Church, State and Nation. Historical Images and Historiography*

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Abstract: ***Church, State and Nation. Historical Images and Historiography.*** This study aims to present the images of the church in relation to the state and to the concept of nation, as they were rooted in the Romanian historical consciousness following the historiographical debate, but also the propagation of the identity discourse of the churches and the contribution of the ideas formulated by philosophers of culture. The beginnings of the relations between church and state coincide with the birth of the state itself, and nationalism of modern and contemporary epochs has decisively marked the dynamics of this relationship, influencing both the self-image of the church and the general view on its role in politics and society.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, Greek-Catholicism, nationalism, Byzantine tradition, communism, religiosity

Rezumat: ***Biserică, stat şi naţiune. Imagini istorice şi istoriografice.*** Acest studiu îşi propune prezentarea imaginii bisericii în raport cu statul şi cu conceptul de naţiune, aşa cum s-au înrădăcinat ele în conştiinţa istorică românească în urma dezbaterii istoriografice, dar şi a propagării discursului identitar al bisericilor şi a contribuţiei ideilor formulate de filosofi ai culturii. Începuturile raporturilor dintre biserică şi stat coincid cu naşterea statului însuşi, iar naţionalismul epocii moderne şi contemporane a marcat în mod decisiv dinamica acestei relaţii, influenţând atât imaginea de sine a bisericii, cât şi viziunea generală asupra rolului ei în politică şi societate.

Cuvinte-cheie: ortodoxie, greco-catolicism, naţionalism, tradiţie bizantină, comunism, religiozitate

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The belief in a transcendent force that governs the people's lives is one of the essential archetypal structures of human existence, its various implications representing the object of study for many socio-humanistic sciences. History places religiosity in time and space, recording and interpreting its material traces, its written and emblematic vestiges, in an attempt to decipher their meanings within the development of human society.

Within the large spectrum of historical subjects, the imaginary has long gained an important place. However, apart from its role in scrutinising mental constructions (be them political ideologies, or even the myth of longevity), historical writing is fated to elaborate its own images of the past. Nonetheless, such records seek to be based on tangible, critically interpreted sources in order to paint a picture of the past as close to reality as possible, in spite of it being inevitably subjected to the author's lenses.

In the present article, a series of images regarding religion and church, identifiable in historical writings and consciousness, will be presented in the manner they are understood in the Romanian culture. The subject has been at the forefront of Romanian historiography since its beginnings, the religious life and the institution built to shelter it being perceived as basic elements of social life. Any synthesis of Romanian history includes references to church history, without which the genesis reconstruction of the Romanian people and its political-cultural evolution would remain incomplete.

Like many other aspects of history, religious life has often been passed through the mystifying filter of *nationalist ideology*.[1] The Latin origins of Christianity, the prestige of the apostolic symbols, the continuity, the note of originality born from the blend of Latin beginnings and Byzantine ritual – all these turned into the founding stones of the national identity edifice. The "Romanian rule" of medieval documents became a "national" religion, orthodoxy claiming its place among the basic features of the Romanian character. However, historical records underline the role of the Greek-Catholic clergy in the sedimentation of national consciousness, their participation in the construction of discourses on identity being considered, in the beginning, more active than that of the Orthodox clergy. The Romanian Orthodox Church has fully embraced the historically focused discourse, contributing to the completion of the pantheon of national heroes by glorifying personalities whose outstanding political deeds have been

[1] Lucian Boia, *Istorie şi mit în conştiința românească* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2011).

complemented by important acts of charity in the benefit of the church.[2] By embracing the issue of nationality, the churches have adapted to the new form of social cohesion that, at the beginning of the 19th century, exceeded in strength and intensity the old practices of religious solidarity.[3] In the European space, national solidarity remains strong even to this date, in spite of it being challenged by transnational values.

The interplay of religious and national identity has found its most eloquent expression in *the relationship between church and state*. The history of these two institutions' interaction dates back to the formation of medieval states. The collaboration between noblemen and clergymen (the legitimisation of political power through the approval of the church, in response to which the ecclesiastical institution received protection, material support and the right to be present in the decision-making bodies of the state) denotes the adaptation of the Byzantine model within the Romanian space. What defines this model is the close cooperation between the two authorities in order to govern the destinies of the same community (both as subjects of the state and believers of the church). The dynamics of the state-church relationship changed with the triumph of nationalism and the focus of political efforts being shifted towards the creation of the modern national state. The political factor gained the tendency of increasingly subordinating the church and transforming it into an instrument in the achievement of its specific goals.[4] This tendency peaked with the establishment of the communist regime and it had disastrous consequences for the ecclesiastical institution. The traditional "cooperation" was turned into absolute "subordination" for the church, as price for its very right to existence.[5]

Church and nation

The relationship between the religious and national identities has been supported through historical writing from the first cultivated records of the modern era, the idea of an organic connection between ethnicity and

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[2] Lucian N. Leuştean (ed.), *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 101-163.

