Promoting Ancestry as Ecodomy in Romanian Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The Role of Ancestors in Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Rhetoric

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Abstract

For the most part, contemporary Romanian Orthodox spirituality is still heavily based on a rhetoric which builds on the notion of ancestry with the intention not only to provide Romanians with a safe comfort zone, but also to secure its privileges and influence over most of today's Romanian society. In attempting to go back in history to demonstrate that the ancestry of Romanians is sufficient proof for their full and unconditional adherence to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in its local Romanian version as the Romanian Orthodox Church, most of today's representatives of Romanian Orthodox spirituality—notably Dumitru Stăniloae, Ioan Rămureanu, and Teoctist, the former Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church—focused on a rhetoric that, on the one hand, takes Romanians back to their Thracian, Dacian, and Roman ancestors, while on the other hand, seeks to inculcate the idea that an unflinching adherence to this specific ancestry, which is described as Christian by nature and birth, must be kept at all costs. Thus, this specific kind of rhetoric attempts to build a protective fence around Romanians, who are taught that they need to preserve their Eastern Orthodox Christianity and their allegiance to the Romanian Orthodox Church mostly because, since their ancestors were Christians, they are in fact born Christian. The process of building this protective wall around Romanians is described by means of the term 'ecodomy' and, unlike its general use in contemporary debates as focusing on positive aspects, the particular focus of the Romanian Orthodox Church on ecodomy based on the idea of ancestry is going to be revealed mostly through a chain of negative connotations. Thus, the contemporary rhetoric of the Romanian Orthodox Church based on the notion of ancestry as ecodomy—one may even call it negative ecodomy—is going to be explained in connection with three fundamental aspects, namely church, nation, and culture, all intended to preserve not only the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church in nowadays Romanian society, but also a set of privileges in its relationship with the state.

Keywords: church, nation, culture, Orthodox, Romanian, ancestry, ecodomy

Introduction

On November 12, 2014, the Constitutional Court of Romania issued a decision whereby it acknowledged the unconstitutional character of article 9, paragraph 2 of the Education Law No. 84/1995 and of article 18, paragraph 2 of the Education Law No. 1/2011 (Aștefănesei and Nicolaescu, 2014). Since the former states that a pupil is permitted not to attend religion classes following the written request of his parents or legal custodian and the latter indicates that a pupil is allowed not to attend religion classes as a result of the written request of his parents, legal custodian, or oneself in case one is at least 18 years of age, one is entitled to conclude that—put

simply—religion lost much of its importance in Romania's pre-university academic curriculum. While religion was not officially ousted from schools, as many newspapers hastened to conclude, it was certainly displaced from what used to be a rather privileged place and moved into a more or less secluded corner. Thus pupils are no longer required to attend religion classes by default but rather if and when their parents or legal custodian decide to forward a written request to the director of a particular institution of pre-university education. On the other hand, the Constitution of Romania guarantees the freedom of religious education in article 32, paragraph 7, which affirms that religious education is not only organized but also guaranteed by law even in state institutions of pre-university education. When coupled with article 29, paragraph 5 of the same Constitution of Romania which says that religious denominations benefit from the sup-port of the Romanian state although they are autonomous from it, one realizes that religion plays—at least on paper—a decisively crucial role in Romania's pre-university education system and the Constitutional Court's recent decision certainly appears to disrupt this tradition (***, 2014: *The Romanian Constitution*).

While such a piece of news may go unnoticed in the more secularized society of Western Europe, in Eastern Europe's Romania, things are significantly different. Literally dominated by the theology and practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Romania is still a rather traditional country when it comes to religion, an attitude which seems to affect not only the religious life of the ordinary Romanian citizen but also his social, economic, and educational status. Given this particular state of affairs, the decision of Romania's Constitutional Court regarding religion classes had absolutely no chance to remain in some obscure recesses of the country's legal system. On the contrary, the Romanian Patriarchate immediately issued a press release, which not only characterized the decision of the Constitutional Court as "dis-criminating and humiliating" but also vowed to "remain unintimidated and undiscouraged" for the sake of "today's Romanian society" which is "systematically aggressed by anti-religious secularism under the guise of the freedom of consciousness". Thus, through the voice of its Patriarchate, the Romanian Orthodox Church—which still considers itself the only true church not only in the country of Romania but also in the whole world, based on the belief that Eastern Orthodoxy is a "member of the original Christian Church" (***, nd: The Ancient Church)—promises to be a "faithful ally in defending and promoting the eternal values of Eastern Orthodox faith" in order not to "reduce children's education to limited and ephemeral horizons". Such a declaration would not necessarily be a problem in itself if the press release had stopped here. It did not, however, stop here but moved the whole argument from the sphere of religious convictions into the realm of national consciousness by stating that these "eternal values of Eastern Orthodox faith" are "specific to the Romanian people" which in the opinion of the prelates of the Romanian Patriarchate is said to be "profoundly religious" (Biroul de Presă al Patriarhiei Române, 2014).

