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PhD THESIS

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**ORTODOX ETHICS AND POSTMODERNIST
VALUES IN THE 21ST CENTURY
A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW**

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ABTRACT

Despite Weber's warning not to transform his analysis on the Protestant ethic into a paradigm, we should take a look back over the whole Orthodox world as it is now and has always been and not empirically observe the world of the relative success in the implementation of the capitalism spirit.

The hypothesis put forward by Weber does not have a general character and the German sociologist does not claim that religion would be the sole, decisive and determinant factor of the development of Western capitalism, even if the fundamental idea remains timeliness. A correlation between religious beliefs and economic system would explain why the capitalist model had a low adhesion in certain countries, such as those in Africa, for example.

Beyond the attitude towards the market economy, religion adopted by a social category (or a nation) is correlated with the adherence to a set of values that allow the members of the community to survive and develop. In this category of representations promoted by one or another Christian doctrines one could notice the attitude of the believer and of the ecclesial institution toward the state.

On the one hand, we start from the epistemological reality of Weberian definition of the *ideal type*, which characterize a given action and a social event and allow relevant features to be released in order to get to understanding the logic of those situations, processes and phenomena that are a target of our investigation.

The most important thing is the correct, balanced understanding of the concepts from which we start from.

The concept is essential to analyze the cultural and religious factors influencing the economic behavior of individuals, even if *the ideal type* has only a heuristic value and represent a means of general orientation in the epistemological process. In particular, we consider those

features that the ideal type should contain: *the abstract generality* and *the ideal-typical exaggeration* of the empirical reality.

A nuanced interpretation shows that economic ethics associated with investigated religion is fundamentally different from that of ascetic Protestantism through its implications in economic activities. We hold as a working hypothesis that the Orthodox ethics is, in fact, a deterrent element.

We will add to the conceptual system of the doctoral thesis terms from Orthodox dogma, as we found them in the work of representative thinkers in this field. Given these methodological considerations, and some related to the authorship of this kind of research, we will approach the scientific model of sociological study by using Weber's thinking, corrected and completed by the modern exegetes.

On the other hand, we consider that sociological studies indicate a high degree of traditionalism as far as the Romanian society is concerned,¹ but the mechanisms of this state of fact are often simple explanations that have nothing to do with the scientific approach.

Perhaps for these reasons, the Orthodox ethos hermeneutics reverberations in all aspects of our existence, be it secularised and secularized however, it is particularly useful to take into consideration the concept of "multiple identities" issued by Victor Neumann², who rightly believes that "we belong simultaneously to several categories of identity".

The concept of "multiple identity" is commonly used by psychologists, together with its variant, "multiple personality".³ It refers to subjects (possibly patients) that have been living radical personality changes.

Then the term is commonly used in current research on group identity. One type of severe double identity may oppose to the urban existence and rural memory - see the case of African populations studied in terms of multiple identity by Tawana Kúpe⁴.

¹ Interesting to that end is the *Public and Science* study elaborated under the coordination of Professor Lazar Vlasceanu, PhD, available at www.stisoc.ro/docs/STISOC2010

² Victor Neumann, *Skinn, People or Nation? On the European Political Identities*, Editura Curtea Veche, Bucharest, 2003, p. 154

³ Nicholas Spanos, *Multiple Identities & False Memories. A Sociocognitive Perspective*, American Psychological Association, 1996

⁴ Kupe, Tawana, *Comment: New Forms in Cultural Identity in an African Society*, in Tore Slatta, ed., *Media and the Transition of Collective Identities*, University of Oslo, Oslo, 1996

This expression can be found, however, in multicultural diversity literature.

The meaning of "Neumannian" multiple identity given by author himself or "community and multiple language roots of the majority population of a city or a region suggest the existence of each person plural identity", "the recognition of each individual identity firstly by region belongs to the same political philosophy as the recognition of linguistic and religious rights of the minority"⁵.

