



ULBS

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PH.D THESIS

Romanian Orthodox Identity and Confession in the
Holy Land in the Context of Religious Pluralism -
Missionary Strategies and Perspectives

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Summary

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I believe that the issue of Romanian identity is a very important subject that needs to be studied and deepened by each of us. In the world in which we live, technology and the advance of modernism often do not allow us to be aware of the value we have as people. Only a people that truly knows its identity and value can be able to enter into communion with other peoples. I believe that building national dignity is imperative in the context of increased globalisation.

It can be observed, at the level of society, the presence of external influences that produce a degradation of national identity, a rejection of the true values of the Romanian nation and the Orthodox Church. The content of the following lines is not intended to be the voice of a nationalist tendency presented in an extremist way but only an objective opinion adopted by the author. The thesis is intended to be one of the academic means by which readers are offered a starting point for rebuilding national dignity and identity. The pages of the thesis provide readers with living examples of witness to Romanian identity and the Orthodox faith, worthy role models and the holiness of people who have become, through their own lives, witnesses to God and models of love for their neighbour and their nation. Culture, traditions and the land in which we were born represent for us, as Romanians, the nurturing juice from which we drink our longing for eternity.

The Romanian people have a special way of communion with the spiritual and transcendent order, namely Orthodoxy¹. Through it, the Romanian is able to look towards the sky and perceive it as a universe prepared for him since the creation of the world. Throughout history, Romanian identity has been formed in the Church, which to this day is the threshold sought by every man in times of trouble and pain. The rulers and the voivodes were men close to God who fought for the Romanian nation and the defence of the national identity with courage and with God in mind. In spite of the hard times that the Romanian people sometimes experienced, he never forgot God and had a firm relationship with the Heavenly

¹ Pr.Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ortodoxia, modul spiritualității românești*, în „Gândirea”, 19, (1940), 6, pp.416-425 *apud* Pr.Dumitru Stăniloae, „Reflecții despre spiritualitate poporului român”, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2018, p.257.

Father. Moreover, there is evidence of the confessional love of the Romanians for Mount Athos and the Holy Places.

Orthodox places of worship in the Holy Land bear witness to the love of the Romanian people: the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (it preserves the portrait of Constantin Brâncoveanu in a place of honour), the Church of the Nativity of the Lord in Bethlehem (the silver star was donated by a Romanian ruler), the candles of the Holy Sepulchre, some are proof of Romanian love. These are some of the gifts that the Romanian people gave to the Holy Land through historical leaders as a testimony of love and desire for communion with God.

National identity is an integral part of the Romanian nation. A people is not authentic, original if it loses its identity. Confession of the Orthodox Christian faith is also an essential part of Romanianism. I say this because the communion preached by Orthodoxy is based on love, humility and dedication. The Savior Jesus Christ came to earth out of love for us humans to teach us the most important lesson-humility.

The Romanian people overcame hardships only with prayer and the thought of God. Stephen the Great, before any confrontation, went to confess to the confessor and confess before God his Christian identity and then fought for the Romanian one. In the context of the research, the symbiosis between Orthodoxy and Romanianism is emphasized as a link for eternity. Romanian identity finds its fulfilment in Orthodox communion based on love. The Orthodox Church has always been at the side of the nation and has contributed decisively to the spiritual edification of the Romanian people.

The authenticity of the present work lies in the original note of the presentation of the ways of affirming the Romanian and Orthodox identity, the highlighting of the mission of holy people who fought for the preservation of the faith and the nation, the missionary impact of the Romanian churches, in whose tent every pilgrim feels closer to what he calls "home" and last but not least the Romanian community, those who by the model of life and activities carried out are missionaries and witnesses of the national culture.

The spirit of communion specific to Orthodoxy has been of real use for the Romanian people and in international relations and for the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the ecumenical level. The present research presents the mission of the Romanian Orthodoxy in the Holy Land, a place where multifaith, multiculturalism and religious values take various forms.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The production of a reference work for the theological field requires the study of a specialized bibliography but also an intercultural report specific to the subject. Historical studies, press articles, analysis of statistics and field research were used as a basis for the research to illustrate new and original information. It was imperative to synthesize the material written so far on the topic or interference with the subject and to study archival documents and official acts.

In order to achieve the research objectives, it was inevitable to take a transdisciplinary approach to some chapters and sub-chapters - the involvement of the social in the religious field, the impact of some political decisions on the religious situation in a territory, the effect of some military events on territorial stability and Romanian identity in a territory. The thesis is structured in five chapters as follows:

Chapter I- *Romanian Orthodox Identity in a Multifaith Context* describes the role that Orthodoxy plays in ecumenical and interreligious relations. Man, because of his greatness, has been given the responsibility to lead creation towards full communion with God. The phenomenon of multifaith present in the Holy Land is not a missionary hindrance but an additional reason for affirmation, demonstration of the values on which Orthodoxy is founded and the cultivation of Christian love, the essential condition for a favourable interreligious dialogue.

Chapter II- *Romanian witness and testimony in the holy Land* aims to illustrate the mission of some Romanian monks who went to the Holy Land with the precise purpose of seeking God and became His missionaries for the Romanian people. Another important aspect of the chapter is the missionary impact of the Romanian churches in the Holy Land which are oases of Romanian prayer in an Eastern world. The mission of the Church is carried out by priests chosen by the Holy Spirit to be representatives of the Romanian people and of the Romanian Orthodox Church for a better brotherly communion in liturgical spirit.