[3] Sorin Mitu, *Geneza identității naționale la românii ardeleni* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1997).

[4] Leuştean, *Orthodox Christianity*.

[5] Ioan-Marius Bucur, *Din istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice Române (1918-1953)* (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2003); Olivier Gillet, *Religie şi naționalism. Ideologia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române sub regimul comunist* (Bucureşti: Compania, 2001); Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu comunist* (Bucureşti: Curtea Veche, 2005).

religion being developed in the identity discourse of the Orthodox Church. The formula of orthodoxy as "Romanian rule" appears in the medieval texts referring to the Romanians in Transylvania. It represents the result of the empirical observation that religion was a characteristic differentiating the Romanian elements from the other ethnic groups present in the region. Thus, this trait became a specific element identifying this ethnic group. With the triumph of nationalist ideologies, this attribute changed its valences, religion being deemed the saviour and protector of the national spirit, while religious identity represented an integrant part of the national element and the Orthodox Church assumed the mission of serving the nation and the Romanian culture – thus becoming itself a "national" Church. Evolving from these concepts, ideas such as challenging the Romanian character of other confessions embraced by Romanian nationals, or rejecting the cultural models and products coming from Catholic environments due to their incompatibility with the Orthodox dogmas, gave way to a significant public debate.

The *national identity discourse* is owed to the Greek-catholic Transylvanian clergy that initiated the creation of a national consciousness, later on also assumed by laic exponents. In its part, the intellectual elite also contributed to consolidating the role of religion in the definition of the national character. The culminant point of this tendency was reached in the interwar period when a number of autochthonous local currents placed orthodoxy at the epicentre of ethnic identity.

Modernist theory places the beginnings of nationalism in the 18th century. The Enlightenment had the power to sway the supremacy of religion and bring about major changes in political thinking and societal ideals. In many parts of Europe, it birthed a broad spectrum of reform programs that aimed at transforming the continent in accordance to the spirit of modernity. The cult of reason and the emphasis placed on education have prepared the ground for Romantic philosophers to define the concept of the ethnic nation based on the unity of language, history, traditions and customs. In the modern era, the national identity has succeeded in rendering the religious identity as a merely one of its fundamental components.[6]

Although formally the pretence of universality of the Christian faith was maintained, once the political centralisation and birth of medieval states occurred, the 'local' churches became involved in the

[6] Mitu, *Geneza*.

political life, often placing the wellbeing of their own states above the interests of Vatican or Constantinople. When nationalism evolved from a literary and cultural current into a dominant political ideology, the church became involved in the struggle for fulfilling national ambitions, thus playing a political role perceived by clerical and secular elites alike as being 'predestines'.

The Greek-Catholic theologians from Transylvania sought historical arguments in support of religious unity; hence, the *Latin origin and continuity* claims became fundamental pillars of religious and national identity. The two concepts endorsed the idea of unity of the Romanian people, on the basis of common origins and the perseveration of cultural identity throughout centuries of migration and foreign domination. The first intellectual to use the continuity argument in order to claim political and economic rights for the united clergy, as well as for the laity, was Bishop Inochentie Micu Klein. His concept of nation was still ambiguous, as he used the term in both the medieval sense of privileged group and the modern one, thus referring in some of his petitions to the Romanian nationals as an ethnic community united through language and history. The ideological universe displayed by Micu Klein strongly reflects "the evolution of confessional into national"[7]. His concept was developed by the authors of books seeking to contribute to the consolidation of Greek-Catholic identity. Petru Pavel Aron, Gherontie Cotore and other theologians educated in Rome or Vienna and familiarised with the European ideological currents drew connections between the Latinity of the Romanian people and that of the Church of Rome. However, the Byzantine culture was not abandoned, the attachment to it being evident in the intransigence with which the united clergy opposed any tendencies of Latinising their church's rite, particular emphasis being placed on the preservation of the oriental traditions of religious rituals.[8]

In the second half of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, the high clergy of the Unified Church, in their role as exponents of the Romanian Enlightenment, gave the first modern definition of national identity. Samuil Micu, Petru Maior, Gheorghe Şincai, and Ioan Budai-Deleanu were the authors of the first scientific histories on the subject. In their writings, continuing on ideas conveyed in the chronicles

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[7]Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Şerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României* (Bucureşti: Ed. Enciclopedică,1998), p. 307.

[8] Keith Hitchins, *Conştiinţă naţională şi acţiune politică la românii din Transilvania. 1700-1868*, vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1987), pp. 54-61.

of the previous century, they placed an emphasis on the Latin origin of the Romanian people and language, as well as on its Christianity and the fact that the ancestors of this people were baptised in Rome, directly by the Apostles. The continued existence of the descendants of Roman colonists in the space between the Danube and the Carpathian Mountains, the privilege of having been the first to settle here unlike the other peoples living in Transylvania, became an important argument in the fight for political rights. The nationalist discourse spread in all regions inhabited by Romanians, the awareness of belonging to the same nation generating a unionist political program in the Principalities.

