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Alternative Modernities in Europe

Modernity, Religion and Secularization in South-Eastern Europe: the Romanian case¹

Dan Dungaciu²

“*The waters flow, but the stones remain. We are the stones.*” (a Romanian bishop)

Abstract

The last census in Romania (2002) indicated that Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe (the same situation has been registered in 1992: 87.5% of the population declared itself Christian Orthodox – 0.04% atheists – and the level of confidence in the Orthodox Church has constantly been high, 80-90%, in polls and surveys). How can such an evolution be explained, after fifty years of atheist and dogmatic rule? The usual ‘explanation’ supplied by some hurried commentators is that religion has become, after 1989, a ‘substitute ideology’ (an ideological *Ersatz*) replacing the old ideology (the communist one) – now ‘disenchanted’ and, therefore, refuted and eliminated. This so-called explanation remains, at best, naïve. First of all because the disenchantment of the communist ideology occurred, at least in Romania, even before the Soviet occupation of this part of Europe, and the real popular enthusiasm stirred – very rarely – by the Communist Party (1945: the defeat of fascism in Europe; 1968: the opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia etc.) clearly vanished in the eighties. Therefore, to claim that the communist ideology was a sort of *Weltanschauung* before 1989 is quite absurd. Even more, the most religious sections of the Romanian population in the nineties are the young people and the oldest ones, that is those groups least affected by communist ideology.

The explanation, in my view, should be looked for in the processes of modernization that characterized the history of Romania – and of the entire South-Eastern Europe – from the end of the 19th century until today. Religion – and the Church – have been involved, in different and subtle ways, in this process.

Recently, Grace Davie has accurately examined the nature of European religion within a global context. In Europe, the idea that as the world modernizes it will necessarily secularize, has become a conviction but there is scant evidence for secularization in other spaces, despite convincing indicators of modernization in those areas. Grace Davie’s point is that Europe increasingly looks like an exceptional case when it comes to the matters of faith.

The argumentation is adequate, as far as Western Europe is concerned. But I shall argue in my paper that we cannot talk about an European modernity as such, because, from the point of view of religion, there are at least two models of modernization – and modernities – in Europe: the first one is typical for the Western Europe, the second one for the South-Eastern Europe (the Orthodox area). The process of modernization in *Mittleuropa* could be a third model, although it is rather an intermediary model between the two.

¹ I would like to thank Professor Chris Hann for offering me the opportunity to work at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, and to present there an earlier version of this paper. I am grateful to my discussants Monica Heintz and Bettina Mann for their very useful comments and suggestions. Their considerations were of much help.

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1. Eastern Europe Outside the Scope of Western Sociology of Religion

An observation can be made by any sociologist of religion interested in South-Eastern Europe: the lack of attention given to the area is quite amazing. A famous historian once said: “Although the Balkan peninsula has played a major role in history, the area has been subject to less intensive study than any other European region” (Jelavich 1983: IX). And she was right. The ignorance or the lack of attention given to the region before 1990 can be demonstrated in another way: the important readers or books on religion – or the most famous treatise on secularization – quite often ignore the texts of Balkan authors and the materials concerning these questions in Eastern Europe³.

Before 1989, the religious question in this area was neglected, also for political reasons⁴. After 1990, the political reasons disappeared, and, gradually, the lack of interest and the ignorance⁵. Step by step, Central and Eastern Europe has become a topic on the agenda of the European sociology of religion and proves to be a real challenge for the sociology of religion developed in the West. As one Eastern sociologist noticed, this region challenges “the basic concepts of social sciences and plausibilities of enlightened Europe” (Tomka 2001: 11), and more: “the religious revival in Eastern Europe may relativise the de-Christianisation of Western Europe” (ibid.). Because the tendencies of this region do not always follow West-

³ Some ‘classics’: Berger 1970, 1973; Chadwick 1993 [1975]; Campbell 1971; Dobbelaire 1981; Wilson 1966, 1982; Luhman 1984 etc. Among them, David Martin 1978 is an exception.

⁴ It is worth remembering here a famous episode, which is very relevant to the general attitude and the general frame of mind. An example is offered by Costas Carras, a Greek historian who lived in Great Britain after the Second World War. At the beginning of the sixties, he attempted to publish a letter from Russia describing the sufferings inflicted on the Church by the persecutions and the terror unleashed by Hrusciv – the most terrible since the great Stalin terror of the fourth decade. The British press refused to publish the letter, the editors putting forward different reasons for this: *The Times* had a new correspondent in Moscow, whose position would have been jeopardized, *Daily Telegraph* considered that its readers were not interested in religion; *The Guardian* had shortly before published an article about the harassment of the Orthodox Church and they did not want to come back to the matter so soon; and, finally, *Encounter*, considered an anti-Soviet magazine, offered, through its representative, both the worst and the best explanations for not publishing the letter: “It does the Church good to be persecuted.” In the end, the only publication interested in the letter was the English language Russian catholic weekly, *The Tablet*. But it gave the whole thing the meaning that the critical position of the authors was because they were already on the road to Rome (Carras 1998: 17-20).

