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# Christianity, Modernity and Romanian Folklore

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The Romanian space underwent the modernisation process at a later stage as compared to other regions from Europe, and Romanian elites, eager to catch up with the “civilised” Europe, stimulated the phenomenon known as “stage burning” in Romanian historiography.

In fact, this means the simultaneous and concentrated manifestation of certain phenomena which, in the West, occurred somewhat distinctly and over a long period of time. In the West, before the time of secularised modernity, we encounter a long period when the complex historical phenomena, known as the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, shape and “modernise” the entire society.

Religiously speaking, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation insisted on refuting “superstitions” and on establishing a “pure” religion, one of the main tools used to that effect being education. Later on, these mechanisms were taken over and developed by the laicised modernity in the manifestation of its own values.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian society was deeply traditional, religion playing an important part: the Orthodox Church was the dominant church, begin protected by the State and by the relative opacity of the society. The creators of modern Romania were, generally, individuals who had received a laic education, shaped after the ideals of the French Revolution. For them, religious beliefs and the Church were an obstacle to the development of Romania. Therefore, they adopted measures for beginning a fast and forced secularisation.

In parallel with this phenomenon, the opening of Romania to the world allowed, on the one hand, the establishment and development of several new religious cults, unknown until then and, on the other hand, an internal process, manifested among the common people who had access to education, comparable to the Reformation that happened in Western Europe four centuries ago. This was a “modernisation” of religion, popular beliefs (popular Christianity) being considered a mixture of superstitions and the Orthodox Church a bearer of unchristian beliefs and incapable of a true conversion of the believers.

Romanian popular beliefs, included in the modern concept of “folklore” were being studied “scientifically” by the representatives of a new science, ethnography. In contrast with the ethnographers from other European regions, most of the Romanian ethnographers saw folklore as the “living tradition”, attempting to integrate these beliefs in the grammar of modernity. In the inter-war period, when a “spiritualist” cultural trend spread in Romania, the popular tradition became “the full expression of the Romanian soul”, an entire “ethnic ontology” coming to be built from its components (in the words of philosopher Sorin Antohi).

Next to ethnographers, the debate regarding “folklore” and “popular Christianity” attracted theologians of the Orthodox Church who tried to prove the authentic Christianity of the Romanian popular traditions.

**Keywords:** Christianity, modernity, folklore, tradition, Romania

It is well-known that the word “pagan” comes from “paganus”, used to designate the rural population of the Roman Empire, insufficiently Christianised or entirely unchristian, unlike the urban population which, at least from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD on, undergoes a systematic and full process of conversion.<sup>1</sup> The more traditionalist world of the villages kept many elements of the old faiths under what some people called a Christianity “gloss”. From time to time, people of the Church expressed their concern regarding this state of things, proposing measures for counteracting the “superstitio”, that is, the fragments, the remains of old rituals or faiths, unconnected to Christianity, kept alongside or integrated within Christian practices. For instance, in the Byzantine world, attempts were made to remove “superstitions” by means of canons or normative tests, but the extent of this process was not comparable to the one in Occident.<sup>2</sup>

If in the Occident, in the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a certain tolerance towards the beliefs of the simple people (the so called “popular Christianity”), gradually, at the same time with the consolidation of the Catholic Church, the development of towns, of state structures, of the aulic culture, a firmer attitude is manifested for refuting “superstitions”.<sup>3</sup> Historians looked for various explanations of this phenomenon: the wish to “purify” Christianity, the desire for power, etc. Obviously, the discussions regarding the historical context and the evolution of the phenomenon are much too complicated to explain them in a few lines. We can only state that the dawn of the Renaissance of the 15<sup>th</sup> century coincides with the creation of the stereotype regarding the Sabbath and the beginning of the witch hunt. As one part of the society was more and more absorbed in a rationalizing, “enlightening” effort, the other part of the society was subject to horrible persecutions. As already proven, the Sabbath was a construct of the elites, not a popular phenomenon, although the victims came mostly from the rural environment, from the mass of simple and “superstitious” people.<sup>4</sup>

The reform and the appearance of the protestant cults at the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century brought an even more accentuated pathos. One of the fundamental themes of the protestant preachers was the retrieval of the original purity of Christianity, founded on reporting oneself exclusively to the biblical text. From this perspective, the Catholic Church itself was violently accused of “paganism” because it included in its dogmas and cult, ideas and practices inspired from the philosophy and religion of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>5</sup> The belief “purifying” action often acquired violent proportions, hundreds of thousands of people, dominated by “superstitions”, becoming its victims. The positive

side of this phenomenon is the development of schools and education, the individual being torn from the traditional environment and integrated in the rhythms of a savant, aulic culture, seen as the true and safe path for humans and for the society. Thus, from the timeless horizon of the village, the individual was being integrated into history.

