ETHICAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES FOR THE EASTER RITUAL IN COVID TIMES: SACRED TIME IN (NON)SACRED ONLINE SPACE

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the ethical and unethical perspectives in media communication from the political discourse and journalistic discourse to the discourse of the representatives of the Orthodox Church, in the context of the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The content analysis of these discourses has as a reference dimension the agreements signed by the Ministry of Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church to prevent the spread of the virus during the Easter holidays, a form of communication that goes beyond the paradigm of institutional collaboration. Does the limitation of the spread of the virus become an ethical or unethical cause for the restriction of freedom? Is the way in which the Romanian Orthodox Church disapproves of the ban on the believers' participation in the Resurrection service during the pandemic a matter of ethics, in defense of human rights, or a purely theological issue? The symbolic arguments related to officiating services in the physical presence of the congregation are transferred to the virtual space. On the other hand, the present study follows the reactions of the public in the (trans)ritualization of the Easter holidays, the analysis between "sacred space," "hierophanic time" and "digital environment," through the media and institutional platforms on Facebook. In the digital environment, the symbolic effectiveness of the religious rite was continued and the online medium did not confiscate the rite but strengthened and sustained its situatedness in sacred time. If the sacred space is only the one related to the temple, the church, the sacred time can be experienced beyond the church space, through prayer and meditation or through the comments of parishioners who attest to live participation in the religious ritual during online services.*

Keywords: *discourse ethics; media; Covid-19; (trans)ritualization; Easter holidays; digital environment*

The Ethics of Communication

From Jonathan Dancy's point of view, the theory of duty does not state that some principles are more important than others (Dancy 248). If classical utilitarianism is based on "seeking the greatest happiness for the most" (Mill 17), instead, the Kantian principle is a categorical imperative of universal law which states that "an action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose that is to be attained by it, but in the maxim according to which the action is determined" (Kant 107). According to Ross, who overturns classical

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principles and observes their disorder, actions are seen as a *prima facie* duty by virtue of certain aspects, in order of importance: "It is more important to help others than to keep our promises" (Ross, qtd. in Dancy 250). In many cases, principles must deal with ethical conflicts or dilemmas, that is, we have "a prima facie duty to tell the truth and another duty to help those in need" (source page). Dancy argues that we should keep both principles in mind when the conflict takes place between actions that are equally important and that neither of them should be abandoned; rather, one should reflect on the importance of each principle depending on the situational context (Dancy 251). Following in the footsteps of classical Kantian philosophy, the principle of legal moralism means the prohibition by law of potentially immoral or dangerous behavior, and the criminalization of such behaviors on the basis of the principle of injury or the principle of avoiding an offense (Scoccia, Miroiu, Blebea, qtd. in Radu 30-31). An act is considered harmful if it negatively and explicitly affects the interests of an individual, if it undermines human dignity, and also if it does not explicitly harm while being considered illegal (Plaisance, qtd. in Radu 31). Offensive situations can take various forms, depending on the geographical, historical and dominant moral differences, depending on the people's conceptions of good and evil, in accordance with the policy or norms of each society.

Perspectives and Reactions in Media Communication

The myth of the end of the world has been upheld to this day for millennia and will conceivably not die any time soon. It is only a redundancy fabricated, nowadays, by the laity for the illocutionary purpose of warning the public or, perhaps, for the purpose of controlling the masses and inducing panic. Umberto Eco calls the apocalypse a secular obsession rather than a Christian one, an opinion also embraced by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini with whom Eco corresponds. Eco's motivation is that, in Christianity, "the emphasis is not on the end of the ages, but on their passage" (Martini, Eco 14; my translation). In terms of apocalyptic contexts, Eco lists some of the fears of the new generations, including the apocalypse generated by incurable diseases, changing climate, melting glaciers, and "genetic engineering leading to the creation of our clones" (Martini, Eco 14).

In Romania, on the eve of the Easter holidays, the context generated by the Covid-19 pandemic was quite tragic, with over 400 deaths and over 8000 infected people. To prevent the spread of the virus, measures taken through military ordinances included banning parishioners from physically participating in church services. We know that external control of behavior violates human freedom, whether it is deprivation of liberty or it affects the freedom of conscience. However, the context in which human rights are limited owes to the Military Ordinances issued during the state of emergency,

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with the motivation of limiting the spread of Covid-19. Thus, does the limitation of the spread of the virus become an ethical or unethical cause for the restriction of freedom? According to Ross, we should examine the importance of each category, therefore, if we relate to human life and health, then the reasoning behind the restriction of freedom may (or may not) seem acceptable.

