ON A FEW ASPECTS OF THE IMPACT OF EMMIGRATION ON THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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Abstract: The newly created diaspora communities are permanently subjected to a natural pressure from local communities, but through various mutual influences, they build their new identity – called by specialists “relational identity”. The communities abroad are well connected with their families of origin, but are attentive also at the new context where they live, which makes them be in a state of constant vigilance. Another feature resulting from this effort to build an identity in the diaspora lies in the vitality and energy with which these communities involve themselves in the religious practice, in the context of a sedentary Europe, affected by secularization. The missionary dynamics of parishes in the diaspora is recognized as such, and is mainly based on an increased parochial awareness of the laity and of the clergy, on solidarity, and on the effort to preserve the ethnical identity.

Keywords: Immigration, Diaspora, Emerging Churches, Mission.

The Church has to permanently exert, as one among its duties, a missionary activity, because God Himself is the subject as well as the object of this mission, He is the One Who sends and Who sends Himself. The duty of incorporating the Spirit of Christ within the whole of creation (should we speak of human persons, or of actions¹ taken throughout history?) is imparted by the Redeemer to His Church and could in no way be substituted by whatever other institution which might ever exist on Earth. For the purpose of

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¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1996, vol. I, p. 11.

fulfilling this outstanding task, the Church finds itself, sometimes, placed under the circumstance of professing its Credo; there are times when Christ might not be a subject about Whom it could be possible to speak openly; yet, there are other times when He is received with greetings. What we do know is that missionary action ought to start from a direct object, and that it ought to suit the same framework, the one of the mandate that has been entrusted to us by our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Through the Church, the missionary action is the visible act of the Holy Trinity's will ; this is why it is for us very important to be duly aware of the way in which God is defined in His relationship with the Church that He has founded up, on the Golgotha.

Missiology, as we know it by its tradition, is nowadays going through a deep process of renewal concerning its methods and means. Our opinion is that this necessary strive for synchronisation with the actual realities should also include the improvement of the methodology it could practise. This process, hard to carry on as it is, does constitute an intrinsic part of the attention which the Redeemer – as Head of the Church – devotes to leading the latter, as the Body which is permanently destined to serve in the sense of assuring the redemption of its believers. This work of the Redeemer can also be seen in the case of missiology, mostly through the elaboration of its theological grounds, but, simultaneously, in the visible choice of adopting some new techniques, which make the right use of the newest results that modern science has so far obtained.

1. The Relationship between missionary practice and the diaspora

From a Christian perspective, should a significant group of people move from their mother country to another, as currently is the case of the Romanians who have left their homes in order to live mostly throughout Europe, but also in other, more geographically distant, countries, we would be able to speak of a diaspora. In this regard, the Romanian Orthodox Church has been careful to organize

several Archbishoprics wherever the Romanian people have chosen to live, especially after 1989, but even before.

In its theological sense, the term „diaspora” means an organized community which lives nostalgically hankering for its origins, which has sprung from a certain particular country, and whose people feel exiled from the concerned former country. Yet, due to current technical means of communication, and to modern transportation facilities, the diaspora nowadays no longer fits the whole complexity of the ancient sense held by this term. Since today’s society has gradually, but effectively, become transnational, this newly acquired feature does indeed influence the nature of the respective relationships which by now exist between the persons who have left their homeland and their siblings who have remained there.

What we are able to notice is the fact that the Romanian diaspora keeps increasing, and it does that in considerable proportions. Thus, the Synod of our Church has given to this reality the most appropriate answer, by sending bishops and priests able to guide the believers outside Romania through their pastoral ministry. By analyzing the situation² of the parishes in the Romanian diaspora, we realize that the persons who assume the statute of immigrants are much more sensitive towards spiritual necessities, and that they quickly come to join the nearest Romanian parish in their neighborhood. The Romanian communities in the diaspora are, gradually, beginning to constitute a more and more visible presence, and, insofar as they are improving their own internal structure, they become a core of social stability, therefore enabling the creation of a local social equilibrium which becomes highly precious in the current context, defined by the general economic crisis and by the recently risen terrorist threats.

The importance of the diaspora for the missionary exercise has been known ever since the Acts of the New Testament, especially from the pilgrim journeys of St. Apostle Paul, who was usually

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²<http://www.mitropolia.eu/>;

<http://www.romarch.org/>; <http://www.roeanz.com.au/>

<http://www.mitropoliaro.de/>;

seeking, during his voyages, the Hebrew' synagogues where to preach the Gospel. Nowadays, almost all Christian acting missionaries require the participation of the ethnically constituted groups living outside their country of origin in order to develop a missionary programme.