However, this change of mentality left little traces in the daily life of the population, particularly in relations to the way they managed religious life. Under the influence of *Enlightenment*, a greater emphasis was placed on the proper training of priests due to preach in the lands inhabited by Romanians. In Transylvania, schools were established in Blaj for the Greek-Catholic clergy, while in Wallachia and Moldavia the Phanariot regimes became more involved in the ecclesiastical life with the purpose of introducing a series of reforms. Constantine Mavrocordat took a series of measures meant to strengthen the position of the clergy and that of the ecclesiastical institution (ex. exemption from servile obligations and taxes, training for the lower clergy etc.). By the end of the 18th century, priesthood began to be conditioned by graduating a special school.[9] These measures, as well as the dissemination of books popularising the idea of religious unity and those defending the orthodox faith, their increased publishing in the Romanian language, have all contributed to the improvement of dogmatic knowledge. However, for the vast majority of the population, the religious rituals and practices continued to occupy a central place. Attending Sunday liturgy, marking through religious rituals the main moments of life (birth, marriage, death), observing the days of fasting, the cult of icons, saints and relics, charms and superstitions etc. are all emblematic elements of "practiced" religion. At the same time, in the discourses of the intellectual elite, religion started being integrated into ethnic solidarity.

The 1848 generation embraced the nationalist ideology in its romantic spirit. The revolutionary movements were mainly coordinated by the developing secular elite; however, members of the high clergy also became involved in the struggle for national desiderata. Andrei Şaguna presided over the National Assembly of Blaj alongside the

[9] Bărbulescu, Deletant, Hitchins, Papacostea, Teodor, *Istoria României*, pp. 314-317.

Greek-Catholic bishop, the two leaders of the Romanian churches from Transylvania taking the role of formal leaders of the political movement – proving the national desiderata took precedence over religious conflicts.

Bishop (later Metropolitan) Andrei Şaguna played a significant role in defining the Orthodox identity, all while completing the internal organisation of the church and securing the recognition of its autonomy in relation to the state. In Şaguna's view, the principal trait of the Romanian people was its strong attachment to the Orthodox confession. This indestructible attachment, his reasoning followed, was the key element in preserving the Romanian ethnic identity over time and its culture of Orthodox inspiration was fully aligned with the Romanian spirit. Therefore, the Romanian Orthodox Church was one national in character. Şaguna was proud of both the Latin origin of the Romanian people and his spiritual formation of Oriental rite, without noticing any inadvertence between the two features that defined the originality of the Romanian nation. In his fight for the restoration of the Orthodox Metropolitan and therefore its independence from the Serbian hierarchy in Karlowitz, Şaguna used not only canon law arguments, but also the idea of national self-determination. The Church was seen as one and national and that was why it could not be indifferent to the greatest aspirations of the nation – among which was the independence from the Serbian religious authority. The Romanian Orthodox from Transylvania lived in "the spirit of the era" and could no longer accept foreign ecclesiastical guidance and the Slavic liturgical language. The great Orthodox Bishop appreciated that the Greek-Catholics also belonged to the Romanian nation, reason why, when arguing in support of the Romanian political claims (1848/9 and 1863/4), he spoke on behalf of the entire nation. He was, however, a declared adversary of the religious unification of the two Romanian Churches and he considered that a great injustice had been done to the Orthodox Church through the signing of the union acts with Rome.[10]

The myth of orthodoxy as a pavement of ethnic identity was shattered in Dumitru Drăghicescu's 1907 work titled *"Din psichologia poporului român" (From the Psychology of the Romanian People)*. Formulating his ideas on the basis of the social realities in the Old Kingdom, Drăghicescu considered the Romanian people preserved their identity not due to orthodoxy, but in spite of it. In his view, the

[10] Keith Hitchins, *Identity of Romania* (Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 2009), pp. 119-132.

Orthodox Church was what opened the way for Slavic and Greek influences within the Romanian element. This first ample analysis of Romanian ethnic-psychology offers a series of subjective consideration on the subject of religiosity. The exaggerated respect shown to ritual and the lack of any philosophical depth were seen as the main traits of Romanian religiosity, the people's tolerance in religious matters being owed precisely to their ignorance regarding aspects of doctrine. What truly mattered to Romanians was the strict observance of customs marking the preparation of the soul for the world of beyond, for life after death, in which they strongly believed. It is due to this belief that the numerous monasteries and churches built by princes and noblemen were built and endow with considerable financial means. The cult of saints was a derivate of the Oriental custom of appealing to intermediaries in order to obtain favours from those in positions of authority. Certain concepts encouraged by orthodoxy, such as the emphasis placed on strong beliefs at the expense of the practical application of moral concepts or the importance placed on fasting, are identified as the causes of a negative trait often attributed to Romanians: "laziness".[11]

