STATE AND ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE ROMANIAN HISTORY

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Abstract: The Orthodox Church has always kept very close relations with the political authorities of the time. Therefore the ruling princes, imitating the Byzantine emperors' authority, have imposed their will when appointing the bishops. Sometimes these bishops were related to the rulers. The Metropolitans were advisers to rulers, supporting their policy. The Metropolitans and Bishops were members of the delegations that the princes sent on diplomatic missions to the neighbouring countries. Very often these bishops followed the princes in exile when they lost their reigns.The princes and boyars controlled the religious life. In the nineteenth century they could get some of the church patrimony, and finally Alexandru Ioan Cuza secularized the monastic properties. Little by little, the Church came under state control. During the communist authoritarian regime - one of the hardest historical periods - the State controlled the Church. During the last few years, the capitalist State has gained, through various actions, some control over the Orthodox Church. The study presents some of the relationships between the Romanian State and the Orthodox Church in the course of time.

Keywords: bishop, state, control, orthodox, society

More and more cultivated people have recently analysed the role of the Church in the Romanian society considering that this one was a break in the development of the Romanian society, as it brought the Romanians to the block of the Orthodox countries of the Eastern Europe remained in a lower economical and social stage of development compared to the Western Europe. Even the appearance of the Romanians on the European political scene is considered as rather belated in comparison just with our Orthodox neighbours from the South of the River Danube, to say nothing of the Western countries. To say that the Orthodox Church was an obstacle for the development of the Romanian society is exaggerated. I have never heard of Romanian ruling princes or boyars to have tried great actions for modernising and civilising the Romanian society and to have been hindered by the Orthodox Church. It was the overwhelming majority of the ruling princes who authoritatively controlled the life of the Church, who imposed the hierarchs and used them to support their own policy. This phenomenon was not alien to the Orthodox Church in general, having been a Byzantine legacy which acquired even darker aspects in certain respects.

What was the statute of the clergy in the Romanian society? It was, certainly, submitted to the political authority no matter which this one was. Yet, there also were some cases of clergy who opposed the state authorities at critical times, having been with the faithful whom they served and supporting their rebellions for a better life. Usually, these ones were the parish priests, as the hierarchs were very seldom mentioned in such cases. Most times the hierarchs supported the position of the ruler and that of the boyars as it was easier

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for them to identify with their attitude. On the other hand, we should not forget that, in general, the Orthodox clergy enjoyed a better social position than that of their faithful. Yet, several rulers exempted the clergy from paying taxes, so that priesthood was seen at a certain time as a means to avoid the economical and social oppression of the state. Given this fact the number of priests unreasonably increased especially in the 18th century. In order to grow their income the village priests also worked in agriculture, while those living in cities had small shops or pubs sometimes situated just near their churches[1].

The restriction of the aids that the state grants to the Orthodox Church is also talked of. I personally think that this state of things is more confusing today than a few decades ago, as it is an extension of the practices present ever since the time of the communist regime. Although it seems to be a rather delicate issue in many respects, causing fear, it is rather topical and worth debating.

Voices are heard in the Romanian society, either ignorant or ill-disposed, who criticise the construction of churches, arguing that there are more churches than schools. We should not forget that the Orthodox Church is a few hundred years older than the Romanian education, because it was the clergy who provided education and culture in the Romanian mediaeval society. On the other hand, none of the Romanian ruling princes and boyars thought he could be saved through school. They always thought it was easier to have their sins forgiven if they built a church. Yet, these churches and monasteries, still present today, were the Romanians' schools and hospitals for a few hundred years. Our Orthodox affiliation is a historical fact, but thinking that the Romanian society was backward because of that is a distorted view. We can see a series of our sins as a people while looking at the "progress" of the Romanian society during the last few decades. Much of this lamentation is no other than a permanent attempt to exculpate ourselves as a nation, for the many failures that the Romanian people passed through because their rulers never assumed some clear cut political decisions.