The press release of the Romanian Patriarchate was followed, days later, by a more caustic approach issued by Pimen, the Eastern Orthodox archbishop of Suceava, in his Christmas Pastoral Letter. The high-ranking official of the Romanian Orthodox Church not only reiterates the connection between Eastern Orthodox faith and the consciousness of the Romanian nation, but also chooses to cement this relationship by pushing it back in time. Thus, for Pimen, Eastern Orthodox faith is "the soul with which the Romanian people was born", which shows that the whole Romanian spirituality, past and present, is influenced, and perhaps even dictated, by Eastern Orthodox faith, evidently in a specifically Romanian format. In other words, for Romanians, faith is not only a matter of religion, but more importantly, a matter of nationality and ethnicity, as well as culture and history. When the connection between faith and nationality is established in such terms, Pimen's discourse suddenly

turns into a sample of nationalistic radicalism. Thus, he contends, the decision of Romania's Constitutional Court regarding the religion class is "an attack on our [Romanian] national being, on the [Eastern Orthodox] faith of our [Romanian] people, an offense to divine majesty". In quoting Romans 10:17 which indicates that, according to the apostle Paul, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God", Pimen continues to build on his conviction that, as far as Romanians are concerned, their Eastern Orthodox faith is inexorably bound to their national identity. Thus, he underlines that Paul's "saving truth" was "paid heed at by our ancestors", who were not only "leaders of the country", but also "fatherly ministers of the holy altars of our [Romanian Eastern Orthodox] ancestral church". This connection between national identity and religious belief is further strengthened by Pimen's declaration that faith—obviously in its Eastern Orthodox and specifically Romanian version—is "the foundation of our [Romanian] spiritual life" as well as "our security in the face of historical unpredictability"; faith is, according to Pimen, "this ancient and holy national patrimony of all Romanian centuries and generations" (Pimen, 2014). Such a discourse is vivid indication of the fact that today's Romanian Eastern Orthodox rhetoric is marked not as much by religious convictions as it is loaded with nationalistic ideas and claims of radical ethnicity, both however informed by the encompassing notion of ancestry; the religious thought of the Romanian Orthodox Church is therefore, in the words of Emil Bartoș, "a kind of «ethnotheology»" (Bartoș, 2002: 2).

In this case, however, the idea of ancestry acquires defensive and protective connotations, in the sense that it provides Romanian Orthodox Church with the necessary frame-work for the building of an environment where all Romanians are supposed to feel comfortable and secure. In other words, ancestry becomes ecodomy—a particular way to raise a protective fence around Romanians by promoting a single church [the Romanian Orthodox Church], a single nation [the Romanian people in its historical lands], and a single culture [a philosophy based on the theology of Eastern Christianity as adapted by Romanians]. Although in contemporary academic discussions, ecodomy is considered "the art of inhabiting instead of dominating the earth, our house", as Ernst Conradie (2006: 16) notices following the argument of Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, one can extend its meaning "to any constructive process" (1995: 109).

One should notice, however, that, while Müller-Fahrenholz's "constructive process" is predominantly positive in nature, the ecodomy unwittingly promoted by the Romanian Orthodox Church through the idea of ancestry—I say "unwittingly" because I am not aware of any such use of the word "ecodomy" in Romanian Orthodox theology—is not always positive as it involves diverse ideologies about radical nationalism, ethnicity, and culture. Therefore, in using the idea of ancestry the contemporary Romanian Orthodox Church is actively promoting a threefold ecodomy which, while focusing on church, nation, and culture as features of a vital space or a haven presumed safe for all Romanians, bears within it not only a set of negative aspects but also some concrete nefarious consequences, some of which have already become unfortunate moments in Romania's recent past.

Ecodomy as Church Building: the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation

While it may appear at least odd to the eye of the Western European, the interweaving of national-ism and ethnicity with Eastern Orthodox belief in Romania is neither an issue of novelty nor an element of surprise for the local inhabitant of the Romanian historic provinces. It is, however, the very first element which defines ancestry as ecodomy: the church as a safe place for all Romanians.

