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Theoretical clarifications regarding the polarity of the concept of Church

Abstract: This paper presents a sociological point of view but also the theological definition of the Church. Thus treated various aspects involved in the concept of the Church, namely: Community nature versus institutional character, unity and universality, divine nature and human nature, visible and invisible depiction of the Church. There are also presented here principles of organization of the Orthodox Church and aspects of the structure of the Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Keywords: Church, Orthodox Church, Romanian Orthodox Church, church community, religious institution, ecclesial structure, principles of ecclesiastical organisation.

The sociological and theological concerns manifested in the direction of defining the Church, captured two fundamental aspects of the meaning of this term, namely the *community aspect* and the *institutional aspect*.

The community character is affirmed, in the sociological literature, for the first time, by Emile Durkheim, in whose concept, the religious life is an eminently collective thing, which cannot be separated from the idea of group or community (Durkheim, 1998). He defines the Church as a delimited group (Durkheim, 1998), whose members share the same religious conviction and who, through the communion of faith, manifest themselves as a unitary group:

Une société dont les membres sont unis parce qu'ils se représentent de la même manière le monde sacré et ses rapports avec le monde profane et parce qu'ils traduisent cette représentation commune dans des pratiques identiques (Durkheim, 1998, p. 60).

It is not just a clerical society, a priestly brotherhood, but a moral community made up of all believers of the same faith and their priests (Durkheim, 1998). The religious community can manifest itself at both national and transnational level, at the domestic or corporate level, and

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even at the level of individual beliefs, to the extent that they relate to a community religion (Durkheim, 1998).

Defining religion as a way of acting in the community, Max Weber makes a clear distinction between religious communities and religious institutions (Willaime, 2001). In his view, religious communities are grouped around a charismatic figure and can exist for a period of time without formal institutional structures. Such communities, however, cannot resist after the death of the leader or in case of loss of charisma, unless it is integrated in an organizational structure, which gives people official authority. As for the authority of the charisma, it does not have a stable character, it existing, in its pure form, only in the initial phase of the community, after which it is either inscribed in tradition, or is rationalized or maintained by a combination of tradition, and rationalization (Tilley, 1995). Weber's conclusion is that any religious community needs institutionalization to be sustainable (Tilley, 1995).

The type of religious association based on institutional structure is, in Weber's conception, the Church. Outlining the institutional aspect of the Church, Max Weber defines it as a bureaucratized institution that manages the property of salvation, an organization in which the authority of functions is exercised and which is in symbiosis with the global society (Hervieu-Léger; Willaime, 2001). He argues the bureaucratized and hierocratic character of the Church by the following criteria (Hervieu-Léger; Willaime, 2001):

- has a body of professional priests whose status is governed by salary, career, professional obligations and a specific lifestyle,
- claims universalist domination, which transcends family, tribal ties or ethnic and national barriers,
- has a rationalized dogma and cult, recorded in holy writings,
- it manifests itself in an institutionalized community.

There are two types of authority on which the Church is based, in its capacity as an institutional structure, as stated by Max Weber: the rational, based on legal norms that confer the right of religious authorities to exercise their power of government and the traditional one, based on the fact that there is faith in the immemorial sanctity of traditions and in the legitimacy of exercising authority over them (Tilley, 1995). However, he does not completely eliminate the presence of the authority of charisma in the ecclesial institution. However, it makes a nuance between the *personal charisma*, as an expression of some very special personality traits and the *function charisma*, which is conferred to the priests, following the consecration (Wach, 1997).

The institutional aspect of the Church is also at the forefront of the

definition given by Joachim Wach, he considering the Church as an organization made up of the community of faith and characterized by the existence of an elaborated and systematized doctrine, the formulation of rules, a creed and the existence of standardized collective prayer formulas, all of which relate to a particular ideal (Wach, 1997).

