

# THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL SPACE

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## **Abstract:**

Church life is part of the life of our people, who were born Christian; therefore, we cannot consider that what has been said about the Christianity of our great poet Mihai Eminescu, about his views of the ancestral Church, the oldest institution of this nation, is an exaggeration. But this institution that educated and cultivated the first generations of scholars could not but reflect in the entire Romanian literature. And that happened because literature, just like education, flourished within the Church as well, being supported, in the early days, by monastery deacons, by the servants of parishes, that is, by churches in the villages.

## **Key words:**

Culture, language, literature, Christian, history, religious writers.

## **1. Introduction**

This article focuses on the manner in which the church servants are reflected in Romanian literature. Naturally, we have not considered only the ministers in parishes, but also the monastery servants and the hermits. As the church servants rose from among this people, we may say that the Church of Christ, in its Romanian version, was born in the bosom of the Romanian nation, just as Christ Himself was born in the bosom of the chosen people; and with it, its culture gained a certain spiritual depth.

According to the Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania, the first translation of the *Holy Scripture* into the national language of a people has a founding role, because it becomes a basis of reference for that particular national culture. The other translations are nothing more than *diorthosis*, i.e., the bringing up to date of biblical texts in that language or the rendering of the sacred founding text in the language at a certain moment in time. That is

why, as far as we, the Romanians, are concerned, the appearance of *Biblia de la București* (*The Bucharest Bible*) (1688) had a key role in the Romanian language formation, alongside of *Psaltirea în versuri* (1683) of the Metropolitan Dosoftei. Therefore, when dealing with the manner in which the servants of the ancient Church are reflected in literature, one should start from these fundamentals of the Romanian language and literature.

In addition to the aforementioned works, we should also mention the literary translations from Maramureș, *Noul Testament de la Bălgrad* (1648) and *Palia de la Orăștie* (1582). The texts of old chronicles should be referred to roughly in the same terms, starting with *Cronica moldo-germană* (1502), *Pomelnicul de la Mănăstirea Bistrița* (Neamț), *Catehismul* of Filip Mahler from Sibiu (1544). Deacon Coresi's printed works and *Răspunsul la Catehismul calvinist* (1641) of the Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldova should also be regarded as bases of the Romanian language and culture. All this mirrors the effort of development of the Romanian language; among those who strived, there were also eminent servants of the ancestral altar.

The old church language and that of chronicles thus became the instrument of the first literary creations, for they placed the language of our forefathers among the literary languages of our old continent as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In view of this, we understand why the Romanian language could not have been missing from the liturgical languages; the creator of the Romanian poetic language had the honour of being the founder of liturgical language by printing *The Holy Liturgy* in the language of our ancestors (the Holy Metropolitan Dosoftei, 1688).

We have mentioned these aspects in order to justify the fact that the topic proposed for research is not one without interest. In this paper, without referring to the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>-century creations, we shall dwell upon modern literary creations, starting with the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day. This, of course, is not to exhaust the topic entirely, but we shall capture the main aspects related to the ministration of the pastors, hierarchs and priests of our ancestral church.

## **2. Inculturation of the Christian faith among Romanians**

The phenomenon known as “inculturation” (or, more accurately, “acculturation” or “cultural adaptation”) refers to “*the process by which the socio-cultural factors of the reference environment shape and structure the*

*individual from a socio-behavioural point of view and in terms of ideal values.”<sup>1</sup> In short, it is the incorporation of faith into a nation’s culture. Romanian Orthodoxy, as all Eastern churches, stands proof of this process that occurred in the Dacian-Roman culture, mirrored in “*the humanism of social life, of family life, of the civil status, of the great spiritual experiences, of aspirations serving progress.*”<sup>2</sup>*

As regards Romanian Orthodoxy, this phenomenon began with the birth of the Romanian people as a new nation, thus intermingling with the Romanian ethnogenesis, which, on the one hand, facilitates the approach to this phenomenon, and, on the other hand, complicates this approach, being closely related to the birth of this nation, as it cannot be found in any other European nations. Our great national poet Mihai Eminescu put it as follows: faith was established “in a layer of culture at the mouths of the Danube”.

