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THE RELIGION, THE STATE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

Abstract: Romanian state attempted to use religious organizations to achieve certain political goals in the modern era. This has prevented the development of religious pluralism. It took a whole historical process to resolve disputes that exist between the state, the religions and society.

The emergence of a mature and responsible civil society favoured the development of religious pluralism in Romania. Solving problems within the Romanian society was also favoured by the belonging to a stable political and cultural space (the European Union).

This text aims at highlighting the evolution of state-religions-society relations in contemporary Romania, from state control over the religious affairs to a state that is neutral in religious matters.

Keywords: *religion, state, public sphere, Romania, modernity*

A matter of power: the church versus the state in the battle for the domination of the public sphere in the modern era

Lately, the interest for the presence of religion and its role in the contemporary society, as well as the manner in which religion influences international relations have grown considerably. This is due to the “religious resurgence” phenomenon, noticed by a large part of the academic world which questions the theories of secularization that had become the dominant paradigm in the interpretation of the evolution of the religious phenomenon. This explains the ever persistent use of the “after secularism”¹ set phrase or the need to rethink the manner of understanding secularization.

In a volume entitled “Rethinking Secularism”², Alfred Stepan, professor at Columbia University, publishes a study entitled *The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes*, where he wonders to what

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¹ Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism. Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-27.

² Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), GooglePlay edition.

extent the concept of “secularism” is necessary for the analysis of democracy. Among other aspects, the author shows that there are prosperous democratic societies nowadays, such as the Scandinavian states, which still maintain a state church, as well as “secular” societies, dominated by dictatorship and social injustice; the conclusion is the following: “patterns of state-religion-society relations that happens to coexist with democracy at any given time are best seen as conjunctural, socially constructed, political arrangements, rather than as fixed, normative models”.

Alfred Stepan’s study, as well as many others, suggests a few basic ideas that we shall make use of during our investigation. First of all, we notice the diversity of approaching religion within contemporary societies, there being multiple forms of “secularism” and “laicism”. Second of all, in the context of the connections that have been made between religion and nationalism or between religion and terrorism during the past several decades, there is great sensitivity, equally felt in the academic, political and social circles, regarding the influence exerted by religion and other various religious organizations upon democracy.

Generally speaking, whenever there are talks about secularization, two models have priority: the American one and the French one. The American model, based on the first amendment to the Constitution, introduces the idea of a “wall of separation” between church and state. The interpretations are numerous but, essentially, this “wall” is a guarantee of the fact that the state does not interfere in religious matters, that there is no official church and that no representative of authority is allowed to use his/her political or administrative function to attract believers towards the denomination that he/she belongs to, or favour any particular denomination. The religious organizations function in a free market, where they attract new followers, get organized and promote themselves exclusively by their own means, having the freedom of expression in the public space, as well as the possibility to influence this space. These organizations, by means of the influence they exert within the community, can influence the political and social agenda but this is possible only within the limits stipulated by the constitution. A politician may embrace a proposal coming from a religious organization but, when it is subjected to public debate, this proposal is not looked upon from the perspective of morals or religious values but it is evaluated strictly according to the constitution and the laws in force. All these elements turn the United States into a space of paradox: a state without an official religion, with a “wall of separation” between religious organizations and state institutions, but with an active presence of the religious organizations in the public space which they influence to a certain extent, their proposals being filtered through the framework legally guaranteed by the constitution. However, beyond the various debates, there is in the Americans’ consciousness the opinion that religion is generally a positive element, able to contribute the moral and social progress.³

³ Jeremy T. Gunn and John Witte, Jr., eds., *No Establishment of Religion. America’s Original Contribution to Religious Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 2012); John Witte, Jr

The French model, consecrated by the 1905 law of separation between church and state, is based on the following principles: the neutrality of the state, the freedom of religious exercise, and public powers related to the church. This law is seen as the backbone of the French principle of *laïcité*. Apparently, there are elements that bring the French law close to the American one, but the spirit in which the former was adopted and implemented is different. The French legislators saw religion as a potential danger for the values of modern society and, given this perspective, they imagined various ways to discourage the promotion and spreading of religious faith so as, in time, laicism should prevail.⁴ The anti-religious and anti-cleric attitude will gain a new dimension in the Soviet Russia, where the communist leaders unleash a systematic battle, through propaganda, administrative and repression measures, meant to completely eliminate religion from the people's minds. In this context, the religious denominations' access to the public space was utterly forbidden.⁵

Besides these models, a large part of Europe maintained, during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, a certain type of state-church relations which originates in the 18th century.

In his study, "*Omnes et singulatim*": towards a criticism of the political reason, Michel Foucault analyses the rationality of the state power during the "Great Century" period (le "Grand Siècle"), which was mainly formulated in two doctrinal bodies: the state reason and the police theory. The state reason signifies a rational governance capable of increasing the power of the state in accordance with itself, overpassing the idea that the art of governing has to imitate the governance of nature by God, which made many consider this kind of rationality as being atheist.⁶

As far as the "police" is concerned, the authors of the Age of Enlightenment understood by this term certain areas which require the intervention of the state. According to N. de Lamare (1705), the police had to watch over 11 aspects within a state. They are the following: the religion; the morality; the health; the supplies; the streets, bridges and roads, public edifices; the public safety; the liberal arts; the trade; the factories; the servants and workers; the poor. Through the

and Joel A. Nichols, *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment* (Westview Press, 2011).

⁴ Jacques Le Goff, René Remond, eds., *Histoire de la France religieuse*, Tome 3, *Du roi Très Chrétien à la laïcité républicaine*, volume dirigé par Philippe Joutard (Paris: Seuil, 1991); Axel Freiherr von Campenhausen, *L'Eglise et l'état en France* (Paris: Editions de l'Epi, 1964).

⁵ Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: MacMillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962); Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar. The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 42-54; Sabrina Petra Ramet, ed., *Religious policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Lumea e un mare azil. Studii despre putere*, trans. Bogdan Ghiu, Raluca Arsenie (Cluj: Idea Design&Print, 2005), 73-95.

“police”, the political and administrative power could intervene anytime in order to guide the man towards “the greatest happiness that he/she could experience in life”.⁷

Even though the 19th century is undisputedly dominated by the liberal ideology, which can hardly harmonize from a theoretical point of view with the “police” theory, many European states will practice, de facto, to a lesser or greater extent, in a more or less beneficial manner, this type of “police” on their own population.

This is not however the place to discuss in detail the causes that generated this reality. We will refer to the practical case of Eastern Europe. The societies of this region, wishing to shorten the distance from the advanced societies in Western Europe and across the Atlantic, will largely adopt the liberal ideology and the capitalist spirit but with a major correction: a special role assigned to the state seen as an instrument capable of coordinating and accelerating the development of society. To an equal extent, the enhanced role of the state in Eastern Europe is related to the national issue as well. The preservation of national identity becomes a real obsession for the peoples in Eastern Europe; this obsession manifests in many cases as a defensive attitude when facing various challenges of modernity, phenomenon which was called by some specialists “tendential modernity”.⁸

Within this context, the connections between the state and the churches, denominations sects or cults display numerous analogies specific to the “Old Regime” before 1789, i.e. the religion and the church become part of the state’s “police” system. The church organisation and religious teachings are often reinterpreted so as to serve the state, mainly as instruments of persuasion, used to stimulate the social solidarity and the development of national consciousness. From this point of view, the public presence of the church remains significant but it is controlled by the state.

Modern Romania also knew such a model of state-church relationship, understood as an instrument of strengthening the Romanian nation, which functioned till after the Second World War, when it was replaced by a Soviet-inspired model introduced as a result of entering Moscow’s sphere of influence; later, after the 1989 revolution and the fall of communism, Romania had to face new challenges belonging to the post-modern world, whose values are radically different from the communist ones or those of the Romanian 19th century.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, the purpose of the present study is to highlight the evolution of the state-church relationships in the Romania during the modern and contemporary eras, the manner in which the two institutions shared the public space, as well as the transition from a regime in which the state

⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁸ Constantin Schifirneț, “Orthodoxy, Church, State and National Identity in the Context of Tendential Modernity,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 12, issue 34 (Spring 2013): 173-208

controlled the church to a system which accepts the freedom of churches and religious pluralism.

