

**"AUREL VLAICU" UNIVERSITY OF ARAD FACULTY OF
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY "ILARION V. FELEA"
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL
THE FIELD OF THEOLOGY**

PHD THESIS

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ARAD

2024

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**The emergence and development of the system of
parish organization in the Orthodox Church.
Historical-canonical study**

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INTRODUCTION

1. Preliminaries

Orthodox theology is the explanation of the Faith Of The Church for each generation of believers and for each particular pastoral context, in order to make known to people the love of God for the whole world, expressed through the Gospel, and, equally, to support Christians in the process of salvation and to ensure communion of love with God and among others. Whether it is elaborated in the university space or in the parish, in society or in the monastery, "in the shadow of the cross" or "in the glory" of each time, true theology is – in the orthodox conception – the word of life born in the life of the church that lives in the Holy Spirit the mystery and truth in the humanity of God and the deification of man in Jesus Christ¹. In this sense, father Dumitru Staniloae summarizing Christian teaching highlighted that theology is an ecclesial ministry that aims to save people: "it is the reflection on the content of faith inherited from the initial testimony and experience of revelation that we have in Scripture and in the Apostolic Tradition, in order to make it effective as a factor of salvation for each generation of believers"².

The Orthodox Church – missionary by its very nature-has always paid attention to the social dynamics and society, the forms of organization and the normative coordinates that guided the main evolutionary moments of the individual, aiming, in fact, at the transposition in society of its eschatological content. Starting from this reality-as natural as it is necessary – the picture of the third millennium of Christianity captures, if not a direct relationship, at least the presence of the Orthodox Church in Romania in all dimensions of life, from the social to the cultural³.

¹ Preafericitul Părinte DANIEL, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, *Cuvânt înainte la Teologia ortodoxă în secolul al XX-lea și la începutul secolului al XXI-lea*, Ed. Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2011, p. 5.

² Pr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2003, p. 100.

³ The presence of the Church in social life has always been guided by the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church, according to which the clergy are forbidden to belong to political parties-see, more, Irimie Marga, *Drept Canonic*, Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, Sibiu, 2009, p. 2. Although the incompatibility of pastoral mission with worldly affairs has been affirmed and highlighted throughout the evolution of Christianity (apostolic canons 6, 81, 83). The conclusions of the IV Ecumenical Council, Constantinople – (861), the concept of the Byzantine Symphony –

The radiography of the relationship between the individual/society and the religious feeling in the Twenty-First Century in the Romanian space presents us with a globalized and secularized society, in fact subject to a complex process of desacralization, a context that generated the profound transformation of the religious life, of the liturgical community and mystic-individual manifestation of the individual in the contemporary society. The transmission of the Gospel message and the fulfillment of the Church's mission in social life – in a dynamic missionary context and a heightened social and moral volatility-involve more and more challenges, but this does not mean that it is impossible to achieve. In such circumstances, the means of communication used to carry out the pastoral, liturgical, cultural and philanthropic missions of the Church – strongly affected by individualism and secularization – need a well-defined framework, based on principles and instruments that preserve the tradition of organizing Romanian orthodoxy. Starting from these realities, the church turned her attention to communion and social Brotherhood, the creeds and dogmas having as mission the encounter between God and the world, transposed by ensuring an Orthodox perspective and following the presence of God on all levels of the world, in a perfect and universal-human manner. In the Orthodox reality, the mission of explaining the faith and of ecclesial service is accomplished through the smallest unit of church life – the enoria (Parish). First of all we have to answer the question *What is a parish?* as only then, during this doctoral research, to allocate an extended space to capture and understand in depth the evolution of the concept, the role and functions of the organizational structure, as well as the determinants of this evolution. Currently, according to the *Statute for the organization and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church*⁴ – the constituent units of the Romanian Orthodox Church are represented by the parish, monastery, deanery (protoieria), Vicariate, diocese (archdiocese and episcopacy), respectively Metropolia, all of which have the status of legal entities of private law and public utility, with the rights and obligations provided by this statute⁵. Within the same statutory document it is stipulated that "the parish is the

definition of the relationship between the state and the church – legitimized the principle of harmonization of political interests with those of the Church, leading to the development of cooperation between the two entities. Throughout history, the Romanian space has not excluded the Byzantine paradigm in transposing the relationship between the state and the church.

⁴ Published in Monitorul Oficial al României, Partea I, Nr. 97/10.II.2020.

⁵ *** *Statute for the organization and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, art. 40.

community of Orthodox Christians, clergy and laity, located on a certain territory and subordinated to the Diocesan Center from the canonical, legal, administrative and patrimonial point of view, headed by a parish priest appointed by the chiriarch (archbishop or bishop) of the respective diocese"⁶. Moreover, the statutory document extensively defines both the role, functions and duties of the parish, as well as the rights and obligations of the parish priest and of the internal bodies configured to support his ministry, such as: the parish Assembly, the council and the parish committee, respectively the relationship of this form of organization (parish) with the other constituent units of the church, but we will not stop our attention on them at this stage of the research, allocating them a generous space within Chapter IV-dedicated to the parish system in the contemporary debate.

The coordinates presented above regarding the parish represent the transposition of the local administrative organization in the Orthodox Christian reality of the XXI century, but the transformation process that led to the present reality was a complex one and closely followed the evolution of society-through the use of the usual means of social organization⁷ – even if it was perceived and lived as a community distinct from any other kind of community, starting precisely from the principle of communion⁸. This fact confirms the manifestation of the church within human society both as a spiritual, sacramental reality, but also as a social-institutional reality, and man, as an individual, belonging to both the Kingdom Of Heaven and the Kingdom of Caesar (cf. Matthew 22: 21; Mark 12: 17). On the other hand, from a symbolic point of view, the parish constitutes the mystical body of Christ, within which the grace of God works and in which every Christian must integrate, in order to be a partaker of grace and acquire salvation⁹ – there is a direct and undeniable relationship between the two.

In fact, the first use of the term Parish – *παροικία* (*paroikia*) – was attributed to Jewish culture to define the form of Organization of Jewish communities spread in the pagan world

⁶ *** *Statutul pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, art. 43.

⁷ Pr. Liviu Stan, „Instituțiile de asistență socială în Biserica Veche”, in vol. *Biserica și Dreptul, studii de drept canonic ortodox*, part. a IV-a, p. 66.

⁸ Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Biserica în sensul de locaș și de largă comuniune în Hristos”, în *Ortodoxia*, 3 (1982), „Comunitate prin iubire”, în *Ortodoxia*, 1 (1963), p. 54-67.

⁹ Ene și Ecaterina Braniște, *Dicționar enciclopedic de cunoștințe religioase*, Caransebeș, Eds. Diecezană Caransebeș, 2001, p. 350.

(Diaspora), later taken over by elini for the definition of the first Christian communities within the cities. The spread in the countryside of Christian principles, including those of organization, led to the emergence of a new term that defined the same reality, namely the one of ἐν χωρίον¹⁰. In the early stages of Christianity, the term Parish was meant the totality of the inhabitants of a town or village of Christian religion, but from the fifth to sixth centuries it was referred to a specific church constituency in a town or village, headed by a parish priest. In time, parish churches became stand-alone churches, led by priests with permanent delegation, dependent on the bishop.

In the early Church catechumens underwent profound moral and ascetic training (catechization) as a fundamental part of the process of conversion to the Christian faith in the first centuries of Christianity. Becoming a Christian meant a capital decision, a complete break with the past and old customs, and the appropriation of Christian principles and values, as well as the reception of the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and the Eucharist required specific training and education. Man had to be taught to live according to evangelical precepts, so catechumens were trained in the basic teachings of Christianity, including faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, in God and the Holy Trinity, and in other fundamental theological teachings, especially those of the New Testament, to understand Christian history and message. On the other hand, it was not at all easy to maintain their faith, surrounded by people who lived in malice and immorality. It is enough to read a few passages from the Epistle addressed by the Holy Apostle Paul to the Romans, to understand what it meant to live in a social climate in which people became captive to worldly sins and in which "God surrendered them to uncleanness, according to the lusts of their heart": " they were full of all injustice, of debauchery, of cunning, of greed, of malice; full of envy, of murder, of strife, of deceit, of gossips; deniers, haters of God, reproaches, Haughts, Haughts, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, disregarding, transgressors of the word, unloving, lacking in love, lacking in mercy..."(Romans 1: 24-31). The social reality of that era can be compared with a real moral war, waged with the enemies of darkness, and the catechumen was only at the beginning of its preparation.

¹⁰ Arhid. Ioan N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii*, p. 258-263; Ene Braniște, Ecaterina Braniște, *Dicționar enciclopedic de cunoștințe religioase*, p. 350.