In parallel with this “purifying” effort of Christian expression, a Godless rationalism takes shape, with the same pretensions of true path and with the same taste and missionary and “pedagogical” spirit, the aberrant expression of which was the Communism.<sup>6</sup> This emphasises the best tendency of the modern spirit to “purify” through education or even through corrective means, a behind the times world, dominated by “superstitions” which hinder the evolution of man and society. We are faced once more with an opposition between the dynamic world of the town and the closed horizon of the village, which becomes a “terra misionis” for various “luminaries”, atheists most of them. The beliefs of the rural world become “folklore”, notion by which we understand a simple cultural vestige of a bygone world, opposed both to Christianity and to the secularizing modernity.<sup>7</sup> Along the years, the ones who were rejecting the so-called “tyranny” of Christianity or of the modern spirit found within this “folklore” the pieces to (re)build some “neo-pagan” religious, such as Wicca and neo-druidism.<sup>8</sup>

## **Modernity vs. tradition on the Romanian territory**

“Thrust” into modernity at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian world, mostly a rural universe dominated by ancestral traditions, knew both challenges. On the one hand, the Romanians had to integrate themselves in history, to adapt to the rhythms of the time, and for this they had to rid the society of all the elements that were holding it back.<sup>9</sup> Under the auspices of secularization, the traditional beliefs were seen as a huge moral obstacle to it. The Romanian elites educated in the laic schools of the Occident, had no scruples in demolishing what they saw as a bundle of superstitions.

On the other hand, the opening of our country towards modernity favoured the penetration of several proselyte Christian cults, phenomenon which disturbed the Romanian world East and South of the Carpathians, which, for centuries on end, had been sheltered from major fluctuations regarding the dynamics of the religious phenomenon, keeping in high respect what it had inherited from the ancestors.<sup>10</sup> The new missionaries considered the Romanian village a territory on which the real Christianity had to be made known.

The idea that the Romanians were not real Christians, but that they were led by pagan beliefs and superstitions was not a new one.<sup>11</sup> The foreign travellers which crossed the Romanian countries, Catholic or Protestants, clerics or laics with a certain theological knowledge, proponents of a more “advanced” world, were recording, horrified, ever since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, attitudes and religious practices which seem to contravene to the Christian belief. The evangelical missions from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the Romanian territory insisted on the idea that the Orthodox Church had not succeeded in truly Christianising the Romanian society which was still in a stage of religious obscurantism. From this perspective, the “religious awakening” was mandatory, the aim being to build a more elevated religiousness, which implied the evolution of the society as well.

The success of these missions was due, on the one hand, to the dissolution of the old interdictions regarding religious propaganda and, on the other hand, to the transformations which occur in the Romanian society under the impact of modernisation.<sup>12</sup> The increase in the number of those who had access to education, the socio-economic changes, etc. cause mentality transformations, religiously expressed through a phenomenon which could be named a “late reform”.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is essentially characterised by its questioning the authority of the priest, hitherto uncontested, and by the tendency to have one’s own opinions regarding faith. The unmediated dialogue with God will go hand in hand with the idea of a more exigent moral.<sup>14</sup> Passing from Orthodoxy to another religion, the new converts considered themselves “penitents”, purified, born to a new life, while the old faith became a bundle of superstitions and immorality (this was due to the style of the propaganda as well). This led to many heated debates between the Orthodox (seen as superstitious and amoral by the others) and the converts (pejoratively named “sectarians” by the Orthodox).

All this historical evolution crystallised a set of ideas which can be summarized as follows: along the years, the Romanian Orthodox Church proved itself deprived of dynamism and unable to impose the word of God and the values of a superior civilisation. The so-called Christianity of the Romanian village was, in fact, a bundle of superstitions which had nothing to do with the authentic faith, being only a part of “folklore”, notion by which the European ethnographers designated the remains of the traditional culture still preserved in the space dominated by the modern European culture.