Certainly, it is a Christian culture, affirmed in the native language of a nation that is different from Slavic and Hungarian peoples surrounding it. Faith is, for Romanians, “*the foundation of all the laws of life through a coexistence of mutual appreciation and cooperation, which ensures its unity and identity.*”<sup>3</sup>

From this point of view, the ideas formulated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae are revealing:

*“Adam himself was not non-national, but spoke a language, had a certain mentality, a certain physical structure. A nationally pure, uncoloured man, without national determinants, is an abstraction. Just as there can be no apple without the determinants of a certain variety, so there can be no man without individual determinants. Man can only exist in the national form, with a national colour and as an individual determinant. Individual or national determinants cannot be extracted from a person or a nation so as to obtain a pure man. It would mean to destroy the very human being.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> See *Fenomenul de inculturare în școli. Documents.docslide.com.us.*

<sup>2</sup> Părintele Mihai Himcinschi, *Misiune și dialog. Ontologia misionară a Bisericii din perspectiva dialogului interreligios*, Alba Iulia: Editura Reîntregirea, 2003, pp. 144-145.

<sup>3</sup> Preot Dumitru Stăniloae, 2004, *Reflecții asupra spiritualității poporului român*, București: Editura Elion, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup><https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2012/04/06/dumitru-staniloae-ortodoxie-si-nationalism/>, 10.01.2023, 10:15 .

Father Dumitru Stăniloae points out how things actually are:

*“Christianity addresses the individual. It does not address the nation, for, in the beginning, there was no independent, hypostatic self-consciousness of the nation. But human individuals are not abstract units, stripped of determination and, hence, entirely identical. They may be separated, of course, from any particular determinants, as accidental and superficial. But there are many features a person cannot be stripped of even if one goes deep into their last nucleus and reaches what one refers to as the self”.*<sup>5</sup>

In *Istoria Dobrogei*<sup>6</sup>, Radu Vulpe says that if we had not been Christian today, we would not have been Romanians, because we would have got lost among other nations, first and foremost, among the migratory peoples, as happened with some of the South Slavs. In his article *Nu am fi fost creștini astăzi dacă nu ne-am fi născut creștini*, he brings forward archaeological and linguistic arguments, particularly toponyms, in order to justify his claim<sup>7</sup>.

The idea is supported by Viorel Cosma as well, who claims, in line with B. P. Hasdeu, that our cultural identity can also be established by relating to traditions:

*“We would not have been Christians today if we had not been born Christians. The carols are a kind of Romanianism among the Slavs and not Slavism among the Romanians, for the very musicality of carols testifies to the ancientness of Romanian Christianity; therefore, they may be considered as the most authentic birth certificates of the Romanian people as a Christian nation or tribe.”*

Nations, Father D. Stăniloae states, are the measure of adherence to Christianity:

*“By their matter, nations are eternal in God. God desires them all. In each of them, He displays a nuance of His endless spirituality. As regards the Romanian people, Orthodoxy is one of the historical factors that have shaped the Romanian soul as it is today.”*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2012/04/06/dumitru-staniloae-ortodoxie-si-nationalism/>. 10.01.2023, 11:00.

<sup>6</sup> Radu Vulpe, Ion Barnea, 1968, *Din istoria Dobrogei*, volumul II: *România de la Dunărea de Jos*, București: Editura Academiei, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *De la Dunăre la Mare*, 1977, Galați: Editura Episcopiei Dunării de Jos.

The Romanian right has shaped our entire national being, which explains why the language, song, game, clothing, social customs and religious rituals express the Romanians' "specific spiritual structure", as "the life of a people bears the seal of their religion". That is to say, it carries that living spirit of the right faith foreign to "Latin metaphysics", which "is a combination and a play of static forms, of empty concepts, a puppet theatre"; this metaphysics offers but "some shells", for "the kernel of things is eluded or vaporised into forms."<sup>8</sup>

This specificity of Eastern Christianity, which was engrafted on a Latin or Romanic stem, is characteristic of the Romanian people; it is the visible result of the inculturation mentioned above which, according to the great theologians, proves that its encounter with the Christian religion was a founding and mediating one. That is why, the true establishment of this nation is its baptism into Christ from the very beginning, through the preaching of the first of the Apostles, Saint Andrew.