In the *interwar period*, the "Romanian way of being" gained more ground of exploration during ideological debates. The achievement of national unification, as well as the trauma of a World War, has caused the acute need for finding political and ideological ways to be followed by the entire nation, as well as the dilemma of identifying the defining traits of the Romanian people. Religiosity was among the aspects that had to be touched upon while attempting to answer the question 'how is the Romanian people'. The theories ranged from challenging the "inherent" religiosity of the nation and rejecting orthodoxy as a hindrance to the cultural and economic development, to its identification with the 'Romanian spirit', as argued by the mystical orthodoxy of the Romanian philosophical current known as *gândirism*. The dispute between traditionalists and modernists, between autochthonists and Europeanists regarding the imitation of occidental values or the exploitation of the native potential in order to allow a natural, organic progress, based on national qualities has animated the political and intellectual debates of the interwar period. The modernists, those supporting the implementation of occidental values within the Romanian society, regarded orthodoxy as an element in dissonance with

[11] Dumitru Drăghicescu, *Din psichologia poporului român (introducere)* (Bucureşti, 1907), pp. 357-382.

progress, its passive and contemplative character opposing modernisation. In Eugen Lovinescu's view, for the construction of the modern Romanian civilisation, the spiritual alignment with the occident was necessary.[12] The autochthonists have elaborated several theories regarding the way to be followed in the future, their common point being the emphasis placed on the 'Romanian' values. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru talked about the birth of a new type of nationalism in the aftermath of the world conflagration, one that no longer imitated any 'classical model', but made use of the specific spiritual character of every people. The new nationalism, called *românism*, was however not compatible with the orthodoxy, as it could not reach its ultimate goal – the modernisation of the Romanian society through exploiting its own potential and not imitating any foreign models – if it still identified the Romanian spirituality with the Orthodox dogma. Despite religiosity being a "certain recommendation for an elevate culture", the Orthodox Church had to resign itself exclusively to its spiritual calling and not get involved in the battles carried in the name of the Romanian nationalism.[13]

At the opposite end of the ideological spectrum of the era were Nechifor Crainic and Nae Ionescu, who have identified orthodoxy as the defining element of the Romanian character, practically, overlapping it with the concept of ethnicity. In the magazine *Gândirea*, Crainic and his disciples spoke about orthodoxy as the expression of the rural soul (the only authentic beholder of the national spirit) and stressed on the need for art to express this orthodox national specificity.[14]

Theologian Dumitru Stăniloae underlined as well the close relationship between the "ancestral" religion and the Romanianism. Many lay intellectuals who spoke on the subject treated orthodoxy as an ethnic-cultural phenomenon, detaching it from its dogmatic side. Among them were personalities such as Lucian Blaga, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran and Mircea Vulcănescu. Although extremist accents did not lack (they being noticeable in Crainic and Ionescu's works), the orthodoxy of

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[12] Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria civilizației române moderne* (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1997).

[13] Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Românismul – catehismul unei noi spiritualități* (Bucureşti: Ed. Ştiințifică, 1992).

[14] Zigu Ornea, *Tradiționalism şi modernitate în deceniul al treilea* (Bucureşti: Ed. Eminescu, 1980).

the interwar period was mainly "a philosophy of culture and a theory of development".[15]

Beyond the heated scene of intellectual debates, phenomena like "the miracle of Maglavit" became echoes of the masses' religiosity. However, it also showed the effects excessive publicity had on religious sensitivity, transforming the miraculous into triviality through media dilution.[16]

Orthodoxy remained the religion followed by the great majority of Greater Romania's population and the 1923 Constitution designated the position of the Orthodox Church as "dominant". The identity discourse of the ecclesiastical institution highlighted the tight bond between orthodoxy and ethnicity, between church and nation, thus promoting the idea of religious unification as the natural continuation of political unification. Some higher ranked hierarchs have called upon the Greek-Catholic believers and clergymen to return to the ancestral church. The arguments regarding the necessity of religious unity were based on two main points: redressing the injustice done to the Orthodox Church in 1700 due to foreign meddling and linking national progress with the achievement of church unity.[17] The Greek-Catholic clergy joined the debates regarding the unification of the two Romanian Churches. In spite of not being against the thought of it, they imagined its realisation in a completely different form; namely, by following the Florentine council model and uniting with Rome.

The "reunification" of the Romanian Orthodox Church through the homecoming of Greek-Catholic believers and clergymen took place in 1948, when the *Romanian Greek Catholic Church was abolished* through an abusive degree of the communist regime. The decision was one political in nature, but it nonetheless suited the interests of the Orthodox Church, which seconded the process.[18] On the other hand, the orthodox clergy's options regarding the management of the Greek-Catholic churches were limited, as they themselves had to make compromises in order to survive a regime that demanded total obedience. According to

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[15] Alexandru Zub, „Ortodoxia română în disputele din perioada interbelică", în *Xenopoliana* VII (1999), 3-4, pp. 10-21.

