

## THE NATIONAL PEASANTS' STATE IN THE VISION OF CONSTANTIN RĂDULESCU-MOTRU\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *The National Peasants' State in the Vision of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru.*

In the interwar period, the major parties, the Liberal Party and the Peasants' Party, looked for their government formulas, the options being a bourgeois capitalist state or a state built on national peculiarity, as an expression of the existing social structures, rising from traditional values. In April 1934, the *Philosophical Journal* published the study *The Ideology of the Romanian state*, which perhaps was the most important contribution to the elaboration of the principles that formed the basis of the peasant state. From the outset, without any connection to Peasantrism, being a conservative, he built his philosophy on the idea that the liberal state is inadequate and is an artificial creation, idea which results from all his work in the philosophy of Romanian culture. Approaching the Peasantrism doctrine came naturally, the philosopher exposing his ideas in the personal line, whether he defined Peasantrism or the peasant state.

**Keywords:** *peasant' state, Peasantrism, liberal state, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru*

### Introduction

The philosophical and cultural approach of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru on the peasants' state is rooted in his early works before the war, when the philosopher regarded that the foundations of society should be built in line with the realities and spirituality of each people. The author lamented the disappearance of old rural social structures, criticizing the bourgeois state for nearly half a century. In the study *From Racial Struggle to Class Struggle*. C. Rădulescu-Motru, Marta Petreu said, "for forty years from now, the philosopher will work to build a philosophy of culture intertwined with political philosophy and applied to the Romanian people, in which

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the preferred terms, often metaphorically defined are: soul of the people, personality, culture, vocation, destiny, ethnic, racial, energetism, ecc.” In this book, set on the general basis of Junimism theory of forms without substance, the philosopher “went further than his mentors, making the village centre of national tradition and epicentre of the social and economic development”, which approaches him to the “agrarian trends”, as noted by Keith Hitchins.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1920, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru fought for political representation of the peasantry by choosing their own representatives in the Romanian State, in order to bring their issues to the forefront of society. His book *Peasantry, a Soul and a Policy*, published in 1924, is a call for both peasants and intellectuals to contribute to the birth of political consciousness, of a Romanian peasant ideal, with a view to a political regeneration of society. Of course that in the social and political context, the emergence of agrarian parties which had registered success in the first elections of the unified Romania, signaled the initiation for a political movement designed to have the peasantry as centre pin. He saw the Peasantry movement in a broader sense than that movement organized within the Peasants’ Party, through the fact that the peasantry must reach a political consciousness to be able to materialize the ideals it has to fulfil. The philosopher’s idea was that not the organization, syllabus or statute of the party can mobilize peasants to achieve their interests, but the acquisition of the consciousness that they have a precise role in society, and for that he calls Romanian intellectuals originated from villages, he calls the Peasants’ Party to contribute to the ideals that the peasantry has to fulfil. “The more this knowledge will come faster and more complete, the faster the regeneration of our political life will come and it will be more profound”.<sup>2</sup> In his view, the forty-fighters have established in society the European bourgeois mentality, in that everything was done in the name of freedom and democracy, but things remained the same.

Thus, he said, these words become magic and oppressive while preventing an objective analysis of Romanian policy and of peasant political principles and also did not produce anything serious for this deeply disadvantaged category. The peasant was not the beneficiary of these stated goals, the provisions of the new Constitution being away from him. The peasants’ class was not the beneficiary of the rights registered in the Constitution, it did not benefit from the European liberalism which opened its doors to privileges only to landowners. These were only interested in agricultural benefits, but not the interests of the 80% of the rural population. “We removed the adequate

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<sup>1</sup> Marta Petreu, *From Junimea to Noica. Romanian Culture Studies*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2011, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Writings*, the study, *Peasantry, a Soul and a Policy*, Preface by Cristian Preda, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 417.

peasant mentality without introducing the authentic policy of the European bourgeois mentality. We have introduced liberal trade laws, but anti-Semitism at the base; we introduced universal suffrage, but cheating at ballot boxes; we killed rural households to multiply credit institutions, but we didn't allow free competition between these institutions, but we favoured some, those belonging to our people and we persecuted those belonging to others, those of opponents; we encouraged national industry, but not to come to the benefit of the rural population, as it would have been right, because it made sacrifices, but to come to the benefit of politicians who were the retirees of this national industry."<sup>3</sup> To have their own policy, peasants need autonomy in their communities, and a part of the taxes to the state to remain, in order to establish their needs and interests, and their children who went to school to find there their purpose in life, in order to improve their lives, to support their development and their communities. The philosopher insists that the peasantry and the intellectuals must make common cause in rising villages through education and culture and to stop the spiritual uprooting. "The duty of all intellectuals is to contribute to the awakening of the peasants so that they come to understand themselves"<sup>4</sup> Also, peasants need to learn from intellectuals crafts, new skills, economic and practical techniques to transform the culture and primitive agricultural production of the labour force in a perfectible work. He also refers to the existing political organization of the Peasants' Party, he appreciates the party leaders, but besides political syllabus, the peasant, he says, needs a moral improvement for the state to be able to keep its natural and historic coordinates. Namely, maintaining political conservatism, which is political at us, which can be achieved if peasants will have "a clear consciousness of the ideal they have to fulfil. A soul and a policy"<sup>5</sup>.