As one of the apprentices of Saint John the Baptist, he was the first of the 12 disciples to recognise Jesus as the Messiah: "We have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (*John* 1: 41-42). This bringing of Simon, who was to become the patron saint of the capital of the Roman Empire, is somewhat symbolic of the bringing before Christ the Saviour of the Romance populations of Scythia Minor (Dobruja) and also of those from the Carpathians and the Danube, who would later form the Romanian nation.

This is attested by numerous toponyms, hydronyms and names of old localities. Even the Valley of the Danube, as attested by the martyrdom of the priest Montanus of Singidunum, was the valley of those who would praise God Almighty in churches in the Dacian-Roman language; as we can see, this was different from the Latin language of the Empire. This is a proof that was to be confirmed throughout the centuries by the presence of the ancient faith in these regions, where there were no Arian or Audian disturbances caused by the Gothic nations.

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<sup>8</sup><https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2012/04/06/dumitru-staniloae-ortodoxie-si-nationalism/>, 10.01.2023, 12:25.

Before proceeding to the analysis of elements that demonstrate the profundity and wide distribution of this inculturation, we should say that the very nomad peoples, such as the Huns, acknowledged this Christian Romanity at the mouths of the Danube. Theotimus, the bishop of Tomi, was called the god of Romanians due to his moral and religious prestige, whereas Attila's descendants were terrified of Menumorut, who told them he would not give them one inch of the country's land, i.e., the ancestral land sanctified with the blood of those who had received the faith in Christ, and he would address the emperor of Constantinople, the "Tsargrad" of our ancient carols.

The new faith brought to these lands "*would speak to the poor, who formed the majority of the new population of the province. Faith was imposed through the right teaching and the idea of equality of individuals as sons of the same God-Father, as brethren meant to lead a brotherly life full of love; the advice to forgive the others' mistakes showed that man was often quite little guilty and responsible; the example of living together, in the same house, and, if possible, at the same table, sharing the same treasury, suggested how each of them could contribute with their means*".<sup>9</sup>

This first stage of the establishment of the religious dogma points out that this faith in Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, helped polish the less belligerent character of the descendants of Thraco-Dacians and Romans. This explains their peaceful and quiet nature characterised by that non-violence mirrored in the creation of the folk ballad. Then, the pastoral life of these inhabitants acquired a communal aspect, very similar to that of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, within which "*all the believers were together and had everything in common.*" (*Facts 2:44*).

With this communal life came the spirit of martyrdom – the old courage in battle transformed into that courage of confession. The "confessors", that is, martyrs, proved themselves worthy, "refusing the legal sacrifice and affirming the forbidden teaching in front of everybody". They said they "were ready to receive the blows and then death, through which life on earth is victorious and the other one opens triumphantly". It is this attitude that prompted pagan or migratory peoples to embrace faith, rushing towards

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolae Iorga, 2016, *Istoria Bisericii românești*. Volumul I. Ediție îngrijită și prefață de I. Oprișan, București: Editura Saeculum I.O., pp. 24-25.

the “symbolic images of the gentle Lamb, carrying the cross of suffering in catacombs and other caves and hideaways of the persecuted Christianity, because He alone, amid all the laws, denied the official cult and wounded the heart of the state itself.”<sup>10</sup>

This state of affairs was to entail an essential change in the ethos of the people at the mouths of the Danube. Christian faith, by teaching immortality, would make them look beyond the petty and turbulent existence, rendering them stronger in the face of the new challenges brought about by the successive migration waves of nations and tribes, each more savage and more prepared for bloodshed than the preceding ones.

In short, it is not just a new self-image, but also an eschatological conception, provided by the Christian promise, through the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven or of the eternal life.

This was to be reflected not only in the collective mentality, but also in the language of ancient Romanians, a language in the process of formation in the 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.:

*“In Christianity, as in Vulgar Latin, the common people found their victors and the vanquished, the new and old masters of these places, that spiritual unity which corresponded to the political unity resulting from inclusion within the borders of the same empire; and it had to correspond, so that the citizens and subjects of the same state slowly and gradually became the same people, which is ours.”*<sup>11</sup>

### **3. Philological evidence of the inculturation of the Christian faith**

The most relevant proof of the new changes that occurred in the language of the new people emerging on the horizon of history, as emphasised by the historian Nicolae Iorga, is that of the language. The Romanian language attests “the ancientness of Romanian Christianity, which, far from being borrowed from nations newer in culture than us, such as the Bulgarians, was one of the manners in which our people, the Romanians, were formed.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Nicolae Iorga, 2016, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Nicolae Iorga, 2016, p. 27.