⁵ There is even an association of the sociologists of religion from Eastern Europe: International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA), grouping all those interested in the religious situation of formerly communist Europe. The first conference leading to the birth of ISORECEA took place in 1991, in Krakow, Poland; the last one, in 2003, in Lvov, Ukraine (“Challenges of Religious Plurality for Eastern and Central Europe”). ISORECEA has published many books in English, collections of articles based on the presented papers at the conferences organized in the series “Religion and Churches in Central and Eastern Europe”. ISORECEA has done a lot to promote the religious condition of the former communist countries and sociologist of religion dealing with this particular topic. Nevertheless, religion in Eastern Europe is not always on the agenda of Western sociology. See, for example: Hamilton 1995, Heelas 1998; Woodhead and Heelas 2000; Fenn 2001 etc.

East patterns (Pollack 2003; Mueller 2003), there are still some problems when sociologists from East and West are dealing with this area. Let me here point out just two of them.

The first one is the use – and abuse – of the so-called ‘secularization thesis’. I am not going to claim here that South-Eastern Europe is not secular – in the sense that the *social significance of religion* has declined⁶, but this is not the whole story of the complex process which has occurred in the region. The *secularization thesis* contains a major risk: to be a sort of methodological or theoretical lense through which we observe and consequently depict a reality – the Orthodox area – that, basically, has nothing to do with the *construction* of the theory as such. In other words, what should be remembered here is that the *secularization thesis* developed from empirical material collected in investigations carried out in Western Europe (Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, in the Northern countries). The religious landscape of South-Eastern Europe was omitted from the initial debate. The secularization thesis is used as a methodological framework or as a hypothesis – *without a previous knowledge of the area* –, and sometimes, not always, of course, what the researcher actually does during the investigation is to pick up – explicitly or implicitly – those particular elements, which would help him or her to make his or her point. South-Eastern Europe is large enough to find examples for almost everything. Needless to say, this strategy is fallacious from an anthropological and sociological point of view⁷. (I shall come to this point later.)

The second way of ignoring the area is illustrated by the recent debates regarding the secularization of Europe and the place of it in the worldwide religious picture. The so-called ‘case of Europe’ has recently been brought back to the agenda by some authors who are trying to prove a so-called ‘European exceptionalism’ as far as the attitude towards religion and the Church is concerned. The most significant attempt belongs, maybe, to Grace Davie, about which I would like to say a few words.

⁶ See: Wilson 2001; Bruce 2001; Bruce 2003; Martin 1978. Apparently, secularization is no longer the dominant paradigm in sociology of religion. In order to describe the current development of religion, terms such as ‘de-secularization’ (Berger), ‘de-privatization’ (Casanova), ‘re-spiritualization’ (Hors), or ‘resurgence’ (Robertson/Chirico) are used, see Mueller 2003.

⁷ Again: I am not claiming here that the secularization thesis is wrong. It works, to some extent, in the West (what Grace Davie calls ‘Europe’). In its ‘Western style’, it does not work in the East, although the process of secularization has occurred here (in terms of *social decline of religion*). I will use the phrase ‘alternative modernity’ in respect to Grace Davie’s work – this is the conceptual framework of this paper and this is the reason I am suggesting an alternative modernity from the point of view of religion.

2. Davie's 'Europe' and the Secularization Thesis

The secularization thesis was developed within a European framework. For certain stages in Europe's religious development, there is a convincing fit between the argument and the data. As Europe's developed economically and politically, it was evident – at least for many sociologists – that religion diminished in public significance; religious aspirations continued to exist, but were increasingly relegated to the private sphere⁸. But this picture has been challenged in the last decade. How is it possible to accommodate the very different situation found, for example, in the United States within the same framework? Some authors talk about 'exceptionalism' at this point, although it is not very clear which case is the exceptional one. Some answers lay in trying to understand American exceptionalism, but others, Berger and Martin, for example, have suggested that the argument be reversed. Exceptionalism undoubtedly exists, but it is Europe, rather than the United States that is exceptional.

In two books – *Religion in Modern Europe* (2000) and *Europe. An Exceptional Case* (2001a) – Grace Davie has made this point stronger than others. Briefly, Davie's view – following Berger, Martin, and Casanova – concerns the atypical nature of religion in Europe – notably “the relatively low levels of religious activity and institutional commitment” (Davie 2001: 270)⁹. The distinctiveness of the European case is obvious. This is, at least, Grace Davie's point¹⁰. And this is important not only for the 'European patterns of religion', but for Europe – for *European identity* – as such: “All-important in the whole analysis is the specificity not only of Europe's religion, but of culture in which this has been embedded for the best part of a millennium. Europe's religious memory is part of what it means to be a European” (ibid.: 273).

