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**FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

**Doctoral School “Isidor Todoran”**

**THE CATECHETICAL ACTIVITY IN THE ROMANIAN AND GREEK  
ORTHODOX CHURCHES TODAY  
– A COMPARATIVE STUDY –**

**PhD Thesis**

**– abstract –**

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**Keywords:** *catechesis; Romanian Orthodox Church; Greek Orthodox Church; Christian education.*

**ABSTRACT**

This PhD thesis, written as a member of the Doctoral School of Orthodox Theology “Isidor Todoran” of the “Babeş-Bolyai” University from Cluj-Napoca, which focuses on the subject “the Catechetical Activity in the Romanian and Greek orthodox Churches Today. A Comparative Study”, intends to present an analysis of the catechetical activities developed within the two sister Churches, with the purpose to emphasize the good practice examples that can be borrowed and used in order to achieve better results during the process of catechization.

This research belongs to the field of Catechetics, but, it also contains elements of History of the Church and Homiletics, since the catechetical activity has been closely connected along the years with these two aspects of the Christian education and sermon.

In approaching the catechetical activity from the Romanian Orthodox Church and that from the Greek Orthodox Church, we focused at first on a description of the history of Catechesis in the two Orthodox countries, in order to have a broad view, and then we studied the activities organized starting with the 20<sup>th</sup> century until today. This comparative analysis wishes to be useful both for the two Churches for an improvement of the programs and projects developed, and for the other Christian Churches.

Serving for 12 years as a priest in Greece and having the opportunity to be a part of the catechization process in the Greek Church, starting with 2006, offered me the possibility to observe the good organization of the catechetical programs in this country. I am familiar, of course, with the catechetical situation in Romania as well, in the past years, starting with 2018, participating actively in the education of the young people as professor of Homiletics, Catechetic

and Greek language at the Theological Seminary “Teoctist the Patriarch” from Giurgiu and as counselor in the Cultural Department and Activities with the Young of the Giurgiu Bishopric. Having this beautiful experience, I considered that a detailed comparative analysis of the entire process of catechization developed within the two Orthodox Churches will be beneficial for both Churches, as a good exchange of experience.

Regarding the present **state of research**, I would like to mention that there isn't any other work that presents comparatively the catechetical activity of the two Orthodox Churches, and the subject is approached only tangentially in certain contexts<sup>1</sup>.

The **purpose** of this study consists of the knowledge, analysis and comparison of the catechetical activities developed within the two Orthodox Churches in order to emphasize the examples of good practices that can be borrowed from one another and used to obtain better results in the process of catechization. In writing this PhD thesis I focused on the following **objectives**: the identification of the catechetical activities of the two Orthodox Churches and their description; the comparative analysis of the catechetical activities and the study of the methods used; the identification of the examples of good practices, of the positive and negative aspects as well as of the resources and dangers that stand against the catechetical activities within the two sister Churches; establishing the similarities and differences following the comparative analysis.

The PhD thesis is elaborated in the form of a comparative study between the catechetical activity developed by the Romanian and Greek Orthodox Churches, and the **method** used was that of the comparative analysis.

The effort of our research is focused on the description of the process of catechization both in the Romanian Orthodox Church and in the Greek Orthodox Church, the comparative analysis being based on a parallelism, on a diagnosis and synthesis of the data of the research in order to emphasize the examples of good practice, examples that should serve as landmarks in the elaboration of new catechetical programs and projects. The variables that were considered starting points in our study were the activity of catechization (independent variable) and the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Veaceslav (Veniamin) GOREANU, „Bisericile ortodoxe locale și organizarea lor canonică în zilele noastre”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 4-6 (2006), pp. 371-425; Liviu VIDICAN-MANCI, *Propovăduirea Evangheliei în Era Digitală*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2020; see also my study, „Importanța catehezei în actualitate. Activități catehetice desfășurate în Biserica Ortodoxă Română și Biserica Ortodoxă din Grecia (studiu comparativ)”, *Studia Theologica Orthodoxa Doctoralia Napocensia*, 2 (2020), pp. 228-239. For a detailed situation in each country, see the bibliography used for the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter (Romanian Orthodox Church) and for the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter (Greek Orthodox Church).

examples of good practice (dependent variables which generate the conclusion of the study) used within the non-formal activity, through which the process of catechization is achieved with a special impact on the process of attracting young people to catechization.