The Romanians affirm themselves, as a presence in the European political life, to the middle of the 14th century, namely rather late compared to the Orthodox peoples around. To the end of the 12th century the Bulgarians were already passing through their second empire. But they have been known in Europe ever since the 9th century, when they were carrying on a subtle policy both in Rome and in Constantinople. The Serbians have had an autocephalous Metropolitanate recognised ever since the beginning of the 13th century, a true symbiosis between the political power and the Orthodox Church. The Western European states have had hundreds of years of existence, and the Catholic Church behaved not only as the main spiritual force, but also as an authentic political force, in permanent competition with the political authorities whom they were trying to dominate through their statute. Rome was cultivating its own political doctrine of spiritual expansion and political domination which reached its perfect aspect at the time of pope Innocentius II. All the great universities we see today were already operating in Europe, while in Moldova and Wallachia, only a few churches and monasteries were mentioned in the donation documents of some ruling princes, which were also supporting a primary school. Even the Romanian monasticism was reorganised by a Serb, Saint Nicodim from Tismana, while the printing press was introduced through the efforts of a Montenegrin at the beginning of the 15th century.

[1] Constanţa Vintilă - Ghiţulescu, *În şalvari şi cu işlic*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2011, p. 35.

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The appearance of Moldova and of Ungro-Wallachia in history was due to the defence fight against the Hungarian expansion. The Romanians are known in history as Orthodox with birth certificates to the middle of the 14th century, when the Patriarchate of Constantinople recognises the Metropolitanates from Curtea de Arges and from Suceava. We certainly know the birth certificate of the Orthodox Church as institution. The dioceses that made up the two Metropolitanates would be known from now on. The Metropolitan from Vicina was transferred to Curtea de Arges, while in Moldova a Romanian person was metropolitan because he was related to the ruling prince. In its turn, the Ecumenical Patriarchate waged its own fight for imposing Greek hierarchs to the Romanians, a rather difficult mission given the fact that sometimes the Romanian ruling princes preferred those related to them, as in the case of metropolitan Iosif Musat of Moldova, later on of Gheorghe Movila, or even of Gavriil Callimachi.[2] In fact, the successor of Iosif Musat to the leadership of the Metropolitanate of Moldova seems to be have been called metropolitan of Poleanina even by Manuel II the Paleologue, to the great discontent of patriarch Eftimie.[3] Some historians tend to affirm that this metropolitan must have been a Romanian also accepted by Prince Alexander the Kind. Certainly, the emperor's authority was imposed to the patriarch.

The Church was a rather democratic institution for the time, because the sons of ordinary peasants could become hierarchs, besides the relatives of the prince or boyars. The worthy monks could have a true church career, having been carefully prepared in various schools, so that later on they could reach the most important ranks in the leadership of the Church. This is why many times these hierarchs became close advisers to the ruling princes and to the boyars. Rather often the bishops and metropolitans close to the rulers followed them in exile, some of them never to return to their eparchies. Many of the hierarchs have also supported the policy of their rulers, who appointed them bishops, and when the ruler was replaced, they were affected too. Metropolitan Gheorghe from Bistrita, who supported prince Stefan Rares, had to go into exile when the prince was removed through a plot of the boyars. When he came back to the country he was burned at the stake by prince John the Terrible, some people say because this one wanted to take his fortune, but it was also possible because he sustained the measures of the former prince against the Armenians. Maybe as dramatic was the tragic time of the death of Saint Antim of Ivir (1708-1716), whom the prince gave to the executioners.[4] Neither should we forget the case of metropolitan Dosoftei of Moldova (1671-1686) who, when the reign was changed, he preferred to go into exile to Poland, where from

[2] Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. II, Bucharest, Edited by the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1992, p. 477; Şerban Papacostea, „Întemeiera Mitropoliei Moldovei. Implicaţii central şi est-europene", in *Românii în istoria universală*, III, Iaşi, 1988, pp. 567-578; See Ciprian Zaharia, *Iosif I Muşat, întâiul mare ierarh român*, Bucharest, 1987; Constantin Mosor, „Aspecte principale din viaţa şi activitatea mitropolitului Gavriil Callimachi (1760-1786)", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, year LXXXVIII (1970), issue. 7-8, pp 764-777.

[3] Steven Runciman, *Teocraţia bizantină*, trad. Vasile Adrian Carabă, Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 2012, p. 162.

[4] Claudiu Cotan, *O istorie a Bisericilor ortodoxe slave*, Iaşi, Vasiliana '98 Publishing House, 2009, p. 65; See Claudiu Cotan, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1600-2000*, Iaşi, Vasiliana '98 Publishing House, 2009; See Andrei Pippidi, *Tradiţia politică bizantină în Ţările Române în secolele XVI-XVIII*, Bucharest, Corint Publishing House, 2001.