Grace Davie uses the word 'Europe' a lot. But it is not Europe as such that is at stake in her texts, but *Western Europe*. The Eastern area – if not ignored – is rarely approached or analyzed. And here lies the main problem of her strategy. When one says Europe, but what one means is in fact Western Europe, an area more or less homogeneous as far as religious landscape is concerned, a significant part of the continent remains unexplored or ignored. And

⁸ As a commentator has put it: “Bit by bit (...) the thesis rather than the data began to dominate the agenda. The 'fit' became axiomatic, theoretically necessary rather than empirically founded – so much that Europe's religious life was considered a prototype of global religiosity; what Europe did today everyone else would do tomorrow. Secularization was a necessary part of modernization and as the world modernized, it would automatically secularize” (Davie 2000: 26).

⁹ In her words: “(...) European patterns of religiousness are indeed unusual in the modern world and should be seen as one strand in what it means to be a European, rather than in terms of any necessary relationship between religion and modernity or religion and process of modernization” (ibid.: 271).

¹⁰ The same point has been made, for example, by Miklos Tomka. See Tomka 2001: 11.

this part of the continent – Central and Eastern Europe – has its own religious shape, past and maybe present. This part of Europe wishes to join Western Europe and most likely will succeed in the near future. One of the consequences, whereof we are rarely aware, is that these countries will bring to the continent a different religious pattern and sensibility¹¹.

3. What Do the Figures Say? Censuses in Romania: 1992-2002

Let us take, for example, the case of Romania. The 1992 census indicates that Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe: 99% Christians, 86.67% of the population declared itself Christian Orthodox, 0.04% atheists. The same situation was registered in 2002: 99% Christians, 86.81% Christian Orthodox, 0.05% atheists. Again, the level of confidence in the Orthodox Church has been constantly high – 70-90% in polls and surveys after 1990.

The first remark is obvious: the situation in Romania does not fit Davie's picture. The formula 'believing without belonging' which Davie has explored, first, in the British context and, later in the European one, cannot be used to describe what is happening in Romania today.¹² Nor does the formula 'belonging without believing' accurately describe the condition of Romania in this respect.¹³ As censuses, surveys or available data show, neither "believing without belonging" nor 'belonging without believing' – as theoretical frameworks – can be used in order to describe Eastern Europe today. As far as the religious landscape is concerned, Romania is different from Western Europe (Gheorghe 2001; Szilagy and Flora 2001). A theoretically informed observation of these differences sets a demanding agenda for the Eastern sociology of religion at the turn of the millennium (Tomka 1999, 2001).

¹¹ The story of encounters between the 'East' and the 'West' is a long one. There is much to do in order to depict the way in which these encounters feed back to not only the self-description of the Orthodox Church but also of Western Christianity – this topic would go far beyond the purpose of the present paper. On this subject, see: Sherrard 1995, 1998; Lafont 1994, 1999. On the story of the 'encounters' between the 'East' and the 'West' as far as *nationalism* in this two 'areas' is concerned, see Dungaciu 2000.

¹² 'Believing without belonging' means that "statistics relating to 'soft' religious variables – general statements of belief, the notion of a religious disposition, and denominational self-ascription – remain relatively high, whilst those that pertain to regular religious practice or to the credal statements of Christian doctrine have dropped very markedly indeed". (Davie 2001: 269)

¹³ 'Belonging without believing' means that people maintain a nominal rather than active allegiance to their churches and what they represent, but in a way provided for by their particular ecclesiastical history". Or, as one commentator succinctly put it: "what people believe in is, in fact, belonging". (Davie 2001: 270)

4. Researching the Contemporary Orthodox Area. The secularization thesis in a different context

How can the Romanian case be explained, after fifty years of atheist and dogmatic rule?¹⁴ The usual but inadequate “explanation” is that religion has become a ‘substitute ideology’ (an ideological *Ersatz*) replacing the old ideology (the communist one) – now ‘disenchanted’ and, therefore, refuted and eliminated. The classical formulation of this view belongs to Adam Michnik and was formulated in 1991:

“Communism aspired to the role of a worldview that explained everything. After Communism there remained an ideological vacuum; and the end of Communism meant the opening of a Pandora’s box. Into that vacuum began to creep demons from bygone epochs: ideologies proclaiming chauvinism and xenophobia, populism and intolerance. (...) Nationalism is the last word of Communism” (Michnik 1991: 759).

Some authors use ‘nationalism’ as an ideological *Erzatz*, others, religion.

But this so-called explanation remains, at best, naïve. First of all, because the disenchantment with the communist ideology occurred, at least in Romania, even *before the Soviet occupation* of this part of Europe, and the *real* popular enthusiasm stirred – very rarely – by the Communist Party (1945: the defeat of fascism in Europe; 1968: the opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia etc.) clearly vanished in the eighties. Therefore, to claim that the communist ideology had been a sort of *Weltanschauung* before 1989 is quite absurd. Even more, as polls and surveys show, the most religious sections of the Romanian population in the nineties are the young people and the oldest ones, that is those groups least affected by communist ideology (see Dungaciu 2000).

