

## **State-/Nation-building and Confessionalization in SEE: Nationalism and Religion in Nineteenth Century Romania**

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For nineteenth-century Southeastern Europe, the Orthodox Church has conventionally been seen as opposing the processes of modernization. But most of these scholarly opinions inferred that opposition from studies with a different focus (e.g. intellectuals, official discourse(s) of modernization and nationalism etc.) and not by systematic research on sources produced by and within the Orthodox Church. This situation is part of the larger problem with current analyses of the processes of modernization and state/nation-building in nineteenth century South-Eastern Europe – the lack of a systematic survey of the instruments and other components of the state bureaucracy that were used in implementing the cultural politics of the nation-state. Since the spread of literacy was considered the precondition and the medium for disseminating civic values and forming the national identity, the system of primary education has already received a great deal of attention (Charles Jelavich for Serbia, Mirela-Luminita Murgescu for Romania, Diana Mishkova for Bulgaria and Christina Koulouri for Greece) even if most of these studies offer little data about the impact of the School as a disseminator of nationalist discourse in Southeastern Europe. In addition to School, the Army and the Church were considered by many Romanian intellectuals as two of the three pillars of nation-building. Yet both have received little attention from social and cultural historians not only in relation with the spread of nationalism but also as independent topics.

Against this background, my paper will use as a case study the role of the Orthodox Church in the processes of modernization and state-/nation-building in Romania after 1850. The argument of this paper is that a process of “confessionalization” has accompanied the process of state-/nation-building in Romania, a process that has influenced a large part of the population. In support for this argument, my paper concentrates on role of the military priests as carriers and disseminators of a combination of religion and nationalism which was articulated by the members of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

### ***State-/nation-building and confessionalization in nineteenth century SEE?***

Used for the first time by Ernst Walter Zeeden in the 1950s, the concept of confessionalization was refined later by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard, the first one focusing on Protestantism, while the second on Catholicism. For Schilling and Reinhard, “confessionalization” defines the intertwine of Church and State for the period after the Reformation, an intertwine manifested in the close connection between the processes of confession-building and state-building. The results of this connection was a homogenization of the population in every German principality, the intensification of (modern) state formation, a general process of social disciplining resulting from the

disciplining measures of both church and state, and the development of cultural and political collective identities in which confession has played a key-role.<sup>1</sup>

According to Ute Lotz-Heumann, Wolfgang Reinhard has identified seven methods or mechanisms of confessionalization that were used by church and state to establish confessional homogeneity: a) the establishment of the “pure Doctrine” and its formulation in a confession of faith; b) the ‘distribution,’ or actually division, and the enforcement of these new norms; c) the internalization of the new norms through education; d) disciplining the population; e) rites and the control of participation in rites; and f) the confessional regulation of language. Ute Lotz-Heumann reviews also the criticisms of the theory of confessionalization: a) the theory is too functionalist and minimizes the theological characteristics of each of the three confessions; b) confessionalization was not the only major historical process and not the most important (others were the adoption of the Roman law, the Humanist *republic of lettres* etc.); c) the theory is structurally similar to the theory of modernization; and d) the etatist emphasis in its formulation by conceiving people as passive subjects.

These are important observations but none of them is actually dismissing the theory and contributes not only to its refining but from my point of view they constitutes arguments for applying the theory of confessionalization to the nineteenth century South-Eastern Europe: a) the theory is purposely functionalist in order to bring under the same theory different phenomena that most observers consider them as related and similar even if the periodization and the impact is different; b) confessionalization was not the only major trend in early modern but it had the largest and fastest impact on the mass of the people; c) on the one hand, there was not a single unitary theory of modernization in the 1960s and 1970s and, on the other hand, every student of the nineteenth century Balkans agrees there was a process of transformations and “westernization” in the region, the problem being how to define it and formulate a specific model for it; and d) by changing the etatist perspective through including all the social categories and the way how they have received and shaped the understanding of the process does not change its essential “up-to-bottom” character. Coming back to the functionalist use of the theory of confessionalization, I must stress the fact that this is its most important atu in trying to apply it to South-Eastern Europe.

### ***State-/nation-building and confessionalization in the XIXth century Romania***

The process of confessionalization in the Danubian principalities seems to have started to be systematically implemented with the establishment of the Organic Statutes (1831-1832) and its periodization may be fragmented in relation to the beginning of the nation-building process (1860s). The first part of this process of confessionalization may be considered this period of the Organic Statutes, while its second part is attached to and fostered by the nation-building process. For the second period, the 1860s and 1870s are a

<sup>1</sup> Ute Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*. Edited by Hans J. Hillerbrand, vol. 1 (A-C) (Routledge, 2004), pp. 497-501. Useful reviews are Joel F. Harrington and Helmut Walser Smith. “Confessionalization, community, and state building in Germany, 1555-1870,” *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 69, nr. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 77-101 and Jörg Deventer. “Confessionalization – A useful theoretical concept for the study of religion, politics and society in Early Modern East Central Europe?” *European Review of History*, vol. 11, nr. 3, 2004, pp. 403-425.

first phase of explicit implementing confessionalization while the 1890s and 1900s are a second phase of deepening the process. But what are the arguments for my claim?