Gheorghe Asachi said that “instead of borrowing Christian terms from the peoples around us, we borrowed many terms from the Hungarians, Slavs and other nations that passed through this area. Such an example may be the Goths, to whom Ulfilas, by translating the *Bible*, offered several terms from common Latin spoken by this people.”

The Christian terms in Romanian are, without a doubt, a “strong argument for the ancientness of Christianity among Daco-Romans”, because “numerous words with a Christian meaning in our language are of Latin origin, particularly those referring to the basic notions of faith.”<sup>13</sup> Why is this important? As Al. Philippide claims, Christianity, to a great extent, helped the Romanians preserve their ethnical being, in which many Romanic elements are to be found.

The best-known term is *biserică* ‘church’, which derives from Lat. *basilica*, cf. Gk. *basilica*, “house of the prince/king”. It designated “special rooms for holding services”, a meaning which “in time, extended from the place of worship to the entire Christian community.” The other Romance languages borrowed the Greek term *ekklesia*, hence Fr. *église*, It. *chiesa*, and even the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic terms *church* and *Kirche*.<sup>14</sup> This shows that the term was quite early appropriated by the Daco-Roman Christians. The respect for the “house of the lord” has been preserved throughout the centuries and is also found in a proverb: “*Oricât de sărac ar fi satul, casa împăratului trebuie să fie frumoasă!*” (i.e., ‘No matter how poor the village, the emperor’s house must be beautiful!’).

Others complete this term:

“*The sole divinity, the only leader and creator of worlds, is signified by the union of two Latin words: **Domine-Deus** > **Dumnezeu** (i.e., God), as in old Italian **Domenedio**; the Saviour, Christus is Crest, from which the Christian derives*”.<sup>15</sup> This word, as shown by Sextil Pușcariu, has been preserved to this day, with the same bimillennial meaning, which cannot be found anywhere else in Europe. Even only these two words, if considered by

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<sup>13</sup> Preot Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, 1992, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, București: Editura Institutului Teologic și de Misiune al BOR, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Preot Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, 1992, p. 27.



the elders of the European Union, could convince those who deny the Christian roots of European culture, including that created by our ancestors.

Seeking to more thoroughly explain this aspect related to the religious service, Nicolae Iorga points out:

“The divine service was not yet sufficiently well established in the early times in order to be able to convey Latin terms; still, the word *sărbătoare*<sup>16</sup> (‘holiday, celebration’) comes from the Latin language thesaurus, which also gave names for days of fasting: *cășlegi*, *carnelegi*, *lăsatul secului*, halving of the Easter fast and the Holy Easter fast; there is a debate regarding the origin of the word *Crăciun* (‘Christmas’), which some recent researchers try to get from Slavonic or even Greek”.<sup>17</sup>

According to Mircea Păcurariu, the term *Crăciun* “comes from *collation* (Acc. *collationem*), a Roman holiday at the beginning of the year, when the year’s holidays were announced in the temple. The fact that, during the first Christian centuries, Nativity was celebrated along with the *Epiphany*, on 6 January, then Easter and other movable feasts were announced, justifies this name, also related to *colindat* ‘carolling’, *sărbătoare* ‘celebration, holiday’ and so on.”<sup>18</sup> That is how a mere name of a holiday may provide interesting data regarding the folk calendar, knowing that other periods of time may be connected with the Easter date, such as those related to the agricultural and pastoral preoccupations of our ancestors.

