

Christian-Democracy and Orthodoxy. The case of Romania

Abstract: Christian-democracy as a Christian inspired political movement tries to address the diversity of issues of the modern societies and the social model promoted is one capable of resettling morality in the political realm, offering also a moral basis for the development of responsible policies. Often Christian-democracy and political catholicism overlapped in many contexts, and this article tries to outline the deceitfulness of the prejudice that Christian-democracy stops at the border of Orthodoxy. Although Christian-democracy has catholic origins, this political movement has the capacity of adapting in other geographical and spiritual meridians. A good example is Romania, a majoritarian Orthodox society in which Christian-democracy had an important and visionary role in shaping the first post-communist decade.

Key words: Christianity, Democracy, Catholicism, Orthodoxy

„Man must not be separated from God, and neither politics from morality.”

Thomas Morus

From a historically point of view, Christian-democracy has catholic origins, and the universalist character of the Catholic Church has supported the appearance of the Christian-democratic movements that reflected national realities and whose principles provide a way

of addressing the diversity of issues of the modern societies. The social model proposed by Christian-democracy stresses the importance of morality in politics, and appeals to the conception of personalism as a real moral basis for the development

of responsible policies capable of solving social problems.

If some authors identify the origin of the term „Christian-democracy” in a speech held in November 1871 by a Bishop named Lamurette in front of the French Legislative Assembly, making references to the „bright principles of Christian-democracy”, to a democratic and popular Church, the true „Magna Charta of Christian-democracy” is attributed to Pope Leon XIII. The so called founder of social catholicism laid down the basic principles of Christian-democracy in the encyclical „De Rerum Novarum” in 1891, offering

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catholics „a charter of the christian social order [...] who brought democracy to the option of society's christianization”¹, so that in 1897 to justify the new concept of „Christian democracy” and its use to describe exclusively those social actions that carry a „beneficent Christian action in society”². In the encyclical “Graves de Communi Re” of 1901, Pope Leon XIII described the political movement inspired by the Catholic Church as the „popular Catholic action”, and for the first time the Catholic program aimed at the establishment of a political movement inspired by Christian principles. Also Henry A. Wallace argued in 1942 that „the idea of freedom derives from the Bible and from its extraordinary insistence on human dignity, democracy being thus the only true political expression of Christianity”, while Jacques Maritain, the great Christian philosopher believes that „democracy is nothing but the secular name of the Christian ideal”.

With the appearance of the encyclical “De Rerum Novarum”, the first Christian oriented parties emerged, a good example are the Republican People's Movement in France in 1896 or the Popular Party in Italy, with key roles played by Marc Sangnier and, respectively, Don Luigi Sturzo. Christian-democrats have appealed to the principle of personalism, addressing the whole nation from the point of view of the Christian morality and love and care for the others, thereby promoting accountability and citizen participation. A basic principle of Christian-democracy is also the principle of subsidiarity which argues that „it is an injustice and also a serious harm and a disturbance of right order to transfer to a larger and higher collectivity those functions that can be carried out by subordinate and more elementary institutions”³. Christian-democracy promotes also social dialogue between state and market actors, it does not accept state intervention and radical redistribution, promoting „social capitalism”, „social economy”. Christian-democracy considers that the economy should not become an end in itself but it should pursue a social justice achieved by government intervention only when the market is deregulated. Thus, the economy is placed in the service of all the people, widely distributing justice through the free competition laws, through the various market mechanisms and turning private property into a genuine „cornerstone” of the social market economy⁴.

Christian-democracy is a Christian-inspired political movement that supports a political, social and economic system based on freedom, justice, solidarity, responsibility. The Christian-democratic vision illustrates a pluralistic and democratic society in which the state is a guarantor of the common good, the politics are to be subordinated to moral norms, thus creating a society in which the state protects the rights and the human dignity, the man through his freedom and rational capacity being the essential value of Christian-democracy.