Replies to these challenges came both from the Church and from ethnographers, ethnologists and folklorists. We will focus hereinafter on the way in which the Romanian ethnographers, proponents of a science which defined its research object and methods in the Occident, referred to the issue of the relationship between Christianity and Romanian folklore. The answers given by the people of the Church, oscillating between the self-critical assumption of the absence of an authentic evangelisation and the identification of the popular beliefs with the Orthodoxy itself, can constitute the subject of a distinct study.

Analysing various collections of folklore or ethnographic studies, we may say that most of the Romanian folklorists and ethnographers did not see the “folklore” as something exterior to their being, able to submit it to a cold dissection, but sympathised with it at the very least. Such an attitude was due to the fact that, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “folklore” was a living reality, a part of life, which the ethnographers themselves belonged to, who found it hard to accept that their parents and grandparents had lived their lives believing in absurd superstitions. Therefore, ever since the crystallisation of the ethnographic science in Romania, its representatives tried, beyond the

prestige of the imposed schemes and the various hostile speeches, to nuance the relationship between Christianity and “folklore” in the Romanian world. We can understand better the evolution of this phenomenon from the history of the Romanian culture if we analyse the work of three exceptional personalities: Tudor Pamfile, Ernest Bernea and Ovidiu Papadima.

## **Tudor Pamfile on the “character of the religion” of the Romanian people**

Tudor Pamfile carries out his prodigious activity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20 century, in an age dominated by *semănătorism*. The words which best define the attitude of this movement towards the rural world are “sympathy” and “condescendence”. The rural was the area inhabited by most of the Romanians; therefore, it could not be despised. However, this was a primitive world, the equivalent of a child who needs help and education. Still, beyond the contested and contestable doctrinaire aspects, the *semănătorism* raised the interest for the “understanding” of the popular traditions.

At the end of the book *Sărbătorile la români (Romanian Holidays)*, Tudor Pamfile writes an epilogue, entitled “Cu privire la sărbătorile păgânești și credințele deșerte” (On Pagan Celebrations and Empty Beliefs). One of his aims was to synthesise a “clear idea regarding the character of the religion which dominates the Romanian people”, fact which proves that this was a major concern in those days.

For Pamfile, the conclusion was clear:

“it strikes us, first and foremost, the faint Christian aspect of all our celebrations, even those whose name was not given by the Church; however, in terms of tradition and oral literature, the people borrowed but little from the Church. What can we find in the people from the rich ecclesiastical literature? The Evangelists’ stories are widely known because they are often heard, in the same way, thus not allowing people’s imagination to change them, either by amplifying or by diminishing them. Apart from this, their content, foreign to the realities of life today protects them from the creative power of people’s minds [...] Saints’ lives [...] especially due to the monotony of the martyrdom character, could not remain with the people [...] If we find many stories around certain saints, these are due to the honouring of the Church and not to religious literature; when the people did not know those stories which entitled the Church to the great services performed for certain saints, it invented the stories itself [...] These popular creations overwhelm the texts and the doctrines of the Christian religion, which are almost drown, in spite of the official character they rejoice in”.<sup>15</sup>

However, for Pamfile, this thing is not a characteristic of the Romanian people only: “The Romanian people, like all the Christian peoples, are Christian almost only by name, by practising few signs which it is seldom aware of.”<sup>16</sup> Seeking an explanation for this surprising statement, he finds it in man’s incapacity, obsessed by the concrete and by the multi-shape character of mundane realities, to conceive that there is only one God who takes care of everything:

“It is insufficient to cover all needs - the people thought, too improbable that God gives rain for the fields and, at the same time, sun for bleaching the linen [...] In this world, where interests clash every second, where the most fierce battle is fought between nature and man, one only source of confidence is unlikely: thus, each man, each social class sought special ways to reach the desired haven”.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the famous words of Saint Augustine: “Love and do what you want” are incomprehensible and fear generators for most of the people who perceive this amazing freedom as an abyss which they feel the need to fill with an entire system of beliefs and practices, building this “path” Pamfile speaks of. He does not condemn these practices (“What is the reeling of this path if not fait. Faith is the path on which someone can reach his goal, it is the means which removes the obstacles”), and he classifies them as “pagan” and not “empty” as qualified by others. They are “pagan” “because they are not shown in the rituals of the official religious books: they are written in another law, created or given by Christianity to us”.<sup>18</sup> In his speech, Tudor Pamfile is not at all clear regarding the relationship between Christianity and these pagan practices, whether they merge or simply juxtapose. His concern was to underline that these “structures are indispensable to a people’s life” for, in fact, this is a complex code which shows the dos and don’ts and thus keeps the order of the world: “the people who does not have them, does not feel, does not want, it is like a cow which a child pulls along by a rope”.<sup>19</sup>