Two other holidays were also related to the Easter date<sup>19</sup>:

“*Floriile* (‘Palm Sunday’) is named after a pagan spring holiday, specific to Latins, *Floralia* or *Florilia*, a holiday of flowers. Because its date was close to the date of the Saviour’s Entry into Jerusalem (referred to as ‘the Sunday of flowers’ in old texts), the two overlapped. Similarly, *Rusaliile* (‘Pentecost’), a name which comes from the old pagan holiday *Rosalia* (‘festival of roses’), a commemoration of the dead celebrated during spring, when roses (*rosa*, *-ae*) blossom, came to be set in the Christian calendar as the date marking the Descent of the Holy Spirit, an event which occurred

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> In this respect, Nicolae Iorga points out that *Botezul* (‘Baptism’) and *Sfânta Împărtășanie* (‘Eucharist’), two of the names of Christian sacraments, also come from Latin, *ibidem*, p. 28.

around the same time”.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Daco-Roman Christians assigned the names of the old pagan holidays to their own events.

When mentioning this assimilation of ancient names and feasts, M. Păcurariu resumes what Mircea Eliade said about Romanian Christianity, namely, that it has a cosmic dimension. More specifically, only the names were taken, not the cyclic vision specific to the old cosmic religions, which also included the Chthonian and Uranian gods of the Dacians. Furthermore, the Romanian Christian terminology mainly reflects how the ancient Geto-Dacian cultures and beliefs, deeply rooted in the agropastoral traditions and customs of the dwellers of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space, were Christianised. What is peculiar to Romanian Christianity is this practice of the old *henotheism* that Father Ioan Gh. Coman referred to. It is a “cult of transition from polytheism to monotheism”, which bestows a unique characteristic upon the beliefs of this place. It is not only the oldest Christianity in the area, but a very original one as well. It is related to one of Cappadocian origin, as shown by St. Basil in his letter to Soranus, the governor of Tomis.

The adoption of several *Christian* terms or the Christianisation of older terms mentioned by Father Mircea Păcurariu should also be considered from this point of view: *a boteza* (*baptizein*, from Greek) ‘baptise’, *cer* (*caelum*) ‘sky’, a *creștina* (*christinare*) ‘Christianise’, *cruce* (*crux*, Acc. *crucem*) ‘cross’, *a se cumenica* (*comunicare*) ‘communicate, housel’, *duminică* (“*dies dominica*”, *zi domnească* ‘day of the Lord’) ‘Sunday’, *înger* (*angelus*) ‘angel’.<sup>21</sup>

A true *Weltanschauung*, a view of the world deeply influenced by the Christian vision, replaced the Thraco-Getic or Dacian thinking of the inhabitants of these lands, which contributed to the entire culture of these ancient dwellers in these plains. Such a change could not have occurred if baptism had been performed at a certain date, by order of the great leaders of the country, i.e., through a violent break from the pagan past. Fortunately, the reality conveyed by these terms, the number of which is much larger, is that of a slow and profound process that started at the bottom and moved upwards,

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<sup>20</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, 1992, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

that is, from the common people towards their leaders; moreover, such words show us that this process was long enough to penetrate into the collective mind and imaginary.

Had things been different, one could not have explained how completely new terms were created where no adequate terms were found. As Father Mircea Păcurariu says, “It should be noted that some terms of faith were created on the spot, with the help of Latin terms”. It thus results that the Latin word-stock settled even more firmly through the Christian faith, resisting all subsequent influences due to the contacts with barbarian or migratory nations and tribes. Among these terms, we should mention “Împărăția lui Dumnezeu” ‘Kingdom of God’, “Făcătorul lumii” ‘Creator of the world’, “Treime” ‘Trinity’, “Credința” ‘Faith’, “Crezul” ‘Creed’, “Ființa” ‘Being’, “Învieerea” ‘Resurrection’, “Răscumpărarea” ‘Redemption’, “Iertarea” ‘Forgiveness’, “Înălțarea” ‘Ascension’, “Comuniunea” ‘Communion’ and “Fecioara” ‘Virgin’ (as in “Sfânta Fecioară” ‘Holy Virgin’). An interesting detail is that the prayer *Tatăl nostru* ‘Our Father’, just like *Simbolul de credință niceo-constantinopolitan* ‘Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed’, has more than 90% of words of Latin origin (except the words *ispită* ‘temptation’, *mântuire* ‘salvation’ in the *Our Father*)”.<sup>22</sup>

It would also be worth mentioning what P. P. Panaitescu has to say in this regard:

*“Christian terminology in Romanian (all the words related to the Christian faith) sheds more light on the origins of our Christianity. The founding notions of Christianity are rendered in Romanian through words of Latin origin. (...) The most significant word in Christian terminology is the name of **Easter**, the Christians’ essential feast. This word derived from the Latin form is the decisive proof of the origin of the faith of Christ, before the coming of the Slavs.”*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, 1992, p. 21. Furthermore, in Latin, the two terms are *tentation* and *salvare*. The synonym of Slavic origin of the former, *ispită*, derives from the Romanian verb *a ispiti* < Slav. *ispytati*; the non-Latin synonym of the latter term, *mântuire*, comes from the Hungarian *menteni*.