Regarding the journalistic perspectives, as well as the political ones, the reactions are contradictory and communication suffers blockages, aspects that go beyond the paradigm of agreement between institutions. On March 21, 2020, Military Ordinance no. 2 came with additions to Military Ordinance no. 1, introducing some of the first emergency measures regarding crowds. Thus, the following additions were made to art. 9: "Services in places of worship may be officiated by church / religious ministers, without public access, the services may be broadcast in the media or online."[1] On April 14, a first agreement was concluded between the Ministry of Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church, which stipulated that "The blessed Host, consecrated on Holy Thursday, will be distributed to the faithful on Friday and Saturday, between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. in all parishes, in places specially arranged, outside the places of worship, by church staff and volunteers," and that "the distribution of the Holy Light brought from Jerusalem will be made by parish volunteers and public order squads and patrols on mission on Saturday, starting at 8 p.m.," with believers permitted "to go out in the vicinity of the house, respecting the rules of social distancing in order to avoid crowding and the formation of groups of more than three people" (source). Marcel Vela, Minister of Internal Affairs, also motivated his decision and stated that

> there are enough citizens who want to make diversions and create actions such as those of August 10 in order to assault the churches. He said that he has reliable information that there are many political heroes (PSD mayors) who want to earn electoral points and use this sacred event to elevate their own image or to attack the decisions of the Minister of Interior or the Government.[2]

The Social Democrat Party (henceforth, PSD, in Romanian) issued a press release denying the allegations made by the Interior Minister and warning that the dissemination of false information is a crime.[3] In another press release,

[1] https://www.untrr.ro/userfiles/files/ordonanta-militar-nr-2-din-21-03-2020-privind-masuri-de-prevenire-a-raspandire-a-covid-19-15848767633438b26ab2dd5d654508e1696ba83473%281%29.pdf

[2] https://perol.ro/ministrul-de-interne-ofera-precizari-despre-impartirea-luminii-sfinte-si-a-sfintelor-pasti-este-un-fake-news-ca-este-scandal-in-guvern/

[3] *Idem.*

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The Democrat Union of Magyars in Romania (hereafter UDMR, in Romanian) criticized the agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church, accused Marcel Vela of endangering the country and the health of the population, and stated that the agreement "would diminish the efforts in the recent months of a country preparing to recover economically in this situation of unprecedented gravity."[4] At the date of concluding the first agreement between the Ministry of Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban stated that "According to how this agreement was conceived, if it is respected, it will not generate any risk of spreading the virus."[5] The declaration of the Interior Minister and the Prime Minister takes after the paradigm of understanding the conditions stipulated in the agreement. However, the next day President Iohannis requested the cancelation of the agreement: "At this meeting, I will ask Prime Minister Orban and the Minister of the Interior to reconsider the agreement, to come up, if they want, with a formula based on the 'Stay at home' principle, which fits perfectly with the requirements of the decree that extends the state of emergency and which, obviously, respects all military ordinances," the head of state announced.[6]

Either the paradigm of the agreement was not respected, or there were communication problems between the institutions, because Marcel Vela replied in the press that both the prime minister and the president knew and initially approved of the first agreement, with the intention of dispelling suspicions that the president had not been informed.[7] The second agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church forbade the participation of parishioners in church services, excluded volunteers from the Ministry of the Interior and allowed the distribution of the blessed Host and of the Holy Light to be done only by church representatives: "church services will be carried out without parishioners, while the Host and the Holy Light will be distributed to the population, upon request, by clerical staff accompanied by a maximum of five volunteers, who will be wearing protective equipment."[8]

In the same context, through accusations regarding deviations from the legal norms imposed by the authorities beyond the satire and pathos specific

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[4] https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2020/04/15/udmr-cere-anularea-acordului-mai-bor-privind-pastele-relaxarea-restrictiilor-extrem-de-periculoasa--487521

[5] https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2020/04/14/orban-despre-parteneriatul-dintre-mai-si-patriarhie-daca-este-respectat-nu-va-genera-riscuri-de-raspandire-a-virusului--487454

[6] https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2020/04/15/video-iohannis-voi-solicita-premierului-si-ministrului-de-interne-sa-revina-asupra-acordului-mai-bor--487689

[7] https://www.digi24.ro/amphtml/stiri/actualitate/social/marcel-vela-anunta-ca-a-modificat-acordul-cu-biserica-dupa-o-noua-intalnire-cu-patriarhul-1292669