## **The “good dialectics” between traditions and the values of modernity**

The discussion moves on to another register, that of the correct attitude which should be adopted regarding popular beliefs. Pamfile shows that these beliefs are a living reality of the rural world and cannot be eradicated by force. One of the central themes of the speech of the time was that of the “laziness” of the Romanian peasant. “Foul and lazy people”, such words could be heard already. The leading elites, willing to stimulate the productivity of agriculture, along the capitalist lines, had priests and teachers preach in cultural circles that in a year “there are more than a hundred pagan feasts, days when one can work”. These days were celebrated, allegedly, out of laziness and not out of an inner belief; it was a mere pretext to refuse to work. In fact, Pamfile suggests, the peasant was not lazy, but had a different perspective on work as compared to the one promoted by the capitalist spirit, idea further developed by Ovidiu Papadima. The beliefs continue to remain alive, making up a guiding system for peasants.

Pamfile shows clearly that the complex system of interdictions to do certain things on certain days does not mean doing nothing, but crays a calendar of the activities, each day having its dos and don'ts. The fact that the time is not monotonous and uniform, as the modernity claims, is an entire different issue.

Addressing harsh words to those who "scorn ancestral traditions", Pamfile admits that there are daunting or "void" conceptions, however these can change through the power of example: "These beliefs have good parts and bad parts, but we must know that the extinction of the useless ones will happen naturally and not by force. For instance, let us not call them foul and lazy merely because they celebrate a certain day for the chills, or drink some weed for the chills, but let us prevent them for suffering from chills, let us convince them that there are strong cures for the chills and, in this way, the superstitions will be forgotten".<sup>20</sup>

The inter-war generation kept from Tudor Pamfile the idea that the popular thinking makes up a living system, however the cultural paradigm which will shape the debate will be different from the one of this ethnographer from Tecuci.

## **Peasants' culture and national values**

If in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a part of the elite, educated in the Occidental spirit, wanted to impose to the majority a superior cultural model to the detriment of current "superstitions", at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the vision changes entirely. The "Romanian peasant" becomes the symbol and the standard of the "Romanian soul", the keeper of the fundamental values. The new elite bowed to these values, undertaking the role to "translate" and process them in order to cope with the challenges of the modern world. Thus, the inter-war period is characterised by this "organicism" of the culture, in which the elites seek points of reference and values.<sup>21</sup>

As one of the fundamental reference points for a significant part of the inter-war Romanian elite was Christianity, naturally, one of the most heated debates concerned the presence and profundity of Christianity in the Romanian consciousness, particularly in the life of the Romanian peasant. The list of the people who considered this issue from the perspective of ethnographical, sociological, historical or theological researches is long enough. We will hereinafter refer to two representatives of the "young inter-war generation", who elaborated, on the basis of interdisciplinary researches, complex answers regarding the relationship between Christianity and Romanian folklore. They are Ernest Bernea and Ovidiu Papadima.

Both of them are top scientific personalities of their time. Ernest Bernea (1905-1990), with thorough ethnographical and sociological studies, was a member of the monographic teams initiated by Dimitrie Gusti, appreciated researcher and university professor, founder member of the known magazine "Rânduiala".

Ovidiu Papadima (1909-1996), graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Humboldt beneficiary, George Călinescu's assistant, he had varied scientific interest, studying, on the one hand, the illuminist movements and the positivist spirit of the Romanian literature and, on the other hand, the "soul of the Romanian people".

Although the specialisations of the two are somewhat different, they get close to one another through the topic tackled ("the spirit of the Romanian traditionalist civilisation") and through convergent conclusions. Furthermore, what brings them together is the spirit of the age, resistant to the dry positivism, tempted by comprehension and dominated by "intuition", forcing the limits of scientificity. Like Mircea Eliade<sup>22</sup>, the illustrious historian of religions, the two young savants are concerned by understanding the wholeness and the exploitation of knowledge in a superior sense, in the service of a real national or general human pedagogy. This is why their work, like that of Mircea Eliade, might seem, occasionally, unscientific for those dominated by the academic spirit, however, the force, the magic, even, of the ideational constructions of Bernea or Papadima were founded on an amazing erudition.