Against this background, the catechumens' preparation process also focused on moral preparation, as they were trained in Christian ethics and moral values, including Love For God and close, Christian virtues, and the avoidance of sins. In this sense, in some early Christian communities, catechumens went through periods of fasting, intense prayer, and other practices intended for humility, spiritual focus, and, why not, self-control. Subsequently, the process of Christianization reached its central point, after the catechumens went through moral and doctrinal preparation, baptism – through immersion in water, signifying death to sin and rebirth into a new life in Christ. After baptism, catechumens received, for the first time, the Eucharist in the Liturgy, directly participating in communion with the body and blood of Christ. Although the process of catechization varied depending on the Christian community and the historical period, the main objective of the catechumens' preparation was to prepare them spiritually and morally to become members of the Christian community and to live in accordance with Christian teachings and values.

Making an incursion in time, we note that the Orthodox Church had a fundamental role in the religious, social and cultural life of the Romanian people in the Middle Ages, holding the role of custodian but also protector (especially during periods of foreign occupation or political subjugation) of the Christian faith in the Romanian regions and constituting itself in the main symbol of the national identity that resisted assimilation or foreign religious pressure. In fact, with the crystallization of the first forms of pre-state and state organization in the Romanian space, the researchers highlighted the fact that the church organization followed the secular organization. Moreover, parishes have played a central role in the teaching and preservation of Christian teachings and liturgical traditions, with church services and sermons of priests having a significant impact on the formation and consolidation of the Christian faith of the population. At the same time, parishes have played a significant role in organizing and ensuring the cohesion of local communities, providing a space for debate including social, economic and even legal issues of the community. The parish priests concerned themselves with the spiritual and moral care of the faithful being responsible for offering religious and moral advice and developing a healthy spiritual life. The Middle Ages, more precisely the social, political and economic realities of the Times, called for the intervention of parishes and on the dimension of supporting and protecting the poor and needy in the community, collecting donations and providing food, shelter and medical care for those lacking resources.

In the modern era, the Orthodox Church has ensured the preservation, consolidation and promotion of the national identity, including by maintaining and using the Romanian language in the liturgy and sermons. Briefly, some of the functions of the Church aimed at involvement in the process of education and literacy of the Romanian people, especially in rural areas, monasteries functioning as educational centers. Another function concerned the development of social and charitable infrastructure by supporting hospitals, schools and orphanages, essentially disadvantaged social categories, contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of communities. Thus, another dimension is added to the role of the Church in general and of parishes in particular in the community, namely that of agent of modernization. The main role of the parish in the Romanian space in the modern era was that of spiritual and moral guidance of the faithful in an increasingly diversified society, and the priests had the role of religious leaders, ensuring spiritual, moral and ethical consultation. In fact, during the shepherding period of Metropolitan Andrei Saguna the parish became one of the most important administrative and spiritual structures of the Orthodox Church – by reference to the mission and role played in the communities, being promoted the idea of autonomy of parishes and their role in the administration and organization of church affairs. Starting from his own ecclesiological vision of the role of the Church in the relationship with the state and the community – fully translated into legal and canonical language within the organic statute – Metropolitan Andrei Saguna campaigned to increase the involvement of believers in the local church life, by ensuring a significant role in the election and appointment of priests in the community. In the same register, the Metropolitan of Transylvania argued that, in addition to the main function of ensuring the Religious Service and place of worship, the parishes had to fulfill the role of centers of Romanian culture and contribute to the preservation and promotion of the national identity, to the solidarity of the community and its welfare. In this context, the role of the parish was formalized on a wide range of dimensions of community life.

The effervescence of the era claimed the involvement of the church, including in the social and political emancipation issues of the time, supporting the national movements and supporting the idea of national unity of the Romanians during the revolution of 1848 and the war of independence of 1877-1878. Moreover, it should not be neglected that by means of the established church constitution, Metropolitan Andrei Saguna had as a secondary objective including compensating the privations to which the austro-Hungarian dualism subjected the

Romanian nation, ensuring the possibility of democratic exercise of rights through diocesan synods (met annually), as well as through National Church Congresses (convened every three years). From this perspective, the relationship of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space with the state authorities was a complex one, whether we are talking about the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire or the modern Romanian state, ranging from convergence to divergence, depending on the circumstances of the era. However, the Church has remained a fundamental element in the religious, cultural and social life of the Romanian people in the modern era and has continued to have a significant impact in the development and evolution of Romanian society, although such moments have enshrined the autonomy of the Church in relation to the state form of organization.

The communist period was marked mainly by challenges for the Romanian Orthodox Church, since the political regime of that period often had a hostile attitude towards religion and especially towards the Orthodox Church, considering, especially, the role of binder in society that it had. However, the Orthodox Church, through its ministers and through its parishes and monasteries, has played a complex role in the evolution of society and in the preservation of identity values. Considering these premises, the research project starts from several questions, one of which is the timing of assigning a relevant role to the parish in the organization and functioning of the church and society. In this respect we will make an incursion on the canonical tradition in order to identify the reasons why the parish life, the parish community and the entire parish system do not benefit from increased attention. Moreover, during this doctoral research we will try to identify to what extent the rural communities detached from the bishop contributed to the crystallization of the first forms of Organization of parishes within the Church. Another dimension aimed to be explored in this doctoral research is represented by the evolution of the parochial organization system within other national churches, as well as the factors that influenced this process. Inevitably the coordinates that will guide the research will have to include aspects regarding how the evolution of the parish was influenced by the dynamics of the relationship between church and society, respectively Church and state and, from this perspective, we will try to identify which were the main factors that influenced the emergence, development and consolidation of the system of parish organization in the Romanian space. The answer to these questions is not simple, but through this approach I will try to clarify how the

system of parochial organization in the Orthodox Church arose and developed, from a historical and canonical point of view.

2. Motivation for choosing the subject

Motivation of the proposal of this doctoral research topic-the emergence and development of the system of parish organization in the Orthodox Church. Historical-canonical study-derives from the needs felt as a member of the Orthodox clergy, respectively to clarify the pastoral mission in the life of the XXI Century Society, on all components of the relationship between the parish and the pastoral community, individual and parish, in order to calibrate the missionary, liturgical and cultural-philanthropic activity, in accordance with the teaching transmitted by the Savior Jesus Christ and by the Holy Apostles. Moreover, in the constant desire to update the priestly work I find that the Christian priest has always been the man of time and times, his mission being carried out based on coordinates governed by the divine revelation, this being transposed through his sources, respectively the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition. In fact, these coordinates should support in the process of confirmation the one called to the highest level of the priesthood, to take from the experience of the individual and of society in order to be able to project a future in which man knows and glorifies God, both in the church and in the world¹¹.

The church is formed by the laity together with the clergy and cannot exist otherwise – "as without the faithful there is no point in the existence of the clergy and being constituted in the church, so without the clergy the faithful constituted in the church cannot exist"¹². Thus, the work of the Savior Jesus Christ is continued by the Church, which is the one who preaches the Holy Gospel and the Savior through worship and the Divine Liturgy¹³ and who facilitates the process of deification of man. In this sense, after the Resurrection, through the message sent to the Apostles: "peace to you! As the father sent me, I send you. And when he said these things, he breathed upon them, and said to them, take the Holy Spirit. To whom you will forgive sins, they

¹¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre preoție*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 1998, p. 62-63.

¹² Pr. Dr. Liviu Stan, *Mirenii în Biserică, importanța elementului mirean în Biserică și participarea lui la exercitarea puterii bisericesti, studiu canonic-istoric*, Tiparul tipografiei arhidiecezane Sibiu, 1939, p. 24-25.

¹³ Valer Bel, *Missio Dei*, în Ioan Chirilă (coord.), *Misiunea Bisericii în Sfânta Scriptură și în istorie*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, pp. 12-15.

will be forgiven, and to whom you will keep them, they will be kept” (John 21: 23) The Savior instituted¹⁴ the Holy Sacrament of the priesthood. In fact, the Holy Fathers John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus emphasize the decisive role that the priesthood plays in the process of deification of man, perceived as his sacralization within the limits of his human nature.

As for the parish, in the biblical sense of the concept, it represents the missionary cell par excellence, a space where individuals live together in the community¹⁵ and which facilitates the transmission of the teaching of salvation, the place where the threefold service of the Savior is carried out, both through clergy and lay people. The realization of the saving work of the Savior Jesus Christ within the parish requires the strengthening of spiritual unity through parish priests, who have all the liturgical and missionary means. On the other hand, the mission of the priest has another valence, which aims to relate to the other bodies and institutions of the church, but to the coordinates of the relationship with his bishop. The 1st and 2nd Apostolic canons emphasize that the Bishop is the direct follower of the Holy Apostles, since only he has the fullness of grace. In addition, according to the teachings of St. Gregory of Nazianzus¹⁶, each local church was headed by a bishop, since he was invested with both the responsibility of performing the sacraments (which can be performed by any priest) and the possibility of performing the sacrament of ordination. On these theological grounds, St. Ignatius theophoros points out, in his Epistle to the Ephesians¹⁷, that the Church is seen in the bishop and unseen in Christ. The intrinsic link between the bishop and the Church has been affirmed since the second century by the bishop of Antioch, who tells us that the Bishop is the image of the Father¹⁸. Eloquently in this sense, he

¹⁴ According to the foundations of Holy Scripture, all the seven Holy Mysteries are instituted by the Savior Jesus Christ, and their divine institution from Christ and their commission by the Apostles and their followers – the bishops, and later the priests, constitute the main element of the being of the mysteries-see more: Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1978, p. 143-144.