The **hypothesis** from which I started in developing the comparative study was that: if the catechetical tradition is strongly tethered in the land of a country, as is the case for Greece (see Chapter III), then the level of deployment of the catechetical activities is higher.

We observe that the contemporary society is under the pressure of major changes, especially on a spiritual level and that is why I consider that the Church has the responsibility of finding new ways and strategies of catechization, through the achievement of a constructive communication for all the factors involved.

**Chapter I.** The research endeavor was initiated with the presentation of several information on the importance of catechesis and of the catechetical actions, through the emphasis of the role that religion has as a determining factor in the history and education of a nation, through outlining the personality of the catechet and through the presentation of the forms of catechization.

In the nowadays context, the mission of the Church is extremely difficult. In a world confronting with secularization, when man tends to find quickly his joy only within the borders of this world, to count exclusively on his own power, on the technical and scientific evolutions, a state of uncertainty is created. The world passes through a spiritual crisis – “a spiritual poverty of thought, which reduces the life of a person to the biological level and identifies the autonomy of man with self-sufficiency and lack of transcendence”<sup>2</sup>.

The catechet has from the beginning of Christianity a special status. He is mentioned by Saint Apostle Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:29) among those with special gifts. Their duty was to read, to interpret and to teach the catechumens the word of God. The catechet is, through his work and calling, a new disciple of Christ, a called, a forerunner and worker of the mission of preaching the Gospel<sup>3</sup>.

Along the years, the catechesis and the teaching activities were adapted to the historical and cultural context of each period and region, but they never missed from the pastoral-

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<sup>2</sup> † DANIEL, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, „Hristos dăruiește oamenilor vindecarea și viața”, *Ziarul Lumina de duminică*, 28 octombrie 2012, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> A. IVAN (coord.), *Crezul Ortodox în 12 cateheze*, Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2015, pp. 14-15.

missionary concerns of the Church. Today, we see that one of the main preoccupations of the modern theology is to communicate the truths of faith through catechesis and catechetical activities. If in the past Catechesis was included among the practical subjects, today it is rightfully included, along with Homiletics, into the field of the communication sciences<sup>4</sup>. The Orthodox method of religious education requires to weigh all the methods and means used in the education and formation of the Christian in order to obtain the desired result.

In **Chapter II**, our research focused on the presentation and description of the manner in which the catechization process takes place within the Romanian Orthodox Church, especially in the nowadays context – as the title of the thesis indicates. Thus, after pointing out several introductory elements, in which I presented briefly the historical trajectory of the teaching activity of the Church in our country, from the beginning until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the catechetical activity intensifies (through the introduction of Religion as a school subject, through the implementation of the program “Christ given to the children” and through the catechization offices for the young etc.), I stopped to the main subject of the chapter, namely: the catechetical activity nowadays. Consequently, I presented a series of projects and activities developed locally and within the eparchy between 202 and 2023 – hence, during the COVID-19 pandemic – actions which may serve as examples of good practices for those who wish to have a check point in managing catechesis.

It is well known the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church was the main support of the culture of our nation, it was the one who kept the nation alive and protected it against all troubles of history<sup>5</sup>.

The beginning of the religious education in our country is closely linked to the beginning of the mass education. The monks were the one who built the first Romanian schools, and the children were taught using the liturgical books. Also under the supervision of the Church was the shift to laic education. As Nicolae Iorga said: “the school starts from Christianity, from the lesson of catechism in the narthex to the education of the chosen ones, of the catechumens, who, of course, had to learn four things: the dogma, the symbols, the ritual and the moral”<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Constantin NECULA, *Duc in altum. Ieșiți în larg. O introducere în Catehetică. Importanța catehezei în propovăduirea creștină*, ediția a III-a, Ed. Andreiana, Sibiu, 2021, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Dumitru GRIGORE, „Argument”, in: George RIZESCU, *Nevoia de ortodoxie*, Ed. Paralela 45, București, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Lecture at the University from Bucharest in the series “School and Culture”.

The catechetical actions developed gradually, along the centuries, depending on the political and social context, but the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a difficult one for the Romanian Orthodox Church. After the harsh experience of the Two World Wars, the Romanian Orthodoxy had to confront the difficulties and troubles that came from the Communist regime. During this period of time the religious education was eliminated from schools, many theological schools were closed, catechization was forbidden, and many of the clerics, monks and theologians were imprisoned, condemned to hard work or deported. After the 90's, the Church organized progressively, an important event being the introduction of the class of Religion in schools, as well as the liberty to organize the catechetical education.

