

ASPECTS REGARDING THE OFFICIAL SPEECH ABOUT THE INTERWAR ROMANIAN CRISIS

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Abstract: This article presents a few aspects regarding the official speech about the interwar Romanian crisis, with accent on the moral crisis, reflected in some documentary sources of the time, published and unpublished. After a short definition of the concept of crisis, the analysis is focused on the way the crisis was understood and defined by the laic and religious authorities from the interwar period and what theoretical solutions they proposed to solve the crisis, as is seen, primarily, from the conferences and public speeches held by the laic and religious authorities, with the occasion of various public events.

Keywords: interwar crisis, moral crisis, official speech, conferences, institutions

In the period between World Wars, it was manifested, in the European space, a multilateral crisis, identified in political plan (by the regime, by the government/ministries, by the system), economic, social, cultural and moral or identity, of whose consequences combined led to the start of the Second World War. Considering the fact that, in the discussed period, the crisis in Romania fitted in the European patterns, before we start the article on the subject in the title, we consider necessary a few notes, relative to the definition of the concept by the specialists, also on how the crisis was understood and define by various laic and religious authorities and what theoretical solutions were proposed to fix it.

The term of crisis can be defined as representing “a situation of abnormality at national or international level, in which are threatened or severely disturbed the fundamental values, the balance or stability of country’s political, economic and social life, fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens, material and cultural values, environmental, state’s interests and objectives”¹. The concept of crisis contains “all aspects regarding inner and outer life of human as individual and as part of social relations that he will establish inside the communities that he is part off”².

Between 1930 and 1940, in the context of events evolution internally (the increase of popularity of extremist movements – Legionnaire Movement, decrease of faith of the population in state’s structures and representatives, radicalization of the

¹ Daniel Apostol, *Criza, a cincea putere în stat. Managementul crizelor politice și economice, reflectat în presa timpului în România anilor 1930-1939*, București, Univers Juridic Publishing House, 2009, p. 16.

² Reinhart Koselleck, *Conceptele și istoriile lor. Semantica și pragmatica limbajului social-politic*, with two contributions of Ulrike H. Decuble și Willibald Steinmetz, translation from German language by Gabriel H. Decuble și Mari Oruz, coordination and unification of translations by Gabriel H. Decuble, București, Art Publishing House, 2009, p. 177.

electorate options, visible during parliamentary elections in the autumn of 1937, falling into desuetude of the Romanian traditional values: family, Christian orthodox faith, etc.) and externally – economic crisis, ascension of extremist movements – communism and fascism, deterioration of the international situation and the start of the Second World War³, cooperation of state institutions, to identify solutions to restore the social balance and create socio-cultural models based on the fundamentals of Christian morals, grew⁴.

Relevant, for our analyze, is how it was understood and defined by the representatives of the politic, culture and church of the Romanian state the crisis in the period between wars and what solutions they proposed for coming out of the crisis. Analyzing the documents of the time shows the fact that the cultural laic and ecclesiastic authorities or personalities considered that the unbalance was caused by the morale crisis, felt at the level of every social categories and, implicitly, in every field of activity.

Therefore, even from the '30 of the XXth Century, the representatives of the Orthodox Romanian Church and various cultural personalities highlighted the need to reactivate the orthodox spirit in the public life, considering that the main cause of the social problems was the *morale crisis*, that manifested in the society under various forms: exaggerated negativism as factor of social degradation, the frauds in the public institutions, political demagogy, lack of reaction of the people and/or the human communities against what was harmful to the evolution of the Romanian society etc. Eloquent in this matter is the following fragment from the conference held by the Romanian Patriarch Miron Cristea, at the "Dalles" Foundation, on December 9, 1932:

"It seems that – after achievement of our national unity – we no longer have a precise goal, towards we aim and focus our powers, making them active and fruitful. [...] These abnormal situations hunting the humanity, but especially the Romanian people, are known generally as: *morale crisis*. There are the cause of all complains and disorders, more and more obvious, that rules over the actual society. It manifests, (...), thru that exaggerated negativism, that became itself a factor of social dissolution.

³ See, for the evolution of the events internally and internationally, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România întregită (1918-1940)*, coordinator: Ioan Scurtu, secretar: Petre Otu, București, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 2003, p. 385-390; Keith Hitchins, *România 1866 – 1947*, translation from English language by: George D. Potra și Delia Răzdolescu, București, Humanitas Publishing House, 1996, p. 443-448; Daniel Dieaconu, *Realitatea unui mit, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. O cronică a naționalismului românesc interbelic*, Iași, Timpul Publishing House, Piatra-Neamț, Cetatea Doamnei Publishing House, 2009, *passim*; Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, 3rd edition revised and completed, București, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, 2002, p. 318-348; Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, *Istoria Europei*, vol. 5, *Secolul XX (din 1919 până în zilele noastre)*, translation by: Monica Timu, edition supervised, notes and comments by: Doina Barcan Sterpu, Iași, Institutul European Publishing House, 1998, p. 74-119; Barbara Jelavich, *Istoria Balcanior. Secolul al XX-lea*, vol. II, translation by: Mihai-Eugen Avădanei, afterword by: I. Ciupercă, Iași, Institutul European Publishing House, 2000, p. 177-194.