After 1990 other strategies have been used in order to explain or to describe the religious landscape in Romania (and in South-Eastern Europe, in general). In general, the starting point of these studies or surveys – as I said before – is a theory or a sociological framework produced in Western Europe now being tested and put to work in Eastern (or Orthodox) Europe. But, again, there is a major risk in carrying out such research. South-Eastern Europe is a large region, and, if the initial framework is – for example – the secularization thesis or different versions of it, you can use or select whatever you want in order to make your point.

What the secularization thesis sustains is, basically – in its strong version, at least – the inevitable and irreversible decline of the religious spirit in society. In spite of some important

¹⁴ On the beginnings of the sociology of religions in Romania, see: Gheorghe 1999. Before 1989, sociology – including *sociology of religion* – was prohibited in Romania by the communist regime (in 1979, for example, the Faculty of Sociology has been closed down).

conflicting evidence to the theory of secularization collected during the last decade, many sociologists and historians concerned with the religious phenomenon went on working in this area, more or less explicitly, within that particular framework. Looking at the Orthodox region, one can see again that the theory of secularization is out of its ‘reference area’, the context (spiritual, political etc.) and the historical pattern being different from those the theory has been set to explain. These differences are important enough – at least starting with the modern era – to be considered as such in an analysis dedicated, after all, to modernity.

We have to recall here Steve Bruce’s warning: “(...) secularization is not inevitable. Of course, the West’s power and prestige give its characteristics a degree of preeminence as a model for others to emulate (or react against) but the changes described here will be repeated elsewhere *only if the circumstances match the old*” (Bruce 2001: 251).

To understand ‘if the circumstances match the old’ means to understand the processes of *modernization* that characterized the history of South-Eastern Europe, in general, and Romania, in particular, from the end of the 19th century until today. Religion and the Church have been involved in this process in different and subtle ways.

5. Modernity and Religion in Romania. Three elements

I am not going to offer here a theory of secularization of Eastern Europe. What I am trying to do is to discuss *three* neglected elements that have to be taken into account when discussing modernity and religion in Romania¹⁵.

Again, we should not forget the main question: How is it that in this region religion (or religious identity) and Church are still so important, at least in comparison with other parts of Europe? Or, to put it in Davie’s words: How is it that Eastern Europe is an *exceptional* case?

5.1 The Specificity of the “Orthodox culture”. The Orthodox Church and modernity

When we talk about ‘secularization’ or ‘cultural changes’ in Eastern Europe, the first element that has to be evaluated is the *specificity of the “Orthodox culture”* (see Kokosalakis 1995, 1996). As I said at the beginning of my paper, one of the geographical and cultural areas ignored by the disciplinary knowledge of the sociologist of religion today is the Orthodox European area. There are, of course, some comparative analyses at the level of all of Europe, but, unfortunately, what comparison means in many cases is just a translation of the Western concepts and/or theories to the East without a preliminary depiction of an area,

¹⁵ On religion and political modernization in Central and Eastern Europe, see Borowik 1999: 18-20. See also Borowik 2001.

which has its own particularities and specificity at least as far as religion and religious life are concerned. And there are some arguments for this statement¹⁶.

First of all, “orthodoxy is a pre-modern culture in the sense that it was not directly disrupted by the major movements which constitute the foundations of modernity, namely the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment” (Kokosalakis 1995: 234). And moreover, the typically modern phenomena, namely industrial revolution and capitalist accumulation “were born and grew outside countries where Orthodoxy has been the dominant religion” (ibid.). In other words, the continuity of the Orthodox culture, of the ‘way of life’ that is specific for Orthodoxy (using a phrase imposed by the Greek philosopher Christos Yannaras) did not suffer ‘breaches’, or decisive displacements due to endogenous socio-cultural developments like those that define modernity. In this sense Orthodoxy “can be understood as pre-modern in a modern world”. (ibid.) What are the practical consequences of this peculiar condition?

First of all, the *position* of the Orthodox Church in this process as an *insider* and an *outsider* at the same time. The Orthodox Church has not been *part* of the process of modernization – it has been *involved* in it, but not *part* of it. What we call today ‘disenchantment of the world’ (*Entzauberung der Welt*) means, basically, disenchantment of the *modern* world – of modernity as an *existential project*. In the Orthodox area or in some parts of it, the story is different for reasons, which I have already suggested. The Church and the Orthodox religion have not been part of modernity, but they have always been there, and still are, as an *alternative existential project*, which remains available and at hand. Today, when we witness the ‘disenchantment of the *modern* world’ – this is what postmodernity and postmodernism are all about –, a resurrection of the *traditional* religiosity in the Orthodox area is not incomprehensible. And this is one of the reasons for *new religious movements* as an alternative religiosity in this part of Europe¹⁷. The inner spirituality of the Orthodox peoples can still be expressed in traditional forms, because it is still there, available, not disenchanted. In this respect, the Orthodox religion could be called a *post-modern* religion.