These days, regardless of whether one lives in Transylvania, Moldova, or Walachia, the aver-age Romanian is consciously or unconsciously aware of the fact that one must have some sort of connection with Eastern Orthodoxy by virtue of his or her being Romanian or being somehow related to Romanian ancestry. In short, as Gavril Flora and Georgina Szilagyi correctly notice (Flora and Szilagyi, 2005: 114), being Romanian or being of Romanian stock equals being Eastern Orthodox and, by definition, being a promotor of the interests of the Romanian nation and of its Orthodox Church by any means necessary. As Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu point out, one of the most controversial means whereby these so-called interests of the Romanian nation are said to be promoted is the National Salvation Cathedral (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 56).

While a more exact translation, though not so elegant, of this flamboyant project of the Romanian Orthodox Church would be the Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] People or Nation, one cannot overlook the conspicuous connection between religion and nationality in the very title of the edifice which is meant to point not only to the grandeur of the Romanian Orthodox Church but also to the fact that it is supposed to be the only church of the whole Romanian nation, a place where all Romanians should feel religiously, ecclesiastically, and theologically safe. The actual construction of the building has started in recent years despite numerous accusations and harsh criticism both from the civil society and the more or less secularized media; the building process, however, is not doing extremely well and the salvation of the Romanian people/nation will possibly suffer from a serious set-back if this megalomaniac project is not going to be financed even more heavily than it has been so far. For some Romanians, however, but also for some of the members of the Romanian Orthodox clergy, the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation is not only a must, but also proof of the interpenetration of Eastern Orthodoxy and Romanian nationalism (Roudometof, 2014: 94), both based on the idea of ancestry. Thus, the larger the cathedral is eventually going to be in its final form—and the building is neither unimpressive nor easy to overlook with its dimensions seventy-two meters in length, forty-four in width, and fifty in height—the more poignantly it will express the symbiosis between the Romanian nation and its Eastern Orthodox faith, coupled with its Dacian and Latin ancestry (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 45).

It is this idea of a "spiritual synthesis of Dacian, Latin, and Eastern Orthodox elements" (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 59) that currently characterizes the rhetoric of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church in an effort to maintain as well as expand its influence in Romanian life and particularly in society as a whole. While ignoring urgent aspects such as the need to catechize the vast majority of the Romanian citizens who claim to be Orthodox simply because they are unacquainted with the basic tenets of Eastern Orthodoxy, today's Eastern Orthodox clerics in Romania still prefer to play the card of the identity between religious beliefs and national identity (Romocea, 2011: 109ff). Simply because Romanians are said to be the beneficiaries of a highly spiritual ancestry going back at least two thousand years in history to the time of Dacians, the Roman conquest, the Latin colonization, and the subsequent—but also very late—influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the life of the nation. Although it may seem that the Romanian Orthodox Church is the only entity which should be blamed for developing the idea of ancestry into something with obvious nationalist and ethnic connotations, this is not actually the case. As Stan and Turcescu point out, politicians were very eager to get the support of the Romanian Orthodox Church and this eagerness often turned into despair mostly in crucial times like the years dominated by general elections (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 59).

In times like these, when politics and religion join forces—a reality aptly presented by Tina Olteanu and Dorothée de Nève (Olteanu and de Nève, 2014: 189)—in a symbiosis between the desperate Romanian politician and the compliant Romanian Orthodox cleric, the idea of ancestry surfaces time and time again in an effort to underline the necessity that Romanians show their Romanian-ness regarding the situation of the nation, their Eastern Orthodox faith, and their ancestral history, so powerfully embodied in the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation. This colorful ideology combining ancestry, nationalism, and ethnicity was eventually given free rein when politicians and clerics conceded, after numerous quarrels, that the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation should be built in the immediate vicinity of the Romanian Parliament as indicative of how church and nation work together in ancestral Romania (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 59-60).

While it may not be that apparent, the church and the nation did work together just fine in Romania where the successors of the ancient Dacians as well as the Latin conquerors and colonizers are currently building the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation in a location which, during the Communist regime, the former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu "had unknowingly cleared" as he was contemplating the idea of building the House of the People (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 63). The House of the People was eventually erected and became one of the largest buildings on the face of the earth and it is possible that in the future a second building—mimicking but likely not matching its megalomania—will stand next to it. If this prospect comes to fruition, then the Romanian ideology of the ancestry of the Romanian people who so proudly combine patriotic preoccupations with the welfare of the nation and pious interests for the progress of the local Eastern Orthodox Church will have blossomed into a reality which confirms not only theoretically but also practically that religion, nationalism, and politics are conjoined in today's Romania. This situation however, it must be stressed, is not necessarily the fault of Eastern Orthodox theology, but—as Donald Fairbairn writes—rather of the ethnically and nationalistically orientated Romanian Orthodox Church (Fairbairn, 2002: 146).