Capitolul III- *Witness through holiness: saint john jacob the hozevitch* is a description of the mission of a Romanian monk who had a difficult life but managed to turn suffering into a stairway to heaven. The particularity of the mission of the Pious John James the Chozevite lies in the mastery of the pen, the gift of versification with the help of which he left us as a legacy a series of lyrical meditations with a philocalic flavour. A warm soul, an

innocent child to the last breath, Father John the Chozevite is one of the representatives of the Romanian people before the throne of Christ the Saviour.

Chapter IV- *In search of saints and holiness: the Romanian pilgrimage form of mission in the holy land* aims to illustrate how a journey that may be apparently a tourism enterprise can become a school of Christianity and a pedagogue of national consciousness education. Everyone dreams of going to the Holy Land at least once, even if it is not out of a purely religious conviction. The role of a pilgrimage is to teach people that a relationship with God is suitable for everyone, regardless of their degree of religiosity or the way they live their lives. A burdened soul finds in these places the peace it needs and the support it comes from the clergy to unite with the Heavenly Father. The first missionary journeys to the Holy Land also had an administrative purpose due to the efforts made to build a Romanian church here, others were aimed at maintaining the spirit of communion between the sister Orthodox Churches and others were true ways of seeking and finding God.

Chapter V- *Current Issues, Strategies and Missionary Perspectives* has the objective to present the current church mission carried out by the Romanian churches, the situation of the Romanian community and the role that Father Archimandrite Teofil Anăstăsoaie has in coordinating the Romanian mission at the Holy Places. The Superior of the Romanian settlements in Jerusalem, Jordan and Jericho has the role of representing the Romanian Orthodox Church before the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and is mandated to take care of the smooth running of the Orthodox confession, of the national identity and towards the good inter-Orthodox collaboration. The second part of the chapter summarizes the activity of the Romanian community in Israel to keep alive the flame of the values taught by their ancestors. Extremely interesting is also the analysis of the community of Jews whose origins are in Romania who join the Romanian identity approach and contribute to the spread of the values learned from the national lands by any means and from any public position.

CHAPTER I: ROMANIAN ORTHODOX IDENTITY IN A MULTIFAITH CONTEXT

I.1. Person and Communion as a Specific Character of the Orthodox Christian Identity

The Christian religion is founded by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to earth to reconcile us to God and give us the possibility of access to eternity. Orthodox identity presupposes communion with God and with others as a mark of the fulfilment of the commandment which Christ the Saviour gave us: I give you a new commandment: Love one another (John 13:34). It is the Christian religion that offers man the possibility of access to the Kingdom of God through Christian love. The concept of "person" and "communion" characterises man as God's most important creation. Through the Holy Mysteries of Initiation man receives the status of person by denying ancestral sin and receiving the Holy Mystery of Baptism, acquiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Mystery of the Anointing and union with Christ through the Holy Eucharist.

The human person is characterized by communion with others because each of our fellow human beings is a partner in our redemption. The ultimate model of communion is the Holy Trinity, and we each must relate to it in order to be truly worthy of the personal status we have received. To the extent that man is in communion with God he is also in communion with those around him. Every Christian is a mirror of the Kingdom of God. Differences among us must not be a hindrance to the evidence of a witnessing love.

I.2. Jerusalem - the capital of Israel, the meeting place of the great monotheistic religions

Every place on earth is a setting for an encounter with God. All creation is the work of the Holy Trinity. The relationship to the sacred, whatever its forms of manifestation, is found in all the world's religions. Religious pluralism upholds the equality of all people and religions before God. Each religion describes a unique and just way of relating to the divine. The most important city for monotheistic religions is Jerusalem, considered the Holy City for millions of believers.

For Christians, Jerusalem is the theo-cosmic space in which the Person of the Saviour Christ makes His presence felt through the places where He performed miracles, healed and gave people stories for the acquisition of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Sepulchre is the

most important focus for the Christian religion because it is from this place that Life has sprung and united us around the joy of the Resurrection.

Islam is a monotheistic religion that emphasizes a reference to the one personal sacrament and first appeared in the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century. There were polytheistic tribes there. Mohammed, who is considered the founder of this religion and who lived between 570-632, had his first revelations at the age of 40 and believed that they were brought to him by the Archangel Gabriel from Allah.

Religious identity within the Islamic religion is manifested through the five pillars that urge man to allegiance to Allah. These are:

The first and most important pillar is the confession of faith/shahada which consists of a short phrase: „Allah is God and Muhammad his prophet".

The second pillar is the ritual prayer/salat that a representative of the Islamic religion must perform five times a day.

The third pillar is the ritual beneficence.zakat which is like a tax to be paid.

The fourth pillar is the month-long Islamic saum fast known as the month of Ramadan.

The fifth pillar that concludes the foundations of Islamic religion and religious identity is the pilgrimage. The most sacred place for Muslims is Mecca.

The five columns show how Muslims affirm their religious identity. The two religious landmarks for Muslims: Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock.

The Jewish religion is the majority religion in Jerusalem and this means opening up new missionary perspectives for dialogue between Christians and the Jewish people. Judaism is a monotheistic religion which, according to historical research, has some differences of opinion about its founder. Some argue that Moses is the founder of the religion because he led the Jewish people to the Promised Land, others attribute the role of founder to Abraham as the father of many peoples and the last opinion gives Ezra as a possible representative because of his loving attitude towards divinity. Religious identity within the Jewish people is based on the Holy Book, the Torah, the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Commentaries on the Talmud and the Commentaries on the Torah.

In Jerusalem, due to the multitude of religions, cultures and traditions, there are tense moments that sometimes lead to conflict. Multifaith implies the presence of cultural, religious and confessional variety.