[8] *Idem.*

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to media communication, the journalistic discourse constituted an attack on the Romanian Orthodox Church: "Patriarch Daniel *infected us*! *Verily he has infected us*!" or:

> How does Jesus see the Resurrection made by the Romanian Orthodox Church & Daniel? I say this: *greed*! – this is what Patriarch Daniel has understood from all the wisdom of Jesus Christ. There is not enough COVID in Romania. No. We must spread the virus to all the people. The situation with the teaspoon [used for the communion – ed.] was not enough, no! Let us give them the Easter communion, let us give them the holy light. Let us put COVID in the slums by force, with the Gendarmerie, with the Police ... Patriarch Daniel *imposes* the Resurrection with the help of the Gendarmerie.[9]

The opulence displayed by the Church leadership was also ridiculed: "Patriarch Daniel will drive through the neighborhoods on the night of the Resurrection in his Mercedes and he will be dishing out flashes of holy light!"[10]

The actions of politicians and representatives of the Orthodox Church, respectively the agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church, were challenged by some journalists. The agreement was controversial, in the sense that the rite of the Easter holidays was politicized by rules that go beyond the ethics of the old rite. Thus, the illocutionary discourse is verdictive (it accuses and condemns) in terms of political interests that prevail over public safety. The journalist Ion Cristoiu criticized the first agreement, in which police officers were appointed to distribute the holy light, and compared it with business: "It simply came to our notice then. Keeping Vela is a disaster," "Let's see what the disaster was. Mr. Klaus Iohannis had an intervention yesterday and both the message to the nation and the decree presented an apocalyptic image to the Romanians. It is no longer the light at the end of the tunnel, but the apocalypse";[11] "How could Patriarch Daniel sign an agreement with Marcel Vela?" "Is distributing the Holy Light really the Police's business?" "I do not share the view of Iohannis that the problem with this agreement was that it did not respect any restrictions. NO! This agreement brought the Romanian Orthodox Church down in the mud of the militia"; "Meanwhile, the Church, taking the example of the Catholic Church, became a kind of business or joint stock company, with television,

[9] https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-perspektiva-23849666-patriarhul-daniel-virusat-adevarat-virusat-sau-cum-vede-isus-invierea-made-bordaniel.htm

[10] https://kmkz.ro/de-ras/patriarhul-daniel-va-merge-cu-mertanul-prin-cartiere-noaptea-de-inviere-si-va-da-flashuri-de

[11] https://www.antena3.ro/actualitate/cristoiu-klaus-iohannis-a-avut-un-mesaj-electoral-anti-opozitie-566919.html

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newspapers, businesses, earnings, Mercedes cars", "Faith is within the human soul", "the Ministry of the Interior wanted to turn the police into angels who would bring us light", "Patriarch Daniel could only sign an agreement with the apostle Paul".[12]

Also, the journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu criticized the politicization of the religious: "How could Klaus Iohannis have agreed with that excuse of an agreement?"; "President Klaus Iohannis could not agree with such a protocol; because he took the most serious measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus epidemic"; "Why did Mr. Orban and Mr. Vela do that? Because they are concerned about the upcoming elections, they want to appear to be the friends of the people, of the believers, under the military ordinances, which they also presented like some archangels."[13] Another critical remark of C. T. Popescu addressed the statement of Patriarch Daniel: that "the greatest thing priests feel sorry for nowadays is that they have no believers during mass." The journalist attacked the leadership of the Orthodox Church and accused it of commercial interests: "So the greatest thing that Romanian priests feel sorry for in our country is not that every day 15-20-10 people die, and then another 20 pass away (*sic!*). There are 400 Romanians who have died solely because of this virus and more will die. This is not the greatest thing Mr. Daniel feels sorry for, but that they have no clients. The owners of hotels and restaurants also share this feeling of sadness."[14]

C. T. Popescu's remark has a gospel undertone. When Jesus entered the courts of the Temple in Jerusalem he "drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves" (Matthew 21:12, NIV). Divine resentment results from the actions of those who take advantage of the sacred space of the temple and use it for personal affairs: "'It is written,' he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers'" (Matthew 21:13). We should also mention here the call made by Pope Francis to politicians: "We pray that political parties in various countries, in this time of pandemic, seek together the good of their country, not the good of their own party."[15]