⁴ Starting with the second decade of the XX century, there were constant preoccupations for the rebuilt of the Romanian socio-cultural life, affected by the First World War. On this line we can record the starting of the Association for Social Study and Reform that will become, in 1921, the Romanian Social Institute, and from 1938, The Institute for Social Research of Romania, and also the opening, in 1921, of the People's House of Culture, that became, in 1922, Royal Cultural Foundation "Principe Carol" (Antonio Momoc, *Capcanele politice ale sociologiei interbelice: școala gustiană între carlism și legionarism*, preface by Zoltán Rostás, București, Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2012, p. 86-89, 109, 151, 153; „Monitorul Oficial”, part I, year CVI, no. 242, 18 October 1938, p. 4953).

So many frauds in the public institutions, so many bankruptcies in the commercial institutions, the demagoguery, that manifests more and more meretricious and kills the public life, lack of reaction against all that is obviously dangerous to order and progress, all are the effects, not of a bad economic situation, but of a sickly morale situation. *The material deficit that the economists are talking about is the result of a morale deficit.* [...] The lack of a superior ideal in life got us stuck in the mud of the physical life needs. The morale commands being ignored, all the powers, that control life, got consumed and became unbalanced, so that the society floats in ignorance, without goal and soar”⁵.

The Patriarch sustained that, in order to remedy this abnormal situation, every man had, in public and private life, to acquire and show an ideal based on the Christian morale precepts. He considered that the *morale ideal* was “*the base element that provides durability and vitality to a social organism* providing in this organism the power of cohesion, which will curdle and connects with steadiness the composing parts”. Achieving that ideal was the duty of every member of a community, but especially of those that, thru the positions they occupy, had the role of guides in public life. Also, was necessary that every social categories to work together to achieve the Church work⁶.

Also on the line of preoccupation to reactivate the orthodox spirit in public life, the university professor Stefan Bogdan considered that, in order to improve the social life, the fundamentals of Christian-orthodox faith can be used „as a principle of social solidarity”⁷, while Nichifor Crainic blamed the state for lack of initiative in educating the youth in the Christian-orthodox spirit⁸.

Religion was considered to be firstly a social manifestation, the moral factor representing “the key of the balance in society”⁹. According to the university professor V. Gh. Ispir:

„Spiritual rebirth of the Romanian culture has to be a postulate of the Church. (...) The Church has the duty to begin an action of moralization of our public life. She has to be a guide in intellectual discipline, severe in social and morale life, to guide in every day actions. [...] The Church has the duty to come out of its walls, to face the time’s waives and show the main objective of the contemporary life. In all manifestations: art, politics, science she has to provide the leading ideal. What the people expect from the Church is that she needs to resolve in a Christian way every problem of the day: politic, economic and cultural. [...] The Christian mission in our country is to specify an active social ideal in society and to cooperate on our kind’s soul unity”¹⁰.

In light of what is exposed above, we can state that, at least at the theoretical level, in the years 1930s of the XXth century existed the conviction that the amplification of activity of Orthodox Romanian Church in the life of humane communities could get

⁵ Miron Cristea, *Îndatoririle generației de azi*, in volume *Biserica și probleme sociale. Conferințe, sine loco*, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, 1933, p. 21-22.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23, 27, 29.

⁷ Ștefan Bogdan, *Biserica și viața socială*, in *Ibidem*, p. 35-36.

⁸ Nichifor Crainic, *Tineretul și creștinismul*, in *Ibidem*, p. 98-116.

⁹ V. Gh. Ispir, *Misiunea creștină în România nouă*, in *Ibidem*, p. 196.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 211, 215, 226.

the Romanian society out of the morale crisis of the time between wars. The cultural laic and ecclesiastic personalities of the time proposed various way of action like: define a social ideal based on the Christian-orthodox morale percept's, which will be assumed by the society members; thru the intensification of missionaries, charity activities etc.

As final result, the Church's "offensive" in public life had to contribute to initiation of a healthy orientation with the purpose of solving the existing social problems of the time and lead to coagulation of a social solidarity, meant to produce a positive evolution in every activity field.