I.3. Christianity in the Holy Land

The foundation of the Christian Church through the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles represents the beginning of the Christian mission and the sending forth of the first missionaries of Christianity. The presence of the Holy Spirit in creation offers the possibility of the fulfilment of every trial and every endeavour by which man wishes to draw closer to God. The first synodal assembly of the Christian Church is described in Acts 15:7-11 where the Apostle Peter speaks and strengthens the souls present there in faith.

The Church of Jerusalem has a special importance within the Orthodox Church because of its eloquent mission throughout time and the witness that its hierarchs carry out with and without time.

I.4. The chosen people and their rebirth

The desire of the Jewish people to have an autonomous state has been witnessed by many leading representatives of the Jewish religion. One of these was Haim Nahman Bialik, a man of culture, who in his lyrics described the sadness of the chosen people at the lack of a land of their own. Zionism as a political movement was also an important step in the founding of the Jewish state. Jewish religious identity was considered in danger without a place where it could be confessed without any hindrance.

The longing for this ideal has its origins in the ancient Jewish tradition of three daily prayers in which Jews around the world pray for the return to their homeland. Wherever they are in the world, Jews on major holidays wish to celebrate Passover next year in Jerusalem.

In their prayers text from the psalms is present that recalls the oath made by their ancestors sent into slavery ``If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning! If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.!' (Psalm 136, 5-6).

The wish of the Jews was fulfilled with the 1917 Balfour Declaration which, despite the controversy it raised, was a wake-up call to the Jewish people's desire for self-government. On 10th of May 1948, on the last day of the British Mandate, Jewish leaders of the Jewish Agency proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel in accordance with UN Resolution 181. The Declaration of Independence, read by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, describes the plight of Jews around the world and their longing for a homeland where they can manifest their national, cultural and religious identity without hindrance.

Israeli law guarantees freedom of religion to every religion and cult. Very importantly, the mission of the Christian community is really telling in the Western Galilee where about 75% of the citizens are Christians. The community is concentrated in the cities of Haifa and Nazareth as well as in the villages of Shfaram and Kfar Yasif where the religious situation also features Muslims.

The villages of Ma'aliya and Fassuta in northern Israel are the only settlements in which the inhabitants are professing Christians.

CHAPTER II: ROMANIAN HOLY CONFESSION IN THE HOLY LAND

II.1. Establishment of the Romanian Institutions-Missionary Aspects.

The Romanians' love for God was to be materialized by building a Romanian house of prayer in the Holy Land. This demonstrates the love that the Romanian people have for the Holy Places and the desire to unite in a spirit of prayer in a place of worship.

The Romanian dream of building a Romanian house of prayer led to several founding initiatives.

The **first initiative** belonged, according to historical sources, to the monk Irinarh Rosetti who, in 1859, wanted to establish a church where services would be held in Romanian.

The **second initiative** dates back to the 19th century and consisted in the re-purposing of a Greek monastery that was dedicated to Saints Michael and Gabriel. The place of worship was a small monastery for pilgrims to the Holy Land. The church had three altars, one of which was dedicated to the Romanians through the care of a Romanian nun from Rășinari, the nun Porfiriea who initiated the restoration process.

The **third initiative** dates back to 1906 and is promoted by the man of culture Teodor Burada². He wrote a letter to the President of the Holy Synod in which he expressed his

² Teodor Burada (3 octombrie 1839-17 februarie 1923) este originar din Târgu Odobești. Familia Burada a pornit de jos spre cele mai înalte trepte boierești din zona Moldovei. Bunicul său a fost preot de mare prestigiu în Odobești iar tatăl său a urmat cursurile seminarului de la Socola. Teodor Burada a marcat istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române și cultura națională. A fost muzicolog, folclorist, etnograf, jurist, profesor violonist și bizantinolog. Toate aceste atribuții academice îl situează în cartea de aur a culturii românești și a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.

desire to build a Romanian church: "What sorrow, what grief came over us, however, when there in Jerusalem we did not find any little church in which we could say the holy prayers in our Romanian language, for all the Christian peoples have their churches in Jerusalem. Only we, the Romanian people, do not. Intrigued by this fact and offended in our Christian and national dignity."³

In 1910, a letter was also written to His Majesty, King Charles I, to support the identity approach. The Royal House of Romania was no stranger to this approach and even had an active involvement through the honorary presidency of the initiative committee held by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth in 1914. The Romanian dream came true centuries later, on 28 May 1975, when the consecration of the church of the Romanian settlement in Jerusalem took place. The Romanian Orthodox Church has three settlements in the Holy Land: Jerusalem, Jordan and Jericho.

The Romanian Church in Jerusalem houses the residence of the Romanian Superior who is responsible for the administrative and spiritual work of the other two settlements in Jericho and Jordan. The settlement is built in the Byzantine style and is similar to a voivodship chapel. Over the years, many guests have passed through the doors of the Romanian church and have written in the book of honour the impressions and thoughts that have crossed their minds while they were there. Among the prominent guests of the church are heads of the Romanian state, heads of government, hierarchs, Romanian and foreign diplomats.

The Romanian Church of Jericho is considered the Romanian pearl located in an Arab enclave. Through the craftsmanship of its construction and its adornment with national icon paintings, the place of worship is an important landmark of Romanian identity and Romanian Orthodox mission.

The Romanian mission in Jericho originated in 1933 when promoters of the Romanian ideal became Constantin and Dumitru Samoila, who donated the land and their houses in Jericho to the Romanian Patriarchate for pastoral missionary purposes. Another personality who was involved in the building of the church in Jericho was Father Ilarion Argatu, who worked closely to raise the necessary funds for the building.

