

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY**  
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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Demons and Exorcism in the Orthodox and Roman-Catholic  
Collective Mentality**

**PhD Supervisor**

**Professor Dr. Toader Nicoară**

**PhD Student**

**Alexandru Rusu**

**CLUJ-NAPOCA**

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## **Keywords**

- collective mentalities
- demonology
- exorcism
- social imaginary
- religion

## SUMMARY

The interwar period meant a historiographical revolution with far reached effects in the approach and understanding of the past and way of writing and textual reconstitution of past realities. Annales School, developed around the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* under the patronage of March Bloch and Lucien Febvre had refreshed the relationship with history.<sup>1</sup> While till that moment the subjects of history were particularly the crowned heads and army generals, that became secondary to historiographic interest on social aspects, popular beliefs and social imaginary. Annales School produced, in Thomas Kuhn's terms, a "change of paradigm."<sup>2</sup> The shift consisted of recentring the historiographic discourse from monarchs, generals, wars, diplomacy and matrimonial alliances to history of collective mentalities. As Toader Nicoară showed, the one to align Romanian historiography to the European movement: "History of collective mentalities takes into account the restitution of the entire domain of affect, feelings, attitudes and human behaviour, individual or collective, without which any perspective on the past would remain fragmentary and incomplete."<sup>3</sup>

The present thesis is an anthropological demarche, a history of collective mentality and social imaginary over demonology and Orthodox and Roman-Catholic exorcism while reconstituting a religious world less known and debated. The motivation of this work is based on lack of studies that would convey a theological vision and a historical-anthropological one. This area of research offers studies with personal points of view or with a sensational touch, while comparative studies are missing. Our investigation tries to delineate research directions within the frame of history of mentalities and imaginary with the help of political, social, religious and cultural history.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89*. London: Polity Press, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *Structura revoluțiilor științifice*. București: Humanitas, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Toader Nicoară, *Transilvania la începuturile timpurilor moderne (1680-1800). Societate rurală și mentalități colective*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, p. 5.

The magnitude of occult phenomena, satanism, spiritism, witchcraft, magic and exorcism from the past eras have played a key role in the choice of this theme of research. This is a universe where Christian doctrines – Orthodox and Roman-Catholic - are interwoven with popular beliefs and practices. Moreover, there is a personal dimension that adds to the perception of religious sensibility. Thus, this attempt of approach from the perspective of collective mentality is probably the only way of restoring the sensitive dimension, attitudes and individual, as well as collective behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

The present approach is an ambitious one, as it sets out to achieve the comparison and attempt of understanding the religious background of two churches and societies – Catholic and Orthodox. There is an attraction for both researchers and general public toward this research topic. However, timidity or excess characterizes the researches of anthropology of religion into which the elements of demonology and exorcism fit perfectly. We uncover work about demons and exorcism that stop at the theological border. In that case, we sense the timidity of the priest, while at the opposite spectrum, we see excess. Valorisation from both historical and cultural perspective is necessary, given that the sensational element is fashionable as ever.

To that end, we considered a different approach by analysing the phenomena of demonology and exorcism at the collective mentality, using the comparison between the Orthodox and Roman-Catholic background. Our research covers a large period, starting with the Old Testament to our days: "As it is known, mentality and imaginary impose an analysis of a large period of time (*la longue duree de l'histoire*) so that the results are coherent and convincing."<sup>5</sup> Having as the starting point the fact that Orthodox and Catholic theology have a common historical moment, our demarche may unveil unique aspects, even though there are limits between the two doctrines concerning demonology and exorcism.

Our research is part of the corpus of researches initiated by Professor Toader Nicoară from anthropological perspective and history of mentalities. The interdisciplinary aspect represents a key facet of this thesis. Both Catholic and Orthodox demonology and exorcism are analysed from historical, theological, anthropological, ethnological, psychiatric and literary aspects.

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<sup>4</sup> T. Nicoară, *op-cit*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p.8.