During the XX-th century, the great missionary initiatives have flown from the wealthy states towards the pauper ones, that is to say from the North towards the South; however, nowadays we might reach the conclusion that missionary dynamics has changed its geographical orientation: now the missionary impulse comes from economically deprived zones towards the more ancient Christian communities which seem to be affected by a certain tiredness³. We are aware now of the fact that various Protestant missions are coming towards Europe from Latin America or from Africa. In this regard, we might ask ourselves if the historical Churches in Europe are prepared to respond to this type of initiatives, which were created by a different context, obliged as we are to take into consideration the fact that, in Western Europe, the number of members held by the historical Churches is continuously decreasing, and it does that at a constant rate.

After World War II, the phenomenon of immigration has become a current theme for usual debates, in Western Europe, in the USA, or in Canada. Since this phenomenon has been occurring with an increased obviousness during the recent 20 years, it has, consequently, also led to intensified debates on the ethnical dimension of the diaspora, or on social integration as a general matter. These are just the major themes that have blossomed from the immigration phenomenon, though this is not at all a newly sprung

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³ Martien E. Brinkman, *The Emergence of a New Kind of Christianity in West European Cities: A Dutch Reformed Assessment*, in Christine Lienemann-Perrin et alii (eds.), *Contextuality in Reformed Europe. The Mission of Church in the transformation of European Culture*, New York, 2004, p. 74. See also *Mission and Postmodernities*, Edited by Rolv Olsen with Kajsa Ahlstrand, J. Andrew Kirk, Tania Petrova, Teresa Francesca Rossi, and J. Jayakiran Sebastian, Regnum Books International, Edinburgh, 2011.

matter in the history of humanity. Yet, at the dawn of the XX-th century and, most of all, immediately after World Wars I and II respectively, statistical data have demonstrated that considerable *masses* of people had decided to carry on with their lives in another context than the one in which they had been born; this fact, therefore, happened due to various reasons, such as: the simple lack of appropriate means of living, political reasons, personal religious adhesions, and many others.

The anniversary of a century since the first ever world conference of Christian missionaries, organized in Edinburgh, Great Britain, was celebrated in 2010. The organizers of this event wanted to find out, on this occasion, how should the Church's mission be shaped so that the Gospel could reach, through its preaching, some zones where it had not at all been present before. One hundred years ago, Europeans and North Americans were thinking about how to send Christian missionaries to other continents; nowadays we are witnessing a reversed process, which has led to the creation of Protestant or Orthodox communities in zones or districts where Christianity had weakened its influence during the recent 20-30 years. Due to the migratory phenomenon, the above mentioned reversed movement is not happening in the case of Christians only, but also in the case of Islam, which is implementing solid roots in Western Europe, for example in Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Paris, Rotterdam⁴, Brussels, Strasbourg, Oslo, Vienna. In almost all great European cities, the old Christianity seems to have stepped back, and thereby to have abandoned the battle with the new Christian formulas which come from Korea, Africa, Malaysia or Brazil.

Due to statistical means, we are aware of the fact that this „encounter”, which actually supervenes between the old European Churches and the new Christian forms created outside Europe, is a constitutive component of a currently occurring process of migration

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⁴ In Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, in 2008 there were 95 communities of immigrants coming from Africa: Alle Hoekema, Wout van Laar, (eds.), *The World Church on one km2. Immigrant Churches in Rotterdam*, Utrecht, Netherlands Missionary Council, 2004, p. 11.

from the South towards the North⁵, of which the ultimate meaning resides in the fact that the ancient and historically grounded European Christianity has, in the meantime, become just a fragment among others within the European civilization. During recent decades, Europe has become the territory where a lot of communities pertaining to the Charismatic movement, including the Pentecostals, are managing to develop to the detriment of old-fashioned Christianity⁶. There are authors who, taking as their starting point the really existing fact of the general takeover by the Charismatic movement of places which the historical Churches seem to have abandoned, are supporting the idea that the whole West is facing nowadays a post-Christian situation⁷.

