situation. This is why Miron Cristea’s view over the relation between the Church and the state will also change, as the political situation evolves. If in 1898, as a member of the Church from Transylvania, M. Cristea was a supporter of Cavour’s

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<sup>53</sup> *Law of organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, art. 8 (*Ibid.*, p. 364).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>56</sup> M. Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 410.

<sup>57</sup> P. Brusanowski, *Autonomia și constituționalismul*, p. 98.

<sup>58</sup> On December 29, 1919 Parliament approved the royal decree of the union of Romanian provinces, on December 30 the extraordinary session of the Holy Synod was called, and on December 31 Miron Cristea was chosen primary metropolitan (*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99).

liberal principle, that of “a free Church within a free state”,<sup>59</sup> after he becomes patriarch of the united Romanian Orthodox Church, not only does he oppose this principle, but becomes the adept of a close relation between the state and the Church:

The autonomy of our church should not be some exotic plant, brought from wherever and planted in the soil of our church life....The autonomy of our church should be something special, something that would correspond to the historical evolution and to the development of the relation between our Church and our state....Given these intimate connections, the autonomy of our Church cannot go as far as the autonomy of Churches from other states, which culminates with Cavour’s principle *a free Church in a free state*. This would mean a complete separation of the Church from the state, and in our country this does not correspond to the evolution of our church life nor to evolution of the state’s life. This is why, in this project of law, and in this statute which we’ve created, knowing this past of ours, we’ve created an autonomy which corresponds to the circumstances of our Romanian life....From this law’s entire economy there follows an *appeased autonomy*, reached by the harmonic cooperation between the Church and the state, there where it is necessary and admissible.<sup>60</sup>

The principle of complete autonomy and the separation of the Church from the state are thus refuted, as opposite to the tradition of the Romanian State. “The appeased autonomy” proposed by Miron Cristea characterizes best the relations established between the new state and the Church. It suggests that the Church is autonomous, but within the limits allowed by the state. The separation between the state and the Church, which is conformable with the liberal vision, isn’t possible because thus the Church could no longer be a vector of the national identity, serving the interests of the national state. It is still Miron Cristea, in his quality

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<sup>59</sup> “My opinion, my principle is that the American system is better, more reasonable. The basis of this system is the separation between state and the cult’s affairs. If we cannot reach this goal immediately, we keep this goal in front of us and we support the actions leading there; [...] We say: *a free Church in a free state*”. (M. Cristea, *Dotățiunea clerului. Aprecierea Proiectului de lege despre întregirea veniturilor preoțești*, apud. P. Brusanowski, *Autonomia și constituționalismul*, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> The parliamentary speech of patriarch Miron Cristea on the occasion of the debates on the law of organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church, apud P. Brusanowski, *Autonomia și constituționalismul*, p. 343;

of high hierarchy of the Church, who explicitly affirms the significance of the political role the Church assumes from this point of view:

Can the Government, can the head of the state, can the ruling factors of the country be uninterested about who is a bishop in Hotin, Bălți, Cetatea Albă, Cernăuți, Chișinău, Dobrogea [border territories in the East of Great Romania] or in any other different parts? It cannot be. If any Government would not be interested in these important matters, not Church matters only, but vital matter for the state, then it would commit a great error.<sup>61</sup>

*The Church and the communist state*

By the end of the Second World War, Romania passes under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and, after the abolition of monarchy at 30 December 1947, the communist regime takes over, and the Popular Romanian Republic is installed. In April 1948 the new Constitution is enacted, which provides, in article 27, religious freedom and liberty of conscience. Even though the ideology promoted by the new regime is anti-religious, the Constitution from 1948 doesn't stipulate the separation between the state and the Church. It is only stipulated that "School is separated from the church".<sup>62</sup> The consequence of this article was the exclusion of religion classes from the public teaching, and the preservation of theological seminaries only, for the education of priests. Some theological institutes were also closed.

The year 1948 is a year of radical changes for the religious life of the new Republic. Following the enactment of the Constitution, the Concordat signed between the Romanian State and Vatican in 1927, according to which the Vatican received some jurisdictional rights over the Romanian Church United with Rome,<sup>63</sup> will be dissolved. In a time when the world was already divided between the camps that were going to confront each other during the cold war. Breaking the connections with Vatican meant, for the communist regime, the elimination of the

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<sup>61</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>62</sup> Constitution from 1948, art. 27.

<sup>63</sup> After the subscription of the Concordat, the Romanian Church United with Rome, was recognized in the Constitution as a *Romanian Church* (in the national meaning of the word), was embedded in the Catholic Church and organized according to the canonical Roman law. One article of the Concordat provides that the bishops, the priests and the subjects of the Catholic Church on the territory of Romanian state can communicate with Vatican without the control of civil authorities. This article was often invoked to accuse the Catholic Church of circumvention of the stipulations of the Constitution.

intrusion of the enemy from the imperialist camp. Another reason for the denunciation of the Concordat referred to national sovereignty and independence. If one state is fully sovereign, then it is not possible for another state to have jurisdiction on its own territory. This perspective was also supported by men of the Orthodox Church, which welcomed, in the respective period, the abolition of the Concordat by the communist state:

Through this [the signing of the Concordat], the rulers of Romania had given up an important part of the state's sovereignty to the Vatican, and had submitted our state's sovereignty to Vatican's sovereignty, Romania having thus become a type of dominion of the Vatican, a simulacrum of a state, a cult from outside our country, which pretends to also have the quality of a state, and of a universal state, enjoying universal sovereignty and jurisdiction.<sup>64</sup>

In the same year, after the enactment of the new *Law of cults* and the abolition of the Concordat with Vatican, the Romanian Church United with Rome will be dissolved, and its believers will be forced into orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church was a supporter of this act of the communist state, considering it an act of restoration by which the Transylvanians which had converted to Catholicism by force in 1700, were now free to come back to Orthodox faith. This is the reason why representatives of the Orthodox Church have considered that dissolving the Romanian Church United with Rome was an act of "restoration of the unity of faith for priests and believers"<sup>65</sup> from Transylvania. In this case, the state's interest coincided with the interest of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the two institutions collaborating in taking their plans to a good end.

For that matter, the Romanian Orthodox Church did not exert a systematic opposition towards the communist regime, but collaborated with it for the purpose of saving the Church and the liturgical life, as has been said. The basic principles that regularized the relation of the Church to the state were those from the anterior period.<sup>66</sup> The premises

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<sup>64</sup> Liviu Stan, "Legea cultelor", *Studii teologice*, II-nd series, 1949, no. 9-10, p. 840.

<sup>65</sup> M. Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii*, p. 489.

<sup>66</sup> After the instauration of the communist regime the Romanian theologians affirms that the principles who regularize the relation between Church and the state are consistent with the byzantine tradition of the Orthodox Church: autonomy, synodalism, nomocanonism and the principle of "iconomy" (according to O. Gillet, *Religie și naționalism*, pp. 59-71).

of the collaboration between the two powers were tacit and, to a certain extent, reciprocally convenient: the state assured the liberty of the cult, and enjoyed in exchange the Church's partnership, a dominant institution within the Romanian population. Also, the communist state used to employ the traditional anti-Occidental rhetoric of the Romanian Orthodox Church, something that was obvious in the period of the dissolution of the Romanian Church United with Rome.<sup>67</sup> The Orthodox Church's representatives considered that the collaboration with the state (without minding the political or ideological orientation of the political regime) was something peculiar to the tradition of eastern orthodoxy. One of the principles theorized here was that of the *loyalty towards the state*, which follows from the fact that each form of governance comes from God.<sup>68</sup> The principle of loyalty manifests

by the non-interference of the Church in the state's businesses, it (the Church) being of a different nature than the state [...], by the submission of the Church to the state's laws, seen as expressions of its sovereignty, and implicitly, by the supervision and control from the state's authority, – and also by granting some special honors for the state, including prayers for its rulers.<sup>69</sup>

Thereby, even though religious life had to suffer during the communist period, the Orthodox Church being marginalized in the respective period, still, not even then did a separation of the Church from the state occur, not even a privatization of religion, in the Western sense. The Church and religious teaching continue to be financed from the state's budget, and the activity of the Church is submitted to the control of the communist authorities. The communist regime senses the importance of religious life for social peace and collaborates with the institution of the Church, trying to use it as a political and ideological instrument.

If I am to shortly conclude what I have presented in this chapter, I can say that the institutional evolution of the Romanian Orthodox Church is closely linked with the evolution of the national state. Therefore, in the year 1885 the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church is recognized, following the example of other Churches from the

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>68</sup> L. Stan, "Legislația Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în timpul arhipăstoririi prea fericitului părinte patriarh Justinian", *Ortodoxia. Revista Patriarhiei Române*, vol. XX, no. 2, 1968, p. 286.

<sup>69</sup> *Idem.*

region,<sup>70</sup> after Romania had declared its independence in 1877, and had become a kingdom in 1881. Then, after Great Romania was formed in 1918, the Romanian Patriarchy was founded in 1925. In all this time the state is financing the Church's activity, exerting its influence over it. The relation between the state and the Church is a close one, because the Church, both by its institutional organization and by the ideology it promotes, is a good instrument of consolidation for the national state. This relation between the state and the Church will not be broken even during the communist regime. Although the communist regime had marginalized the activity of the Church and had persecuted the members of the Church that opposed the regime, the Romanian Orthodox Church did collaborate with the state during the communist period, the basis of this collaboration being the nationalist ideology, which constituted the common ground especially during the national-communist period.

### **IS RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM A FORM OF SECULARIZATION OF ORTHODOXY?**

This is the question I have advanced even from the title, following Olivier Clément's hypothesis. As we can note, the French author refers to a specific form of nationalism, namely *religious nationalism*, which is distinct from *secular nationalism*. Secular nationalism is a modern form of nationalism, which is specific to Western civilization, and appears in the matrix of religion and as a result of the decline of religion in the modern world.<sup>71</sup> It constitutes, just like religion, as an "ideology of the order"<sup>72</sup> and receives, as some author think, the marks of a political

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<sup>70</sup> The Greek Orthodox Church declared its autocephaly in 1833, the same year the Greek state became a kingdom. The autocephaly of the Greek Orthodox Church was recognized by the Patriarchy from Constantinople in 1850. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church declared its autocephaly in 1872 and was recognized only in 1945. The Serbian Orthodox Church declared its autocephaly in 1879, one year after the recognition of Serbia's independence by the European powers.

<sup>71</sup> E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1983; A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1997; A.D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>72</sup> This thesis is affirmed by Mark Jurgensmeyer. The author doesn't use the term "ideology" in the political sense (of Marx or Manenheim), but in the original sense, used by the French ideologists: "I will refer to what I have in mind as ideologies of order. Both religious and secular-nationalistic frameworks of thought conceive of the world in coherent, manageable ways; they both suggest that there are levels of meaning beneath the day-to-day world that give coherence to things unseen; and they both provide the authority that gives the

religion.<sup>73</sup> Secular nationalism comes to function similarly to religion, thus becoming its competitor, and pushing it to the private sphere and the periphery of society. Between secular nationalism and religion two important types of analogy can be established: a *formal analogy* and a *functional analogy*. Formally, nationalism is structured like a religion, having its own mythology and speculative theology, which describe the eternal destiny of the country, a canon of consecrated books, similar to the biblical canon, feasts and days of “pilgrimage”, heroes who sacrifice themselves for the future of the country, as do martyrs, days for the commemoration of the heroes, etc.<sup>74</sup> Functionally, nationalism fulfills in modern society the function which religion fulfilled in traditional society:

This structural similarity between secular nationalism and religion is complemented by what I regard as an even more basic, functional similarity: they both serve the ethical function of providing an overarching framework of moral order, a framework that commands ultimate loyalty from those who subscribe to it.<sup>75</sup>

Unlike secular nationalism, religious nationalism is not a strictly modern phenomenon. If secular nationalism was formed within the matrix of religion as an exterior phenomenon to the development to which it contributes,<sup>76</sup> in the case of religious nationalism religion is not an exterior factor, but intimately belongs to the nationalist phenomenon. *This is not about an analogy between religion and nationalism, but about the intertwining or identity between the two elements.* Also, in the case of religious nationalism the matter is not the use of some religious language, neither of some religious symbols or images when speaking about the nation; but the matter is an identity of content, which may be partial or total. Religious identity contributes to the edification of national identity. When speaking about total identity we have a religious nationalism in the very sense of the word. Judaic nationalism is representative here. When speaking of partial identity, we have a weaker

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social and political order its reason for being. In doing so they define for the individual the right way of being in the world and relate persons to the social whole”. (M. Jurgensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism confronts the Secular State* [University of California Press, 1994], p. 31).

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Carlton Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960).

<sup>74</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism. Four approaches”, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol 18, no. 1, 2012, pp. 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> M. Jurgensmeyer, *The New Cold War?* p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> R. Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism”, pp. 5-8.



sample of religious nationalism, when national borders are marked by local religions or when religion is an important criterion “that enables one to identify ethnicity or nationality”.<sup>77</sup> These types of religious nationalism can be found in Northern Ireland, where Catholic Irish people are different from the Protestant English people, or in former Yugoslavia, where Catholic Croatians are distinct from the Orthodox Serbians.

Within the Romanian space, religious nationalism is illustrated by the theory of symbiosis between the Romanian nation and the Orthodox faith. For that matter, Romanian religious nationalism is not a modern phenomenon, as it can be found in the past as well, when faith and the orthodox rite, which were also called “Romanian law” or “ancestry’s law”, used to be regarded as one of the common elements of identity for the Romanians from the three historical provinces. This led to the fact that, when the Orthodox Romanians from Transylvania accepted to be united with the Catholic Church, they accepted under the condition that the orthodox rite be kept as such, as a mark of their distinct identity. From this point of view, Orthodox faith had worked as a factor of instauration of the national identity from very early, and all modernization did was to systematize and strengthen the contribution of the religious element to the edification of national identity.

In order to explain the existence of religious nationalism in the modern world I will turn to the work of American politologist Philip Barker about *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe*. According to the theories of secularization, modernity is similar to a decrease of religion’s influence in society. There are however cases in today’s Europe where religion still plays an important part, and such cases cannot be explained by classical theories of secularization. This is why Ph. Barker starts from Steve Bruce’s hypotheses concerning the situations in which religion can keep an important role in modernity, which can happen in two cases:

if religion steps outside its traditional roles and takes on tasks or identities that are useful on a broader social scale, then it is possible for religion to maintain itself into modernity. For Bruce, this can be accomplished primarily in one of two ways: cultural defense or cultural transition.<sup>78</sup>

*Cultural transition* frequently appears as a result of emigration, or forced urbanization, when a person or a group of persons changes its center and loses the old cultural reference points. In such cases religion comes to play a social part, becoming a keeper of the old reference

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Ph. Barker, *Religious Nationalism*, p. 20.

points. *Cultural defense* emerges when the identity of some community is threatened by an open conflict or by the fact that it is dominated by another community. In these situations religion usually becomes a “guarantor of group identity”.<sup>79</sup>

Starting from these hypotheses Ph. Barker establishes the conditions under which religion may become an important element of collective identity, thus contributing to the emergence of religious nationalism. These factors are given by the existence of some religious frontier, combined with a potential threat to the respective nation:

Thus, in order for religion to maintain its importance as a nationalist force, the nation must exist at a religious frontier, and that frontier must pose a significant threat to the nation.<sup>80</sup>

The threat can be religious, military or economic and it can manifest either from the outside, or from the inside, as a presence of a foreign dominant class.<sup>81</sup> Also, the nuance which Ph. Barker adds here, underlines that religious nationalism can be maintained even when there is no actual threat, but the possibility of one: “Threat is also present when there is the *possibility* that one group may be subjugated to another”.<sup>82</sup> Ph. Barker supports his thesis by giving the example of three nations placed within religious and cultural frontiers: Poland, Greece and Ireland.<sup>83</sup>

If we consider Ph. Barker’s criteria for the emergence of religious nationalism, then we can see that such criteria also apply to the Romanian space. In these parts there existed a population of the same ethnicity and sharing the same religion, which until the 19th century had lived in three separated provinces, two of which (Moldavia and Muntenia) were under Ottoman suzerainty, and the third (Transylvania) under Habsburg administration. We thus have on the one hand the Ottoman domination, and on the other, the pressure of Catholic Counter-reformation and, after 1868, the pressure of Magyarization politics. In these conditions of military, economic and religious conflict, religion becomes a vector of national identity. Even after Romania conquers its independence, in 1877, the threat doesn’t disappear, because the young state has three great empires as neighbors: the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Tsarist Empire.

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<sup>79</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-142.

In the inter-war period religious nationalism is preserved, but the forms of external threat against which it keeps fighting change shape. Thus, we have on the one hand a delimitation from Western democracy, regarded as an exterior form of civilization, discordant with local traditions, and the imitation of which had led to the corruption of the autochthonous public life<sup>84</sup> and, on the other hand, a delimitation from the Bolshevik danger, which was a threat from the East, aiming to destroy Christian civilization and to install “Soviet paganism” and “Bolshevik satanocracy”.<sup>85</sup>

The Romanian space does fill the criteria asserted by Ph. Barker’s theory. However, if we are to go back to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter, Ph. Barker’s theory doesn’t demonstrate that European religious nationalism is specific to the Orthodox space. On the contrary, two of the analyzed cases concern two Catholic nations (Ireland and Poland). More even, in chapter 7, where he discusses the situation of other states from Europe, apart from the three thoroughly analyzed, the author places Russia, an important Orthodox country, within the category of countries dominated by secular nationalism.<sup>86</sup> The author mentions the ascension of Russian religious nationalism, after the fall of the communist regime, owed to “the impact of economic devastation”, but thinks that, although throughout its history Russia did have religious frontiers, still these were never threatened, so much as to lead to the development of religious nationalism: “for much of his history, the Russian Empire was sufficiently strong as to minimize the threats from its religious frontier”.<sup>87</sup>

Of course, Ph. Baker quickly passes over the Russian case, and doesn’t notice that Russian religious nationalism is not just a post-communist phenomenon. At the end of the 18th century, tsar Peter the Great, who made the first attempt of modernization in Russia, dissolved Russia’s Patriarchy and self-proclaimed head of the Russian Church. Supporting the religious ideology of the third Rome, he dreamed of reaching Constantinople to free it from the Turks. Russia’s religious vocation is one with its imperial vocation. Then, in the 19th century, the Russian Slavophil movement comes with an ideology that identifies Orthodox Christianity with “profound Russia”, thus creating an unconfused mark of their own identity in the union between Orthodoxy

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<sup>84</sup> For the critique of the Western civilization by the autochthonous movement see: Gelu Sabău, “Religion and modernity,” pp. 121-131.

<sup>85</sup> These expressions are frequently used by representatives of the Church in inter-war period to nominate the communist regime from USSR (see C. Coajă, *Relația stat-biserică*, pp. 176-184).

<sup>86</sup> Ph. Barker, *Religious Nationalism*, pp. 165-167.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

and the Russian ethnicity. Slavophilism doesn't disappear even in the communist period, when, against the Bolshevik nationalism supported by the authorities, a series of important intellectuals revive the theme according to which national identity could only lie on traditional Christian values. This is the neo-Slavophil movement, a number of whom were also important dissidents of the communist regime.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the case of Russia, with the different metamorphoses which religious nationalism suffered in this space, should definitely be reanalyzed.

Without trying to draw some general conclusions, I think it can be affirmed that in the Romanian case, religious nationalism, although presenting a certain continuity with tradition, is simultaneously a *paradoxical form of adaptation / resistance to modernity*. It is a *form of adaptation* as far as religious nationalism becomes a strong instrument of the edification of the modern national state. On the other hand, it can be considered a *form of resistance* in the sense that, by the contribution it brings to the shaping of the national state, as based on a certain religious identity, religious nationalism blocks the consolidation of democratic values and the enactment of some typically modern institutions.<sup>89</sup>

Of course, religious nationalism is not a reality specific to Orthodoxy. Without being a product of secularization, it is certainly stimulated by the formation of modern national states in Eastern Europe, contributing to their ideological background. Although Ph. Barker mentions that religious nationalism is independent from the relations between the state and the Church,<sup>90</sup> in the Romanian case the theory of symbiosis between nation and faith had stimulated the institutional closeness between the Church and the state, a consequence of which was

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<sup>88</sup> See Dimitry Pospelovsky, "The Neo-Slavophile Trend and Its Relation to the Contemporary Religious Revival in the USSR", in Pedro Ramet (ed.), *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Duke University Press, 1984), pp. 41-58.

<sup>89</sup> As it has already been written about the difficult relation between the orthodox ethos and the democratic pluralism or the human rights. See, for example, O. Gillet, *Religie și naționalism*, ch. "Etica ortodoxă – o frână în calea pluralismului democratic?", pp. 263-278; or Adamantia Pollis, "Greece: A Problematic Secular State", in William Safran (ed.), *The Secular and the Sacred. Nation, Religion and Politics* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2005), pp. 147-160.

