# Some Reflections on Religion and Multiculturalism in Romania: Towards a Reappraisal of the Grammar of Traditions.

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**Abstract:**

This paper discusses the potential of the Christian tradition in Romania to offer a constructive answer to the contemporary dilemmas of multiculturalism. However, for this to happen there is a significant need for a fresh re-reading of this tradition. The starting point of my work will be an overview of the data on the question of religion and ethnicity in post-communist Romania. This will be followed by an assessment of the predominant trends involved in the building of the societal texture of Romanian contemporary society, with special emphasis on attitudes towards authority, otherness and dialogue. The ambiguous potential of traditions, both for destruction and for the healing of societal relations, will be singled out as an important characteristic of traditions. The work will argue for a reappraisal of the Christian tradition and its role, pleading for a fresh re-reading of its complex and pluriformed grammar. Emphasis will be placed on seeing Christianity – and its implicit traditions – as a Religion of Neighbourliness and a Religion of Love, oriented towards the future rather than the past, towards the other rather than the self, inspired by eschatological hope rather than blind allegiance to fixed dogma. Methodologically, my paper will fall in the area of conceptual analysis, partially informed by quantitative analysis and the data available from auxiliary sources

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## 1. Religion in Eastern Europe: Against the Prophecies

The twentieth century, for at least its first seven or eight decades, was undoubtedly marked by a strong sense of suspicion and scepticism towards religion. The so called 'prophets of suspicion' Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, who in some ways marked our modern age in undeletable ways, have not only predicted that, but also prophesised the final end of the age of religion. For all three, in one way or another, with the process of the 'emancipation' of man, one thing was certain: the inevitable and complete fading away of religion from our lives.[1] However, with the passing of time, our current context seems to prove such prediction dramatically wrong. It was wrong at local and global levels, in the West and in the East, in the Northern and in the Southern hemispheres. 9/11 is a proof of the global magnitude as well as of the potentially violent reality of what Anthony Giddens, a more astute interpreter of our times, predicted. Using Freudian language, he announced the return of religion as 'the return of the repressed'.[2]

That religion is alive and here to stay is identifiable not only in the overall and diffuse 'spirit' of the postmodern age, but also in more precise terms, quantified and reflected in current data offered by various opinion pools. What can be surprisingly noted from such data are the high levels of religiosity scored in areas where, for more than half a century (and even in some places for almost an entire century) the population was under fierce and overt atheist indoctrination. Eastern Europe, particularly Romania, is singled out in the report of the latest findings of the GfK[3] survey on religious attitudes in Europe and the USA (2004). Such data shows that an average of three in four people indicated that they belonged to a religion. At 80 per cent, the number of believers is above average in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In Western Europe, two in three people identified with a specific religion, irrespectively of whether they live in rural or urban areas. The same survey reports that 'the percentage of religious people is particularly high in Romania (97 per cent), Turkey (95 per cent) and Greece (89 per cent). While the majority in Greece (98 per cent) and

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1 See their 'prophecies' regarding the future of religion in brief in my article 'Between Fundamentalism and Secularization: the Place and the Role of Religion in Post-communist Orthodox Romania', in Devetak, S., Sirbu, O., Rogobete, S., (eds), *Religion and Democracy in Moldova*, ISCOMET, Maribor-Chisinau-Timisoara, 2005, pp. 103-134, pp. 104-5.

2 Giddens, A., *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, pp. 202.

3 *GfK Custom Research Worldwide* on behalf of The Wall Street Journal Europe, Nuremberg/Frankfurt, 10 December 2004.

Romania (88 per cent) belong to the Orthodox Church, almost all people in Turkey stated that they were Muslims.'

At a national level, as a relevant example, Romania provides us with some unexpected and particularly high levels of religiosity – giving the fact that it has been under one of the most inhumane and repressive regimes during its fifty years of 'cohabitation' with the communist-atheistic ideology. Let us briefly present some of the findings. Religiosity according to the latest National Census in Romania (2002) shows a shocking figure of 99.96 % of the population claiming to belong to an officially recognized religious denomination, while only 0.03 % declaring themselves as atheists and a 0.01 % claiming no religious affiliation. In terms of denominational distribution, the Romanian Orthodox Church has 86.8% of the Romanian population[4]

In terms of the trust placed on religion and religious institutions, the church ranks at the top of the Romanians' list, with 86% compared to other institutions, followed by the army with 69%. At the bottom of the list are political parties, the judiciary, the parliament, and the markers of the free market.