[16] Doru Radosav, *Sentimentul religios la români*, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1997), pp. 318-319.

[17] Bucur, *Din istoria*, pp. 63-64.

[18] Bucur, *Din istoria*, pp. 266-267.

the communist vision, the church proved itself to be "in the service of the people" only by strictly observing the directives of the state.[19]

The first step was the adaption of ecclesiastical ideology to the new political realities. *Apostolatul social (The Social Apostolate)* – a 10 volumes treatise written by the first orthodox patriarch of the communist period, Iustinian Marina (1948-1977) – urged the clergy to serve the interests of the people, to get involved in the struggle for peace and progress, to support the state in its efforts to build a socialist society as this was in the interests of the majority. The church had to become a "popular" one. *The Social Apostolate* can be considered as a tentative of "socialising" the Church according to the model imposed by the new political regime.[20]

In the final phases of the Romanian communism, as the regime of Ceauşescu promoted an aggressive form of nationalism of protochronist tendencies, the Orthodox Church re-embraced its original idea regarding ethnicity, thus identifying the Romanian spirit with orthodoxy. In the new line of discourse, the "ancestral faith" was portrayed as inseparable from the Romanian people from its very conception, both of them accounting for a bi-millennial existence of the territory of ancient Roman Dacia. It was underlined that the church had always supported the state in its struggle for national unification. The Orthodox Church had always been in the service of the Romanian nation, reason why it earned its status of unique Romanian church.[21]

The national character and the social mission are elements present in the identity discourse of the Orthodox Church for a long period of time, the two being recognisable even in Şaguna's vision. However, during the communist period, these "traditional" traits were employed to justify the subordination of the church to the state, in an attempt to ideologically adapt to a secular and anticlerical regime, as well as to preserve the illusion of continuity and respect for the orthodox traditions.

During the *post-communist period*, the identity discourse of the Orthodox Church resumed its already established themes: the Romanian people was a Christian people from its inception; the Orthodox faith represents a fundamental element in the consciousness of the nation's unity alongside Latinity and continuity; the Church served the Romanian people from its establishment and preached the consciousness

[19] Bucur, *Din istoria*, pp. 152-153.
[20] Gillet, *Religie şi naţionalism*, pp. 34-84.
[21] Gillet, *Religie şi naţionalism*, pp. 176-178.

of national unity, thus participating in the struggle for political unity and being present in all crucial moments in Romania's history; the Orthodox Church fought for the achievement of the nation's most ardent desiderata and thereafter for the achievement of its own goals, such as the autocephaly obtained in 1885 and the rising of the rank of patriarchy in 1925, acts that increased the prestige of the Church and of the nation alike. The Romanian Orthodox Church continued to affirm its national character and assume a social mission within a society where the religious factor remained of principal importance.

The Greek-Catholic Church regained its right to existence. However, the decades of clandestine survival have left their marks on the identity profile of this Church. The attachment to the purity of the Oriental rite was no longer as intense, thus allowing the penetration of Latin elements (the prayer of the rosary, the design of new church buildings etc.). Other identity coordinates remained, however, intact – the four points of the union, fidelity to the teachings transmitted by the holy parents of the East, the role played in the spreading of the national consciousness and the opening towards the European culture. Moreover, the martyrdom suffered during the communist regime was now added among these identity elements.[22]

The image of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist period registers in the historical consciousness negative accents (its servile submission to the regime, its participation in the abolition of the Greek-Catholic 'sister church', its embracement of nationalist discourse), although a series of nuances are also necessary: the struggle of the church for its own survival, the efforts of anti-communist resistance of some clergymen etc. The study of its recent history progressed and it reveals, in addition to the analysing of how the church adapted to the regime, the mechanism through which the state abolished the freedom of the ecclesiastical institution. However, the historical perspective on the relationship between state and church reveals a permanent interdependence between the two authorities, a "collaboration" in which the two partners have never been equals as the interests of the state were the ones to always prevail.

Church and State

From as early as the formation of the first centralised medieval states, the church has collaborated with the political power, represented by

[22] Ciprian Ghişa, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania (1700-1850). Elaborarea discursului identitar* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006), pp. 382-385.

Voivodes (princes), conferring it legitimacy and prestige. Given the primordial importance of the religious factor with traditional societies, within the Orthodox and Catholic worlds alike, the earthly power needed the guarantee of the institution representing the divine authority. The ritual of anointment and coronation symbolised the divine empowerment given to the King or Emperor in order to temporarily govern over the devout. The political leader sometimes received the appellative of "holy", thus his role as mediator between society and divinity being more deeply emphasised.