The Orthodox area is not homogeneous and different countries should be approached

¹⁶ I am not going to reify or to essentialize the concept of ‘Orthodox culture’ – or to suggest a sort of Spenglerian – civilization *versus* culture – dichotomy (a more or less essentialist approach). What I am trying to do is to remind that *modernity* has been different in Eastern Europe in the sense that it has not been something ‘*organic*’. *Modernity* is a *Western* invention. This is a truism, but one that we sometimes forget.

¹⁷ I mean a strong dynamic and credible new religious movement. As national censuses prove, many of these movements are, in many cases, accepted by the populations for political or economical reasons.

differently. Nevertheless, they are all *Orthodox*. Let me say a few words about the Romanian case, with which I am most familiar¹⁸.

In the 16th century, while Erasmus was talking about ‘Christ’s philosophy’ and Machiavelli was turning religion into a mere princely hypocrisy and a mere means of dominating and manipulating subjects and all others, thus nullifying both God’s living accomplishment and the moral principle in politics a Wallachian ruler, Neagoe Basarab, was interested in grounding the politics, diplomacy, and military doctrine of his people in the *Hesychast-Orthodox* belief in an ever living and ever manifest God, accessible to man, if not in His *essence*, at least in those *un-created energies* flowing ceaselessly all-over living beings, through which man can establish immediate contact with the unseen divine, can request assistance through prayer can always feel Him nearby, can drink from Him the power to face dangers seemingly indomitable and to conquer enemies seemingly unyielding.

The 18th century – the century of Voltaire – witnessed in Moldavia the most important spiritual resurrection in the Orthodox world. After sixteen years on the Holy Mountain, a remarkable *starez*, Paisii Velichkovskii (1722-1794), returned to Moldavia as Abbot of the monastery of Neamtu. He re-established monastic rule, organized a printing press and began to translate and publish the works of the Greek Fathers; he also translated a selection of the texts of the Greek *Philokalia*. The flowering of *hesychast* spirituality in this area stimulated both the publication of the *Philokalia* and the arrival of many of Paisii’s own disciples not only in other Romanian monasteries but also in Russia. The influence of this spiritual resurrection was immense, as the works of Dostoyevsky testify.

The relationship between Orthodoxy and modernity is unique in this respect. And it has to be pointed out in order to understand the relation between religion, Church and people in this area, and to widen the perspective of the analysis to enable it to contain historical-cultural horizons large enough to host a multiple dimension investigation. The immediate benefit coming from this is that a better definition of the object of study is proposed – ‘Orthodox culture’. We must deal here – this is the message – with different cultural realities, Western and Eastern, and the concepts and theories of one of them – the modern Western one – cannot

¹⁸ The temptation to fuse nation and Church has its own historical mythology in Romania. The idea that ‘the Romanian people was born Christian’ has gone on to identify Romanians with Orthodox Christianity. The claim that the apostle Andrew preached in Dobrogea (part of Romania) is very popular today and this is why now he is starting to be venerated as patron saint of Romania. Leaving aside the fact that the ‘birth’ of a people is a highly mythological concept, and in the face of the paucity of source material we ought to be more cautious, we have to take into account that this view (perspective), as a historical discourse, is much more ambitious and prevalent in its manifestations today.

be used without caveats from the other. The ‘modern rationalist categories’ describing society, for instance, in terms of dichotomy like ‘Church-state’ or ‘religion-politics’ are inadequate when we speak about the Eastern societies. The main problem is that the sociological concepts as much as they derive from a modern *Weltanschauung* – because sociology is the science of modernity par excellence – cannot have but a very limited value when used in explaining a ‘premodern’, ‘preindustrial’ and – even – ‘pre-sociological’ Orthodox culture. That value is limited to the social “fields” that either manage to get completely out of the influence of the specifically Orthodox way of life (which should not be mistaken with the influence of the Church) or are mimetic copies of Western developments. But what is fatally left out is exactly the object of research. Nikos Kokosalakis, a Greek sociologist, has investigated how the sociology of religion in its classical Western variant departs from Eastern social reality in its different respects: political (relations Church-state, constitution of the modern national identities etc.), economical (the theme of relations between Orthodoxy and capitalism has, actually, a rather controversial bibliography), civic (dichotomy public-private sphere etc). The analysis is not exhaustive, but it provides us with an important suggestion. If “modernity did not affect the Orthodox religion from inside, as it happened with other Christian traditions” (Kokosalakis 1996: 133), then secularization, as an effect of modernization (and of modernity, in general) will result in different processes in Orthodox and non-Orthodox societies respectively. Kokosalakis tries to identify the sense of these differences using the Greek case and adapting a concept of ‘private religion’ or ‘privatization of religion’, which becomes ‘personalization of religion’. The purpose is to give an account of the specific features of the “transformation of the religiosity in Greece, within the framework of the Orthodox tradition” (Kokosalakis 1996: 147-148).