**How much trust do you have in …?**
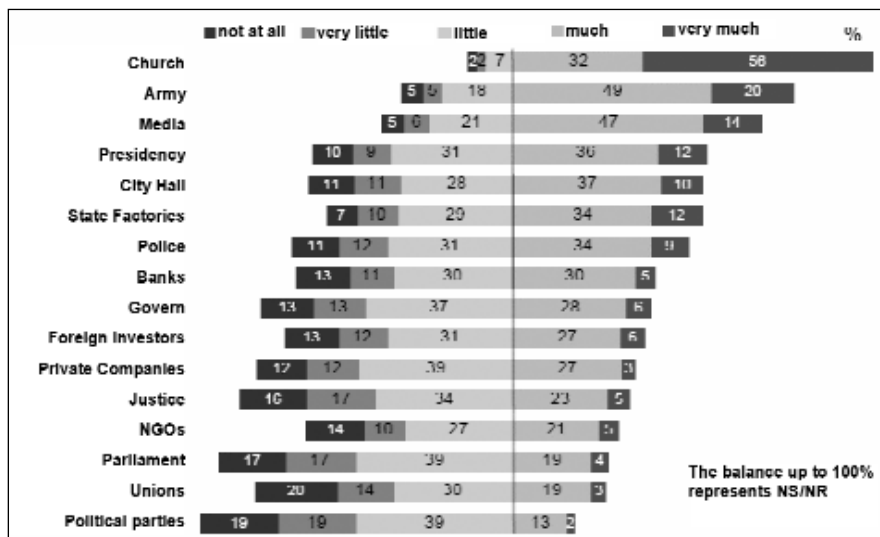


In terms of the daily practice of religion, scores are also very high by any European standards, comparable only with the Catholic Poland. Here is the information relevant to Romania using the same source as above.

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4 For a detailed presentation of the distribution see Rogobete 2005, pg. 106.

**Besides attending funerals and baptismal services, how often do you go to Church?**
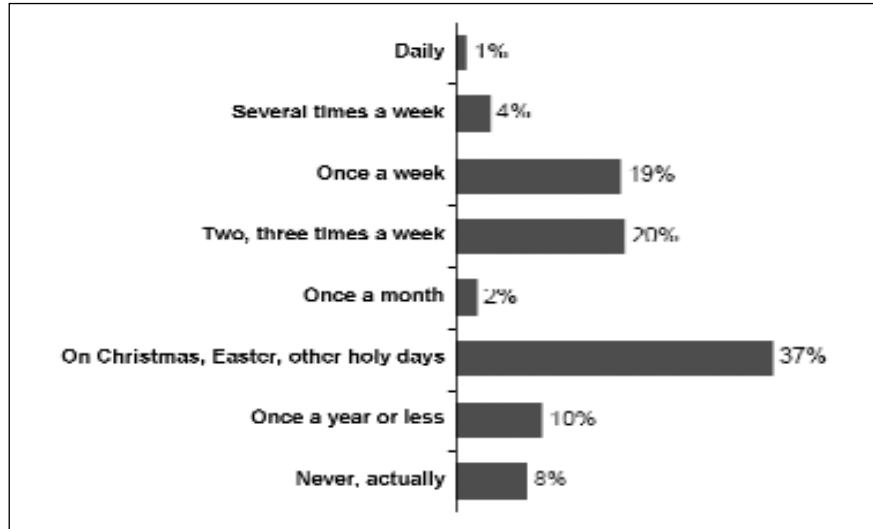


What are the implications of such high levels of religiosity? Is there any potential in such high figures? Moreover, if there is any, is it for good or bad? What conclusions can we trace from such data showing highest levels of trust in Church and Army and lowest in some of the most important institutions related to modern democracy? To answer such questions, let us reflect a little longer on the contemporary situation of the Romanian society and subsequently the place of religion and its afferent tradition.

## 2. Between Feudalism and (Post)Modernity

### *Predominance of National/majority religion*

What constantly came out in the data of various opinion pools for the last fifteen years since the anti-communist revolution, was a striking and significant contrast between, on the one hand, lack of trust in democratic institutions (political parties, justice, government), while on the other, high levels of trust in pre-modern entities (church, army). Some commentators have rightly seen in this a lack of development, a 'deficit of modernity' and thus a form of feudal approach to politics. Characteristics of such politics are an uncritical submission to and longing for strong leadership, lack of individual initiative resting on other higher institutions to provide identity and

vision for the future.[5] Within such context, religion and its implied tradition became one of the highest marks of identity, collective and individual alike. To this we shall return later. For the time being, we should note that such attitudes are well seen in reflexes requiring or uncritically accepting, at mass level, high and unjustified state intrusion in and control of the internal affairs of the individual, particularly at the level of his or her religious life. Moreover, Orthodoxy – the majority religion is in a continuous attempt to monopolise the support offered by the state and to limit the presence of other potential rivals to the notion of defining Romanian identity.

### *State Control and Manipulation of Religious/ethnic Groups; Legal Issues*

As a relevant example is what elsewhere I called the 'unfinished odyssey of a new Law of religion'.[6] It is a well known and at somehow symptomatic fact that the 'hottest potato' in terms of legislation after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 is the so much disputed new law of religion (Rom. Legea Cultelor Religioase, Egl. 'The Law of Religious Cults').[7] What should be first mentioned is that to the date of the writing of this present article (February 2006), things are not settled and de facto the law in action is still the highly abusive 'Law of Religious Cults' issued in 1948 by the communist regime. Second, the various proposals for new legislation issued by various governments in the last fifteen years, regardless of the political 'colour' of the legal initiators, represent significant violations of religious freedom and major attempts to discriminate others while favouring the majority group. Since this is relevant within the newer context of the European Union and its implied multiculturalism of which Romania intends to be a part, such issues are worth our extended attention.