Attributing an ambivalent character to the Church is Gabriel Le Bras. He takes into account both the institutional and the community aspect when defining the Church. In its aspect of *supranational society*, characterized by a community of people who have their own leaders, their own patrimony, their own functioning mechanisms and official relations with the secular authorities, the Church describes itself both as a human community and as a social institution that can be the subject of sociological investigation. The community aspect is manifested, in the conception of Gabriel Bras, as well as in another existential dimension, the Church being a *supernatural society*, with a role in realizing the connection between the real and the surreal plan of existence (Hervieu-Léger; Willaime, 2001). He also sees three plans for the manifestation of the Church: *the common*, represented by adherents to the ecclesial community, *the supernatural*, represented by the unseen powers, and *the civil*, in which associations are established (Hervieu-Léger; Willaime, 2001).

Referring to this ambivalence of ecclesial structures, William Basset states that they are, by their nature, organizational, public and communal at the same time (Blaikie; Ginn, 2009).

According to the American theologian Niebuhr, the Church must be understood in both its manifestations: institutional and community. He considers it unrealistic to give more importance to one of the aspects, as the two aspects, although distinct, are inseparable and interdependent:

No community can exist without some institutions that give it form, boundaries, discipline, and the possibilities of expression and common action. On the other hand, no institution can long exist without some common mind and drive that expresses itself in institutions (Park, 2007).

The church, in his view, means organizations, rituals and discipline, but at the same time, it is a common spiritual, psychological, intellectual and moral life. Also, being a member of the Church implies participation in actions and forms of institutional manifestation, as well as commitment, devotion and common worship (Park, 2007). The ecclesial community also has a common memory, which makes it possible to understand and interpret its past. He calls this process of interpretation and understanding of the past *memory conversion*, stating that in the Christian community, conversion takes place through the Christ model, which brings unity and significance both in common memory and in current experiences (Park, 2007).

In the conception of Christian theologians, but also of some sociologists, the notion of Church refers only to Christian communities, since the concept itself is not descriptive, but normative and implies a doctrinal content related to a certain ideal (Stark, 1966; Wach, 1997). The sociologist Werner Stark proposes, moreover, for the designation of the ecclesial structures of other religions, the term *ecclesial body*²¹. In other words, the notion of *Church* is closely linked to Christianity. The term is found for the first time in the Septuagint, in historical books and in psalms, differing from the older term *synagogue* (Răducă, 2010). If the latter designated a passive assembly, "of those brought together" (Răducă, 2010), the religious concept of the Church designated an active assembly, "of those called" (Răducă, 2010). In the New Testament, the term Church first appears in the Gospel of Matthew, 16, 18, designating the community of believers united by faith in Christ. Seen in this way, the notion of Church indicates the Christian religious organization in its entirety, but also the various organizations of Christian confessions (Floca, 1990). The term also implies life in the community, or life together, following the model of the first Christian communities (R. Kearsley, 2008).

The perspective of living together through the Church brings up the issue of charism again. Sociologist Werner Stark addresses this issue, emphasizing the importance of the charism of the religious founder, but especially the role that the religious community has in stimulating individual charisma (Gresham Jr., 2012). Taking Catholic Christianity as an example, he pleads for the persistence of charism within the Church, in the form of collective charisma and affirms the continuity of Christ's charisma in the collective body of the Church (Gresham Jr., 2012). Stark argues his point of view through the existence, throughout the history of Christianity, of charismatic personalities, called by the Church, saints. According to Stark, their existence is nothing but a sign of collective charisma. Also, the role that the Church has in transmitting charisma, through the so-called apostolic succession, is also a proof of charismatic continuity (Gresham Jr., 2012), and rites, sacred music, dogmas and even religious norms are nothing but means of expression of charismatic inspiration (Gresham Jr., 2012).