The “founding fathers” of modern Romania and the religious issue

In 1859, the great European powers accepted the unification of two Romanian principalities, Moldova and Walachia, into one larger political entity (The Old Kingdom), later called Romania. Under the rule of Prince Al. I. Cuza, an unprecedented programme of political, social and administrative reforms was initiated and its purpose was to recover the historical delay that Romania had as compared to the advanced societies of the West.⁹ The primary interest of Cuza and his collaborators, who can truly be considered the “founding fathers” of modern Romania, will be to define, from the perspective of the modern idea of state, the role the religious factor was to play in the Romanian politics as well as the new social role of the religious institutions.

At the middle of the 19th century, the religious map of Romania was dominated (90%) by the Orthodox faith, whom the vast majority of those who considered themselves Romanians belonged to. Due to the social, political and religious system of the previous centuries, as well as other concrete historical circumstances which are not the focus of this paper, there had been no major religious changes within the historical territory of the Old Kingdom till the 19th century. Proselytism was firmly stopped but those whose faith was already well defined and who chose to settle in the Romanian space were completely free to practice their faith. For this reason, the overwhelming majority of those whose faith was other than orthodox were not Romanians, and their structures were called, till the end of the 19th century, “foreign denominations (sects)”.¹⁰

Till the middle of the 19th century, the Orthodox Church played an extremely important role in the Romanian society from a cultural, economic, social and even economic perspective, often playing the role a far too weak state. Cuza’s goal, as far as the Orthodox Church was concerned, was to transfer its economic, social and political attributions to the state, considered the only rightful representative of the national interest.¹¹

⁹ See A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, IIIrd edition, vol. XIII, *Domnia lui Cuza Vodă*, Ist part (București: Cartea Românească, 1930); A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, IIIrd edition, vol. XIV, *Domnia lui Cuza Vodă*, IInd part (București: Cartea Românească, 1930).

¹⁰ George Enache, “Problema « sectelor » în România. Din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea până în 1948,” *Analele Universității “Dunărea de Jos” din Galați, seria 19 – Istorie* VI (2007): 108-109. There are two main terms in Romanian: “cult” and “sectă”. “Cult” means “church” and “sectă” means “sect” (Weber and Troeltsch’s typology). If we follow Howard P. Becker’s church-sect typology, “cult” include “ecclesia” and “denomination”, “sectă” include “sect” and “cult”.

¹¹ George Enache, “Religie și modernitate în Vechiul Regat: dezbateri privind rolul social, politic și național al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX – lea

Concretely, through the measures adopted by Al. I. Cuza, the Orthodox Church became a state church, entirely subjected to the political authority. The church's properties, which comprised more than 25% of the country's area, were confiscated, the schools under the church's patronage were closed, the entire social assistance was overtaken by the state, the civil marriage was introduced, steps were taken to limit the number of monks and monasteries and the church hierarchy was to be established directly by the prince which contravened the Church's tradition. In exchange for the properties that had been confiscated, the state assumed the obligation to pay salaries to the priests, to build and repair churches.¹² In the following decades, the sums allotted for the needs of the Church continually decreased although the population of Romania experienced in the second half of the 19th century one of the highest growth rates in Europe.¹³

The same Al. I. Cuza is one of the initiators of the so-called "autocephaly" of the Romanian Orthodox Church, event which will happen *de facto* in 1885. The purpose of the administrative separation of the Romanian orthodoxy from the Ecumenical Patriarchy was to "nationalize" the Romanian Orthodox Church and to transform it into an instrument of preserving and promoting national identity.¹⁴

Cuza and his collaborators were influenced by the ideas travelling through Europe during the 1848 revolution. Most of all, the Romanians admired the opinions of the great professors from College de France, Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet, who supported the national emancipation movements of the Eastern-European peoples.¹⁵ They believed in the existence of a divinity that man can become aware of by means of "intuition". Along the evolution of mankind, this intuition of divinity becomes conscious and is rationalized in terms of principles and laws. The divine laws are laws of progress, liberty and emancipation, thought Michelet and Quinet. That is why, contrary to other thinkers, inclined towards atheism, the two considered the existence of religion as the very foundation of human progress. In time, the religious ideas and institutions experienced deviations from their true purpose.

și începutul veacului al XX-lea", in *Schimbare și devenire în istoria României: Lucrările conferinței internaționale „Modernizarea în România în secolele XIX-XXI”, Cluj Napoca, 21-24 mai 2007*, ed. Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane), 375-381.

¹² Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. III (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 110-118.

¹³ PS Vartolomeu Stănescu, episcopul Râmnicului – Noul Severin, *Puterile sociale ale creștinismului. Opere alese*, ed. George Enache, Cătălin Raiu (Galați : Editura Muzeului de Istorie; Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2014), 400-8.

¹⁴ Nicolae Șerbănescu, "Autocefalia bisericească, independența națională", in *Autocefalie, patriarhie, slujire sfântă* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1995), 83-99.

¹⁵ George Enache, "Religie, libertate și progres în opera Dorei d'Istria," in *Mihai Dim. Sturdza la 80 de ani. Omega*, ed. Mircea Ciubotaru, Valeriu Lucian Lefter (Iași: Editura Universității "A.I. Cuza", 2014), 713.

Quinet and Michelet were, among others, against the monasticism, which they considered “reactionary” and destructive as far as the fighting spirit for social justice was concerned and they were supporting the state’s control over the church and urged the churches to adapt their message and organisation so as to support the society’s development and progress.¹⁶

Therefore, Cuza was not an anticleric but, through his reforms, he wanted to transform the Romanian Orthodox Church into an instrument of progress. However, the excessive control imposed by Cuza transformed the church into a simply ministry, strictly controlled by the state.

In the decades that followed Al. I. Cuza’s reforms, the Orthodox Church continued to be an important symbolic presence in the public space through its presence exclusively at the public ceremonies, through the fact that the members of the foreign dynasty brought in Romania in 1866 had to be raised in the Orthodox religion, through the fact that it had to be included into an identity equation which will define the Romanian uniqueness within Europe for a long time: the only Orthodox people of Latin origin.¹⁷

The representatives of the Church protested against these dramatic changes but not radically enough to threaten the strength of the Romanian state, which was unconceivable. All changes were eventually accepted as absolutely necessary for the development of the Romanian nation. This attitude was in contrast with the situation in Bulgaria, where the conflict between the Church and the laic authorities was extremely intense. The difference of attitude is to be seen in the historical evolution of the two countries. In Bulgaria, the state authorities will adopt harsh measures against the clergy, fact which will eventually contribute to the population’s weaker and weaker religiousness.¹⁸ In Romania, due to the constant presence of the clergy within the public space, the population will consider Church and religion as natural facts, continuing to consider themselves Orthodox even if this term did not reflect a real religiousness but, in many cases, an affirmation of identity. As a matter of fact, the state was not interested in the religiousness of the people. The strict control of the public space, by means of hierarchy, along with the lack of any initiative in this area made it possible for the Orthodox Church to

¹⁶ Ibid., 713-719.

¹⁷ “Biserica Ortodoxă Română – scurtă istorie,” accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.crez.org/istorie.asp>; George Enache, “Creștinismul în opera lui Mihai Eminescu,” *Ziarul Lumina*, January 15, 2010, accessed July 13, 2013, <http://ziarullumina.ro/documentar/crestinismul-opera-lui-mihai-eminescu>. These views have been criticized by representatives of the Greek Catholic Church: Silvestru Augustin Prunduș, Clemente Plăianu, *Catholicism și Ortodoxie românească. Scurt istoric al Bisericii Române Unite*, accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.bru.ro/istorie/cat-si-ort-capitolul-3/>.