Mutatis mutandis, Orthodox space fully lives the effervescence of multiple identity, where you can find young professional individuals orientated towards everything that is the information society, but who are parying in the church in the most "pure" manner as Romanian illiterate peasant from a hundred year old.

Protestantism is not relevant to capitalism as a form of knowledge or theological system, but as a *lifestyle* that revolves around ideas of rationality and sustained continuous effort.

To study how the rules of orthodoxy matches with the spirit of capitalism, on the one hand, we start from the canonical aspects, from its peculiarities in relation to other Christian denominations and Othodox ethics principles highlighted in the fundamental works as *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, *Foundations of the Orthodox Faith* or *Paterikon* or *apoftegmele of the desert fathers*. On the other hand, we consider the "popular belief", a concept by which we understand the totality of a people's religious practices, and also its apparently areligious practices.

The study reviews all moral norms of the Orthodox religion regarding work, family and society and presents the existence of a **low compatibility in relation to the values of capitalism**.

The research was conducted in the Cil, Buteni, abounds, Mustenesti, Joia Mare and Radesti towns in Arad County and it implied the analysis of Orthodox and neo-Protestants communities over a period of several years (participatory observation since 2007, respectively interviews and setting up focus groups in 2012 -2014).

⁵ Neumann, Victor, *op. cit.*, p. 154

The thesis is based on the working hypothesis according to which there is some influence of the Orthodox religious education in the sense of the social consequences which is different from those of other Christian confessions:

- Orthodox spirituality encourages an attitude in which work seems less important and there is a kind of detachment toward the material values.
- Orthodox concept on family and the role of women is traditional.
- The Orthodox Church proclaims a moral superiority over the state.
- We can not ask ourselves whether, in addition to many other variables, Orthodox values are contrary to the spirit of capitalism, or, in any event, do not very easily merge with them.

The hypothesis arising from Orthodox religion sociological perspective on labor issues highlight that some elements of the Weberian theory, implemented through a *sociological imagination* approach⁶ to the cultural and religious space of today's Romania, can largely be validated.

The first chapter of the thesis, "**The Church and Society**" underlines the ratio between the ecclesiastical institutions of the Christian confessions and the state.

Thus, while Orthodoxy tends to impose the supranational role of the Church through dogma, Catholicism tries to maintain its political and social influence and places the man at the center of its actions. On the other hand, Evangelical and Protestant churches stress the importancem of the faithful obedience toward the state institutions and authorities and actively imply themselves in social welfare activities.

As Monica Heintz pointed out, if diplomatic skills of native clergy enabled the survival of the institution during the communist regime, the pressures exercised by the members of the institution on the government representatives after 1989 (tolerance towards sexual minorities, for

⁶ Mills, C. Wright, *Sociological Imagination*, Editura Politica, 1975. According to Wright Mills, the concept of "sociological imagination" underlines the current ratio between biography and history, the relation between these two within the society, and that every age has its own way of thinking.

example) led to a negative perception of the Church, often considered too conservative, anti-Western and anti-European”⁷.

From another perspective we should reflected on issues such as:

- Orthodox dogma recognizes the value and necessity of property, but emphasizes the importance of charity, as far as the welfare-temptation-sin relationship and the superiority of spiritual values are concerned;
- Orthodoxy emphasizes individual rights, unlike the Reformed churches which emphasize the believers’ obligations to the community within which they live, and to society in general;
- BOR assign itself the constitutive role in the modern Romanian state, is financed from the budget, having a special tax status (its income are not taxed, and has a "veto" right on legislative initiatives, seeming rather a supranational institution.

Instead, reformed institutions underline the importance of the individual work in society, for the good of the entire community. Although today the differences between the Christian doctrines are not so high, they do exist and they started from the shared vision of Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Chapter II - "**Weberian Sociology of Religion and the Values of Capitalism**" - presents a number of critical perspectives on Weber's theory on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.