2. The phenomenon of migration

Religious beliefs have always constituted a serious reason of exile, deportation or immigration for the common people. Once some large groups of people have chosen to move from one space to another, tensions have subsequently risen concerning the intrinsic homogeneity of a certain population which could feel threatened by the new persons who kept on settling in the public space of the concerned region. The negative connotations related to the immigration's phenomenon are given by the effective number of arriving persons, and by the area itself from where they were coming. For example, in a dominantly European context, should persons of African origin arrive, in a relatively brief time interval, and should these latter also be „of colour”, these facts would undoubtedly contribute to an „uneasiness” among the natives, who

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⁵ *Report of Global Commission on International Migration*, 2005, www.gcim.org.

⁶ Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Mission Strategy in the Context of the United Kingdom in the 21st Century*, in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, January 2011 28: 3-13.

⁷ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity. The Gospel beyond the West*, Eerdmans, 2003, p. 38.

would be placed under the circumstance of noticing, in their usual public or private spaces, and on a day-by-day basis, the actions taken by some persons who „do not belong”, either historically or effectively, to their region, as they had known it before.

In our world nowadays, the demographical mutations originating in the phenomenon of immigration have had and will continue to have an increasingly striking impact. This is substantially and furtherextended, due to modern technology to which we are summoned to respond, because we do find ourselves in front of new situations which result from the common people’s quickened mobility that occurs in the present century. Sometimes, people are in search of their own welfare, or simply looking for the inner peace of their own souls; consequently, they might wish to wander around. Some other types of cases are the persons who find themselves obliged, due to a war occurring in their homeland, to depart from it; they might also urgently need some humanitarian kind of assistance.

The matter of immigration is among those to which the Church not only is effectively summoned to provide an appropriate answer, but, indeed, has the duty to do so, because Christianity has been thought of by God and by the Redeemer in such a way that it ought to transcend the issues which pertain to ethnicity, to the national particular features, or to the various sides of some specific cultural environment; this is the right way things ought to go on, since furthermore the various Churches approach the phenomenon of immigration each in its own way and, therefore, there is no established voice which could speak on behalf of them all ; each of these different answers depends upon the respective Ecclesiology chosen by the concerned Church. On the Western side, immigrants are, usually, welcome in the eyes of Protestant communities; as for the rest, the Protestant theology in its generality has chosen to adopt an open attitude towards „the other one/the foreigner” who might

find himself in our neighborhood and might also come to ask for our help⁸.

After a period spent trying to get accustomed to the newly found Protestant community, immigrants usually tend to organize themselves in ethnically grounded communities, where they could attend the Gospel's divine service provided in their own maternal language; this is the reason why they would, at the very first, seek for a leader who would belong, ethnically, to their respective communities; such is the case of the African-born Pentecostals. Within the Roman Catholic Church, the trend of organizing their communities or parishes along ethnical or linguistic criteria is visible as well; the best example in this regard is provided by the African-born immigrants. From this synthesis between ethnicity and the assumed Diaspora condition many good things have resulted, but schisms have also occurred.

The Church ought to be the voice that should be able to draw attention to some vulnerable or marginalized groups and, by this fact, could provide the best example ever seen of civic involvement. Such is also the case of the young people who are, by themselves, unable to find an appropriate employment; ultimately, this fact prevents them from even thinking about founding a family of their own. These young people end up losing whatever trust or confidence they might have had in their own potential capabilities and, thereby, they often let themselves slide towards anti-social or even violent behavior; under these circumstances they turn into „sitting ducks” rather easily attracted towards various malevolent sects, wherefrom they can only very hardly escape later.

Another item which blocks, for many people, the access to faith is unemployment; it could also bring with it the respective loss

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⁸ Alle G. Hoekema, *The Position of African Christians in the Netherlands*, in vol. *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff, Kalus Hockk, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, 2008, pp. 314-318. See also Alle G. Hoekema, Wout van Laar, (eds.), *The World Church on one km2. Immigrant Churches in Rotterdam*, Neetherlands Missionary Council, Utrecht, 2004.

of hope and self-respect. Unemployment is also exerting a process of erosion upon the young people's sentiment of belonging to their homeland; consequently, it leads to the appearance of a large immigrating flow of youngsters who are departing, in their search for employment, for various European countries or even elsewhere, because they do not find themselves satisfied by what they might find on the Romanian labour market. The voice of the Church ought to let itself be heard much more often; it also ought to rise in order to support the types of social policies which could guide young people towards genuine familial stability, thereby enabling them to protect their own Christian-shaped families, their own inherited traditions, their country's intrinsic culture.