- A systematized hierarchical system of ‘producing’ experts/priests through an approved system of education started to be developed after 1850s and especially since 1890s. While in 1864, Alexandru-Ioan Cuza initiated the process of creating a single Orthodox Church in the new state, the process was implemented only by the later legislative moments aimed to “regulate and modernize” the Church from 1872, 1893, 1904, and 1908. Also, a system of seminars and later faculties of theologies started to be developed and the accession in the Church hierarchy became conditioned by the possession of academic degrees while a process of internal “colonization” took place by establishing more parishes and sending priests to “take care” of the people.

- The process of standardization within the framework of modernization and ‘nationalization’ that Romanian culture was passing at that time affected also the doctrine/rules/norms of the Romanian Orthodox Church, including more or less the daily practices. This standardization meant the codification of the “approved beliefs” manifesting itself as a crystallization of the religious dogma in reaction against the existing mixture of beliefs, superstitions, stories etc. The affirmation/codification of such body of knowledge was done by employing the “national language,” which was also passing in the same period through a process of codification of the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and in the case of Romania, of spelling and change of alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin.<sup>2</sup>

- A number of periodicals, more or less official, were created, establishing this way a specific public sphere through which the language of the Church was adapted in the contexts of the transformations of the Romanian language and culture. A monthly official journal of the Romanian Orthodox Church (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Jurnalul periodicu ecclesiasticu*) was established in 1874 becoming the main medium of a religious public sphere which started to develop by disseminating information concerning the internal affairs, publishing model sermons and articles and conferences about the religious (mainly Orthodox) history.

- New practices that were not customary in the previous period were established while those existing were systematized at all levels of the Romanian Orthodox Church jurisdiction: choruses and catechisms were introduced; preaching and the use of sermons were encouraged etc. The Orthodox Church started to promote religious practices related to a **public** model of life: “society” started to replace “crowd” in Church’s vocabulary while *les rites de passage* in one’s life were receiving a full religious connotation: birth and baptism, marriage, and death. Of course, they existed before but through the process of confessionalization, those who were not accepting them were excluded from the social life.

Details supporting these arguments will be given as a part of this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> For an example of the previous state of mixture from Bulgaria see Maria Todorova, „Language as cultural unifier in a multilingual setting: the Bulgarian case during the nineteenth century,” *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 4, nr. 3, Fall 1990, p. 439: „[one] prayerbook of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century contains prayers to the Virgin, to Saint George, and to other saints, written in Church Slavonic (with Cyrillic letters), in Modern Bulgarian, i.e. the vernacular (with Greek letters), and in Greek (with both Greek and Cyrillic letters).”

### ***Case-study: Religion, militarism and patriotism in the discourse(s) of the Romanian military confessors***

The first military confessors were established in Wallachia in 1850 and their number started to increase especially after 1859. They were already some tens in the early 1860s as it results from the analysis of the annual budgets of the Ministry of War published in the *Monitorul Oastei*. Their duties were: a) to celebrate the religious ceremonies of the military units, b) to lead the collective praying in the mornings of the religious and national holidays, and c) to confess and give the communion to the soldiers, especially during the Lent, and in case of death to celebrate their funerals. Also, extremely important for the argument of this paper, during the peace period the clergy had the duty to teach the “religious sciences” in the regimentary schools, which were three: Catechism, Sacred History and History of Patria (sic!). For the way how nationalism got mediated through religious lenses, let me quote a preach from October 1867, with the occasion of the recruit’s oath of allegiance, from a confessor of a regiment of regular infantry from Iași.:

Now I believe that after you have well understood me on what does it mean to be a soldier, you will understand me as well on what your Patria does mean!... Your Patria means your Mother, but Mother without Father has never been heard in this world! [...] so [she] must have a husband, a man, to be your Father, your [P]arent, [because] without him [she] would be a mother deepened in sufferings and you some unhappy sons. Your Father here on earth is His Highness Carol I whom God’s mercy has accompanied and married with your Mother, Patria. – Swear then faith, obedience and love your Father and your Mother. – But in order to have always with you and to see them permanently in front of your eyes, they gave you a beloved and saint sign, which has remained as a legacy from your forefathers, a veil on which is painted the eagle [the symbol of Wallachia] and urus [the symbol of Moldavia] which have animated your forefathers in their wars [...] This veil is the flag [steag and drapel were both neologisms in the Romanian language] which you proudly carry in your hands, as an icon of your forefathers’ bravery [...]<sup>3</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

It is the point of this paper that the military priest used in the Army as religious confessors and teachers have greatly influenced the understanding of the civic values transmitted from top to the bottom. This process was possible only in the larger framework of confessionalization, which represents the transformations that affected the Romanian Orthodox Church in the long nineteenth century and consequently the military confessors as well. And here it relies the importance of the process of confessionalization: the process of nation-building was a form of confession-building in nineteenth century South-Eastern Europe not only because of the systematization of religious discipline which accompanied the implementation of the modern state framework but also due to the fact that the reception of state-/nation-/civic values were mediated by the religious lenses formed through confessionalization of the majority of rural population.

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<sup>3</sup> *Monitorul Oastei*, nr. 44, 20 noiembrie, 1867, pp. 935-937.