As Professor Ioan Mihailescu stated, the model proposed by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* could explain why capitalist model flourished in some areas and in others did not deliver the expected results⁸.

The same thing also was pointed out by Professor Nicu Gavriluta: "Weber tries to understand how economic (capitalist) mentality may be triggered by Protestant thought and practice. The answer is: through *intra-worldly asceticism* and interpretation of work as vocation and of its results as a sign of

⁷ Monica Heintz, *Romanian Orthodoxy between the Urban and the Rural*, 2004, online, available at <http://www.eth.mpg.de/pubs/wps/mpi-eth-working-paper-0067.html> (text/html <FRAME> / <http://monica.heintz.free.fr>

⁸ Ioan Mihailescu, the introduction at Weber, Max, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Bucharest, Editura Incitatus, 2003, p. 8

divine election. The idea is unique in European ascetic Protestantism. (...) Therefore, we are dealing with an absolutely remarkable effect of Protestant Christian religious authority based on Sola Fide and Sola Scriptura. It is based on social action”⁹.

In any case, Max Weber unequivocally stated that the Reformed churches ethics is not the sole cause of the emergence of capitalism, but also provides the premises of extensive research, constituting only an explanation of regional and historical context.

Even if the Weberian thesis did not support the singular character of the Protestant ethic as the cause of the development of capitalism, it was combated mainly by historians and economists.

Thus, in the *Aspects of the Rise of the criticism of Max Weber and His school* study ¹⁰, HM Robertson argued that the capitalist system developed itself its mercantilist phase during the Catholic world, before the Reformation, when the first liberal economic theories emerged.

Henryk Gossman criticized the Weberian theory arguing that capitalist spirit appeared in Italian cities two centuries before the Reformation. The author pointed out that the development was due proletarianization of the peasants driven away from the land that were use in common and that were involved in the competition on the labor market in urban environment ¹¹.

From our perspective, Weber's study explains also in a pertinent manner the role of religion on the promotion of some values that were incompatible to the system in some regions of the globe.

In addition, the author of *Sociology of Religion* makes some confusion between magic and religion. Magic is an act performed by a person who has knowledge for the benefit of his customer and at his request. Magic act has targeted outcome in terms of everyday life and the ritual used is not aimed at achieving access to heaven or any deification. The aims of this type of ritual are often linked to the financial situation, love and longevity, and in no way transcendent reality.

⁹ Nicu Gavriluta, *op.cit.*, p. 31-32

¹⁰ H.M. Robertson, *Aspects of rise of economic individualism a criticism of Max Weber and his school*, Kelly&Millan, New York, 1959, online, available at <http://archive.org/stream/aspectsofriseofe00robe#page/n7/mode/2up>

¹¹Henryk Grossman, *The Beginnings of Capitalism and the New Mass Morality*, in *Journal of Classical Sociology*, July 2006, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 201-213., online, available at https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/44480/3/Grossman_-_Beginnings_of_Capitalism_and_the_New_Mass_Morality_preprint.pdf

Also, when referring to the act of magic, the German sociologist discusses several examples within the scope of shamanism. They have no connection with religious issues because, as Mircea Eliade demonstrated¹², shamanism is the archaic technique of ecstasy. Religion, whose name comes from the Latin *religo-religare*, is the way in which the human being, fallen because of the original sin, is put in relation to the Holy Trinity.

The third chapter, "**Different Values Perceptions in Christian Confessions and Their Social Impact**", describes the doctrinal differences between Christian denominations, Orthodox theology and popular faith, and social consequences of religious education reporting to the values of capitalism.

It is captivating the metaphor of a philosopher of religion, DM Edwards, who argues that "sacred" is less than a fourth value that would add to Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, being precisely the "matrix" that arise from these values, their common form and origin. Resorting to an image, religion is not a branch, but just the tree trunk. Thus, the analysis of a given culture involves not only the study of theological doctrines, myths or rituals that serve as the means to decipher the religious attitude, but necessarily implies the research of the real atmosphere and the careful study of the general attitude that illustrates the full expression of that life cultures¹³.