We can see a certain secularization of the social structures coexisting with high levels of religiosity at the individual level, and also with religious gestures performed by the state (which are not simply formal)¹⁹.

5.2 Religion and National Identity

The second element that has to be evaluated is the relation between religion and national identity in the Orthodox area. The classical theories of secularization did not ignore this

¹⁹ The analytical ‘framework’ of my paper is a comparative approach suggested by the provocative thesis of Grace Davie. Religious practices in everyday life – how is religious affiliation expressed by believers, how can it be observed in public space and how is religion shaping the field of social interaction – is not the topic of *this* paper. For such an approach, an attempt to identify the more ‘anthropological’ aspects expressed both on the individual and institutional (Orthodox Church) level, see Yannaras 1996 and Walker and Carras 1996.

relation, and the analysis is often concentrated on religion and nationhood “as complementary or antagonistic guardians of overall group identity and of the master symbols of belonging” (Martin 1978: 108). But, again, the Eastern part of the continent has rarely been depicted from this crucial point of view. And this is a serious lack, at least because the institution of *autocephaly* is quite unique in the religious picture of Europe. The term *autocephalous* comes from the ancient Greek and means that the body in question has its own head and is therefore independent or self-governing. The institution of autocephaly is not a 19th century invention. From the beginning, Orthodox Christianity proved more inclined to contemplation and preserved more clearly the early Christian tradition of *sobornost* (conciliatory unity or togetherness). The Orthodox tradition also spoke in this context, of the ‘divinization’ of man by God – a concept entirely foreign to Western Christianity.

The institution of autocephaly characterized the entire Orthodox area. But as far as the Romanian case is concerned, the story of church/national identity relations is far more complicated. It began at the beginning of the 18th century in Transylvania and involved a different church, namely the Greek Catholic Church (or the so-called Uniate Church, a Church derived from the Orthodox Church). This *religious policy* of the Vatican is crucial in order “to trace the development of national consciousness and explain the nature of early modern nationalism among the Romanians of Transylvania in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century” (Hitchins 1999: 7). The period 1700-1848 describes the gradual transformation of an identity that was initially religious and based upon the Romanians’ membership in the international Orthodox community into one that was national and broadly European. *National*, but never anti-religious, anti-clerical or anti-Church.

The story is long and complex (see: Hitchins 1977, 1999, 1999a). In the final decade of the 17th century two events of crucial importance for the progress of the Romanians of Transylvania occurred: the political incorporation of the principality into the Habsburg Monarchy as a result of a successful war against the Ottoman Empire and a religious union of a part of the Romanian Orthodox clergy and faithful with the Roman Catholic Church²⁰. The campaign to convert the Romanian Orthodox was but one aspect of the general Catholic resurgence in the Habsburg Monarchy in the latter half of the 17th century (Hann 2000: 15-16). On September 4, 1700, the Orthodox Metropolitan invoked a general synod at which the

²⁰ The Romanians formed in the 18th century a sizable proportion of the population of Transylvania: the census of 1721 showed 46,138 Romanian households subject to taxation, which represented almost 49% of such households, and at the end of the century the number of Romanians was something over 50% of the total population. The exclusion of the Romanians from the ranks of the political nations was based in the first instance upon the criterion of social class.

Four Articles of the Council of Florence were solemnly adopted. The Uniate Church in Transylvania was born. On March 19, 1700 the Emperor consecrated this religious act through the Second Leopoldine Diploma. An assessment of the church union reveals, first of all, that it brought few substantive changes to Romanian religious life. In matters of *doctrine* and *practice*, then, the two Romanian churches had remained essentially Eastern. The importance of the union for the Romanians lies, therefore, elsewhere.

What is important to understand at this point is that the most significant demand the Metropolitan Teofil – the leader of the Orthodox at that moment – made was not religious at all but political: the new Uniate, or Greek Catholic Church and its faithful should henceforth enjoy the same rights as the Roman Catholic Church and its members – the point made by Teofil was that the Romanians would no longer accept second-class status, but insisted upon being ‘received as sons of the fatherland’.