¹⁵ See, at length, Pr. Prof. dr. Ioan Bria, *Liturghia după Liturghie*, Editura Athena, 1996, p. 109.

¹⁶ Sf. Grigore de Nazianz, *Cuvântarea 2, 99*, J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, series *Graeca*, Paris, 1857-1866, vol. 35, col. 501.

¹⁷ Sf. Ignatie Teoforul, *Epistola către Efeseni*, 3, 1-2, în *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, vol. I, translated by pr. Dr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1995.

¹⁸ Sf. Ignatie Teoforul, *Episcopa către Magnezieni*, 4,1; *Epistola către Smirneni*, 8, 1-2; *Epistola către Tralieni*, 3,1 în *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, vol. I, p. 200-220.

points out that the relationship of society with divinity revolves around the bishop, through the Eucharist, according to St. John the Evangelist¹⁹. Summarizing the examples of the old fathers' assessments of the connection between the bishop and the church, we note that the Church focused on the bishop, regulating every aspect from his prerogatives in the life of the diocese to the manner of election and ordination.

Father Dumitru Staniloae points out that the bishop and the priest under his subordination are the bodies of divine institution through which the other mysteries are transmitted to the believers²⁰. Canon 38, 39, 40 and 41 Apostolic, as well as 12 Ecumenical Council VII, 57 Laodicea, 6, 7, 33 Carthage²¹ bring to attention the duty of obedience that priests and deacons have to the bishop, while Canon 39 apostolic reveals the primary form of Organization of parishes – administrative structures headed by bishops in a first instance-in which priests and deacons performed priestly functions in strict dependence on the bishop. The mission of the Orthodox Church is realized through the mysteries transmitted by the Apostolic Tradition, the teaching about the Eucharist, the teaching about the incarnation of the Savior Jesus Christ, respectively about the Holy Trinity, which is why we consider that the mission of the Church cannot be delimited from the pastoral ministry, which the parish priest performs through the performance of the Holy Mysteries – all lived in the Divine Liturgy. Against this background, we consider that the transmission of the Gospel message cannot be made at random, a context in which the parish priest must calibrate his process by including reporting on the cultural level of the pastoral community. Thus, we observe two major coordinates of the pastoral mission and of the priestly ministry, both of which record profound transformations throughout history, The Church being constantly under the pressure of the evolution of social and political factors. Regarding the relationship/reporting between the priest and his bishop, with the acquisition of pastoral units by the priests and the assumption of responsibilities over the management manner, the dependence of the priest on the hierarch focused on the supervision and control on the part of the bishop, the priests owed him canonical obedience. Subsequently, the adoption of normative acts, such as the Organic statute, respectively the statutory documents for the Organization of the Orthodox Church, the relationship of the parish priest with the other

¹⁹ Sfântul Ignatie al Antiohiei, *Către Magneseni*, VI, 1, în *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. I, p. 165-184.

²⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, p. 143-144.

²¹ Arhid. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii*, p. 32.

constituent units of the church was increasingly better regulated. We cannot say the same with regard to the relationship of the priest with the pastoral community, since it records accentuated dynamics, with a speed of transformation more and more accelerated, as a result of the mutations that occur at the social level. The profound transformations of contemporary man and of secularized and globalized society have direct reverberations on the relationship of the individual with religious feeling, especially regarding its form of manifestation and expression. At present, the individual is assailed and often trapped by the multitude and diversity of cultural and social paradigms transposed and induced through media and informational tools, which invariably lead to the reshaping of collective and behavioral mindsets. According to the literature, contemporary society, viewed from a religious perspective, is a complex one. Theologians, sociologists and historians have identified a series of mutations that occurred in the religious plan in the last decades, transformations that initially penetrated the Western European Society and which, to a degree, have come to manifest in the Orthodox Christian space of eastern Europe. Countries that have experienced a communist political regime face, more and more acutely, a reinterpretation of Christian values, on bases and foundations that do not respect the Christian tradition. Thus, in a relativized society, which in turn relativizes everything, it was expected that moral and Christian values would be subject to the same challenges.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that modern, consumerist and secularized society focuses on the pursuit of material and personal things, ephemeral, while spiritual values are marginalized, labeled as retrograde and irrelevant to an increasing mass of individuals. Although the Orthodox world did not have an appetite for an active participation in the phenomenon called modernity, seen as a tendency to anthropologize theology and religious perceptions, as marked by the Western Christian world²², the anthropological revolution of the twentieth century represented a turning point in the relationship between Christian and secular values in the individual and collective mentality. This reality – whether we accept it or not – inevitably leads to the degradation of ecclesial consciousness and the denial, dilution or even reinterpretation of the Gospel message. More and more frequently, secularization transfers the meaning of human existence from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, but even more so the current situation requires

²² Catholicism and protestantism were marked by decisive moments, because of adaptation to the process of modernization, such as the Renaissance, The Reformation or the Counter-Reformation, respectively the wars of religion, the French Revolution, The Enlightenment, as well as the triumph of reason and Human Rights.

the placement of the priest and the parish face to face with the individual and society, a context in which it is imperative that the Church identify the spiritual meaning, including in globalization for these reasons, the social, political, economic and cultural reality of Christians in the Twenty-First Century must be understood. Becoming all the more important in the current context, the relevance of the priest's relationship with the parish and the pastoral community derives also from the fundamental role that the latter assumes, namely to pray for all the faithful, as well as from the fact that the parish priest accompanies the parishioner in all the determining moments of life, by granting the blessing in the sacrament of baptism, at the moment of marriage or when he leads the parishioners on the last road. For these reasons he should know the needs and joys of each parishioner, since the parish priest must ensure the salvation of those who confirm the importance he has in the shepherded Parish. On these coordinates, the parish must build a united community, and the priestly ministry of the priest must be mutual with the charismatic one of the laity, because the priest must explain to the parish members the importance of union with Jesus in the Eucharist and the joy of communion with God in the Trinity²³.

The subject brought to attention through this research work – the emergence and development of the system of parish organization in the Orthodox Church. Historical study-canonical-falls within the scope of Canon Law Research, starting precisely from the fact that the legislation and the church canons continue to remain the fundamental line of conduct within the Romanian Orthodox Church, both for the spiritual and moral life of the community and of the priest, on the one hand, and on the other it states the nature of the relations established between the constituent bodies of the Church. The ambition of making an X-ray of the metamorphosis of an organizational – administrative structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church-the parish, respectively the complexity of the transformation processes of this unit generated additional challenges, demanding the approach of the subject also from a historical point of view. The history of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian area continues to represent a generous field of research and an instrument of knowledge of the past of this space, all the more so as the researches have highlighted the synergy of its evolution with the cultural, political and social history. Throughout two millennia of Christianity, the Orthodox Church has been the

²³ Pr. Prof. dr. Mihai Himcinschi, *Biserica în societate, aspecte misionare al Bisericii în societatea actuală*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2004, pp. 88.

fundamental institution of Romanians that has protected spiritual-religious, cultural-national and educational interests both at individual and community level. Starting from these realities, taking into account the relevance of the central church institutions and of the bishops, the native historiography focused rather on the functioning and evolution of the central bodies and the impact of the hierarchs in the evolution of society, the local and regional bodies-such as parishes and deaneries – did not benefit equally from the attention of researchers²⁴. From a historical perspective, the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church was constantly subjected to profound transformations, a process that also marked the perspective on the Christian mission – often interpreted as a work of salvation and salvation of the individual²⁵.

3. Purpose and limits of research

The church is called to fulfill its mission, to guide Man and the world to salvation. About two millennia after the Holy Apostles began to spread Christian teaching, it would be tempting to conclude that we should now witness the triumph of the Gospel message. However, at a quick diagnosis we notice that orthodoxy and Christianity are not a universal religion in relation to the population of the Earth but are one of the great religions of the globe. Moreover, throughout time and also today, the church's evangelizing mission has been constantly questioned and often attacked directly or indirectly. However, the mission of ensuring the work of transfiguring the image of the world according to the Gospel of the Savior is continuous and topical. The Christian community of the Twenty-First Century – defined by the literature as postmodern and post-Christian-brings a new perspective about the world in general, but in particular about the religious feeling and the forms of manifestation it embraces. The emphasized process of secularization and implicitly of desacralization, which started from the first forms of

²⁴ Hypothesis brought to attention by a number of researchers, among which we recall the work: Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan, *Ortodoxie și Luteranism în Transilvania și Marea Unire: Evoluție istorică și relații confesionale*, Ed. Andreiană/Presa Universitară Clujeană, Sibiu/Cluj-Napoca, 2015, p. 47-94.