According to this logic, the evlavious attitude of the Romanian society manifest itself in a paradoxical way: on the one hand, there is a gap between the statements of the majority population belonging to the Orthodox religion and the proportion of practitioners of this religion, and on the other hand, the "modernity" feature of the capitalist spirit fall in contradiction with the traditional values supported by the Romanian Church that have difficulties in accepting what is "different".

From a certain perspective, one might say that the Romanian society is in the duplicity era as far as the religious experience is concerned, taking into account the fact that the majority of the population declares itself devoted Orthodox believers. The Church has the best score in the polls, but the issues related to the practitioners and, especially, most pious Orthodox believers are lost in the secular urban cultural patterns (to use a academic acceptable euphemism).

¹² In his famous work *Șamanismul și tehnicile arhaice ale extazului*, Bucharest, Editura Humanitas, 1997

¹³ Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, Polirom, Iasi, 1997, p. 46

These issues generate tensions and hamper the development of domestic capitalism, which can be identified, for the most part, only in a few areas of production with foreign capital.

Chapter IV, "**Christian Religion Perspective of Labour Act and Material Benefits**", analyzes the way in which Christian confessions report themselves to their results. Thus, Orthodox theology and tradition support the superiority of spiritual preoccupations over those "worldly", promoting virtues such as poverty and charity. The accumulation of wealth is directly condemned by the Orthodox Church, while laziness is considered a "minor sin".

Interpretation of the labor act as a consequence of divine curse was opposed by Dumitru Staniloae. In his hermeneutics the original biblical text dissociates the negative connotation, afforded by reading the quoted fragment, of ethical and exemplary promoted by the church, pleading, with the necessary theological arguments, for the need of work as an expression of humility: "Work does not appear after the fall of man, as a punishment for sin. So work is no longer the curse uttered by God to man, but the trouble you add to it, on the one hand for that nature gives harder its products after the fall, and on the other hand because the man that has gone in sin and selfishness and laziness feels the weight of too much work (...). But the sweat and toil which were added to work through the fall, have a positive sense for Christians, as they restrain and weaken the selfish passions and desires"¹⁴.

Things are not similar understood in Catholic doctrine where work is related to family responsibilities and ensures personal dignity.

Moreover protestant doctrine promotes the religious of work and the active involvement of the individual in society. However, wealth is considered a "divine sign" of the fact that the believer conscientiously fulfills the mission that was divinely given to him.

Chapter V, "**Family Christian values and their social impact**," relates Christian confessions perspectives about the role of women within the family, marriage and celibacy.

Regarding the family, both the Orthodox Church and the Catolică show a conservative attitude by prohibiting marriage between persons of the same sex or the ban on divorce.

¹⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, *Chrestian Teaching on Work, Studii Teologice*, V (1953), no. 1-2, p. 32

Also, we mention that Orthodoxy and Catholicism promote the superiority of celibacy toward marriage, while Protestant churches reject monks and celibacy.

BOR representatives (and not only) support sacred dimension of marriage and say that at the root of the family crisis in Romania is the misunderstood freedom, lack of moral guidelines, children's education, freedom of sexual minorities, and the attitude toward relationships between family members: "Contemporary man has become a man who wants to 'live his life', a 'free' man and therefore the foundations of what once stood at the base of society, including family, are now considered 'obsolete'" ¹⁵.

It's a little paradoxical situation if we take into account the fact that the doctrine of Protestant churches tend to keep only apparently old patterns of traditional family: marriage is considered a union between one man and one woman, approved by religious ceremony; sexual relations outside of marriage, infidelity and fornication are not admitted; divorce is not tolerated and abortion is prohibited. Although most Reformed churches regulations seem even stricter than the Orthodox view of marriage, they are no longer observed by most families, even in predominantly Protestant countries.