¹⁸ Claudiu Cotan, *Ortodoxia și mișcările de emancipare națională din Sud-Estul Europei în secolul al XIX-lea* (București: Editura Bizantină, 2004): 304-305.

experience at the end of the 19th century what was called at that age “the Church’s crises”.¹⁹

“The Church’s crises” defines in short the Church’s stiffening in formalism, the loss of the missionary momentum, its transformation into a mere mark of national identity. Simultaneously with this “crises of the Church”, Romania goes at the end of the 19th century through significant changes of the religious landscape. The number of immigrants of other faiths increases and, at the same time, the religious prozelytism phenomenon develops. The Catholics, especially the Evangelic groups (called “neo-protestant” in Romania), consider Romania an extremely important battle field. The dramatic social and economic transformations experienced by the Romania of that time, the increasing number of those who had access to education and the dissatisfactions related to the state in which the orthodox religion was at that moment are factors that contribute to the manner in which the message of these missionaries was perceived.²⁰ The state reacted negatively at the presence of these denominations, sects, cults considered “foreign”, treating them as threats for the national security, trying to stop the phenomenon. Within this context, there appeared some justifications of political nature. In 1907, there bursts a large rebellion of the peasantry who constituted the large majority of the population and who lived under extremely poor conditions. Some of the peasants will find in the egalitarian ideology promoted by neo-protestant groups (The Adventists, “creștini după Evanghelie” - *Plymouth Brethren*) a way to protest against the discriminations they were suffering from. That is why the state will take, immediately after the rebellion’s repression, measures to expel the neo-protestant missionaries.²¹

The new religious groups begin to organize and gain an institutional structure. However, the Romanian state refused to acknowledge them in any way, these groups enjoying the status of “tolerated” till the end of the First World War.

A process of “rebirth” of Orthodoxy takes place at the end of the 19th century as well. People belonging to the laic world as well as clerics talked about the necessity for the Orthodox Church to be more than a formal presence in the public space, demanding the authorities to allow the church to manifest freely, so as to develop its missionary and social calling/vocation. This is the starting point of the so-called “orthodoxism”, a cultural, ideological and spiritual trend with multiple facets and ways of manifestation, which can be related, to a certain extent, to the Slavophilia phenomenon in Russia. The promoters of this trend were giving a new interpretation to the connection between orthodoxy and the Romanian nation, claiming that the orthodoxy was the “soul basis” of the Romanian people and that the former would be truly lived, not only formally stated. From this

¹⁹ Spiru Haret, *Criza bisericească* (București, 1912); N. Iorga, *Tulburările bisericești și politicianismul* (Vălenii de Munte, 1911).

²⁰ Enache, “Problema «sectelor» în România. Din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea până în 1948,” 109-111.

²¹ Ibid., 111.

perspective, the state and the society had not only to grant the Church its freedom, but to contribute, by all means, to the insurance of an “authentic” orthodox education and existence. The “orthodoxism” will fully manifest after the First World War.²²

The interwar Romania: between diversity and religious nationalism

After the World War I, Romania’s borders change radically and so do the fabric of the population and its religious structure. According to the 1930 census, Romania counted around 18 million inhabitants, out of which over 13 million were Orthodox, pertaining to the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Romania, 1.5 million were Greek Catholics (Romanians), 1.2 million were Roman Catholics (most of them Magyars, but also Germans, the number of Romanians belonging to the Roman Catholic confession being around 150,000), Calvinists (most of them Magyars) were 700,000 approximately, Lutherans (Germans) counted 400,000 members, Jews 760,000 and Muslims (Turks, Tatars) were 200,000 approximately. Therefore, the new Romania was much more diverse ethnically and confessionally.²³

All declarations made by the politicians in the 1918-1920 period underlined the idea that the new Romania, the result of the First World War, was to be even more democratic and ensure for all its citizens, “no matter their race or religion”, “full equality of rights, political and religious freedom”.²⁴ In reality, things were not exactly like this. On the one hand, ethnic or religious groups, dissatisfied with their integration within the Romanian state, would complain at international bodies about the “persecutions” they were subjected to by the Romanian authorities, many of these denouncements hiding in fact their refuse to accept the authority of the Romanian state and their wish to keep a series of privileges whose elimination was labelled as “forced Romanianization”.²⁵

On the other hand, the Romanian state itself was not dominated by an authentic democratic spirit, the Romanian leaders being tempted to impose the same type of control over society that had existed before 1918. The temptation to increase the power of state and the secessionist manifestations of various minorities will create a status of tension that will prove baleful to the consolidation in a

²² Andreea Nanu, *Inventarea ortodoxiei. O istorie a identității ortodoxe în spațiul politic românesc* (Ph.D. diss., Universitatea București, 2010), accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.unibuc.ro/studies/Doctorate2010Iunie/Nanu%20Andreea%20-%20Inventarea%20ortodoxiei/REZUMAT%20TEZA%20II.pdf>.

²³ “Recensământul din 1930,” accessed July 12, 2013, http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recens%C4%83m%C3%A2ntul_din_1930.

²⁴ “Constituția României, 1923,” art. 5-8, accessed July 13, 2013, http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=1517.

²⁵ *Minoritățile naționale din România, 1918-1925* (București, 1995): 428 – 449; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare. 1918-1930* (București : Humanitas, 1998).

democratic spirit of the interwar Romanian society, fact which will become apparent in the organization of the religious life in Romania.

The principles at the basis of organizing the religious life of the Great Romania were the respect for the freedom of consciousness and an increased autonomy of the religious organizations in their relation with the state, on the basis of which a unitary working framework for all religious confessions was to be established.²⁶ At the same time, the majority of politicians kept in mind the idea of a church as a simple department of the state. The mixture of various principles is proven by the 1928 Churches Law which is far from creating a unitary organizing and working framework for all religious confessions in Romania.²⁷ As a matter of fact, the situation of the religious confessions in the interwar period is not really based on a certain vision but it is rather the consequence of some relations of power. Where the state already had the control and no international bodies had any interests, the state was tempted to perpetuate that control. The most eloquent case in point is that of the Orthodox Church which was granted at the beginning of the interwar époque a freedom that had been un hoped for before 1918, freedom which the state authorities would constantly seek to limit later on. Where the external pressures were high (in the case of the Magyar minority's churches) and the political interest was strong (the relations with the Vatican), greater freedoms were granted. Therefore, the result was a mosaic of particular situations that generated numerous dissatisfactions. This was the expression of a "weak" state which was trying to compensate the lack of authority over some religious confessions with an increased control over others not having the force (partly because of the external pressures) to impose a set of rules for all. The compromises made by the Romanian state regarding the organization of the church life are best seen in the case of the Concordat signed with the Vatican which regulated the situation of the Catholic Church in Romania.²⁸ The closing of this agreement generated a large debate at that time because they said that art. 22 from the 1923 Constitution was violated; this article stipulated that "The relations between various religious confessions and the state will be established by law". On the other hand, the 1928 Churches Law stipulated that "No church, denomination, sect can have dependency relations with any church authority or organization from abroad, except for those imposed by the dogmatic and juridical-canonical principles. The relations between the state and the Catholic Church – the only one in the country with such a dependency – will be established through a special agreement which will be subject to approval by the

²⁶ "Constituția României, 1923," art. 22, accessed July 13, 2013, http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?id=1517.

²⁷ *Biserica noastră și cultele minoritare. Marea discuție parlamentară în jurul Legii cultelor – 1928*, ed. Constantin Schifirneț (București: Albatros, 2000).