The theological point of view argues that the Church must be understood in the two aspects that it involves: the human character and the divine character. Through its members and their manifestations, the Church can be considered a religious-moral community, but its character is not limited to the human component (Leb, 2005). Through the way it was established, through its doctrine and role, the Church becomes a sacramental community (Evdokimov, 1996), which ensures the communion

of man with the divinity. The primary purpose of the Church is a soteriological one (Soloviov, 1994), and the Trinitarian model of communion is perpetuated at every level of existence (Evdokimov, 1996).

Perceived in this way, the Church is shaped as a universal (V. Soloviov, 1994) and unitary (Evdokimov, 1996) divine-human organism. Given the two attributes, the Church was able to organize itself in the local Churches from the first century, without their integrity and communion with other Christian communities being tarnished. Through the universality of the Church, each local community reproduces the Church in its entirety, and through the sharing of the same dogmatic truth, the unity of these communities is achieved (Evdokimov, 1996). "This integral participation in the truth is the principle of the life of the whole local Church; it is the essence of universalism, because all local churches are identical everywhere and always " (Evdokimov, 1996, p. 171), states Paul Evdokimov.

According to the Eastern theological tradition, the community character is constitutive of the Church, this being a living organism, in which the members are in a close interdependence and unity through the communion of faith and through the bonds of love and mutual care (Meyendorff, 1996). This communion goes beyond the immediate reality, being realized between the heavenly Church and the earthly Church, between all those who have believed, believe and will believe in Christ (Meyendorff, 1996). Communion with the divinity is made by belonging to this body, whose head, Christ, is the very principle of integration. On the other hand, the body of the Church concentrates in itself its entire history, organization and human community, but also its mystical experience, being the place of manifestation of divine energies. One can thus speak of an organic unity between the visible and the invisible hypostasis of the Church (Evdokimov, 1996), but also of a conditioning of the element seen by the unseen (Floca, 1990).

In the visible plan of the Church, the community character is expressed by the existence of a group of people united by sharing the same faith, from which arise a series of common spiritual and material interests, to ensure that the community of believers uses a religious cult described by a set of religious rituals and ceremonies, as well as a form of organization based on religious-moral and juridical norms (Floca, 1990).

From a structural point of view, the church community consists of three church states, so named, according to their *harismatic* state (Floca, 1990):

- laics or lay people, who received the harism through Baptism and Anointing at the time of integration into the community and who have

- the possibility of amplifying this charism through the other Sacraments,
- priests or clerical staff, who in addition to Baptism received the charism for the exercise of one of the three stages of church service: the episcopate, the priesthood or the diaconry,
 - the monks, who differ from the first two categories by a moral state, not a charismatic one, in the sense that they proposed an ascetic way of life, following the three evangelical counsels: of obedience, of poverty and of chastity. In terms of grace, they can also be divided into monks in the clerical state (those who have been ordained) and monks in the secular state (not being invested with another state of grace other than that of Baptism and Anointing).

From an institutional point of view, the Church is defined, in the Eastern tradition, by its very fundamental principles, as a form of organization of the Christian community, in its visible plan (Stan, 2010).

The organizing principles of the Orthodox Church are (Stan, 2010):

- *canonical principles with a dogmatic foundation*, which regulate the community organization of the Christian life:
 - *the ecclesiological-institutional principle*, which specifies the community and institutional character of the Church;
 - *the organic or constitutional principle of the Church*, which expresses the ecclesial structure similar to an organism and affirms the participation of the laity in the exercise of ecclesiastical power;
 - *the principle of ecumenism*, which expresses the unity and universality of the Church;
 - *the hierarchical principle*, which affirms the legitimacy of the three steps of the priestly hierarchy: the episcopate, the presbyterate or the priesthood and the diaconate;
 - *the synodal principle*, which specifies the legitimacy of the ecclesial leadership through the collegial organs, represented by the church synods, rejecting the individual leadership of the Church;
 - *the principle of iconomy*, consists in the right of the church authority to exercise ecclesial power, for soteriological purposes (Floca, 1990);
 - *the principle of external autonomy*, which specifies the autonomy of the Church in carrying out religious activity, in relation to any other external organization (Floca, 1990);
 - *the principle of loyalty to the state*, which implies respect for the sovereignty of the state and the granting of due honor (Floca, 1990).
- *principles with juridical basis*, which are expressions of the way of ecclesial organization (BOR):
 - *the principle of autocephaly*, consists in recognizing the independence of a church unit determined hierarchically, synodally and