The union – although the Uniate Church was never the church of the majority of Romanians in Transylvania – could be considered the first step of Romanian modernity, at least political modernity, and had profound effects on Romanian political development. The imperial diplomas of 1699 and 1701 provided a legal foundation for the later political activity of the Romanians as a separate, distinct entity in a country whose constitution had denied them recognition as a nation. The Union also set Romanian intellectual life in a new direction. The Uniate intellectual elite were the authors and the propagators of a new *idea of nation*. These intellectuals had come to view the connection with Rome from a perspective that transcended religious motives to embrace an entirely new idea of community. Gradually, from a *religious* and *political* idea of nation – based primarily upon legal precedents and privileged castes – Romanian intellectuals developed an organic view of nation that blurred all distinctions between them except the ethnic. At the end of the 18th century, this modern conception of nation began to dominate. In 1790, for the first time, Romanians mounted an organized political campaign, in which Uniate intellectuals were joined by their Orthodox colleagues. They even requested permission to hold a national congress under the chairmanship of the two bishops, to which members of the clergy and nobility would be invited to discuss how best the demands of the Romanian nation might be fulfilled. The *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, the most important single political act of the Romanians in the 18th century, claimed rights for all Romanians without regard to religion, and presented their demands on behalf of the entire Romanian nation, United and Orthodox together. From then on, the distinction between the two religions had no political importance anymore. The generation of Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania who reached maturity between 1830 and 1848

undertook to transform the Romania cultural community into a full-fledged political nation (Hitchins 1999a).

The trend on the other side of the Carpatians – Wallachia and Moldova – was the same. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Orthodox monks and bishops were actively involved in the struggle for national rights and national education against the Fanariot (Orthodox Greeks) regime appointed by the Ottoman Empire. The slogan of the national-religious camp was that “no divine or natural law can condemn a nation for demanding its public rights” (see Georgescu 1971: 145).

Both churches – United and Orthodox – played a major role in 1918, when so-called Great Romania was realized for the first time. In the Constitution promulgated after the First World War, the two churches were called ‘national churches’²¹.

5.3 State-Church Relation in the Orthodox Area

The third element which has to be taken into account is the relation between church and state in this area. ‘External domination’ or ‘power and alternative power’ are categories included in the general debate concerning secularization (Martin 1978). My aim here is not to offer a theory of religion and political power in South-Eastern Europe, but to suggest that a particular view of the church/state relation strongly influences the position of the church in society and, in the end, the process of secularization at the level of the entire community.

The level of confidence in the Orthodox Church in polls and surveys has been consistently high after 1989 in Romania; somewhere around 80-90%, in spite of its – apparent – ‘collaboration’ with the communist regime. The explanation is not difficult, if we understand the perspective and the reaction East Europeans had to Communism. The communist regime was perceived from the beginning as another ‘occupant’ in a long series of occupants and dominant regimes, which have marked the history of this part of Europe. In order to understand the condition of the Christian church, or, more accurately, the *perspective* of the people on the condition of their Church, we must consider the condition of these societies at that moment. The Eastern societies were, at the beginning of the century, traditional, rural societies, with a high degree of religiosity. Religion was one of the major existential landmarks. Thus, the perspective of these societies on political reality was, in turn, influenced

²¹ It is clear that in the explanation of contemporary high levels of religiosity in Eastern Europe, the relation between ‘national identity’ and Church does not suffice. The Church could be perceived – and it is in many cases – as part of the ‘national *patrimonium*’, not as part of *De Civitae Dei*. It is difficult to make a clear cut distinction between ‘nationalism’ and ‘religiosity’ at this point. Nevertheless, this is still important in Eastern Europe, because of historical conditions: the Ottoman Empire was perceived as *different* both *religiously* – ‘pagan’ – and *ethnically* – the ‘Turks’. The relations between ethnicity – later ‘national identity’ – and religion is complex and should be taken into account even at the *popular* level.

by religion – including here also their perspective on Communism. And here we have a major distinction between our contemporary societies and East European societies from the beginning of the 20th century. Essentially, the distinction is between the *religious perspective* and the *secular perspective* on Communism.

The secular perspective on Communism – prevalent today – sees in it a totalitarian system, which is inefficient economically, socially and politically, a regime which trespasses systematically on human rights etc.; sometimes, it also recognizes the trespassing on the religious rights in communist countries. On the contrary, a religious perspective radically changes the hierarchies. Communism becomes here a political regime trying to turn all values and axiologies upside down, a system which closes or destroys churches, a project that wishes to substitute a worldly leader for God and to impose the reign of Anti-Christ on earth.

In Romania, for instance, the latter vision was extremely powerful. The religious anti-communism was, probably, stronger in Romania than anywhere else. The fascist movement in Romania used religion and religious symbolism to the highest degree, which was very different to similar movements in Germany, Italy or elsewhere (Dungaciu 2000). That is the main reason why the anti-Soviet propaganda was very effective and why terms like ‘anti-Soviet crusade’, or the ‘battle with Anti-Christ’ were used during the 1940s. Of course, we must add the geopolitical fact that Romania had a common frontier with the USSR and a better chance to be informed about what was happening in the ‘land of freedom’.

Today, the secular perspective is predominant, but to look at the communist issue only from this secular standpoint is to simplify it. Especially when we are talking about the Christian Church after 1944, when it found itself confronted with a regime denying its ontological premises from the start. *This* is the framework – the one of an *impossible meeting* – within which we have to examine the relation between the Church and the communist regime after the Soviet occupation. At least as far as the situation of the Church is concerned, the words of a recent commentator are very appropriate: “There is no communist society, but a communist domination of the society, which survives as well as it can” (Volkoff 1991: 54).