In this regard, I shall exemplify with some information related to the latest version of the Project of Law which is currently being discussed in the Deputies Chamber, after passing unchanged through the Romanian

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5 See 'Raport de analiza politica. Asteptarile românilor de la statutul de membru al Uniunii Europene', Institutul Ovidiu Sincai, www.fisd.ro, Bucuresti, Oct 2005: 'the high levels of trust given to the church  and the army over against trust in the democratic institutions of the state show a deficit of modernity doubled by an estrangement of society from the political class.'

6 See Rogobete, S., 'The Unfinished Odyssey of a New "Law for the General Regime of Religion" in a South European Country: The Romanian Case', in Devatak, S., and all, (Edts), *Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in South-East Europe*, ISCOMET, Ljubljana-Maribor-Vienna, 2004, pp. 129 – 143.

7 See also Pope, E. A., E, 'Ecumenism, Religious Freedom and the "National Church" Controversy in Romania', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* vol. 36 Wint/Spr 1999, pp. 184-201

Senate (in December 2005, not by being discussed in the Senate but through a juridical procedural trick)[8]. Here are some comments resulted from the review of the above mentioned, latest Project of Law, offered by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.[9] Despite its overall polite tone, the Commission identifies 'certain excessive interferences with the autonomy of the religious communities' which include 'too many imprecise references to other laws. Expressions like "in the conditions of the law" or "according to the law" are frequently used, and without more precise indications, the law becomes subjective leaving far too much space for abuses.'(III.11). Also, the procedures required for the registration of new religious groups include both excessively high levels of quantitative threshold requirements and potentially abusive substantialist interference with the content of the faith/doctrines/ teachings of the newly established religious communities. Some examples will follow:

✦ Membership of at least 300 Romanian citizens residing in Romania is needed for a **religious association** to be registered. This poses two problems: firstly, it may be difficult to fulfil for believers who belong to great religions of the world – as Hinduism or Buddhism – which may not have a great number of followers with Romanian citizenship residing in Romania.

✦ Secondly, the citizenship requirement seems at variance with the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of inter alia citizenship and national origin, a principle enshrined in a number of international instruments ratified by Romania.

✦ The membership requirement for **religious cults** according to Article 18 lit. c of the draft law is at least 0,1 % of the population of Romania according to the latest census. With a population of 22.3 million this provision means the presence of at least 22.300 members, all of which have to be Romanian citizens residing in Romania.

✦ The stability requirements are described in Article 18 lit. a and c of the draft law: any religious association which applies for the status of cult has to provide documentary evidence that it is

8 The time frame within which the Draft was possible to be voted expired and thus it passed unchanged through the Senate, going to the Deputy Chamber to be discussed.

9 'OPINION ON THE DRAFT LAW REGARDING THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE GENERAL REGIME OF RELIGIONS IN ROMANIA', EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION), Opinion no. 354/2005 adopted by the Commission at its 64th plenary session (Venice, 21-22 October 2005) on the basis of the comments by Giorgio MALINVERNI, (Member, Switzerland) Hans-Heinrich VOGEL (Member, Sweden)

constituted legally and has been functioning uninterruptedly on the territory of Romania for at least twelve years.

✦ In terms of what I would call substantialist interferences, the commission's comments are: 'certain provisions of the draft law can be viewed as questionable state interferences, whose necessity in a democratic society is not established. For example, according to Article 18 lit. c of the draft law, documentation has to be provided by religious associations seeking state recognition concerning the applicant's "own confession of faith and the organisation and functioning statute […]; its structure of central and local organisation; the mode of rule, administration and control; […] the statute of their own personnel […]; the main activities which the cult cares to undertake with a view to reaching its spiritual goals". There is no indication in the draft law **why** and **for which purpose** this information has to be provided by the applicant, **how** detailed the information has to be and **for what use** it could be for the Government in reaching a positive or negative decision on the recognition's application. The same holds true for Article 41, paragraph 2 lit. b. Article 23 of the draft law, which deals with staff members recruited by cults, also seems too far-reaching in this context.' (IV.21., my emphasis)

Some of the conclusions of the commission are directly relevant for our argument. Hence, the commission notes: 'These high and rigidly written membership and stability requirements combined can make it very difficult for religious associations to acquire the status of cult.' (IV.16). Moreover, 'When dealing with the legal status of religious communities, it is of the utmost importance that the State takes particular care to respect their autonomous existence. Indeed, the autonomous existence of religious communities is indispensable for pluralism in a democratic society and is thus an issue at the very heart of the protection which Article 9 [of the ECHR] affords.' (IV.20).

### Data on Questions of Neighbouring; EU and the Changing Face of Neighbouring

Before providing our own conclusions, let us add some data on Romanians' approach to others reflected in answers to questions on neighbourliness. This particularly bearing in mind that the majority religion is Christianity, a religion expected to have a high and positive view on such issues. Here are some data related to co-habitation with different categories of people.