On top of it, if or when that happens, the huge House of the People build by Ceaușescu—and which is now the headquarters of the Romanian Parliament—will be flanked by the equally colossal Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation, or rather of a nation which can be seriously misguided in its conviction that its ancestry lies only with Dacians and Romans, and not with other people as well. As Lucian Boia points out, the Romanians' ideology of ancestry is more of a myth than certain reality since in two thousand years of history the inhabitants of the lands which make up today's Romania were forced into cohabitation with different nations—the Slavs, for instance—as well as with different religious and cultural influences, such as the Byzantine-Slavonic ecclesiastical tradition (Boia, 2001: 110-111). Moreover, in resorting to the idea of a Dacian ancestry of the Romanian nation, the Orthodox Church builds its entire ethnogenetic theory on a romantic supposition which, in Boia's opinion, presents the Dacians as "mythical ancestor figures, sunk deep into a time before history, in a land which still recalled their untamed courage" (Boia, 2001: 90), but without real and solid historical or archaeological support. One proof in this respect may be the fact, as Ioana Repciuc shows, that these ancestors are traditionally celebrated mostly in village churches during some of the local summer fruit festivals (Repciuc, 2011, 91).

Mythical or not, the idea of ancestry in today's Romania is heavily dominated by the rhetoric of the Romanian Orthodox Church which constantly pushes the ancestry of Romanians in their distant Dacian and Roman history in an attempt to provide Romanians with a church that, by virtue of being

ancient, is able to offer them a certain sense of perpetual comfort, possibly because of the popular belief that there is a deterministic connection between us and our ancestors, a kind of psychological liaison which, according to Elena-Claudia Rusu, crosses over time and unconsciously leaves upon us the imprints of both positive and negative experiences (Rusu, 2014: 1144). Such an enterprise aims at building a grand vision of the complementarity of nation and religion which—like the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation in its future final version if it is ever going to be completed as an ecclesiastical edifice—is hoped to keep the notion of ancestry alive as some sort of protective fence against any aspect that may pose more or less immediate threats to the still incredibly significant influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church in today's Romanian society.

Ecodomy as Nation Building: the Ethnic Genesis of the Romanian People

As a practical symbol of the convergence between nationalism, religion, and ancestry in Romanian Eastern Orthodox thought, the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation is the result of a determined rhetoric promoted by Orthodox clerics and theologians with utmost persistence after the Revolution of December 1989 and of focusing on the birth of Romanians as an ancient ethnic group characterized by the uniqueness of the Christian faith as professed by the Romanian Orthodox Church. This illustrates that the second aspect of ancestry as ecodomy in the rhetoric of the Romanian Orthodox Church is the idea of the ethnic beginning of the Romanian people. Thus, writing as early as 1991, Mircea Păcurariu, formerly professor of ecclesiastical history, indicates that the Romanian Orthodox Church is ancestral, primarily because its history unfolded in conjunction with the christianization and ethnic genesis of the Romanian nation.

For Păcurariu, as well as for the majority if not the totality of Romanian Orthodox clergy, the association between the Orthodox Church and the birth of the Romanian nation is vital because it is the only way to make sure that today's society is convinced of the ancestral character of the Romanian Orthodox Church and every Romanian is persuaded into believing that he or she was born Christian (Dutceac Segesten, 2011: 214, n. 2). Moreover, when the church and the nation are placed in the same pot, people can be easily convinced that being of Romanian ancestry means that they must also perceive themselves as de facto members of the Romanian Orthodox church. This way, the idea of ancestry functions as a foundation for a rather wide array of nationalistic claims which portray the Romanian nation as somehow different from its surrounding neighbors, although the issue of the ethnogenesis of the Romanians is not exactly a settled matter (Bideleux and Jeffries, 2007: 126-127).

For instance, Păcurariu insists that while these nations can go back in history to a precise date when they were christened, Romanians cannot do that simply because they were born Christians (Cinpoeș, 2010: 97-98). Moreover, this so-called Christian birth of the Romanian nation happened not only spontaneously and naturally but also, simultaneously, with its romanization and latinization. While nothing is said about the fact that the Romans were hardly influenced by the then Eastern, and specifically Greek-Hellenistic version of Christianity, which puts the connection between Romanians and Eastern Orthodoxy at odds, the kind of rhetoric used by Păcurariu and the Romanian clergy in general is still heavily based on the idea that, by virtue of its ancestral Latinism and Christianity, the Romanian nation has no baptism certificate. In other words, while all the surrounding nations became Christian, the Romanians were born Christian, and this is totally the result of its Roman, Latin, and Christian ancestry (Păcurariu, 1991: 5).