In the Byzantine world, Christianity has perfected the forms of an imperial cult blending the elements of Roman tradition with those of Oriental despotism. The Emperor needed the Church's sanction in his role as supreme authority, offering in return his protection and special consideration for the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The collaboration between state and church in order to guide the Christian society represented the essence of the "Byzantine symphony". However, it was an imperfect symbiosis, as the Emperor had the right to subordinate the Church in the name of the good functioning of society.[23] Whereas in the Catholic Occident, at least theoretically, the Church did not allow the intrusion of secular power within its internal affairs and the relations between papacy and royalty/empire were ones of perpetual rivalry, in the Byzantine Empire these relations were characterised by the superiority of the political factor.

The *Romanian medieval states* came into being in a period when the Occidental Christian society was subjected to an intense process of fragmentation, through the formation of centralised states supported by church structures involved in the pursuit of local interest.

Concomitantly with the unification of the pre-existing political formation of the region, the founding Voivodes focused on the institutional organisation of the church as a pillar of support for the political power. The choice for orthodoxy can undoubtedly be seen as motivated by political reasons (as a defensive decision against the expansionist efforts of the Hungarian Kings), but it nonetheless aligns with the Byzantine spiritual orientation the population inclined towards. Unlike the Kingdom of Hungary, where the founding father of the state – King Saint Stephen – opted for Catholicism and the forced Christianisation of his subjects, the Romanian Voivodes decided to

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[23] Dan-Alexandru Popescu, *Putere politică şi autoritate religioasă în Europa medievală. Reprezentări ale monarhului creştin în Evul Mediu românesc şi în regatul Franței: studiu comparativ* (Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, 2008), pp. 33-36.

support a church structure that had evolved through the accumulation of centuries old influences.

The establishment of the Metropolitan of Ungrovlahia in Argeş by Nicolae Alexandru (1352-1364) and later that of Severin (1370) by Vladislav Vlaicu (1364-1377) contributed to the international affirmation of a newly established self-governing state, namely a confirmation of independence from the Kingdom of Hungary. The first Voivodes established the tradition of building monasteries and conferring them large fortunes, as well as the habit of financially supporting some places of worship in Mount Athos and other Holy Places of Orthodoxy. These acts of Christian devotion have become an important feature for the ruling institution of the two Romanian principalities.[24]

The act of coronation, simpler and poorer in symbolism in the Romanian principalities than in the western countries, ultimately conveyed the same message: the ruler was chosen by God and entrusted with earthly powers. However, this privileged came with the obligation of always acting in the spirit of Christianity and the good of the society, respecting certain universal principles. *"Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie" ("The teachings of Neagoe Basarab for his son Theodosie")* (1519-1521), a sample of Romanian medieval political philosophy, emphasised the Christian values as the basis of governance. The prince had to act in accordance to the maxims of the Church and collaborate with the high clergy in the act of governance.[25]

The collaboration between the two elements of power best translated through the participation of hierarchs in the royal councils and court assemblies, as well as by eparchy prelates overtaking some local judicial attributions. The Metropolitans were appointed by the princes, following the advice of high hierarchs and noblemen, and they subsequently received their confirmation from the Patriarch of Constantinople. The central authority confirmed the appointment of bishops, ecumenists, deans, at the proposal of the Metropolitan. The Voivodes took a series of measures to improve the social status of the lower priesthood, granting them tax exemptions. In 17th century Wallachia, the rural priests were gradually released from feudal servitudes. Moreover, in 1714, Metropolitan Antim Ivireanul established that priesthood could be accessible only to free people. The central authorities regulated the clergy's statute in rapport to the devout, the latter having the duty of working without payment for the church

[24] Popescu, *Putere politică*, pp. 77-83.
[25] Popescu, *Putere politică*, pp. 91-109.

servants. The high clergy was present at diplomatic activities, at the ceremonies of the royal courts and the metropolitan held court when the Voivode was not present, having the mission of aiding the central power in its political actions, especially in those with an increased load of symbolism. The Voivodes and the Church collaborated in their attempt to protect the orthodoxy from foreign influences – be them those of Islamism, Reform or Counter-reform.[26]

In Transylvania, Orthodox ecclesiastical settlements were mention even prior to the 14th century, as around the year 1400 these were already under the guidance of the Metropolitan of Wallachia. However, the religious and economic status of the Romanian population, mostly formed of "schismatic" peasants, gave a special role to the clergy. In the 16th century, the Reformation had a resounding success among the Hungarians and Saxons in Transylvania, thus within the social-political structure of the autonomous principality appeared a system of the three privileged nations (Hungarians, Saxons and Szekely) and four favoured religions (Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian). The Romanians were excluded from this legal system, and had neither rights to political representation, nor privileges for their clergy. The Romanian nobility, reduced in number, either lost their national affiliation by conversion to Catholicism, or lost their status becoming merely wealthy peasantry. Likewise, the Romanian artisans and merchants from *Fundus Regius* ("the land of the Saxons") could never integrate into the Saxon guild world and they were far too few in number to form middle class. This social-economic and political reality made the creation of a secular elite impossible for a long while, thus the clergy came to represent the only elite structure capable of getting involved in the fight for political rights.