**Would you be bothered having as your neighbours … ? (BOP2002)**
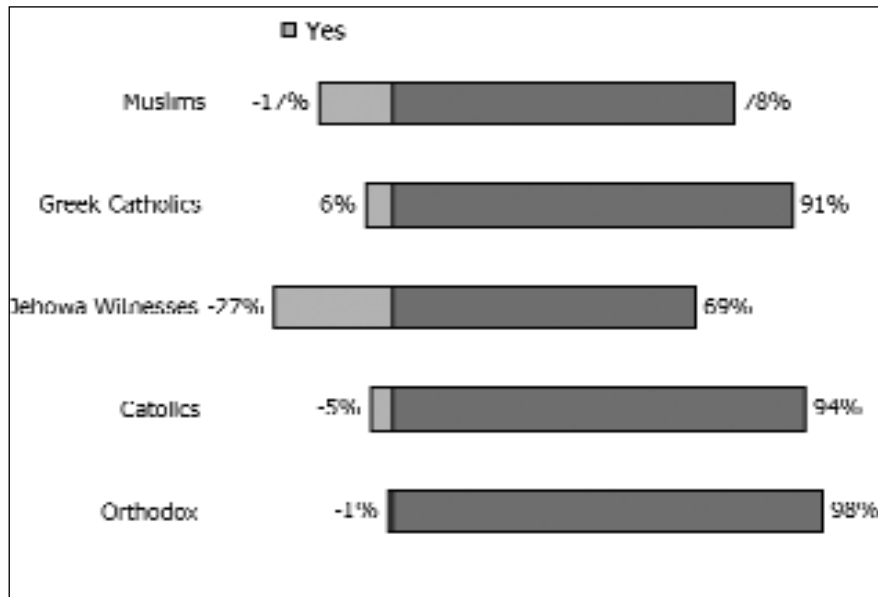


**Would you be bothered having as your neighbours … ? (BOP2002)**
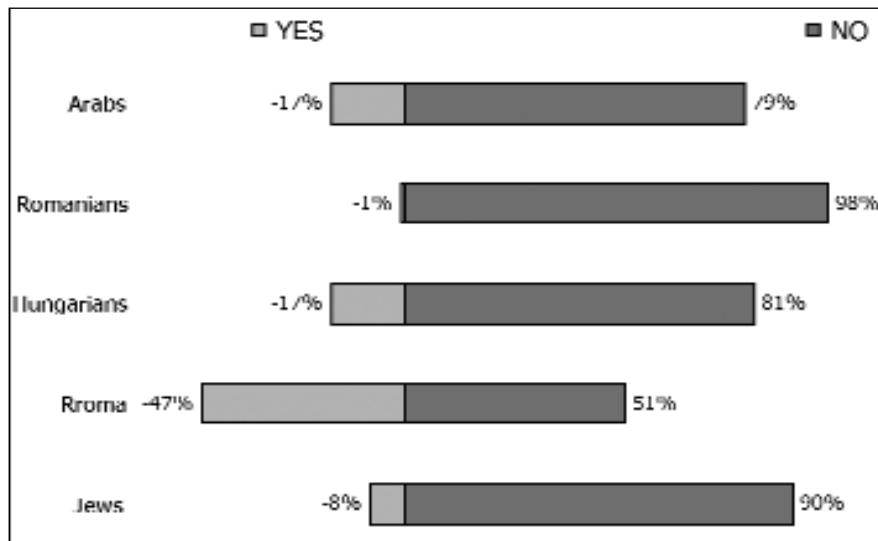
Where does such information place us in relation to the declared openness to and desire for joining the European Union? For it is also known from opinion pools that Romania is one of the most pro-European countries of Europe.[10] How can we interpret such contradictory information and what is the role religion plays in this? First of all, one may suspect a significant lack of proper information about the European Union. Second, considering that other recent opinion pool places the European Union membership between the Church and the Army in terms of the Romanian's trust in various institutions, we can conclude that all three are seen as somehow having a salvific character as well as being strong identity markers. However, what is very likely to present us with significant difficulties is the new multicultural and multireligious context in which Romania will have to find its place. It will be a context requiring the art of cohabitation with people, groups and individuals who are different. The European construct, a postmodern idea, is a new challenge Romania can not afford to ignore.[11] To an assessment of this claim we shall turn next.

### *European Union: Challenges and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Romania*

One of the challenges the countries from the Central and Eastern Europe have to face constantly after the fall of communism in the 1990s is the internal and external diversity of the populations. The regrettable example of the ex-Yugoslavian space has shown that any attempt at questioning one's (ethnic, religious) belonging in the name of a presumed "national" homogeneity is a steady source of violence and open conflict. In the same time, the populations from this area of the world are remarkably mixed, due to the heritages of a controversial history. The Romanian example is most revelatory in this respect: apart from the Romanians, here live Hungarians, Germans, Roma, Jews, to name the most well-known nationalities from a list of over twenty.

One possible way of dealing with the diversity is the multicultural solution, which has been embraced in many forms by states as different as the USA, Canada, Australia and so on. Multiculturalism as a politics of cohabitation represents a challenging way of managing not only the

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10 According to the INSOMAR opinion pool run between 16-21 Feb. 2006, 64% of the Romanian people is very interested or interested of EU integration. 36% are not so interested or not interested at all. At the same time though, 46% think that, following EU integration, the situation in the country will be much worse or worse, while 19% consider it will be the same and 34% think it will be better or much better.