<sup>90</sup> "The term religious nationalism does not necessarily refer to any specific relationship between the church and the state. Again, countries with an established church may not exhibit religious nationalism (Church of England) whereas countries with no established church may". (Ph. Barker, *Religious Nationalism*, p. 14).

that the Romanian Orthodox Church became one of the instruments of the national state. Religious nationalism from the Romanian space can be considered a form of secularization in the sense that, through the identity established between religion and nation, the premises of the theological discourse's transfer into a secular dimension are created, thus transforming religious discourse into an ideological discourse.<sup>91</sup> Neither is the institution of the Church free of such temptation, for, as has already been noted, sometimes its actions towards society do not start from the premises of Christian theology, but from the political premises of the civil society. Or, this way, while claiming to be fighting against secularization, the public position of the Church faces the risk of self-secularization.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> I had analyzed the mechanisms of such a transformation in Gelu Sabău, "Religion and Modernity", pp. 114-132.

<sup>92</sup> The auto-secularization of the Church aims at more aspects: 1) By assuming a national identity the Church risks transforming herself into an "institution of social or political memory" and betraying its religious vocation; 2) The supremacy of the Church in public space based on the majority's argument follows the logic of democracy and has no affinity with Christian values; 3) The claim of the Church to be an "implicit actor of civil society" risks hiding its nature as a "different" institution (See I. Conovici, "Aspecte ale discursului public al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române după 1989: (auto)secularizarea", *Studia Politica*, vol. VII, no. 3, 2007, pp. 785-790).

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## CHAPTER VI

# SECULARIZATION UNDER COMMUNISM: ROMANIAN LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

*MARIUS SILVEȘAN*

Faith in God has been and is an important element through which a Christian receives support and encouragement in times of distress; the communist regime sought to destroy this pillar of society. Based on this fact, in this article we will refer specifically to the legislative measures taken by the communist regime in Romania (1948-1989), through which the role of faith in public life was minimized. For their presentation we refer to a general legislation and to a particular legislation. By “general legislation” we understand that legislation which did not have specific religious environment applicability, and through private legislation we refer to one with a specific applicability to this environment. Specifically, in the first category we refer to the three constitutions of the communist regime in Romania (1948, 1952, 1965), education law, the Criminal Code. When we consider the law for the general status of religious denominations, we include religious denominations statutes drawn up under the supervision of the “guidance” of the state, the organization and functioning law of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Decree on organization and functioning of the Department of Religious Affairs, as well as other unpublished decision in the Official Gazette or the Official Bulletin. We refer here to the regulation of religious services in 1952, a decision aimed at reducing religious service in evangelical or protestant denominations (Adventist, Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostal), but also on the decision on imposing strict assignation upon churches on whether a church is able or not to function. Unlike the decision on regulating religious, the assignation decision affected other churches too, not only evangelical churches known as neo-protestant.

The measures taken by the state in the direction of secularization were not without effect on religious belief, although the Church acted to minimize them.

### **COMMUNISM, ATHEISM OR SECULARIZED RELIGION?**

Communism, as an ideological system, has found many roots in Christianity, referring mainly to collective property. But all these Christian roots of communism “are destroyed by Marx and Engels who operates a radical rupture”, linking communism closely with militant

atheism.<sup>1</sup> Through his book, *The Red Flag. An introduction in the history of communism*,<sup>2</sup> David Preistland performs a very interesting analysis of the communist system whose ideological origins, he identified in relation to the emergence and crystallization of the communist ideology in the French Revolution from 1789.<sup>3</sup> Based on the above-mentioned issues, we launch the following question: was communism only an ideological system that propagates atheism, or more than that? We speak in this case of a secularized religion?

The origins of communist ideology (Marxist), Bolshevik propaganda practice and the exporting of those “confirms that we can always talk about totalitarianism of the left (and right-wing extremism) in terms of *political religion*”. The concept of political religion “was imposed first by Eric Voegelin (in a response to Thomas Mann) and refers to the typical phenomenon of Resacralization of the modern world through utopia”.<sup>4</sup> Given the framing of communism in the category of political religions, we will pursue further features that argue the above claims.

According to the ideas expressed by the prominent historian of mentalities, Professor Lucian Boia, communism as a scientific religion pursued three characteristic goals of any religious synthesis: “a complete and coherent explanation of the world; the interpretation of man's destiny; a code of ethics and behavior”.<sup>5</sup> Marxism

has its own doctrine of creation, namely the doctrine of the genesis of the world and humanity, and a doctrine of a kind of original sin – [social division of labor] – because of which everyone still suffers. Marxism proclaims a doctrine of salvation, which includes the belief in a Redeemer of mankind, namely the *proletariat*. Furthermore, it has a doctrine of the church, which is an association of the first

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Stéphane Courtois (ed.), *Dicționarul comunismului*, trans. Mihai Ungurean, Aliza Ardeleanu, Gabriela Ciubuc (Iași: Polirom, 2008), pp. 525-526.

<sup>2</sup> David Preistland begins his book with a challenging title 1789-1889-1989, dates referring to three important moments of communism history. David Preistland, *Steagul roșu. O istorie a comunismului*, translation: Corina Hădăreanu (București: Litera Internațional, 2012), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> For ideology origins, see the introduction (pp. 15-30) and the prologue (pp. 31-48) in Preistland, *Steagul roșu*.

<sup>4</sup> Mihail Neamțu, “Comunism și religie. Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România. Raport final Editura Humanitas, 2007” in *Dilemateca* (iulie 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului* (București: Humanitas, 1999), p. 24.



fruits of humanity (The Party). Finally, it sustains a so-called doctrine of last things, a doctrine referring to the *purpose* and finality of the history, an eschatology which, although it was not developed in detail, it is also proclaimed with great power.<sup>6</sup>

In this context Marxism has a prophetic character similar to that in Judeo-Christianity<sup>7</sup> and the likeness of the Party “with a church, preserving the message of salvation”<sup>8</sup> in an earthly paradise, opposed to a heavenly paradise, which is considered illusory.<sup>9</sup> For example, in 1961, the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, “predicted that the Soviet Union would reach the promised land of ‘communism’ by 1980”.<sup>10</sup> Another similarity between communism and traditional religions is that it “aspires to put man in harmony with the universe and himself”.<sup>11</sup> Marxism, as a political religion, identifies itself with “the kingdom of men”<sup>12</sup> and represents “a secular perspective on the Kingdom of God”.<sup>13</sup> According to Raymond Aron, communism as a left ideology is atheist even when it did not deny the existence of God, in as much as it designs a “human world without reference to a transcendent”.<sup>14</sup>

The analysis of this information and comparison between the communist and Christian ideology (Christendom) shows that we can talk about communism in terms of a secularized religion. We are talking about a Savior,<sup>15</sup> a clergy, an ideology of salvation that had a common

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<sup>6</sup> K. Bockmuehl, *The Challenge of Marxism*, IVP, Leicester, 1980, p. 17, *apud* Paul Negruț, *Biserica și statul: interogație asupra modelului “simfoniei” bizantine* (Oradea: Editura Institutului Biblic “Emanuel”, 2000), p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Aron, *Opiul intelectualilor*, trans. Adina Dinițoiu, Ed. a 2-a (București: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2008), p. 303.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 304. According to Alain Besançon, this is a collective salvation, being comparable to the biblical salvation. Alain Besançon, *Nenorocirea secolului: despre comunism, nazism și unicitatea “Șoah-ului”*, trans. Mona Antohi (București: Humanitas, 2007), pp. 93, 91.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wurmbrand, *Torturat pentru Hristos (Suferința Bisericii din țările comuniste)*, trans. Dragoș Alexandrescu (București: Living Sacrifice, Book Company, USA, c/o Forumul Civic Creștin, 2007), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Preistland, *Steagul roșu. O istorie a comunismului*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Historian, Lucian Boia, considered that Marxism “took the place of religion in the sense of building a unitary world in which man will finally find the motive of being”, *Ibidem*, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> K. Bockmuehl, *The Challenge of Marxism*, p. 17, *apud* Negruț, *Biserica și statul*, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> Aron, *Opiul intelectualilor*, p. 303.

<sup>15</sup> We identify in this position both the communist party and its leader/leaders. It’s interesting to mention in this case, a remark made by Lutheran

characteristic, atheism. The propagation of communism has become one of the central elements that sought to be imposed on the new society that communism wanted to create.

## THE PHENOMENON OF SECULARIZATION

Secularization is a phenomenon with repercussions on Romanian society and the church. In the light of this reality, through this article we intend to present the relationship between secularization and the legal system, particularly in the first period of Romanian communism, namely between 1948-1965, years considered to be those in which both the society as a whole, and the Church suffered the most profound transformations. The period referred to is the one in which the state takes concerted action through legislation, education and media to secularize society. In this case the concept of secularism is understood as referring to the sometimes brutal actions<sup>16</sup> of the state, which aimed to dismantle the society, trying to promote atheism and remove Christianity<sup>17</sup> from the public space. Mihai Huanu, pastor and president of Baptist Union between 1984-1988, stated in an interview that the “communist idea

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pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed because of his opposition shown to the supreme leader of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer mentioned that “the leader and the function which call themselves gods mocked God and [...] must collapse”, DBWE, vol. 12, pp, 280, 282, *apud* Emanuel Coțac, “Pastorul lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer martir al rezistenței antinaziste în Germania lui Hitler”, *Și cerul s-a umplut de sfinți ...: martiriul în antichitate și în secolul XX: actele Colocviului Internațional “Martiriul în Antichitatea creștină și în secolul XX: teme, dezbateri personaje”*: Sighet, 2-5 June 2011, organized by Academia Civică from Romania, Asociația Culturală Oglindanet; (eds.) Cristian Bădiliță, Emanuel Coțac (București: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2012), p. 495.

<sup>16</sup> “Everywhere from the Elbe to the Vistula and the Danube, taking power and the destruction of the old world was done through terror and violence, under the direct protection of the occupation troops and under the helpless eye of western observatory”, Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria românilor de la origini până în zilele noastre*, Ediția a III-a (București: Humanitas, 1992), p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Religion was considered a private matter that had nothing to do with public life. Due to this reason the school was separated from the church and religion was taken out of school subjects. Another state action aimed the transition in its property of the health and educational institutions belonging to cults. By removing religion from the school curriculum, the prohibition of religious assistance in the army, schools, hospitals and other public institutions, the state has assumed the role of training a new generation that would no longer have anything to do with religion or the Church. Controlling the schools aimed to remove the Christian faith from the minds of youth and inoculate new, atheistic ideas. Developing and explaining these issues were done within the framework of the present material.

denies God, denies the holy and clean life, promoting other principles....”<sup>18</sup> To understand these issues, we will present the general characteristics of secularization, specific aspects of this process, as well as its consequences particularly in Evangelical and Neoprotestant church life, by analyzing the legislative framework. The importance of the legal framework derives from the fact that it regulates the relationship between the secular and the religious, and between state and Churches. The subject of this article fits into a broader research theme related to the dynamics of the relationship between the state and the Christian Baptist Churches of Romania, between 1948 and 1965.<sup>19</sup>

The organizational particularity of each of the religious confessions that were given the legal right to work in Romania (including the Roman Catholic Church) led to a different response to the actions of state laicization of society,<sup>20</sup> to which we shall refer to as the legislative framework. For a clearer understanding of the implications of state actions employed in the sphere of secularization, we need a definition of this term, in fact a concept with poly-semantic meaning. DEX defines the verb “to secularize” with reference to “take out goods from the property or composition of the church, areas of activity or cultural values,<sup>21</sup> passing them into state ownership”.<sup>22</sup> According to the

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<sup>18</sup> Mihai Hușanu, interview taken by Denisa Bodeanu in Denisa Bodeanu (ed.), *Neoprotestanții din Transilvania în timpul regimului comunist: studiu de caz: bapțiștii din județul Cluj: mărturii și documente* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2007), p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> The research deals with matters of legislative regulations, personnel, means and methods of state control, the methods and responsive forms of individual or institutional households of the state, during its persistent interferences in the Baptist churches of Romania and its believers.

<sup>20</sup> Laicization is understood in this context as an extreme form of secularization, René Rémond, *Religie și secularizare în Europa. Secularizarea în secolele al XIX-lea și XX 1780-2000* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), pp.160-161.

<sup>21</sup> Through Decision no. 202 of 31 January 1948 published in the Official Gazette of 3 February 1948: “Ministerial Committee for Economic Recovery and Monetary Stabilization, created by Law No. 248, published in the Official Gazette nr.159 of July 15, 1947, issued a Decision with law power ordering that all the goods of all kinds of institutions be passed immediately to the state – that is, to be seized – in the conditions set out in that Decision”. Tudor R. Popescu, *Salvarea bisericilor de orice rit din România sub ocupația militară sovietică*, Ediția a II-a, edition by Rodica Burdușel (Iași: Lumen, 2009), p. 37. In Article 1 of Decision 202/1948 were referred hospitals, educational and ecclesiastical supplies, which were to enter into state ownership. Point c of Article 1 expressly referred that churches and hermitages would go into the ownership of Ministry of Religious Affairs. The danger lies in the expression of article 2 which stated that, “for the assigning of goods which were not covered by article 1, or on which there are doubts, will be formed a Committee”, *Ibidem*,

Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, “secularization<sup>23</sup> can be defined as the ‘process of change in orientation on the religious foundation of thought and action, to one centered on the world as the only perceptible reality’”.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, we refer to the secularization in the effort to “marginalize the religious domain in the private sphere”,<sup>25</sup> in a context in which, since the latter part of the XX century, in the Romanian space, Marxism was “one of the most effective agents of secularization”.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the Church-state relationship, “secularization is manifested through a higher power state interference in the Church and a restriction of the influence of the Church in relation to the state”,<sup>27</sup> leading to a total dissociation between *religious faith and society*. For a clearer understanding of changes occurring in the relationship between Church and state, we point out that Marxism, and Leninism, defined as ideological systems, declared war on religion and “replaced Church teachings, with an atheistic state philosophy”.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding state-Church relations<sup>29</sup> and actions of secularization by the communist regime, 1948 marked a turning point for society and

p. 38. Through this ambiguous wording, the lawman comprehends within the law framework “property of religious institutions, which were to be confiscated, without discrimination”. *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> DEX online term *seculariza*, <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/seculariza>, accessed on 03.03.2011.

<sup>23</sup> “The term secularism was first used to refer to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which resulted in a transfer of church properties into the hands of the Prince”. Dănuț Mănăstireanu, “Religie și secularizare în modernitatea târzie” <http://agorachristi.wordpress.com/2008/05/26/religie-si-secularizare-in-modernitatea-tarzie/>, accessed on 20.02.2011.

<sup>24</sup> D.K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), p. 253 quoted in Mănăstireanu, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211, *apud*, Mănăstireanu, “Religie și secularizare în modernitatea târzie”.

<sup>26</sup> Mănăstireanu, “Religie și secularizare în modernitatea târzie”.

<sup>27</sup> Paula Podoabă, under the theme of “Secularization and its forms”, <http://dreptcanonic.amforum.net>, accessed on 03.03.2011.

<sup>28</sup> Rémond, *Religie și secularizare în Europa. Secularizarea în secolele al XIX-lea și XX 1780-2000*, p. 177.

<sup>29</sup> “Separation of Church and state – behold the claim that the socialist proletariat presents to contemporary state and contemporary church”, V. I. Lenin, “Socialismul și religia”, in V. I. Lenin, *Despre religie* (București: Editura de Stat pentru Literatura Politică, 1956), p. 9. This attitude is understandable given that Lenin declared that religion is opium for the people, and one of the forms of spiritual oppression. *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

religious life in Romania.<sup>30</sup> To legitimize the communist regime, there was developed a new legislative framework through which they sought to put under state control, the political, social and religious life. Because “the Church was the last major obstacle<sup>31</sup> to the imposition of the Soviet model”,<sup>32</sup> it could not remain outside the legal regulations which sought to establish a new type of relationship between state and Church.<sup>33</sup> The 1948’s Constitution, the Religion Law and the Law of the Organization and functioning of the Ministry of Religious Affairs from the same year, the decision of the Council of Ministers for the Organization and functioning of the Department of Religious Affairs in 1958, rules on financial discipline, discipline in construction, modification of the Penal Code in 1960,<sup>34</sup> regulations on education, all of this represents only a part of the new regulatory framework regarding denominations, built since 1948.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Since 1948, “dark clouds settled down on religious freedom” in Romania, in *Memorialul Durerii*, producer Lucia Hossu Longin, Ep.13, Drama Bisericii Greco-catolice (00:43”).

<sup>31</sup> The Greek Catholic priest, Matei Boilă, makes a competent analysis of the objectives of the communist regime to control the minds and souls of men, and the opposition of the Church and the *Christian faith to modeling the communist doctrine in the souls of men*. “The characteristic of communism was a dictatorship not by its special cruelty, because throughout history may have been enough extraordinary cruel dictatorships, maybe not like them but they were. Totalitarian character was based on the fact that they not only wanted to impose laws, control on people, but also the concept of life. This was the essential thing in the communist regime. Communism tried to rule the world, possessing souls, and that the greatest enemy was the Church and the Christian faith who oppose this true communisation of the human soul by an atheistic Marxist conception”. Priest Matei Boilă in *Ibidem* (03:58”).

<sup>32</sup> Denis Deletant, *România sub regimul Comunist* (Bucureşti: Fundația Academia Civică, 2010), p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> According to Marx, religion and its institutionalized form, the Church, were instruments of the oppressor state, of a system based on exploitation, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Despre religie* (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1960), p.134. Lenin wrote the following when referring to the relationship of Church – state: “We ask that religion will be a private matter to state, but in any case we cannot consider religion a private matter to our own party. The state shouldn’t have anything to do with religion; religious associations must not be linked to state power”. Vladimir Ilich Lenin, “Socialismul și religia” in V.I Lenin, *Opere*, vol. 10 (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Politică, 1956), p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> *Codul Penal. Text oficial cu modificările până la data de 1 decembrie 1960 urmat de o anexă de legi penale speciale* (The official text as amended up to December 1, 1960, followed by an appendix of special penal law) (Bucureşti: Editura Științifică, 1960).

<sup>35</sup> For more details, see Ioan Bunaciu, *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România între 1944-1990* (Bucureşti: Editura Universității din București, 2002),

## CHANGES IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF HISTORICAL DENOMINATIONS

As I already mentioned, political changes that took place in Romania in the mid-40's of the 20th century toward the establishment of a totalitarian regime, resulted in a change in the relationship between the state and religious denominations.<sup>36</sup>

Using the new legislative framework, the communist propaganda claimed that it would assure the freedom of religion and of conscience of citizens in Romania. In reality, parallel with providing a certain degree of freedom for minority denominations, compared with the interwar period, the communists intruded in the domestic life of all denominations through surveillance and control. This was due to the fact that, despite statements or appearances, the communist regime in Romania was atheist<sup>37</sup> and aimed to control religion.<sup>38</sup>

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p. 22; Patricia González Aldea, *Helsinki 1975. Începutul sfârșitului: Degradarea regimului din România și singularitatea lui în Blocul de Est: (1975-1990)*, trans. Alexandra Reocov (București: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2008), cap.7 History and legal bases of the Ceaușescu regime, pp. 171-223.

<sup>36</sup> According to Marx, religion and its institutionalized form, the Church, were instruments of the oppressor state, of a system based on exploitation, Marx, Engels, *Despre religie*, 1960, p. 134.

<sup>37</sup> "In 1948 the communist state leadership, apart from Dr. Petru Groza, declared themselves atheists", Bunaciu, *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România între 1944-1990*, p. 21. Gheorghiu-Dej did not conceal the particular attachment "to the ideas of atheistic belief that, ultimately, communism was to rule the whole world", Richard Wurmbrand, *Cu Dumnezeu în subterană* (București: Stephanus, 2007), p. 31. A similar point is made by the distinguished historian Adrian Cioroianu who characterizes the communist regime as "an atheistic and atheist by definition", Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx: o introducere în istoria comunismului românesc*, ediția a 2-a (București: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2007), p. 268.

<sup>38</sup> When making a party-state balance report in the constitutional system of Socialist Romania, Angela Banciu make a reference to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, stating that "it is the only and true *state religion*", Angela Banciu, *Istoria vieții constituționale în România (1866-1991)* (București: Casa de Editură și Presă "Șansa" S.R.L., 1996), p. 244. Communism "was actually a secularization of Christian messianism", Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist* (foreword by Adrian Cioroianu, București: Editura Curtea Veche, 2004), p. 27. According to Jean-François Soulet, "for the communist leaders from the 50's – as the Bolsheviks before them – any full recovery of society required the eradication of religion and the destruction of Churches", Jean-François Soulet, *Istoria comparată a statelor comuniste din 1945 și până în zilele noastre* (transl. Silvia Albișteanu and Ana Zbârcea, Iași: Polirom, 1998), p. 44.