The official speech regarding the morale crisis of the society knew continuity and even intensification during the monarchic authority regime. King's Carol II monarchic authority regime, that happened between February 10/11, 1938 and September 6, 1940, has been put into practice using a mixed of reforms and measures, that were supposed to transform fundamentally the existing socio-politic structures. The new regime became the carrier for „saving” solutions for political and moral crisis that Romania of those times was going thru. Implementation of those solutions meant, in the vision of carlist's protagonists, forcing some new moral and social norms, a new socio-politic rite, based on the principal of social/community solidarity, on some fundamental concepts for national identity (motherland, patriotism, citizenship, freedom, authority, family, education, etc.).

From the proclamation for the country of King Carol II, press articles and up to public conferences and speeches or memos addressed to various administrative/cultural authorities etc. were highlighted on one side the bankruptcy of the democratic Romanian regime ("the old regime") and the effects of the political, economic, morale and cultural crisis over the structures of Romanian society, and on the other side the necessity of "morale rebirth/recovery of the nation" and the substantial reform of Romanian state and society¹¹.

In this matter, eloquent is the following fragment from the speech held by Alice Nicolescu, on December 18, 1938 with the occasion of the formation of guardian's flock of the professional class for apprentice in Craiova. Alice Nicolescu, the commander of the guardian flock mentioned above, highlighting the reasons why King Carol II started The Guardians of the Country, stated the following:

„The starting point has to be seen in the social state after the war (First World War – our note). A disintegration of the soul started around the war increasing after the end of it, thru the ideas of destruction of the state, the family, the entire social structure.

In front of these ideas of denial and destruction and denial of the state, the preservation instinct and affirmation of nationalism reacted thru a revival of Romanian ethnicity. [...] The youth can no longer be left to chance; has to be guided towards an ideal”¹².

¹¹ See in detail, Diana-Mihaela Păunoiu, *Sărbătoare și propagandă în timpul regelui Carol al II-lea (1938-1940)*, București, Academia Română Publishing House, 2013, p. 21 and the following pages.

¹² National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Olt fund, Administrative Service, File No. 22/1939, f. 103-104.

Relevant to highlight how the morale crisis was understood, in that time, and how “the memory” of it was perpetuated at speech level, is also the following fragment, extras from the memo of the president of Cultural Society “Traian Demetrescu” from Craiova, addressed, in April 1939, to the royal resident of Olt County:

„Who does not remember, Your Excellency, how right after the war (First World War – our note) a moral depression seized all social layers. It was manifested thru a general indifference, a lack of order and discipline of the soul; an unbalance in the household, in finance, in public administrations and even in state’s fortune. To all these we can add an indifference [towards] the day of tomorrow and a fantastic squandering. And to have an exact picture of reality, let’s note and the rest of the decreases, such as: the taste for rapid enrichment, but without work, or economy and without the struggle with the hardness of life”¹³.

Setting the base to enforce the personal monarchic regime and the justifications given by the multilateral crisis in the period between wars, King Carol II has institutionalized the moral recovery of the nation, “facilitating”/imposing in this direction a combined action of the state’s institutions (administration, School, Pre-military – *Premilităria*, Guardian of the Country – *Straja Țării*), National Renaissance Front, cultural institutions, Social Service, Church etc.¹⁴). In this context, the solutions, regarding the social problems of the time, have foreseen the increase of the Church’s¹⁵ involvement in the life of local communities, with the purpose of the affirmation of the social aspects of Christian teachings and promoting fundamental values the evolution of Romanian society. So, the activity of the priest exceeded the boundaries of the Churches, it could/had to be developed within school, the house of culture (*cămin cultural*) and Social Service, Guardian of the Country and even within the “ideological limits” of the unique party, National Renaissance Front. In theory, the priest had to be present at all important social activities, contributing, next to representatives of other institution, to morale regeneration of the humane communities and strengthening the Christian Orthodox faith in the members of these communities.

On this line, the priests community in Oltenia declared from the beginning the adhesion to the political regime enforced by the King Carol II on February 10/11, 1938, appreciating that the effort of Romanian Orthodox Church representatives “Christianization of everyday life” was doubled by the reforms enforced by the carlist

¹³ *Ibidem*, File No. 29/1939, f. 123.

¹⁴ „Monitorul Oficial”, part, year CVI, no. 242, 18 October 1938, p. 4952; „Monitorul Oficial”, part I, year 105, no. 232, 7 October 1937, p. 8190-8192; *Enciclopedia României*, vol. I, *Statul*, editing committee: Dimitrie Gusti, Constantin Orghidan, Mircea Vulcănescu, Virgiliu Leonte, Ediția I, București, Imprimeria Națională, 1938, p. 489; Armand Călinescu, *Noul regim: cuvântări 1938-1939*, 2nd edition, București, DoMinor Publishing House, 2003, p. 99.