²⁸ Nechita Runcan, *Concordatul Vaticanului cu România. Considerații istorico-juridice* (Constanța: ExPonto, 2000); Valeriu Anania, *Pro Memoria. Acțiunea catolicismului în România interbelică* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1992).

Legislative Bodies”.²⁹ This special agreement was considered by the rest of the religious confessions as a privilege granted to the Catholics which discriminated against the rest of the churches in the context in which the state authorities were replying to a memorial submitted by the Baptist believers, who were dissatisfied with their status, as follows: “The Ministry of Religious Affairs has control over all churches and sects, freedom does not exclude control and the Baptists, if they are loyal citizens, must help to discipline the country and keep it safe from any dangers”.³⁰ This answer hides within itself the profound philosophy lying at the basis of the religious policy of the Romanian state during the interwar interval. This religious policy was part of the effort to unify Great Romania, which did not take into account the creation of unity in diversity, but brought forward the idea that only the Romanian nation is state creating and only a few religious cults are reliable from the state’s point of view.

Through the 1928 Churches law, the interwar Romanian state classified the religious confessions into two categories: “culte”, which enjoyed the plenitude of juridical rights and included mainly the so-called “historical churches”, with tradition within the Romanian space, and the “religious associations”, with an inferior juridical status, which comprised mainly the “new” denominations and sects, neo-Protestant and various schisms within the Orthodox Church (especially those of Russian origin).³¹ Thus, Romania obeyed the traditional European vision regarding the classification of religious movements promoted in the scientific world especially by Ernst Troelsch.³²

As far as the “historical churches” are concerned, there was a dichotomy between “Romanian” churches and the other historical churches. As a sign or acknowledgment of the new religious diversity, the Orthodox Church was no longer state church but it was given, honorarily, the title of dominant church. Along it there was the Greek Catholic Church which comprised the Romanians from Transylvania who had recognized the Pope’s authority in the 18th century.³³

The situation of the Orthodox Church was regulated by a special law in 1925. Through this law, voted by the Parliament, the politicians provided themselves with numerous levers to interfere in the life of the church. Among them, two were more important: the interference of the politicians in the election of the hierarchs and the state’s right to control in economic and administrative

²⁹ “Legea pentru regimul general al cultelor, 22 aprilie 1928,” art. 7, accessed July 12, 2013, <http://ebooks.unibuc.ro/istorie/istorie1918-1940/5-7.htm>.

³⁰ Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, *Repertoriu de dispoziții privitoare la regimul asociațiilor religioase* (București, 1934): 13.

³¹ “Legea pentru regimul general al cultelor, 22 aprilie 1928,” art. 21-24.

³² Brian Davies, *Religia din perspectivă sociologică*, trans. Dara Maria Străinu (București: Trei, 2000): 112-114.

³³ “Constituția României, 1923, art. 22,” accessed July 13, 2013, http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?id=1517.

matters; the latter will be abusively employed to remove the uncomfortable people from the church.³⁴

Adopting, out of electoral reasons, the orthodoxist discourse, more and more present in the society, the politicians would often speak about the importance of the Orthodox Church in the life of the Romanian people. From a symbolic point of view, the Orthodox Church overwhelmingly dominated the Romanian public space, fact which would generate a long-term rivalry between the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church for supremacy as far as the domination of the "Romanian soul" was concerned.³⁵ Furthermore, the other historical churches would consider themselves discriminated against and, in the context of the promotion of Romanianism by the Romanian churches, they would become factors of cultivating the nationalist feelings of the ethnic minorities in Romania (especially the Magyar churches and denominations).³⁶

As for the religious associations, in order for them to become "culte", they had to prove that they were not a danger for the state and that they did not affect the good morals, that they had a significant number of steady followers, recruited not by prozelytism, and that they had durability, not being just a sporadic manifestation. On their turn, these religious associations were classified into recognized and unrecognized. Their regime was regulated in the interwar period by decision no. 114.119/1933 and decision no. 31.999/1939.³⁷

Essentially, these decisions strengthened a number of provisions from the Churches Law, in an attempt to prevent the prozelytism phenomenon, considered a major threat to the national security. In order to be more easily controlled, these religious associations were discouraged to institutionally group into a national entity. The associations had to periodically submit a register with the members and the newly converted had to prove they had discernment and that they had converted willingly. There had to be a special place for the cult activities and the ceremonies were to take place only in that location. The preachers could activate only on the basis of a special permit. The only neo-Protestant associations legally recognized in the interwar period were the Baptists, the Adventists and the Plymouth Brethren. The Pentecostalism, which had a rapid growth among the poor rural population, would be utterly forbidden.³⁸

The end of the interwar period coincides with the growth of nationalism, expressed most often under the mask of orthodoxism, and with the lack of trust in

³⁴ George Enache, "Amestecul puterii politice în alegerea ierarhilor Bisericii Ortodoxe Române," *Arhivele totalitarismului* 1-2 (2004): 7 – 33.

³⁵ George Enache, "Biserică, societate, națiune, stat în România interbelică. I. Explorări în orizont liberal," *Revista teologică* 2(2010), accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.revista-teologica.ro/articol.php?r=30&a=3475>.

³⁶ Alin Spănu, "Serviciul Special de Informații atenționează: Revizionism maghiar sub cupola bisericii (1941)," *ANGVSTIA* 10 (2006): 163-170.

³⁷ Dorin Dobrinu, "Religie și putere în România. Politica statului față de confesiunile (neo) protestante, 1919-1944," *Studia Politica* vol. 7, no. 3 (2007): 589.

³⁸ Ibid.

the democratic political system. Starting with 1938 a number of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes are established in Romania and this will culminate with the establishment of communism. The regime of King Carol II, the legionary state and the regime of Marshal Antonescu will develop the ideology of fusion between the Romanian people, state and orthodoxy, fact which was expressed in the definition: “unitary state and unique church”.³⁹

The Law Decree 927/1942, which was issued during Antonescu’s administration, forbade the shift from one denomination to another and the members of the forbidden religious associations were forced to embrace the Orthodoxy so as not to be deported. On November 8th, 1943 the “Law-decree for the interdiction of any activity of various sects in the country” was issued. The purpose of this measure is clearly shown by the resolution given by Antonescu to this bill: “The dissolution of the “secte” aims at forcing the shift to the originary church”. The Orthodox priests also were obliged to participate in this action, being often forced by the gendarmes to “convert” the “sectarians”. Moreover, the state, dissatisfied with the quality of the religious life within the Orthodox Church, will initiate a series of measures to “purify” it.⁴⁰

All this time, the Romanian Jews experienced the most difficult period of their history. Separated from the rest of society by the use of criteria such as “race” and “religion” they will suffer numerous discriminations, will be sent to ghettos and a significant part of the Romanian Jews became victims of the Holocaust (especially those deported to Transnistria).⁴¹ By a decision of Antonescu’s administration, the Christians of Jewish origin were included in the category of Jews and suffered the same harshness as those of Jewish faith. Moreover, the Jew’s baptism was strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, representatives of the religious confessions (especially those of the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches) defended the Jews that had already been converted and supported the Jews’ right to baptize to Christianity in front of Marshal Antonescu.⁴²

The communist period

In August 1944, Romania leaves the alliance with the Nazi Germany and joins the Allies. The instauration of religious freedom, severely affected during the war years, was one of commitments taken by the new government in Bucharest. All religions are recognized and invited to participate to the new democratic life of

³⁹ Ibid., 595-601; Costel Coajă, *Relația stat-biserică în perioada 1938-1948. Cazul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* (Iași: Princeps Edit, 2007): 13-94.

⁴⁰ Viorel Achim, ed., *Politica regimului Antonescu față de cultele neoprotestante. Documente* (Iași: Polirom, 2013).

⁴¹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria* (București: Du Style, 1998).