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[12] https://www.paginademedia.ro/2020/04/ion-cristoiu-se-desparte-de-evenimentul-zilei?fbclid=IwAR0_5biuPokCtVk9mo04dQrgA2XGKEoehyOV_5FlNhnLyomJSLuR6fv990A

[13] https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/ctp-bezna-absoluta-a-mintii-domnului-vela-cum-ar-fi-putut-sa-fie-de-acord-klaus-iohannis-cu-acea-panarama-de-acord-1292323

[14] https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/ctp-atac-dur-patriarh-cea-mai-mare-tristete-domnului-daniel-nu-e-400-romani-murit-zile-ci-nu-clienti-

[15] https://focuspress.ro/apelul-papei-francisc-catre-politicieni-pentru-a-lupta-impotriva-coronavirusului-puneti-tara-inaintea-partidului/?fbclid

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(Trans)Ritualization in Religious Communication

Jonathan Berg raises the question of whether ethics depends on religion and answers that *the good* as an object of ethics depends directly on God, and that "dependence on God implies dependence on religion" (Berg 554). Thus, moral good is identified with the will of God, according to the Theory of the Divine Command. Berg admits, however, that the Theory of the Divine Command raises many objections, not as regards the good, but as to the performance of rituals (Berg 556).

Is the way in which the Romanian Orthodox Church disapproves of the ban on believers' participation in the Resurrection service during the pandemic a matter of ethics, in defense of human rights, or a purely theological issue? Also theological and not always ethical are the rules imposed by various religious denominations: "women are excluded from the priesthood in the Catholic Church, females must be subordinate to males, Muslim religion prohibits alcohol, Catholic Church prohibits divorce" (Martini, Eco 47). Eco argues that every denomination has its own rules and that no one should be scandalized or object to them because we have the freedom to choose: "If you want to divorce, become a Protestant, react only if the Church wants to prevent you from your divorce, even though you are not a Catholic" (Martini, Eco 47).

The symbolic arguments related to officiating services in the physical presence of the congregation are transferred to the virtual space. However, in Romania, through the second agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church it was agreed that the host and the holy light should be distributed to the faithful by church volunteers. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, in correspondence with Eco, also agrees that "a religious denomination must be limited to the legislative sphere of the state", but "on the other hand, the secular state does not have the right to censor the way of life of a believer who lives within the limits of these laws" (Martini, Eco 62). Although Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini argues that one cannot speak of the laws of the state as something absolute and immutable, in the context generated by Covid-19 we encounter military ordinances that become absolute only during the state of emergency. In other countries there have been even tougher bans on the freedom of believers. In Greece, Serbia and northern Macedonia, churches were called to close and believers were forbidden to attend the service. In Bulgaria and Russia, churches remained open but believers were advised to stay home.[16] In Italy, Pope Francis held his Resurrection service in accordance with the laws imposed by the Italian state, and the faithful complied. In Romania, the Archbishop of Tomis Theodosius asked the state authorities to open the churches for the Resurrection services: "Let us all pray and God will persuade those who forced us not to receive you, the faithful, to

[16] https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/ortodocsi-paste-biserica-europa-2956304

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allow us to open the church"[17]; "Here there is even an exaggeration because the believers could sit around the churches, share the Resurrection liturgy together, enjoy the Light, enjoy the Passover and truly live a moment that helps them recover spiritually"[18]; he moreover criticized President Klaus Iohannis' message on the protocol between the Ministry of the Interior and the Romanian Orthodox Church, arguing that the president's warning "Stay home, otherwise we will have funerals after the holidays" is a kind of curse.[19]

Romanian Orthodox Church spokesperson, Vasile Bănescu, states that the agreement of the Patriarchate with the Ministry of the Interior is "in its content, to the last letter, in accordance with all regulations of the state of emergency" and emphasized that Romania is a country and a society built on the values of Christianity, "neither Christianopathic nor Christianophobic".[20] Spokespersons for the Orthodox churches in Moldova, Bucovina, Iasi, Cluj and Alba Iulia said they would broadcast the religious services live, without mentioning details about the political agreement:

> Constantin Sturzu, spokesperson for the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and Bukovina: All those in charge, the operators, the technical crew, work from home. Everything is done remotely. The cameras are installed, we had to equip ourselves with cameras that can be controlled remotely to zoom in, to get close-ups, so that the faithful can be part of all the services during this period as much as possible, but especially so during the Resurrection service. [21]
> Dosoftei Șcheiul, ecclesiastic of the Iași Metropolitan Cathedral: The cameras will be located one to the right and one to the left of the holy altar, one in the back, which will film those who will go out through the holy doors and from there, from the balcony there will be another camera that will cover the entire general perimeter.[22]