11 On the postmodern character of the European construct, see Cooper, R., The Postmodern State and the World Order, London, Demos, The Foreign Policy Centre 2000 (first edition 1996).

ethnic diversity, but also the other forms of diversity (the religious, the sexual, etc.). Yet, multiculturalism is by no means a unique way of responding to the identity solicitations of someone: the various types in which it comes – "multiculturalism of rights" (Kymlicka), "multiculturalism of recognition" (Ch. Taylor), "multiculturalism of fear" (Shklar) speak for many different ways of articulating the questions and the formulation of solutions. Some even speak of other labels – "interculturalism", "trans-culturalism" as being more or less appropriate to the same issues. Is it therefore possible to "export" multiculturalism in the Eastern European states? Or perhaps to "adapt" it? Are there, on the other hand, internal resources to redefine the concept using the specifically given context of high levels of religiosity and trust in religious institutions? It is this latter question that we will concentrate on in our present work, only in passing acknowledging the other possible answers prompted by the first set of question raised above.

Thus referring specifically to Romania, the new European context in which Romania wants to find a home is a sociologically, ethnologically and religiously fluid context, with unprecedented levels of change. The national state metanarrative with its national religion, territorial and juridical autonomy are being challenged and in need of re-evaluation. Regions will play an increasingly higher role, the European Court of Human Rights already has a stronger legal say than the Romanian Constitution and the European Constitution will reduce its influence even more. Postmodernity, with its fragmentation and lack of coherence will be felt as an undeniable reality. In order to enter such a new context, as I will argue here, there is need for significant changes in mentalities, the way Romanians perceive their identity and the role the various identity markers play.

Hence, the questions to which we shall turn now are related to the role religion, particularly Orthodoxy and its afferent discourse on tradition, plays in the new game of multicultural cohabitation – the essential mark of the new European construct to which Romania intends to be a part. As announced earlier, my argument is that certainly there is positive and encouraging potential in religion and traditions, but only if we are first able to project a lucid and realistic view on their ambiguous potentiality. To such an assessment we shall turn next.

## 3. Traditions: pitfalls or potentialities?

*Traditions as Strong Identity Markers*

As Alasdair MacIntyre among others, so amply argued, traditions are crucial to the core definition of our identity.[12]    However, history – ancient and recent alike, has proved that traditions, regardless of what their dogma says, are not necessarily guarantees for ethical behaviour.[13] They seem to be rather ambivalent or perhaps neutral from an axiological perspective. Traditions are strong and undeniable realities and as such they seem to have an inbuilt potential both for good and for evil, for construction and demolition, for integration and disintegration. Consciously or unconsciously, assumed or un-assumed, the decisive forces that can turn traditions one way or the other are complex and their detailed assessment falls beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient for us to understand that such issues require answers to questions of how traditions are transmitted, perceived, manipulated, explained or instrumentalised. This is important in the assessment of the role a predominant religion such as Orthodox Christianity can play in defining identities in countries like Romania, particularly within the rapidly changing context of postmodernity and European integration.

Thus what seems to be the prevalent view regarding the Orthodox Church and its relation with Romanian identity is what can be labelled a substantialist, essentialist view. It is an interpretation whereby the Church with its 'Holy Tradition' is seen as some kind of an 'essence', a 'substance' which constitutes the main ingredient required for being a Romanian, for 'Romanianness'.[14] The Holy Tradition, it is claimed, was and it is still being passed down over the centuries under the form of the 'Legea Stramoseasca', the 'Ancient Law', the 'Law of the Forefathers'. It is an unwritten law which combines the folk customs, language, and the so-believed unchanged/unaltered religious tradition which was always the Orthodox, the 'original and the right faith' proclaimed by the Church Fathers of the first six centuries of the Christian era.

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12 MacIntyre, A., After Virtue, Notre Dame University Press, Indiana, 1985.

13 At this point one major implication of MacIntyre's thesis, i.e., that Aristotelian ethics are in themselves a guarantee for ethical behaviour, seems to be problematic. Our history is filled with examples of traditions being used in justifying/generating/maintaining conflicts, war and disintegration. The more recent ones are from the former Yugoslavia, the 9/11 attacks on the US, Northern Ireland, etc.

14 See a more detailed analysis of the theology and history behind such view in the chapter entitled "Orthodox Reflections on Tradition and National Identity: Nationalism as an Ecclesiological Foundation" in Rogobete, S.E., 'Morality and Tradition in Postcommunist Orthodox Lands: on the Universality of Human Rights, with Special Reference to Romania', Religion, State and Society, vol. 33, 3, Sept. 2004, pp. 275-299; p.284ff