One of our directions of research is the analysis of demonology and implicitly of the exorcism phenomenon at lay and theological level by observing and synthesising similarities and differences. The lay dimension in both Orthodox and Catholic believers is intriguing. The objective is to reveal an image of both faiths within their society and from the theological point of view. For example: "In the eastern space, especially in popular tradition, Satan is ridiculed and subject to satire. That capacity of ridiculing the devil is considered a logical superiority. In that atmosphere, it would be unconceivable for a poet of the Orthodox cultural tradition to write *The Divine Comedy*, on Dante's model or *Paradise Lost*, following in Milton's footsteps. Or for a director to create the film *Exorcist* that shaped the evolution of western art. As a matter of fact, there is no theology of exorcism in the Orthodox Church and no practical textbooks for the exorcism technique, and no synodal decisions."<sup>6</sup> That was the truth when Nikolaos Matsoukas published his *Treaty of Demonology* in 1999 and even in the moment of its translation from Greek to Romanian, in 2002. But since then synodal decisions<sup>7</sup> have been made referring strictly to exorcism practice. Moreover, there are also films concerning that phenomenon that were appreciated and praised in the west.<sup>8</sup>

The description of these phenomena is important due to the ambivalent attitude of believers toward these phenomena, within the Catholic and Orthodox communities. They were seen as useful and harmful, provoking attraction and rejection at the same time, derived from the desire to accomplish a portrait of a possible demonological and exorcism culture. On the other hand, from lay perspective, things are perceived differently. That fact derives from the existence of faith in evil or good spirits. There is a continuous alternation between opposed extremes, which manifests in the human subconscious and represents an expression of the archetype of fight between good and evil.

Another research direction of the present thesis has analysed the evolution of demonology and exorcism phenomenon at lay and theological level over time. From Satan of the Old Testament

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<sup>6</sup> Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică, vol.IV*, Demonologia, Editura Bizantină, București, 2002, pp. 137-140.

<sup>7</sup> The decision no. 630 from 17 February 2011 of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Romanian Church regarding the reading of the Prayers of Saint Basil the Great in the Orthodox Romanian Church. <http://patriarhia.ro/hotararea-sfantului-sinod-privind-citirea-molitfelor-sfantului-vasile-cel-mare-in-biserica-ortodoxa-romana-1559.html>

<sup>8</sup> Cristian Mungiu's film *După Dealuri/Beyond the Hills* received two special prizes at the Cannes festival in 2012. <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/archives/ficheFilm/id/86a32d10-ff21-473e-bef2-c1655094cd6b/year/2012.html> .

to the devil of the New Testament, from demonised people exorcised by Jesus to the possessed of our days, from Roman rituals of 1614 to nowadays, from Prayers of Saint Basil the Great of 1545 or 1648 to those used nowadays we find different visions on demonology and exorcism, as well as different implications.<sup>9</sup> We believe that this demarche about demons and exorcism may be considered part of our culture and may contribute, as Jacques Le Goff stated, to the "integral resurrection of the past."<sup>10</sup>

The thesis consists of six chapters that set out to achieve the image of an evolution of demonology and exorcism throughout history. The first chapter presents the way in which demonology and exorcism are perceived in the Old Testament. Moreover, it presents Satan and the idea of demons in the books of Genesis, Leviticus, Job, I Chronicles and Zechariah. We considered necessary this approach to be able to accomplish a profile of the evil or idea of evil as it appears in the Catholic or Orthodox tradition of the Old Testament. It is also relevant to clarify the conceptions of demons in the Old Testament, as it may be interesting from the Jewish perspective on demons.

The second chapter analyses Jesus' activity as an exorcist, as miracle performer, among which casting out demons from people. Jews' reactions to possessed people in the New Testament, as well as apostles' activity in their struggle with demons is also relevant. The same chapter studies the function of exorcist in the first centuries of Christianity, considered important in the early church.

The third chapter uncovers elements of demonology and exorcism in the Middle Ages from the lay, theological point of view in the Catholic and Orthodox space, while the fourth chapter analyses the image of the devil and exorcism in modernity, especially in the Catholic area, where a famous case of Loudun stirred the imagination of the clergy and lay people.

The fifth chapter reveals aspects of demonology and exorcism in the Orthodox space of modernity, while the last chapter is an approach of Catholic demonology and exorcism, using information of specialised literature or mass media from the contemporary period.

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<sup>9</sup> Nikolaos Matsoukas, *op-cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques le Goff, Nicolas Truong, *Une histoire du corp au Moyen Age*, Liana Levi, Paris, 2003, p. 15.