Following the Soviet model,<sup>39</sup> as “in all communist states” with some variation depending on the particular history,<sup>40</sup> the communist regime in Romania initiated a campaign against the Roman Catholic Church, but also against the Romanian Church United with Rome, known as the Greek Catholic Church. Subjecting Roman Catholic believers and Greek Catholic believers to an outside authority,<sup>41</sup> the Vatican, was, as Jean-François Soulet<sup>42</sup> observed, one of the central issues in the relations between them and the communist regime.<sup>43</sup> The anticommunist position of Catholic and Greek Catholic priests was another reason why the communist regime wanted a change in their own relationship with these churches. The Concordat with the Vatican, an act concluded in 1927 and in force since 1929, which regulated the status of Catholics in Romania,<sup>44</sup> was terminated unilaterally by the Romanian state on July 17, 1948. By denouncing this act, the communist

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<sup>39</sup> “Actions against certain religions were determined by state interests. According to these, some religions were abolished, while others were allowed to work, trying to use them to promote certain geopolitical interests”. George Enache, “Lupta împotriva religiei în U.R.S.S. și promovarea valorilor ateiste. Fundamente doctrinare și forme de acțiune” *Arhivele Securității*, vol. 4 (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2008), p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> In Yugoslavia, the new regime’s intention was to limit the activity of churches to religious service. It sought, among other things, to restrict the influence of the Church in society to the point where it no longer poses anything else than “vestiges of past civilizations”, Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *The improbable survivor. Yugoslavia and its problems 1918-1988* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1988), p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx*, p. 273.

<sup>42</sup> “A more aggressive behavior of the communists towards the Catholic Church explains itself through its centralized structure, its powerful subordination to Rome and the solidarity between the various Catholic countries around the world”, Soulet, *Istoria comparată a statelor comuniste*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> The aspects mentioned are identified by Liviu Țărău in a study on the American perception of the religious situation in Soviet-controlled area in the latter part of the 40’s. Although the Soviet leadership position in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church has undergone a change in the context of Russia’s involvement in the Second World War, they maintained a conservative stance towards Catholicism. The attitude towards Catholicism found its aversion in the “Bolshevistic attitude to religion in general, but it is especially due to the fact that the spiritual center of Catholicism, the Vatican state entity itself – and Catholic churches in different states could not be checked or enrolled in the desired direction of Kremlin policy”. Liviu Țărău, “Percepții americane privind situația religioasă din România 1944-1946” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Theologia Catholica*, Anul XLV, Nr. 2, 2000, Cluj-Napoca, p. 6. Another determining factor was anti-communist attitude adopted by the Vatican at the end of the 19th century, cf. *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx*, p. 273.

authorities sought to take the Catholic and Greek Catholic churches from under the authority of the Vatican and transform them into churches subjected to national authorities. Although it failed to bring the Roman Catholic Church under communist rule, and the rules of operation that were proposed to the Government were not approved, it was allowed to operate throughout the communist period semi-clandestinely with a decimated elite. Regarding the diplomatic relations with the Vatican, “the communists believed that Nunciatures are more like diplomatic espionage dens, so the Nunciatures were forced to close in the East-European countries”.<sup>45</sup>

The Concordat denunciation had an effect also on the Greek Catholic believers, which the regime wanted to terminate as Stalin did in the Ukraine. Bishop Ioan Suciu<sup>46</sup> transmitted the following exhortation to encourage believers: “It is the hour in which Jesus Christ gives us the opportunity to share the sufferings for the Church. Do not be deceived by words, committees, news and lies. Stay strong, steadfast in the faith for which our parents and ancestors gave their blood...”<sup>47</sup> This exhortation of Bishop Ioan Suciu was true also for the United Church’s elite when, during 27-29 of October 1948, all Greek Catholic Bishops were arrested.<sup>48</sup> After the arrest of the Greek Catholic elite, through Decree 358/1948<sup>49</sup> on December 2, 1948, the communist state ordered the abolition of the Greek Catholic cult, and joined the Romanian Church United with Rome with the Romanian Orthodox Church as revealed in the document text.

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<sup>45</sup> Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin*, p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> Ioan Suciu, also known as the youth’s Bishop, was consecrated as auxiliary bishop of Toronto in the summer of 1940, choosing to remain with his believers to serve even after the cession of Northern Transylvania to Hungary in the autumn. Even if he survived an attempted execution of the Hungarian army, the Greek Catholic Bishop did not accept totalitarian regimes breaches, criticizing the pro-Soviet regime in Romania, from the position of an apostolic administrator of the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș.

<sup>47</sup> *Memorialul Durerii*, Ep.13, Drama Bisericii Greco-catolice (02:28”).

<sup>48</sup> Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin*, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> Decretul 358 din 2 decembrie 1948 (Decretul 358/1948) privind stabilirea situației de drept a fostului cult greco-catolic publicat în Monitorul Oficial 281 din 2 decembrie 1948 (Monitorul Oficial 281/1948). [Decree No. 358 of 2 December 1948 (Decree 358/1948) concerning the situation of the former Greek Catholic cult was published in the Official Gazette on 2 December 1948, 281 (Monitorul Oficial 281/1948)]. Referring to this point, the priest Matei Boilă, a former political prisoner and senator, mentions the following: “This aggression against the Greek Catholic Church was the culmination of Soviet occupation”, *Memorialul Durerii*, Ep.13, Drama Bisericii Greco-catolice (01:38”).



Art. 1. After the reallocation of Greek Catholic's local communities (parishes) to Romanian Orthodox cult in accordance with art. 13 of Decree no. 177/1948, organizations and statutory power of this cult as: ecclesiastical province, dioceses, ecclesiastical chapters, orders, congregations, parishes, monasteries, foundations, associations, and any other organized institutions and organizations, under any name, ceases to exist.

Art. 2. Mobile and immovable property belonging to organizations and institutions referred to in article 1 of this Decree, with the exception of the former parishes of property, will return to the Romanian state, which will take over immediately.

An interdepartmental commission composed of representatives from the Ministries: Religious Affairs, Finance, Home Affairs, Agriculture and Public Education Areas will decide the destination of these fortunes, and may assign some of them to Romanian Orthodox Church and its various components.<sup>50</sup>

Intrusions were made and in the life of the Romanian Orthodox Church due to the fact that the party wanted the Church to be under control in terms of hierarchy and strict observation of the Security in respect to parishioners (the body of the believers).<sup>51</sup> In a first phase the communist regime sought to impose its own people on the deliberative bodies of the B.O.R. where they chose bishops and metropolitans.

The presence of a fairly large group of lay people in deliberative organs of the Church was a means by which the party in power chose hierarchies, which were favorable to its policy and exercised control from inside the Church influencing its decisions in the sense desired by the political authorities.<sup>52</sup>

The state intervened in the election of the clergy, as well as in its implementation through withdrawal by 179 Law published in the Official Gazette on 30 May 1947, where in article 3 they mention the conditions under which the state could decide, "the revocation of

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<sup>50</sup> Decree No. 358 of 2 December 1948, published in Monitorul Oficial 281/1948. Available online at <http://www.lexex.ro/Decret-358-02.12.1948-127.aspx> (accessed 6 June 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx*, p. 271.

<sup>52</sup> Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Stalinizarea României: Republica Populară Română 1948-1950: transformări instituționale* (București: BIC ALL, 2005), p. 363.

members of all denominations".<sup>53</sup> The party's point of view is specified by Petru Groza when he presented to the members of the Government, at its meeting of 7 February 1947, a synthesis of his conversation with Patriarch Nicodemus.

From our point of view, we consider priests as civil servants, employees of the state. Under this report, we are at ease, no matter what the canons say, to establish and recognize whether or not a priest is able to perform the function for which we pay him as a public official.<sup>54</sup>

Other rules have had as a consequence the prohibition of denominations from supporting general educational establishments, allowing them institutions only to prepare the clergy.<sup>55</sup> Removing religious objects from schools has prompted reactions from both the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic clergy, also from teachers, parents and peasants. Because of the brutal way in which this action was carried out by the Ministry of Education, the Party was forced to temper its anti-religious campaign.

Political and religious transformations were supported by a legislative framework, which gave the state the right to act legally, though many times, despite apparent legality, this legality actually has been violated. For the understanding of those issues we consider it appropriate to present the main elements of the legal framework, as well as a comparison with the inter-war period.

### **LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPOSITION OF THE SOVIET MODEL IN STATE-CHURCH RELATIONS**

Changes in the political and social level, as a result of the establishment of the communist regime, is continuous as regards a legal framework for the operation and supervision of religious denominations. This was achieved through the constitutions, denominations law, law on organization and functioning of the Ministry of religious affairs, the Department of Religious Affairs, as well as other laws and legal provisions. Reading the new legislative framework built since 1948 can show an apparent existence of religious freedom, but law enforcement and state actions prove concerted action on their part to promote

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 367.

<sup>54</sup> A.N.I.C., fond P.C.M., Transcripts, 1947, file 2, f. 55, *apud* Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Stalinizarea României*, p. 364.

<sup>55</sup> Measure introduced by the Constitution R.P.R. in 1948 and later by Decree 175/1948 on education reform. Reference to theological education.

atheism. We speak in this case of a difference between the official discourse and the reality of religious life. To understand these issues we present and analyze a general legal framework regarding denominations recognized by the 1948 Constitution and the general law with specific reference to the religious domain, most specifically regarding the Baptist denomination.

Based on the issues mentioned, our research finds the year 1948 as a milestone marking a turning point for society and religious life in Romania when the communist regime developed a new legislative framework to pursue state control of political, social and religious life. Because the Church has been an obstacle “in the way to impose the Soviet model”,<sup>56</sup> it could not remain outside the legal regulations that sought to establish a new type of relationship between state and Church. The 1948 Constitution, the Religion Law and the Law of the Organization and functioning of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the same year, the decision of the Council of Ministers for the Organization and functioning of the Department of Religious Affairs in 1958, rules on financial discipline, discipline in construction, modification of the Penal Code in 1960, and regulations on education represent only a part of the new regulatory framework regarding denominations, built since 1948.

#### *The Constitutional Framework*

The Constitutional framework<sup>57</sup> was an important element in the implementation of the policy regarding religious denominations of the new regime in Bucharest. Three constitutions were drawn up, the 1948, 1952 and 1965, the last remaining in force with some modifications until 1989. The three constitutions will be analyzed individually and compared to highlight the fact that at the level of official discourse there were significant changes in which freedom of conscience and freedom

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<sup>56</sup> Deletant, *România sub regimul Comunist*, p. 93. In a public declaration of 22 February 1948, Gheorghiu-Dej identified the Roman Catholic Church as “one of the few institutional obstacles that may stand in front of the communization [of the country]”, Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion about the constitutional framework see Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Stalinizarea României* pp.121-127, 375-382, and also Angela Banciu, *Istoria constituțională a României: deziderate naționale și realități sociale* (București: Editura Lumina Lex, 2001), *passim*. Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură stated, taking some ideas from Jean-François Soulet, *Comparative History of Communist States*, the fact that the country's fundamental laws, constitutions, have been used by communist regimes as a means of strengthening their authority and enhancing their own political systems (regimes).

of religion were included, but these were not as significant for the concrete realities of the daily life for Baptist believers.

*1948's Constitution.* One of the objectives of the new political regime was to provide a legal framework.<sup>58</sup> Thus, after 23 August 1944 is put in force the 1923's Constitution. In respect of the freedoms enjoyed by citizens, the fundamental act, adopted in 1923, stipulate in article 5 that "Romanians, irrespective of ethnic origin, language or religion, enjoy the freedom of conscience, freedom of education, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of associations and of all freedoms and rights laid down by law".<sup>59</sup> This article demonstrates that political and social rights were secured for all citizens. Political rights and freedoms were presented in a similar way in the 1938's Constitution:

All Romanian citizens, regardless of ethnic origin and religious faith, are equal before the law, owing respect and submission. No one can consider being free from his civil or military, public or private duties, on the grounds of religious belief or any other.<sup>60</sup>

The most important item for religious freedom was article 22 of the 1923's Constitution, which stipulated the following:

Conscience's freedom is absolute. The state guarantees the freedom and protection of all religions because their exercise doesn't bring any prejudice to public order, good morals and laws of the state organization. The Christian Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church are Romanian churches. The Romanian Orthodox Church, being the religion of the majority of Romanians, is the dominant church in the Romanian state; and the Greek Catholic has primacy over all others denominations. The Romanian Orthodox Church is and remains autonomous from any foreign Hierarchy, retaining its unity to the ecumenical Church of the East on doctrines. Throughout the Romanian kingdom, The Christian Orthodox Church will have a unified organization with the participation of all

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<sup>58</sup> Through the constitutions, the Communist Party sought to gain the legitimacy that it lacked in the Romanian society.

<sup>59</sup> Constituția din 1923 (1923's Constitution), <http://www.rogoveanu.ro/constitutia/const1923.htm> (accessed 03.05.2011).

<sup>60</sup> Constituția din 1938 (1938's Constitution), <http://www.rogoveanu.ro/constitutia/const1938.htm> (accessed 03.05.2011).

its constituent elements, clergy and laity. A special law will establish the fundamental principles of the organization unit and the method, by which the Church will regulate, manage and administer, through its own and under the control of the state, religious, cultural, ecclesiological and foundational matters. Spiritual and canonical issues of the Romanian Orthodox Church will be regulated by one central conciliar authority. Romanian Orthodox Church's metropolitans and bishops are chosen according to special laws. Relations between the different denominations and the state shall be regulated by law.

This article shall specify clearly the privileged status of the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church, a position that will no longer be found in the Constitutions of 1948, 1952, and 1965. Freedom of religion and of conscience was noted in the 1938's Constitution through article 19, which stated that "freedom of conscience shall be absolute".

Though the items mentioned above as part of the Constitutions of 1923 and 1938 "unequivocally affirmed freedom of speech and worship, de facto, realities were different. The Orthodox Church – helped by the police and court – led a policy against those who shared other faiths".<sup>61</sup>

The Constitution of 1923, with all its shortcomings, has played an important role in the foundation of the democratic regime in the interwar period. Moreover, it proved its value in the years 1944-1947, because in political life, things like crushing the rights of Romanians, increased arrests and deportations, repressions against churches (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, United, and other denominations) were

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<sup>61</sup> Bogdan Emanuel Răduț, *Statul și biserica în România comunistă (1949-1965) – Între demnitate și compromis* (Craiova: Sitech, 2010), p. 47. Bogdan Emanuel Răduț's statement is confirmed by records of Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs comprising a great number of memoirs and interventions by international Baptist bodies regarding religious freedom in Romania. From all of these, we mention: "The Memoir addressed by the BWA to the Council of Ministers on the repressive measures taken against the Baptists in Romania. Response note (27 July 1921 – 22 October 1921)", "Expulsion from Romania of the Baptist missionary Hurlez" (telegr. 13 January 1925, February 1925, etc.) in The Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate of personnel and education. Central Fund M.A.E., Problem 16 (Schools and Churches in Romania) 1875-1950, vol. 11 unpagged; "J. Rushbrooke's Memoir, the BWA's Secretary, on the Romanian Baptist Association's regime. Romanian Government response", "The Secret Order of the General staff which forbade sectarian meeting (also Baptists) – 1927" in *Ibidem*, vol.12 unpagged.

brutal only after abandoning the Constitution of 1923 and the King's departure from the country.<sup>62</sup>

After the forced abdication of the king and the establishment of the republic, work was started on a new constitution that could legitimize the changes. Thus, the first of the three communist Constitutions, adopted on 13 April 1948, stipulated in article 27, the state's guarantee of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and the right to organize and operate freely.

Freedom of conscience and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the state. / Religious denominations are free to organize and can operate freely if their practice and ritual are not contrary to the Constitution, public security or morality. / No confession, religious community or congregation can open or maintain general educational institutions, but only special schools for training denomination's personnel, under state control. / The Romanian Church is autocephalous and unified in its organization. The organization and functioning of religious denominations will be regulated by law.

Analyzing the provisions of the legislative text, Patricia González Aldea believes that this Constitution is “the first legislative result of communism in Romania. Its orientation was exclusively economic and aimed at settling of foundations of the communist regime in this area”. It “can be considered a first step toward setting up the predominant role that the communist legal texts were going to play, since that time, regarding so-called economic rights, social and cultural life in relation to civil and political ones”.<sup>63</sup> As regards the religious freedom to organize and operate freely, it was permitted only if their “practice and ritual was not contrary to the Constitution, the public security or morality”. Ambiguous formulations allowed the discretionary intervention of the state in the internal denominations life. Also through Article 27 they introduced limitations on the denomination's right to “maintains general education institutions”.

*1952's Constitution.* This Constitution resumed ideas expressed in the Constitution promulgated in 1948. The religious issue is presented in Chapter VII, article 84, which references the fundamental rights and duties of citizens. Through this article the state guaranteed formal freedom of conscience by the following formula: “Freedom of

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<sup>62</sup> Banciu, *Istoria vieții constituționale*, pp. 182-183.

<sup>63</sup> González Aldea, *Helsinki 1975*, p. 173.

conscience is guaranteed to all citizens of the Romanian Popular Republic”.

The 84's Article presented the status of denominations, as well as the types of educational institutions that they were entitled to “maintain”.

Religious denominations are free to organize and can operate freely. The freedom of religious denominations to exercise is guaranteed to all citizens of the Romanian Popular Republic. The school is separated from the Church. No confession, congregation or religious community can open or maintain educational institutions, only special schools for the training of their personnel. The organization and functioning of religious denominations will be regulated by law.<sup>64</sup>

It now appears for the first time in the text of the Constitution that school is separated from the Church. Although it states that there is religious freedom to organize and operate freely, the end of Article 84 of the Constitution introduces limitations in the way of expression and manifestation. These limitations are placed on the provision that “the organization and functioning of religious denominations are regulated by law”.<sup>65</sup>

*1965's Constitution.* Legislative provisions on religious cults are filled with the *RSR's Constitution since 1965*. Article 17 stated:

Citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania, irrespective of nationality, race, sex or religion, have equal rights in all economic, political, legal, social and cultural areas. The state guarantees the equal rights of citizens. No restriction of such right and any difference in their exercise on the basis of nationality, race, sex or religion are allowed. Any event aimed at establishing such restrictions, nationalist propaganda – chauvinist incitements of racial or national hatred are punishable by law.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Constituția Republicii Populare Române” (“Romanian People’s Republic’s Constitution 1952”), article 84, in Ioan Muraru, *Constituțiile Române (Culegere)* (București: Universitatea din București, Facultatea de Drept, 1980), p. 82.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 1952’ Constitution, article 84.

<sup>66</sup> Constituția R.S.R. din 1965 (R.S.R.’s Constitution from 1965), article 30, [http://www.infopolitic.ro/imagini/documente/1133864495\\_Constitutia%20RSR%201965.pdf](http://www.infopolitic.ro/imagini/documente/1133864495_Constitutia%20RSR%201965.pdf), pdf, p. 3 (accessed 11 November 2009).

Thus, formally, via Article 30, the state guaranteed freedom of conscience<sup>67</sup> and freedom of a religious exercise.

Freedom of conscience is guaranteed to all citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Everyone is free to share or not religious faith. The freedom to exercise a religious denomination is guaranteed. Religious denominations are organized and function freely. The organization and functioning of religious denominations is regulated by law. The school is separated from the Church. No confession, congregation or religious community can open or maintain educational institutions, only special schools for the training of the personnel.<sup>68</sup> *Decree No.177 from August 4, 1948.*

*The Law on the general status of religious denominations*

Decree no. 177 for the general regime of religious cults, known as the Denominations Law and promulgated on August 4, 1948, brings further notice on the status of religious denominations. Article 1 of that law specifies the following: “Anyone may belong to any religion or embrace any religious belief if the exercise is not contrary to the Constitution, security and public order or morals property”.

This article is complemented by article 6 which stipulates: “Religious denominations are free to organize and operate freely if their ritual practices and are not contrary to the Constitution, security or public order and morality”.<sup>69</sup>

Article 1 and article 6 presents similarities by introducing limitations with regard to the right of the citizen to belong to a religion, or religious organizations to hold reunions because those freedoms are allowed only if these are not contrary to the Constitution, security or public order and morality.<sup>70</sup> Through such vague formulations are advanced limitations in legislation, in regard to the exercise of religious beliefs or of the operation of a religious cult. External relations could not

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<sup>67</sup> Legislative form of expression because in legal practice that right was not guaranteed.

<sup>68</sup> R.S.R.’s Constitution from 1965, pdf, p. 5,

<sup>69</sup> Decretul nr. 177 pentru regimul general al cultelor religioase, publicat în Monitorul Oficial (Partea I-a), Anul CXVI, nr.178, 1948 (Decree no. 177 for religious denominations’ general regime, published in Official Monitor (Part I), Year CXVI, no.178, 1948), p. 6392.