In fact, having roots in the second half of the nineteenth century – the times of the birth of the nation-state, such ideas reached their height in 1885 when the Romanian Orthodox Church gained its autocephalous status. That is, when it moved away from the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Constantinople) and it became its 'own head', building its whole identity around the idea of the Romanian nation-state, an idea to which it contributed in major ways indeed. However, such ideological construct which overlaps ethnicity and the Orthodox faith was labelled filetism and it was in fact already condemned as heresy by a Constantinopolitan Synod in 1870. Yet however again, although correctly foreseeing the dangers inherent to such positioning towards the question of identity, all Orthodox national-state churches – without exception, could not, after all, resist the temptation of power on the one hand, and of the protection secured from the all-powerful sovereign state on the other. And such temptations proved hard to beat indeed. And this regardless of the prevailing ideology of the state, and here the communist-atheist experiment as well as the newly established freedom, are very revealing. The Church was and still is in a continuous 'game' of 'harmonising' with the secular power, while at the same time searching for a hiding place under its – in the Romanian case at least, still very powerful all-protective umbrella. As Olivier Gillet observed, 'Contemporary [Romanian] ecclesiology structures the in itself the principles of submission and cooperation with the state', concluding: 'Thus, contemporary Orthodox nationalism is structured and closely connected with the concept of the Church. Through defining the equation: state-nation-confession, Orthodox ecclesiology determines the configuration of the national unitary and ethnic state, leaving no room for any concept of a multinational or federal state.'[15]

And such conclusion becomes more and more realistic to an increasing number of contemporary commentators.[16] Within the new context offered by the prospect of the European Union, sooner or later such a church-state relationship will prove to be a 'straight jacket' making the life of both parties involved rather uncomfortable. In a strongly critical but lucid way, despite using a journalistic tone rather than academic argumentation, Petru Guran has recently written the following in his article suggestively entitled 'The Romanian Nation will be History and the Romanian Orthodox Church will be a Provincial Sect': "If 127

15 p. 272f.
16 There are rather singular voices from within the Orthodox lay intellectual circles warning along these same lines, albeit often in a much softer key. See authors and editorialists such as H.R. Patapievici, Theodor Baconsky, Mihail Neamtu, Peter Guran. For a relevant example, see Neamtu, M., Bufnita din darimaturi. Insomnii teologice, Deisis, Sibiu, 2005.

years ago the Romanian people were ready to pay with their blood on the battle fields for their political sovereignty, today, the same people, in its great majority, is ready and prepared to put an end to such sovereignty in the name of a new historical adventure…. The Romanian people will be part of the greatest European people which will empower, in a near future, the European institutions with the prerogatives of sovereignty collected from each national state in part.'[17] Within this context, the relevance of such substantialist/essentialist views on religion/tradition and identity are going to be remote to say the list. Hence, Guran quite acidly predicts: 'in less than two years [2007] the Romanian political nation will be history, in less than ten, Bucharest will be the headquarter of a consular authority and in less than thirty, the Romanian Orthodox Church an obscure sect in a province as vaguely identified on the map as it is today'.[18]

Talking about the possible implications for multicultural cohabitation, but this time with a more elaborate academic argumentation and in a more elegant tone, Earl Pope comments on the work of an influential Romanian contemporary theologian, asserting:

> He [Bria] finds it very difficult to articulate a significant role that the minorities can have within the Romanian society, given the prevailing Orthodox view of the unity of their faith with the soul of the Romanian people. For example, he has charged the Lutheran and Reformed churches as being prompted by "confessionalism and ethnocentrism" because of their opposition to the legal recognition of the Orthodox Church as the "national church." This they would unquestionably deny. He has failed to recognize that it was the hope of these and the other minority religious communities that there would be a new understanding of the churches and their freedom in a democratic Romania. This would enable all of them (majority and minorities alike) to make their maximum contributions to the "soul" of a pluralistic Romania so that they could fully cooperate as equals before the law and the state to bring about the creation of a just, civil, and transfigured society.[19]

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17 Guran, P., 'The Romanian Nation will be History and the Romanian Orthodox Church will be a Provincial Sect', in Ziua, 7th of March 2005. The article was prompted by the sumptuous celebrations of 120 years of autocephaly and  80 years of Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

18 Ibid.

19 Pope, E., 'Ecumenism …', Journal of Ecumenical Studies vol. 36 Wint/Spr 1999, p184-201, pg. 196. Note should be taken that Fr. Bria was an experienced ecumenist representing the Romanian Orthodox Church at the WCC for over two decades.

Despite at times talking about the dangers of 'nationalistic captivity' for the Romanian Orthodox Church and also unmasking, as we shall see below, the profound crisis in which his church finds herself in our modern times, at the end of the day Bria did not point us to a clear way ahead; he did not leave a policy that would create real space for otherness, acceptance of differences, a sacrificial attitude towards those who are or can be our neighbours even if they do not share our traditions. If such was the understanding of the older generation of the leading figures of Romanian 'ecumenists', Earl Pope also noted that the younger generation does not present us with more hope. Metropolitan Daniel of Iasi, a prominent younger figure perceived as the leading Orthodox ecumenist in Romania and a first runner to the patriarchal throne, strongly objected to the Romanian Baptist Union's protest regarding an unsuccessful attempt of the Orthodox Church to be legally recognised as the Romanian National Church (in 1994). With the same occasion he rebuked any other Christian group "recently coming in our country" to evangelise a "country which is Christian since 2000 years ago" (the Baptists have over 150 years history on Romanian grounds – sic!), reportedly saying: "The only right way to the truth of God is Orthodoxy and all the other ways chosen by one or another are wrong."[20]