The sources and used bibliography are vast so that we selected the relevant ones for this demarche. We used studies of exorcism that we considered meaningful in both the Catholic and Orthodox spaces. The Orthodox historiography is dominated by theologians, priests or monks who generally take over writings of the Church Fathers of the first centuries of Christianity among which are the Euchologions.<sup>11</sup> The first Euchologion in Slavonic language was published in 1545<sup>12</sup> at Târgoviște. That was the first one to be published on Romanian soil. We mention the Greek Euchologion published in 1648.<sup>13</sup> Other important works concerning demons and exorcism were written in the Orthodox space by Serafim Rose in 2015<sup>14</sup> or Archimandrite Antonie I. Stikianakis about healing of demonised people<sup>15</sup>. A research on contemporary opinions from theological and psychological perspective having the Gospel as the starting points was published in 2014, as well as the aforementioned study of Nikolaos Mathouskas<sup>16</sup>. Throughout the research, we used the Orthodox Bible, published in 1988<sup>17</sup>. Cristian Bădiliță and *Apocrypha Gospels*<sup>18</sup> in 2007, as well as Vasile Andru's *Exorcism from Its Origins to Tanacu Case* in 2012<sup>19</sup> are worth mentioning contributions.

The Catholic historiography offers us a myriad of works and various perspectives – historical, sociological or anthropological. There are much more studies that approach the demonological and exorcism aspects than in the Orthodox case. That is a relevant point, as it allows us to observe the first difference between the two spaces. Among the sources we used, we mention Francesco Bamonte and his *Possessioni diaboliche ed esorcismo, Come riconoscere l'astuto ingannatore* (2011), Jose Antonio Fortea and *Summa Daemoniaca, Trattato di Demonologia e*

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<sup>11</sup> Euchologion is a chief liturgical book written in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries when it reached its complete form. It is an important book for priests to conduct correctly any type of divine service, ordinance, dispensation in the church or outside it.

<sup>12</sup> Slavonic Euchologion, published in Târgoviște during the reign of Radu Paisie, in the printing house of Dimitrie Libavici in 1545.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek Euchologion, published in 1648, Venice.

<sup>14</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *Ortodoxia și Religia Viitorului*, (Ediția a III-a), București, Editura Sophia, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Arhimandrit Antonie I. Stilianakis, *Vindecări ale demonizațiilor*, Galați, Editura Egumenița, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică, vol.IV, Demonologia*, București, Editura Bizantină, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Cristian Bădiliță, *Evangelii Apocrife, Traducere, studiu introductiv, note și prezentări de Cristian Bădiliță*, Iași, Polirom, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Vasile Andru, *Exorcismele, De la origini până la Tanacu, Ediția a II-a, revăzută și adăugită*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2012.

*Manuale dell'Esorcista* (2008),<sup>20</sup> the Roman-Catholic Bible (version of 2008), Giovanni Papini and his work *The Devil* (2009),<sup>21</sup> Robert Muchembled and his *History of the Devil* (2002).<sup>22</sup> These are only several examples of works that analyse demons and exorcism from multiple perspectives.

The study of apocrypha offered important information on demonology and exorcism of the Old and New Testament. In order to convey a closer image to religious reality about demons, devil and exorcism we also read a series of folklore works and ethnological studies. Aspects of demonology and exorcism deal with popular perception instilled by the projection of archetypes of evil recognisable in individual or collective mentality, which emerges as superstitions in all historical eras. That may be the source of exaggerations. One example are films with special effects that easily induce into the subconscious of the viewers and may suggest erroneous conceptions regarding demons and exorcism.<sup>23</sup>

We used the quantitative method, as well as the qualitative one concerning the case studies, which enabled us to understand deeper motivations, emotions, perceptions and feelings. We also used elements of oral history and visual anthropology, such as photographs, films and images from mass media. We aim at presenting religious practices and beliefs, similarities and transformations that shaped the demonological and exorcism both Catholic and Orthodox domains.