## **Religion - the centre of the life of the Romanian village**

The "Romanian village civilisation" lay at the heart of the scientific preoccupations of Ernest Bernea, under all the possible perspectives that the notion of "civilisation" presupposes. For Ernest Bernea, the "Romanian village civilisation shuts within a rhythm of values and order, full of rich lesions. Here, all the products of the popular creation, anonymous and authentic, were objectified and ordered. The Romanian village civilisation is the millenary expression of the fruitful and forever renewed popular experience".<sup>23</sup> We encounter this idea in the writings of Ovidiu Papadima as well, who considers that the world of the village is a matrix in which the Romanian soul was kneaded and which, especially during the inter-war period, at least in certain regions of the country, was still a living organic reality, fact which allowed the reconstitution and understanding of the phenomenon *de visu* and not only through the simple intellectual speculation on certain books. A living, dynamic world, full of authentic values, was waiting to be brought before those who had forgotten everything about it and Bernea and Papadima were firmly convinced that it had been and still was a way for the Romanians to find their own path in the world.

Persecuted under the Communists, Ernest Bernea could not publish much before 1990. Only afterwards, a restitutory series brought to our attention a profound, highly refined thinker. One of the posthumous works is a small volume entitled specifically *Civilizația română sătească (The Romanian Village Civilisation)*, in which Bernea synthesises his ideas on the traditional life units of the Romanian people, on family and social life, on the importance of use and custom in the traditional culture, on the popular song and poem, on architecture and many others. A chapter is dedicated to "Religion and Magic" in the Romanian rural world.

Bernea underlines that

“the religious activity lies at the heart of the life of the Romanian village. All the other phenomena, both the ones which concern the material order of things and those which concern their spiritual order, are run through by religion, like by an invisible thread. All the other activities, artistic, technical, economic, politic or juridical, are judged and guided along the lines of a religious life”.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, in the world of the Romanian village, religion had not broken free from the other human activities, but was still the “traditional value organising force”.

But, to what extent can this religion be considered “Christian”, especially if we take into account that a series of practices occurs in the world of the village which are close to magic?

“The theoretical relationship between religion and magic, according to Ernest Bernea, is a central issue, classical today in the field of religious sociology and ethnology. [...] In the village, things are living; the facts have their own state and meaning, in an organic universe. Especially in the field of religion and magic, this statement is well-founded... In the spiritual world of the village, there is a range of facts of an ancestral local origin which, although outside the church, are not less religious: these are those facts which the researcher places between religion and magic [...] religion and magic appear and function together in the life of the village, because they have the same nature: a mystical nature. They contain beliefs and practices and are the expression of man’s relation - the Romanian peasant in our case - with the metaphysical reality, whose sensibility is loaded by a supernatural world, strong and rich in consequences”.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, even if, for some, this belief does not seem “pure”, Ernest Bernea gives a high importance to this reality of the Romanian village because he sees it as an expression of the sanctity of the entire world, of all the stages of nature. The “mystical spirit” of the Romanian village finds its expression in a strong conscience of a metaphysical vision which underlines the distance between the ephemeral and the eternal: “the Romanian peasant exercises his being in order to surpass the ephemeral within him. He lives the material condition, knowing that remaining in it means remaining in sin. [...] The infinity of this world, the mysteries sown in each being, in each face, in each action and passing, the mysteries of life itself make him answer, make him fight for the conquest of the absolute meaning and support: God”.<sup>26</sup> God is a living reality in the world of the village; He is man’s creator who must work to fulfil His will.

## **The village church**

God’s presence is the guarantee of the Christian life in the Romanian village. Bernea underlines that

“the religious life of the village acquires shape, first of all, in the church. The church is the traditional establishment which organises and guides religious life. [...] The church answers to religiousness, answers to the inner needs of the peasant and gives the necessary guidelines for the promotion of the village spirituality”.<sup>27</sup>

The church houses two main categories of actions. On the one hand, the Sunday mass, more “official” and, on the other hand, various religious acts which give rhythm to man’s life and which often have a local, archaic character. In church, there is a permanent dialogue between the “official church” and the manifestations of the popular religiousness, a dialogue described by Ernest Bernea as follows:

“The Church itself supervises or allows a series of beliefs and deeds which, although they do not possess a Christian character, are close to them. This is an entire series of religious deeds, myths, practices known under the name of popular beliefs and superstitions. [...] An ill-founded belief made the researchers of the village community pay a particular attention to beliefs and superstitions outside the official church, having a truly popular character. Folklore researchers entirely ignored the role of church in the religious life of the village and of the Romanian peasant, in the same way as the theologians try to discard everything that is beyond the Christian dogma and ritual”.<sup>28</sup>