What are the consequences of such positioning towards the Christian Tradition past to us over the centuries? Emphasising the unity between Orthodoxy and the 'soul of the nation', the insecurity of the present leadership of the Orthodox Church in a pluralistic world, and the urgent — indeed, desperate — need for additional and extensive state funds and support are obvious symptoms of a significant and far-reaching religious as well as civic crisis. Referring to Bria again, Earl Pope correctly notes: 'Bria unquestionably believes that the Orthodox Church finds itself in the midst of a profound identity crisis. There are moments when he has even suggested that his church may be at the point of self-destruction. … It is clear that there is an ecumenical crisis in Romania that has posed serious problems not only for the churches but also for the society for which they had hoped to become positive models of tolerance and ecumenism.'[21]

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20 Daniel, Metropolitan of Iasi, quoted in Pope, op.cit., p. 199. As Pope correctly mentions, 'Daniel had spent a number of years lecturing at the ecumenical institute sponsored by the W.C.C. in Bossey, Switzerland, and had returned to Romania the year before the revolution (1988). He had a meteoric rise within the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy and was an important member of a committee for the reformation and renewal of his church. He was considered to be the ecumenical leader who would represent his church to the international ecumenical bodies, a role that Metropolitan Antonie of Sibiu had filled during much of the communist era.' Ibid.

21 Pope, E., Ibid.

Olivier Gillet is even more pessimistic in regard to the potential role of the Orthodox Church, if the Church still sees its main call to be the preservation of the 'essence of *Romanianess'*. His final conclusion is that:

> such confessionalisation of the state leads to the exclusion of anyone who is not a "true Romanian" and any attempt to give rights to minorities remains an illusion, since the nationalist ideology of the Church and the state would automatically exclude any element which is alien from such historicity and such nationalist historic determinism.[22]

Therefore, together with Gillet we are right to say that unless some major changes will happen, the chances that the Romanian society will be a true democracy are rather small.[23]

Hence, the natural questions coming to mind, particularly to someone who still wants to take the Cristian faith and its tradition seriously, are: do such attitudes reflect a proper understanding of the Orthodox Christian faith and its tradition? Is tradition really being preserved in this way? Moreover, is preserving tradition more important than living out the essence of the tradition? What is at the core of the Christian tradition? Is such use of traditions which sets one apart and against the other the only one interpretation available to us? In other words, are there alternative ways of interpreting the teachings and the legacy of the Orthodox – and for that matter of the Christian – tradition in our rapidly changing world? And to return to the concrete situation of Romanian religiosity described in the first part of this work, can religion and the high levels of trust placed in its institutions at popular level in Romania play a positive role in the new context which forces us to face diversity, differences and otherness? Let us address such questions in the final part of this work.

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22 Gillet, O., op. cit. p. 276.

23 Despite a number of correct assertions, I found Nastase's arguments against Gillet's work rather unconvincing. Her article seems to ignore the contradictory realities reflected in the data on religion, corruption, abortion, human rights, etc in this part of the world (partially presented in this article above), attempting at the same time to justify the Romanian's negative image in the West and its lack of performance on the basis of an derogatory attempt to separate Western from Eastern Europe with deep historical roots coming from the 'time of the Enlightenment'. In doing so, she can be accused of trying indirectly to suggest that 'others' are guilty for our own major shortcomings. See Nastase, D., 'Secularizare si religie în integrarea europeana. Bisericile majoritare est-europene împotriva statului laic vest-european?, in Carp, R., ed., Un suflet pentru Europa. Dimensiunea religioasa a unui proiect politic, Anastasia, Sibiu, 2005, p. 235-251, particularly pg. 239.

## 4. For A Reappraisal of the Christian Tradition in Multicultural Contexts

*From the day we speak "conservatively" of tradition, we no longer have it! (Moltmann, TH: p. 292.)*

As mentioned from the beginning of this paper, I would like to argue that Christianity still has a major place and a major role to play in Romania within the new context of European integration, with all its challenges discussed above. However, as it is obvious from our arguments so far, for this to happen there is need for significant change. What can be some alternative interpretations to the ways described above in which the Christian tradition is being approached? What is the potential inherent in its teachings and practices? Can we approach religion and the Christian traditions afresh, without changing its core teachings and thus remaining within the boundaries of what can still be called the 'right faith', the orthodox faith? I am aware that this is a sensitive issue for many, but I am more and more inclined to think that unless we are willing to address such questions leaving behind any politically biased views, Guran would be proved right saying that in a few years, within the new context of the European family the Orthodox faith will be a 'small sect' or a 'historical curiosity of an archaeological type'.

In my attempt to address this final part of my work I am significantly indebted to three important thinkers of our times: to Jurgen Moltmann and his theology of hope. Discussing the role and the place of the Christian tradition for the modern man and woman, Moltmann identifies the profound crisis as well as the need for a fresh reading of the 'pluriform grammar of the Christian faith': the Christian's mission is to 'seek in practice the relevance of Christian life for the world, for others, and solidarity with man in his threatened and betrayed humanity. A church which cannot change in order to exist for the humanity of man in changed circumstances becomes ossified and dies.'[24]

Highly relevant for us today in Romania, one main presupposition identifiable in Moltmann's work is that the Christian faith and its complex traditions are not the equivalent of a singular 'text' requiring one rigid interpretation, often almost of a Gnostic type, expected to be performed solely by those who are institutionally initiated into it. 'Institutionalising' the process of the preservation and interpretation of the Christian traditions has too often ended in controlling and manipulating its content under the driving force of the will to power. The Christian tradition is a