Often Christian-democracy and political Catholicism overlapped in many contexts and despite the fact that there was a clear Catholic domination in the association of the name „Christian” to some parties and organizations in most Western European countries, we can not agree with Irving's statement that „Christian-democracy can be shortly established by the organised political action of the democrat Catholics”⁵. Although the Catholic character, as the foundation of Christian-democratic movements can not be denied, however we can not overlook the fact that in other countries like Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Protestantism and Orthodoxism in Greece and Romania have substantially contributed to the formation of the Christian-democratic ideology. Pierre Letamendia is the one who, through its memorable definition proves the deceitfulness of the prejudice that Christian-democracy stops at the border of Orthodoxy, stating that „Christian-de-

mocracy is a political and cultural movement of Christian and democratic inspiration, autonomous vis-a-vis the ecclesiastical organization, but with roots in large fractions of the Christian, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox people. Thus, it wants to create a democratic and pluralist society with the purpose of promoting policies consistent with the Christian message⁶.

A pressing question arose: how does Orthodoxy react to the political model of Christian-democracy? What are the chances and possibilities of a real rapprochement between Orthodoxy and Christian-democracy? The Orthodox Church consistently failed to achieve symmetry between theory and practice, between religiosity and laity. The Eastern Europe spirituality was primarily focused on a personal level, the spiritual life's stake was solely personal, *Imitatio Christi* was a purely private experience, these elements building the image of a solitary spiritual hero trying to protect himself from the authoritarian assault of the state⁷. Since the fall of Constantinople, the Orthodox Church could not enjoy a single century of self-determination, living different experiences like the ottoman occupation, the atheist communism, spiritual authority being often suppressed and making a bold against the profane actions. There is a huge difference also in the way the majoritarian Orthodox societies see the project of modernity, and how it is seen in the Western Europe. The Orthodox Church considered secularization an attack on religion itself, while Western religions conceived it as a release from the monopolist action of the state.⁸ If we consider also the fact that in the Eastern areas, secularism manifested itself in the brutal form of communism, then we can see why there was a major difference in the development of Christian-democracy in the two hemispheres of the continent. Given the hostility of communism towards religion and the fact that it only promoted economic and social values, denied the spiritual ones and tried to remove them from the society regardless of the methods used, it is understood that the formation of Christian-democratic parties in the Eastern countries and in Romania encountered great difficulties. Primarily, because the believers expected serious repercussions from the communist leaders since religion was no longer a cultural and social center as strong as before. Priests and dignitaries were removed from the secular leading structures of the state, and if they did not accept the new imposed political reality, they were persecuted, arrested, put on trial and considered traitors of the state. And yet, the majoritarian Orthodox societies support a pluralism based on both the uniqueness and diversity of the people, and these features are characteristic for Christian anthropology, unity resulting from this diversity. With the fall of communism, there was a reorganization of the old political ideas, there was a need to search for new ones, and in this context there was a chance to reaffirm the political model of Christian-democracy, which could really be a true social partner.⁹

Although Christian-democracy developed in Western Europe, there have been attempts to introduce Christian values also in the public life of Eastern Europe. Thus, in Romania, the Peasant National Party (PNP), the party resulted from the merger in 1926 of Ion Mihalache's Peasant Party with Iuliu Maniu's National Party from Transylvania, was a party that promoted Christian values in society. PNP, a party that experienced moments of complete victory and moments of despair considered that the strengthening of the Romanian nation imposes a life guided by moral principles, because Christianity saved humanity and for this purpose, the government should cooperate with the Church. Maniu, the leader of PNP claimed the rights and fundamental freedoms, considering that the PNP was the only party animated by a perfect civic altruism that followed the common good of

the country. So it is this the background of ideas and principles of the PNP doctrine like Christian morality, democracy, social justice that are by excellence Christian-democratic principles. Once the communism came to power, all political parties were outlawed. Yet the PNP continued to operate underground, faced the security oppression, in a society torn by fears, anxieties, confused by the uncertainty of the present and the lack of future prospects. In 1987, Corneliu Coposu made a heroic and visionary act through the secret PNP affiliation to the Christian-Democratic International. With the fall of communism and the restoration of political pluralism, on January 8 1990, Coposu enrolled PNP at the Bucharest Court, under the name of Christian-Democratic National Peasant Party and set out the basic principles which included: the development of a market economy based on social protection, respect of the subsidiarity principle, support for the citizen's rights and liberties, promoting equality and social harmony. In Corneliu Coposu's view, Christian-democracy should not be "artificially copied in the Romanian space in its western forms, but adapted in a creative way"¹⁰, thus avoiding a cheap imitation. Even more, Coposu's dream was that Romania would become "the capital of Orthodox Christian-democracy", and a step in this direction was made by the Pope's historic visit to Bucharest, the Orthodox Church becoming „the outpost of the religious Orthodoxy”.¹¹