Once its ancestry is established in terms of Latinism and Christianity, the Romanian Orthodox Church is free to build on the rhetoric of nationalism and ethnicity. This is why Păcurariu explains that, when it comes to the Romanian nation, the church—and by church one should understand the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church—has always "spiritually strengthened and comforted our ancestors, turned them into good Christians, into godly and religious people, men and women who feared God and loved their neighbors" (Păcurariu, 1991: 11). Thus, according to Păcurariu, it is obvious why these people, namely the ancestors of Romanians and, by definition, Romanians themselves, were not only people of high morality and deep godliness, but also martyrs of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

It is astounding, however, how Păcurariu—in mentioning some such martyrs—jumps from the fourth century straight into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries while leaving aside well over one thousand years of history. This rhetorical device though allows him to bridge the evident historical gap between the ancestors of today's Romanians and the time when, under the overwhelming influence of the Enlightenment, Romanians started to develop a consciousness as a nation. While Păcurariu is fair in acknowledging that, as far as the very first centuries are concerned, one cannot speak of a "proper Romanian church, but only a Dacian-Roman church" (Păcurariu, 1991: 18)—he does not say whether this church was Eastern Orthodox or not—ordinary believers are far less sophisticated in their willingness to consider such historical details. Thus, at the level of popular consciousness, nowadays Romanians are convinced not only of the fact that their nation was born Orthodox, but also that they continue to be born into this world with some sort of ontological affiliation to (as well as membership in) the Romanian Orthodox Church, an indication that, as Vasile A. Taloș writes, "the idea of the Dacian-Roman synthesis was trimphant" (Taloș, 2008: 27).

A year later, in 1992, Dumitru Stăniloae—undoubtedly the most famous theologian of the Romanian Orthodox Church of the twentieth century—added to this rhetoric of ancestry, nationalism, and ethnicity by explaining that the Romanian nation has lived in the "middle space between West and East" and, in so doing, it "combined its Latin character and [Eastern] Orthodox Christianity" (Stăniloae, 1992: 22). Like Păcurariu, Stăniloae is not interested in explaining how the latinized and romanized Dacians—who most likely benefited from a Western, specifically Latin, form of Christianity—ended up being absorbed into Eastern Christianity, but in pushing the ancestry of Romanians well beyond the Dacians into the rather obscure history of the Thracians, a group of people who appear to include them (Niculescu, 2007: 153). Thus Stăniloae states that "our Latin character is not unacquainted with the ancientness of our Thracian being" and then he attempts to push the Latin character of Romanians further down in history by pointing out that, as ancestors of Romanians, the Dacians were related to the so-called Besi Thracians. In Stăniloae's view, these "represent the original Latin character that stretched from the old Carpathian Mountains over the whole of the Balkan Peninsula and went even beyond the Bosphorus Strait into Bithynia (and Frigia), with Troy as capital city, from where Priam's grandson traveled to Italy, thus founding Rome and giving birth to Western Latin civilization" (Stăniloae, 1992: 22).

Although he anchors the ancestry of Romanians so far back in history, Stăniloae is not entirely satisfied with the possibility that—based on his own argument about the Western Latin character of some of the Thracians—Romanians could be associated with Western Christianity. This is why he hastens to under-line that Romanians have their own Latin character which not only remained "in the middle, between East and West", but also "received the original Oriental [Eastern] Christianity"

(Stăniloae, 1992: 23). Unfortunately, Stăniloae does not say how this actually happened. Such an explanation, however, does not seem to have been part of his agenda but he does in fact exemplify the use of ancestry as ecodomy in trying to build an image of the Romanian nation which feels safe in its own realm, defined as the middle space within East and West. As Juhász Tamás notices, the result of Stăniloae's ecodomic effort to create a liaison between ancestry and nation results in an idealistic preoccupation with the Latin credentials of the Romanian people which, reportedly due to its original Eastern Latinity and Orthodox Christianity, turned it into some sort of superior nation with an equally superior [Romanian Orthodox] church (Tamás, 2010: 50). In the end, this serves as basis for an ongoing rhetoric of nationalism and ethnicity meant to defend and secure—in contemporary times—the supremacy of the Romanian Orthodox Church over any claims of truth whatsoever issued by other ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical institutions.