²⁵ Regarding the theological coordinates of the Orthodox Christian mission in contemporary society see, at length, David J. Bosch, *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, Orbis Books, 1991; Francis Anekwe Oboiji, *Concepts of mission: the evolution of contemporary missiology*, Orbis Books, 2006; John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community*, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010.

Organization of the Church, becomes today an indisputable reality that has refined in recent decades its objectives, means and instruments by which it manages to consume the individual and contemporary society, context in which the mission of the Church must adapt, by virtue of its call, in order to ensure an authentic, Orthodox Christian prophylaxis. Starting from these theological coordinates, there was also the need to approach, in a structured and systematized manner, the way in which the organizational structures of the Orthodox Church evolved – we relate in particular to the parochial organization system as a space for transmitting Christian teaching, respectively the impact that social, political and economic realities had on these processes. Hence the objectives of the present research, to deepen the knowledge on the evolution of the organizational structures of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space, as well as the renewal and completion of the church historiography, by recovering and restitution of chapters of special relevance in the historical evolution of the administrative structures of the Church – equally interesting and determining elements, but also less visible in the specialized literature. The current reality of the historiography of the problem, namely the relatively small volume of studies dedicated to the parochial organizational structure, derives, on the one hand, from the lack of documentary sources dedicated to the evolution of the smallest administrative unit within the Romanian Orthodox Church – the fact that the research sites focused on restitution, especially, of the impact that prominent church figures had on society in general and the Church in particular, respectively the impact of the Central Church bodies on the evolution of the system of Organization of the Church – an aspect particularly relevant for the national historiography.

Once the national historiography has been enriched by numerous researches, studies and articles dedicated, as I mentioned before, to the illustrious figures of hierarchs, as well as to the central bodies, we appreciate that it is the right time to return the relevance of the parish structures. Moreover, for Orthodox canonical theology, the presentation of this subject is a challenge, but also an opportunity, since it can be seen, through this historical-canonical excursion, how the system of parochial organization emerged and developed throughout history. Of course, this excursion also has some limits, especially related to the period treated, but also to the way in which today the various Autocephalous Orthodox churches understand to organize their smallest administrative unit. Consequently, the present research project represents a sequence of a much larger research site, through which the historical and canonical course of the

organizational structures of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as they are presented by the church tradition in the statutory documents, is brought to attention. Starting from these premises, the purpose of our approach is a clear one, that is, we will approach the topic with the confidence that we will manage to capture and highlight, and later to convey what is useful and useful for the pastoral mission, but we also have the awareness that this subject, like any other, cannot be treated and presented exhaustively in a doctoral research, but we hope to contribute to the development of historiography on this subject. Specifically, the doctoral research systematically approaches, through the appeal to the edited and unpublished bibliographic sources, the following coordinates: a. Analysis of the organizational structure of the parish seen through the light of the old and New Testaments, context in which we will try to capture the developments of the Christian communities by reference to the concept of the family, as well as the relationship between ecclesia and the synagogue; B. the church organization in the first Christian centuries in the East and West and the development of the concept of parish, respectively highlighting the way in which the concept of *paroikia* was approached within the Canons of the Orthodox Church, starting from Canon 13 of the Council of Ancira, to Canon 19 of Carthage and the first records of parish churches within the Fourth Ecumenical Council and the Trullan Council-dimension that facilitates; c. to complete the image among the steps subjected to the in-depth analysis is also the radiography of the system of parochial organization in the second Christian millennium, starting from the schism of 1054 until the fall of Constantinople; d. the parochial system in the complex theological debate represents a consistent sequence, through which we will try to bring to attention, in a comprehensive manner, the perception of the parochial organizational structure within the ecclesiological currents developed in the twentieth century, from eucharistic ecclesiology in the sense of theologian Nikolai Afanassieff and to the conception of Ioannis Zizioulas, respectively the practice of *Fermentum* and *Antimis*. Invariably, in order to ensure the completeness of the doctoral research, we will approach the coordinates of the Christian mission in the XXI century, in relation to the sacramental-liturgical, pastoral-missionary and administrative-ecclesiastical activity, including the canonical and Administrative Organization of the Romanian Orthodox Diaspora.

4. Current state of research

By reference to the theological perspective on the system of parochial organization in the Orthodox Church, we identify an extensive range of studies and approaches regarding the Universal synodality, but also the regional one. On the other hand, the Synodal relationship from the local level between the parish and the diocese is not so thoroughly researched, equally being neglected the process of transformation of the system of parochial organization over two millennia of Christianity in the Romanian space. By way of side, we find today that theologians and researchers are still looking for a solution regarding the key to interpretation of the relationship between priest and bishop in the Orthodox world, given that the literature highlights a much more clearly articulated relationship between Bishop and priest in the Western world. In evangelical and Catholic theology, the parish and the parish priest represent a basic theme for contemporary research, the studies elaborated in this regard covering an extensive range of research, from the biblical significance of the primary communities and the eschatological meaning of the term "*paroikia*", to the theology of the parish systematized at the Second Vatican Council²⁶. Therefore, this research project is directly part of the local initiatives to strengthen the specialized literature related to the subject, and indirectly aims to contribute to the development of Romanian theology, an approach all the more necessary as the subject under attention has not benefited from extensive attention lately. In fact, in the Romanian theological space, a reference work dedicated to the challenges associated with the crystallization of the process of Administrative Organization of parishes is missing. On the other hand, although in the domestic literature the number of works that even tangentially address the subject of the present doctoral research, in foreign literature there are a number of reference works, among which we mention: P. V. Aimone-Braida, "La parrocchia nel secondo millennio", in VV. A. a., *La parrocchia*, Milan, 2004, pp. 35-86; V. Bo, *Storia della parrocchia*, I-V, Rome, 2004; A. Cattaneo, "per un proficuo rapporto fra parrocchia e movimenti", in *Annales Theologici*, 19 (2005), no. 2, pp. 397-417; F. Coccopalmeiro, *de paroecia*, Rome, 1991; F. Coccopalmeiro, "Il concetto di parrocchia", in A.

²⁶ See, at length: Leszek Zynger, *Einleitung*, în Nathalie Kruppa, Leszek Zynger, *Pfarreien im Mittelalter: Deutschland, Polen, Tschechien und Ungarn im Vergleich*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, p. 9-26; Alphonse Borrás, *La parrocchia. Diritto canonico e prospettive pastorali*, Dehoniane, Bologna, 1997; Vincenzo Bo, *Storia della parrocchia*, vol. I-II, Roma 1990, 1992; Răzvan Perșa, *Apariția și dezvoltarea sistemului de organizare parohială în Biserica Ortodoxă*, p. 528.

Longhitano (et al.), *La parrocchia e le sue strutture*, Bologna, 1987, pp. 29-82; F. Coccopalmeiro, *La parrocchia. Tra Concilio Vaticano II e Codice di Diritto Canonico*, Cinisello Balsamo, 2000; F. Coccopalmeiro, "Parroquia", in Javier Otaduy, Antonio Viana, Joaquin Sedano (eds.) *Diccionario General de Derecho Canonico*, vol. V, Ed. Thomson Reuters Aranzadi, Pamplona, 2012, pp. 907-916; Gruppo Italiano Docenti di Diritto Canonico (a cura di), *La parrocchia*, Milan, 2005; A. Longhitano (et al.), *La parrocchia e le sue strutture*, Bologna, 1987; J. Manzanares, J. Mostaza and L. Santos, *Nuevo derecho parroquial*, Madrid, 1988; P. Pavanello, "La parrocchia. Prospettive canonistiche innovative", in *Quaderni di Diritto Ecclesiale*, 18 (2005), pp. 299-312; R. Pellitero, "Parrocchia, Chiesa locale, eucaristia domenicale", in *Studi Canonici*, 468 (2000), pp. 114-120; J. P. Risset, *Laparoisse*, Paris, 1989; K. Rahner, "per una teologia della parrocchia", in K. Rahner (Ed.), *La parrocchia*, Rome, 1965, pp. 43-53; a.m. Rouco Varela, "La parroquia en la Iglesia. Evoluci excl. histo, presento momento, perspectivas de futuro", in VV. A. a., *La parroquia desde el nuevo derecho Canonico*, Salamanca, 1991, pp. 15-29; a.m. Stickler, "La Parroquia nella sua evoluzione storica", in VV. A. a., *La parroquia desde el nuevo derecho can excarnico*, Salamanca, 1991, pp. 7-19; R. Tononi, "La parrocchia come chiesa locale nel Concilio Vaticano II", in *Quaderni Teologi del Seminario di Brescia*, 3 (1993), pp. 83-115; A. Viana, *Organizaci Adminn del gobierno en la Iglesia*, Pamplona, 2010, pp. 286-296; A. Viana, "El P. R. Roco, pastor proprio de la Parroquia", in *IUs Canonicum*, 58 (1989), pp. 467-481; VV. A. a., *La parrocchia*, Citta del Vaticano, 1997; R. Naz (ed.), *Lived by droit canonique*, vol. I, Paris, 1954, pp. 516-517; F. Claeys Bouuaert, "curio", in *Dictionnaire de Droit Canonique*, vol. IV, pp. 889-892.