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he refused to come back.[5] The ruling princes also used the hierarchs to head various delegations trying to have good diplomatic relations with the stronger neighbour states.[6]

Unless the metropolitan obeyed the ruler he had all chances to be removed. The ruler appointed the metropolitan and it was also he who could remove him, sometimes even with the bought approval of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The good understanding between the ruler and the metropolitan was profitable for both of them. The ruler could use the metropolitan or the bishops in his political actions. If the metropolitan joined the people's masses approving their needs, he was peaceful removed at the right time or "through other methods".[7] The hierarchs knew that it was for their own good to have the political support of some boyars, of some "influential people" to be protected in case of unpleasant events. Some of them not even so could escape the "long hand" of the ruler. Neither should we forget the conflict between prince Mihai Sturdza and metropolitan Veniamin Costachi of Moldova broken out when the prince tried and finally succeeded in getting the fortunes of some monasteries in his personal interest.[8] But harder times came for the Orthodox Church, namely the reign of Prince Cuza (1859 – 1866). Comparatively, the Veniamin affair was only a prelude of the measures that Cuza adopted at the time of the secularisation of the monastic properties, who wanted to unconditionally submit the Church to his policy. From now on, the public image of the priest is changed too, having been assimilated to the statute of the public employee and submitted to the penal law, as before Cuza the priests could be only canonically punished. Seeming to remember Sturdza, prince Cuza forces the resignation of metropolitan Sofronie of Moldova within the same initiative to control the monasteries. Because of the secularisation of the monastic properties and of the regulations of the monasteries adopted, the philanthropic activity the Church unfolded was dissolved, and the monasteries and churches had to limit to the small budgets provided by the Ministry for Religious Affairs which were always coming late.[9]

The reign of King Charles I (1866-1914) attracted the Orthodox bishop into the political life even more. The new Constitution integrates the bishops and metropolitans into the Senate as lawful members, which fact exposes the Church to the political interference more than before. The new regulations for administrating the Ephorate of the Civil Hospitals of Bucharest and the Trusteeship of the Hospital of Saint Spiridon of Iasi promulgated on 9 July 1868 completed the legislative measures started in Cuza's time designed to substitute the church social assistance for the state laic medical assistance. Because according to the old canons the social assistance and spiritual one are the main features of the Church, one can

[5] See I. D. Lăudat, *350 de ani de la naşterea lui Dosoftei mitropolitul Moldovei. Studii şi articole*, Iaşi, 1975.

[6] See Claudiu Cotan, „The Role of the Orthodox Hierarchs in the Foreign Political Life of the Romanian Principalities. The Political Relaţions with Poland from 1450 to 1750", in *The Ortohodox Church in the Balkans and Poland. Conenection and Common Tradition*, Bialystok, 2007, pp. 15-36.

[7] Nicolae C. Turcu, „Activitatea mitropolitului Neofit I al Ungrovlahiei", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, year LXXXIV, issue. 5-6, p. 533-551.

[8] Dragoş Carciga, *Cler şi societate în Bucureştiul interbelic. O analiză a proiectului social urban bisericesc 1918-1940* (doctorate thesis), Bucharest, 2012, pp. 47-57.

[9] See Constantin C. Giurescu, *Viaţa şi opera lui Cuza Vodă*, ed. a II-a, Bucharest, 1970; See Claudiu Cotan, *Ortodoxia şi mişcările de emancipare naţională din sud-estul Europei în secolul al XIX-lea*, Bucharest, Bizantină Publishing House, 2004.

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certainly say that the law of 1868 destroyed one of the characteristic features of Christianity. The State deprived the Church of her income through the secularisation law, and through the subordination of her social assistance network the same state deprived her of the love for the fellow beings.