Ecodomy as Culture Building: the Dangerous Philosophy of the Recent Past

The rhetoric promoted in the early 1990s by theologians like Rămureanu and Stăniloae who portray the Romanian people as a nation born, not made, Christian prepared the way for an even stronger affirmation of the said ancient-ness and Christian ethnicity of the Romanian nation that occurred in the mid 1990s. This time, however, the notion of ancestry explains not only the ethnicity of the Romanian nation, but also its philosophy, an aspect which reveals the third component of ancestry as ecodomy in the reality of culture. Thus, in 1995, a huge volume on the autocephaly and the patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church was published under the patronage of Teoctist, the then Patriarch of Romania, and with the approval of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church (***, 1995). Celebrating 110 years since the proclamation of the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as 70 years since the establishment of its Patriarchate, this massive volume proliferates the previous nationalistic rhetoric of Rămureanu and Stăniloae by insisting on the ancientness of the Romanian Orthodox Church described as the "national church" of the Romanian people which "caught deep roots in this ancient land and in the hearts of our Dacian-Roman ancestors" (Teoctist, 1995: 5).

To be sure, while the land points to the idea of nation, the heart speaks about the notion of a common consciousness and culture. For Teoctist, therefore, the past of the Romanian nation should be understood not only politically and ecclesiastically, but also culturally. In other words, in the history of the Romanians the nation and the church are intertwined due to the ancientness of Christianity brought here by the Roman colonists, who are considered the ancestors of today's Romanians in the land of Dacia where a specific cultural spirituality took shape over centuries (Teoctist, 1995: 9). Teoctist continues to underline the connection between nation and church by stressing the link between contemporary Romanians and their "ancient church"—a reference to the Romanian Orthodox Church, unlike Rămureanu who at least admitted that, regarding the ancestors of Romanians, one can only speak of a Dacian and Roman church, not a Romanian Orthodox Church—with the specific purpose of keeping what he calls "this binding thread with our ancestors" (Teoctist, 1995: 13-14). In its ancient capacity, the Romanian Orthodox Church, Teoctist writes, "is the spiritual mother of the Romanian nation" (Teoctist, 1995: 5), a clear indication of the Romanians' cultural heritage which, as Cristian Vasile clarifies, includes only the Orthodox and certainly not other non-Orthodox Christian churches, such as the Greek-Catholics persecuted by the Communist regime with the support of some Orthodox leaders (Vasile, 2002: 317).

In the very next article written by Constantin Pârvu, then administrative patriarchal vicar, these Dacian and Roman ancestors become "strămâni" or "ancientromanians", a compound word which puts together the ideas of ancestry and that of nation with the specific intention to show "the incontestable proof " of the "presence, permanence, and continuity of [Eastern] Orthodox Romanians in these [latinized and romanized] lands" (Pârvu, 1995: 17-18). This is evidently another demonstration of how contemporary Orthodox rhetoric uses the idea of ancestry as ecodomy in an attempt to secure a comfort zone in the mind of nowadays Romanians by attempting to convince them that they share not only the same national ideals and ethnic characteristics, but also the same cultural history. One should not loose sight of the fact that, in their efforts to convince Romanians of their ancestry as a Christian nation, the clerics of the Romanian Orthodox Church also sought to preserve a set of privileges which, in Pârvu's words, can be defined as "priority necessities for the clergy and ecclesiastical life" and they include "the integral remuneration of the clergy and the members of the ecclesiastical personnel from the budget of the state government, the recovery of the status of public officers for the clergy, and the exclusive right of the [Romanian Orthodox] church to sell cultic objects" (Pârvu, 1995: 56-57).

This specific kind of discourse which juxtaposes ideas such as nation, ethnicity, and ancestry in an attempt to construct a certain type of religious propaganda aimed at supporting a so-called national Romanian Orthodox Church results not only in the benign pragmatism that supports the building of the Cathedral for the Salvation of the (Romanian) Nation, but also in a malignant nationalism that can eventually lead to ethnic hatred, ecclesiastical bigotry, and historiographic inaccuracy. In fact, the benign pragmatism behind the idea of a Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation can really turn into malignant nationalism in a matter of only a few years with catastrophic consequences not only for the lives of individuals, but also for the actual history of a whole nation. As Stan and Turcescu point out, the idea of a Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation is no novelty for Romanians. Far from being the initiative of patriarch Teoctist in the early 1990s—as the majority of today's Romanians most likely perceive it—the idea of such an ecclesiastical edifice goes back in time to Miron Cristea, the first patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and even as far as 1877, when the Kingdom of Romania (which back then did not include Transylvania) won its independence from the Ottoman Empire during the Russian-Turkish war (Stan and Turcescu, 2007: 56-57).