⁴² Florin Stan, *Situația evreilor din România între anii 1940-1944* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2012), 325-355.

the country. Unfortunately for Romania, in the years to come, “democracy” meant the “popular democracy” inspired by the Soviet Union.⁴³

The Romanian communists, massively supported by the Soviet authorities, acted rapidly and with great determination in order to take over the complete power over the state and to establish a regime similar to that in the Soviet Union. The legend they wished to promote in the public space was that the power takeover happened legally, with the full consent of the people.

The resort to the people is a frequent topic in the communist discourse, even when reference is made to the religions. The communist leaders declared that, although atheists, they understood the vitality of the religious faith in Romania and that they respected it. Moreover, they promised that the authorities would financially support the religions, according to tradition, and this happened during the entire communist regime in Romania, being a rare case in the communist world.⁴⁴ The condition for funding was though total loyalty towards the communist Romanian state. After the establishment of the popular republic in 1948, all churches, denominations and sects had, through their representatives, to take a pledge in front of the new authorities.⁴⁵

Behind the pretext that, in the past, the religious organizations had been corrupted by co-existing with the political factor, the communists moved to a vast programme of restructuring the religions. It was stated that in the end the religions in Romania would become “purer” and would be finally able to express their true teaching. One of the supporting arguments was always the “people”, which wants the change and no longer follows the religious leaders, who betrayed the interests of the ordinary man.⁴⁶

The regime of the religions in Romania was regulated by the Law decree 177 on August 4th, 1948. This decree introduces for the first time in Romania the idea of the completely laic nature of the public space and proclaims the total freedom of consciousness. People had the liberty to believe and the liberty not to

⁴³ Vladimir Gsovski, ed., *Church and State behind the Iron Curtain. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, with an introduction on the Soviet Union* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1955), 253-300; *Biserica Română Unită – 250 de ani de istorie* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa de Editură Viața Creștină, 1998); Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist* (București: Curtea Veche, 2003); George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană* (București: Nemira, 2005); Adrian Nicolae Petcu, ed., *Partidul, Securitatea și Cultele, 1945 – 1989* (București: Nemira, 2005); Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu comunist* (București: Curtea Veche, 2005); Vasilică Croitor, *Răscumpărarea memoriei. Cultul pentecostal în perioada comunistă* (Succedd Publishing, 2010).

⁴⁴ “O diversiune: despărțirea bisericii de stat,” *Universul*, no. 264, November, 16, 1946, 1.

⁴⁵ George Enache, “Depunerea jurământului față de statul democrat popular de către cultele religioase din România în anul 1948,” *Analele Universității “Dunărea de Jos” Galați, fascicula 19 – Istorie VII* (2008): 183-196.

⁴⁶ Stanciu Stoian, *Culte religioase în Republica Populară Română* (București, 1949): 7-53.

believe and religion was taken out of schools. The distinction between “historical churches” and “religious associations” was eliminated, all religions being placed on the same level.⁴⁷

The communist regime considered the new law a new beginning and asked every religious organization to request for a new recognition from the state. This meant they had to submit a statute of organization and function as well as a brief profession of faith which had to be approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The new regime encouraged (actually forced) every religious movement to have a unitary institutional organization, as centralized as possible, fact which will later prove a favouring factor in the state controlling the religions’ life.⁴⁸

Through excessive measures, the communist regime included the majority of the church properties in the property of the state, accomplishing for the first time a complete secularization. This did not mean though the separation of the church from the state. Part of the churches’ maintenance expenses and the salaries of the clergy still was to be paid by the state, which had the right to control the way the money was spent. The contributions of the believers were limited, probably due to the fact that resorting to the believers would have stimulated a stronger relation between the clergy and the believers.

If religion had nothing to do with the social space, the clergy could come into the public space, as citizens, to take part in the political life. There were priests members of the Great National Assembly (The communist parliament) and of various communist organizations.⁴⁹ It was another way of keeping the illusion for the believing people that the church still played a role in the public space.

One of the major concerns of the 1948 Law was to limit the religions’ connections with the exterior, more than in the case of the 1928 Law. Any contact with the exterior had to be approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the religious authorities abroad could not, under any circumstances, have any influence upon the life of the believers from Romania.⁵⁰

Therefore, the 1948 Law created an efficient system of control over the religions, completely separated religion from the social space but left the impression that the churches are entities accepted in the public space while the

⁴⁷ George Enache, “Decretul 177 din 4 august 1948 și consecințele acestuia pentru viața religioasă din România. Privire comparativă,” *Analele Universității “Dunărea de Jos” Galați, fascicula 19 – Istorie XII* (2013): 131-149.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Legea Nr. 560 privitor la alegerile pentru Adunarea Deputaților,” accessed July 27, 2013, http://fp.kross.ro/pdf/le_1946.pdf; “Constituția Republicii Populare Române, Titlul IV,” accessed July 27, 2013, <http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/act/constitutia-republicii-populare-romane-emitent-marea-adunare-nationala-publicat-n-monitorul-oficial-nr-87-bis-din-13-14931.html>; “Constituția Republicii Socialiste România, 1965,” art. 4, 17, 25, 44, accessed July 27, 2013, <http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/constitutie/constitutia-republicii-socialiste-romania-1965.php>; “Decret nr. 391 din 26 septembrie 1953 privind alegerea deputaților în sfaturile populare,” art. 11, accessed July 27, 2013, http://fp.kross.ro/pdf/le_1953.pdf.

⁵⁰ Enache, “Decretul 177 din 4 august 1948,” 131-149.

freedom of expression was respected. In reality, it was building an illusion because through administrative mechanisms and systematic repressive actions the communist state aimed at transforming the religions in mere decorative elements.

As far as the individuals were concerned, the focus was on the persons who were considered extremely religious, especially those who acted as formal or informal leaders because they were able to influence the community. This kind of persons were marginalized, compromised or arrested and sent to prison, on account of penal reasons. There are tens of thousands of people who ended up in prison under various pretexts, the real reason being in fact their religious convictions.⁵¹

At the same time, the communist authorities, through the political police (The Securitate), tried to infiltrate the religious organizations by creating a vast network of informants as well as by imposing within the management bodies some persons faithful to the system who would guarantee the loyalty of those particular cults towards the communist state.⁵² The communists constantly tried to leave the impression that they do not openly interfere with the life of the religious organizations, trying to act in an occult manner, but, when the interest asked for it, they shifted to open repressive actions. The best known case is that of the Greek Catholic Church. Thinking that this church was too closely connected to the Peasants National Party, the most important party opposing the communist power, the Romanian communist leaders inspired themselves from the example given by Stalin, who dissolved the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and in 1948 they organized the dissolution of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church.⁵³ The bishops and a large part of the clergy were arrested and the believers were forced to join the Orthodox Church (many opposed and were repressed). Moreover, in the context of Stalin started an ample propagandistic (and not only) action against the Vatican, the Romanian authorities shift to the systematic persecution of Roman Catholic priests and bishops, seeking to create an institutional structure by means of which to cut off the Romanian Roman Catholics from the Pope.⁵⁴ Another example that

⁵¹ Vasile Manea, Cicerone Ionițoiu, *Martiri și mărturisitori ai bisericii din România (1948-1989)*. Biserica ortodoxă, vol. I, ediția a II-a (Cluj-Napoca: Patmos, 1998), accessed July 27, 2013, <http://www.procesulcomunismului.com/marturii/fonduri/ioanitoiu/ortodoxa/>; Ioan Bota, Cicerone Ionițoiu, *Martiri și mărturisitori ai bisericii din România (1948-1989)*. Biserica Română Unită cu Roma, Greco-Catolică. Biserica Romano-Catolică, vol. II, ediția a II-a (Cluj-Napoca: Patmos, 1998), accessed July 27, 2013, <http://www.procesulcomunismului.com/marturii/fonduri/ioanitoiu/bisericii/>.

⁵² George Enache, "Misiunile Securității în problema «Culte» la începuturile regimului comunist," *Analele Universității "Dunărea de Jos" Galați, fascicula 19 – Istorie VIII* (2009): 167-192.