<sup>70</sup> Legea Cultelor, Decretul 177/1948 (Denominations Law, Decree 177/1948), articles 1 & 6.



escape state supervision, which is why it was governed by Article 40 of the Denominations Law that stated the following:

Religious relations with foreign countries will only be of a religious nature. No religious denomination and no representative of any religion shall maintain links with religious organizations, institutions or officials outside the country, without the consent of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>71</sup>

The provisions referred to were based on the relationship of the Baptist Christian Cult from Romania with the Baptist World Alliance, the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist, missionary organizations or charities, and the Baptist national organizations from other countries, especially Western Europe.

Another area covered by the new legislation was that of economic relations with religious organizations abroad. Thus, contrary to article 9 of the Denominations Law of 1928, which required religious denominations and religious associations to bring to the attention of the Government any aid received from abroad, article 42 of the law on cults of 1948, stated the following: "Offerings or aids received from abroad for religious cults in the country or sent them abroad will be controlled by the state".<sup>72</sup>

In parallel with the affirmation of religious freedom, there was an ultra-strict control of religious manifestations.

#### *Organization of Decision-making Institutions on a Denomination's Activity*

In parallel with the development of the general legal framework and the new Law on Religious Denominations in 1948, they drafted rules (refer to paragraph I.3.1: a, b, c & d) on the operation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which in 1957 became the Department of Religious Affairs.

*The Ministry of Religious Affairs.* This was the institution through which the communist state transposed into practice the new political religious regulations; through it were enacted the state's efforts to

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<sup>71</sup> ASSC, Fond Direcția Studii și Documentare, "Prevederile legislației din 1928 și 1948 referitoare la relația cultelor cu străinătatea", pp. 1-2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

control the religious denominations, as evidenced by Decree 178/1948 on the organization of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>73</sup>

Article 1 stated:

The Ministry of Religious Affairs is the public service through which the state exercises the right of surveillance and monitoring to ensure the use and exercise of religious freedom and freedom of conscience.<sup>74</sup>

Through the analysis of this article, we observe that the supervision and monitoring of religious worship became a state's right, exercised in order to guarantee freedom of conscience and religious freedom. In reality, the state has made use of this right to limit the ways in which churches were carrying their specific activities. Control was exercised in accord with the powers established by the Decree of the cult's institutions, clearances for worship, religious education, and goods of any kind and of any provenance. Supervisory control of tasks and religious personnel of the Baptist Christian worship was exercised by the Division II of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which according to Article 13, letter A,

Prepares and executes according to the laws and orders received, works in conjunction with confirmation appointment, transfer, advancement, delegation, rewards, holidays, prime ministers and retiring clerical staff, administrative and service of all other denominations.<sup>75</sup>

The actions of Ministry of Religious Affairs to restrict religious freedom were determined by political factors as well as the people who transposed these decisions into practice. Ministers of Religious Affairs and Religious Affairs Department Directors saw themselves, as representatives of the state, their position with regard to religion in general and the various religious denominations in particular. Professor Stanciu Stoian,<sup>76</sup> Minister of Religious Affairs in the period 1947-1951,

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<sup>73</sup> "Decretul 178 pentru organizarea Ministerului Cultelor" in *Monitorul Oficial* (Partea I A), Anul CXVI, Nr.178 din 14 august 1948, pp. 6396-6399 (pp. 7-9).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6396 (6A).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6397 (7). Within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Directorate I was for the Orthodox Church, and Directorate II was for the other denominations.

<sup>76</sup> During communist times, the ministers of religious denominations (from 1957 the Ministry was transformed in Department) were: Priest Constantin Burducea (6.03.1945-30.11.1946), Radu Roșculeț (1.12.1946-29.12.1947), Stanciu Stoian (30.12.1947-23.04.1951), Vasile Pogăceanu (23.04.1951-

stated in a speech that “the Romanian state has nothing to do with any denomination as long as it does not dispute the new social order”.<sup>77</sup> As this term allowed multiple interpretations, we had a difference between what the Minister said and the actions of the institution they represent.

*Denominations Commissioners.* After the decree on the organization of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it took a number of decisions and judgments for it to become operational. Thus, “to fulfill its tasks, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has as an organ for the exterior, the Body of commissioners”.<sup>78</sup> It was “made up of regional authorized people, one for each administrative region and one for RPR's Capital, helped by an agent who acts as secretary and also by the authorized people from every district”.<sup>79</sup>

Alexa Popovici believes that on the basis of secret decree No. 284, since 1945 on organizing the Ministry of cults, there “emerged a

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2.06.1952), Petre Constantinescu-Iași (28.01.1953-19.03.1957), Dumitru Dogaru (General Secretary of the Department of Religious Affairs; from 1970 – President of the Department of Religious Affairs; 1957-1975), Gheorghe Nenciu (1975-4.02.1977), Ion Roșianu (4.02.1977-7.05.1984) and Ion Cumpănașu (7.05.1984-18.01.1990), Cf. *Viața religioasă din România: studiu documentar*, [Study lead by Gh. F. Anghelescu and Ștefan Ioniță], Ministerul Culturii și Cultelor. Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte (București: Paideea, 1999), p. 97. Also see Stelian Neagoe, *Istoria guvernelor României: de la începuturi – 1859, până în zilele noastre – 1999*, Second edition, revised and enlarged (București: Machiavelli, 1999), pp. 155-171. Starting with the Chivu Stoica Government (20/03/1957) up to January 18, 1990 the leaders of the Department of Religious Affairs, an institution established by reorganizing the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which was dismantled, was not connected to the government and could not be found among the ministers. The Department of Religious Affairs was an institution directly subordinated to the Communist Party, operating as a department attached to C.C. P.M.R. (1957-1965), namely P.C.R. (1965-1989).

<sup>77</sup> Stanciu Stoian, “Discurs cu ocazia înscăunării P.S. Teofil Herineanu ca episcop al Romanului și Hușilor” in *Revista Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, an LXVII (1949), nr. 11-12, November-December, pp. 35-37, *apud* George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană. Studii și eseuri* (București: Nemira, 2005), p. 26.

<sup>78</sup> “Instrucțiuni pentru funcționarea corpului de împuterniciți ai Ministerului Cultelor”, Art.1, în Arhiva Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte (ASSC), Dosar Legislație 1953-1987. Împuterniciții de culte, Departamentul Cultelor, Inspectorii teritoriale, nepaginat. “Instructions for the functioning of the authorized body of the Ministry of Religious Affairs”, Art.1, in State Secretary’s Archive for Denominations (ASSC), Legislation Folder 1953-1987. Denominations Commissioners, The Department of Religious Affairs, Territorial Inspectors, unpagged.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, Art. 3.

new institution of commissioners of Ministry of Religious Affairs, some of them having jurisdiction on a county, others on a district. These commissioners were nothing than ‘the Security forces in the Church’s area’. Nobody knows what their mission was and upon which religious denominations they have authority. A curious fact has been discovered: these commissioners of Ministry of Religious Affairs were not appointed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but by Security and they were not dismissed or replaced by Ministry, but by Security”.<sup>80</sup> The statements made by Alexa Popovici on the beginnings of the Body of commissioners are interesting, but some aspects of the organization and distribution of duties were not related to the 40’s, but to a later period, when the administration of the Romanian territory was reorganized.

Through instructions, the Ministry of Religious Affairs established commissioners’ duties:

- a) to ensure the link between religious representatives and local authorities and to resolve the problems belonging to them;
- b) to recognize decisions with prior consultation of the Vice President of the Executive Committee of the Regional People’s Council which have responsibility for cults, appointments and other personnel movements in parishes and deaneries, namely: priests, deacons, pastors, elders [...];
- c) payroll concerns leading worship each diocese and meet certain financial services of appropriate mentoring from local and regional leadership neoprotestant denominations, etc.;
- d) to become aware in advance of statutory meetings and occasional meetings or local committees of denominations (Diocesan Assemblies Deanery, Diocesan meetings of local and regional fora leading protestant cults, etc.);
- e) the exercise by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the right to survey and become aware of local and intermediate management level of cults and provide the necessary support to their proper functioning.

By formulating *local and intermediate election fora* were considering elections of: committees and parish elders or for churches of protestant denominations, diocesan general meetings, regional community committees, offices or conferences. Regarding the choice of delegations for the council or central management level of denominations, the above prerogatives return directly to the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

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<sup>80</sup> Alexa Popovici, *Istoria baptiștilor din România: 1856-1989*, Ed. a 2-a rev. (Oradea: Editura Universității Emanuel din Oradea, Editura Făclia), 2007, p. 734.

f) attending to conferences on the orientation of denominations and interfaith meetings.<sup>81</sup>

The duties referred to in subparagraphs b, c, d are exercised by the RPR Capital's commissioner for the Baptist Union.

After analyzing these instructions we observe that the organization was at the level of regions and the Capital and that the commissioners had supervision as their main tasks in order to provide a link between local authorities and representatives of the denominations so as to solve problems pertaining to the composition of the commissioners. In fact, the commissioners were the ones who put into practice the decisions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs locally. Sometimes they had discretionary powers and applied territorial decisions as they considered necessary. Professor Ioan Bunaciu recalls that initially the commissioners were simple people, then they were replaced with people trained, who knew communist ideology; they spoke nicely, but wanted Baptist pastors to implement decisions that they transmitted or for whose application they were responsible.<sup>82</sup>

As mentioned above, in a first step, commissioner's organization staff provides supervision only in a particular region, but as the communist society became more centralized, the state wanted to exercise a more effective control over religious denominations. For this, through the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 2412/1953, there was established the function of commissioners for religious denominations in the People's Council at the level of district and in the People's Council at the level of town. The objective being defined and because there is a need for stringent control, The Council of Ministers of the Romanian Popular Republic decides:

1. It is established on January 1, 1953, the function of commissioner for religious denominations within the Executive Committees of People's Council in districts, of People's Council in the Capital, and of People's Council in cities: Arad, Cluj, Craiova, Iași, Oradea, Sibiu, Stalin's City and Timișoara.

2. Fixing duties over commissioners for religious denominations referred to in point 1, the direction and control of their activity is carried

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<sup>81</sup> "Instrucțiuni pentru funcționarea corpului de împuterniciți ai Ministerului Cultelor", Art. 3 în ASSC, Dosar Legislație 1953-1987 ("Instructions for the functioning of the authorized body of the Ministry of Religious Affairs", in ASSC, Legislation Folder 1953-1987).

<sup>82</sup> Ioan Bunaciu, *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România*, p. 32.

out by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the central organs and regional commissioners for religious denominations.<sup>83</sup>

As the Party consolidates power, commissioners' task becomes one of supervision, control and direction of denomination's activity "to attract them to a position of loyalty to the state". To achieve this objective, "the commissioners look after the training of clergy in the battle for peace, supporting actions of universal interest and actions to combat the reaction from the clergy". And as such actions have generated discontent, denominations commissioners, "have the task of resolving queries about the use of freedom by the believers and to resolve the misunderstandings that might arise between clergy and the state, in the spirit of regime's policy towards religious denominations".<sup>84</sup> Another document issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in order to regulate the activity, assigns clearly that the state exceeded their powers of supervision, which now combines with a more tightly control regulated legally in the internal life of religious denominations. The Decalogue of the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated the following 10 tasks for denominations commissioners:<sup>85</sup>

1. Supervises and controls.
2. The commissioners take action to remove perplexities.
3. Examine issues raised by the cults to be submitted to the Ministry.
4. Consider requests for opening new communities and houses of prayer.
5. Provide full support for the introduction of better ordinances in the life of monasteries.
6. Guide the denominations activity.

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<sup>83</sup> "Hotărârea Nr.[2412/1953] privind înființarea funcțiunii de împuterniciți pentru culte în cadrul Sfaturilor Populare raionale și în cadrul unor Sfaturi Populare orășenești", ASSC, Dosar Legislație 1953-1987. Împuterniciții de culte, Departamentul Cultelor, Inspectorii teritoriale, nepaginat ("Decision No.. [2412/1953] on the establishment of the function of commissioners for denominations in the frame of People's Council in district and People's Council in cities", ASSC, Legislation Folder 1953-1987. Denominations Commissioners, The Department of Religious Affairs, Territorial Inspectors, unpaginated).

<sup>84</sup> "Ministerul Cultelor. Direcțiunea Împuterniciților. Adresa Nr. 125 din 11.III.1953", în ASSC, Dosar Legislație 1953-1987 ("The Ministry of Religious Affairs. Commissioners Direction. Address No. 125 from 11.III.1953", in ASSC, Legislation Folder 1953-1987).

<sup>85</sup> "Atribuțiile împuterniciților", în ASSC, Dosar Legislație 1953-1987 ("Commissioners' attributes", in ASSC, Legislation Folder 1953-1987).

7. Concern itself with the knowledge and limitation of denominations' manifestation, and counter mystical unhealthy events and eliminate their influence on the masses of believers whose work on the land of building socialism should not be impeded.

8. Take measures to prohibit unrecognized religious currents.

9. Have knowledge of manifestations and clergy's attitudes, support the honorable elements of the clergy and combat through the church hierarchy and through honest elements, any attitudes hostile to the regime.

10. Fulfill the tasks assigned by the Ministry.

The analysis of these tasks reveals multiple areas of expertise aimed at monitoring and controlling the Baptist denomination in order to have the same type of policy as the state.

Tasks aimed at problems and denominations' grievances, opening new communities and house of prayer's applications, knowledge, limitation and liquidation of unhealthy mystical events and counter the influence of such events on the mass of believers.

*Religious Affairs Department.* In 1957, through HCM 435/21 March it is established the Department of Religious Affairs, institution which was in fact a reorganization of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Religious Affairs Department will be organized by HCM Nr. 286 / March 5, 1958, which had 10 articles through which they set out the tasks of institution along with other regulations. Of the 10 articles, the most important and the largest is Article 2 which has 16 sub-sections. Through this article were established powers of supervision and control "on guaranteeing freedom of religious exercise".<sup>86</sup> In fact, the Department of Religious Affairs takes the attributions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, plus new ones on educational, financial, personnel and external relations matters. The freedom affirmed at the level of speech was much restricted by decision of the assembly and how the representatives acted.

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<sup>86</sup> "Hotărârea Nr.286/din 5 martie 1958 pentru organizarea și funcționarea Departamentului Cultelor" în Daniel Mitrofan, *Pași: Cultul Creștin Baptist în perioada comunistă*, Centrul de istorie și apologetică, <http://carteapasi.wordpress.com> (accesat 16 octombrie 2010) pp. 246-247 ("Decision No.286/March 5, 1958, organization and functioning of the Department of Religious Affairs" in Mitrofan, *Pași: Cultul Creștin Baptist în perioada comunistă*, pp. 246-247).

**REGULATION OF TRANSITION FROM A DENOMINATION TO ANOTHER**

In analyzing the relationship that recognized religious denominations had between them during the period covered, we mention under this sub-chapter the way the transition from one denomination to another was regulated by the state. That aspect is highlighted by the difficulty with which the statement was obtained to transit from one denomination to another, i.e. from the Orthodox to the Baptist church. Moving from one denomination to another was hampered by the provisions relating to the regulation of baptisms, and also by the fact that the certificates attesting the transition from one denomination to another were removed from the People's Council without being transferred to another institution. This was achieved through Decree 272 of December 30, 1950 on the civil status, under which local authorities have no competence in communicating statements on leaving a religious cult and to issue a proof. Not specifying the citizens' religion in law was not an invention of the communist regime in Bucharest, because the concept was mentioned in the Bolshevik decree of January 23, 1918 about "The separation of Church from state and school from Church", provisions resumed in the Bolshevik Constitution of 1920.

Law on the general arrangements of the religious denominations from 1948, in force throughout the communist period, stated in Chapter V, which regulated relations between denominations: "The transition from one cult to another or leaving a cult is free. Declaration of leaving a denomination will be communicated to local component of the denomination through local municipal authority. On request, the local authority shall be obliged to issue a proof of such communication". The Religion Law of 1948 specified that no denomination will be able to sign up new followers if they don't prove that they have notified the denomination to which they belonged. In fact, by this mention the state simply takes up the Religion Law of 1948 provisions that governed relations between denominations since the interwar period. An example of this is the response of the Ministry of Arts and Culture Nr. 2460/1938, Denominations' Direction, following a request for issuing a document proving the change of religion. Answer mentioned the following: "to your request, registered as Nr. 2460/1938, we inform you that this kind of requests to change religion are not address to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but to the civil status officer from the actual residence of the one making the output statement from the cult". Given that according to Decree 272/1950, local authorities were making birth registration, registration or recognition of sonship, recorded adoption, marriage, divorce, change of name and surname, or death, lacking any



provision relating to religion, it was clear that the state was to limit the transition from one denomination to another.

### **LIMITATION OF CLERGY TRAVEL**

During communist rule, the state established limitations on the movement of the clergy, who could not leave their activity zone without the approval of the Ministry and later the Department of Religious Affairs Ministry. On this issue, Constantin Adorian Vice President of the Baptist Union in 1950, said “that there is an order given by MIA prohibiting the movement of ministers from one place to another without special permission, which he brought to the knowledge of all preachers in the ‘Herald’s Circle of Evangelicals’”.<sup>87</sup>

### **DECREE 324/1957 REFERRING TO THE ACTS OF VAGRANCY**

Limitations on religious personnel were accomplished through Decree 324/1957, which referred to acts of vagrancy. Cataloging pastors’ travel outside of their activity zone recognized by the Department of Religious Affairs as acts of vagrancy, this institution will thus limit the preaching right of Baptist ministers, starting from 1960 and will fall under the criminal law for failure to comply with their duties. “Decree 324 applies not only to preachers, but also to believers who were not allowed to travel in groups to other cities. Preachers who traveled to a town that did not appear on their license were categorized as vagrants”.<sup>88</sup> These state actions have been achieved in the context of imposing a service scheme “in which was fixed a number of pastors’ positions per country”. Dozens of churches have found out then that although they had the economic power and the desire to provide for themselves a pastor, are no longer entitled to it because “it does not have ‘a pastor in the diagram’”.<sup>89</sup> Through the Religious Affairs Department’s regulation, they established a fixed number of pastors’ positions and they did not allow hiring cult’s personnel if it was not provided in the diagram, although his presence was required and the salary was supported by the church.

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<sup>87</sup> ACNSAS, Fond documentar (Documentary Fond), file 6902, vol. 3, f. 143.

<sup>88</sup> Vasilić Croitor, *Răscumpărarea memoriei: cultul penticostal în perioada comunistă* (Medgidia: Succed Publishing), 2010, p. 50.

<sup>89</sup> Iosif Ţon, *Confruntări*, Ed. a 3-a (Oradea: Cartea Creştină, 2009), p. 64.

**PENAL CODE OF 1960 WHICH STIPULATED THE PUNISHMENT OF THOSE WHO OFFICIATE ACTS OF WORSHIP WITHOUT LEGAL PERMITS**

In this section we refer here to Nr.212/1960 Decree, “which, following the amendment of Article 256 of the Penal Code,<sup>90</sup> imposed sanctions against persons who did in a clerical or administrative frame acts of worship<sup>91</sup> without the admission of the Department of Religious Affairs, as well of those who, by neglecting their duties, allowed the performance of such functions by those who did not have this recognition”.<sup>92</sup>

On this issue,<sup>93</sup> the Christian Baptist Communities Union from R.P.R., submit to the Department of Religious Affairs, Note no. 222 of June 23, 1960 that stated the following:

Decree Law no. 212, for the amendment of the Penal Code, published in the Official Bulletin, no. 8 of June 17, 1960, at art. 1, section 44 was added to art. 256 of the old Penal Code, paragraph 3 as follows: ‘The punishment referred to in paragraph 1 shall apply to persons who meet the clerical and administrative functions without admission of Department of Religious Affairs as well as those who, disregarding their duties allow performing such functions without this recognition’.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Penal Code was amended by Decree Law Nr.212/1960 and published in the Official Bulletin no. 8 of June 17, 1960.

<sup>91</sup> The most common cultic practice was carried out without the consent of Department of Religious Affairs in the 50s and 60s making clandestine baptisms.

<sup>92</sup> Gheorghe Modoran-Pantelimon, *Biserica prin pustiul roșu: rezistență și compromis în adventismul din România în perioada comunistă (1944-1965)*, vol. I (București: Editura Viață și Sănătate, 2013), p. 55.

<sup>93</sup> The issue is also discussed in Marius Silveșan, *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România între persecuție, acomodare și rezistență 1948-1965* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), p. 163 (Marius Silveșan, *Christian Baptist Churches of Romania between persecution, accommodation and resistance 1948-1965*, Cetatea de Scaun: Targoviște, 2012, p. 163)

<sup>94</sup> ASSC, fond Studies Division, 1960, file 103, f.3. The passage referred to in the document sent by the Baptist Union, to the Department of Religious Affairs appears in the Penal Code published in December 1960, in Article 256, which is located in Section IV of Chapter II. For details see *Codul Penal. Text oficial cu modificările până la data de 1 decembrie 1960 urmat de o anexă de legi penale speciale* (București: Editura Științifică, 1960), p. 157.