In April 1934, the *Philosophy magazine* published the study of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, "The ideology of the Romanian state", which is perhaps the most important contribution to the elaboration of the principles that formed the basis of peasants' state. The philosopher generally delimitates himself from the radical-conservative or radical anti-industrialist views and he is a critic of the liberal state, of liberalism in general. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru was a conservative alongside Take Ionescu, who developed concepts of conservative philosophy culture. He occupies an important place in the development of Peasantry doctrine, being a representative of the Peasants' Conservatism trend especially because of the fundamental idea which he elaborated from the beginning, namely state building on organic realities, "Rădulescu-

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<sup>3</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Writings*, the study, *Peasantry, a Soul and a Policy*, Nemira Publishing House, Preface by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, p. 373.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 371.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 341.

Motru built his socio-political conception step by step and left from tolerance philosophical points. He is a representative thinker of the culture, respectively for the Romanian philosophy from the first half of the twentieth century and the evolution of his thinking reflects how things were at his time, helping us to reconstruct some of the drama that happened in Romania in a long historic period".<sup>6</sup>

He believes that our national state has developed only under the conditions corrupted by the Turkish Empire and under the influence of the European states. He says there is no bourgeois state, nor liberal or socialist, but each state has its own identity that functions, be it the English state, creator of the bourgeoisie, be it the National Socialist German state or the French state based on the principles of the French Revolution. He says that the bourgeois regime is challenged "everywhere and in different forms", without making a distinction between regimes, where formulas of the authoritarian state have evolved towards totalitarianism, as is the case for Germany. The same, he refers to fascism in Italy, which he considers as an alternative to liberalism and capitalism of which he says: "Their immediate end is anticipated."<sup>7</sup> Thus, he argues that states must be placed on their history, on their own experiences, which are not created on the new authorities, the existing authority being only sublimated, the philosopher does not differentiate between democratic or authoritarian states in the construction of ideas.

Contemporary reality shows that the ideology that was gaining greater popular support in Europe was nationalism and totalitarianism, and at the level of collective thinking, between state and nation, there was a pronounced adherence. State identifies with the vocation of every nation, "namely the state of each nation",<sup>8</sup> he said. In contrast to bourgeois principles, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru outlines the directions on which the Romanian state should be based on, respectively on an organizational model of true equal opportunities, namely the rising of all classes through education, access to resources and culture. Motru mixed things in the sense that he was making reference to national values, whether he formulated an idea in support of a state based on democratic principles, whether he related to totalitarian states.

Following the adoption of the motion by the National Peasants' Party Congress in April 22-23, 1935, its government has assumed the new syllabus and the basic principles of the Peasantry as its ideological line, on the idea of peasants'

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<sup>6</sup> Marta Petreu, *From Junimea to Noica. Romanian Culture Studies*, Polirom Publishing House, p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Studies*, the study „Ideology of the Romanian State”, Nemira Publishing House, Preface by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, p. 429.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 417.

democracy, as a “fundamental requirement of the Romanian political life”.<sup>9</sup> In the debates for and against the peasants’ state, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru says that most critics of the peasants’ state are those with Marxist views, be they publishers or supporters of the liberal state, who believe that the peasants “cannot reach class consciousness of their social class, as they always aspire to become little more than peasants!”<sup>10</sup> He believes that the syllabus of the National Peasants’ Party is based on the idea of work aimed at developing and implementing Romanian people’s interests, according to its nature and cooperation between social classes. The philosopher thinks that Europe no longer believes in the individual, heading for other anti-liberal and anti-individualist forms, be it Italian fascism, the Russian Sovietism or the German state. But peasants’ state differs, however, because it does not cultivate any racial kinship nor imperialism, nor a dictatorial industrial organization, but the formation of a healthy moral peasantry, which to be taken out of poverty and ignorance and be the representative of the people for the people.