<sup>23</sup> \*\*\*, 1969, *Introducere în istoria culturii românești*, București: Editura Academiei, p. 103.

#### **4. Christian patronyms of Greco-Roman origin**

The names of the martyrs of Christianity, due to the reception of the *Gospel of Christ* despite interdictions in the Roman Empire, are found both in the acts of martyrdom of some local saints and in the folk tradition, which attests that they were part of the everyday reality of the dwellers of these territories. Thus, the names of the priest Montanus and of his wife, Maximina, are mentioned. The man “is the first Daco-Roman priest known as a martyr”. A document reveals that in Sirmium, “the bishop Irineu and his deacon, Demetrius, died for Christ in the same year (304)”. Also, the deacon Ermil and the jailor Stratonicus met the same fate.

The following were martyred at Durostorum: Pasicrat and Valentinus (April 298), Marcian and Nicandru (June 298), Quintilian, Dadas and Maxim Citezul (April 304), Emilian (362); in Scythia Minor, at Tomis, the bishop Efrem (304), Macrobius, Gordian, Heli, Lucian, Zotic, the Argeu brothers, Narcis and Marcelin (320-323) suffered martyrdom; at Axiopolis – Chiril, Chindeas and Dasius (beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century). In the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the priest Epictet and the young Astion were martyred at Halmyris, as were Zoticos, Attalos, Kamasis and Filippos of Niculițel.<sup>24</sup>

Many of these confessors of Christ became models for the locals who received the Christian faith; many of the new converts even took the names of those who had preached the *Gospel* or of those who had been martyred. In order to better understand how this school of saintliness contributed to the inculturation of the Christian faith in the ethos of the Daco-Roman inhabitants, it would be enough to read “The Letter of the Church of Gothia to the Church of Cappadocia, about the martyrdom of Saint Sabbas.”<sup>25</sup>

Consciousness and unity with all those who hope to inherit the Kingdom of God are relevant; the path to this is guided, apart from Christ, by those who have pleased God.

*The Epistle to Diognetus* (2<sup>nd</sup> century) is also interesting, stating:

“The Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. They neither inhabit cities

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<sup>24</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, 1992, pp. 26-27.

<sup>25</sup> Ștefan Alexe, “Scrisoarea Bisericii din Gatia către Biserica din Capadocia, despre martiriul Sfântului Sava”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, nr. 5-6/1972, pp. 557-559.

of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. (...) They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.”<sup>26</sup> Such statements reflect the conscience of belonging to the people of God.

The abovementioned latter, sent together with the holy relics to the Christians of Cappadocia, via the governor Iunius Soranus, “the illustrious duke of Scythia”, says:

*“Living in Gothia, in a stubborn and perfidious tribe, Saint Sabbas revealed himself as a light upon the world, imitating the saints and shining together with them in his works after Christ. For since his childhood, he had no other desire but to show devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour, striving for perfect virtue in order to become a perfect man in the knowledge of the Son of God.”*<sup>27</sup>

Saint Sabbas, martyred on 12 April 372, the second day after Easter, “would sing psalms in the church and take great care of it”, leading a remarkable life for he was “frugal in everything, living in virginity, retired, fasting with the priest, persevering in prayers and winning everyone over with his fine behaviour”. Driven by his zeal for the holy things, as the feast of the Holy Resurrection of God approached, “he wanted to go to another city, to the priest Gutica, to spend the holiday with him”. After a wonderful apparition he had on his way, he turned back to celebrate the great feast with the priest Sansala. Unfortunately, “on the third night after the feast”, the Goths apprehended him and the priest Sansala.<sup>28</sup>

The author of the letter provides important data regarding the celebration of the Lord’s Resurrection in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the area of Buzău. It was where the modern writer Vintilă Horia was to imagine a journey of Ovid, the one banished to Tomis, and the manner in which the communion of

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<sup>26</sup><https://doxologia.ro/arheologie-patristica/lumea-uraste-pe-crestini-pentru-ca-se-impotrivesc-placerilor-ei>, 11.01.2023, 09:00.