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[17] https://www.activenews.ro/stiri-social/IPS-Teodosie-cere-statului-sa-deschida-bisericile-de-Inviere-Sa-ne-rugam-cu-totii-si-Dumnezeu-va-indupleca-pe-cei-care-ne-au-silit-sa-nu-va-primim-pe-dvs-credinciosii-sa-ne-dea-voie-sa-deschidem-biserica-160847

[18] https://thetrustword.com/interviu-arhiepiscopul-tomisului-ips-teodosie-trebuie-sa-fim-foarte-atenti-nu-sa-slabim-masurile-de-siguranta-dar-sa-le-dublam-cu-niste-masuri-mai-omenoase-de-apropiere-intre-oameni-sa-le-aducem/?fbclid=IwAR0GsmfhEP_johTXPnX_dHHfAViBcT-Zwz40FjNNo5BuJTUqg9Rh4y0I2YQ

[19] https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-23862053-ips-teodosie-acea-exprimare-lui-iohannis-daca-nu-ascultati-veti-face-inmormantare-este-soi-blestem.htm

[20] https://romania.europalibera.org/a/scandalul-înțelegerii-biserică--mai-pentru-paște-conflict-între-președinte-vela-și-orban-cum-spun-partidele-și-polițiștii/30555758.html

[21] https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/pastele-ortodox-2020-unde-pot-urmari-credinciosii-slujba-de-inviere.html

[22] *Idem.*

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> Bogdan Ivanov, spokesperson for the Metropolitan Church of Cluj: We will be able to enjoy together the service, even if through telecommunication, of the communion that the Resurrection of the Lord gives us. Our hearts are close and we are convinced that the Resurrection of the Lord remains the greatest promise that life overcomes death.
> Oliviu Butoi, spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia: The Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia broadcasts LIVE all the ceremonies, all the processions and religious services during the Holy Week and those during the enlightened week.[23]

In an interview, Father Marius Moșteanu, parish priest at the Saint Nicholas Church in Constanța, expressed his opinion regarding the duty of the faithful to listen to the divine command, to accept the divine will and to understand that we are asked to be our better selves:

> this year is a special year in which God allows us to be resurrected by ourselves. He does not allow us to rise from what we have. Not from ritualism, not from everything that implies a procession around the church and bringing the Holy Light from Jerusalem and so on. This year, God has left us to rise alone. Because in the Garden of Gethsemane, God left his Son after prayer to be convinced that he must take the cup prepared for him, that is, his passion. And he said, "Let me take the cup you gave me," and that was paramount to the resurrection of the Savior, the assumption that He will rise again. The Father did not help him" (Lăpușan 4).[24]

(Trans)ritualization means, in this case, the supplanting of the classical ritual in which the public physically participates in the ritual in the church. We witnessed last spring the conversion of the rite of resurrection into a rite altered by the regulations generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, namely the banning of parishioners from taking part in the resurrection services. Thus, (trans)ritualization occurred entirely via online communication through the changing of the space of ritualization simultaneously with the preservation of sacred time.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade argues that *hierophany* – "*an irruption of the sacred*" (26) – occurs in any "*sacred enclosure" (26)* because "within the sacred precincts the profane world is transcended" (25-26) both

[23] *Idem.*

[24] A. Lăpușan, *Datina*, anul 6, nr. 72, aprilie 2020, p. 4. https://cctb.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/datina72.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0nF8Xdga2iUBrOSAx-hOQ5BCO7WJGIuHltBz2DagvFL0qyuz_WyiD_tt0

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spatially and temporally. For Eliade, *"communication with the gods" (26) is a sacred* experience enabled spatially*: "there must be a door to the world above, by which the gods can descend to earth and man [*sic*] can symbolically ascend to heaven"* (26). For the "door *to the world above"* to open, another one should open first, to mark the physical transition from the profane to the sacred world, or rather the rupture between them: the threshold or door of the sanctuary. Furthermore, there is a sacred time associated with the celebration of the ritual; this liturgical time is "a primordial time, sanctified by the gods and capable of being made present by the festival" (Eliade 71). Ritual is able – indeed, intended – to recover mythical time: "*sacred time is reversible* in the sense that, properly speaking, it is *a primordial mythical time made present*" (Eliade 68, original emphasis). The repetition of the ritual grants it efficacious existence in the present time, Eliade contends in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. For instance, "*Christ's passion, death and resurrection are not simply* remembered *during the services of Holy Week; they really happen* then *before the eyes of the faithful. And a convinced Christian must feel that he [*sic*] is* contemporary *with these*" (392-3). Thus, religious time has the characteristics of periodicity, repetition, eternal present, elements through which sacredness is restored, according to Marcel Mauss: "the religious things that take place in time are legitimately and logically looked upon as taking place in eternity" (Mauss, qtd. in Eliade, *Patterns* 396).