⁵³ Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-catolice sub regimul comunist – 1945 – 1989. Documente și mărturii* (Iași: Polirom, 2003); Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist*.

⁵⁴ Cristian Vasile, "Procesul mons. Vladimir Ghica (24 octombrie 1953 – 15 iunie 1954)," *Pro Memoria* 3 (2004): 142-163; Raluca Vasilescu, "Arbitrariul justiției comuniste: cazul Episcopului dr. Ioan Scheffler," in *C.N.S.A.S., Studii, 1, Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare*

can be invoked here is the 410 decree in 1959 through which the communist leaders sought to destroy the orthodox monasticism, considered a threat to the regime due to the large number of monks and their great influence among the believers.⁵⁵

Besides these strategies there is also the atheist propaganda and the actions against religious faith. Unlike other communist states, the Romanian anti-religious propaganda did not take the hideous forms of destruction and systematic desacralisation of the churches or humiliation of the priests. People were encouraged to give up religion and not go to religious gatherings, and the promotion of religion in the public space was forbidden. In spite of all these, people were not stopped from entering the churches and participating in religious ceremonies, as long as these ceremonies took place within the space of the church. For this reason, throughout the entire communist period, most of the Romanian population got baptised and wedded religiously, the situation being, from this point of view, completely different from that in the Soviet Union. Moreover, certain public religious ceremonies, where religious symbols were present, were tolerated, such as: Easter and Christmas holidays, church consecrations, funerary processions. In Romania, there were certain situations that were otherwise unconceivable in other communist countries. Thus, Petru Groza, Prime-minister for many years, was buried with religious ceremony⁵⁶ and the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu had to accept the will of his father who asked to be buried with religious sermon, performed by several priests.⁵⁷ This suggests that the Romanian communist leaders were not preoccupied to systematically and ever faster destroy faith and the churches, as it was the case in Albania⁵⁸, but were satisfied with

și represiune în România comunistă (București, 2001), 137-145; Dănuț Doboș, ed., *Biserica Romano-Catolică din România în perioada persecuției comuniste (1948-1989)* (Iași: Sapiența, 2008); William Totok, *Episcopul, Hitler și Securitatea. Procesul stalinist împotriva „spionilor Vaticanului” din România* (Iași: Polirom, 2008).

⁵⁵ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Monahismul ortodox și puterea comunistă în România anilor '50* (Galați: Partener, 2009).

⁵⁶ Dan Ciachir, “Înmormântarea lui Petru Groza. O colivă purtată de milițieni,” *Ziua*, March 18, 2008, accessed July 13, 2013, <http://sfvasile.blogspot.ro/2008/03/inmormantarea-lui-petru-groza.html>.

⁵⁷ Ionuț Cristian Ungureanu, “Paștele în Epoca de Aur: enoriașii se duceau pe furiș la biserică, în timp ce familia Ceaușescu respecta cu rigoare tradițiile,” accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.frontpress.ro/2012/04/pastele-in-epoca-de-aur-enoriasii-se-duceau-pe-furis-la-biserica-in-timp-ce-familia-ceausescu-respecta-cu-rigoare-traditiile.html>; Lavinia Betea, “Pasiunile lui Nea Andruța Ceaușescu, pământul și băutura,” *Jurnalul Național*, May 3, 2011, accessed July 13, 2013, <http://jurnalul.ro/special-jurnalul/pasiunile-lui-nea-andruta-ceausescu-pamantul-si-bautura-576857.html>.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Pano, “The Albanian Orthodox Church,” in *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-91*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), Kindle edition.

having strict control over the churches and with manipulating them for various political interests.

After the first communist decade, period during which the churches suffered ample repressions, there came a period of relative calmness. The communist leaders saw the churches as instruments of promoting national values (the national-communism age was beginning) and the foreign interests of the Romanian state. Trying to tighten the connections with the West, the Romanian communist leaders seek to normalize the relations with the Vatican⁵⁹, accept the enlisting of the churches from Romania in the World Council of Churches⁶⁰ and support (at least at a declarative level) the existence of religious freedom in Romania. In exchange of a tolerant attitude, the representatives of churches are asked to present abroad a positive image of the regime.⁶¹

This extremely fragile balance collapses after 1975, in the context of signing the Helsinki agreement and of the growth in importance of the issue of human right in international relations. The western world pays more attention to the realities in the communist Romania, trying to also listen to other voices than those sent by the party. In this context, more and more voices start to denounce the excessive control of the state over the churches and ask for authentic religious freedom. Thus, Iosif Țon, Silvian Cioată, Pavel Nicolescu, Aurelian Popescu, Constantin Caraman and Radu Dumitrescu write a statement entitled *The neo-protestant denominations and the issue of human rights in Romania*, which was broadcast by Free Europe Radio on April 3rd, 1977. The document denounced the hypocrisy of the authorities and the control and repression mechanisms that were exerted upon the believers.⁶² Another important character at that time is the orthodox priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, former political convict in the 1948-1964 period, who, in 1978, in a series of public speeches, demanded that the young could be catechized.⁶³ The reaction of the communist authorities was extremely harsh and the control over the churches strengthened. The leaders of the churches were forced to new declarations of loyalty and the contact with the exterior were strictly monitored.

⁵⁹ Ovidiu Bozgan, *Cronica unui eșec previzibil. România și Sfântul Scaun în epoca pontificatului lui Paul al VI-lea (1963-1978)* (București: Curtea Veche, 2004).

⁶⁰ "World Council of Churches – History," accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/wcc-history>.

⁶¹ Adrian Nicolae Petcu, "Activitatea Departamentului Cultelor în atenția Securității (1970-1989)," *Caietele CNSAS* an II, nr. 2 (4) (2009): 69-120.

⁶² Dorin Dobrinu, "«Culte neoprotestante și drepturile omului în România». Un memoriu din 1977," *Archiva Moldaviae* 4 (2012): 351-402.

⁶³ Michael Bourdeaux, "Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa - Fearless Romanian cleric defiant in the face of oppression," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2007, accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/jan/10/guardianobituaries.religion>; Fr. George Calciu, *Christ is calling you. A course in catacomb pastorship* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina/California, 1997).

The last part of Ceaușescu's regime was dominated by the disputes with the United States. Ceaușescu wanted to maintain the clause of the most favoured nation but more and more political leaders from the United States expressed their reserves regarding the situation of human rights in Romania, especially those related to religious freedom. In order to counterattack these attitudes, the Romanian government organizes a visit of Pastor Billy Graham, who delivers a series of biblical conferences in front of a large number of people. The visit, controlled to the smallest detail by the political police, was doubled by some speeches of the religious leaders who, on the authorities' "recommendation", emphasised the existence of religious freedom in Romania.⁶⁴ Eventually, the whole action was pointless because Ceaușescu gave up the clause willingly, closing Romania to any external influence. Fearing an instigation to an anti-communist rebellion through the churches, Ceaușescu and the Securitate subjected the churches to a suffocating control in the 1988-1989 period.⁶⁵ For this reason, the revolution in December 1989 meant the finding of freedom for the religions as well.

Development of a true religious pluralism, after 1989⁶⁶

Georges Sorel is the author who introduces the "revolutionary catastrophe" theory, by which he understands a radical change, by means of violence, of certain realities otherwise difficult to change.⁶⁷ The communist regime produced this kind of "catastrophes" which dramatically changed social or ethnic realities which, under other circumstances, would have been impossible to change. But, on its turn, communism, through its excesses, was itself the victim of a "catastrophe", fact expressed by the radical manner in which it was rejected by the Eastern European societies that got out of communism.

⁶⁴ Denisa Bodeanu, Valentin Vasile, eds., *Afacerea Evanghelistul*. *Vizita lui Billy Graham în România (1985)* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2010).