<sup>27</sup> Ștefan Alexe, 1972, pp. 557.

<sup>28</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, 1992, p. 30.

faith was lived by the entire community gathered around the mentioned priests. His book is entitled *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil* ('God Was Born in Exile'), 1960. In this amazingly ingenious story, one cannot but see a reflection of the way in which the descendants of the Holy Apostles fulfilled their mission of preaching:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them...” (*Matthew* 28:19). And the Saviour’s exhortation: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (*Matthew* 5:48).

It is this deeply Christian life that Simion Mehedinți referred to when he recommended the pedagogues of this nation “to immerse themselves in the life of their people as far as the deepest depths, as the exceptional man who was called Mihai Eminescu did only once, in the cultural direction.”<sup>29</sup> And especially to delve into the knowledge of the culture and values which the Gospel of Christ brought to the world and therefore to the Romanian people as well.”<sup>30</sup>

However, what had to be mirrored in the literary creations was this Romanian ethos; namely, if “the mother is the teacher of children”, so “the priest should be the teacher of mothers”, for our Church raised the woman “very high”! Until the coming of Christ, the wife was the man’s servant anywhere in the world. Mary’s Son, on the other way, was not ashamed to speak to a Samaritan woman; well, he also asked for a drink. He knew how much tenderness and kindness were hidden in the worthy women’s souls and that is why he would look at them with the same love as he would innocent children. And his love was rewarded, for among his disciples there were not only men, but also women.”<sup>31</sup>

Let us not forget that a ballad like *Miorița* has no people; neither old, nor new. Proverbs, carols, legends and fairy tales are pearls not to be given away. Those who know them can testify without shame that the Romanian’s soul, as his land, is a garden. Therefore, the villagers have no reason to feel humiliated before any pedagogue if they will wholeheartedly accept the task

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<sup>29</sup> Simion Mehedinți Soveja, 2009, *Alte creșteri. Școala muncii*, ediția a X-a, Pitești: Editura Rotonda, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Simion Mehedinți Soveja, 2009, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

of being the representatives of our nation in its language, manners and all its characteristic customs.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Conclusions**

In the few presentations on the topic of pastoral works that we have made, one may easily note that the sacrificial ministry of the servant priests of the ancient Church did not pass unnoticed. Therefore, one could not have overlooked a ministration to which we owe the first literary creations in this blessed language of a people who received the faith in Christ from the cradle of its existence.

As early as the interwar period, Simion Mehedinți Soveja would point to the fact that serving the ancestral Church should be done with dynamism, delving into the example of the sacrificial devotion of some priests and servants, reflected in the literature of this nation: “Instead of the numb Church of today, we need a living Church. We do not ask the priests to speak like the learned apostle Paul or like Chrysostom and Bossuet. The great gift of speaking beautiful words is rarely given to people. We would be content with two or three heartfelt words, uttered humanely, that should be understood by everyone. And, above all, we would like the servants of the Altar to awaken, in people’s minds, a high idea about their purpose in the world, because the mother is the beginning of schooling. The first lesson of pedagogy should start from within the Church.”<sup>33</sup>

Reconsidering the example provided by the altar servants, we should identify the missionary priorities, starting with the parish, especially since we are faced with “a new morphology of the parish even in villages, where the outskirts of the cities have expanded.” Unfortunately, Christian life is characterised by what we may refer to as “the great anonymity in which all human relationships, mainly the missionary and pastoral one, unfold. We baptise anonymous children, we celebrate unknown youths and bury the dead whose name and age we read on the cross”, which has created a paradoxical situation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>33</sup> \*\*\*, „O altă creștere. Școala muncii”, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> Rev. Prof. Dr. Valer Bel, 2006, *Misiune, parohie, pastorație. Coordonate pentru o strategie misionară*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Renașterea, p. 15.

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