¹⁵ From the beginning of the monarchic authority regime, was stated and existed a bilateral cooperation between laic and religious representatives of the power, the evidence being also the fact that the prime minister of the Romanian Kingdom (the president of the Ministers Council) was, between February 11, 1938 – March 6, 1939, the Patriarch Miron Cristea. (Cristian Vasile Petcu, *Guvernarea Miron Cristea*, București, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 2009, p. 234-235; Lucian Dindirică, *Miron Cristea: patriarh, regent și prim-ministru*, Iași, Tipo Moldova Publishing House, 2011, p. 316; Idem, *O filă de istorie ecleziastică românească: Mitropolitul Nifon Criveanu*, in „Misiunea. Revista Centrului de Cercetare a Conlucrării Bisericii Ortodoxe cu Armata României « General Paul Teodorescu »”, year II, No. 1(2)/2015, p. 75-79).

regime, something highlighted at the annual congress of the Priest's Society "Renaissance", held in Caracal, on December 15, 1938:

„That was observed from the fact that political leadership spheres of the state not only there were not influenced by the religious revival, but also sign up as prime principle of recovery of the entire life of the Romanian state, the religious morale principles of our church.

(...) It's proper therefore that in any occasion to bring our entire offering of recognition to His Majesty Christian Orthodox King Carol II (...)

Therefore we make an earnestly call to the entire priest community to enrol and activate with enthusiasm in these organizations like: Guardians, Pre-military and Social Service, being secure they will contribute not only to raising the kind, but also to capitalize of the social role they have in the middle of society"¹⁶.

During the 16th congress diocesan of the Society of Priests "Renaissance", that took place on March 22, 1939, in Craiova, the priests from Oltenia voted a motion where they expressed their profound devotion towards the King Carol II, "the protector of our national church", and also towards "the opera of social education for the renaissance of the Romanian people". In the same time it took a commitment to cooperate with administrative, cultural and politic authorities to "raise the people" within the Social Service and the National Renaissance Front¹⁷.

The *Mitropolit* Nifon Criveanu enforced/reconfirmed the new relation between the state and Romanian Orthodox Church and assumed, in behalf of the priests community in Oltenia, "the new role" of the Church received from the carlist regime. Therefore, in the speech from November 30, 1939, with the occasion of his election as *Archiepiscop* of Craiova and *Mitropolit* of Oltenia, Râmnicului and Severinului¹⁸, Nifon Criveanu stated the following:

„Its proper that the Church, ..., to be more present to all calls of life national, cultural, spiritual, social and philanthropic and *become more useful and necessary in the life of state (our underline)*, in guiding the people, the society, the family and individual, in forming the youth, justifying with this its existence, its utility.

(...)The Church is ever called – by the times an people – to purify, to renew and Nobile the humane life, to bring into social life and the people life the holy spirit of peace and brotherhood, the holy spirit of servitude and sacrifice, spreading justice and humanity in leadership, obedience and faith in listening, peaceful work for all, honesty, order, devotion and zeal, is called to empower the Romanian soul with the strait of faith and love, solidarity and unification (...)"¹⁹.

¹⁶ National Archive Dolj, Rezidența Regală a Ținutului Ol fund, Administrative Service, File No. 7/1938, f. 391-392.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, File No. 25/1939, f. 50v.

¹⁸ See, for details regarding the life and activity of Nifon Criveanu, Diana-Mihaela Păunoiu, *Nifon Criveanu – primul mitropolit al Olteniei, Râmnicului și Severinului* in volume „Mehedinți – istorie, cultură și spiritualitate”, vol. 3, supervised by Pr. PhD Iulian Nedelcu, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Didahia Severin Publishing House, 2010, p. 248-259.

¹⁹ „Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Revista Sfântului Sinod”, year LVII, No. 11-12, November – December 1939, p. 716-717.

Generally, after the instauration of the carlist regime, the Church representatives sustained and spread thru various means of information the official points of view, according to which the solving of the morale crisis, and implicitly the social crisis, could be achieved thru a constant action or involvement of the Church in the life of humane communities, having necessary the coordination of the work of priests to achieve positive results at national level.

Considering the analyzed information from the documentary sources used, we can state that solving the interwar Romanian crisis, including the moral crisis, included, at least at the theoretical level, an efficient combined action of all cultural and politic, laic and religious representatives.

On the other side, the involvement of the state's institutions in solving the interwar Romanian moral crisis, in other words, the project of moral regeneration – „rebirth /recovery” – of the Romanian nation, was done in the internal and external specific context of the 1938 – 1940, when, right after the installation of the monarchic authority regime of King Carol II, was started a process of social transformation, of redefinition of Romanian traditional values. In this context, all social and professional categories had to carry on their activities within „ideological limits” and institutional limits enforced by the carlist regime. The failure of the monarchic authority regime (February 10/11, 1938 – September 6, 1940) and the context created the Second World War determined the impossibility of efficiently application of the foreseen solutions in the period to overcome the interwar Romanian crisis.

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