Obtaining the necessary permits, starting the construction and completing the process brings together priests and grooms, teachers and painters who felt they had to put

³ Alexandru Damian Anfile, Teodor T. Burada, *Opere*, vol V Biserică. Călătorii în Orient, Palestina, Editura Basilica, București, 2014, p.31.

their souls at the service of national dignity. Father Superior Ieronim Cretu together with Ambassador Vasile Prună obtained the necessary authorisations for the building of the church from the President of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat, then the Father together with the Minister Plenipotentiary Marin Albu teamed up with the well established aim of finishing the work. The building of the church, which was intended to be recognizably Romanian, was accomplished through the efforts of the team of workers led by the architect Professor Sorin Vasilescu.

The painting of the church was carried out by painters Ioan and Dana Moldoveanu who engraved on the walls of the place of worship faces of Saints adorned with Romanian love and feeling.

The Romanian settlement at Jordan, the third place of worship, is located in a desert area, about 40 km from Jerusalem and 8 km from the biblical city of Jericho. Several hermits, among them the Pious Joseph of Bisericani and St. John James the Chozevite, have served here. The building of the church brought together a number of Romanians who contributed decisively to the design, architecture and painting of the church. The Romanian architect who designed the Romanian Church of Jordan was Dumitru Ionescu Berechet, who submitted the plan and estimate for the construction. The painter who painted on the walls of the church the holy faces to be familiar to the people was Gheorghe Vânătoru.

Following the armed conflict between 5 and 10 June 1967, known in history as the "Six-Day War", the Romanian place of worship became part of the Israeli territory. The outbreaks degenerated and the monks had to leave the hermitage. Only one monk remained, Damian Stogu, who was trapped between the bombings and died as a martyr for the defence of the Orthodox faith and Romanian identity.

An important landmark of the current Romanian mission in Jordan is the date of 28 May 2019 when, after 50 years, a Romanian prayer was said again amidst the ruins of the church. At present the process of demining the area has been completed and steps are being taken to build a new place of worship.

II.2. Romanian Saints, Orthodox Witnesses/Martyrs in a Multifaith World

Saints are people chosen by God to be an example to all those who wish to reach full union with Him. Every nation has in its genes the holiness of people who have decided to dedicate their lives to God. The present academic research brings to the attention of the

readers the mission of two Pious Saints who played an important role in the witness of the Romanian identity in the Holy Land.

Saint Pious Joseph of Bisericani, out of love for God, chose to leave the turmoil of the world and go to the quiet of the desert in the Holy Land. He performed his work in the Jordan Valley, a place where from ancient times it was considered to be the Monastery of the Holy Mission. According to historical information, the monk Joseph of Bisericani was the first monk in our country who gathered around him about 17 disciples in the Jordan Valley with whom „he founded the first Romanian monastic community in the Holy Land.”⁴

The honour that the Romanian Orthodox Church gives him is a proof of the piety and witness of the life and mission that he carried out with humility and dedication in the Holy Land. His love for God and his desire to deepen in prayer led him to go, with the blessing of the abbot, to where he felt the mysterious call of the Saviour. As a sign of piety, the Romanian Orthodox Church has composed the Altar of Saints Joseph and Chiriatic of Bisericani. The text of the 5th Icos is the written testimony of the love and piety that the Romanian people have for him: "Burning with the heart worship the Giver of Life, the Lord's Sepulchre, you set out for the Holy Land, and in the valley of the Jordan you dwelt, our Father Joseph, where you bore even greater hardships for which we praise you" (5th Icos). The dignity of being the first Romanian monk in the Jordan Valley is confessed at every service of the Altar, "Rejoice, the first Romanian hermit in the wilderness of Jordan. (5th Icos).

Being from his lifetime a model worthy to be followed for his pure life combined with fasting, prayer and good deeds, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to canonize him during its working session of 5-7 March 2008. The solemn Mass was celebrated at the Neamț Monastery on the 5th June 2008.

Irinarh Rosetti (1771-1859)

Born in 1771, originally from Focșani, he was a member of the family of the Moldavian high functionaries, the Rosetti. His parents, Nicolae and Pelaghia, tried to give their son a cultural destiny and to bring him closer to God.

In 1792 he put on the monastic clothes and was raised to monasticism by Saint Paisie Velecicovschi, who gave him his first apprenticeship at the monastery printing press.

⁴ Patriarhia Română, Cancelaria Sfântului Sinod, Acte și tomosuri sinodale privind canonizarea sfinților români (1950-2020), Ediția a II a revizuită și adăugită, Editura Basilica, București, 2020, p.551.

This was a blessing for the young monk who enriched his culture and combined prayer with the discovery of the world of books.

After about 12 years of hermit life in Romania, he decided to leave in 1843 with his disciple Nectarie Banu for the Holy Land. There he fulfilled his obedience and the prayer ordinance specific to the monastic state. For five years they lived in Nazareth and then on Mount Tabor. Because of his pure soul and open mind to noetic union, he became God's chosen vessel and was given a special mission - to build a Christian church on Mount Tabor. This he did with complete obedience and dedication from the time when, through an angelic vision on his way to the Monastery of Neamț, he was given by God to build a place of Christian worship on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The building of the Church on Mount Tabor began in 1859 by the Pious Irinarh who started this project as a form of Romanian Orthodox Christian mission and affirmation. This initiative represents a special event for the entire Christian soul that gathers on that mountain in memory of the divine miracle. Monk Irinarh is the founder of the restoration of a place of worship that marks over the centuries a unique way of confessing the Orthodox Christian faith: "By unwavering perseverance, he was able to rebuild the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. Through him, this place, the heart of so many millions of Christian hearts, has once again become a place of worship for Orthodoxy, after centuries of desolation and oblivion, one of the principal places of worship and pilgrimage to the Holy Places."⁵

His initiative prompted many people to help build the Christian church on Mount Tabor. Support from the host people was not slow in coming - a certain Constantine Averino of Haifa collected 14,000 piastres from the Orthodox of Galilee and Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem (1845-1872) sent 5,000 piastres to build the church.⁶

The goal of building the place of worship became the missionary creed of the entire Orthodox community in the Holy Land at that time.