Without representing an exhaustive list, among the reference researches addressing the process of organizing the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space are: Iorgu Ivan, *Importanța principiilor fundamentale canonice de organizație și administrație pentru unitatea Bisericii*, Constantin Rus, *Importanța canoanelor Sinodului II ecumenic pentru organizarea și disciplina Bisericii*; *Principii și dispoziții de organizare și disciplină bisericească în canoanele Sinodului al VII-lea Ecumenic*; *Canonul 4 al Sinodului Ecumenic și importanța lui pentru organizarea Bisericii*, Ioan Vasile Leb, Gabriel Viorel Gârdan, Marius Eppel, Emilian Iustinian Roman, Mircea Gheorghe Abrudan. *Instituții ecleziastice ortodoxe. Izvoare legislative bisericești și laice (sec. XVIII-XX)*, Nicolae V. Dură, *Principiile canonice, fundamentale de organizare și funcționare a Bisericii Ortodoxe și reflectarea lor în legislația Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Mircea

Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Paul Brusanowski, *Învățămintul confesional ortodox român din Transilvania între anii 1848-1918. Între exigențele statului centralist și principiile autonomiei bisericești*, Mircea Gh. Abrudan, *Ortodoxie și Luteranism în Transilvania între revoluția pașoptistă și Marea Unire – Evoluție istorică și relații confesionale*, Ioan-Vasile Leb, *Importanța evenimentelor istorice ale secolului al XX-lea pentru Biserica Ortodoxă Română*.

Regarding the dynamics of the relationship between the state and the Church, the topic has attracted the attention of several researchers, which is why we mention that it is divided on several eras and perspectives, starting from the first forms of organization, autonomy and up to autocephaly, on the multiple dimensions of the existing interference from the perspective of focusing on the same communities. Among the works that attracted our attention by reference to these coordinates are: Candea Romulus, *Biserică și Stat. Câteva considerații istorice și principale*; Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în evul mediu românesc*; Ștefan Pascu, *Făurirea statului național unitar român*; Mircea Păcurariu, *Politica statului ungar față de biserica românească din Transilvania în perioada dualismului (1867-1918)*; Liviu Stan, *Relațiile dintre Biserică și Stat*; M. Chiriță, *Raportul dintre Stat și Biserică din punctul de vedere juridic*; I. Mateiu, *Dreptul bisericesc de stat în România întregită*; Theodor Fecioru, *Poporul român și fenomenul religios*; Liviu Stan, *Relațiile dintre Biserică și Stat. Studiu istorico-juridic*; Gr. Marcu, *Biserica ortodoxă înaintemergătoare a statului național român*.

Another dimension of the research area under consideration in our research is represented by the issue of ecclesiastical autonomy and autocephaly in the Romanian Orthodox space, the subject approached from complex perspectives in: Liviu Stan, *Despre autonomia bisericească, respectiv Autocefalia și autonomia în Ortodoxie*; Ilie Moldovan, *Etnicitate și autonomie. Considerații de ordin teologic-moral, cu ocazia aniversării autocegaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*; Iorgu Ivan, *Autonomia Bisericii în concepția IPS Mitropolit Nicolae Bălan*; Gheorghe Ciuhandu, *Autochefalie și autonomie bisericească*; Ioan Floca, *L'autocephalie dans l'Eglise orthodoxe roumaine*; Faze și etape ale stărilor de independență de tip autonom și autocefal în Biserica Ortodoxă Română; Iorgu Ivan, *Autocefalia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române – un veac de la recunoașterea ei*; + Daniel, Patriarhul României, *Autocefalia bisericească: unitate de credință și libertate de conducere*; Constantin Rus, *Probleme referitoare la autocefalie*; *Unity and Autocephaly. Some canonical remarks*; *Canonul 34 apostolic și implicațiile sale canonice*;

Georgică Grigoriță, *Autocefalia în sinodalitate. Autonomia eclezială în Biserică din punct de vedere canonic*.

Regarding the Orthodox perspective on the evolution of the parochial organization system, the literature highlights two major coordinates through which this process is analyzed, namely the missionary nature of these administrative structures and the ecclesiological nature. By reference to the missionary nature of the parish, although the canonical structure of the parish was considered, in most cases, to be unimportant, the literature approached this perspective because this dimension captures the pastoral-missionary structure of the parish. As for the ecclesiological research concerning the nature of the relationship between the parish and the bishopric, in the scientific literature of the twentieth century two major directions are distinguished, through which the parish is perceived, on the one hand, as the real expression of the local church, an administrative structure with sacramental attributions within which the Eucharist is performed²⁷. On the other hand, the parish is perceived as a reality dependent on the bishop and represents an extension of the Eucharist officiated by him²⁸. In addition to these approaches, a new perspective is noted in the literature related to the evolution of the system of parish organization, determined by the need to revitalize the parish communities, by connecting to the ecclesiological model presented in the theology of St. Ignatius Theophorus, which states that for the commission of the Eucharist the bishop can delegate a cleric²⁹.

On the other hand, the specialized literature following the mission and the role of the priest in the community brings to attention a series of works, among which we mention: Nicodim Milaș, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe, însoțite de comentarii*; Ioan N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe, note și comentarii*; Dumitru Stăniloae, *Slujirile bisericești și atribuțiile lor; Creația ca dar și Tainele Bisericii; Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă; Temeiurile teologice ale ierarhiei și*

²⁷ Eloquent in this regard, see studies: Michael Plekon, *Always Everyone and Always Together: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanasiev's 'The Lord's Supper' Revisited*, în *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 41 (1997), p. 158-159; Maximos Aghiorghoussis, *The parish presbyter, and his bishop: a review of the pastoral roles, relationship and authority*, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 29, no. 1 (1985), p. 54-55.

²⁸ Ioannis Zizioulas, *Euharistie, Episcop, Biserică*, Editura Basilica, București, 2009; *Ființa eclezială*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2007; Gheorghios D. Metallinos, *Parohia – Hristos în mijlocul nostru*, translation Pr. prof. Ioan I. Ică, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2004.

²⁹ Sfântul Ignatie Teoforul, *Epistola către Smirneni*, în *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, vol. I, p. 184.

ale sinodalității; Spiridon Cândea, *Scopul preoției la Sfinții Părinți*; *Chipul preotului după Sfânta Scriptură și Sfinții Părinți*; Nicolas Afanasiev, *The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable*; Vladimir Lossky, *Teologica mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*; Paul Evdokimov, *L'orthodoxie*.

Although the present doctoral research represents a first stage of a much larger project, we appreciate that the interdisciplinary approach to the subject and the appeal to the primary documents associated with the subject, with all the limits, imperatives and constraints associated with such an approach, have facilitated the understanding of the evolution of the system of parish organization within the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space, and can contribute to the completion of knowledge, as well as to the restoration of the role of the parish within the institutional structure of the Church.

5. Research methodology

In the present thesis, The Subject subject to research will be approached from Canonical, theological, historical, respectively descriptive and Comparative Perspective, which implies an overview of the concept of the parish and contextualization of its relations with the spaces to which it addresses. The concept of contextualization, applied to the religious field in general, refers to limits, horizons, boundaries, differences, distinctions, diversity, plurality, uniqueness, action, acceptance, openness, sincerity, complexity, contextualization, values and principles in the space of manifestation of the human, in which the human is understood from the perspective of the saving act of the incarnation of Christ. Starting from these premises and taking into account the fact that the doctoral thesis starts from the first forms of Organization of Christianity and has the ambition to cover the two millennia of evolution and development of the organizational structures of the Church, the complexity of the subject subject to attention directly determined the selection of the methodology used. Consequently, the theoretical and methodological framework was built on systematic, analytical, comparative and interdisciplinary coordinates, within which the canonical perspective was doubled by an analysis in the historical key. The interdisciplinarity of the subject's approach also derives from the fact that the analysis through the canonical, legal and historical lens of the evolution of the parochial organization system ensures the interpretation of the impact of historical events in a broader context, as well as from the hope that it will provide ecclesiological and canonical content and meaning for understanding

these realities. In this respect, we have also applied the hermeneutic method, which combines the historical-philological study with the typological-theological one, in order to ensure a perspective that includes both the context and the framework in which the system of parochial organization was born and developed, as well as to highlight the revealed theological gift. In the same sense we used the exegetical-comparative method, for the interpretation of canons or canonists' works. The application of analytical methods in this doctoral research has facilitated the highlighting of the theological, historical, as well as sociological position of some researchers regarding the concepts addressed in the doctoral thesis, as well as of the decisive moments in the evolution of the parochial organization system. Through this I tried to bring to attention the analysis of each concept in the research area, as well as the nuances that derive from the theologians' distinct reporting on the evolution of the parochial organization system, in order to answer some of the questions that guided the elaboration of this research. The historical method facilitated the highlighting of the metamorphosis of the parochial organization system over time, namely the impact that factors exogenous to ecclesiastical institutions had on it. Along with the research of the biblical text, there is a need for an adequate contextualization of the process of transforming an administrative structure, an approach that can be achieved only by resorting to methodologies specific to historical research. Thus, we started from the premise that these phenomena and processes of transformation of society have also left their mark on the evolution of the forms of Organization of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space, which is why I hope that bringing this perspective to attention will contribute to the extended understanding of the metamorphosis of the parochial organization system.