Exemplary to that end is tolerance towards sexual minorities in countries such as Holland, Germany (not only in the north), Belgium (not only Walloon region) etc.

The main Orthodox ethical implications arise from the Christian conception of man, in his dual aspect of human being and person. By defining human nature Holy Fathers revealed the common essence and connection with the Logos.

According to Orthodox dogma, man's likeness to divinity is only potential and it must be achieved through conscious effort. So human life has a spiritual purpose, namely the deification by grace, and God is in a "*constant dialogue*"¹⁶ with man (through natural revelation) leading him to perfection.

¹⁵ Silviu Dascalu, *Contemporan Family Sufferences*, online, available at <http://www.ziarullumina.ro/biserica-si-societate/suferintele-familiei-contemporane>

¹⁶ "In fact, God speaks and works continuously through the things He create and govern, by creating new circumstances which calls everyone to the fulfillment of their debts to Him and his fellow man and responds to calls in every moment. [...] But God speaks of our being mostly through the thoughts born in our conscience when we want to do something or need to do something; or, after we did something bad, He speaks to us through reprimands, troubles and diseases. Through all of these, God leads us through an ongoing dialogue that, for our perfection, is opening us to the fulfillment perspective direction of our existence in communion with God at infinit"- Dumitru Staniloae, op. cit., p. 26

From the perspective of Orthodox ethics, the creation of man after God's image and the establishment of the constitution of human beings by divine person are strong arguments on accepting harming human genome and limiting the possibility to change it, even with a view to remedying certain diseases.

To that end, ethical issues generated by using new medical techniques or assisted medical procreation, treatment and genetic manipulation of human embryos become highly controversial and sensitive. Due to the complexity of these issues, social conscience can not find an answer by appealing solely to the biology or physiology.

According to Orthodox ethics, one should impose restrictions on interventions on the human genome and carefully reflect on some potential adverse consequences, a similar stance being shared by the Catholic Church, whose representatives combat with dogmatic arguments the in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, surrogacy. Thus, Pope Benedict XVI counseled infertile couples to avoid artificial fertilization and noted that such a move was "a form of arrogance".

Chapter VI is a **sociological research** done in neo-orthodox communities from some localities in Arad County to establish a pattern of behavior on the labor discipline, attitudes toward wealth, family and society, moral values and religious practices.

Regarding the future prospects of the research, according to our thesis, "the Orthodox exception" mentioned by sociologists when referring to the particular relationship between the state and religious dimension is valid in terms of attitudes toward the values of capitalism.

Orthodox traditional society as the Romanian one, are reluctant to the challenges posed by the new socio-cultural context and tend to keep the old set of rules to govern their main aspects of existence (related to work, family, society). Attempts to submit new ideas to the community generate in this society resistance that can take the form of a radical religiosity.

Promoting European values about work discipline, competitiveness, family relationships or role of the Church within the state often give rise to polemics and tensions, which warns us that changing the vision with some modernity parts can not be imposed.

The results of the current research stressed some aspect that do nothing more than confirm working hypotheses, but also some surprising aspects.

1. As a **general background**, pillars of community life may be described as following:

- Instead of the communist state coercive institutions which provided to a certain degree a distorted and outdated education - job - social protection triad, slough transition years in which nothing was created affected the village.
- Social fracture after 1990 has revealed the gaps that are considered unfair and harmful to the community. From the reports of interviewees we noticed that the 40 years of communism did not destroyed the solidarity of the people, the community as a whole. The differences in material plan that followed and especially the fact that they were not the result of farming and livestock diligence, but speculation of a current economic context, opportunities, and often of the "trick" and "dishonest" things, created a rift between people.
- Besides the demographic impact led by migration / immigration, fall in birth rates and aging of rural communities, there is a helplessness due to *inability to overcome subsistence levels in agriculture without real intervention of the state*.
- It is a paradox that people were closer to the church when there were restrictions than now and television has a responsibility to that regard. People prefer to sit passively on TV.