### **MANDATORY RECOGNITION OF DENOMINATIONS' LEADERS THROUGH THE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE FROM 1974**

In the Official Bulletin No. 83 of 19.06.1974 there was a change to Article 21 of Decree no. 177/1948 (Religious Affairs Law) which stipulated that leaders of denominations are recognized based only on a presidential decree.<sup>95</sup>

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The imposition of the communist regime in Romania was a gradual process that entailed political, cultural, social and institutional transformation. Along with the political impositions carried out by terror, the new regime wanted to obtain an internal legitimacy. More than a desire, legitimacy was a necessity that has been obtained fictionally through constitutions. Along with the political changes, the state directed attention to the relationship with the Church, an institution with which it would establish new relationships through general or particular legislative framework, separately for each denomination. All these aspects show that during the period analyzed (1948-1965), but also of the next one (1965/1966-1989), we are dealing with a mentality of authorities including at the legislative level according to which the state must exercise on religious denominations an activity of guidance, supervision and control.<sup>96</sup>

Analysis of the legislative framework reveals a distinction between official discourse that spoke about equality and freedom of conscience – this includes religious freedom – and the reality of religious life, where the same legislative framework introduced a number of limitations. The aspects mentioned, treated in this chapter, show at the concrete level the situation was grim in terms of religious rights because the state promoted atheism along with banning or restricting the rights of its own citizens.

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<sup>95</sup> For details see Hungarian Open Society Archives (HU-OSA) 300-60-1 Box 518, file 2800 (7) Art. state secret.

<sup>96</sup> “Nostalgie a controlului comunist asupra cultelor?” in *Călăuza Ortodoxă*, Revista Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, October 1, 2010, <http://www.calauza.edj.ro/?p=1185> (accessed 25.05.2011) (Nostalgia communist control over religious affairs? in *Călăuza Ortodoxă*)

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE IMPOSSIBLE SECULARIZATION

*MIHAI MACI*

The image already became banal through repetition but nevertheless the founder of the world in which we lived: the winter of 1989 – the masses are gathered in the public squares of the main cities to manifest against Ceaușescu, kneeling and chanting the “Our Father.” Some one from the Western world would have remained perplexed watching those images of the “Live Revolution”. At the celebration of two centuries from the French Revolution it was unthinkable for the democratic West to see compact masses of people occupying the center of large cities, kneeling and reciting prayers together. In 1989, people were openly speaking about the off tracks from the French Revolution (the massacres in Vendée, the assassination of the royal family, etc.), while the myth of the October Revolution was utterly wiped out by the velvet Revolutions from the “Iron Curtain” countries. Yet – in the Occident – no one questioned the freedom of thought, secularism, the separation between Church and State, the separation between Church and education, the optional and subjective character of faith, the historical-philological criticism of the sacred texts accompanied or not by anticlericalism, all subsumed to the idea of “disenchanted the world”.

If the sacred still floats over the western world it does so in a soft and intercultural way: New Age ideologies meaning to be the new spiritual Esperanto of a society left on the edge of material welfare. Not much Christianity, especially from a humanist approach, rather more Zen and mystical inspiration, as well as vague desacralized magic tricks, some popularized science, a few basic schemes of Artificial Intelligence, “motivational” psychologies and “masters” of all colors (plus whatever anyone may wish to add) – this seems to be the recipe of the spiritual comfort (seasoned with dietetic silhouettes and ambient music) that the occidental citizen aspires to since the end of the millennium. It is true that *annus mirabilis* marks the absolute triumph of the spiritual resistance of the East embodied in the West by Pope John Paul II. However, it is less clear if the great Pope asserts himself through his message – lucid and critical inclusively at the drifts of the welfare society – or through the force of seduction of his personality (which does not lack a well attended mass-media component). As the same world, that applauds his diatribes against the eastern European autocrats,

watches from a distance (if not with hostility) his same decisive attitude against the leftward drift of Latin American theology.

In a word, the Eastern countries' resurrection of faith in the public space seems to ruffle the secular perceptiveness of the westerner. He can understand it either as a "breakthrough of a hang-up" (because of the interdiction of public manifestations of religiosity during the Communist regime), or as a picturesque element of certain societies that – seen from Paris or from London – have always belonged to another world that had not really entered modernity. For the Easterners – and particularly for the Romanians, for whom freedom from Communism overlaps with the winter holidays – the public expression of faith is associated firstly with the feeling of rebirth (as a way out from dictatorship), with that of freedom (of conscience and expression) and, at least in those days, with that of solidarity and mutual generosity. The "Our Father" would still resonate in the summer of 1990 in the University Square, only to be choked not so much by the police assaults and the miner crowds brought in Bucharest at the expense of the new government, as by the noise of the political life and by the "Occident temptation" manifested firstly at the level of consumerism frenzy and the ascent of the "new class".

After two decades from the Revolution, Romania seems to be a society as secularized as Occidental societies. It is true that all the surveys affirm the trust that apparently the population has – at exaggerated rates – in the Church; but, on the other hand, neither theological knowledge, nor attending religious services could be expected to give the measure of this trust. The impression left by these numbers is that people excessively overrate the value of the Church, while actually drawing away from it. In order to understand the way in which the Romanians relate to the Church – particularly to the majority one: the Orthodox Church – we need briefly to consider the history of its relationship with the State during Communist times and during the following two decades. We will also attempt to reveal a panoramic view of the evolution of Romanian society during the last century and to see the impact that the consecutive social mutations have had on religiosity and its public manifestations. In short, we will ponder the forms that secularization has taken in contemporary Romania. During this journey our perspective will be a social one, in which anthropology, sociology and religious psychology (and particularly Orthodox theology) will help us outline an image of faith in today's life. We will not enter any dogmatic debates, as we have no competence in this area.

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The status of the Orthodox Church under Communism was ambiguous: after 1989 it was constantly said that the Church had been



persecuted by the atheist state. It is true (and it is enough to think about the tribute that was paid to the Communist prisons by both the hierarchy and the priests).

But this is not the whole truth about the destiny of the Church in that period. However, using it as a starting point, there has been created the image of a Church in the catacombs, a victim of the Antichrist's terror. Any discussion about the other aspects of the Church's odyssey during Communism appears, in this context, as an impiety against the apostles of faith. For instance, not all the clergy has been tortured in the basements of the Security, and the Orthodox Church as an institution has never been prohibited or suspended during the period of the Communist regime. The detractors of the Church – armed with the files of CNSAS (National Council for the Study of Security Archives) – throw in the balance scale the accusation that the pastors of souls are guilty of having collaborated (and implicitly of having betrayed their parishioners.) And the attitude of the Church which insists that silence should be kept about those files, draws – more than anything else – water to their mill. This is, indeed, a (painful) truth but, once again, a partial truth. Not every priest and not the whole hierarchy have commissioned themselves in the service of their enemies. There have always been, since the beginning and to the end of the Romanian Communism, truly devoted priests who have been fighting for (often paying with their own lives, or suffering the condemnation imposed on them by the authorities) the dignity of faith. Maybe – in the long run – their courage and fidelity weights more than the cowardice of the others. Maybe the others have thought that a compromise “now and then” could save more essential matters. I am not attempting to make up an excuse for those who have dishonored their names and clerical status by writing declarations and reports: even if today they consider them harmless; at that time they knew well what their purpose was. And they knew that the institution to which they were giving these was not a neutral archive that merely filed them immediately.

Beyond all these, the “pact” made by the Church with the State had another nature: recognizing the political power, praying for the state officials, inducing respect for the authorities (supported by quotations from the writings of Saint Paul), participating at the Socialist Romania's external campaigns for peace and the internal affirmation of national values. None of these are reprehensible in themselves: the Church is not a paramilitary organization meant to overturn the political power, and its militating for peace and for national identity seems quite praiseworthy rather than to be blamed. In fact, the Communist regime has never asked the Orthodox Church to deny the Truths of Faith or to change the liturgical rites. Maybe if this had been required – or imposed – they would have met with an articulate resistance. At one time, in 1948, it has

even been made a gift: the recess of the Greek Catholic Church. The Orthodox believers have always claimed that the Greek Catholic system had been the product of political pressure; a symmetrical political pressure was asked to balance the scale. Only all the “gifts” of Communism were poisoned. The recess of the Greek Catholic Church (accompanied by spoliation of patrimony and the physical annihilation of its hierarchs) did not unite the churches, but rather created between them a deeper gap of resentment and distrust. Peace and national values, no matter how much they sustained the spirit of the Church, have not been sincerely expressed, but imposed and – implicitly – fake. It is hard to believe that the hierarchy of the Church remained unaware and saddening to see that they chose to accept it.

The price was not only the survival of the Church (as its defenders claim), but – most of all – its marginalization: in those 45 years, the Orthodox Church has never been a public voice. Moreover, its public incidence, its role in shaping the times (whether the ‘60s or the ‘80s) and its involvement in drawing a future for Romania was “*quasi-nulle*”. The price paid for its survival was its being removed from history (with the ultimate expression – and humiliation – represented by the demolition of the churches in the historical center of Bucharest). Its inoffensive a-temporality has been tolerated: there have been published (in strictly overseen editions) “The Fathers of the Church”, courses of theology and magazines for internal circulation. All these have been accessible only for priests (who, in their large majority, were not guilty of any intellectual excess) and during those years failed to have any public relevance. No one from the ecclesiastical sphere dared to open any debate (no matter how discreet or well covered in intellectual argument) against the “classics” (in fact, famous anonymous thinkers) Petru Berar and Octavian Chețan. No one within the Church advocated the work of the publishers of classical philosophy or historians of medieval art.

The Church accepted the boundaries of its enclosure in which it has been locked and was content with what was left: the freedom of cult and of instructing religious personnel. In one way, that is more than nothing; in another way it is less than nothing: the a-temporality attested to in the desertion of faith. That was the most perverse effect of the cohabitation of the Orthodox Church with the Communist state: depriving the faith of its active and public dimension and transforming it into a refuge with relevance to the currents of history. Obviously, the same remark can be made about almost any other form of culture that “survived” Communism.

After '89, the Church has seen itself suddenly thrown on the forestage of public life first by the public, afterwards by the new State in search of legitimacy. Retrospectively, the discourse of the Church has been antique. In the new world born of the fall of Communism and the

emergence of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of technologies, the Church continued its ancient discourse about the everlasting national values. These values were opposed to a history on the move (that implicitly simplified the criticism of modernity), and national values opposed all the evils that could contaminate the world as foreign (being implicitly an apology for its self-sufficient spiritual isolation). There should be added to all these the excess of the media (with the long array of priests suddenly caught by the frenzy of ministry) and the inexhaustible passion of enormous building. If, before '89 it was warmly and vibrantly explained that the Romanian soul found its expression in the small wooden churches, after this date the soul found its expression of freedom and joy in marble and concrete.

Asked about earthly things clergymen would humbly answer from heavenly realms, suddenly remembering the goods of this world: from the Greek Catholic churches their lands lost since the reform of Cuza and from the new protestant propaganda to the Jewish-masonic cabbala. The unforgotten priest, Tatu (a monument of opportunism), was in the époque the reverse of father Galeriu (an example of Christian life lived in fidelity).

Today it is hard to say, but who knows, after the fall of Communism and the Marxist-Leninist ideology and in an époque where it was not at all clear whether we went right or left, whether we followed the "German model", the American or the Swedish one, it looks like the Church was dreaming – even if only for a moment – of being the ideological deliverer of the new world. It had as an avant-garde a generation of determined young men and women from the Orthodox Students League raised, not only in the spiritual parables, but also in the cult of martyrdom. The époque was one of total openness: each city is endowed with a University and, within it there is a department of Theology; the market of expression is free and the religious books are themselves constituted in a special genre. Many translations appear (some of them remarkable) of the Church Fathers and contemporary Orthodox theologians (especially those from the Russian exile), reprints of the inter-war theologians, Dumitru Stăniloae is celebrated rightly as the guide of contemporary theological thinking and many spiritual books are developed (with a profoundness that is not always simple, or, on the contrary, with a simplicity not always profound). Religion is being introduced as a compulsory subject in schools, even though it is not at all clear how (and why) it needed to be taught to 21<sup>st</sup> century students, the project of "The Cathedral of the Romanian People's Redemption" is being launched (that wishes to be an exorcism of the spirit in the People's House) and broadcasting stations are being installed next to episcopacies. Freed from pressure and free to express themselves, intellectuals discover faith, come back to it or simply persist in it. The

pathetic faith of the poet Ioan Alexandru cohabits with the spiritualized faith of the philosopher Andrei Pleșu and together with the jovial rigor of the “starets” Cleopa, as well as with the hard to define faith of the ex-security corpus who, most often on the nationalist course, found something to fill their inner void generated by the fall of the “noble ideals” of Communism.

What should we apprehend from all this? The arrival of fundamental works of theological thinking – especially the contemporary one – in the Romanian language and the public affirmation of a new generation of theologians (Theodor Bakonski, Ioan I. Ică, Mihail Neamțu) that, taken as a whole, create a new dynamics and give Orthodoxy a new language (even when reinvesting the old one). The institutional Church is subjected as well to the tremors of transition and, with all its miracles, after the apogee moments of the beginnings, loses field in front of the new technologies and the consumerism that becomes the ideology of the moment. The enthusiasm for jobs diminishes, the Orthodox Students League becomes an urban subculture (together with many others), The Cathedral of the Romanian People’s Redemption does not go beyond the planning stage, and the clergy accept the criteria of the present world, with a hierarchy of ones with properties. In one word the Church becomes (without its consent) a business agent in the market that today tends to become more and more the metaphor of our life. It is being rescued from anonymity either by a seduction scandal (filmed on the mobile phone or recorded in certain CNSAS files), or the two central events that marked the evolution after ’89: the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1999 and the change of the Patriarch in 2007. Invested with high hopes, it is hard to say what this latter could bring. At the moment, Patriarch Daniel does not seem to give a fresh spirit to the Church whose head he is. On the other hand, he is only at the beginning of a long patriarchate, during which the Church needs to solve weighty issues which – at least until today – it has failed to solve. But maybe it won’t take so long: the absence of the Church from the actual debate over the problems we are being challenged with could have as an effect the meeting (and the coalition) of the militant anticlericalism of the “nostalgic” generation, with the parody prone and disappointed anticlericalism of the new generations. If the Church wants her voice to be heard, it has to do something before the world in which it lives turns into a desert.

However, it could be that, in spite of its magnitude, the message of the Church has a lesser impact than the one expected. And this, because since the first decades of Communism and until the European integration, the Romanian world suffered radical mutations. If in 1945 we were – from many points of view – a “traditional society”, in 2012 Romania is, at most chapters (including the religious one), a European

country but with no stridence (even if, from the economical point of view it remains a poor country, and from the institutional point of view a country with many dysfunctions).

According to the Romanian Encyclopedia (its first volume published in 1938 – but using the census data from 1930) 78,2% of the citizens were, at that time, engaged in agricultural activities<sup>1</sup>, and the figure of the rural population is predominantly composed of the Romanian ethnic group, while the cities – especially in Transylvania (united with Romania in 1918) – group large communities of allogeneic peoples (Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Armenians, Greeks etc.). For this population illiteracy reaches the huge rate of 54,3%<sup>2</sup>, the highest in Europe, and of the literate population 85,1% (93,0% from the rural inhabitants and 66,3% from the urban)<sup>3</sup> had only a primary school education, which in those times consisted of 7 grades. We are, though, subjected to the laws of education given by Spiru Haret (at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), who founded “schools for adults” as well, and meant to reduce illiteracy. If we consider the numbers provided by Roger Chartier, Dominique Julia and Marie-Madeleine Compère<sup>4</sup>, education in Romania during the ‘30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was inferior to that in France two centuries ago. We mentioned these numbers not to emphasize the difference between Eastern European agricultural societies and the Western industrial societies at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in order to reveal the significant characteristics of religiosity of the Romanian population during those times.

Widely illiterate, this population remains foreign to rationalization and the progressive introspection of faith that happens in the Occident on the move of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Romanian religiosity is, in its essence, a Pre-Modern one, traditional, based on the oral transmission and the lack of distinction between faith and faiths. We need to bear in mind, whenever we analyze this form of popular religiosity that it is not only (and maybe not as much) a faith based on

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<sup>1</sup> Sabin Manuilă (ed.), *Enciclopedia României (Romanian Encyclopedia)*, vol. I (București: Imprimeria Națională, 1938), p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Gheorghe Dobre (ed.), *Economia României în context european (Romanian Economy in European context)* (București: Editura Fundației Științifice «Memoria Oeconomica», 1996), p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> Sabin Mănuilă (ed.), *Enciclopedia României (Romanian Encyclopedia)*, p. 164. After presenting these numbers, the same Sabin Manuilă adds, honestly: “detached by the number of the graduated grades”. It is supposed that, in the rural area, it was merely the first four grades.

<sup>4</sup> See *L'Education en France du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1976), (particularly in the first chapter: *L'école au village*).

dogmatic statements and the cultural transmission of religious regulations, but rather a relatively homogenous cultic practice (in its ritual forms) and a complex mental universe in which Christian teaching cohabits and composes with Pre-Christian remnants and with folkloric products of the rural people's fantasy.

One more thing, essential for the rural religiosity: "(...) faith, especially of the peasants, is a collective and traditional thing (...) Due to this social character of their religiosity, any alienation from the Church also means a dilution of their connection with the community."<sup>5</sup> The social dimension of this rural religiosity underlines its practices – which are collective – historically settled as customs that, in their turn, define the context of action and thought of the peasant. More or less, these customs overlap with the rituals that mark the elements and the cycles of nature – with which the rural inhabitant has permanent contact – resulting in a unique mentality, fascinating to some (as Mircea Eliade – who sees it as a “cosmic Christianity”) and detested by others (as young Emil Cioran who denounces its “fatality”). It is poetic in the multitude of elements that compose it, stable in its communitarian and lived dimension, and judged by the dynamics of the forms of expression. In the 4<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this folk religiosity goes in two antipodal directions. On one hand, it is progressively dislocated by the contact with the world and urban life. The city is not necessarily opposed to the village, but it becomes a horizon, in which the standards and criteria of life are altered. This alteration – as a consequence of an accelerated education of the urban population – has the effect of creating an utterly intellectual poetical-mythical image of the village and its faith. This is not the detailed analysis of the rural religiosity (never done in Romania), but the “discovery” of the world of “common people”, an authenticity that the city loses together with its gradual modernization. The pastoral life (idyllically emphasized by the people who do not live through the work of their hands) is opposed to the mechanical existence and brutalization of the workers and the employees. The pure (and naive) faith of the villager is meant to counterbalance the cynicism of the dominant class and the moral drift of the lumpen-proletariat. Moreover, the majority of the Romanian population in the cities was urbanized, at that time only for the first generation. As a result, the exaltation of the rural translates nostalgia for the origins that the new intelligence (re)constructed by combining memories, information and conceptual schemes learned in school (and under foreign influence). At that moment the Church already had the public image that we still inherit today.

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<sup>5</sup> George Em. Marica, *Curs de sociologie rurală (Rural sociology course)* (Cluj: Uniunea Națională a Studenților din România, 1948), pp. 148-149.

The Union in 1918 also made possible the union of two different images of the Orthodox Church; on the one hand that of a national Church predominant in the Transylvanian imaginary, on the other hand that of a traditional Church that had asserted itself in the old kingdom. The Habsburg Empire (and then the Austro-Hungarian one) as an inheritor of the medieval rules used by the Transylvanian Province, defined the nation in terms of faith. Thus, Romanians were assimilated to the Orthodox “schismatics” or, at most, to the tolerated Greek Catholics. The bishop of the latter – Inochentie Micu-Klein – was the first Romanian ethnic in the Transylvanian Diet.

After the failure of Revolution in 1948, the bishop, and then the Orthodox metropolitan bishop Andrei Șaguna becomes the main spokesman of the Romanian majority in Transylvania. Due to this fusion between nationality and faith, the two dimensions end up by overlapping and becoming interchangeable. It is true that, in the Transylvanian case there was a certain liberation between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics, visible in the participation of the two bishops (Miron Cristea și Iuliu Hossu) at the Assembly in Alba Iulia and in the delegation who brought the papers of the Assembly to Bucharest. Appointing Miron Cristea as a primate Metropolitan Bishop (in 1919) and, then, as the Romanian Patriarch (in 1925) wiped out the ambiguity – visible in 1918 – in favor of what was to become more and more “the religion of the nation”. The old kingdom, being long under Greek-Phanariot domination, with bishops and metropolitan bishops often of foreign origin, couldn’t claim this assimilation of the representatives of the high clergy with the basic nation. But, after 1860 – when, in the time of Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s reign, there occurs the confiscation of monastic properties – it could establish itself as the defender of a tradition threatened by the aggressive modernization imposed by the Occidentalized elite.