The Easter holidays represent one such repeatable hierophanic time that brings the sacred into the present. Through live broadcasts on television channels and digital platforms, the Easter rite of April 2020 could be made present as a symbolic operator able to produce live sacred history. Media platforms monumentalized the event then and gave it legitimacy, as they had done before.[25] Thus, the 'aired' rite became a symbolic bridge between religious signifiers, Romanian Orthodox Church representatives, and the public even outside the sacred precincts. We should also recall, in this connection, the divine exhortation which refers to two sacred spaces and to the importance and effectiveness of prayer in intimacy, in people's homes: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father" (Matthew 6.5-6, NIV).

Below we have a synoptic picture in which we observe the effects of the (trans)ritualization of the Easter holidays on Facebook pages. For the year 2020, we have analyzed six pages on Facebook that broadcast live the Service of the Lord's Supper and eight Facebook pages that broadcast live the Service

[25] Religious services have been broadcast live by the Romanian Orthodox Church since the 1990s for the sake of believers who could not attend religious services physically.

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of the Resurrection of the Lord. We have also analyzed three Facebook pages that broadcast the Resurrection Service in 2019, to compare the impact of reactions between a year in which the Easter holidays were celebrated in churches, in the presence of the congregation, and 2020, when the pandemic crisis did not allow the presence of parishioners at the church.

Facebook page	Religious service, location and date of event	No. of followers	Number of likes	No. of comments	No. of shares	No. of views
TVR (Romanian National Television)[26]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Patriarchal Cathedral of Bucharest, 17.04.2020	1,2 k	2,1k	431	320	55,2 k
Dobrogea TV (local television of the southeastern region which includes Constanța)[27]	The Service of the Lord's Supper, the Church of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel and the Holy Martyr Philophtea from Topraisar (Constanța County), 17.04.2020	1,9 k	249	164	46	104k
Archdiocese of Tomis (ecclesiastical name of the Constanța diocese)[28]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Archbishop's Cathedral of Saints Peter	9,1k	10,4k	9,7k	2,3k	

[26] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=548322592749495&ref=watch_permalink
[27] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2300915000214409&ref=watch_permalink
[28] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=819980621831441&ref=watch_permalink

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	and Paul in Constanța, 17.04.2020					
Trinitas (official TV channel of the Romanian Orthodox Church)[29]	The Service of the Lord's Supper, Putna Monastery, 17.04.2020.		12,8k	6,5k	2,3k	1,5 M
Doxologia (Christian Orthodox online platform)[30]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Vespers of the removal of the Holy Epitaph, Iași Metropolitan Cathedral, 17.04.2020		6,4k	2,8k	1,2k	
Doxologia[31]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Sihăstria Monastery (Neamț County), 17.04.2020.		5,7k	2,2k	1k	225k
Doxologia[32]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Annunciation Chapel, Lacu Hermitage, Holy Mount Athos, Greece, 17.04.2020		1,1k	306	106	25,4k

[29] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1686010528214113&ref=watch_permalink
[30] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=220149005925842&ref=watch_permalink
[31] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=234567341236389&ref=watch_permalink
[32] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=227784388635317&ref=watch_permalink

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Doxologia[33]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Putna Monastery, 17.04.2020		7,2k	3,5k	1,8k	1,6 M
Ministry of National Defense[34]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Military Church of the Ministry of National Defense, 17.04.2020		2,2k	417	370	109k
TVR[35]	The Resurrection Service, Special edition of the show The Universe of Faith [Universul Credinței], Patriarchal Cathedral of Bucharest, 18.04.2020		1,1k	218	112	42,5k
Dobrogea TV[36]	Service of the Resurrection of the Lord, Archbishop's Cathedral of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul from		1,2k	1k	414	52k

[33] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1685998648215301&ref=watch_permalink
[34] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=273852836988865&ref=watch_permalink
[35] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=250632866089980&ref=watch_permalink
[36] https://www.facebook.com/DobrogeaTV/videos/254357382412946/