In the historical-canonical excursus of this doctoral research, we emphasized the consultation of patristic sources and sources, of official documents, as well as of specialized works that addressed the church history and its evolution in the Romanian space. On these coordinates, the doctoral research aimed at:

a) the analysis of the legislation and of the church canons, a perspective that facilitated the understanding of the evolution of the parochial system of organization by reference to the fundamental line of conduct within the Romanian Orthodox Church both for the spiritual and moral life of the community and that of the parish priest;

b) the comprehensive diagnosis of the historical and cultural dimension, through which we aimed to understand the phenomena and how they influenced the way of organizing the

component units of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space, as well as the determining factors that influenced this process;

c) aspects concerning systematic theology, but also having a missionary applicability, a process carried out by understanding the concepts of secularization, globalization, consumerism and understanding their impact on religious sentiment at the level of individual and Christian community.

In our approach, we will be guided by some principles, in order to meet those that are required as a methodology in research, but we will also relate to the perspective of the Church's mission in a time when it is appropriate to find its place in the Romanian society and to face so many problems that confront it, respectively: a) to be based on documents, that is, any information and statement must be based on a source, document, truthful testimony; b) to be selective, i.e. from the set of events recorded in the documents to choose only those that have importance and are relevant to the topic addressed, those that have contributed to the elucidation and clarification of important theological hypotheses; c) be objective, that is, due respect for the truth, be an honest, sincere exposition and with the desire to be for the benefit of the Church. Objectivity must be respected and cultivated, and then placed in the dimension of giving work to the cause of the Church; d) to be systematic, that is, the whole process of the work to be presented in a certain order, showing their natural chain, forming a single whole; e) to be a decent exposition, which meets the proper norms, in a natural form and understandable to the reader. In other words, to achieve a harmonious combination of erudition, objectivity and elegance of exposure.

6. Uniqueness, originality and timeliness of the research topic

From the investigations I have concluded that the research topic I stopped at and which I hope to complete, was a little to insufficiently treated. No doubt I will use bibliographic resources to comprehensively address the dimensions of the evolution of the parish structure, but I will make a lot of effort to ensure that the ideas and approaches are well below this mark of originality. The fact that in the Romanian canonical literature, except for a few small studies, the subject has not been researched, is an additional reason for a note of uniqueness and originality. Regarding the actuality and novelty of the subject of the doctoral research, the relevance of the doctoral thesis is conferred by The Restitution of the role of the parish structure in the

organization and functioning of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space. The framework through which this evolution is seen relates both to the affirmation of Orthodox spirituality in the postmodern European context marked by a series of existential pathologies, and to the manner in which Orthodoxy can contribute to understanding, assuming and even overcoming the challenges that the contemporary individual feels in the current social and global dynamics. Starting from the premise that the Savior and the Holy Apostles adapted the transmitted teachings and the theological discourse according to the moral and social challenges they encountered within the pastored communities, so the parish priest of today must adapt his Christian message and teaching and anchor it in the current realities. Taking into account the fact that the postmodern individual is the follower of a self-determining perception and an autonomous reason, the transposition of Orthodoxy as a solution to the interpretation of contemporary challenges ensures the knowledge of a new perspective and an invitation to dialogue for the whole society. Secondly, the appeal made during the doctoral research to the teachings transmitted by the Holy Fathers in substantiating the hypotheses and analyzes developed on the evolution of the organizational structures of the church ensures an extended perspective on the process of institutional transformation, considering both the depth of theological works and their direct and direct spiritual experience with God. In this regard, we turned to the analysis, comparison and interpretation of the main biblical and patristic sources, making a diachronic and synchronous incursion of ecclesiological doctrinal coordinates within primary Christianity. Thirdly, the novelty and originality of doctoral research is also brought by the interdisciplinary approach of the subject subject to attention. In this regard, we emphasize that the approach of analyzing the evolution of the parochial system of organization from the perspective of legislation and church canons facilitated the understanding of the fundamental line of conduct within the Romanian Orthodox Church both for the spiritual and moral life of the community, as well as that of the parish priest. On the other hand, in order to understand the complex processes that caused this metamorphosis of the organizational-administrative structure, we approached the subject through a historical filter, applying specific methods and tools, in order to understand the context in which this transformation occurred.

7. Structure and content of the work

The present paper was presented as a doctoral thesis in theology, being prepared under the careful guidance of father Professor Doctor Constantin Rus. This research aims to deepen, from a historical and canonical perspective, the emergence and development of the system of organization in the Orthodox Church, focusing on the parish structure. Under the term "parochial organization" is not only a presentation and reporting in the past, but an approach that reaches up to date will be tried. In order to achieve the objectives assumed at the beginning of the doctoral research, the paper is structured in six chapters, as follows: The first chapter presents, from a biblical perspective, the beginnings of the parish as "people", "Family", "Church-House" in the old and New Testaments. It should be emphasized that in this context the foundations of the organization of the parish were laid-at least at a theoretical level – based on the organization and functioning of the israelite family, in the relationship between God and the Chosen People, as well as within the first Christian communities founded by the Holy Apostles. If we had not made this presentation, we would not have been able to understand the subsequent historical and canonical development of the parish and the parish system in the life of the Church. The second chapter will present the emergence of the parochial organization system, a context in which the presentation of the Imperial and ecclesiastical organization in the first Christian centuries will be pursued in the two European reference areas: the West and the East. It will also address the term "paroikia" in the Canons of the Orthodox Church and the presence of the first rural parish churches. In this chapter we will come to a deepening of the term "paroikia" and of the parish system in the West and East until the end of the first Christian millennium. The third chapter aims to identify the parish system and its evolution in the second millennium. For this period a reference point will be the system of parochial organization in the late Byzantine period and in the post-Byzantine period. The parish system in local Orthodox Churches will also be addressed.

Under this nuance will be presented: Greek Orthodox Churches, the definition of the parish in the organization statutes of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, of the Greek Orthodox Church, Russian and Romanian, and in the end of the chapter, as a synthesis, will be presented a structuring of the parish according to the current canonical legislation within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The fourth chapter deals with the analysis of the parish system by reference to church and state legislation. There are analyzed the Little and The Big Rules, organic regulations, Saguna's regulations for the organization of church affairs, the Organic status of the

Orthodox Church in Hungary and Transylvania, the regulations for the administration and control of church affairs, as well as the statutes for the organization and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church (1925, 1949, 2007 and 2020). In all these statutes and regulations, the parish system occupies a central place. Through their analysis, we better understand how the parish evolved and crystallized within the Romanian Orthodox Church. Chapter number five deals with the parish system in the current theological debate. This debate will address the ecclesiological currents of the twentieth century and the definition of the parish. Will eucharistic ecclesiology and the identity of the parish be presented in the conception of Nicolai Affanasiev as well as the parish – local church or expression of the local church? There will also be an approach towards eucharistic ecclesiology and the identity of the parish in the conception of Ioannis Zizioulas. In order to revitalize and restructure the parochial life, it is necessary to examine its history and canonicity, in order to delimit the episcopalist vision, on the one hand, through which the priest is seen as a mere delegate of the bishop, and the Congregationalist vision, through which the priest is seen as a representative of the laity. The last chapter deals with "the system of parish organization and the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church", both in the country and in the Romanian Orthodox diaspora. The emergence and development of Romanian Orthodox communities outside the borders of the country, with their parochial structures, as well as the mission they carry out in the diaspora, a mission different from the native one, with implications also on the parochial organization system and the way the Romanian Orthodox parish is understood in the diaspora.

The research ends with the presentation of some final conclusions, followed by a general bibliographic list, which was the basis for the in-depth documentation of the evolution of the parochial organization system. In a world increasingly marked by the crisis of meaninglessness as a result of the remoteness from God, this work wishes to be a modest contribution to a better knowledge and understanding of what it meant, means and ought to represent in the future "the parish" and "the parish community". The church is a community with human characteristics that cannot be denied, but it is not a social community created to serve only the immediate purposes of its members. Rather, the Church exists to serve this last Purpose: life dependent on God as Creator and Savior. In this sense we use the words of the Saviour "how many times have I willed to gather your sons, as the bird gathers its young under its wings, but you have not willed" (Matthew 28: 37), which emphasizes the law of human freedom. This freedom leads to power

choices between good and evil. Or the parish, this "micro ecclesie" is meant, through the minister priest, to guide the Christian's mind and will towards God.