As the Romanian monk's mission grew more and more intense, the love of Christians and non-Christians alike became more and more evident. The unique thing that deserves to be taken to heart is the appreciation of the Romanian monk by non-Christians. He was honoured as a man of God. Respect and love for him was also nurtured in the heart of a Bedouin tribal

⁵ I.P.S. Lucian, Arhiep. Tomisului „Antologie Aghiografică Românească”, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1994, p. 225.

⁶ Pr. Nicolae Timuș, *Starețul român Irinarh al Mănăstirii de pe Muntele Tabor* în revista „Luminătorul” a Bisericii Ortodoxe din Basarabia, nr. 9 din septembrie, 1937, pp. 539-541.

chief from the Galilee area: "The chief of the Bedouin tribe of Galilee, Achil-aga himself, believing Irinarh to be a dervish, a man of God, often asked him for advice, showing him all respect and always ready to give the abbot help and protect him from any danger".⁷

His missionary work could not be accomplished because he passed away at the age of 88. The news of the Romanian monk's death was a new occasion for the unity of Orthodoxy in the Holy Land. Thus, Christians from Nazareth, Cana of Galilee and other nearby places came to accompany in the hour of passing the man who was their spiritual father, a witness before God for their souls and a preacher of eternity.

The building of the place of worship was continued by the disciple of Irinarh, the hieromonk Nectarie Banu, who followed the continuation of the mission of his priestly father. He was helped by the Archbishop of Nazareth and Patriarch Cyril of Jerusalem, who kindly supported the Romanian monks' efforts to the end.

II.3. 2000 years since the Nativity of the Lord

This event was an occasion for uniting the whole of Orthodoxy around the Holy Sacrament and the witness of the same creed of identity.

II.4. Mother Church hierarchy in support of the Romanian witness in the Holy Land

The fraternal communion specific to Orthodoxy has materialized over the years through certain canonical visits between hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church and members of the Church of Jerusalem.

Guests from Jerusalem at the Romanian Patriarchate

In 1924 Patriarch Damian of Jerusalem made a canonical visit to the Romanian Patriarchate, on which occasion, through Metropolitan Dositei of Sevastia, he offered His Majesty King Ferdinand I the Order of the Grand Cross of the Holy Sepulchre.

In 1925, Metropolitan Dositei of Sevastia visited to mark the moment of fraternal joy caused by the decision to establish the rank of Patriarch in the Romanian Orthodox Church.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.539.

1975 a delegation of the Jerusalem Patriarchate visited the Romanian Patriarchate on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the recognition of the autocephaly and the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Romanian Patriarchate.

Patriarch Diodorus of Jerusalem paid a canonical visit to the Romanian Patriarchate on 15-26 June 1982. On this occasion fraternal unity was reaffirmed, the importance of the Romanian settlements in the Holy Land for the Orthodox mission was emphasized and several monasteries in the North of Moldavia were visited.

The enthronement of Patriarch Theoctist in 1986, attended by Patriarch Diodorus.

A delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, composed of His Eminence Metropolitan Constantinos of Skytopolis and His Eminence Archimandrite Dimiytrios, Secretary of the Holy Synod, was present in Bucharest from 25-27 October 1995.

Archbishop Theophan of Gerasa and Exarch of the Holy Sepulchre was present at the Holy Mass for the enthronement of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel on 30 September 2007.

In 2014 and 2018 there were canonical visits of His Beatitude Theophilus III of Jerusalem, during which fraternal communion was strengthened through Eucharistic union and gifts were exchanged.

Missionary Visits of the Romanian Hierarchs in the Holy Land

On 20-30 May 1975 His Beatitude Iustinian accompanied by Metropolitan Iustin Moisescu of Moldavia, Archbishop Teoctist Arăpașu of Oltenia, Archbishop Teofil Herineanu of Cluj, Bishop Vasile Coman of Oradea, Vicar Bishops Antonie Plămădeală and Lucian Florea paid a canonical visit to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem on the occasion of which he consecrated the two Romanian churches of Jerusalem and Jordan.

In 2005, on the occasion of the enthronement of His Beatitude Theophilus III, on September 6, a delegation of the Romanian Patriarchate composed of His Beatitude Theophan Metropolitan of Oltenia, His Beatitude Vincențiu and Pr David Pristavu was present to convey the message from the Primate of our Church.

CHAPTER III: WITNESS THROUGH HOLINESS: SAINT JAMES THE CHOZEVITE

III.1. Life and Mission

A contemporary Saint who carried on his shoulders the burden of childhood sadness caused by the death of his parents and the longing for family communion was the Pious John James the Chozevite. Originally from Botoşani county, the child Ilie Iacob was orphaned and was looked after, raised and educated by his grandmother Maria, who would become his model of love for God, his neighbour and a fervent prayerful mother.