He believes that the state promoted by economic liberalism is a lie and, behind those principles, a small group of interests develops, as the only beneficiaries of the principles, which in theory and on paper, are addressed to all citizens. From his observation emerges the idea that theoretically nobody hinders the well-being of individuals in a free state, where the laws are equal for all, where the conditions of prosperity are available to all. So, everyone can enrich, everyone can be happy and prosperous. But it’s not like that. It isn’t like that because the liberal state is tailored so that only the bourgeoisie to be the beneficiary of this form of organization, most actually not having direct access to welfare. The bourgeois state has shown its limits, he says, by the very fact that the industry or trade cannot expand indefinitely and even greater production brings no gain, and economic crises, unemployment, are the effects of this system that tends to be replaced by ideology that takes many forms, as mentioned, in the case of Germany or Italy. He believes that bourgeois organization is a creation of English spirituality, of machinery production, of industrial technology, which was subsequently loaned to other European countries, so these countries do not have their historic vocation to be supported on the model of the British bourgeoisie. However, beyond these advantages the industrial progress gives, the state must take into account each nation’s own vocation, which must be supported, in our case, on the spiritual traditions of the nation and on the intrinsic link between peasant family and the territory of the country. “The ideology of peasants’ state does not justify the political order of the Romanian State on abstract considerations of economic individualism and on the hypothetical desire of gain that would have

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<sup>9</sup> *Dreptatea* newspaper, 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1935.

<sup>10</sup> C. Rădulescu-Motru, “Peasants’ State and the Liberal State”, in *Dreptatea* 21<sup>st</sup> November 1935.

existed in the soul of each individual, but on the actual institution of peasant household, where man, work and land form an inseparably integer, with a vocation in which the nation and the land identify.”<sup>11</sup>

Constantin Rădulescu-Motru believed that the state has focused on the interests of the bourgeoisie, those of capitalist production, on a large scale of estates leasing and lending institutions were made available to traders and industrialists. Great assets avoided peasantry, schools have trained free practitioners in the service of the same bourgeoisie. The peasant needs a cheap credit for the production that highlights the country’s land, he says, and the state must ensure individual activity within the collective activity of society, considering that it is one of the most important functions of the state. “The real Romanian state treats the peasants as if they were underage, who can still wait. Peasants’ economic interests result from commercial and industrial interests”.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the construction of the idea that the Romanian state must follow its natural, historical course, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru starts right from the Constitution of 1923, which is very similar to that of other European countries, however, he says, reality and political life in these countries are different from ours. “The text of the Romanian Constitution does not differentiate anyhow the Romanian State from the other European states. In it we find the same democratic principles that we find in the Constitution of the Belgian State, although the political life of the Romanian nation is different than the political life of the Belgian people.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, every article of the Constitution must have a counterpart in the Romanian reality, to indicate whether the classes of society take part in the exercise of those rights or they are the beneficiaries of such rights that are listed. The author demonstrates that the fundamental principles underlying the Constitution are being eroded by social and economic reality. The philosopher argues that the principle that Romania’s territory is indivisible is vague, because land areas are leased by industrial holdings, belonging to petroleum, that the industries maintained by foreign capital compete with the exports of peasant agricultural production. Thus, the principle is distorted, rather being a national goal. With regard to individual rights, Romanian citizens benefit from right support, but at the same time, governments may restrict these rights, be it political, by applying special conditions in the country, by restricting the public activism of citizens, or economic, where the state intervenes between the industrial and agricultural producer or between creditor and debtor.

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<sup>11</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Studies*, the study „Ideology of the Romanian State”, Nemira Publishing House, Preface by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, p. 429.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 423.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 420.

At the foundation of the state there is our nation made up of citizens who have the right to vote and this should be reflected considering the composition of the state, which in our case consists in its great majority of peasants. The state must first treat their interests like duties, to create the normal frame for development, as if in the case of cities. We're talking about the education of the peasants' children, villages' hygiene, peasant economic interests that are behind the industrial interests, agricultural interests who regard agricultural exploitations in general rather than peasant households. "The Romanian state should be more a peasants' state in its concerns, however it is a bourgeois state in concerns, like all industrial countries of Western Europe. Borrowing in its written constitution the great democratic principles, it also borrowed along with these principles the bourgeois spirit, considering itself not an executor of national peasants' will, but educator and leading with self -power of this will! Instead of delegates of peasants, those who exercise the powers of the Romanian State take their role as masters of the peasants. Real Romanian state is the exact opposite of the Romanian state from the Constitution".<sup>14</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru believes that, following the introduction of universal suffrage, the peasantry opens up the possibility of occupying or capitalizing on a certain social function, occupying a free position, through the national character of the elections. This allows the Romanian State to be a national state, by identifying the electoral body with the peasant population. "It also must be said that Rădulescu-Motru believed that" Romanism "will be stately performed based on the peasant class"; "Under the new spirituality of Europe, the Romanian state will have to stand on its true foundation, on the peasant population. He will be, by its differential characters from other states, a peasants' state";<sup>15</sup> "According to the new spirituality of Europe, the Romanian state will have to stand on its true foundation, which is the peasant population. It will be, by its differential characters, a peasants' state, different from other states."<sup>16</sup>