2. Both **Orthodox and Protestant interviewees** recognize the existence of some features as far as the vision of *labor, family and way of seeing the world* in general are concerned. This vision over the other was expressed as following:

- It seems that migration to the city is higher among the Orthodox, mainly because there are no viable forms of integration and mechanisms to adapt to new socio-economic realities. In addition, neoprotestant family is more cohesive and integrative and integrates families into the community much more effectively.

Protestant communities largely cover the places where the state should be present and where the Orthodox community is vulnerable: social protection, education, social control over deviant behavior from the point of view of morality.

- Regarding the number of practitioners among parishioners and implicitly over the religious factors impact on everyday life, *both communities are experiencing a significant regression* with multiple causes - aging (poor health of the population does

not allow movement only with great difficulty or not at all), modern practices affecting the style life and the way of prioritizing activities (television especially among the elderly or middle aged or the Internet and social networks for young people).

But there is one feature where **Pentecostals** expressed in **a stronger resistance to maintain traditions due to a stronger spirit of cohesion and the religious education system that begins at an early age and requires precise roles and rigor.**

- Other Christian confessions perceive Orthodox as characterized by "humanity" and selflessness, and Pentecostals as hard workers and "selfishness" in the sense of focusing on their own family/community. It is interesting that everything shown in the paper by commentators through comparative analysis of religious texts is replicated by the opinions expressed by these simple left-handed people.
- There is a modern perspective on the roles in the family among neoprotestants: the head of the family should not necessarily be the man, but both spouses. The husband should handle the household and bring money ("you can not live without salary"). On the other hand, the Orthodoxy promotes the traditional model of the male as the head of the family who unequivocally makes all the decisions. A great example to that end is the story of an old, Orthodox female with a sick ("deformed") husband who took the administrative decisions regarding household, but doing so would appear they were made by her husband.
- It seems that, surprisingly, *the Orthodox are more interested in their children's graduation*, the license being considered the fulfillment in their lives. Finding a job is an important issue, but seen in a fatalistic manner ("if they find their job better employment, if not to find something to earn bread").
Neoprotestants plead for finding well-paid jobs, possibly abroad, learning effective cultivation or an occupations needed by the market. The goal is always returning home and investing the money.
- Orthodox interviewees consider that the extra material success the Protestants have is due to seriousness, to the fact they do not consume alcohol and thus are better appreciated by employers in the country or abroad. They also openly disapprove obscene, trivial behavior.
- Protestants disagree "charity" that may occur near all Orthodox churches in various ways. For example, after a parish meeting, Pentecostal congregations refused the proposal to use

one of the weekly retiring collections for a social, charitable scope, opting for investing money in technical rehabilitation of the church.

- One should note the Orthodox orientation towards a stable job that requires a salary, but this is not seen as a dedication to the profession, a job, but rather as a "state job", no matter how poorly paid, but be sure. Many Orthodox interviewees highlighted the propensity for what actually would be a pseudo sinecure.

Perhaps the most interesting and relevant result of the research, somehow adjacent to thesis objective, **is a type of solidarity that transcends religious affiliation or another** and has its origins in the Transylvanian village ancestral values. Here appears a paradox of accelerated secularization effect on rural communities. During the communist regime the process went from the brutal destructive regime of the 50s to the forms of indirect coercion and persuasion in the 1970-1989 periods, flattening the ester forms of religious expression which were even more rigorously kept in private space as a form of passive resistance.

Since 1989, the secularization accelerated within the deeper layers of the rural community, paradoxically increasing the external forms of manifestation, and representing a blatant way of promoting alleged moral qualities and of compensating the church absence from real life and the daily life of the family.

Against this background, solidarity among religious communities has increased as emotional interests in the dogmatic differences have considerably narrowed. However, on the long-term (especially under the pressure of "capitalist" hectic pace imposed after 1990), people tend to become careless in helping their neighbors - a price tag for our alienation from the letter and spirit of Christianity.