⁶⁵ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, Paul Brusanowski, Ionuț Tudorie, "Biserica Ortodoxă Română în anii regimului comunist. Observații pe marginea capitolului dedicat cultelor din Raportul final al Comisiei prezidențiale pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România," *Studii teologice*, seria a III-a, year V, nr. 2 (April-June 2009): 7-104.

⁶⁶ About religious life in Romania after 1989 see Ion Bria, *Ortodoxia în România. Locul spiritualității române* (Iași: Trinitas, 1995); Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România postcomunistă. Reconstrucția unei identități publice*, vol. I-II (Cluj Napoca: Eikon, 2009); Radu Preda, *Biserica în stat: o invitație la dezbateri* (Cluj-Napoca: Scripta, 1999); Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat. Religion, Politics and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, *Church, State and Democracy in Expanding Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁷ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings, *Cambridge Texts of the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

In modern Romania, the state's role was overwhelming for the society. Communism managed to make this status questionable and the civil society started to appear in Romania too, a country deprived of such a thing for a long time. Likewise, the communist initiatives in various fields were also questioned.

Religiously speaking, these perceptions had important consequences. The 1948 Churches Law was kept but the state withdrew unprecedently from the life of the churches, which gained a large freedom of manifestation. Only the rights of the churches were preserved and applied from the law and the churches kept receiving state funding, the sums constantly growing as compensation for the limitations during the years of communism.

In spite of the fact that the churches in Romania did not manifest as forces of anti-communist resistance, as was the case with Poland, most of the population placed religion and communism in a relation of antinomy. The relatively important presence of the churches in the public space in the communist period, as compared to other states, maintained a high level of religiousness among the population, of which only a tiny fraction declared atheist. For Romanians, the more pronounced presence of the churches in the public space could not have been more natural. Two were the motivations lying at the basis of this attitude shared by the large majority of the population: considering religion as a positive element of society and fixing the injustices done by the communist regime. One of the measures taken immediately after the revolution and which enjoyed at the time a large support was the introduction of religious education in the public schools.⁶⁸

Having the population's support and the state's good will, the churches started reconquering the public space, but this fact generated a lot of unrest. First of all, it was felt that the disappearance of communism must be marked by a comeback to the realities before 1948. Thus, the Orthodox Church continued to state that it is a "national church" and that it deserves a dominant position, claiming an exclusive ecclesiastic space. The Greek Catholic Church, legal again, counted in the first years after the revolution, as a result of the catastrophe that it suffered, only a tenth of the number of believers before 1948. It claimed "restitutio in integrum", by this meaning to go back to the realities of the interwar period, both in terms of believers, and in terms of patrimony. Due to this, a long-term conflict started between the orthodox and the greek catholics based on the fact that the communist regime gave the Greek Catholic places of worship to the Orthodox Church. The orthodox pretended that the churches belong to the believers and since they chose to remain orthodox, then the churches must remain in the property of the Orthodox Church. The Greco-Catholics claimed that the places of worship were the property of the ecclesiastic institution taken as a whole, and did not belong to

⁶⁸ Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, "Religious education in Romania," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 38- 401.

the believers, therefore, they had to be retroceded. A solution to these frictions was sought in the court of law, through long and cumbersome trials.⁶⁹

The Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church maintained the mentality of “historical church”, from the interwar period, trying to preserve a certain status, to have amiable relations with the state and to look reluctantly upon prozelytism, preferring the idea of amiable vicinity with the other churches.⁷⁰ The historical churches of the Magyar and German minorities adhered to these values as well, adding an active involvement in the process of affirmation of the two ethnic groups, after the age of national communism when their rights were limited.

The neo-protestant churches, older or recently arrived in Romania, situated in opposition to these “historical” churches. Although persecuted, the number of neo-protestants grew very much during the years of the communist regime. People were attracted by the dynamism of these denominations, by their missionary activity, by their more fastidious religiousness.⁷¹ Thus, former Greek Catholics moved to neo-protestant cults when they refused to move to orthodoxy, in the context of forbidding the Greek Catholic Church, or numerous more rigorous orthodox groups in terms of religiousness, dissatisfied with the laxity of the official Orthodox Church. Especially towards the end of the communist regime, for many Romanians converting to a neo-protestant cult meant an extra opportunity to get support from the West in order to leave the prison that Romanian had become.

These churches came along with their missionary dynamism, called prozelytism by the “historical” churches, speaking against churches being funded by the state and against any administrative barriers against the missionary activities. They were in favour of an open market in the religious field, the suggested model being the American one.⁷²

Besides the inter-confessional conflicts, a new problem appeared: the religious influence that the churches in Romania exert upon a young democracy which tries to grow up after decades of totalitarianism. The development of nationalist feelings in Eastern Europe and the increase of the religiously-motivated conflicts made the “religion and democracy” topic became a major one in the international academic world of the early '90s.

In the Romanian case, the situation was multifaceted. Firstly, there was the collaborationism of some representatives of the churches with the former

⁶⁹ “Disputa patrimonială dintre Biserica Greco-Catolică și Biserica Ortodoxă Română,” accessed July 27, 2013, http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disputa_patrimonial%C4%83_dintre_Biserica_GrecoCatolic%C4%83_%C8%99i_Biserica_Ortodox%C4%83_Rom%C3%A2n%C4%83.

⁷⁰ Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România poscomunistă*, I, 370-382.

⁷¹ Elis Neagore-Pleșa, Liviu Pleșa, “Culte neoprotestante din România în perioada 1975-1989,” in *Partidul, Securitatea și Cultele. 1945-1989*, ed. Adrian Nicolae Petcu (București, Nemira, 2005), 350-394.

⁷² In particular the Baptist Church and the Adventist Church; APADOR-CH, *Stat și religii în România* (București, 2008), 23-25, accessed July 27, 2013; http://www.apador.org/publicatii/raport_stat_religii.pdf.

communist regime.⁷³ The absence of a public confession and the clear expression of regret for the compromises during the communist years generated a vivid debate regarding the necessity to “take communism out” of the churches in Romania, by removing the compromised leaders from the positions they held. The debate on this topic offered the opportunity to see who and how can interfere in the life of the churches, to what extent the state authorities or the public opinion can determine a change within a church or whether only the representatives of that church are entitled to make decisions in matters referring to them. Eventually, The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, the institution that took under administration the archives of the former communist political police, started to make public data from the archive regarding the relations of various representatives of the churches with the communist regime. Initially, it was this council that passed the verdict of collaborating or non-collaborating with the Securitate; starting with 2007 this has been done by a court of law.⁷⁴ Establishing the quality of being a collaborator with the Securitate has only a moral dimension, without administrative consequences. The problem of the relations between the representatives of the churches and the Securitate reached a peak in 2006-2009; from then on the interest in this topic grew smaller and smaller.

A second aspect of the debate about “religion and democracy” refers to the institutional organization of the churches and even their doctrine, whether these aspects are compatible with the democratic values or not. The topic is not new, but it goes back as far as the 19th century, when the Catholic Church was regarded as essentially anti-democratic, a supporter of the Old Regime. Such a topic is extremely provocative but also extremely delicate as there is a lot of room for hasty generalizations and exaggerations. In 1997, a Belgian, Olivier Gillet, published a book entitled *Religion et nationalisme: L'idéologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le régime communiste*.⁷⁵ The Romanian edition generated a vivid emotion within the public opinion through the author's blunt statements regarding the anti-democratic vocation of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The intense and amplified debates that followed, with pros and cons, were helpful in overcoming the nostalgic views upon the position of the church in the society and a more determined move was made towards connecting the churches in Romanian to the reality of the contemporary world.

⁷³ Radu Preda, *Semnele vremii. Lecturi social-teologice* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2008), 59-74; Radu Preda, *Comunismul, o modernitate eşuată* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2009): 197-260; Carmen Chivu-Duță, *Culte din Romania între prigonire și colaborare* (Iași, Polirom, 2007).