Once Transylvania became part of the Habsburg dominions, a good means for obtaining tangible results seemed to be the conversion to Catholicism while preserving the Oriental rite.[27] Inochentie Micu Klein (1692-1768) was energetically involved in the political struggle. At the beginning, he claimed the rights promised to the Romanian clergy through the diplomas of union with the Empire, but he gradually expanded his demands to the entire Romanian population in Transylvania, invoking the numerical superiority and the uninterrupted existence of this people within the region since ancient times. Micu Klein aimed to see the status of the Romanians being raised to that of

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[26] *Istoria românilor*, vol. V: *O epocă de înnoiri în spirit european (1601-1711/1716)*, coord. Virgil Cândea (Bucureşti: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2012), pp. 756-765.

[27] Hitchins, *Identity of Romania*, pp. 19-23.

"privileged nation" similarly to the other co-habitant nations. The Greek-Catholic bishop assumed the role of political leader, by virtue of his position and in the light of a deep understanding of the historical moment. He formulated the first coherent political program demanding the right of representation in the central and local political and administrative forums, using the historical argument, as well as that of natural law. Cultural and economic claims aiming to improve the life of the free and dependant peasantry complemented Klein's political requests. This program would later be expanded on by both the ecclesiastical elite and the secular one that was under development in the 19th century.[28] Inochentie Micu Klein represents the prototype of the hierarch turned politician, whose ideological legacy had a large resonance in the national movement of the Romanians from Transylvania.

The figure of Andrei Şaguna stands out among the Orthodox hierarchs who became noted on the political scene. He assumed the dual role of spiritual and political leader during a period of intense turmoil and transformations in the Habsburg Empire, thus remaining in the historical records for his great merit in the organisation of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania as well as for his actions as spokesman of the national movement. He dedicated himself to the establishment of an adequate legal framework within which the activity of the church to be conducted. Its independence from the Serbian Metropolitan of Karlowitz, through the *restoration of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan*, has greatly increased the prestige of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania. However, Şaguna fully understood the ruling ideology of the era (nationalism and the desiderata of national emancipation, liberalism and the pursuit of progress on all levels) and the need to adapt the discourse of the Church to the new form of solidarity that transcended religion in importance. Moreover, he considered the Church could no remained indifferent to the social situation of its believers. The social aspects intertwined with the national ones towards the formulation of rights for the Romanian people understood as nation. However, the battle towards national self-determination had to be fought respecting the moral principles and the legitimate state authority.[29] Andrei Şaguna followed the paths made available by the existent political and legal systems in order to obtain the recognition of his church. In line with the Byzantine tradition, the hierarch decided that

[28] Bărbulescu, Deletant, Hitchins, Papacostea, Teodor, *Istoria României*, pp. 305-310.
[29] Hitchins, *Identity of Romania*, pp. 119-132.

the political regime installed through the 1867 Compromise had to be respected and, thus, the Romanians' fight for national rights had to be conducted within the constitutional framework made available by the Hungarian state.

The metropolitans and bishops of the two Romanian churches in Transylvania were lawful members of the Upper House of the parliament of Dualist Hungary. From this position, they took the floor whenever legislative projects concerning the Church were under debate (education laws, the finances of priests, the law on the free religious exercise, the law of civil marriage, etc.) and opposed the liberal policies that tried to restrict the authority of the ecclesiastical institutions strictly to the spiritual sphere.

In the Romanian Principalities, the presence of high hierarchs at all important political assemblies, coupled with their symbolic role at the forefront of decisional forums, their appointment as chairs of the national assemblies established by the Organic Regulations were all elements that highlighted the continual participation in the affairs of the state. However, in the second half of the 19th century, the Principalities underwent important political transformations. The engravings of the era are all suggestive of the role the Church continued to play in society, a role that the liberals saw more as symbolic than decisional.

Following the unification of the two Principalities – union actively supported by the members of the high clergy, as the Metropolitans were the chairs of the unionist communities – the Romanian political class was committed to the process of building a modern national state. The practice of the ruler's intervention within the internal problems of the Church, which was initiated under the Phanariot regime, continued during the short reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Through his *ecclesiastical reforms*, Cuza sought to intensify the control of the state over the church, while also using the ecclesiastical institution to legitimise and support his regime. Among the measures taken were: the unification of the two churches into a single "national" body, the involvement of the central power in the appointment of the high hierarchs, the establishment of a general synod of the church (which declared independence from the ecumenical patriarchy), the appointment of the metropolitans and the bishops as members of the upper parliamentary chamber etc.[30] A series of preparatory measures (the prohibition of religious services being officiated in a language other than Romanian, the use of monastery funds for repairs and maintenance,

[30] Leuştean, *Orthodox Christianity,* pp. 116-122.