Nowadays, a distinctively particular case are the families from which either the father or the mother, or even both, have emigrated to European countries, in search of employment, while their children have been entrusted to the care of grandparents or other relatives. These children have undoubtedly come to suffer by now from their parents' absence, and they need an increased level of attention devoted to them so that they could be helped to integrate in society, to benefit from the education they need, and to suffer the least possible. The phenomenon of the labour force migrating from Romania to the whole of Europe has generated in our country a lot of situations which destabilize the Christian family. This is the reason why the Church is preoccupied by the consequences brought by this phenomenon.

Because of the occurred schism, the Church does not speak with only one voice; the same thing happens in theology, where, due to the lack of only one faith, all the efforts taken by the Church in order to more vividly involve itself in secular activities or structures could in no way be uniform and, thereby, lead to a confusing perception about them. When it has become obvious that, somewhere nearby, there are people who need a roof over their heads, or have nothing to eat or to wear, whichever of the Church present ought to find the necessary resources so that it could remediate that situation through its intervention.

3. The urban mission

It is a well-known fact that, in the West, the practice of social assistance has developed very well, and that this domain is taken into consideration by the community of Christians as bearing the highest potential. This is the reason why the idea has risen (and intensely circulates) that the Churches ought to take over some of the intervention perimeters which, actually, pertain to the modern State. Yet, some of the so-called prophetic churches nourish no wish at all to be involved in this type of participation in charity deeds, due to the argument that, should they do so, they would consequently depart from their status of independence in regard to the secular State.

Unfortunately, in the same Western complex of circumstances, some of the old buildings formerly devoted to the cult's exercise have come to be used for secular social actions, because they are no longer useful for the exercise of the public divine service. This attitude is defended by Neo-Protestant theology, which has made the choice to rely upon new, alternative forms which they have imparted to the exercise of the public cult and, also, upon the idea of „churches with no walls”, all of this being done to the detriment of the ancient system of parishes. Yet, we find ourselves entitled to say that their abandon of a system long-proven as the most effective one has not lead them to such a huge success that it could render them legitimate, and also that, moved as they are by the wish of doing simpler things for the purpose of attracting more people, they ultimately could register only losses in this regard.

For the purpose of accomplishing a most adequate intervention through the structures of our Church, we have to underline the fact that, during recent years, a large number of Christian believers have developed various projects under the aegis of the Orthodox Church, and that more and more of our priests have been trained in order to be able to design or to elaborate a project which could respond to some social or spiritual necessities, by making use of the currently employed methods in the scientific domains of organizational management and development. Such projects prove themselves

particularly effective in the missionary practice, and they also stand as a sensible evidence of the community's efforts, carried on for the purpose of responding to the current problems met by our society.

In the case of the urban type of mission, the main issues to cope with are defined within the perimeter of the following theological topics:

- Poverty, suffering, and vulnerable/marginalized social groups;
- Modalities of the coeval Christian profession of faith;
- The Christians seen as effective agents serving social justice, considered in their relationship with God's Kingdom;
- Identity, tradition, and culture.

It is an undisputable fact that we are living in a time of religious revival, even though sometimes we can notice that certain types of religious sensitivity are expressing themselves in a distinctive way, apart from the great religious traditions as we know them. These new forms are attempting to fill in the voids left by certain ideologies which, by the end of the XX-th century, lost the influential power they used to exert in the public space. Such is the case of communism in the Balkans. In the society which is coeval to us, the laity holds a very important role; it acts together with diversity, and its imparted task is to rule over most of the public space. Between the democratic State and its citizens, no other social body could be tolerated; thereby we are told that, should we allow such a thing to happen, then the citizen's autonomy and individual independence would come to be diminished. On the other hand, many people are stating that the democratic State is, ultimately, „denaturalizing the ancient hierarchies”, and excluding from the temporal order, which it claims (in this latter's totality) for itself, all the forms of possible authority that the religious power could exert, this attitude concerning also the sub-system of the national education, which the State has exclusively assumed⁹.

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⁹ Robert Legros, *La question de la souveraineté. Droit naturel et contrat social*, Paris, Edit. Elipses, 2001, p. 13.