Setting of this population as the foundation of the Romanian state should not be seen by the fact that the state must solve their problems or to standardize the needs of citizens in towns and villages, those cultural, educational or other, but the state to mediate social order to achieve a moral and material prosperity. It is not an ideology of conservative reaction or a return to the past. "The Peasants' state means something precise and simple; it means ordering state functions with permanent interests, moral and material interests belonging to the peasants' population. An ordering, not for the momentary satisfaction of the interests of the peasants voters, but ordering of permanent interests that ensure the future good moral and material condition of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 423.

<sup>15</sup> Marta Petreu, *From Junimea to Noica*, Polirom Publishing House, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Romanism*, p. 150.

peasantry.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the vote must remain the main pillar of democracy and not an exchange of services between voter and candidate, the latter taking only the vote in exchange for promises, only because the peasantry has no consciousness of its interests. All this vicious circle, after which beneficiaries are some demagogues politicians can be interrupted only by educating the peasants, rural youth, so a deep reform of the state in the spirit of national interest, “the scholastic policy of the Romanian national state should focus in the future to a single goal: bringing intellectual youth among rural population. With this youth should begin offensive against poverty, which dries the roots of the nation”.<sup>18</sup>

Returning to the bourgeois state, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru considers that it appeared accidentally, and the laws being made by the bourgeoisie, sought to strengthen their own interests by leasing large-scale estates, making available large capital and other benefits related to education or culture. Also, the ideology of the bourgeois state goes forth the premises of individualist production, from which the state takes its share from taxes and solves its problems. Thus, based on economic individualism, the bourgeois state develops a whole network, by providing material and intellectual capital through credit institutions, higher institutions of education, etc. Economic individualism and freedom are not enough to increase wealth, and for that it requires material and intellectual capital, so schools and credit institutions which the bourgeois state provides for. He believes it is not enough to affirm your principles, but try to give them meaning, otherwise they have only a theoretical value. Liberal state, he says, invites everyone to happiness, invites the peasants to get out of poverty. Laws, being equal for all, all are invited to enrichment and prosperity, as we mentioned. But is this possible? Motru says that a peasant child can become a clerk just as someone can become a lottery millionaire, with the same chance of success. “Even so, one in ten thousand peasants can become a bourgeois in the city or a great owner in the country. All are possible in this world when man is lucky. But state policy should not be a lottery prospect. And so it is liberal state policy; a lottery prospect. Without the peasant who become clerk or become rich, there are still nine hundred ninety-nine peasants at home in misery and ignorance. How long can this scam take place with equal conditions before fortune?”<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the peasants’ state, it must not be viewed by reversing the principles of the bourgeois state, but by restoring normal relations between social classes, being placed in a community of interest. The peasant, he says, needs cheap

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<sup>17</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Studies*, the study „Ideology of the Romanian State”, Nemira Publishing House, Preface by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, p. 429.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 435.

<sup>19</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru in *Dreptatea*, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1935.

credit for the production that highlights the country's land and needs autonomy to promote primary interests in the community. The state should be concerned, firstly, by framing the individual in the collective activity of society on the principle of collectively organized production and not in any case on the principle of individualism, which is alien to the nature of the peasantry. If the bourgeois state is interested in multiplying individual entrepreneurs, peasants' ideal is to form families of wealthy peasants, within which "health and traditions of the nation to ensure their continuity". This connection is historic because, over time, the warriors and the soldiers were rewarded with land, and today this connection is "the root of our national energy". Thus, Peasantry ideology prioritizes the peasant family which is in communion with the country's territory: "peasants' state ideology is characterized, on the contrary, by the tendency to give the isolated state a framing in the collective production of the village, as by means of it to raise itself to a moral and material prosperity. Peasants' state ideology is based on the principle that welfare of the individual peasant depends on the welfare of the whole village."<sup>20</sup> "So Constantin Rădulescu-Motru desires a recovery, eventually adapted, of the old rural structures, by returning to the village and a recovery of relations in which the peasant should be rewarded by access to cheap credit, social insurance, school and other benefits, because the peasant, no matter how well it will work the land, will not be able to reach the retailers' level, of entrepreneurs, who by nature of their trade can develop much more, with many possibilities. Therefore, to compensate for the lack of opportunities, the peasantry must be again the basis of political order, because it is a national interest and a common creed.