Our thesis explores the understanding of demonology in Christianity. It was showed that demonology is a consisting part of the Christian perspective, where a battle of cosmic proportions takes place between devil and his agents, on one hand, and the Church, regardless of its specificity, on the other. The imaginary of this perpetual battle in the collective mentality, as well as of the way demons, possession and exorcism evolved throughout two millenia of Christendom is our main concern. However, the demonological conception in both Churches is based on the paradigm of exorcism performed by Jesus, according to the source of the New Testament. Soon after Jesus' crucifixion, another indirect type of exorcism appeared in the Christian culture, exemplified by the actions of Virgin Mary and appearance of holy relics. Later the profession of exorcist was defined

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<sup>20</sup> Jose Antonio Fortea, *Summa Daemoniaca, Trattato di Demonologia e Manuale dell'Esorcista*, Roma, Tre Editori, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Giovanni Papini, *Diavolul*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Muchembled, *O istorie a Diavolului, Civilizația occidentală în secolele XII-XX*, Editura Cartier, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandru Buzalic, *Demonologia creștină-revelație, tradiție și rațiune-*, Editura Gutemberg, Târgu-Lăpuș, 2010, p. 16.

within the early Church and perpetuated in the Catholic Church that had a huge influence in the Middle Ages, as it is evident from the great witchcraft trials conducted by the Inquisition.

Both the attitude and approach of the Orthodox and Catholic Church modified throughout centuries, evolving from restraints in talking publicly about this topic in some historical periods to the openness of approaching them in recent history. The idea of a true war between people and the forces of darkness from the Orthodox theological perspective is evident: "We are in a harsh battle with the forces of darkness, a battle of which less and less people are aware. Others ignore it out of laziness, pleasures of life. And when they happen to assist at a service when the priests cast out evil spirits they are shocked. And that is because they realize that they live in an unreal world, no demons, angels or God included. That contact with reality scares them."<sup>24</sup> According to the Orthodox doctrine, there is a war between good and evil and believers must pay attention according to the principle "choose then take."<sup>25</sup> In the Catholic case, it appears that nowadays there are some issues concerning the belief in demons and exorcism as well; there are also few exorcist priests.<sup>26</sup> Despite that, the Catholic theology offers probably more cases of demonic possession and exorcism than the Orthodox one.

On the other hand, the attitude of lay people from the Orthodox and Catholic areas has modified in time. We refer to both Orthodox and Catholic people that attend church frequently, pray and have questions about God and saints that protect them or about devil and unpleasant events of their lives. From believers' perspective, the phenomenon must be regarded through the difference between the intensity of emotions produces by the religious text and uttered words. We have to take into account the fact that in the Old and New Testament eras, as well as in the Middle Ages and till modernity masses were guided by the uttered word and not by the written word, while the perception of the religious feeling had a major impact in those historical periods. The religious fervour of the Jewish people in the Old Testament and their religious feelings induced by the priests and/or kings in that period are well-known. In the period of the New Testament we find many examples of preachers from those times about demonised people and their exorcism. It is also

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 490.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous author, *Ortodoxie Traditionalistă si Teologie Patristică [Traditionalist Orthodoxy and Patristic Theology]*, Saint Kiril of Jerusalem about the necessity of the link between ecclesial life and deeds - <https://theologiepatristica.wordpress.com/2015/05/12/sfantul-chiril-al-ierusalimului-despre-necesitatea-legaturii-fapte-viata-eccleziala/>.

<sup>26</sup> Marco Tosatti, *op-cit*, p. 15.

known what impression had preachers of the Middle Ages when the description of the horrors of hell moved people, and preachers talked loudly to that end.<sup>27</sup> An example of the effect of a discourse is telling:

”We may have an idea of the shocks produced from the story that cities fought to get a promise of a sermon, as the mayor and the people greeted the preacher with a pomp suitable to a king and preachers had to interrupt their discourse because of the bursts in tears of the crowd. Once, while Vicente Ferrer was preaching, two condemned to death – a man and a woman – passed nearby. Vicente tried to hide the victims under his pulpit, preaching about their sins. After the sermon there were only bones under the pulpit so that the people were convinced that preacher’s words burnt the people alive and delivered them at the same time.”<sup>28</sup>

This is an example that points out the power of the word on the masses.