For Ernest Bernea there is no breach between the two aspects. The people of the church have always acted for shaping the believers in the Christian spirit, without doing violence to their forms of religious life (traditional practices and customs): “In the religious life of the Romanian village, the official and the popular are deeply interpenetrated, at times, up to organic coagulation. The local ancestral spirituality adapted to the forms and to the meaning of the religious life represented by the church, without giving up its content and values, and the official church adapted to the conditions and to the meaning of the local tradition, without giving up the essential”.<sup>29</sup> More than reshaping a Christian religious view from the disparate bricks of old customs and beliefs, according to Bernea and to other scholars, in the specific case of the Romanian people, a spirit meeting occurred between Dacians’ belief and Christianity, an enduring and coherent junction being achieved between seemingly disparate elements, idea better emphasised in Ovidiu Papadima’s work.

## **Christianity and the Thracian heritage**

The coherence and the essentially Christian view of the Romanian spirituality are Ovidiu Papadima’s stakes in his debut book, *O viziune românească a lumii* (*A Romanian View of the World*). The manner in which Papadima proves how a set of predominantly Christian values results from various facts, beliefs and practices is extremely spectacular and deserves a distinct discussion. Remaining within the limits of the already initiated speech, we must say

that Ovidiu Papadima underlines, every time he has the chance, the organic, still living character of the Romanian popular tradition, “inexhaustible laboratory of miracles” and, in spite of the erudite demonstration from his book, he feels the need for a balance chapter, necessary for underlining a series of aspects which caused heated debates in those days.

“The Christianity of our folklore is a reality, Papadima says, but a reality specific to it; it is not a purely theological reality, uncontestedly faithful to dogmas [...] Our ethnic perspective moves away from the biblical one, following its own structure lines, although it remains Christian in its spirit [...] if the notions of folklore and Christianity almost coincide today, this does not mean that they have always coincided. And from what we have discerned from these lines of specific structure, we could verify the conclusion that, in this relation, anteriority is to the folklore. However, since, according to all the data of our history and philology, our people was born Christian, it means that our folklore is, first and foremost, a heritage”.<sup>30</sup>

For Ovidiu Papadima, this “heritage” is the Thracian tradition, a fragmented tradition, it’s true, but which had the necessary spiritual premises to melt and fulfil itself in Christianity:

“These old roots pushed, from the very start, their stems into the new and glaring light of the first days of Christianity... the autochthonous fund kneaded the strong and rich life of Christianity and how organic did our folklore grow from this kneading. This is why it can house so many ancestral brotherhoods with the nature and so many spiritualized Christian visions”.<sup>31</sup>

The world of the Romanian “cosmic Christianity”, to be described so enthusiastically by Mircea Eliade<sup>32</sup>, opened thus itself to the world.

## **Epilogue “Orthodoxy” = “Popular Christianity” = Romanianism**

As we can see, the ethnological research turned in the inter-war period in a real re-interpretation of the tradition, meant to serve to outlining an “ethnic ontology” (in the words of the historian and philosopher Sorin Antohi<sup>33</sup>). In 1918, all the Romanian provinces had united and the Romanians had fulfilled at least one important political goal. A new challenge was being born: that the Romanians would have a say in the great culture.

The disputes regarding the ways in which such a goal could be reached had been intense and extremely varied, impossible to be summarized in just a few lines. We will speak only of that direction, qualified at times as “nationalistic”, which wished that the Romanians bring their own genius, their own specificity into the European culture. Among the scholars of the inter-war period, Nichifor Crainic insisted mostly on the relation between the national genius and the universal culture. For Crainic, Romanians have a cultural specificity which represents a valuable treasury, both at the national and at the international level. Although “nationalist”, Crainic states that Romanians cannot evolve in isolation and outside the rest of the world. In order to establish contact with the other Romanians, beyond their own cultural idiom, they must cultivate a “grand idea”, an idea of Universalist character. For Crainic, this universal idea is Christianity, more precisely, Orthodoxy.<sup>34</sup>