The European revival of religion which has occurred during recent decades is, definitely, questioning again the modern principle of laity, in spite of the fact that we can notice, through simple eyesight, that the religious movements concerned are alternative choices only, they are diffuse and they lack a precise structure, their flourishing being favored only by the decline of the influence previously exerted by Christian traditional institutions. The influential power thereof has diminished in direct proportion to the number of Christian believers willing to obey them. Until the Middle Ages, European society had been organized as a hierarchical structure, Jesus Christ Himself being situated at the top of it. The Redeemer's authority was duly consolidated in common people's eyes, through the functioning of the established Christian institutions. He was holding a dominant position, for both the common people and the royal courts. As for the rest, the reigning king's authority was presented as having flown from a divine origin, consequently from an authority with whom the respective monarch was „obliged” to maintain some „privileged” relationships¹⁰. Should he not have agreed to let himself be framed within this kind of pattern, he could even have found himself excommunicated by the Church.

Consequently, this type of sovereign power had the Church as its first censor. As to the aristocratic regime, the political belief which, however, allowed the royal sovereign power to be legitimated was continuously tested by performing fastuous rites and by various ceremonial etiquette rules, where the power exerted by the members of the instituted aristocracy was carefully expressed through religious Christian-shaped modalities.

4. The emerging churches

In most modern European states, where the respective Constitutions avoid establishing a precisely instituted role to be assumed by religion, the currently enforced establishment is one in

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¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

which the duty of the state is to be neutral towards every religion or confession, its political attitude consisting in the choice of sustaining and warranting for the human rights, no matter what opinions or beliefs the concerned human beings might nourish themselves. We may, therefore, agree upon the fact that any state which declares itself as an upholder of laity also finds itself under the assumed obligation neither to favour, nor to distinguish or express its possible preferences for any existing beliefs or confessions. It is also bound to adopt the same attitude when it ought to distinguish between one religious group and another, should this latter be a religious one or not. Its assumed duty should be to preserve its strict and absolute impartiality, thereby carefully avoiding the temptation of taking sides, in the often occurring situations of disputes or conflicts, in view of the thesis claiming the existence of an absolute equality among its citizens. However, in reality, such a *desideratum* is increasingly difficult to fulfil, because, on the other hand, the same state is also bound to respect the democratic principle which requires the existence of organizational freedom, granted to whatever religious cult might be practiced on its territory.

The Neo-Protestant communities are mostly making use of innovative messages, by which they are attempting to uphold their own absolute and genuine novelty, to the detriment of the other traditional Churches; they consider themselves as communities „which follow the path of Jesus” in post-modern cultures¹¹. This is a method which they use in order to deny the orthodoxy of all the other traditional Churches; therefore, they raise questions concerning the respective status of the historical Churches and, of course, they also put themselves forward as the only valuable source of the truth, though it is, may we say it for once, a more than obvious fact that they have situated themselves outside of the Apostle’ Succession of Spirit and Faith.

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¹¹ Eddie Gibbs, Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005, p. 44.

At the local level, their activities are appreciated as proofs of their involvement in the respective community's public life, due to the diversity of the modalities they have chosen for the purpose of their own extension. They participate in, or promote social reunions through which they launch their own initiatives; some of these are targeting the young people, others are focused upon the family, or upon the seniors. The main themes of such reunions are structured around the concepts of justice and mercy, which have a particularly deep impact among immigrants, or among persons who have failed in their social integration attempts. Internet sites or personal blogs are also means they use in order to spread convenient rumours about their activities; through these means they usually initiate conversations or dialogues on themes concerning matters pertaining to philosophy, art, and culture¹². Because it has no unified structure and no official doctrine, the movement of these so-called „emerging churches” is definitely taken into consideration as a threat, even in respect to the traditional Reformed ecclesiology.

Within the diaspora, the communities which attempt to coagulate themselves on ethnical grounds are submitted to an assimilation process which often leads to the final loss of their original identity as natives of their homeland, and to the adoption of a new set of values, should these be moral, cultural, or pertaining to social behavior. This type of pressure acts either through the employments they find, or through the educational process undergone by their children, who are, unavoidably, inmatriculated in new schools, and who might very easily fall into the temptation of identifying themselves with the majority they are situated in. Consequently, an inner tension appears between the set of values that children get accustomed with during their class time in school, and the initial one from their homes, which they have to obey in their family environment. Another source of pressure which can cause

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¹² Ian Mobsby, *The Becoming of G-d*, Oxford, YTC Press, 2008, pp. 65-79. Vezi □i Ian Mobsby, *Emerging & Fresh Expressions of Church: How are they authentically Church and Anglican*, London, Moot Community Publishing, 2007, pp. 19-21.