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	Constanța, 18.04.2020					
Adevărul (website of the Romanian daily newspaper)[37]	The Resurrection Service, Patriarchal Cathedral of Bucharest, 18.04.2020		4,4k	2,5k	951	204k
Archdiocese of Tomis[38]	The Resurrection Service, Archbishop's Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Constanța, 18.04.2020	7,9k	8,1k	6k	2,2k	347k
Constanța City Hall[39]	The Resurrection Service, Archbishop's Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Constanța, 18.04.2020		1,8k	1k	467	72k
Trinitas[40]	The Resurrection Service, Patriarchal Cathedral of Bucharest, 18.04.2020	12,2k	13k	10,7k	3,3k	415k
Doxologia[41]	The Resurrection	5,6k	9,7k	5,1k	1,6k	316k

[37] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=220216359075489&ref=watch_permalink
[38] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=239805684055479&ref=watch_permalink
[39] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=734942707250824&ref=watch_permalink
[40] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1312146708971149&ref=watch_permalink
[41] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=216945306403772&ref=watch_permalink

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	Service, Iași Metropolitan Cathedral, 18.04.2020					
Doxologia[42]	The Resurrection Service, Sihăstria Monastery (Neamț County), 18.04.2020	3k	5,2k	2,6k	833	172k
Doxologia[43]	The Resurrection Service, Putna Monastery, 18.04.2020	24,2k	4,6k	2,4k	887	1,2 M
Ministry of National Defense[44]	The Service of the Resurrection of the Lord, the Church of the Holy Great Martyr George and the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel within the Ministry of National Defense, 18/04/2020.	933	1,9k	719	404	98k
TVR[45]	The Resurrection Service,		580	189	76	11,6K

[42] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1532557283575755&ref=watch_permalink
[43] https://www.facebook.com/doxologia.ro/videos/2612692305679264/?v=2612692305679264
[44] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=224766018961599&ref=watch_permalink
[45] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2035296789930662&ref=watch_permalink

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	Patriarchal Cathedral of Bucharest, 28.04.2019					
Dobrogea TV[46]	The Resurrection Service of the Archbishop's Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Constanța, April 27, 2019		14	1	3	29,6k
Archdiocese of Tomis[47]	Service of the Lord's Supper, Archbishop's Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Constanța, 04/26/2019		1k	531	374	91,7k
Archdiocese of Tomis[48]	Service of the Resurrection of the Lord, Archbishop's Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Constanța, April 27, 2019		307	145	96	29,6k

Comment

During the broadcast of the Lord's Supper service, although the number of appreciations/likes (2.1k), comments (431) and shares (320) on the TVR Facebook page is superior to that on the Facebook page of the local television Dobrogea TV (249 likes, 164 comments, 46 shares), we notice that the number of views of the local Dobrogea TV page is almost double compared to the TVR

[46] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2340356406290271&ref=watch_permalink
[47] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=520782951659425&ref=watch_permalink
[48] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2340351186290793&ref=watch_permalink

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page, with 104 k compared to 55.2 k. During live broadcasts, the Facebook page of the Archdiocese of Tomis is the one most appreciated locally (10.4k likes), in competition with and similar in number of likes to the Facebook page of Trinitas television, the television that earned the most appreciations of the Lord's Supper service (12.8k likes). Most of the views of the Lord's Supper service are identified on the pages of Trinitas with 1.5 M and Doxologia (broadcast from Putna Monastery) with 1.6 M. Of all the Facebook pages of political institutions, the only one with a live broadcast of the service of Lord's Supper was the Ministry of National Defense page, with 2.2 k likes and 109 k views.

In the case of the live broadcast of the Resurrection service, the Facebook pages of TVR and Dobrogea TV have a similar number of appreciations, 1.1k likes for TVR and 1.2k likes for Dobrogea TV. Nevertheless, the number of views in the case of the local television is higher than the one of the public television, with 52 k compared to 42.5 k. Also, the comments and distributions in the case of live transmission of the local television are superior to those of the national public television: Dobrogea TV (1k comments, 414 shares), TVR (218 comments, 112 shares).

The page of the Archdiocese of Tomis was the most appreciated and viewed among the Facebook pages, at local level, with 8.1 k likes and 347 k views. The Facebook page of Trinitas TV had the most appreciations compared to the other Facebook pages that broadcast live: 13 k likes. The most viewed Facebook page during the transmission of the service of the Lord's Resurrection was Doxologia (transmission from Putna Monastery) with 1.2 M views. Among the pages of political institutions, locally, the page of Constanța City Hall broadcast live the service of the Resurrection and had 1.8 k appreciations and 72 k views, close in number to the reactions to the page of the Ministry of National Defense, with 1.9 k likes and 98 k views.