Orthodoxy, converted in cultural trend, emblem of the Romanian spirit and means of communication of the Romanians with the universal, was an idea which knew a huge success and had unsuspected consequences with regard to the definition of the identity of the Romanian nation. One of the most significant personalities of the Romanian inter-war culture, philosopher Nae Ionescu, makes at some point, in a dispute with a Catholic intellectual, Iosif Frollo, a remark which will become for most of the Romanians, a true slogan of their identity:

“We are Orthodox because we are Romanians, and we are Romanians because we are Orthodox. Can we become Catholics? For this, we should change our souls so that we could achieve Catholicism. This change means, however, giving up our history and our spiritual structure; in other words, giving up Romania. There is no third position here: you either remain Romanian - and then your Catholicism is not real; or you become a Catholic - and then you are no longer Romanian”.<sup>35</sup>

Nae Ionescu’s statements triggered powerful echoes in the Romanian society. Thus, theologian Dumitru Stăniloae was writing in “Telegraful Român” (Romanian Telegrapher) two articles entitled *Între ortodoxie și catolicism (Between Orthodoxy and Catholicism)* and *Între românism și catolicism (Between Romanianism and Catholicism)*. In the first article, the Right Reverend was underlining the fundamental differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which, in the author’s opinion, are: “Catholicism is rational and immanentist, Orthodoxy is mystical and transcendentalist”.<sup>36</sup> It results, from the differences between the living spirit of Orthodoxy and that of Catholicism, a set of consequences which make the Right Reverend Stăniloae state that there is an “enormous difference” between the two religions and, hence, the “impossibility to change one with the other, without altering one’s spiritual being”. As religion is not a theory, but a way of being, the change of religion implies the change of the entire being and, in the case of a people, the “ethnic being is altered”.

In the second article, Dumitru Stăniloae analyses the essential components of a nation. On another occasion, he tried to answer to an essential issue: can Christianity be national? If it can, is the Orthodoxy a part of the national spirit and can it generate specific cultural attitudes?

The reflections of the professor started from the idea of iconomy of the Holy Trinity, which geminates identity and difference alike, the substance unity and people’s distinction, connected through love. Starting from here, Stăniloae believes in the connection between Orthodoxy and the Romanian nation. Given that the nations are natural

entities, they are accepted by God, who accepts the diversity of manifestations of faith, for various are also the charismas of saints. In *Between Romanianism and Catholicism*, Dumitru Stăniloae shows that

“if for a nation, its specific spiritual structure is essential, it means that similarly essential is any historical, geographical, hereditary factor which entered in this structure and exists in it, determining its course of subsequent development [...] Therefore, it is obvious that Orthodoxy itself is a basic element in the architecture of the Romanian soul [...] This also because religion [...] changes, to a certain extent, the soul [...] The entire life of a nation bears the seal of its religion”.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, for Dumitru Stăniloae, the Orthodoxy had shaped decisively the soul of the Romanian people. Due to this reason, for the great theologian, Orthodoxy and the Romanian popular belief have become practically equivalent notions. He states that Orthodoxy, unlike the other religions, “has stuck by its essential and human permanent values of piety, by the simple, deep and eternal preoccupations of man in his reach for the absolute”, that is, it represents the original Christianity, which the Romanian people shared from the beginning through its opening towards the “real and essential problems of life”.<sup>38</sup> In another article, Dumitru Stăniloae was saying: “we are the people with the spirituality closest to the genuinely Christian one, to Christ’s primary light”.<sup>39</sup>

This is how, in the difficult process of finding one’s identity in the modern world, a part of the Romanians found the answer in the Christianity chased away by the secularized society, a type of Christianity in its Orthodox version and practically equated with the popular beliefs which had been considered nothing but superstitions for a long time. All these reflections have strongly marked the Romanian consciousness in the modern and contemporary period, with consequences which have no agreeing appreciations. Beyond the appreciations, these reflections represent a fascinating phenomenon of national self-definition and reinvention.

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<sup>1</sup> „Catholic Encyclopedia, Paganism”. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11388a.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Nelu Zugravu, „O nouă direcție istoriografică. Studiul religiei populare”, Europa XXI III-IV (1994-1995): 87-101.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Riche, *Educație și cultură în Occidentul barbar. Secolele VI-VIII*, trans. Florica berechet (București: Editura meridiane, 2001): 267-93; Marcel Pacaut, Jaques Rossiaud, *Epoca romanică*, trans. V. Protopopescu (București, Editura Meridiane, 1982): 72-103. J. Derek Holmes, Bernard W. Bickers, *A Short History of the Catholic Church* (Burns&Oates,1992): 45-172. Philip Hughes, *A Short History of the Church*, volume 2 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985): 209-91; 323-82; 406-34.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Muchembled, ed., *Magia și vrăjitoria în Europa din Evul Mediu până astăzi*, trans. Maria and Cezar Ivănescu (București: Editura Humanitas, 1997): 15-46.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul Goodwin, Bob Frazier, *Baptist Churches in all Ages*.