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24 Moltmann, J., The Crucified God, London SCM Press, 1974, pg. 12.

complex reality speaking of something both past and future, which is somehow beyond our capacity to capture entirely into a codified, literary or rigidly understood, ritualistic system. It is a rather complex reality speaking of past events which, however, have at the core of their message predications about the things to come in and through the crucified and the resurrected Christ. Therefore the main emphasis should be placed on its present and future-oriented message rather than its past-time forms, on its self-sacrificing ethos rather than its rigid dogma, on its core eternal values rather than its temporary form.[25] Opposing the usual types of perceiving/approaching religion with new and fresh perspectives, Moltmann is concerned with not changing the content of the Christian faith and yet he is able to offer us tools to reach towards the core of its message and thus to make it relevant for today. Let us look at some proposals inspired from Moltmann's thought which I found relevant for the Romanian Christian churches today.

### Future vs. Past Orientation of Tradition, Preservation vs. Proclamation of Tradition

Moltmann correctly observes that contemporary readings and interpretations of the Christian faith and its traditions are often very similar with the ways in which traditions were perceived and interpreted by the classics in ancient times.[26] This is a way in which the past is being venerated and it is seen as the only source of regeneration:

> the passing ages are regenerated in the times of sacred festivals. Each festival and each liturgical season brings once more the time of the beginning, the time of the origin, in principio. … History here means falling away from the origin and degenerating from the holiness of the beginning. Tradition means the bringing back of fallen life to the primeval age and the first origin. For this conception of the tradition 'truth' is always bound with 'the old'. The prerogative of tradition is expressed in the phrase 'from of old'.[27]

Anyone familiar with the dominant ways in which the Christian faith, its practice and traditions are perceived in Romania today would recognise

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25 See for example Moltmann's relevant discussion of the meaning of tradition and history in Moltmann, J., Theology of Hope, London: SCM Press, 1967, the Chapter on 'Eschatology and History' (Moltmann, TH).

26 Moltmann acknowledges the influence of Mircea Eliade's studies of the history of the sacred at this point of his argument.

27 Moltmann, TH: p. 295f

such approach as described by Moltmann here. The main events of which the Tradition speaks as well as the best ways to put in practice such events, are things of the past. The past is venerated as an un-altered, pure and holly reality, the Holy Tradition which needs to be preserved this way. Thus the past needs to be protected from any modern influences and passed on to future generations unchanged. The further we move from the events of the past the more prone we are to make mistakes. Thus the language, practices and the rituals given to us 'from old' need to be kept unchanged. This leads, as we mentioned above, to the existence of a group of 'initiated' people who have the tools to access the past and to pass it on to us 'as it was given from old'. Particularly when such an approach is combined with politics of nationalism, the relevance of the Tradition's teachings is endangered and the temptation to dominate is real. Foucault lucidly proved that knowledge is power and those who control the systems of signs are the ones most tempted to dominate the others.[28]

However, joining Moltmann we can rightly ask if 'the risen Christ' can be 'proclaimed' in such terms. To answer, he warns us, we need to be aware that 'What tradition is, and how it comes about, all depends on the matter to be transmitted.' (Moltmann, TH: 297) The core of the Christian faith, although connected with the past, surpasses the past and charges both the past and the present with the power and the vision of the future. Due to its very 'matter' that forms its essence, Christianity has an intrinsic, inbuilt capacity to point us to the future and to make us see the present as well as the past in the light of what it can and what it should become. And here lies the great potential of the Christian tradition, if properly appropriated in our modern times, but only if a new reading of the complex grammar is put in place. It is one centred on the many facets of the claim of the Resurrection and the Return of Christ which informs and changes the present by its potential future. In Moltmann's words,

> This tradition of promise turns our eyes not towards some primeval, original event, but towards the future and finally towards and eschaton of fulfilment. (p. 298) … Christian tradition is not a tradition of wisdom and truth in doctrinal principles. It is the announcing, revealing and publishing of an eschatological event. It reveals the risen Christ's lordship over the world, and sets men free for the coming salvation in faith and hope. (TH: p. 299)

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28 Foucault, M., Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, edited by Colin Gordon, Harvester, London, 1980.

Thus the interpretation of the Christian Tradition needs to move away from a rigid reading of past events often instrumentalised to justify national identity over against other identities. It should instead reflect the power of love which can change the present in the light of the announced new life which is to come. It should alleviate pain, individual and social fractures, inequalities and injustices of all kinds here and now. For, as Moltmann puts it: "Theological concepts do not run leaping behind reality, looking at it with the night eyes of Minerva's owl; they illuminate reality by displaying its future. Their knowledge is founded not on the will to dominate but on the love for the possible future of things. ... Engaged in a process of movement, they call for change and for practical action. … A new horizon is formed." (Moltmann, TH: p. 298). The Christian Tradition, founded on sacrificial love rather than the love of power should therefore lead to a new understanding of 'otherness', which leads us to another crucial point regarding the positive role of the Christian religion in our increasingly complicated multicultural world. It is the question of how we relate to those who are different and with whom we are expected to live side by side.

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