⁷⁴ “Curtea Constituțională: Legea CNSAS este neconstituțională,” accessed July 27, 2013, <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/curtea-constititionala-legea-cnsas-este-neconstititionala-video-protv-2358154>.

⁷⁵ Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme: L'idéologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Bruxelles, Editions de l'ULB, 1997).

In 1999 Pope John Paul II visited Romania, the first visit of the leader of the Catholic Church to a predominantly orthodox country.⁷⁶ The meeting that took place marked the beginning of a relief of the tensions between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Romania. Then, Romania's wish to join NATO and the European Union contributed to the strengthening of the collaboration relations between the religious cults and the rethinking of the Romanian religious space in a European key. All churches in Romania supported Romania's path to Europe and firmly expressed their support for the democratic values.⁷⁷ In 2007, in Sibiu, the Third European Ecumenical Assembly took place, and during discussions between the churches in Romania they used more and more often the idea of "religious pluralism", which was considered a fundamental principle of the contemporary world.⁷⁸

In 2006, a new law was adopted which was meant to regulate the activity of the churches in Romania (Law 489).⁷⁹ The law represents a compromise between tradition and the new European realities:

- Law 489 guarantees the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, states that no one shall be prevented from adopting a religious opinion or joining a religious faith.
- There is no national church. All religions are equal.
- The law does not explicitly mention the principle of the separation between church and state, on the ground that the state neutrality in relation with any religion or ideology was already stated in art. 9 of the law.
- The law established a model of partnership between the state and the church. The recognized denominations are public utility legal entities, and as such, they are entitled to financial support from the state, proportionally with their membership.
- The law distinguishes between "culte" (churches, denominations) and religious associations. Anyone can found a religious association. In order to be legally recognized as "cult", religious associations must prove that they have functioned for at least 12 years in Romania and their membership amounts to at least 0.1 % of the population (German model).

The law paved the way for the establishment of true religious pluralism⁸⁰ although it received criticism from some representatives of churches or religious

⁷⁶ Bogdan-Aurel Teleanu, "Cronica vizitei papale în România," *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, year IX, nr. 226-227 (June 1999): 6.

⁷⁷ Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România postcomunistă*, I, 453-475.

⁷⁸ Cătălin Grumeza, "Pluralismul religios, o încercare de a-l înțelege pe celălalt," *Ziarul Lumina*, September, 20, 2011, <http://ziarullumina.ro/societatea-perspectiva-crestina/pluralismul-religios-o-incercare-de-l-intelege-pe-celalalt>.

⁷⁹ "Legea 489 2006 privind libertatea religioasă și regimul general al cultelor, publicata în Monitorul Oficial nr. 11 din 8.1.2007," accessed July 27, 2013, <http://legeaz.net/legea-cultelor-489-2006/>.

associations⁸¹, and representatives from civil society, the most vehement as representatives of secular associations.

These groups, small at first, became increasingly present and influential. They believe that religion and church are excessively present in the public space. These groups, at first small, have become more and more present and influential. Essentially, they claim that religion should be taken out of public schools (the laicization of the public educational system), the state funding for churches should be withdrawn and the money should be used for other social projects.⁸² The influence of these associations has grown fuelled by the ever intense discussions regarding the informal relations between the leaders of the churches and the political forces and by the use of the financial resources for other purposes than charitable actions. This is also seen in the significant decrease of the population's trust in the most important church in Romania, the Orthodox Church, from 80% to approximately 60% trust.⁸³ For the time being, it looks less like a process of secularization of society, of faith decrease, and more like an anti-clerical feeling.

In this context, in November 2014, the Constitutional Court of Romania, following the requests filled by representatives of the secular associations, gave a new interpretation to the manner in which religion is studied in school. According to the law, religion used to be an optional subject, but all pupils were enlisted by default, and those who did not wish to study religion filled a request to be

⁸⁰ "Legea cultelor, salutată de Institutul INTER," accessed July 27, 2013, <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/misiune-ortodoxa/conversations/messages/46>.

⁸¹ Dorin Dobrinu, "Legea cultelor: text, subtext si context," 22, January, 19, 2007, accessed July 27, 2013, <http://www.revista22.ro/legea-cultelor-text-subtext-si-context-3392.html>; Natalia Vlas, "«Who Could Challenge Democracy?» The Law on Religious Freedom – An Expression of Romanian Democracy?," accessed July 27, 2013, http://euroacademia.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Natalia_Vlas_Who_Could_Challenge_Democracy_The_Law_on_Religious_Freedom-An_Expression_of_Romanian_Democracy.pdf; APADOR-CH, *Stat și religii în România*.

⁸² "CNCI Decision 323/2006," accessed July 27, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNCI_Ddecision_323/2006; Smaranda Enache, ed., *Promovarea interesului superior al copilului în educația religioasă. Monitorizarea educației religioase în școlile publice din România* (Târgu-Mureș: Pro Europa, 2007); Ovidiu Pecican, "Stat și biserică în România postcomunistă," 22, June 18, 2008, accessed July 27, 2013, <http://www.revista22.ro/stat-si-biserica-in-romania-postcomunista-4634.html>; Emil Moise, "Relația Stat-Biserică în privința educației religioase în școlile publice din România," *JSRI* 7 (Spring 2004), accessed July 27, 2013, http://www.jsri.ro/old/html%20version/index/no_7/emilmoise-articol.htm; "Asociația Secular – Umanistă din România," accessed September 17, 2014, <http://www.asur.ro/>.

⁸³ "Grupul român pentru studiul valorilor sociale, Valorile românilor – Newsletter no. 5 iulie 2009," accessed July 27, 2013, http://www.iccv.ro/valori/newsletter/NLVR_NO_5.pdf; Marcel Răduț, "Scade încrederea în Biserică - realități din umbra unui sondaj," *Adevărul*, October 23, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014, http://adevarul.ro/news/politica/scade-increderea-biserica-realitati-umbra-unuisondaj_1_5448a6930d133766a82a50f3/index.html#.

withdrawn. The court decided that this is unconstitutional and established that those who wish to study religion should file a request to the school authorities.⁸⁴ The fact was perceived by the supporters of religion study as a first step in the removal of religion from public schools.

Conclusions

- In the modern period the Romanian state tried to use the religious organizations in order to reach certain political objectives. The state's intervention blocked the development of religious pluralism for a long time.

- The state's control over the religious organizations did not lead to a decrease of the religious feeling. The present population of Romania still has one of the highest levels of religiousness in Europe. Religiousness has transformed, experimenting new ways of expression.

- In the modern era, the public space was dominated by state and church. The civil society appears later. The civil society plays a significant role in Romania after 1989, as a result of the "catastrophe" of the totalitarian state. The presence of the civil society favoured the development of religious pluralism. Nowadays, the state is neutral in matters of religion.

- There have been few "catastrophes" in the area of religious life to lead to significant changes of the religions map, unlike other areas in Europe. One of the major "catastrophes" is the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948, which, after being re-legalized, comprises only a small percentage of the old believers. Other "catastrophes" that we could mention are the exodus of Jews and Germans, fact which made the percentage of Lutherans and Mosaic Jews significantly lower.

- In general, the relations among the religions in Romania have been based on tolerance and respect. Conflicts appeared when religion mixed with political interests. Since Romania joined the European Union the inter-confessional relations have become better and better, being based on respecting the democratic values.

- After 1989, the presence of the churches in the Romanian public space has considerably grown, as a reaction to the persecutions during the communist period. At present, a part of the Romanian society is in favour of a new secularization.

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⁸⁴ "Religia nu e obligatorie în școli: Povestea omului care a învins sistemul și a înfuriat Biserica," accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.ziare.com/social/religie/religia-nu-e-obligatorie-in-scoli-povestea-omului-care-a-invins-sistemul-si-a-infuriat-biserica-1333221>.

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