[http://www.pbministries.org/History/Goodwin\\_&\\_Frazier/churches\\_01.htm](http://www.pbministries.org/History/Goodwin_&_Frazier/churches_01.htm)

<sup>6</sup> René Rémond, *Religie și societate în Europa*, trans. Giuliano Sfichi (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2003): 165-67. Radu Preda, *Comunismul. O modernitate eșuată* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2009): 29-94.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Le folklore* (Paris: Stock, 1924).

[http://rupestres.perso.neuf.fr/page0/page12/assets/Van\\_Gennep.pdf](http://rupestres.perso.neuf.fr/page0/page12/assets/Van_Gennep.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Dennis D. Carpenter, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 35-72.

<sup>9</sup> Gh. Platon, V. Russu, Gh. Iacob, V. Cristian, I. Agrigoroaiei, *Cum s-a înfăptuit România modernă* (Iași: Editura Universității Al. I. Cuza, 1993): 7-135.

<sup>10</sup> George Enache, „Problema sectelor în România. Din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea până în 1948 (I)”, *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați*, seria 19 – Istorie VI (2007): 108-15.

<sup>11</sup> Sever-Mircea Catalan, „Credință, mituri și superstiții în societatea românească a secolului al XVIII – lea”, in *Orașul românesc și lumea rurală. Realități locale și percepții europene la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII – lea și începutul celui de al XIX –lea*, ed. Ileana Căzan and Daniela Bușă (Brăila: Editura Istros, 2004): 160 – 61.

<sup>12</sup> Constantin Cuciuc, *Religii care au fost interzise în România* (București: Editura Gnosis, 2001): 12-15.

<sup>13</sup> George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană* (București: Editura Nemira, 2005): 507-13.

<sup>14</sup> V.G. Ispir, *Curs de sectologie. Partea a III-a. Critica sectelor* (București: 1938): 3-28.

<sup>15</sup> Tudor Pamfile, *Sărbătorile la români* (București: Editura Saeculum I.O., 1997), 403.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>21</sup> Zigu Ornea, *Tradiționalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea* (București: Editura Eminescu, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1980), 291-348.

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Bernea, *Civilizația română sătească* (București: Editura Vremea, 2006), 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>30</sup> Ovidiu Papadima, *O viziune românească a lumii* (București: Editura Saeculum I.O., 1995), 170.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 172-73.

<sup>32</sup> Mircea Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis la Gighis Han* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980), 246.

<sup>33</sup> Sorin Antohi, „Argumentum biologicum. Eugenism și biopolitică”, *Cuvântul* 10 (October 2008). <http://www.romaniaculturala.ro/articol.php?cod=11317>.



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<sup>34</sup> George Enache, „Creștinism și fascism în gândirea lui Nichifor Crainic”, Rost 12 (February 2004). [http://www.rostonline.org/rost/feb2004/crainic\\_crestinism.shtml](http://www.rostonline.org/rost/feb2004/crainic_crestinism.shtml).

<sup>35</sup> Nae Ionescu, „A fi bun român”. <http://cersipamantromanesc.wordpress.com/2010/12/17/nae-ionescu-a-fi-bun-roman/>. Adrian Boldișor, „Maestru și discipol. De la Nae Ionescu la Mircea Eliade”, Tabor 6 (September 2010). [http://www.tabor-revista.ro/in\\_ro.php?module=content\\_full&id=10699](http://www.tabor-revista.ro/in_ro.php?module=content_full&id=10699).

<sup>36</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, „Între ortodoxie și catolicism”, Telegraful Român LXXVIII, no. 88 (1930): 1.

<sup>37</sup> Stăniloae, „Între românism și catolicism”, Telegraful Român LXXVIII, no. 86 (1930): 1.

<sup>38</sup> Stăniloae, *Națiune și creștinism* (București: Editura Elion, 2003): 198.

<sup>39</sup> Stăniloae, „Între Orient și Occident”, Telegraful român LXXXIX, no. 30 (1941): 1.

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