changes in their native cultural patrimony is represented by intermarriage, i.e. by inter-confessional or inter-religious ones. In the cases of marriages among Christians, the pressure does, indeed, weigh less, but it is not yet devoid of importance. A harder impact occurs in the cases of marriages between persons whose religions are different (Christian and Judaic; Christian and Muslim; Christian and Hindu, or Buddhist, etc.). In this paper we have discussed only the possibilities which might most frequently appear in Europe, though such cases could be much more diverse. This kind of situations are hard to cope with for the concerned families and, usually, one of the spouses does indeed succeed in imposing further than the other one his/her own cultural traditions in their common day-by-day life; from here on, conflicts may rise.

From the statistical analysis we have performed upon the number of Orthodox parishes which have been founded, during the last quarter of a century, in Western Europe but also in the USA and Canada, we estimate ourselves entitled to say that the Romanian diaspora is astoundingly dynamic. The organizations which have been created around our parishes, we mean here parents' associations, foster-spotting centers, Romanian language schools, reception groups caring for the new immigrants, but also our old-fashioned Parrish Councils, are, all of them, the visible sides of a carefully designed intervention process, aimed, simultaneously, at providing the daily assistance of the Church concerning the believers' spiritual needs, but also at constituting missionary modalities that could, thereby, create various *nuclei* able to respond to the necessities of the persons who happen to go through some difficult times of their lives. Thankful for the help he might have received at just the right moment, the immigrant would often choose to keep in close touch with his parish, and even to join the currently developed pastoral programme of the Church. This is the reason why we are entitled to take these facts into consideration as a missionary task, which could only be accomplished practically after 1989, imparted to the current diaspora by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

About the case of the missionary activity under Diasporan circumstances, we may, generally, say that this type of mission was, quietly, but duly, carried on even before the Romanian Revolution; consequently, after 1990, the formerly constituted Romanian parishes were able to become some kind of useful bridges for the first wave¹³ of Romanian immigrants, whom they supported in getting used to the Western kind of life¹⁴. The older Romanian Orthodox parishes were an appropriate vehicle for the flows of Romanian immigrants until around the year 2000; then, taking into consideration the exponential increase in the number of Romanians who chose to leave in search for work, mostly towards Europe, our Church was able to configure new Bishoprics and new Metropolitan Sees, through which the right answers were provided to the spiritual necessities of our believers. The Holy Synod of our Church has accomplished an effort which, today, has taken the concrete form of a positive model, sincerely appreciated by other sister Churches, and not only by them. For the Romanian diaspora, this achievement could be taken into consideration as an outstanding missionary action. This unprecedented development of the Romanian Orthodox parishes abroad, as an occurring phenomenon, creates a positive impact even for the Church's internal (geographically speaking) frame. The Romanian diaspora has become endowed with an increasingly stronger resonance upon the domestic Romanian stage, and this fact is true not only in ecclesial terms; the strength of this trend has been proven on the occasion of the recent political elections.

A recent problem is the one created by the recognition of religious minorities within the European countries, especially in the

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¹³ Sandu, D., Radu, C., Constantinescu, M., Ciobanu, O., *A Country Report on Romanian Migration Abroad: Stocks and Flows After 1989*, <http://www.migrationonline.cz/>, 2004.

¹⁴ Martin Baldwin-Edwards, *Migration policies for Romania within the European Union: Navigating between Scylla and Charybdis* (Mediterranean Migration Observatory, Working Paper no. 7, Research Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Grecia, 2005.

case of religious groups originating from countries of Muslim religion. Because of the religious terrorism of Islamic strain, the European countries, and not only they, are, more than ever, alerted to the worst. The recent terrorist attacks which have occurred in France have generated a series of actions, taken at the European Union level, expressed through measures adopted in what concerns the generality of religion, as well as modalities through which religious freedom, and the freedom to be a religious cult's believer, are, thereby, allowed to exist. The currently debated topics are, by now, the importance that the public order should or could have, and the limits possibly assigned to individual rights in respect to the matter of security.

The old concept of civic responsibility finds itself brought to a new life, in order to stand against sectarian proselytism, no matter what religion this latter might serve, but also against all forms of religious involvement which, ultimately, would come to jeopardize the social equilibrium of a country. Under the actual circumstances of the liberally-shaped European political pluralism, the ways in which a modern state could take actions or intervene, in whatever way, concerning religious matters are not, in the effective reality, accessible to any state; thus, we estimate that, in order to be successful in its projects, such a state might need to establish a partnership with the traditional Churches.