To speak in this context about ‘adaptation’ or ‘co-optation’ of the Church with the communist state, as Sabrina Ramet (1988 and 1989) – among others (see also Gillet 1997) – does, is therefore, a truism and an over-simplification. What else could the Church have done, realistically speaking? We do not have to forget that, for example, out of the 2544 prelates and religious officials imprisoned in Romania, 1888 were Orthodox, 235 were Greek-Catholic, 172 Roman-Catholic, 67 Protestants, 25 Neo-Protestants, 23 Muslim, and 13 Jewish (Caravia et al., 1999).

The real question is if in a government of terror, a Church does better or worse if it compromises with the state? To get sacraments to the people it needed a legal status. To have a legal status it had to do what the state wanted and not criticize the policy or the leaders of the State. If this was humiliation, a prelate must sometimes put up with humiliation or the necessity for flattery of politicians because the *higher good* was that the people should get the sacraments and the faith which they needed. Patriarch Alexei in Moscow, Patriarch Justinian in Bucharest, Patriarch Kiril in Bulgaria, the Lutheran Bishop Schönherr in East Berlin and the Lutheran archbishops in Latvia and Estonia all “helped their Churches by a certain willingness to play along with the State” (Chadwick, 1993: 69); that is, “to make the best of a bad situation, to get such freedom for the Church as were still allowed, and in return to lay on courtesy or flattery for the State leaders, so that the State regarded the Church, however lamentable and backward, as a help to it in being accepted by some of the people” (ibid.). The question Owen Chadwick asked still remains: “It is really the higher good to be silent in the face of injustice?” (ibid.). An open question. It is certain, that all the churches that were majority churches in their countries chose co-operation and not overt opposition²².

This ‘solution’ – *compromises for sacraments* – was adopted, in fact, everywhere in Eastern Europe: Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox areas. *Compromise* was and is the condition of the Church in this area. Or, at least, this is what even today many people still believe. And this interpretation is still prevalent and could be an explanation for the high level of trust that Orthodox Church has been accredited with after 1990.

6. Conclusion

The main purpose of this text was to call attention to a theme that is important for Eastern sociology of religion, both from the point of view of its substance and its up-to-dateness (the high interest raised by similar matters elsewhere can be a proof). This is the theme of

²² Only two famous cases here, described by the same author (ibid.). After more than seventeen years of imprisonment, in 1963 the Uniate metropolitan Slipyj was released on the condition that he did not talk. He went into exile in Rome and, in 1971, as Pope Paul VI moved towards reconciliation with the East, Slipyj ‘could hold his peace no longer’. He talked of the ‘cruel destruction of his Church’. Speaking in Rome, he ‘denounced the Vatican for its silence and failure to protest at the persecution of the Uniates by the Russians’. Paul VI had sent representatives to the Moscow council to pay respects at the election of the new Patriarch of Moscow, Pimen. There Pimen had declared the old union of the Ukrainians with Rome, the so-called Union of Brest-Litovsk, to be null and void. Yet not a single Roman Catholic present protested (ibid. 54). In the name of something more important, Slipyj’ voice had to be ignored. More interesting is the case of Jozsef Mindszenty, one of the most extraordinary prelates of the 20th century. After October 1956 – the Hungarian Revolution – he remained in the American embassy at Budapest for fifteen years. In 1971, his presence hampered friendship between Hungary and the United States. The Pope ordered him to come out. His speeches in the West against communism caused some Hungarian bishops to ask Rome to silence him. The Pope did not allow him to publish his memoirs – it could aggravate the predicament of the Hungarian church. However, Mindszenty published his memoirs, the only autobiography of a cardinal to end with a pitiless attack upon his Pope (ibid.).

religiosity and secularization in the contemporary Christian Orthodox world, a little analyzed regions, in spite of its closeness to the West and its relatively high accessibility, given the number of similar elements and common cultural evolution.

If modernity has been unique in history in conceiving a secular world, obviously this is not the case with Orthodox societies.

The main argument of my paper is that we cannot talk about a *European* modernity as such, because, from the point of view of religion, there are at least *two* models of modernization²³ – and modernities – in Europe: the first one is typical for Western Europe, the second one for South-Eastern Europe (the Orthodox area). The process of modernization in *Mittleuropa* could be a third model, although seems rather an intermediary model between the two²⁴.

There is a lot of work to do in the future in order to clarify the complex picture of the religious past and present of our continent.

²³ ‘Modernization’ means here the socio-economic process; ‘modernism’ – the discourse about/of modernization.

²⁴ The main topic of my paper was Europe and European modernity/modernities. Islamic modernity, for example, is a too different subject to be approached here. Although ‘Eastern’ and ‘Islamic’ modernity resembling each other to some extent, the processes are not similar, and a comparative perspective should be very careful pursued. On this topic, see Asal 2003.

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