Paradoxically, secularization is, in fact, a nationalization of the “sacred” lands in the two historical provinces<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, the national image of this radical measure will not impose itself here, but rather the violence applied by the new state to the “ancestral faith” and its actual representatives. Both a national Church and a victim of the modern state, the Orthodox Church becomes – in the years 1930 – 1940 – a sort of national alternative to the drifts of a modernity seen as being foreign to the Romanian customs. Thus we can explain its pathetic exaltation by such intellectuals as Nae Ionescu and Nichifor Crainic, the

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<sup>6</sup> The best representation of the debates over secularization of the abbey’s owns can be found in Paul Bruszanowski, *Stat și Biserică în vechea Românie între 1821-1925 (State and Church in old Romania between 1821-1925)* (Cluj: Presa Universitara Clujeană, 2010).

adherence of a part of the clergy to the Legionary Movement or the attempt of King Carol II to counterbalance this adherence by appointing Patriarch Miron Cristea as a prime minister at the beginning of his royal dictatorship. Beyond the picturesque Maglavit episode (meant to celebrate “the poverty in the spirit” of an elementary rural mentality), the Church – in its institutional dimension – scarcely reacted to the mutations of the inter-war. Satisfied with its predominant massiveness and – almost implicitly – by its national dimension, the Orthodox Church is living its maximum institutionalization, blessing almost all the actions of the state and faithfully seconding Kings and Rulers.

The institution of Communism will completely change the status of the Church in the society. And this will happen both as a direct action of the Communist state over the Church (that was presented earlier), but especially as a consequence of the radical social changes that will happen over a relatively short period and that will trigger a fall, unprecedented in Romanian history, in the structure of the population. Seen from a distance, the biggest change is the one at the level of urbanization: according to the numbers given by the National Statistics Agency, in 2007 we had in the rural area 44.80% of the inhabitants of the country. It is a high percentage, if we relate these figures to the European average of the time. But, if we take as a reference point the situation in the inter-war Romania, we can see that – in 70 years – half of the rural population moved to the cities. This process of urbanization is based on the forced industrial policy that the Communist Party applied in Romania following Soviet patterns. The surplus of the rural population – which was a problem at the birth of the modern Romanian state<sup>7</sup> – was absorbed by the new industry that starts at the end of the ‘60s and marked by a double quality both of a worker and an inhabitant of the new cities. Moving from city to city is not only a matter of space, but shapes a certain mentality as well. If for the rural man life was subjected to the essential rhythms of nature, for the urban man life was governed by utilitarian reasons expressed in the production times and in the schedule of large factories. The primary education (or its lack) for the rural people – for whom practical abilities were essential – gives place to mid education (predominantly technical) that forms industrial workers. At least at the beginning, these workers are a mass of young people dislocated too early from their rural origin to be able to internalize the basic rules of faith. What has marked them is rather a certain folk magic, doubled by the social formalism of the religious life in the countryside.

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<sup>7</sup> See Daniel Chirot, *Social Change in a Peripheral Society* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).



Reaching the city, they are infused – through occupational schools and high schools that are developing in that time – with the science of the ‘60s, dominated by a mechanical paradigm in which the emphasis is laid on explaining the basics of certain material elements and of some simple causal connections. A decade later, diversified industry and the appearance of some concerns tied to the quality of its products (connected both with the rise in the requirements of the internal market, and the intensification of the external exchange), has as an effect the progressive move towards an adequate understanding of things – based on the development of electronic technologies – that favors the network connections and the “ecological” perspective of the whole. If the first paradigm is joined with the eradication of illiteracy and with massive urbanization in the ‘70s – ‘80s, the second one is timed to the generalization of industrial high schools and the development of polytechnic universities during the next decade.

It is clear that in the first case the number of students is what matters, having as a stake an elementary indoctrination and not the explanation of certain things that did not have anything in common with the universe of the traditional peasant. In the second case, the emphasis should fall on the intensity and the structural dimension that needs time (and multiple connections) in order to achieve its normal amplitude. The problem is that due to the mass nature of the industrial high school compared with the small number of students (including those in the polytechnic) in the Communist time, the level of the average education is pretty low. Hence, though the curriculum is intended for more complex things, the functional paradigm still remains that of a mechanical nature in which education is direct, simple and intuitive. Such more complicated things as (atomic physics, genetics, etc.) escape the understanding of the common man as they cannot be translated into this elementary language. On the other hand, not only the school, but a good part of Communist mass media is constantly mobilized in the “scientific education of the masses”. From magazines, that could be assimilated today with the tabloids, to the specialized publications almost exclusively dedicated to export and from magazines having pupils as their target public, to the materials dedicated to the “advancement of the educational personnel”, a full press arsenal – doubled by the book production (including specialized publishing houses, as the “Science and encyclopedia” – is developed in the service of extending the scientific knowledge at all the levels of the Romanian population. Which, in itself, is not bad, especially if we bear in mind the precarious knowledge specific to the population to which it was destined.

The problem is that, explicitly (at the beginning in an aggressive manner, then more temperately), this sort of education has a major

propaganda component: its function is (also) to associate Socialism with science and development, and equally, faith with superstitions and retrogression. Even if people do not “develop multilaterally” in the socialist schools, as the system requires, the majority remains marked – more or less visibly – by this system of associations, as well as by the manner of explaining reality that the school offers through its real and technical disciplines. Moreover, during the whole period of Communism, – without forbidding religion (as we have earlier shown), it is still impossible to have any public religious manifestation, such as catechesis, or the literature related to religion which is either not being published, or strictly circumscribed to the cult education. Thus, intentionally, religion is reduced to the Church and the Church to cult.

Deprived of its public and intellectual dimension, faith takes refuge in the subjective life and ends up as pietism. A formal pietism – if we take into account the extremely formalized character of the cult of the Orthodox Church – that will make faith look like the appendage of old bigoted women. What should be said, in this context, is that this evolution is not proper to the Romanian Orthodox Church but, – in the same time – was not one that the Church openly opposed. The young generations of the Romanian Communism (those who did not study religion at school and did not see the Church in the public space) did not necessarily become atheist. Most of its representatives being raised in the rural area, had that religious education that every rural child receives in the family. Then, in school, they discovered the world and became acquainted with it through the materialist-dialectic ideology predominant in the *époque* of their studies. The contrast between the faith of childhood and what they had learned in school (and later discovered in life – as first generation urbanites) is so striking that, even without becoming atheists, they preferred to suspend any judgment in the religious area. For most of them, faith is a strictly personal issue, in which each person engages how and how much he pleases. The paradox of this antireligious official politics is that it favors the ascension of new Protestant cults that valorize exactly the subjective dimension of faith and the personal engagement.

In any case, between 1945 and 1989 people’s pattern of thinking radically changed. Not so much that the official propaganda – perceived by the majority of population as an aggression of some foreign clichés – is the one that determines this mutation, but the accelerated transformation of everyday life: moving from the village to the city (that implies breaking from the natural context of a faith connected to the major life cycles), falling from the extended family specific to villages to the nuclear family specific to cities (that questions the fundamental problem of the oral transmission of faith – in the absence of a public transmission, officially forbidden), school, preponderantly real and

technical, engaging in industrial complexes and in bureaucracy, as well as generalizing the household appliances (that all have as an effect a certain thinking that favors national explanation, in steps and based on examples). As a dogma of the Party, the “dialectical materialism” is of interest to almost nobody; without ever abandoning it, the Party itself puts it more and more on mute, leaving the impression that its fundamental doctrine abbreviates to the scientific reasoning, a militant humanism and a convicted patriotism. In this way the foreign and arbitrary character of Communism from its beginnings wants in its second stage to be nationalized and rationalized. The massive change – and in most of the cases for the better – of the living conditions for the majority of the population, extended education, the ubiquity of the scientific references and the nationalization of Communism have the effect of a *modus vivendi* of the citizen with the power, by virtue of which the former does not raise problems (of the nature of legitimacy) to the latter, and the latter does not interfere with the personal convictions (as long as it does not reclaim public power) of the former. As such, imposing the scientific vision at the cost of the religious one is not only – and not firstly – the act of social violence (as was possible in the first decades of Communism), but that of modernizing the society and of progressive rationalization of the social imagery. These things (that – in our knowledge – have not benefited yet from a detailed analysis in Romanian historiography) have a significant importance – either on the national side (independence, sovereignty, etc.), or on the social one (the ideology of progress, of raising the living standard, of universalizing the welfare state – persisted or came back even after the official abolition of the Communist regime. If all these had been only some compulsory things, under the threat of force, the fall of Communism would have been synchronized with the return to the status quo and the mentality prior to its institution. But this did not happen. Beyond any ideological reasons, Romanian Communism reached its decline the moment it was incapable of fulfilling its social commitments. Only then did deeper things begin to appear – as the arbitrary economic decision making (camouflaged as “centralized planning”), as well as the autocracy of the President Secretary General, who was the first and the last in deciding everything – that, for a decade, manifested the lack of legitimation of Communist claims. In this context of mistrust in the Party, in its actions and its logic, the temptation of alternate forms of thinking rose. From a certain point of view, these alternatives have always been seductive in the country of “unique thinking”; but in the last years of Communism the interest towards them became a public phenomenon. Yoga, alchemy, Taoism, magic, anthroposophy, spiritualism of all colors (including the ancient spiritism that had no parallel in the Occident), even psychoanalysis or phenomenology, they are all *mythes, rêves et mystères*

for a world in which science is held to explain even what has nothing to do with science. Willing or not the official propaganda tolerated a certain space of impreciseness (considering – probably – that its interest is more or less reducible to science): sea monsters and yeti, UFOs and un-elucidated enigmas (from Easter Islands to Kennedy’s assassination) are among the few things that drew attention and constituted the subject of talk among people. The idea that, in the immensity of the sidereal space, there are civilizations that are more advanced than ours or that we have not finished to exploit the Earth are not – *a priori* – opposed to the official scientific ideology. Yet, the majority of people will not read them from the perspective of an asymptote of knowledge that will fully be resolved in the future, but rather from doubts that regard the present: But what if we have not been told the whole truth? What if there are things (or pieces of information) that constitute an appendage of ruling (self-proclaimed) elite? Seconded by the exposures made by the Occidental radio broadcasts (Free Europe, Voice of America, BBC etc.) about the history of Communism – especially together with the *glasnost* process in the USSR – these things in the mentality of the population constitute a level of suspicion and a temptation to conspiracy that all the forms of manipulation (especially television) will draw upon after the ‘90s. Without the temptation of the theory of conspiracy, neither the potpourri of the interpretations of the December Revolution nor the mass psychosis induced by scandal TVs after 2000 would be possible. On the other hand, at the cogent level of things, there is a significant connection – and somehow surprisingly – to the religious research in the Occidental world. This was due to the translation in the Romanian language of a part of Mircea Eliade’s scientific work (viewed as a value mainly as a recuperation – with valence of national pride – of the great figures of Romanian exile). Mircea Eliade benefited in the époque by a double prestige: first of all he was not only fully integrated in the Occidental culture (as a University teacher overseas), but one of the peaks in his field; author of monographic works and marked treaties for the specialists and, especially creator of a methodology and a school. More than any scientist (George Palade or Nicholas Georgescu – Roegen, for example) Mircea Eliade embodied the model of the intellectual Romanian as well as the worldwide success. On the other hand, Eliade’s prestige was due to his own area of research: “the history of faith and religious ideas”. The pretence of a scientific approach that the dialectic materialism had manifested itself not only as an openness towards science, but, at the same time, as an obstinate rejection of any forms of religiosity, pejoratively catalogued as “mystical and obscurantist”. In fact the last wave of violent repression of the inter-war intellectuals at the end of the ‘60s and the beginning of the ‘60s synchronized with Hruščiov’s great antireligious campaign, that all the states of the Eastern

block took over and remained in the memory of those who were students in those years. Largely due to the authority of the name of Eliade, the discourse regarding religion (even if predominantly in the area of anthropology and ethno-linguistics) returned to the cultural space at the end of the '80s. In a certain way, from a distance, Mircea Eliade supported the less ideologized form of research in the field of socio-humanistic science in Communist Romania. More interesting as access to its sources was prohibited, Eliade becomes a true fashion among the young intellectuals.

So that, around December 1989 the mentality of the common people in Romania far from having the unity (that could produce action) that the official power desired, looked rather like a *patchwork* in which there was a juxtaposition – often without really meeting – of faith confused with personal hopes and wishes, remnants of rural practices and faiths, scientific thinking most often assimilated on the surface, vague tendencies towards mysteries and esoterisms, a few references to the history of religion (in Eliade's style) and a constant temptation towards conspiracy. The absence of religion on the public space, especially at the level of reflections on the theology foundations, as well as the absence of an intellectual discourse of the people of faith able to challenge the horizons of the people who had already been urbanized and schooled had something to say. And it will be said in the years to come.

The miracle of Revolution – that the prayer we referred to at the beginning of this text – meant, among other things, that the Church, as well, played no role in the outburst of the street movements against Ceaușescu. The spontaneous association between the fall of the dictatorship and the Christmas holiday, the outburst in the public space (and on the screen) of the representatives of the clergy created the impression of a Church that was in the avant-garde of the events. The urban constructivism and the institutionalized services of opening, inauguration and celebration perpetuated this image for a while. But, very soon it was obvious that the Church was taken by surprise. Its discourse was parochial and reactive; beyond seeking their own career, the majority of the priests could scarcely understand modernity, and they awkwardly disguised their inadequacy by repeating some formula meant to suggest eternity. The public passion for the Church lowered as well: finally in the urban context few were inclined to follow strictly the canons kept by an institution anchored in a mythic-poetic Byzantine imagery. For the most of the people, the Church was an occasional reference, for Celebrations and the fundamental moments of life. The Church did not open up to a catechesis for the adults and, with rare exceptions, neither did the clergy come out into society in any other form than a synod. Confused by its public appearance the Church as a

majority did not realize from the very beginning that the whole spiritual market was liberalized and, in a short time, would find itself in competition with more tempting offers for the new urban generations: from the new-protestant fervor, to the intellectual rigor of Catholicism and from the luxury of the Oriental mysticism to the mercantile gnosis of motivational literature. The official discourse of the priests, grave and wry, was lost in the hysterical noise of the new world. What really mattered after 1989 was that people's desires and hopes found other safety valves: for some political career, for others getting rich, for many the chance to start a new life in another country; for some education, for others devotion to a social cause. So the Church emptied again, remaining the retreat for those who are beyond the temptations of this world – the first generation of seniors in the cities. The thing that mattered the most from the Communist inheritance was the subjectivity of faith: if it is the ultimate refuge of each person, then everybody places it where it seems relevant, after house, job, family, and everything that needs to be solved. Ultimately, faith has become a sort of objective fetish – the cross in the necklace or in the tattoo, the one hung on the car mirror or the one placed (with the actual synod) in different places and junctions – a sign meant to point towards a distance in which no one sees anything. Occasionally, in the trial moments of life, we remember this something else of which we are reminded by the cross, then we lose it again under the avalanche of “the something else” about which contemporary marketing is specialized. But we never lose it totally; as with Christmas it comes back all the time, as the shadow of a childhood that we have never lived and by missing it our maturity has been compromised as well.

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Is today's society a secularized one? It is hard to say. If we consider the exterior forms of life, then the Romanian world does not differ substantially from any of the western societies. Though (apparently) it looks just like these, however Romanian society does not have its history (and, as a result, neither its problematic horizon, nor the answers that – in time – have been given to these problems). Probably if we judge secularization according to the occidental criteria, things become much more visible: for example we do not have – in Romania – the militant anticlericalism of the Enlightenment or of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the contrary – and this could be a cause for perplexity – the representatives of the Enlightenment in the Romanian Provinces (especially in Transylvania) are clergymen! In a very unstable history – as that of Romanians – one of the guides was represented by the institution and the person of the Metropolitan Bishop (who functioned over a period of time as superior to the Prince), and in Transylvania the

bishops and the metropolitan bishops were merely the representatives of the whole people who spoke Romanian. It is hard to imagine in these conditions an anticlericalism of the Occidental type. Not even later, when – along with the development of the state – the Church lost its social role, anticlericalism does not become stronger; in the logic of the Byzantine “symphony”, the religious hierarchy related to any secular power, but did not identify with any. Power was perceived all time (including under Communism) as the advantage of this symbiosis, but the people also clearly understood its boundaries. Also, the Orthodox priest does not have the intellectual appearance (that comes from a pre-modern tradition and – in patches – is anti-modern) of the Catholic priest, nor the rigor and inflexible moralism of the protestant pastor. On the contrary, he is a common man, almost the same as any other man, maybe a little more wealthy, but always happy, jovial, tolerant with failures in observing the religious calendar (extremely vast in Orthodoxy) – in brief, a man with whom people identify and call him with familiarity “popa”. Except for a few minor productions (in the genre of Damian Stănoiu’s books, the only fully anticlerical Romanian writer), even when it belongs to some major writers (Arghezi, V. Voiculescu), the criticism of religious hierarchy has not produced anything significant in Romanian culture. When the Communist power will arrest the clergy (massively for the Catholics and the Greek Catholics, and selectively for the Orthodox and the New-protestants), the world will perceive this act as an attempt to uproot the community whose pastor has been stolen. And, far from being at a distance from the persecuted ones, will be sympathetic with them, in silence (and sometimes in suffering), maintaining their image and creating a local cult for them long before their confessional church would consecrate him. As a general rule, the clergy in Romania (and the high hierarchs) have been perceived neither as foreigners, nor as belonging to the privileged, nor as the depositary of an authority (effective or epistemic) opposed to modernity (though some benefited from one or another of these attributes) but, on the contrary, have been seen as belonging to the people and the nation, and sometimes as representatives of it, and their knowledge – at least in the Modern times – being above the knowledge of the rest of the Romanians, appeared in itself – to an illiterate array – as a form of modernization. As such, in this world, anticlericalism was in vain.

But neither did the general criticism of religion, such as by the Occidental left wing, find any favor in the Romanian world. With a certain regularity, the Communist authorities have published anthologies of “Romanian materialist tradition” or of “intellectual debates” concerning the place of religion in the Romanian world (“debates” in which only the positive criticism was being portrayed – and many times

taken out of the context – when concerning religion). Most of them reproduce the same texts and, as a whole, are pretty thin. The file of the apology of religion in Romania – if it was published – would be infinitely voluminous. In a world in which we could talk about an intellectuality in the actual sense of the term only from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that realized (pathetically and sometimes ironically) its cultural institutions only at the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion has played – for centuries – the role of a folk culture. Without the pretence of internalizing a dogmatic system (that would involve – as noticed by Ioan Petru Culianu<sup>8</sup> – a “secular arm” that would eliminate its competitors), the Orthodox Church united with the pre-Christian background and with the folk beliefs that floated on Romanian territory. Thus, a unique folklore was being born, one that – on the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – has been the feast of the ethnologists, and one that Communism – that wanted to be national – ended up by caricaturing through depriving it of its religious component. Certainly, this faith made up the foundational mentality of the Romanian peasant. Only together with urbanization, the institutionalizing of the culture and the intellectual commerce with the Occident does this mental paradigm enter into a crisis. Firstly, on a romantic line, it is exalted, but in the selected and literary enriched versions (the case of the well-known ballad “Miorița”), then – from the moment when modernization effectively begins (from the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) – it is, in turn, rejected as being primitive and, implicitly, opposed to the modernity that had to be copied from the Occident or eulogized, as being the “spiritual matrix” of a people that will find its own modernity. Even for those who criticize it, the problem is not religion in itself, but the economic and social context of the rural believer. The Leninist version of the priest as an agent and vindicator of exploitation and faith as “opium for the people” will reach Romania only through a Soviet path, after 1945. And, just because it was foreign, it will be rejected by the entire social body. This does not mean that, before the Communists, the precarious life and rural education (including the rural priests) had not been observed and discussed. Also, if the philosopher Lucian Blaga or the historian of religions Mircea Eliade had the passion of the “Dacian ground” spread by the Romanian “cosmic Christianity”, Mircea Florian, for example, as philosopher deplores the lack of rigor of a folk faith up to its dissolution in the ritual and magic of incantation. However, certainly, what the inter-war “rationalists” hoped for was the spiritualization of faith, not its eradication. As we pointed out before, the change of people’s world, doubled by closing religion in some very narrow borderlines, pushed it

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<sup>8</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere (Eros and magic in the Renaissance)* (București: Editura Nemira, 1994), pp. 351-352.



into an anachronism in Communist times. However, with all of these, the Church has had intellectual peaks (as the theologian Dumitru Stăniloae), carried out – as much as it was allowed – an intellectual work (for example publishing “The Fathers and the Writers of the Church”), and, especially, based on the fascination of its interdiction, it cultivated a certain aura of clandestine culture (and eclectic enough) associated to its rituals. It is significant also that, in its last months, being in full drift, declaiming an ideological verbosity that no one believed in – probably excepting Ceaușescu himself – the Communist state looking for its legitimacy comes back – on the nationalist wing (and) towards the Church. Hereby, as a (bizarre) tragic irony, in the moment when the churches are being demolished from the old center of Bucharest (caught in the Ruler’s “systematization plan”), there is being published – paid by the Communist state – the luxury edition of “the New Testament from Belgrade” (“Noul Testament de la Bălgrad”) and “Șerban Cantacuzino’s Bible” (“Biblia lui Șerban Cantacuzino”). Furthermore, in mid-1989 (approximately in the time of the Round Table in Warsaw), the Army Magazine (“Viața militară”) publishes a critical text against the historical patriotism of the Orthodox Church<sup>9</sup>. It was the ultimate proof of the fact that faith and Church have only been, even for the Communist officials, only a reservoir of “mysticism and obscurantism”. What they really were, the Communists could not tell (any more).