In 2019, although some believers physically participated in the service of the Lord's Resurrection, others watched the live broadcast from their Facebook pages as well. TVR's Facebook page had 580 likes and 11.6 k views, below those of April 2020. Also in 2019, Dobrogea TV had a higher audience than TVR, with an almost triple number of views, 29.6 k, a similar number with the views of the page of the Archdiocese of Tomis, which broadcast the service of the Lord's Resurrection live.

Conclusions

Since the early 1950s, theoretical and canonical texts have been published in the Vatican to state that the blessings received from believers kneeling before the television station were valid, symbolically: "since the advent of television, hundreds of millions of people can participate in this, including themselves in the vast community of Catholics, in the great family of Christendom, achieving

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this through vision, emotion and prayer, shared virtually, that is, through the grace of television technology" (Lardellier 151).

If we refer to digital technology, we can say that it is much more complete than the classic one mentioned by Pascal Lardellier, through platforms that allow not only live TV broadcasts, but also the interaction between page administrators and believers or the interaction among users, the obtaining of feedback through their reactions, such as likes, appreciations, comments and sharing. Thus, users become participants in the rite or participate in the trans-ritualization operation, they become witnesses of the (re)presentation framework that allows their belonging to the community to be expressed virtually. The Easter experience of 2020 has taught us important lessons or has validated received wisdom. Thus, it can be argued that the online environment is a continuator of the symbolic effectiveness of the religious rite and can contribute to the emotional restructuration of the rite. The online medium does not confiscate the rite, but maintains its sacredness, sacred time, and can accelerate the interaction and expression of public feelings. At the denotative level, the reporters and the operators' cameras describe the religious symbolic signs: the cross, the vestments, the holy books, etc. At the connotative level, the emphasis is on emotion, on the pain of the crucifixion. The excitement is even greater, as, for the first time, in 2020 parishioners could not physically participate in the Easter services. The digital register enables the passage beyond ritual, a trans-ritualization of the Easter services, and multiplies the audience.

If the sacred space is only the one related to the temple, the church, the sacred time can be experienced beyond the church space, through prayer and meditation or through the comments of parishioners who attest to live participation in the religious ritual during online services: "Christ is risen"; "Truly he is risen!"; "Amen!"; "Hallelujah!"' "Glory to You, Lord, Glory to You!"; "Lord, forgive us!"; "Remember me in Your kingdom!"; "Lord, forgive our sins and have mercy on us!"; "Bless us, Lord!" In addition, some comments of the faithful are accompanied by memorial lists for the living, especially on the Doxologia platform. The Easter holiday rejuvenates the sacred time, and through the Christian rite the historical time is valued, with the trans-historical purpose of human salvation. The Christians' commentaries do not target any religious leader, nor do they recall the legal norms that stopped physical participation in religious service, but only evoke the Christian divinity, strictly within a cultural framework specific to the Christian model: "The Christian model - sacrifice for others, humility, kindness, and altruism - represents a major cultural framework for evaluating certain situations" (Coman, Coman 140).

From the examples extracted from the press articles, what stands out is the politicization of the religious rite through the media, which in turn leads to

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conflicts or cognitive dissonances at the level of institutions, aspects that go beyond the ethics of the Christian ritual. Beyond the controversy over the deviations from the rules imposed by the crisis generated by Covid-19 and the criticism brought to the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding the transformation of the religious rite into a political and marketing event, the online environment did not confiscate the Christian rite, as it could be seen from the monitoring of digital pages on Facebook, but strengthened it, helping to preserve its sacred time.

Thanks to the digital environment, the symbolic effectiveness of the religious ritual was continued via the live transmissions of the religious services, but also through the reactions of the Christian users who participated in the religious blessings. This is evidenced by the reactions, comments and shares of users who watched the live broadcasts of religious services, both locally and nationally. What we remember from the effects of multiple crises, political or religious, is that Christian users have shown solidarity and given importance to the Christian rite; emotions are strictly related to the emotion of the crucifixion and not to political-religious disputes. It is, perhaps, a lesson that Christians understood the ethics of duties and complied with legal norms, virtually accepting religious services, but “sanctioned” political-religious disputes by avoiding mentioning them during the sacred time of the crucifixion.

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