A German Christian-democrat, Horst Kossack noted that at the first post-revolutionary elections, most of the Romanian people saw the election „a right, but not a moral and social obligation”, which led them to vote „for their immediate interests at the cost of ignoring political doctrines, these elements being considered as deficiencies of young democracies”.¹² Dan Pavel thought that "there is a Christian-democracy tradition included in the PNP history" and that independent of the Catholic imprint for the Christian-democracy, "this ideology has a capacity of adapting in other geographical and spiritual meridians, arguing that the Church can give a sense of stability and can stop the political class's drift"¹³. On the other hand, Daniel Barbu believes that between Christian-democracy and Orthodoxy there is a compatibility problem, Orthodoxy being in his opinion a "Christianity which has lost its universality through a national reductionism, leading to uniformity and blind obedience to institutions and hierarchies".¹⁴

The elections held on 20 may 1990 have established the detached victory of the National Salvation Front (66% of votes) and Ion Iliescu (85% of votes), while the PNP was ranked fifth with a mediocre percentage of only 2,56% and its candidate, Ion Ratiu gained only 4,29% being the last of the three competitors. In February 1992 the first free local elections were held and the opposition grouped in the Romanian Democratic Convention under the leadership of Emil Constantinescu, who was ranked second (20,16% of votes) after National Salvation Democratic Front (28,29% of votes). However, at the parliamentary and presidential elections in September October 1992, Ion Iliescu was re-elected with 61% of the votes, and the Romanian Social-Democratic Party, the political party lead by Ion Iliescu defeated the Romanian Democratic Convention (RDC). The alliance won about 20% of the votes at the parliamentary elections, Emil Constantinescu qualified for the second round of the presidential elections, obtaining 31.24% of votes in the first round.

In 1996, however, the situation changes, Emil Constantinescu becomes the President of Romania, the National Christian-Democratic Peasant Party (CDNPP) was invited in the government in the RDC. In the 2000 elections, CDNPP was defeated with a score below the electoral threshold of 5%, which led to a strong fragmentation, various factions detaching themselves from the party. CDNPP was the scapegoat of the government coalition

of 1996-2000. Within the ruling coalition the discontent, strife and lack of authority lead to a deep fragmentation of the party. In 2007, Marian Milut was elected president of CDNPP, followed by Aurelian Pavelescu, so that from June 2011, Victor Ciorbea became the party leader. The failure of the Christian-democratic doctrine in the first post-communist decade represented a turning point stressing the need to rethink a Christian-democratic alternative to bridge local tradition and the euro-atlantic lines. And as Ioan Stanomir said "effigies of Maniu and Coposu are not only museum objects, but they may represent those points around which we can arrange a demo-Christian sensibility, that is ready to defend freedom and to praise human dignity. In fact, memory is the brick without which no community can really be imagined"¹⁵.

Today CDNPP believes that Romania needs a new Constitution to proclaim the rule of law, places the man in the center of its political project, dignity and life being essential regardless of gender, race, and nationality. Freedom requires responsibility, solidarity is the base of social cohesion, common good is the goal to which all citizens should contribute, being also the reason of existing for the political authorities. CDNPP believes in democracy, believes that the power comes from the sovereign people, promotes minority rights, and encourages private initiative and creativity that lead to economic development. Social justice, social market economy, transparent welfare system and independent political power also represent key principles of CDNPP's program. Arguably, the CDNPP's poor performance in the elections of 2000 and 2004 may be attributed to the attempt of adapting Catholic values in an Orthodox space. Yet things are not quite so, Christian-democracy in Orthodoxy is not just a form without substance. Indeed CDNPP doesn't make its presence felt on the actual Romanian political scene, although it played a key role in shaping Romanian politics after the events of 1989, being a truly visionary party. The interest shown by EPP (European People's Party) towards the Romanian parties was mainly during the ministry of Victor Ciorbea 1997-1998, the president of the Christian-Democrat European Union, and vice-president of EPP, Wim van Velzen making numerous visits to Romania. He praised the government's efforts in a press conference held by CDNPP, heavily criticizing the main opponents of the Christian-democrats.¹⁶