Initially intended as means to celebrate as well as symbolize "the victory of [Eastern] Orthodoxy over the Muslim Ottomans", the idea of a national cathedral began to flourish around a theology that combined nationalism, religion, and politics. At this point, its initial benign pragmatism turned into malignant nationalism, an ideology supported and disseminated by a number of influential theologians and intellectuals who chose to praise the Romanian nation, ethnicity, and ancestry to the detriment of any other human values. As Paul A. Shapiro points out, theologians like Miron Cristea, the first patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and intellectuals like Nicolae Iorga, the world renowned Romanian historian and an exceptionally accomplished man of culture, favored the right-wing political doctrine of an ancient Romanian nation which had an equally ancestral cultural heritage. This ideology, now combining not only nationalism and ethnicity but also culture and philosophy, pictures an image of the Romanian people as hated by everybody, especially by Hungarians, Jews, and Gypsies who endanger the very being of Romanians. The Romanian nation thus must find a way not only to reform its politics, but also to revitalize itself morally and spiritually by "returning… to [Eastern] Orthodox Christian values", the very homophobic philosophy of the fascist Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement (Shapiro, 2007: 147, 142). As for the latter, Stanley

G. Payne writes that it adopted the theology of the Romanian Orthodox Church and considered it "cosubstantial" with the whole of the Romanian nation (Payne, 1995: 136).

The fact that Miron Cristea and Nicolae Iorga promoted the kind of right-wing philosophy which ended up fueling the antisemitism of the Legionary Movement is no longer a problem that can be solved by today's Romanian Orthodox Church, even if it is indeed an unsettling and tragic historical reality, as is made clear by William O. Oldson (2002: 303). Their inclusion, however, in a list of "reputed men of our nation" compiled by Teoctist, the former Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, is most certainly—if not immediately problematic—at least deeply disturbing. Teoctist's list also includes Simion Mehedinți, another prominent intellectual of that time who, alongside other likeminded people, laid the foundation of an influential cultural movement called Gândirism ("Thinkism"). As Keith Hitchins explains, the movement was led by Nichifor Crainic, a theologian and philologist profoundly preoccupied with the reinstate-ment of traditional authentic Romanian values rooted in the dangerously flammable mixture of Eastern Orthodox spirituality, militant nationalism, and ethnic enthusiasm (Hitchins, 2014: 163).

Cristea, Iorga, and Mehedinți focused on building an idealistic and almost idyllic image of the Romanian nation which, despite the vicissitudes of history and countless enemies threatening its existence over the centuries, miraculously succeeded in not only preserving its national and cultural Eastern Orthodox identity, but also in rising above its troubled history due to its Eastern Orthodox faith, love for all human beings, and a particularly remark-able morality, all anchored in its Latinized and Romanized Dacian ancestry. Mehedinți, for instance, has a whole list of so-called "Romanian virtues" which, in addition to presenting the Romanian people in unbelievably romantic—even utopian— terms, are exemplified by reference to the Legionary movement. More concretely, Romanians—including their homophobic, antisemitic, fascist, and even murderous brothers from the Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement—are said to be characterized by cultural virtues such as the lack of confessional wars, neutrality regarding dogmatic quarrels, the primacy of the soul, the ancient-ness of [Romanian Orthodox] Christianity, the symbiosis between [the Romanian Orthodox] church and state, the lack of heresies and heretics, the presence of Jesus in national folklore, the absence of vengeful impulses, the acceptance of suffering as means of moral purification, trust in the victory of good over evil, and the purity of moral beauty over formal justice (Mehedinți, 1995).

The disturbing nature of the inclusion of Cristea, Iorga, and Mehedinți in Patriarch Teoctist's list is enhanced by Stăniloae's eulogy of Crainic's cultural accomplishments and specifically of his Romanian "nationalism, poetry, and theology", which found "a true and meaningful fulfillment" in his lifelong activity (Stăniloae, 1940: 264). Consequently, through Teoctist's list and Stăniloae's eulogy of Crainic, the Romanian Orthodox Church is unapologetically as well as dangerously connected with the radically homophobic philosophy of the Legionary Movement, which not only combined the Romanians' Latinized ancestry, nationality, and ethnicity with Eastern Orthodox theology, but also used them to assassinate most of those who—according to the idealistically romanticized cultural view of the Romanian nation sup-ported by right-wing thinking—posed a threat to this false image of the Romanian people. A more significant aspect, though, is the fact that this unfortunate juxtaposition of ancestry, nationalism, and culture was meant to provide Romanians with an ecodomic sense of accomplishment, comfort, and trust in their own specific abilities as a nation, even if —as shown by Sorin Șipoș—it is very possible that Romanians

themselves do not adhere to the Romanian Orthodox Church primarily for its theology and spirituality, but rather for its "tradition, ethnicity, and heritage" (Șipoș, 2008: 86).