The Orthodox Church supported the union of the Romanian Principalities in 1859, and then she had to suffer the tough interference of the state in her own organisation through some non-canonical laws. Politics starts being directly present in the election of the hierarch and appointment of the clergy according to political criteria. This state of things affected the Orthodox hierarchy at its highest level, as well as the ordinary clergy. This is why on 15 October 1912, the primate metropolitan Conon Aramescu Donici addressed the following circular letter to the archpriests: *"We have often received applications of certain priests to be transferred either within the same city to parishes better than those they had, or from rural parishes to urban ones; we have also received applications of the priests to be promoted as parish priests either in the country or in the cities. In order to have such applications satisfied, some priests do not take into account the stipulations of the laws for the married priests and the regulations for their application, acting contrary to the canonical laws and degrading in this way the priestly character, when they use the laics' interventions to get the things they crave for, but which most often do not deserve. The church administration suffers a lot because of the political interference"*.[10] Unfortunately, this practice was present during the communist time too, when the relations with the Communist Party contributed to the growth of the authority of some clergy willing to hold positions in the church administration body. This phenomenon is, certainly, still present in the church life today, where the good relations with the local administrative authorities are a great advantage. This sort of interventions in the Church life affected even the Orthodox hierarchy. The case of the fight between the political parties for appointing the primate metropolitan is well known. The fight between metropolitan Ghenadie Petrescu and Iosif Gheorghian showed how fragile the Church was when faced with politics. "Ghenadie affair" fell into the parties' hands that passed it to the public opinion brutally affecting the image of the Church. The sister Orthodox Churches came into the dispute alerted by the former metropolitan Ghenadie. Demonstrations for supporting Ghenadie were organised in the great cities, whom the Conservatory party made metropolitan and then defrocked through the intervention of the Liberal Party.[11] Later on, the primate metropolitan Athanasie Mironescu was in the same situation and finally obligated to resign later on although innocent. The state of things was dramatic for the Orthodox Church. Spiru Haret, Minister for Religious Affairs at the time deplored the sad image of the Orthodox clergy at the beginning of the 20th century: *"We have all seen during the last eight months the funny show of a minister (Arion) who, while crying that he has solved the crisis, he ran from man to man, the primate's walking staff in his hand and found nobody to accept it. Mr Aron was persuasive, smiled, prayed, and frowned his eyebrows, but in vain. Nobody wanted to hear of his proposals. When finally, after many prayers and humiliations, he found somebody to consent, a cruel fate took him away from him, just when*

[10] *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, year XXXVI (1912), issue. 8, p. 827.

[11] See George I. Gibescu, *Un mare ierarh din trecutu apropiat al Bisericii noastre: Mitropolitul Ghenadie Petrescu, 1893-1896*, Bucharest, 1940.

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he thought he solved the case".[12] The Orthodox bishops were afraid of the political power. The event is very much like the well known case of metropolitan Teodosie of the 17th century, victim of the conflict between the boyars' families.[13]

The recognition of the church autocephaly in 1885 and proclamation of the Patriarchy in 1925 were also achieved with the direct contribution of the state which was a mediator between Bucharest and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The new international statute of Romania imposed this thing after getting independence and achieving Great Romania. The State intervened in the Church life wishing to improve the hard financial situation of the Orthodox clergy, a social category closer at least from this point of view to the Middle Ages than to a society to be modernised. The laws and measures adopted have only partially succeeded in achieving this thing. The law adopted in 1893 improved the social state of the Orthodox priests, but basically has not changed anything, so that the clergy continued to be discontented. The "Church House", an institution the state set up in 1902 in order to improve the social state of the priests changes forever the priests' statute from servants of the altar into state employees, namely into public employees providing spiritual services. From now on they are submitted to double jurisdiction: of the Church from a canonical perspective and of the state from penal perspective, according to the model Cuza instituted. The Church still controls only the occasional social assistance (alms of mercy) and, certainly, the spiritual assistance. The setting up of the "Church House" brings about certain benefits to the servants of the altars, but it becomes an instrument for extending the state control over them. In order to subsist, the priests develop a national network of societies of private pensions, of inter-aid, loan, and other activities. They develop in the context of the freedom of association guaranteed by the Constitution of 1866, which stipulates the fact that the priests can form such associations if they do not affect the public order.[14] During the inter-war period, the active participation of the patriarch in the public life and especially his relationship with the king proved the fact that the Church remained a simple administrative annex of the lay state. *Patriarch Miron Christian Orthodox Association* started to operate at the level of the parishes, which unfolded the Christian educational activity of the patriarch. Two spiritual phenomena mark an interesting page in the church history: the *Lord's Army*, religious movement founded by priest Iosif Trifa from Sibiu (1889 – 1935) and the *Romanian Orthodox Brotherhood*, an organisation set up by Nicolae Balan, Metropolitan of Transylvania (1920 – 1955). The two Christian Orthodox organisations were designed to revive the religious life from a moral and spiritual point of view through the laics' discipleship.