The moment of his grandmother's departure from this life represented for young Elijah an assumption of the responsibility of living alone. For a few years he was in the care of his uncle Alecu Iacob, who helped him discover his love of culture and literature. God's call was great and so he decided to enter monasticism. This materialised on 8 April 1936 when he received the angelic image with the name John. In the monastery of Neamţ he surpassed many monks with his cultural accuracy and spiritual maturity.

His greatest wish was to go to the Holy Land, which he did. With the blessing of the abbot and the one he received in tears from the graves of his loved ones, he chose the path of monasticism in the holy desert. Arriving in those lands, he made a stop at Golgotha, worshipped at the Holy Sepulchre and then travelled with two other Romanian monks with whom he left, Damschin Trofin and Claudiu Derevleanu, through all the lands full of holy history.

God chose him for priestly service and so he was ordained deacon and priest at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The mission to which he was called was for the Hieromonk John James an additional reason for increased prayer and love.

In 1947, Patriarch Nicodemus appointed him abbot of the Romanian Hermitage of Jordan dedicated to St. John the Baptist, where for five years he imposed an ascetic and spiritual order based on a more severe fasting and prayer of the heart. After a temporary life in this community, he wanted to go to the desert to deepen his prayer and silence.

His whole life was in the service of God and of the pilgrim groups that were travelling through the Holy Land. His mission was adorned with humility, fasting and prayer. His love embraced every soul who came to him for advice or support in time of need. His life and mission on this earth is a model for all of us today: "As a servant of the altar, he spread the seed of the divine Word in the hearts of the faithful, who keep his memory, celebrating him as a great living of Romanian monasticism. His ascetic deeds, his life of prayer and work, and

the example of fasting combined with love of neighbour, remain as a telling example for the world of today and for future generations."⁸

The confession of the monk John James is authentic, adorned with love and sacrifice. Eager for the wilderness, he withdrew to the cave of Saint Anne in the valley of the river Horat, where he fulfilled his mission and his witness through the sacrifice of his own existence. The end of his earthly life was for the Romanian curate an occasion of joy and strengthening in faith.

On 5 August 1960, the Romanian monk gave his soul into God's hands at the age of 47. He fell asleep with a smile on his face, a smile of meeting the Heavenly Bridegroom, of sinking into eternity. His body was consecrated according to monastic rites, the service being performed by Archimandrite Anfilohie, abbot of the monastery of St George the Hezekiah, surrounded by monks and hermits.⁹

Confessions and Memories

The personality and mission of St. John James has not been forgotten in history but has given rise to testimonies worthy of consideration:

His Eminence Irineu Pop testifies to the holiness of the Pious John James as he heard from the monks of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem who considered the Romanian monk "the man of God". The Abbot of Chozeva Monastery, Archimandrite Gherman, confessed to Father Irineu, Superior of the Romanian settlements at that time, that Father John Jacob is the Saint who performs the most miracles of all the saints with relics in the Holy Land.

Another testimony about the holiness of the Pious John James belongs to the Most Holy Father John Archbishop of Timișoara and Metropolitan of Banat who puts at our heart a miracle experienced by him and his sister from Romania. The Metropolitan's sister went to worship at the coffin with the holy relics and sprinkled a handful of dust from her father's house on the glass of the coffin. A few minutes after this event the whole church was filled with fragrance and the ground was soaked with chrism. This not only shows the obvious holiness of the curate but also the longing and love that the man of God had for his homeland.

A longer period of Romanian mission in the Holy Land was had by the Most Holy Father Ieronim Sinaitul, Bishop of Dacia Felix. Father Jerome's long mission was fully accompanied by the presence of St. John James. The testimonies of Most Holy Father

⁸ Arhiva Administrației Patriarhale, Dosar 359/1970 f.34.

⁹ IPS Irineu Pop Bistrițeanu, *Sfântul Ioan Iacob, sihastrul român de la Hozeva*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2015, p.47.

Ieronim are proof that the hermit is a saint of God and a friend of the Romanians, a full teacher of those who seek longing for heaven. A first proof of the fact that he was a Saint of God from his lifetime is the testimony of Patriarch Diodor to Father Superior Jerome. The latter confessed to him, "eitan aghios antropos" ≈ he was a holy man! His fasts, his vigils, the power of prayer, his perfect humility and austerity of life were well known. He was widely regarded as a living saint.

The canonization of St. John James of Neamț, the New Chozevite was proclaimed by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church on 20 June 1992. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem decided to officially recognize the sanctity of the Romanian monk in the autumn session of the Holy Synod of the Year of Salvation 2015. The Mass was officiated under the auspices of His Beatitude Theophilus III Patriarch of Jerusalem and All Palestine on January 31, 2016, at the Monastery of "Saint George the Venerable" in Chozeva.

Archimandrite Constantine, Egument of the Holy Monastery Chozeva also praises the love of the pilgrims for St. John and put before Him all the sufferings, desires and burdens of the soul. Over the centuries, several printed works have been published as proof of the piety and love of the Romanian people towards Saint John Jacob.

III.2. Lyrical Meditations

His writings can be classified as lyrical meditations of a religious nature. Each writing appears versified but the content is that of a moralistic prose intended to help anyone who reads them to change their thoughts and life for the better. In the course of time, several volumes dedicated to the literary mission of the Saint have appeared: the book "Food for Soul" edited on 25 November 1963; another volume appeared in 1970, with the following title: "The book of fearful visions and too wonderful writings, which help the soul to escape from death" edited by the monk Ioanchie and printed in Jerusalem. In 2010 the volume „For those with a needy soul like me..." appeared. Complete works - printed by Doxologia Publishing House of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia and Bucovina.