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the idea of ancestry in Romanian Orthodox Christianity has been used by the Romanian Orthodox Church to engage in an aggressively defensive rhetoric which sees the role of ancestors as builders of a safe vital space for the whole Romanian nation. This is why the term used in this paper to describe the idea as well as the process of building such a safe environment is ecodomy, a notion which, in contemporary academic debates, has mostly positive connotations because it involves the idea of habitation rather than domination, while, in the rhetoric of today's Romanian Orthodox Church, it becomes a term with evident negative connotations, which much too often resulted in a whole range of disastrous events. In recent Romanian Orthodox spirituality the use of ancestry as ecodomy or as process which is meant to build a safe zone for the Romanian people, deals with three main aspects: church, nation, and culture.

Although the idea of ancestry as ecodomy has a positive purpose in attempting to secure a zone of general ecclesiastical, national, and cultural safety and comfort for Romanians, the ways used to pursue this goal as well as some of its concrete results were undoubtedly negative to say the least. Thus, instead of focusing on the catechization of Romanians and their religious instruction, the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to invest huge financial resources in building the so-called Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation, which, other than wasting an considerable amount of money, has proved to serve no practical purpose whatsoever. The rhetoric behind the reasons for the construction of such an impressive edifice was based on the idea that Romanians must have the same church, a national Church, which can only be the Romanian Orthodox Church because, in being the offspring of Dacians and the Latinizing Roman (and Christian) colonists, Romanians were born a Christian nation. Thus, they surely must have had the same cultural heritage which is predominantly Eastern Orthodox in nature mostly because, as the contemporary rhetoric goes, the Romanian Orthodox Church has nurtured the Romanian nation as a true and loving mother.

These convictions that Romanians must have a unique church, nation, and culture prompted some theologians to picture such an unrealistically idealistic and utopian image of Romanians that it borders on the grotesque. For instance, in Stăniloae, the so-called "spirit" of the Romanian people is presented in terms of sweetness, meek-ness, and tenderness; Romanians are thus said to be people of infinite goodness and gentleness, they have never had bellicose thoughts or expansionist plans, because they always wanted to stay in their comfort zone, in the ancient hearth of the Romanian land (Stăniloae, 1992: 5-6). Or, as Dan Ioan Mureșan puts it, Romanians had a "humble presence at the crossroads of the Orthodox world" (Mureșan, 2012: 141-153) most likely because, in Stăniloae's words, Romanians "are spiritually superior to other people in Europe" (Dădârlat, 1992: 16). This is only a continuation of the rhetoric used by Mehedinți, who seems to have been convinced that Romanian (Eastern Orthodox) Christianity is the foundation of a "truly superior spiritual life", devoid of any avenging thoughts. Although Mehedinți was a witness of numerous assassinations carried out by the Legionary Movement (whose extremist right-wing philosophy he himself defended) and then of the violent confrontation between the Iron Guard and Antonescu's government that resulted in the dissolution of the Legionary Movement, he nonetheless wrote that "this unique shame in the life of the Romanian nation" had nothing to do with "something essential in the nature of the Romanian

people" (Mehedinți, 1995: 197). In other words, Romanians cannot be blamed for anything bad that happened in their history; on the contrary, Romanians fought against each other because of Hungarians, Bulgarians, Russians, Gypsies, and Jews, who all hated the pristine Romanian nation and deliberately sought to undermine its very existence.

This defeatist approach can be seen not only in Stăniloae, but also in Teoctist, who describes Romanians as a nation "so heavily tested by history" whose "current path is so full of difficulties and so spied on from outside by those who seek the destruction of our [Romanian Orthodox] church" (Teoctist 1995: 14). The reference here is mainly to "non-Orthodox religious churches [Protestant and other religious groups]" criticized for performing "aggressive proselytizing", repeatedly described as "sects" (***, 2005: 413) and, as in the case of Greek-Catholics, "dismissed … not only as apostates from the Orthodox faith, but also as traitors of the Romanian nation" (Byrnes, 2001: 78) or even "non-Romanian" (Verdery, 1999: 76) by the Romanian Orthodox Church. These attitudes produced a rhetoric which focused on the idea of ancestry as ecodomy, because most of today's famous representatives of Romanian Orthodox spirituality appear to be convinced that the only way to provide Romanians with a safe comfort zone is to convince them that, based on their unique ancestry, they are a unique nation with a unique church and a unique culture.

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