8. Difficulties encountered

In any scientific endeavor, and even more so in the elaboration of a paper that will bear the seal "doctoral thesis", the difficulties of research, synthesis and elaboration are frequent. There was no shortage of watershed moments. However, I have looked with confidence at the whole endeavor and effort, and I weigh that the whole Labor will not be in vain. An aspect worth mentioning here is the lack of bibliographic material in Romanian, as well as the pioneering work in some punctual aspects of the thesis, aspects overcome but through much work and competent guidance from Professor Constantin Rus.

9. Prospects

Through the present doctoral research, we have proposed an radiography of the system of parochial organization in the Orthodox Church, from the beginning to the present day. Being of such magnitude, of course the subject is an open one. In the future, it would be useful to analyze in more depth some ecclesiological aspects (such as the ratio/relationship between the Universal Church and the local one), historical (especially related to the periods when the Orthodox churches were under various dominions), canonical and legal (especially related to the relationship between Parish and state organization, in the country and in the diaspora, as well as how this organization has contributed to the crystallization of the system of parish organization today). The research can then be extended to the legal field, through the relations between the parish and the local organization of the state, as well as those related to the way of establishment, financing, organization, functioning and control by the authorized bodies of the state. In particular, in view of the expansion of the research site, we consider that it would be useful to explore how the parish system as a whole is seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – as a pennant period of consolidation of the parish organization system, by researching the works of Orthodox canon law published until the establishment of the communist regime, the church regulations developed at the level of the bishoprics and how they were transposed in the press of the time, respectively how they were reflected in the collective mentality of the modern age.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In identifying the first landmarks of the parochial organization system we started from the analysis of the primary forms of Organization of the local Christian and Jewish communities. The appeal to the biblical testimonies, to the reference texts of the old and New Testaments, respectively to the scriptural, patristic and canonical testimonies facilitated the radiography of the Christian community ethos and the way of organization within the early Church. Subjecting the analysis and through the prism of the theological meanings of the concept of communion, we identified a series of similarities between the way of Organization of the synagogue and that expressed within Christian societies. Eloquently in this sense, the Israelite family constituted – in the sense of the Old Testament writings – the representative family model, structured and with direct-indirect, common-specific responsibilities, with community participation and patriarchal domination, coordinated on which the Christian family was built. Moreover, this family model was also the instrument of interpretation of the relationship between God and his people. An additional characteristic of the way of organization encountered in New Testament Christian communities is the transition from the itinerant specificity of religious life to the overlapping of the dynamics of individual life with the church one, at which time a new community ethos was formed, in which the cult is integrated into the current life of the individual, and their homes became places of sanctification and communion. The special significance of this form of social organization was the fact that on its structure, as well as of the Greco-Roman societies, the house church developed subsequently—a term used for the ecclesial structure within the early Church, especially in the First Century. The similarities with the place of worship, in the current sense of the term, derive from the fact that they met 4 of the characteristics of a church, respectively they ensured: *koinonia* (community), *diakonia* (service and mission), *kerygma* (preaching of evangelical principles and perceptions), as well as *leiturgia* (Eucharist). Moreover, the members of the church in the house developed a sense of belonging, Union and interconnection, both within it and with other churches in the house, forming the foundations of the current parish system.

In addition to this perspective, we started from the premise that the analysis of the specificity of the experience of communion within the early Church should also map the relationship and comparison between ecclesial and synagogue worship. Thus, although in the

first instance we expected to identify several similarities regarding the organization of the synagogue with that of the local communities of Christians, the analysis of the specialized literature substantiated our conclusion that there is a distinct meaning of the Jewish synagogue from that of the Christian Church. Moreover, the Patristic literature of the first centuries emphasizes these differences by appealing, in a first instance, to the differences between the two systems of organization in terms of the presence and role of the members of the community in missionary activity, respectively to the explicit expression of the Christological perspective within the Christian Church. On these coordinates, the present doctoral research facilitated the understanding of the first forms of organization within the early Church and the connection with the elements of ecclesiological order. Thus, in the process of transforming the system of parochial organization, we identified several stages, but until the second century, the main steps of the Church, namely the diocese, the priesthood and the diaconate, as well as the secondary ones (deaconesses and readers or lecturers) were clarified. In the second stage of the evolutionary process research, extended until the medieval period, the main promoters of the change in the system of Organization of the church were represented by the accelerated development of the church life, context in which the ecclesial administration expanded by creating new administrative dignities, respectively bodies that ensured the functioning of the church. As we pointed out during this doctoral research, the first Christian communities had a small number of believers, developed mainly in the urban area, a context in which the assembly around the bishop came naturally. Starting from this reality, the New Testament and post-apostolic writings established an indissoluble connection between the bishop and the Presbyter, the first of whom was perceived as the leader of the Eucharistic Assembly, surrounded by priests and deacons, aspects also confirmed by the Epistles of St. Ignatius Theophorusus. Moreover, in the canons of the Orthodox Church the term Parish is used more than 30 times, but in all cases the mention refers to subordination to the bishop.

The spread of Christianity in the countryside brought into question the need to reconfigure organizational structures within Christian communities. In the present research I emphasized that in the early Church, rural communities remained under the authority of bishops, the supervisory dimension being transferred for a period to the horepiscopes – they had the right to commit the Eucharist but could not ordain priests or deacons. Note that the negative impact of their activity within the church claimed the restriction of rights – by Canon 10 of Antioch and 57 (end of the

fourth century) of Laodicea the competence of the horepiscopes was restricted, the main argument being that in rural areas a priest was sufficient. The shaping of local communities, attested since the period of Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373), crystallizes from the III-IV centuries, when the papal authorities feel the need to pay increased attention to limit the chaotic multiplication of parishes. At that time, Christian parishes or communities were organized on three criteria: by community with community property; by college and association, respectively by community, but without property and differed from the medieval and modern institution of the same name, the former resembling rather the current meaning of the diocese, and not with an administrative and territorial unit, coordinated by a parish. Although the concrete moment of defining the system of parochial organization cannot be accurately dated in the literature, neither in rural nor in urban, independent of the moment of formalizing the role, the parish arose out of a natural necessity and closely followed the development of society, as a result of overlapping the dynamics of daily life with that of spiritual life.

The naturalness of the appearance of the system of parochial organization stands out also from the absence of obvious and disruptive breaks from the church tradition regarding the practice of the Eucharist, but on the contrary the primary Church guarding the organization of the parish as an extension of the Eucharist committed by the bishop – eloquent in supporting the premise that the parish is an extension of the unity of the Church, in the bishop, is the attribution of antimis, by which the priest was delegated by his bishop to perform the Divine Liturgy. On these coordinates, we concluded that at the moment when the priests were able to perform the Eucharist in the absence of the bishop and individually constitute, in fact, the first official manifestations of the parochial system of organization, established since the fourth century. On the other hand, the effervescence that marked the first centuries of Christianity led to the development and establishment, within the early Church, of four fundamental principles that marked the whole manifestation of organizational life: hierarchical, synodal, autocephaly and autonomy, and which have remained instruments for measuring, until today, the canonicity and canonical foundations of church organization. As regards the principle of autonomy, within the early Church the bishop exercised his ecclesiastical power in an independent manner for the entire guardianship diocese, and in matters of cultic and dogmatic matters he was obliged, by the canons 34 apostolic and 9 Antioch, to be in the assent of the other bishops, through his primate. On the other hand, the state of autocephaly derived from the equality between bishops, a principle

also grounded by the equality between the Holy Apostles, hence the fraternal relations between the local Christian churches, the highest expression of the principle of autocephaly and synodality. The principle of the church hierarchy, through the three hierarchical stages, develops in the next generation of the Apostolic Fathers, and in its concrete manifestation: the bishop represented the leader and the organ of its unity, with limited area of competence to the diocese he represented, but with universal recognition, chosen by the clergy and faithful of the shepherded community; the priest served together with his bishop or separately the mandated services, comes to; the deacon helps bishops in cultic activities.

The radiography carried out on the first Christian ages, through the analysis of scriptural, patristic and canonical testimonies, revealed the historical and canonical foundations of the institutional buds of the parochial organization system, but also the state of affairs of the community ethos. From the biblical foundations of the concept of parish, to the New Testament house church and to the historical and canonical Organization of the parish system, this historical, canonical and historiographic journey guided the first steps of doctoral research, and the structuring of the process of knowledge. As we observed during the research, the transition from the subordination of the local church (parish) to the Episcopal Authority, towards the parish as a subordinate structure to the parish priest, with administrative, organizational and territorial attributions, was the result of a constant effort of the representatives of the Orthodox Church, which crystallized over two centuries of Christianity. But we must be aware that the results of the efforts of the bishops to acquire an official status in accordance with the role and mission of the parish, illustrating their dogmatic identity and eastern ecclesial consciousness according to their own imperatives and constraints and not imposed on the realities of other symbolic geographies, were gradually realized. Regarding the affirmation of the position of the parochial organization system in the life of the Church in the Romanian space, a turning point is represented by the emergence and development of the first political formations and, in parallel, the need of local leaders to legitimize their power through the appeal to the church and its representatives, a context that accelerates the organization of religious life, the church organization following the political organization.