The Romanian Orthodox Church has not become modern opposing the state, but submitted to its authority. In order to have her at its side – but not in the political life too – the state has become her protector, defending her both against the other Churches, Catholic and Greek Catholic, and against any other sect. King Carol II co-opted even patriarch Miron

[12] Spiru Haret, *Criza bisericească*, Bucharest, 1912, pp. 134-135; Paul Brusanowski, *Stat şi Biserică în Vechea Românie*, Presa Universitară Clujană Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, pp. 125-141.

[13] Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. II, Bucharest, Edited by the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church 1994, p. 127.

[14] Dragoş Carciga, *Cler şi societate în Bucureştiul interbelic. O analiză a proiectului social urban bisericesc 1918-1940* (doctorate thesis), Bucharest, 2012, pp. 84-97.

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Cristea to his authoritative policy, at a time when many priests made politics, and a large number of them were members or sympathizers of the Legionary Movement. The appointment of patriarch Miron Cristea as president of Council of Ministers was well received by a series of political leaders. Yet, a political leader like Iuliu Maniu asked the patriarch through a letter not to interfere in the political disputes for fear to compromise the Church. It was obvious that the new regime focused its actions against the legionaries accused to have undermined the state authority with the support of the Orthodox Church.

The dictator Ion Antonescu (1940 – 1944), the leader of the state, saw the Orthodox Church as a second army of the country. His government too was trying to organise the Church on new principles, to serve especially the new political ideology. The political initiatives of marshal Antonescu also included a series of aspects focused directly on the Orthodox Church, a strong national Church able to sustain a strong state too.

During the communist period, the state made tremendous efforts to get total control over the Orthodox Church. Although criticised for her submissive conciliatory attitude, she only tried to survive. To a certain extent, the Orthodox clergy had the chance to survive due to the removal from the political scene of the communists of the old guard who would have treated the Romanian Orthodoxy just as Stalin did when he reduced the Church of Russia to total submission. Certainly, there were Romanian Orthodox clergy who betrayed the call of the priestly service, but most of them tried, and some of them successfully succeeded to accomplish their mission of confessors of Christ. In society, the devotion of the faithful for the Church has been permanent in spite of all the communist propaganda. One proof in this sense is the fact that after the first two decades of communist oppression passed, the theological schools which were still operating were in great demand with the candidates to priesthood.

The dissolution of communism has not directly meant that much better times would follow for the Orthodox Church. First of all, the Church was not prepared to face the capitalism of Romanian type. The first trial came very fast, the removal of patriarch Teoctist accused of collaboration with the communist leaders and of obedience, an act that caused a true disorganisation in the Orthodox Church for a few months. The patriarch had to return, but remained in a permanent state of siege, having been considered too close to the old communist political regime. However, the Romanian Orthodox people have not passed through the post-communist religious experience of the Bulgarians who reached schism, or that of the Ukrainians divided into various Orthodox Churches appeared after the disintegration of the USSR.

The Orthodox clergy also had the mirage to involve in the political life after the anti-communist Revolution of 1989. Hierarchs and ordinary priests tried to join the political parties or fight for heading various city halls or holding positions in the local or central administration. Moreover, some of them became members of the Parliament. Criticised once for her absence from the social life, today, some people see the Orthodox Church as too present in society.

The Orthodoxy succeeded in recuperating one of her old dimensions, namely philanthropy. For today's Romanian Orthodox Church social assistance has become a dimension of the pastoral service more and more present, remembering the last centuries.

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Today, the Orthodox Church coordinates social centres, kindergartens, youth associations and medical centres. Unfortunately, she has not got the necessary financial force for sustaining extensive programmes in this field. The most part of the church estates confiscated by communists through nationalisation have not been recuperated by the Church which is still under political control in this field. This is why the majority of the Orthodox clergy receive salaries from the state.

Although the Church is present in the system of public education through the Religion taught in schools, as well as in the army through the chaplain priests, more and more voices are heard who want this state of things changed. Today, these ones are trying to remove Religion from school under the pretext of discrimination and freedom. Many times the disputes on this theme caused even violent manifestations, involving persons, foundations and associations. Although Europe, with old Christian roots, is looking more and more for its identity, such people wish to remove Christianity from Romania. These disagreements prove that after 25 years, the Romanian society has not found yet a consensus in the field of the religious freedom. The purpose of the Church is to lead this world to the kingdom of God. The role of the Orthodox Church in the world is to deify it.

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