CHAPTER IV: IN SEARCH OF SAINTS AND HOLINESS:THE ROMANIAN PILGRIMAGE FORM OF MISSION IN THE HOLY LAND

Pilgrimage is a religious phenomenon with visible missionary effects due to its pastoral and spiritual character. Any journey with a religious purpose is based on man's desire to unite with God and change his life. For every person, a journey to the Holy Land cannot be a mere journey, but has special spiritual implications. Pilgrimage is also a form of thanksgiving because, as the Most Blessed Patriarch says: "Pilgrimage is a spiritual act of thanksgiving to God for the blessings received from Him".¹⁰ Man owes God thanks for all the benefits he has received.

Over the years there have been several missionary journeys, pilgrimages to the Holy Land that highlight the love of the Romanians for the biblical territories.

A noteworthy pilgrimage in contemporary history is the one made in 1925 by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan who, on 21 September, set sail on the ship "Emperor Trajan" with about 160 souls to the Holy Lands. Among the participants in the pilgrimage was the priest Iosif Trifa who made a travel diary and wrote some impressions and historical information from each visited site. His memoirs gave rise to scholarly studies that are to this day a missionary manual on the importance of pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

In contemporary times, pilgrimages to the Holy Land have helped people to rediscover themselves and the beauty of Christianity by walking in the places where He was born. In order to meet the spiritual needs of the people, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel established the Basilica Travel Pilgrimage Agency in 2007, through which religious trips to the Holy Land can be made. The main role of the Agency is to offer people the best means to reach Israel, Palestine or any location with religious objectives both in the country and abroad, a priest accompanying the group and the possibility of always having theological explanations to the touristic objectives or doubts that arise.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

The research also includes testimonies of some of the priests, guides and pilgrims who were touched by the mystery of those places and wanted to share their experience:

Father Mihăiță Profiroiu¹¹ says that it is very important as a priest guide to make pilgrims aware of the importance of their presence in a certain place in the Holy Land. The presence in Bethlehem should be seen as a real fact that leads us to the Incarnation of the Saviour for us humans and for our salvation. Our presence in Cana of Galilee, where the first miracle took place, must be experienced as we, as pilgrims, are also in a position to see with our own eyes the first wonderful deed done by the Saviour Christ. The celebration of the Holy Mass and the reading of the Gospel pericope in Romanian is a great joy for every clergyman and for the missionary pilgrims present there.

Another testimony belongs to Father Deacon Bogdan Hosu: "I believe that for a deacon who is de facto a servant without the responsibility of shepherding a community, guiding in the Holy Land is a special missionary practice that has the potential to prepare him for a future mission in a parish".¹²

Father David Pristavu's testimony also represents a mission assumed to be a guide for pilgrims in the Holy Places. The joy of a priest guide is all the greater when, at the end of the journey, people return home more spiritually strengthened and happier. This proves that the mission was not in vain and the pilgrimage was not just a simple journey but a real school of the Christian religion. Father David is happy for every person who wants to change their life after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land: "I have this joy that with every group that leaves I see them fulfilled, I see them changed. If one out of fifty-five seats on the bus changes their life, it weighs a lot to me."¹³

CHAPTER V: CURRENT ISSUES, STRATEGIES AND MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVES

V.1. Situation of the Romanian Community

Christian religion and Orthodoxy is an integral part of national identity. The Romanian people have always been close to God and culturally enriched through the Church,

¹¹ Părintele Mihăiță Profiroiu este printre primii ghizi angajați de agenția de pelerinaje Basilica Travel.

¹² Mărturie primită din partea părintelui diacon Bogdan Hosu, ghid turistic din cadrul Arhiepiscopiei Sibiului, în luna Ianuarie 2023, care și a exprimat verbal acordul pentru integrarea mărturiei în teză.

¹³ Mărturie primită din partea părintelui David Pristavu în luna Mai 2023. Părintele îndeplinește această misiune de ghid în Țara Sfântă de aproximativ 33 de ani.

which has had and still has a defining role in educating the national culture. His Beatitude the Patriarch confesses: "The Romanian Orthodox Church has made a major contribution to the formation and promotion of the culture of the Romanian nation. With the first attempts at state organization, the role of the Church in the development of Romanian culture and civilization followed the Byzantine model; a number of ecclesiastical personalities: bishops, priests or monks, among whom we will mention only a few names, guided the main cultural activity of the time".¹⁴.

In the Holy Land there is a Romanian monastic community representative for the Orthodox identity of our nation. I will list a few representatives who, through their status as monks, lead the Christians there and the pilgrims who cross the threshold of Romanian churches towards a better knowledge of the Orthodox faith and national culture.

Father Gherasim Timofte, priest at the Church of the Holy Archangels in Yaffo Port, Tel-Aviv, confesses that he has been holding this mission for 22 years. Like any beginning, it was difficult in the past, only 2-3 people used to come to mass, but now every Saturday the church gathers about 600/700 people. Through its pastoral missionary work it also contributes to educating the national conscience. A tradition it has implemented is that every year at the Holy Resurrection service after offering the Holy Light the feast tropar is sung and then three verses of the national hymn.

Father Avraam Mintar, priest minister at the Romanian settlement in Jericho is the one who welcomes with great joy the Romanian and Orthodox pilgrims who come to worship at the Romanian church. Its mission is unique in that the Romanian settlement in this area is representative for the host community and so every day foreign guests and delegations come to admire the Romanian pearl planted there.