We are thus witnessing a development of the relationship between the state and the Church on much deeper levels and levels, which come to articulate the evolving symbiosis of the institutions of the two powers in the state. In particular, at a deeper analysis, we found that

another factor that influenced the evolution of the system of Organization of the Church in general and of the parochial one in particular was represented by the introduction of printing in the Romanian space and, implicitly, the increase in the number of publications in the religious field. A special moment was represented by the printing of the *Pravila* or *Pravila of Govora*, the code of laws officially promulgated by the state and church authorities, the first collection of civil and church laws that belonged to the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space. The relevance of the code of laws for understanding the system of parochial organization in the Romanian space is conferred by the strengthening of the role of the priest within the parochial Parish, including by establishing the coordinates of their judgment regarding the administration of parochial property, its moral and ethical conduct, respectively the exclusion of magical practices. In addition, the *Pravila* also stated the relationship that was established between the bishop and the priests, respectively the manner of his ordination. In the process of defining the parish system, the code of laws forces the achievement of a significant step in the parish organization by making a clear distinction between the assets of the parish and those of the parish. We note thus that the *Pravila* brings to attention and tries to clarify the accumulations of the last centuries regarding the coordinates of the system of parish organization.

The coordinates set by the little *Pravila* were developed and consolidated within the code of laws with church and political values – the Targoviste *Pravila* (the Great *Pravila*) – adopted in 1652. The innovative character of the *pravila* is conferred by the consecration of the legal union of the two Romanian countries, but also by the imposition of the Romanian language as the national language of law, to the detriment of the Slavonic language. In the legislative, administrative and institutional vacuum specific to the Romanian era and space, *Pravila* introduces new coordinates regarding the parochial organization system, transposed also in the responsibilities of the clergy and of the church staff. Among them, in the dedicated chapter we present the delegation of the powers to judge civil and criminal cases, the assumption of Notarial responsibilities, but also clarifications on canonical practices related to the administration of the Holy Mysteries, respectively of the Holy *irerugrii*, as well as the moral and ethical conditions of the priest. As well as the small *Pravila*, the code of laws adopted in 1652 was also a guide of faith for the daily life of Christians in the Romanian space, through the dogmatic and cultic character of the stipulated provisions. Moreover, the analysis of the code of laws allowed us to understand the partnership between the two forums in the life of society and how it influenced

the development of the parish system. While the parish represented the space for the officiating of the Holy Mysteries, the provisions of the pravila consolidated the administrative authority of the chiriarch within the shepherded diocese, but also his autonomy in the administration of church affairs and goods. Without insisting on the elements of novelty in the parochial organization as a whole introduced by the two Pravvas, another document with determining importance on the subject to thorough research is represented by the adoption of the organic regulations of 1831-1832. The normative act establishes the major coordinates of the development of the church life by reference to the duties of the upper clergy, but also of the lower one. Regarding the higher clergy, the method of electing hierarchs is stated, but also a series of extended responsibilities that derive from interaction with society and its members. Regarding the lower clergy, the statutory document establishes the responsibilities of the archpriest, parish priest and Deacon and emphasizes the need to refine the selection process for ordination and strengthen the system of preparing priests. Thus, we note that through this code of laws the attempt was made to connect the system of Organization of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space to the political and social realities of the era, a premise from which the present research started.

The Organization of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space has seen some decisive moments in its evolution in the nineteenth century, in this register being recorded and the adoption of several regulations that stated the organization of the church life in the Transylvanian space. In the present doctoral research, I appreciated as relevant the analysis of *Regulamentul pentru organizarea treburilor bisericești, școlare și fundaționale române de religie greco-orientală în statele austriece prin Andrei baron de Șaguna, episcopul Bisericii greco-orientale din Ardeal* (1864); *Statutul Organic al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din Ungaria și Transilvania* (1868); *Regulamentul pentru administrarea și controlarea averilor bisericești din Arhidieceza gr.-or. română a Transilvaniei* (1880), documents reflecting the canonical vision and thinking of hierarch Andrei Saguna in the social and political effervescence of the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of the normative documents from the aforementioned list opened the way towards the modernization of the organizational structures of the Orthodox Church in the Transylvanian area. The basis of church organization was placed the parish, which was supported in the performance of administrative responsibilities by a number of parish bodies, including the parish Synod, the parish committee and the epitropy. At the same time, the

ecclesiastical constitutional act brought to attention the educational dimension of the clergy, but also of the community, contributing significantly to the development of elementary schools, a context that enshrines the role of the parish priest on the education and training dimension of the pastoral community.

The second constitutional Act invoked, the Organic statute, first of all drew our attention through its emphasis on the need to coordinate the mission of the Church in a form of synodal manifestation, on all dimensions, from the dogmatic to the administrative one. In parallel, the fundamental law for the Organization of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania consolidates the principles of synodality, constitutionality, autonomy and separation of powers at the level of all organizational structures, by setting up the five organic bodies, hierarchically and independently built, including the parish. As we highlighted during this doctoral thesis, the statute pays more attention to the administrative dimension of the parish concept, focusing on setting the coordinates of the role and functions of the parish priest and the parish. Another novelty element brought to attention by the regulations adopted in the Transylvanian area is represented by the consecration of the role of clergy and laity in the life and organization of the Church, by their presence in the executive and deliberative bodies of the Church, as they were presented in the dedicated chapter.

The situation of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space recorded a general improvement in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the adoption of a set of laws, such as those analyzed in this doctoral research, which stated the general principles of Organization, leadership and church administration, supplemented by a series of special laws and regulations for the discipline of the myrrh and monastic clergy. In fact, in the modern era, we have witnessed in the entire Romanian space a real effervescence regarding the development of church institutions, their role and functionality within society and in relation to the state. The twentieth century, however, captures the Orthodox Church in the Romanian space in a unique landscape, both in terms of political realities, as well as social and cultural ones. Eloquently in this regard, in the X-ray we highlighted the fact that with the adoption of the statute of organization in 1925, parishes are consecrated as church communities in their own right, and parish priests carry out their church mission based on the mandate received from the bishop. In comparison, the Statute adopted in 1949 complements the definition of the parish and the principle of territoriality, as the foundation of the structure of church life within a parish. After

the fall of the communist regime, the new realities demanded the adoption of a new constitutive document of the Romanian Orthodox Church, a process that lasted until 2008. The statute attaches great importance to the harmonization of the principles of church organization with ecclesiology and the pastoral-missionary work of the Orthodox Church. In addition to the form of the Statute adopted in 2008, noting a series of dimensions of social and spiritual life that were not sufficiently well-normed, between 2008-2019 a new form of the statute was developed, which emphasizes the role of synodality, paying increased attention to the Holy Synod, the Permanent Synod and the Metropolitan Synod, as well as cooperation between clergy and laity. Moreover, regarding the definition of the term Parish, this fundamental act states that the parish is a legal person of private law and public utility, with rights and obligations, is managed and administered autonomously in relations with other component units of the same rank, but subordinated canonically, legally, administratively and patrimonially to the Diocesan Center.

As I mentioned during this doctoral research, the mission of the Church is exercised in various forms and is carried out mainly within the parish, this being the basic cell of the Church. As for the pastoral-missionary dimension, the parish continues to represent today, as in the first centuries of Christendom, the most familiar method of gathering and communion of the faithful, its unity being ensured by the bond established between the faithful who freely participate in the life of the community and share in Christian teachings. In the current social and cultural context, since the political dimension no longer has the same implications on the development of church life, at least in the Romanian space, the Church must promote the message of the universality of salvation in Christ, namely that it is a space of freedom. On the other hand, the full character of the Church does not consist in the declaration of belonging and in the firm preaching of Christian teachings, meaning in which it is imperative to augment pastoral-missionary activities. In the current context it goes without saying that the success of the process of revitalizing the religious feeling and its forms of manifestation must start from the parish level, which can be a catalyst including through contagion. Regarding the capitalization of the results of the present doctoral project, a more careful focus is required on the way of organization and parochial functioning within the other sister Orthodox Churches. Also, in the context of discussions on the administrative-territorial reform of our country, it is of interest how the current parochial organization system will fold on this reform. Besides all this, an important aspect is also the deepening of the problem of the relationship between the parish priest and the other parish

governing bodies, as well as between the priest and the faithful. Of course, all this is constituted in Desiderata that are of personal scientific interest in the near future.

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