the surveillance of precious objects, the collection of documents from the monasteries, conditioning the status of monks by the approval of the Ministry of Cults etc.) preceded the adoption of the law secularising the monasteries' fortunes, which was passed on December 13/25, 1863. Following its adoption, the estates of the consecrated monasteries, about a quarter of the territory of the country, passed into state ownership. The law did not meet a significant opposition, being interpreted as a measure of defence of the Romanian nation in the face of Greek influences. The image of Cuza in the historical consciousness remained that of the authoritarian prince who recovered the lands of the church from the hands of the Greekk, thus increasing the international prestige of Romania. He transformed the Church into a reliable ally in the implementation of his political vision, the ecclesiastical institution also contributing to the birth of the myth of the "providential ruler", built around the first ruler of the United Principalities.[31]

The 1866 Constitution regulated the relationship between state and church, as well as the position of the church within the new political and legal configuration of the country. The Orthodox Church was seen as the "dominant" ecclesiastical institution as it was followed by the vast majority of the country's inhabitants – according to the 1899 census, 92.5% of the population adhered to orthodoxy. Moreover, the Church was autonomous – administered on the basis of a synod system – and independent of any foreign hierarchy, preserving its unity with the Oriental ecumenical church only in what dogmas were concerned. The ecumenical patriarchy recognised *the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church* in 1885, this act being an equivalent to the international recognition of the new Romanian national state. Under the reign of Carol I, the state consolidated its control over the church through its involvement in the appointment of high hierarchs. It also got involved at the lower levels of the ecclesiastical institution, through regulating the salaries of the priests in accordance to the funds of the church, which had been drastically reduced following the secularisation of the monastery fortunes. In 1902, through the creation of the House of the Church, the administration of church assets came entirely in the hands of the state.[32]

In the aftermath of the 1918 unification, the Romanian Orthodox Church was faced with the problem of internal reorganisation in order to incorporate the churches form the united provinces within its structures. Moreover, it needed to establish relations with the new confessions. The

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[31] Leuştean, *Orthodox Christianity,* pp. 116-122.
[32] Leuştean, *Orthodox Christianity,* pp. 116-122.

Greek-Catholics represented an issue due to their status as "second Romanian church", which many Orthodox hierarchs contested.

Following the instauration of the communist regime, the relationship between the churches and the state entered a new phase, that of total subordination. In order to justify its submission to the new regime, the Orthodox Church invoked the tradition of the Byzantine symphony and its mission as "servant of the people", and later of the nation. The state was nothing but an emanation of the people and, therefore, the Church had the duty to obey it.[33] However, this argument was part of a public discourse the Orthodox Church was forced to elaborate in order to avoid reaching the situation of the Greek-Orthodox Church or other Orthodox Churches in the communist bloc. Among the methods employed in order to subjugate the church were the legislative ones (that turned the church into a state institution), the surveillance of the *Securitate*, the persecution of recalcitrant clergy and the repression of any attempts of opposition, as well as the exploitation of inter-confessional conflicts, discords among hierarchs or other insignificant local conflicts.[34]

In the post-communist era, the churches redefine their rapport with the state in the context of the Romanian society's democratisation. The Orthodox Church continues to play an important role on the public arena and it enjoys a solid social support, its voice being heard within the political, ecclesiastical and cultural pluralism of the new era.

Conclusions

The representations of the church and religiousness in the Romanian historical imaginary combine the results of the historical scientific approach with that of confessional identity discourse, political discourse and philosophical theories of culture. The historiography is not the only force able to model the historical consciousness. However, historiography has the duty of seeking an honest path of remembrance, even when this implies the acceptance of the inevitable influence the present has on the interpretations of the past. Today's "present" is that of promoting the European and democratic values, while the interwar "present" was that of rediscovering the national identity, the Enlightenment "present" was the triumph of reason and the medieval "present" was that of deep religiosity. Thus, the images of religion and churches fall within the limits of these subjective coordinates, while

[33] Gillet, *Religie şi naţionalism*.
[34] Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*.

being contextualised according to the purpose pursued by the one creating the image. Hence, for the Greek-Catholic clergy at the end of the 18th century the longevity and Latinity of Christianity were closely linked to the need of identifying illustrious roots of the ethnic community in the awakening of its national consciousness; the interwar elite, struggling with the dilemmas of modernisation, either glorified or repudiated the orthodoxy according to its attitude towards the Occidental mode; for the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime, the illusion of preserving the tradition was a way of adapting to the demands of the repressive regime.

In the light of its communist experience, the image of the Romanian Orthodox Church had much to suffer. Many accused the Church for its collaborationism, as well as for its nationalist discourse, whose exaggerated accents outlined during the interwar period had resurfaced in the final phases of the communist regime. However, the criticism of the Church coincided with a revival in the religious sentiment and its renewed public manifestations in the Romanian society, in the aftermath of a long time in which religion had been condemned to the isolation of the private space.