The contemporary Christians have a different perception about demons and exorcism, especially contrasting the Middle Ages or the New Testament period. The background is not a religious one, but a technological pragmatism and religious skepticism. It may be the most fascinating period for the study of demonology and exorcism. The technological revolution has opened the access to people for information referring to demons, possessions and exorcism. The sensational cases broadcast by mass media stimulate the public interest for such information. We may talk about personal perceptions regarding demons or exorcism, given the myriad of information, images and theological aspects about this area. We refer primarily to the access we have to written information. It may seem a battle for the nowadays people’s soul, a manifestation of the myth of the battle between evil and good that moved from the street to the virtual space, from an exterior to an intimate space. And the skepticism is often hand in hand with lack of faith. Devil is accused of creating a package of the new era, where Neosatanism, Occultism, Spiritism and witchcraft, along with false religions are options, while literature, art and mass media are ways of corrupting people.<sup>29</sup>

After modernity, obsession with the devil and fascination toward the occult took a different form, while the importance of the devil diminished in cultural imaginary. Despite the recent

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<sup>27</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Amurgul Evului Mediu*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1993, pp. 308-309.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p.309.

<sup>29</sup> *Demonii și lucrările lor*, Învățătura Bisericii și o culegere de povestiri despre duhurile rele, Traducere din limba greacă de Cristian Spătărelu, Editura Cartea Ortodoxă, 2007, p. 6.

reaffirmation of the belief of the Catholic Church in devil's existence, secularisation has reduced Church's influence in the daily life and has altered traditional beliefs in good and evil. Taking into account Baudelaire's affirmation about devil's trick to convince people about his inexistence, we may try to picture human intelligence from devil's perspective. Paul Valery, famous poet and subtle interpreter of diabolic psychology, offers us this perspective: "Devil said: That man was not intelligent enough to tire myself arguing with him. He lacked the brains. He was so stupid that he beat me. Defeating an imbecile – that is a problem! He did not get any of my temptations."<sup>30</sup>

Few studies in the Orthodox area have delineated the cases of authentic demonical possession, psychiatric illness and collective hysteria. Although they attract due to its sensational character, such cases are mentioned in the press, especially if deadly, the Orthodox believers avoid talking about demons, possession and exorcism. They prefer to ignore demons as a result of the Church's recommendation as a way of fighting them. We concluded from the writings of Orthodox theologians that the nowadays Orthodox society is affected by two divergent tendencies. The first one is negating devil and personal entity, whose tactic is to stay in the shadow, while the second is superstition that endows devil with supernatural powers and ending up venerating him. In the second case, it is considered that devil is not that pretentious toward the contemporary people's style and more dangerous due to his presumable power of torturing people. Therefore, the second tendency would seem appealing unless the Christian Church considered it a serious sin.<sup>31</sup>

The reasonable conclusion is that devil managed to trick most of Europe whose secularised citizens fell into his cognitive traps, not believing in his existence. On the other hand, Americans seem harder to be fooled. We would like to propose as an analogy of Pascal's bet, what we call "Baudelaire's bet." As it is known, Pascal stated that a rational person chooses to believe in God as there is nothing to lose if he/she believes that God exists. On the other hand, if the person does not believe in God's existence and God exists, he/she loses everything and goes to hell. On the same structure: if people do not believe in devil, devil wins because he managed to trick people

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<sup>30</sup> Giovanni Papini, *op-cit.*, p.122

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/parinti/parintele-profesor-alexander-schmemann-157741.html>.

concerning his existence; on the other, if people believe in his power, devil wins, as he exists at least in the collective imaginary.<sup>32</sup>

As Robert Muchembled noted, "devil is always a child of his time."<sup>33</sup> From that perspective, we tried to follow his hypostases throughout history, along with his path and metamorphosis in both the Orthodox and Catholic world. Undoubtedly, this demarche was not easy due to the fact that it covers a great period. The new factor is firstly represented by the comparison of two Christian religions and devil's image impregnated in theology and people's mentality. Places and myths shaped a different image of the devil and demons in different historical eras. That is why it would be better to discuss about a religious mentality that would be part of the history of collective mentality, being the case of religious sensibility, a path opened by Annales School at the beginning of the 20th century. We have completed the thesis bearing in mind that "the historian must give birth to history"<sup>34</sup> and in order to do that the historian must intervene in the analysed events and to have a social approach on events.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Alexandru Rusu, *La granița dintre științe: istorie, mentalități, imaginar*, Omagiu profesorilor Simona și Toader Nicoară la vârsta de 60 de ani, Coordonatori Ovidiu Ghitta, Gheorghe Negustor, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Argonaut/Mega, 2017, pp.171-172.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Muchembled, *O istorie a Diavolului, Civilizația occidentală în secolele XII-XX*, Chișinău, Cartier, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Lucien Febvre, *Combats pour l'histoire*, Paris, 1953.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

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