territorially, from units of the same kind, but with the obligation for it to maintain dogmatic, cultic and canonical unity with the entire Orthodox community.

- *the principle of internal autonomy*, confers the right of certain units of the Church to be governed by their own organs, but with the supervision, control and guidance of the superior church authorities.
- *the nomocanonical principle*, specifies that the Church is governed both by its own laws and by state laws.
- *the territorial principle*, which involves the adaptation of the territorial church organization according to the patterns of the administrative division of state units.

The institutional elements of the Church include the following elements (BOR):

- *local and territorial organizational units*, which have experienced multiple diversifications and changes throughout church history. Currently, the Romanian Orthodox Church is structured in the following component units:
 - *the parish*, which represents "the community of Orthodox Christians, clergy and laity, located on a certain territory and subordinated to the Diocesan Center from a canonical, legal, administrative and patrimonial point of view, led by a parish priest appointed by the diocese (archbishop or bishop) of that diocese" (BOR).
 - *the monastery*, a "community of monks or nuns who have freely decided to live their lives in restraint, voluntary poverty and obedience" (BOR), having as leader the local bishop or archbishop.
 - *the archdiocese or archdiocese*, which is a church administrative unit that includes several parishes in the territory of the same diocese and is led, on behalf of the bishop or archbishop, by a leading priest, called archpriest or archpriest.
 - *the vicariate*, "an administrative church unit with a missionary-pastoral regime, under the direct jurisdiction of the Romanian Patriarchate, which includes several archdioceses, parishes and monasteries" (BOR).
 - *the diocese (archdiocese and diocese)*, a church unit led by a bishop or archbishop, which consists of a number of parishes, grouped in archdioceses, as well as monasteries located on a certain territory.
 - *the metropolis*, a canonical and administrative unit that groups several bishops and archbishops and is led by a metropolitan.
 - *the patriarchate*, which represents the community of all Orthodox

Christians, constituted in the parishes and monasteries of the dioceses of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

- *the governing bodies* (BOR), which in turn are divided into:
 - individual organs, represented by all the steps of the clergy, which the canons mention in the constitution of the church hierarchy. These include the three sacramental stages: the episcopate, the presbyterate and the diaconate, with their derivatives (Floca, 1990, p. 273).
 - collegiate or synodal bodies are represented by the Holy Synod, the Permanent Synod, the Metropolitan Synods and the Mixed Synods.
- *religious communities*, of which only monastic communities and Christian associations or fraternities have survived today;
- *church social-philanthropic and educational units*, as a concrete and organized expression of Christian philanthropy;
- *church laws and legal institutions*, represented by canons, synodal decisions, rules and other legal norms.

Respecting the political and administrative division of the territories, the Orthodox Church was organized, in time, into national Churches, which, although they developed a diverse cultural specificity, maintained the communion of faith with the universal Orthodox Church. This is also the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR), which mentions its position towards the Orthodox community in the first articles of the Statute of the B.O.R. : "The Romanian Orthodox Church, of apostolic origin, is and remains in communion and dogmatic, liturgical and canonical unity with the universal Orthodox Church" (BOR). Defining itself as "the community of Orthodox Christians [...] canonically constituted in parishes and monasteries in the dioceses of the Romanian Patriarchate located inside and outside Romania"(BOR), the Romanian Orthodox Church specifies its unitary character in "its organization and its pastoral, missionary and administrative work "(BOR).

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