In the debates of his time, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru considered that their opponents and their supporters are under Marxist influence and that the peasants' state seeks not class struggle, and the governance perspective should not aim at replacing a class with another, but harmonization of classes by subordination of personal interests to general interests of the nation. Nichifor Crainic and the thinking sociology followers understood something different. Crainic reacted vehemently against the idea of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, saying the peasants' state is a state of class and that could only be totalitarian state. "It is the reaction against the bourgeoisie state. The peasantry against the bourgeoisie."<sup>21</sup> The same is notified by Cristian Preda, who said that this was one of the forms used by Motru to express radical opposition to liberalism and democracy. "In 1934, when he wrote the *Ideology*

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<sup>20</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Studies*, the study „Ideology of the Romanian State”, Nemira Publishing House, Preface by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, p. 432.

<sup>21</sup> Dumitru Micu, *Thinking and "Gândirism". Moments and Syntheses*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1975, p. 344, „Mystification of Romanism” in *Gândirea*, XV, no. 7, September 1936, p. 361.

of the Romanian state, Motru used to oppose to the bourgeois ideology (whose »basis« was economic individualism, which entails »political liberalism«), the peasants' ideology or the ideology of the peasants' state."<sup>22</sup> Comparing the liberal state with the peasants' state, he says that individualist belief in totalitarian states is subordinated to totality supremacy of the people, by the fact that totality chooses the individual's fate and not the individual decides the fate of others, the individual acquiring meaning only within the totality of the nation.

The philosopher is moving toward such a political philosophy and a totalitarian political solution. By contrast, the peasants' state upholds the interests of the peasantry, thus serving all people. He said that Europe no longer believed in the individual's power to generate prosperity and hence individualism remained from then on, a problem for philosophers.

Constantin Rădulescu-Motru was concerned about the development of principles for the Peasantry doctrine, focused himself on drafting the party and state ideology seen by him from a peasant's point of view. Some ideas are found in Constantin Stere and Virgil Madgearu too. Drawing a conclusion, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru requires a reform of the state on grounds of our nationality, our education and culture, by organizing the peasants' interests in the spirit of peasants' state ideology. "Peasants' state ideology situates, at the ground of our political order, the hierarchy required by the permanent interests of the nation. Peasants' interests first and only then those of the bourgeoisie. It is the ideology of the Romanian national state, as this state must have been if it had been able to develop under normal conditions. This ideology should be the ground of our syllabus as a common creed of all politicians."<sup>23</sup> Capitalizing this tradition as the foundation of national policy, was actually an alternative to anti-liberal and anti-democratic vision, says Cristian Preda. "The Romanian state is a creation of major European countries policies. Old spirituality of Europe gave the Romanian State the baptizing: it made it democratic and bourgeois and thus put it at enmity with national traditions ... In the new spirituality of Europe, the Romanian state will have to stand on its true foundation: the peasant population. It will be, through its differentiated characters, different from other states, a peasants' state."<sup>24</sup>

In Constantin Rădulescu-Motru we find some of the principles issued by Junimea, such as the idea that nations develop and reborn naturally, that by their own culture and preserving the past and the traditions, nations can build their

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<sup>22</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Political Studies*, Nemira Publishing House, Preliminary study by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 432.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41

future. But from a traditional conservative thinking and conception, Motru comes to admire totalitarian visions. "From an organic and conservative vision of society and history, Motru reached a totalitarian vision, and then to a complete totalitarianism, following the German model, in which he accepted the idea of superior and inferior races, the idea of their hierarchy and therefore unequal treatment which they may be subjected to."<sup>25</sup>

Of course that from the beginning, without any connection to peasantry, being a conservative, he built his philosophy on the idea that the liberal state is inadequate, an artificial creation, which is apparent from all his philosophy work. Organic conservative vision of society at the beginnings of his writings turned into a radical approach to ideas that ultimately led even to acceptance of totalitarianism. Approaching of the peasants' doctrine came naturally, the philosopher developed his ideas in a very personal manner (his works were not referring to other authors), whether he defined peasantry or the peasants' state.

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<sup>25</sup> Marta Petru, *From Junimea to Noica. Studies of Romanian culture*, mentioned Publishing House, p. 177.