As for the situation of the Romanian community in Israel, there is a relatively small number of people who strive, as far as possible, to preserve the traditions and the joy of communion learned in their native lands. On the occasion of holidays they preserve the inherited customs, preach Orthodoxy in their own language and thus confess their Romanian identity. On the feast day of the Representation Church, the Romanian residents come to the Romanian service as if they were at home. The monastic community here, together with the Romanians from different parts of the Holy Land, form a big heart that beats to the Romanian Mioritic rhythm. The Romanian community in the Palestinian area is also a factor in the

¹⁴ <https://basilica.ro/mesajul-patriarhului-daniel-de-ziua-culturii-nationale-biserica-a-plamadit-si-promovat-cultura-poporului-roman/> accesat la data de 18.02.2023, ora 19.26.

witness of Romanian identity. They have the support of the President of the Palestinian Authority, who has offered free days to Christians on the occasion of the major holidays.

Romania's representative institutions are partners of the national missionary approach and also contribute to the activities promoting Romanianism in the Holy Land. An important point of the research is also the analysis of the mission of the community of Jews originally from Romania who also contribute to the shaping of a beautiful image of the national culture.

Among the personalities who contribute to the Romanian identity today are:

Dr. Herman Berkovits, the personal physician of the Prime Minister of Israel, is a Jew of Romanian origin from Târgu Lăpuș, County of Maramureș. He is a leading figure in Romanian and Israeli medicine and has made a decisive contribution to the management of critical situations for Romania - the fire at the Colectiv Club and the Covid pandemic.

Journalist Edgard Bitel, a Jew of Romanian origin from Piatra Neamț, founded the Betapres Publishing House, which was born out of a desire to promote Romanian-language printing in Israel at minimal expense to authors. Among the most important achievements we list the organization of Romanian cultural events on the occasion of the 60th and 85th anniversary of Nichita Stănescu's birth.

Journalist Doina Maiseles considered the Phoenix Bird of Romanian journalism in Israel. She was editor of several Romanian-language Jewish publications and was instrumental in spreading an honourable image of national culture among Jews.

The journalist Dragoș Nelersa, president of the Association of Romanian-speaking Israeli Writers, is the one who gathers around him people of culture who want to make their contribution to the Romanian life. One of his greatest missionary achievements is the establishment of the publication "Gazeta Românească" at the beginning of 2000, a magazine dedicated exclusively to the promotion of the Romanian language in Israel. Mr. Nelersa explains the motivation for the establishment of the editorial: "All these Romanian speakers need publications, cultural information as a spiritual nourishment of the soul. We want to print a newspaper that will be a cultural bridge for the Romanian community in Israel".¹⁵.

CASE STUDY: Superiors of Romanian settlements and their mission

1. Father Irineu Pop 1989-1990

¹⁵ Mărturie primită din partea domnului Dragoș Nelersa, în luna Februarie 2022.

Archimandrite Irineu, although he held the administrative position of superior for only one year, had noteworthy achievements for the preservation of Romanian identity and the confession of Orthodoxy. He inaugurated a square bearing the name of the great Gala Galaction and this has not been scattered in the pages of the press of the time or history. Another Romanian identity initiative was the creation of a cultural supplement, the Romanian magazine „ Spirit liber" where articles, memoirs, impressions and diary pages were collected, all of them adding up to an album of Romanian experiences.

2. Father Vincențiu Grifoni 1990-1994

His mission was constantly in administrative steps to ensure the smooth running of pastoral missionary activity.

3. Father Ioan Selejean 1 februarie-12 iulie 1994

Although the shortest period as a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the Holy Places, Archimandrite Ioan made the most of this time by doing housework and painting the church porch. The engraving on the wall at the entrance of the outline of the country and the Mother of God watching over our homeland are among the most eloquent proofs that remain for eternity of the Romanian presence in the Holy Land.

4. Father Ieronim Crețu 1994-2014

Archimandrite Jerome's missionary ministry is his longest to date. Each year spent as Superior was for Father Cretu an occasion to fulfill the missionary obedience he received. The beginnings of his activity were linked to obtaining the authorizations for the construction of the Romanian church in Jericho.

The development of pilgrimages and training through collaboration with schools of Christian guides of those who wish to be part of the activity of preaching the word of God, as possible, together with the Representation team is another important project carried out.

Another mission of impact for the whole of Christianity and specifically for Orthodoxy was the organization of the event "Bethlehem 2000", which was the occasion for the liturgical unity of Orthodox Christian hierarchs from all over the world. Also on this occasion the Jericho settlement and a chapel were consecrated.

Over the years Father Superior has hosted many groups of pilgrims, official delegations from home and abroad and on each occasion he has shown diplomacy and ecumenical dialogue in the Orthodox Christian spirit.

5. Father Timotei Aioanei 2014 February 2014-middle of January 2015

Throughout the period in which he was the representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the Holy Places, Father Timotei carried out a mission to reunite the minority of the Romanians in the territories, participated as a guest at several services in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and was always in prayer for the Romanian people.

6. Father Teofil Anăstăsoaie 2015-Up to the Present Day

Today the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church is carried out with deep devotion and full responsibility by Father Archimandrite Teofil. Every missionary endeavour that they will write about in the following pages bodes well for the affirmation of Romanianism and the preaching of the Orthodox Christian faith in the Holy Land.

Conclusions

The affirmation of the Romanian identity and the confession of the Orthodox faith must be the benchmark of every Christian who feels united with the land for which our ancestors fought and prayed to be free and whole for us today. The pages of this work are a humble attempt to highlight the role that the Romanian Orthodox Church has in affirming the Romanian identity in the holy lands. Each of the personalities or Saints mentioned in the thesis are role models for perseverance in faith and in the defence of true national and religious values, all of them characterised by fraternal love.

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