Beyond the militant dimension – that presumes open criticism of the (pretences of the) ecclesiastic hierarchy and the antique and obsolete character of faith – secularization has also had a less offensive sense: the passing of some goods, values and ideas from the religious area to the secular one to such an extent that their social exercise does not presume religious reference any more. It is even harder to say if, from this point of view, the Romanian world is a secularized world. Beyond the material goods nationalized in different stages, starting with Cuza, what could be the religious values transferred to the Romanian society? Just to notice that this society, in its institutional wing, was being built after a foreign model (that crossed both types of secularization we referred to), that did meet neither resistance from, nor challenged the adherence to the autochthon Church. With the exception of some cases perceived in the époque as rather eccentric (a few socialists who criticized – miming the Occidental left wing – the conservative role of the Church and Nae Ionescu’s – and some of his disciples – who criticized the alienation of the inter-war society from the values of Orthodoxy), there was no friction between the Church and the state. It seemed that the roles were well distributed: the state was concerned with the everyday life, the

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<sup>9</sup> Ilie Manole, “Servind cauza națională” (“Serving the national cause”), in *Viața militară* (*Military Life*), București, no. 5/ 1989.

Church with the eternal one and that, implicitly, each of them has its own vocabulary that could not be translated in the language of the other. Could we appeal to any laic value having, clearly, a genealogy in the orthodox faith? Humanness seems to be rather a function of sociability and hospitality proper to any traditional culture. Patriotism is recent and, almost certainly, from a laic context. But still one fundamental religious value has absolutely failed to integrate itself – at all – into the Romanian laic mentality. It is about the solicitude towards your neighbor who, in the laic context gives his attention and availability towards the other. Or, in a laic context, this function blazes through absence in the Romanians' daily behavior: at any level of life and of society, the other's attention seeks for payment. The bribe – that any foreigner denounces as being a hydra of the Romanian world (or, more widely, of the Balkans) – does not regard the payment of a thing or an activity, but rather buying the attention of the one asked for the thing or service in question. Only after the interested one has assured in this way the benevolence of the other they can get to the real action. As much as we would invoke the Ottoman and Greek-Phanariote practices (connected to the fluctuant tribute and the compulsory “gifts” towards the Ottoman Power), it is as well the effect of a non-assimilation of faith in its fundamental dimension of openness towards the other. Our world – archaic until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – has only valued the homely or tribal solidarity that constituted the only guarantee against external aggressions. This type of solidarity constitutes a second face of corruption, so much reproached to our world. Our Church – for centuries a rural Church – has never seen more than the relatives gathering in the small stoop of the wooden churches. The neutral image of the one close-by that the city is in favor of (with its population moves) is foreign to the imagery of “place and blood” perpetuated by the small rural communities. On the other hand, we need to say this, as well, there are no religious radicalisms (of the fanatic genre) that are laic to the Romanian remained world, despite all, a world in which the Church is present all the time, but – at least until the post-revolutionary constructivism – never aggressive, always giving advice, but very little involved and always meditative, but never tempted with trenchant verdicts.

Besides all these, there is also the crucial problem of a society with guides on the move and things that in other parts seem to be firm, while in the Romanian world they are very volatile. For instance, it is not clear how much a movement of the right wing – as the Legionary was exclusively right (on a traditional angle) or it had a left component as well (concerning the improvement of the rural problems, and even a form of urban collectivism) or, symmetrically, a left wing movement, remained only in the left area (with the celebration of socialism and

Ceaușescu), or it slipped to the right (with a manifested nationalist component). The paradox is that opposed things become interchangeable and, in this mirror game (in which the extremes reverse) it is totally unclear who is saying what and what is the right attitude to adopt. Generally, the Church had no attitude, which on one hand saved it, but on the other hand condemned it to irrelevance.

Its major problem is today. More or less, the discourse about secularization points to a bipolar mentality, of the “cold war” type: on one side the society that degenerates under the frequent beats of modernity, on the other side the Church that is meant to resist these drifts. However, sadly or happily, this is not the real problem of today’s Romanian Church. As – no matter what the Church is saying – modernity inexorably succeeds, and its effects are not only before us, but also (as I have tried to show) behind us. Whether we like it or not, we, as European and global citizens will have to accept this common fact: secularization is not in front of us – as a problem that we have to confront, but behind us – as a sum of problems with consequences that need to be managed. Today we are no longer on opposite sides – and, as such, neither the black and white pairs are able to say much; everyone can live according to his own thinking, can believe in whatever he pleases, and can do whatever he feels appropriate. People’s thoughts and actions add up and compose the texture of quotidian existence. The real problem of the world today is that the experience of an absolute does not shine anymore (to make it intelligible) over our quotidian experience, which develops – entirely – under the artificial light of the technological and bureaucratic systems. In a certain way, this is the radical secularization of our world: the ultimate intelligibility of this world strictly belongs to the references and connections within it. Keeping the prior analogy, we are dealing not with the polarity between light and darkness (a common place for religious reflection), but with a light that falls on another light. Will the man of tomorrow ever be able to distinguish them? And will the Church be able to teach him how to distinguish them? Will the Church, isolated in its unearthly light be able to see the “lights of the city”?

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## EPILOGUE

### THE PRIEST'S TEMPTATIONS AND THE PEOPLE'S ESCAPE FROM CHURCH

WILHELM DANCĂ

“The one who is sick goes to see a doctor;  
the one who makes his will goes to a notary,  
a specialist. Is there also a specialist  
of God's relationship with myself?”<sup>1</sup>

The priest plays an important role in the people's religious and spiritual education and, in such a way, in promoting the sense of belonging to a community<sup>2</sup>. By his care for keeping tradition alive, by cultivating the language of the ritual, by living and spreading the truths of faith, the priest builds the Church as community.

Throughout my pastoral experience, I have noticed that not only cultural phenomena, such as secularization, moral relativism, material individualism etc., political pressures or social circumstances, but more importantly the ways the sacred is revealed within Christianity as part of the tradition represented by the priest play a decisive role in the people's relation with God and the Church.<sup>3</sup> The priest's effort to preserve the primary experience of Christian faith is mirrored in the way the community participates in the life of the Church. Therefore, the priest's apostolate measures the world's closeness to, or alienation from, Church as community. I will argue for and analyze this theme from a historical-phenomenological perspective.

#### THE ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

The world within which the Catholic priests of Romania work is subjected to rapid and profound changes. The first of them is related to the image and *meaning of priestly ministry*. Thus, at the time when the Catholic Church of Romania had the status of a tolerated Church (that is,

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Priestly Spirituality/Esistenza sacerdotale* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2010), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> See Wilhelm Dancă, *Pentru iubirea lui Cristos. Dialoguri despre preoție, biserică și credință [For the Love of Christ. Dialogues about Priesthood, Church and Faith]* (Jassy: Sapientia, 2011), pp. 21-32.

<sup>3</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *Tratat de istorie a religiilor [A History of Religious Ideas]*, transl. Mariana Noica (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005<sup>4</sup>), p. 26.

surveyed and controlled by the atheist Communist state, between 1945 and 1989) and did not enjoy full freedom to manifest its cult in public, priests were few, while the number of the faithful was greater. Priests then manifested more fervor and pastoral charity, seemed more motivated and certain of their mission and identity, while the faithful, though poor, contributed what they had for the welfare of the Church. As the number of priests increased, the number of the faithful decreased, especially due to the economic difficulties Romania confronted, and the phenomenon of the youth migration to the rich countries of Western Europe; the priests' availability and joy to serve the communities with less faithful dwindled or were anyhow no longer so visible, and the lay faithful became either more critical, or indifferent to the Church. Some of the priests gave in to the temptation to live a quiet, comfortable life, hiding their escape from unconditional ministry behind liturgical norms. For instance, prior to 1989 a priest was, without any question at all, celebrating liturgy three times on Sundays, or more in case of necessity; he would have also been happy to serve abroad or in missions. Today some younger priests hardly accept to celebrate liturgy twice on feast days or on Sundays; they argue a lot before accepting to serve in another diocese or country. In this way, the priestly apostolate seems to be no longer sought for, but scheduled, debated over or negotiated, if not even avoided. But if the priest's identity depends on his pastoral work as well, in a context characterized by few pastoral obligations and small communities of faithful, the temptation to escape the assumed priestly mission is very high.

The second major change in the Catholic Church of Romania refers to ecclesiastical structures, more precisely the *governing structures*. A few years ago, while preparing the first synod of the diocese of Jassy<sup>4</sup>, Bishop Petru Gherghel confessed he feared the results of the synod as, according to him, "as soon as we have finished establishing the structures, problems will start to arise". He was right. Before 1989, it was prison and age that made the difference among priests in Romania. They met joyfully, regardless of their position, and helped one another as true brothers. After the Church started organizing its hierarchical structures and enlarging its pastoral sectors, the priests were overwhelmed by bureaucratic, technical obligations and meetings that led to chilling relations among them. Here and there, concerns for the development of the material structures within the Church or the parish, and the cultivation of a political-financial *clientèle* have given

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<sup>4</sup> Dieceza de Iași [Diocese of Jassy], *Cartea sinodală. Biserica, noul popor al lui Dumnezeu, este trimisă în misiune la oamenii de astăzi* [The Synodal Book. The Church, God's New People, Is Sent on Mission to the People of Today] (Jassy: Sapientia, 2005).

rise to tensions, too human sometimes, between different generations of priests. Paradoxically, precisely the focus of priests on those questions pertaining to the manner in which the Church is perceived from the outside have led to the alienation of the faithful from the Church.

The third change refers to *spiritual life*, to the intimate relation the priest has with God. Both at the time when the Catholic Church of Romania was persecuted and the diminishing of the number of priests was systematically pursued, and also nowadays, when the Church can freely promote the necessary number of priests, according to its ability and concrete pastoral needs, the main source of priestly vocations has been and remained the good example of priests in their pastoral work, especially of the young ones. Then, as well as now, people's closeness to the Church was not related to the fulfillment of some material obligations the priest had to fulfill – heating in the church, high quality microphones, new organ and light shows. People were drawn by well-prepared liturgical celebrations that everybody took part in as much as possible, by the homilies delivered whole-heartedly, rather than read, by the priest, by his spirit of prayer and human and theological experience. The managing aspect counted very little. People came to the priest who prayed, not to the one building churches or annexes for the parish. For instance, they used to say about the parish priest in my village (between 1969-2003) that he was not even able to build a footway near the house. But he spent much of the daytime praying in the church and talking to people, especially to the little ones he was carefully and joyfully catechizing. He fulfilled his mission as a parish priest for about thirty years and of the children he catechized, some became priests, about forty-five, if I am not wrong. I too am one of the youths who felt the call to priesthood near this priest who enjoyed priesthood, preaching, praying and talking to people.

I believe that the intensity of the people's relation with the Church is highly dependent on the priest's witness. Nevertheless, in order to counteract those interpretations that lay too much emphasis on the place held by the priest within a community, I hasten to add here that, despite the importance of the priest's irreplaceable mission, he remains a member of the community of Jesus' disciples, even if he sits in front. It is further true that this community is authentic to the extent it announces the Word and celebrates the Eucharist. But the subject of the liturgical assemblies is not only the priest, but the priest together with the people who announce the Good News and celebrate the sacraments of salvation.

Finally, the temptations that the priests of our country face nowadays must be interpreted in the light of the ecclesial context outlined above.

### **OLD TEMPTATIONS: THE CONFISCATION OF MINISTRY, CLERICALISM AND DEMOCRATISM**

All throughout his life, the Catholic priest struggles against many temptations. Some of them are older, others are more recent. Of the old ones, one seems to have “apostolic roots” and resides in the tendency, rooted in the priest, to *confiscate ministry* for the purpose of satisfying his own interests. Once they reach their highest form, these tendencies serve the thirst for power or everything is circumscribed to the cult of personality. When it comes to the priest, serving his own interests takes on different forms and levels of intensity, but the effect is the same: the partial or total neglect of the spiritual well-being of the faithful. Jesus’ first disciples were themselves confronted with this temptation.

Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves” (Lk 22:24-27).

Jesus clearly saw that the temptation of power was gaining ground in the disciples’ minds and hearts, and therefore he corrected them by telling them that any form of authority must always be exercised in the spirit of ministry and with selfless commitment to the good of the flock, following his example, who gave his life for the good of the sheep (Jn 10:11). By making reference to the washing of the disciples’ feet shortly before his glorious passion, Jesus told them: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:15).

Yet, despite Jesus’ warnings, the temptation of ministering for the sake of one’s own interests is also encountered by the members of the communities at the beginnings of the Church. Here is what St. Peter writes in his first letter:

So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed. Tend the flock of God in your midst, [overseeing] not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock (1 Pt 5:1-3).



Through their selfless and generous ministry, the disciples gather the community together, therefore Jesus urges them to walk ahead of the sheep, to care for the sheep and not to run away before the wolves (Jn 10:4,12-13).

The second old temptation that arises in the life of priests is *clericalism*. It manifests itself especially in those communities in which the Church is seen as a society divided between two classes, clergy and laity, in which the clergy and the religious control the life of the Church, rejecting working together with the lay Christians. As a consequence, the lay are marginalized, their abilities being recognized only as pertaining to the lay, secular world. For the supporters of the clerical mentality, the Church is one and the same with the hierarchy, and the spiritual guidance of the faithful is identified with priestly pastoral work. There have also been attempts in our case to promote movements of the lay apostolate, but they have for long remained related to the clericalism existing within the Church, meaning that the lay were invited to take part in the apostolate of the Church hierarchy. After Vatican Council II the implementation of the dogmatic constitution about the Church, *Lumen gentium*, initiated the un-clericalisation of God's people. However, in Romania the implementation of the conciliar ecclesiology with its openness to the lay apostolate needs deepening and caution. Living in a society marked by the mentality and spirituality of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with a strong clerical sense, the weakening of the priest's recognizable presence within the Church could be interpreted as some sort of escape from the Church or as a tendency towards Protestantism of the Catholic Church.

Nowadays clericalism takes on two forms: legalism and functionalism. Pope Francis was recently telling in a homily during the time of the Advent: "When there is no prophecy amongst the people of God, the emptiness that is created gets filled by clericalism"; it is this clericalism that asks Jesus: "By what authority do you do these things? By what law? And the memory of the promise and the hope of going forward becomes reduced to only the present: neither the past, nor a hopeful future. The present is legal. If it is legal it moves forward".<sup>5</sup>

Functionalism reduces priestly ministry to its functional aspects alone: "To merely *play* the role of the priest, carrying out a few services and ensuring completion of various tasks would make up the entire priestly existence. Such a reductive conception of the identity and the ministry of the priest risks pushing their lives towards emptiness, an emptiness which often comes to be filled by lifestyles not consonant

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *A Church That Lacks Prophecy Becomes Filled with Clericalism*, Vatican Radio, 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2013.

with their ministry”.<sup>6</sup> Clericalism has been present in the Romanian Church in the mentality and activity of some priests before 1989 under the form of functionalism (practiced by the fearing and comfort-seeking priests confronted with the dictatorial regime) and nowadays too, under the form of legalism, another way of rejecting the dialogue with people. Legalism changes the face of the Church, turning it from a mother into a judge.

The third old temptation can be called “the improper democratic spirit” or “*democratism*”. This “democratism” leads to ignoring Christ’s authority and grace and to distorting the Church into an NGO. The mentality of “democratism” manifests itself in certain groups of ecclesial participation and tends to mistake the priests’ duties for those of the faithful, or not to distinguish at all between the bishop’s authority and that of the priests. In this way, our Church has well understood that the groups of ecclesial participation – the presbyteral council or the parish and administrative councils etc. – are not priestly or lay unions with claims and party interests foreign to the Church communion.<sup>7</sup>

Besides these three old temptations, we can still speak, together with Pope Francis, about others that tend to take on universal dimensions.<sup>8</sup> I call them “universal” because they do not pertain to a particular local context, but to the challenges of the globalized culture of today, especially of the mass-media culture.

### **UNIVERSAL TEMPTATIONS: RELATIVISATION OF PRIESTLY IDENTITY, ISOLATION AND SPIRITUAL WORLDLINESS**

The Catholic priests of Romania are also the sons of their time and, as such, they are influenced by the present globalized culture which, though offering many advantages and new possibilities, can also limit, condition or even harm them. In this context, several temptations tend to darken the horizon of their pastoral activity.

The first of these is the *relativisation of priestly identity* under the influence of the mass-media culture and that of certain secularizing intellectual circles that systematically cultivate mistrust in the Church and its ministers<sup>9</sup>. For instance, within the span of just a few years, the trust of the Romanians in the Romanian Orthodox Church has

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<sup>6</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (Vatican City, 1994), no. 44.

<sup>7</sup> See Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory*, no. 17.

<sup>8</sup> See Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”* (Vatican City, 2013), nos. 78-109.

<sup>9</sup> See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 79-87.

diminished from 90% to 63%. The situation is pretty much the same when it comes to the trust towards the Catholic Church in Romania which, until recently, has been assimilated with a nest of spies working for the Vatican, Hungarian revisionists, pedophiles and collaborators of the former Secret Services, even if the media was never able to supply concrete and convincing examples of priests being spies, pedophiles or informers of the Communist Secret Services. Most of the denigrating information about Catholic priests was taken from news about the Catholic Church of Western Europe or North America. In the context of this culture of mistrust in the priest's mission and identity, a number of our priests fostered a feeling of resignation and defeat that made them look wearied, pessimistic and dark-faced dissatisfied ones in the eyes of the public. In this context, Pope Francis invites us to become, for these priests who have fallen into the net of barren pessimism, "living sources of water from which others can drink"<sup>10</sup> the water of trusting themselves and their call. "At times this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water".<sup>11</sup>

The second universal temptation stands under the influence of the same media culture and can be called *isolationism*<sup>12</sup>. It is true that the means and networks of communication nowadays promote a "mystique of living together"<sup>13</sup>, which boldly invite us to meet one another, to live as many experiences of fraternity as possible, to randomly mingle with the sacred pilgrims of the caravan of solidarity without frontiers. Normally, "greater possibilities of communication turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone".<sup>14</sup> Yet, it is often not the case. Many people remain at the level of inter-personal relations mediated by machines and systems that can be turned on and off on demand. Having such a wide range of means of communication at his disposal, the priest also risks isolating himself in some kind of autonomy, an immanence that excludes God and leads to a form of spiritual consumerism smelling of individualism. In answering people's thirst for God, the priest must point them not only to the spiritual Christ, without body and without cross, but to the Son of God born of Virgin Mary, who, through his physical presence, through his joys, pains and sufferings, challenges us, influences us and brings us to solitary communion with him and our fellow human beings. When facing the various forms of a *spirituality of well-being* without a community, the

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 86.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 86.

<sup>12</sup> See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 87-89.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 87.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 86.

*theology of welfare* without any fraternal commitments or the subjective experiences without a face encountered in the world of internet surfers, the priest is called to promote a face-to-face encounter, committing encounters, receiving his inspiration from the forms of popular religiosity that include people's personal relations not with harmonizing energies, but with God, with Jesus Christ, with Mary, with a saint. Since it nourishes man's relational potential instead of his individualist escapes, popular religiosity lends itself as a spiritual remedy to the illnesses caused by the Internet excessive consumption.

Finally, a third temptation derives from the mentality promoted by the present globalizing culture of subjectivism, namely *spiritual worldliness*.<sup>15</sup> This temptation feeds itself on the fascination of Gnosticism, understood as living the belief in the limits of a subject's reason and feelings, on the one hand, and on the other, on the attraction of self-referential and Promethean Neopelagianism, found in those who rely solely on their own strengths and feel superior to others because they obey certain laws, or follow a certain way of being Catholic that belongs to the past. Spiritual worldliness manifests itself as a doctrinal or disciplinary certainty that gives rise to a narcissistic and authoritative elitism. The priests drawn to this spiritual behavior are not interested in Christ. Suffering from a serious form of anthropocentric immanentism, they are not concerned about evangelization or the celebration of sacraments, but about categorizing and controlling others. They may manifest a special care for the Church liturgy, doctrine and reputation, but they show no real concern for making it possible for the Gospel to touch the lives of the people of today. Among other expressions of spiritual worldliness, we can also count the trivial involvement in social and political life, frequent participations in congresses and formal receptions, managerial functionalism filled with statistics, plans and perspectives. Spiritual worldliness is falling into the sin of "it must be done". This grave sin that seems to be good can be cured by focusing the Church mission on Jesus Christ, who goes out of himself to welcome others, by breathing in the fresh air of the Holy Spirit that frees us of the suffocating self-reference.