The African Christianity is, nowadays, increasingly present in almost all the great European cities, coming even to be designated by the syntagm "suburban Christianity", because of the fact that its believers are mostly present within the suburbs of the great urban agglomerations which are the capitals of many countries¹⁵. During the recent decades, due to poverty and to the existing circumstances involving a lack of political stability, an increase in the number of immigrants coming from Africa towards the Old Continent has been remarked. An almost permanent trend, consisting in the will of

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¹⁵ Gerloff Roswith, *The Significance of the African Christian Diaspora in Europe*, in *International Review of Mission*, 89: 281–290, 2000.

extracting themselves from their mother countries, does actually exist, i.e. a drive towards Europe from the African continent; this phenomenon is also favoured by Africa's demographical growth and by its consequently limited resources in respect to the current living standards.

Theologically speaking, the communities created by the African-born people within the European territory are highly active, while sometimes being totally, simply, and instrumentally subordinated auxiliaries to the phenomenon of migration. In what concerns the emerging trend of these African communities, they are visibly multiplying within the European suburbs, being defined by the respect vowed to a mixture of ritual African traditions which were also active during the times when the African people were struggling in order to liberate themselves from the supremacy of the colonizing white race¹⁶.

5. A few notes on the sociological approach towards immigration

The performed researches concerning the sociological side of the immigration's phenomenon have focused on the individual person, on the communities consequently formed by immigrants, on the intrinsic social dynamics of these new communities, in search for a plausible explanation for the migratory phenomenon. In this regard, religion has always had, and keeps having, a major importance, especially in what concerns the integration struggle carried on by immigrants once they have arrived in their host countries. Religion has also been taken into consideration when the question has risen about the recognition of the immigrants' social and political rights,

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¹⁶ Adogame, A. U., & Spickard, J. V., *Religion crossing boundaries: Transnational religious and social dynamics in Africa and the new African diaspora*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2010. See also Adogame, Afeosemimo U, Ezra Chitando, Bolaji Bateye, and Jacob K. Olupona. *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies*. Farnham, Surrey, England, Ashgate, 2013.

such as the right to work, the right to benefit from social assistance, or the right to maintain a person's human dignity during their lifetime.

Within the European societies, immigration has become a current issue after the '80's, when, due to the spectacular increase in the number of immigrants, the problems have risen about finding the most appropriate ways to develop some social policies which could be able to integrate the immigrants, as well as granting them a distinct and precise legal status. In the religious sphere, as the end of the XX-th century was approaching, voices endowed with both competence and authority have made themselves heard, from the Roman Catholic side¹⁷, as well as from the Protestant one, both sides pledging either for the assimilation of the newly constituted communities of immigrants, or for the creation of a distinct space where they could fully manifest themselves, therefore beyond the cultural constraints which were enforced as being considered natural by the ancient mono-cultural communities. The old traditional European Churches have, ultimately, allowed for the new communities to constitute themselves within their territories; nowadays, we are remarking them as being active in the suburbs of all the European important cities.

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¹⁷ *Populum Progressio*, enciclica papei Paul VI, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html. See also Enciclica *Pastoralis Migratorum cura*, Paul VI, 1969: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom99-00_81_84/rc_pc_migrants_pom81_chirayath.htm; Papa Pius XII, Enciclica *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*, 1952 www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/p12exsul.htm; Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html;

6. Conclusions

The newly created diaspora communities are permanently subjected to a natural pressure from the local communities, but through various mutual influences they build their new identity, called by specialists a 'relational identity'¹⁸. The communities abroad are well connected with their families of origin, but are attentive also at the new context where they live, which makes them be in a state of constant vigilance.

Another feature resulting from this effort to build an identity in the diaspora lies in the vitality and energy with which these communities involve themselves in the religious practice in a Europe which is both sedentary, and affected by secularization. The missionary dynamics of the parishes in the diaspora is recognized as such, and is mainly based on an increased parochial awareness of the laity and of the clergy, on solidarity, and on an effort to preserve the ethnical identity.

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¹⁸ Bleuzen Brigitte, *Religieux en banlieu. Sociologie d'un institut religieux de 1940 à 2003*, Paris, EHESS, 2006. Pierre Bourdieu, *L'identité et la représentation*, in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 35, pp. 63-72.

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