The experiences of the First World War and the threat of fascism led to the idea that overcoming nationalism is a precondition for peace preservation. A first attempt to cooperate between Christian-democrats was made in 1926 when the first pillars of the International Secretariat of Christian Inspiration Democratic Parties were set in Paris, under the influence of Luigi Sturzo. With the advent of communism, Christian-democratic parties from Central-Eastern Europe were banned. In July 1950 the exiled representatives of these parties formed the Christian Democrat Union of Central Europe. In Germany, Netherlands, Italy the Christian-democratic parties have returned in the political scene after the Second World-War, winning the elections, so that after 1945 to set as a goal the European unification. Among the EU founding fathers we can find the Christian-democrats: Alcide de Gasperi, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer. In 1953 the Christian-democratic members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community created the European Christian Democrat Group, so that in 1965 to change its name to European Christian Democracy Union, a union that comprised all the parties from the Christian-democratic family in Europe.

If we try to better understand the evolution of Christian-democracy in Europe, then we should turn our attention to the European People's Party founded on the 8 July 1976, a

center-right political family, whose roots are to be identified in the European integration history, being dedicated to a strong Europe, based on a federal model, supporting the subsidiarity principle. EPP wants a more democratic, transparent and efficient Europe, a Europe closer to its citizens, thinking that prosperity can be achieved by promoting a free market economy accompanied by a social conscience. In March 1990, an article in the weekly the *Economist*, dedicated to the Christian-democratic parties in Europe said that „Much of Europe is run by Christian-democratic parties”¹⁷. These parties were a real political force, at the June 1989 elections they had approximately 31 million voters. In 1994, EPP had 157 members from a total of 567 EMPs, being the second largest parliamentary group after the socialist party which had 198 members.

At the European level, EPP is recognized as the Christian-democrats party federation, and its programmatic document entitled „Basic document” was developed in 1992, at the EPP Congress in Athens. EPP is related to the Christian-democracy ideology, to this pivotal role in the European construction, being the political force with the highest number of representatives in the EP, and also with the large influence in the historical development of Europe. EPP highlighted in the political program adopted at the first Congress in Brussels in 1978 that „we base our policy on an image of a man inspired from the fundamental Christian values and who finds its expression in dignity, inalienable and inviolable freedom of man and responsibility. This implies equality in diversity, the will for development and recognition of the imperfect human nature”¹⁸. Since 1999, the parliamentary group operates under the name of “European People Party’s Group (Christian democrat) and European Democrats”. As Ovidiu Vaida highlighted in his paper “A dilution of the Christian-democrat message: the case of the EPP”, we may notice a decrease in use of the main political reference, the name of the Christian-democrat family in all programmatic documents after 1992, even more in the 1995 document there is no longer any reference to Christian-democracy. Another fundamental concept of the Christian-democrat doctrine, “*federalism* has also been gradually removed from the EPP programmatic texts”¹⁹, and if the EPP Congress in 1990 titled „A federal and democratic constitution for the European Union”, with the adoption of Estoril program in 2002 on the creation of a Constitution for Europe, the „federal” expression occurs less frequently and unclear. There is a decrease in use of the concept of subsidiarity and also of the social market economy, these two principles being essential to the Christian-democratic doctrine. This phase out of the expressions that suggest adherence to Christian values and principles of democracy is due to the entry into the EPP of Neo Dimokratia²⁰ (1981) and then of the Partido Popular (1989), but also by accepting conservative or national liberal parties between 1990-2000²¹. All these factors have led to a “dilution close to extinction of the Christian-democratic element in the EPP”²². Even more, the most important force of European Christian-democracy in the postwar era, the German Christian-democrats follows this trend towards conservatorism. All this suggest that at the European level, Christian democracy has lost its original extent, it turned into „a second rank ideological stream, after socialism, liberalism or conservatorism”²³. If we look at the European political system, we can see that basically, “except for Germany and Benelux, the Christian-democratic parties have disappeared like in Italy or they have significantly reduced their importance”²⁴.

Although Christian-democracy is a political movement that has Catholic origins, I can not agree with the belief that its principles cannot be applied in other societies. Romania is an example of how the values of Christian-democracy can transcend Orthodoxy’s

borders and shape the political and social realm. The principles of Christianity are universal, they can offer a moral base for the society's organization, values like freedom, responsibility, respect for human rights and dignity, being essential in any democratic society.

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