We may also add here other temptations having universal dimensions, but they are, in one way or another, consequences of the three temptations described above. For instance, spiritual worldliness that makes some give primacy to history, language, economic safety, to the prejudice of the Gospel and the spiritual well-being of the faithful, is the root of the misunderstandings or conflicts among the priests within the same diocese, country or continent.

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<sup>15</sup> See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 93-97.

Turning back now to the context of our local Church, we can speak of three other important temptations: escape from serving the Lord, escape from the people, and searching to help politicians.

### **THREE SPECIAL ESCAPES: ESCAPE FROM SERVING THE LORD, ESCAPE FROM THE PEOPLE, AND SEARCHING TO HELP POLITICIANS**

The first of these seems to me to be the *escape from serving the Lord*. We know that this temptation too is widely spread within the Church, but in our case it has specific connotations. One may say that it is the archetypal temptation of the priest's escape from the Lord who calls him. We find the first example of it in the Bible, where we read that the Lord entrusted this mission to prophet Jonah:

Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it; for their wickedness has come before me. But Jonah made ready to flee to Tarshish, away from the Lord (Jon 1:2-3).

The prophet's mission was difficult enough, because in the case of conversion, God remained God, while the prophet was exposed to the Ninivites' wickedness and threats. Indeed, following Jonah's preaching,

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out. But this greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said while I was still in my own country? This is why I fled at first toward Tarshish" (Jon 3:10 – 4:1-2).

In order to stay as far away as possible from the people's feelings of revenge, "Jonah then left the city for a place to the east of it" (Jon 4:5).

What is important here is the fact that Jonah ran away from the face of the Lord because he greatly feared the risky, dangerous mission; he was running away from an evil that only existed in his own mind. He was also running away because he knew that God is unpredictable and that is why he did not want to entrust himself to him with his whole being. He did not want to work with a merciful, unpredictable God; he was afraid.

Going now to the case of the Romanian Catholic priests who run away from the mission entrusted to them, the immediate motivations and the context have a specific character. But in the end, it is still an escape

from a God that they do not know what to expect from.<sup>16</sup> We can give many examples here, from the most inner experiences of a surprising God in the life of a priest, to the gestures and convictions of those priests who embody, before the altar or in everyday life in the parish, the saying: “to be more Catholic than the Pope”. But what is of interest to us here are the causes of the escape from the mission that the priest received from God.<sup>17</sup>

The first cause is related to the fact that priestly ministry has a repetitive character. Indeed, in the case of younger priests, one may notice that after their first or second year of priesthood their joy of being priests is on the wane. Life takes on shades of grey and becomes unbearable. A monotonous life becomes wearisome, isn't it? The escape is expressed here by the inner rejection of self-giving, by tiredness, boredom when the minimal gestures of priestly ministry have to be fulfilled. It seems to me that many priests have gone through such an experience of losing the joy and getting tired of being priests.

Another cause is related to the great number of priests in the Romanian-speaking Catholic dioceses. Indeed, unlike many other local Churches in Central and Western Europe, the Catholic Church in our country has a numerous and young clergy. If I am not mistaken, the average age of the Catholic clergy here is under 35. In the archdiocese of Bucharest a priest ministers to approximately 250 faithful, which is a luxury from a pastoral point of view, both in comparison with the situation of the archdiocese of Bucharest in the past, as well as with the present situation in other dioceses of the world. Vocations to priesthood have diminished in recent years, yet not at an alarming, dramatic rate. In the past, around 15 to 20 priests have been ordained each year in both dioceses, and the young candidates who enter the Seminary are about 20

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, while he was a simple catechumen and the people, both Catholics and Arians, agreed to elect him bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose tried to get out of the city riding a she-ass. St Augustine hesitated at first, then intended to run away from the Christians of Hippo who decided that he be ordained a priest, so that in this way, he could succeed the old bishop Valerius; after having been elected patriarch of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom was in no hurry to leave his native Antioch. That is why the emperor ordered that he be forcefully brought to the imperial capital city, which indeed happened. Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, was obliged to consecrate him bishop on 26<sup>th</sup> of February 398. Due to criticism and various kinds of humiliations, the priest Jean Marie Vianney tried to run away from Ars on at least three different occasions: in 1840, in 1847 and in 1853, with the intention to find true happiness by withdrawing from the world. Nevertheless, every time he came back to the mission entrusted to him.

<sup>17</sup> See Carlo Maria Martini, *Prove e consolazioni del prete. Meditazioni con opere di Francesco Radaelli* (Milan: Editrice Ancora, 2010), pp. 18-25.

to 30 in number. There are also a great number of retired priests. When needed, there is always a retired priest to temporarily replace an active priest. In these circumstances, a young priest can easily get the feeling of being useless.

Coming back to the great local temptations, the second one is *the escape from the people*. The priest escapes because he perceives the people as being aggressive, difficult, because it seems to him that it does not accept him as priest, it does not accept him telling what the world itself cannot tell or give to itself. For instance, *I absolve you from your sins! May peace and the Lord be with you!* Usually the cause of misunderstandings rising from the tense relation with the people is hard to solve. The priest going through such conflicting situations lives harsh experiences that diminish his trust in himself and in the others. Escape appears as the rational way out. Such examples can be found in the Gospel too – Jesus had to leave Nazareth – but also in the history of the Church.<sup>18</sup>

If we also add to this tense relation with the people the fact that the priest cannot harmonize simplicity, the inner spiritual unity and the multitude of external duties, then it becomes clear that the thought of running away from pastoral duties is very strong. One can easily notice the fact that the priests caught in the trap of administration – are not able sometimes to celebrate in the right way, they lose the joy to preach, they feel no attraction to pray by themselves or together with others. Dragging from one day to the next, they no longer feel the taste for the sacred things; salvation seems to be a matter that can be postponed. Then, when they see they are not able to save themselves, they start doubting they could help others reach a happy life in eternity. Priests

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<sup>18</sup> St. Athanasius fled Alexandria five times between 335 and 365, because of the Arians. St. John Chrysostom was forced to leave the community of Constantinople twice, between 403 and 404, ending his earthly life in exile at Cormana, on the Black Sea shore, in 407. While keeping the proportions in mind, I add here a personal experience. On one cold December night in 1989, I was talking to my parish priest about the limits of the parochial vicar's right to listen to confessions. By arguing that I am entitled to listen to the confession of any person who asks for it, and that I can give him/her absolution in accordance with the norms of canon law, I invoked both the documents of Vatican Council II, and the Code of Canon Law adopted in 1983. The parish priest was not aware of these documents, as he had completed his theological studies during the works of the Council. But his answer to my objections was so violent and humiliating, that I could not cope with the situation and so I went out of the parish house at around 10 o'clock in the evening. We finally made up two hours later, when he came in his car looking for me in the neighboring village where I had walked to on foot. Ever since then we have never had any other fight and we have stayed good friends.

who are too much of administrators are easily discouraged and nourish a kind of spiritual sickness or moral and doctrinal laxity, first in their own lives, then in that of the faithful.

In the priest running away from the people we also notice something else, namely his lack of concern for the great, fundamental questions of the society and the present time. This priest accepts no uncertainty, assumes no risk in front of the fragility and confusion brought forth by liminal questions. I refer here to the anthropological questions, too little discussed in our Church, but debated with a lot of interest in other parts of the Catholic Church, such as the place of the woman in the Church, ecumenical relations, bio-ethics, theology based on virtual communication etc. This kind of escape nourishes certain gestures of fundamentalism and integralism, a rigidity that leads to rejecting dialogue with the world, with other religions and Christian denominations. What hides in fact behind this escape is ignoring or failing to accept the contemporary theology propounded by Vatican Council II.

Finally, the third local temptation is *searching to help politicians*. We refer here to the priests who pursue controversial financial interests with politicians or the local authorities. Certainly, the question of the priest's economic dependence on benefactors outside the Church is an important matter for the Catholic priest living in Romania. Only the one having experienced the failure to finish some urgent pastoral projects and financial deficiencies is able to tell how comfortable life is when you feel you have a safe ground under your feet. Nevertheless, this search for financial stability and predictability exposes the Romanian priest to various political and administrative pressures that lead to the negative consequence of turning the altar into an electoral tribune. In the experience of organizing *democratic elections* in Romania from 1989 onwards, one could see that the religious factor played each time a decisive role. The politicians learnt the lesson and have always cultivated relations of financial support towards the Church, especially towards the Orthodox one, at the time of the approaching elections. However, in this context, we can see that a clean, poor priest has a greater number of faithful coming to church.

## **NEGLECTING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

While working as a parish priest in the St. Theresa community of Bucharest, I used to visit the psychiatric hospital in the neighborhood every year, in order to prepare the sick Catholic Christians for the celebration of Easter. It once happened that an old man, who was Orthodox, stood in the line at the door of the room in which I was hearing confessions. The nurse who kept an eye on what was going on



passed by in front of the door and, seeing him, said: "You, old man, what are you doing here? The priest listening to confession is Catholic!" The old man replied: "Leave me alone, woman! It is God I am looking for, not the Catholic priest!"

In the background of this recollection, I bring into discussion the *most powerful temptation* the Catholic priest is exposed to, namely *neglecting the relationship with God*, neglecting to take care of his own spiritual life. Indeed, of the main causes leading to the rupture between the Church and the people, the most serious one is related to the priests who are not perceived as "men of God". A man of God has a spiritual life, and spiritual life is spiritual, as St. Pachomius was saying. Without it, the priest runs the risk of becoming a bureaucrat, a clerk, a technician of the sacred. He thinks it is enough for him to convey information and theories about God and Christian morality, but his celebrations and homilies do not touch people's souls.

Due to the lack of bearers of the sacred and experts in things divine, the world we live in tends to become, from a religious point of view, more indifferent, on the one hand, and on the other, more fundamentalist. The spreading of religious indifference seems to question the traditional anthropological tenet according to which man is naturally open to God, looks for Him and longs for Him<sup>19</sup>. Religious indifference makes contemporary man believe that the question regarding the existence of God is useless or meaningless. According to statistics, the number of the religiously indifferent has increased in the last ten years in Romania. Thus, if in 2002 the non-religious were about 12,825, in 2011 their number reached 18,917 (meaning, an increase from 0.06% to 0.10% from the total population of the country of 20,121,641).

Among other causes of the increase of religious indifference and atheism in Romania we must mention here those politicians, historians, journalists and so on, who prefer to speak more about the God of the Romanians, rather than about God, Father and Creator of all people, or more about the God of the people or nation, rather than about God, as revealed by the Holy Scripture. By adulterating the image of God revealed in Jesus Christ, all these people embolden the Romanian fundamentalists, who serve the ethnic and nationalistic propaganda, thus doing a great disservice to Christianity.

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<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions* I, 1: "our heart is restless, until it reposes in Thee". Mircea Eliade: the sacred "is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of consciousness. (...) Experience of the sacred is inherent in man's mode of being in the world", *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet*, transl. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 154.

In between these dominant extremes, religious indifference and religious fundamentalism, we can still discern many forms of authentic lived and shared spirituality, capable of touching people's hearts. I refer here to the Christian spirituality lived by the members of the religious orders and congregations present in Romania, who serve God in the Church and man in schools, hospitals, prisons, under-privileged areas, immigrant asylums etc. When speaking about spiritual life, we have to make a distinction between Christian spirituality and the spirituality recently imported from the Far or Near East, such as transcendental meditation, Buddhist or Zen meditation, the spiritual integration into the absolute etc. The latter have an immanent or pantheist character, promoting the dissolution of personal identity, and usually invite an exercise of the will having a gnostic and self-redeeming character. As an alternative to this Oriental type of spirituality, we witness nowadays, in our Christian context, the successful spread of certain charismatic movements oriented towards the supernatural of a sacral kind, that is, towards miracles, divine epiphanies, the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit. The religious charismatic families are proliferating, the pilgrimages to places where miracles are guaranteed to take place are also increasing. Likewise, religious associations propounding a democratic, lay spirituality, without any reference to the Church as institution or having a very critical attitude towards the Church as institution are proliferating. I refer here to the recent neo-Protestant religious communities, but also to the *new age*, lay-democratic type of religious movements that feed on the Christian teaching, but take over from it only what suits them. It is a sort of spirituality *à la carte*.

Within this democratized and globalized religious context, the priest is called to recover and promote belief that pertains to faith, and not just the philosophical-anthropological belief that man's heart is created, touched and challenged by God. According to this creed, on ways known by God alone, each man is made to look for Him and enter in dialogue with Him. Even without knowing His name (good, truth, justice, mercy towards the poor), man will still find the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the priest is called to give witness about the true image of God, about His authentic Spirit.

In today's globalized culture, God is understood and translated in extremely variegated ways. For some, God is the same as the sacred, *mysterium fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum*, God who rewards and, at the same time, punishes, who helps and destroys, saves and damns. For others, God is violent (when offended) and merciful (when receiving prayers asking for His clemency). For some, God imposes His will on man through norms and moral laws alien to the dynamism of his freedom. For others, God wants sacrifices and mortifications instead of a full life, freedom, joy and love, because God is the manifestation of

power.<sup>20</sup> This latter perception of God would be allegedly supported by the Church in collaboration with the State, which would need an instrument of controlling the masses and social cohesion (*instrumentum regni*). Finally, for the atheists and the religiously indifferent, God is not a person, nor a mystery of communion and life, but an instrument of oppression of man. This seems to be the case when the Church remains tied to the Constantinian model and encourages the political and ideological instrumentalisation of God. It is this ambiguity of which the integralist and fundamentalist religious movements take advantage, which in their turn nourish themselves out of religious indifference and practical atheism.

The Catholic priest wants to be part of a free Church that lives in a free State. This principle of separation between the political and spiritual powers supports the dialogue between the Church and the State, in order to fulfill the integral good of the human person. In this context, the priest is called to overthrow the post-Communist conception that turned God into a “conceptual idol”. It is quite true that the priest is very exposed to falling into the idolatry of theological statements. But none of the words people use to speak about God is capable of encompassing Him; they refer to Him, but they fail to define His essence. There is likeness to a very little extent, whereas unlikeness, to a very high degree. That is why, when we speak about God a negative language is more appropriate to articulate not what He is, but what He is not. God is absolute transcendence. Given this huge distance between the likeness and the unlikeness of the words we use in our God-talk, the priest is called to make use of the language of love. The relation between man and God is similar to what happens with the desire for good within ourselves: it does not diminish, but rather grows as we become better.

But in virtue of the principle of Incarnation, when we speak about God we can make reference to His name, for He Himself incarnated himself into words and events. Of the privileged names whereby God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ two hold a significant place: *agape* and *logos*, love and word.<sup>21</sup> Following Paul Ricoeur, we can see that the human term of love applied to God in 1 John 4:16 enriches and gives a new meaning to the name YHWH – the Lord revealed in Exodus 3:14, while, in its turn, it is enriched and transformed precisely because it refers to the subject of that name, thus giving rise to a play of

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<sup>20</sup> The history and phenomenology of religions distinguishes between theophanies, epiphanies, hierophanies and kratophanies.

<sup>21</sup> See Giovanni Ferretti, *Essere prete oggi* (Torino: Editrice Elledici, 2009), pp. 15-23.

crisscrossing revealing metaphors (love and transcendent lord), which represent the originality of the Christian revealed concept of God.<sup>22</sup>

We must not neglect the name of logos when speaking about God, as Pope Benedict XVI urges us, for in this way we can counteract the understanding of God as a blind power that justifies the relations of violence inspired by religion and, at the same time, we have more opportunities at hand to reveal the essentially pacific dimension of religion.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, we can support the harmony of Christian faith with human reason, with the Greek logos, with modern reason, because God is “reason”. Thus, by revealing Himself, God did not want to defeat us by imposing on us a truth that can only be accepted through blind obedience, but to convince us by manifesting the truth, by dialogue, by offering motivations that the reasoning man can understand. We equally become part of this campaign, trying to salvage the dignity of human reason, which, enriched by its relation with the divine Logos, grows towards embracing the deep human truths and thus, God’s revelation.

But the logos can also be translated as word, as St. John does in the prologue to his gospel. With this meaning, we understand that God is the source of a dia-logic relationship, that is, of his revelation by word. In this case, the word is not only understood as a mere vehicle conveying an idea, a thought, a piece of information, but as “address”, which implies the openness of His own person to other persons and the invitation addressed to the latter to open up too. It is the relation between an I and a You to whom man can address himself and speak. The personal, spiritual “I” is not an isolated subject, enclosed in itself, but a subject open to the relation of the word, brought to life by its ability to speak, to address the word to its fellows and to listen to, to receive the words the others to address it.

The priest who is able to combine these two revealed concepts, love and reason, in his God-speech is a true miracle of grace. Many think they understood this, but they are wrong. They speak more about themselves than about God. Others are blocked by their own language, by the fear of losing contact with the present people. The miracle expected from a priest is called holiness, which happens when the priest loses his own consciousness in God to the point that he considers Him the only reality that matters. This priest knows how to break and share the Eucharistic bread and the Word of life. Like the monks of old times, either in the East or in the West, the spiritual priest descends to the depth

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<sup>22</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, “Dio è amore”, D. Iervolino (ed.), *Ricoeur. L'amore difficile* (Rome: Studium, 1995), pp. 178-195, apud Giovanni Ferretti, *Essere prete oggi*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Benedict XVI et al., *Dio salvi la ragione* (Sienna: Cantagalli, 2006), pp. 9-29.

of inner life and brings out from there bread, light, guidance. In Greek, the monks were called *pneumatikoi*, that is, spiritual. This designation was kept to refer to several priests who received the mission of spiritual guidance in seminaries or in monasteries, but the title or the adjective has disappeared almost completely from the priests doing pastoral work. Some monks ordained priests are also called spiritual fathers, but only rarely. The absence of the Spirit or of the Holy Spirit from a spiritually failed person can help us understand what the true presence of the Spirit's power in a priest can mean. A priest who is spiritually ineffective is ignorant, sly, active and invasive, wants to be listened to all the time and is a sort of a propagandist. This class of priests settles as a hoar frost on the field of contemporary Church, both in our country and abroad. Only adversities and obligations remind these spiritual persons that they have to pray. Meanwhile, let us pray for them, says Hans Urs von Balthasar in an article about the image of the priest we expect in our Churches.<sup>24</sup>

### **JOB'S REACTION TO GOD**

Becoming aware of these temptations is already a good step forward towards chasing away the thoughts of those priests who are ready to "run away from the ministry entrusted to them by the Lord", and from the world that waits on them to speak about God. The second step would be to open up his inner turmoil to a friend. In a real conflicting situation, the solution may be found with the help of prayer and a lucid head. So, the tempted priest could keep his eyes on several basic certainties acquired through prayer and dialogue: knowing Jesus, friendship with Jesus, entering the intimacy of Trinitarian mystery. No world can destroy such certainties, neither the post-Communist world, nor the post-modernist one.

Furthermore, by analyzing the confusing problems of post-modernity, the tempted priest should look for the respite necessary for reflection and the distinction between what is clear and what is opaque. Many times a leveling veil of confusion and discouragement is thrown over reality. But if the world around is looked at attentively, one can see so many little, simple things that turn into footholds and shields against uncertain things. Finally, the tempted priest can strengthen himself in the belief that he is called by God if he humbly accepts the mental limits and the limits of the secularized age he lives in. One of the characteristics of post-modernity is that, unlike the modern age, not everything can be known today; many things can be made technically, but their meaning is not understood. In this case, the limits of knowledge can be overcome

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<sup>24</sup> See Balthasar, *Esistenza sacerdotale*, pp. 69-71.

through love, because love is, after all, always credible. Even if not everything can always be understood, love is always possible. Love is a way of healing the fracture of significance that bewilders the contemporary society. Love is a deeper knowledge, which is never wrong, because it imitates God, the One who knows and loves.

In order to overcome all present-day temptations, the priest must look not only at Jonah's image, but more at that of the just Job, who for a long time negotiated with God the limits of understanding the divine plan. Jonah ran away from the face of the Lord, but Job, after having revolted himself against God, came to peace with Him, accepting the rules of the divine game. Which means that, instead of fighting God and losing in the end, one had better surrender, and the sooner, the better!

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# **THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY**

## **PURPOSE**

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

## **PROJECTS**

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

4. *Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development*. A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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