Another important event in the catechetical mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the post-Communist times was the implementation of the program *Christ given to the children*, which was complementary to the class of Religion. This program addresses children with the ages between 6 and 18 and wishes to bring children closer to Christ and to the Church by shaping their hearts. This project started in 1999, and in December 2005, when the meeting took place in Sinaia, the project was initiated and it still goes on to the day.

Within this project, starting with 2010, every year the Romanian Patriarchate organized the National Catechetical Contest through the Theological-Educational Department. This contest has a different theme each year – in agreement with the theme of the commemorative year of the Romanian Patriarchate which was taken into account within the project.

“Choose School!” is another project dedicated to the mission of catechization of the young, implemented by the Romanian Patriarchate, through the Theological-Educational Department, in partnership with World Vision Romania and the Mitropoly of Moldova and Bukovina. This project has as a main objective to: prevent and control the phenomenon of abandonment of school and prevention of the juvenile delinquency, by developing solutions such as “Sunday school”<sup>7</sup>.

Through the projects “Christ given to the children” and “Choose School!”, the Romanian Patriarchate has as objective to rebuild the relationship between children and the religious community, as a support of the religious education from school and of the class of Religion.

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<sup>7</sup> *Alege Școala!, Curs de formare pentru formatori*, Iași, 2011, p. 3.

Furthermore, in the past years we observe a more intense development of social-philanthropic activities through partnerships between parishes and schools, programs that aim for a better education of the young and also for a decrease of school abandonment.

A special subchapter is dedicated to the catechetical activities during the COVID-19 pandemics. Once the pandemic started in the spring of 2020, several problems that existed within society surfaced. These changes had a special impact on the educational system as well, but also on the process of catechization. The Romanian Orthodox Church had an important role during this period of time, working devotedly to support the faithful through an intensification of prayer, of the on-line transmissions, of the philanthropic activities, as well as through the implementation of the measures of protection of the people's health imposed by the pandemic.

During the pandemic religion was seen by many as the main modality through which the crisis could be overcome, the class of Religion had special social impact in generating behaviors and promoting immortal values.

During the pandemics, the Romanian Patriarchate implemented and supported several catechetical actions of which we mention: the TV show "The Class of Religion" produced by Trinitas TV and the series "3 Minutes of the Religion Class", with an animated visual support, broadcasted during the show "Universe of Faith" of the Romanian Television and on the TV channel of the Romanian Patriarchate. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Theological-Educational Department of the Romanian Patriarchate, elaborated and published the document "Methodological Marks for Religion"<sup>8</sup>. The guide is structured in five chapters, covers 216 pages, in which it offers general recommendations and clear examples dedicated to each grade, for various religious cults from Romania.

An example of good practices which helped all the students is "The Class of Religion", a TV show produced by the television of the Romanian Patriarchate, which is not only an addition to the religious education, but also an adequate spiritual and emotional support. The themes approached were chosen from the school curriculum, but also from other sources, precisely in order to be able to offer a different perspective in the making of the class of Religion, in agreement with the concrete needs of the time, to focus the students' attention towards joy, prayer, hope and faith in God.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://basilica.ro/repere-metodologice-pentru-religie-in-contextul-pandemiei-actuale/> (accessed: 10.05.2021).

The importance of the catechetical courses developed within the Patriarchate is essential. Through these events, the activities developed locally are emphasized, having in the same time the attribute of being models and examples for the other local communities. Promoting these activities through media, especially through Trinitas TV, Radio Trinitas and “Lumina” Newspaper, represents a productive mission within our Church.

Another substantial chapter of this section of the thesis is the one in which I analyzed the catechetical activities developed within the parishes belonging to several eparchies. Thus, within the catechetical and pedagogical strategies developed I identified the following categories: activities with the young, with the adults, with the old, with the needy or poor and with persons belonging to other religions. By observing the activities developed within the Churches I investigated, I remarked the fact that each community creates and adapts the activities depending on the needs of its members, while the priest of the parish, of course, plays an important role by coordinating the life of that parish according to the rules of the church administration and also depending on his perspective and abilities. Of the multitude of catechetical actions (from the “classical” form of catechesis to complementary activities), I mention: the services on Sundays and Feasts, the Holy Sacraments and services, catechetical meetings on a pre-established schedule, excursions and pilgrimages, meetings of the parochial council and committee, pastoral visits, love feasts, visits to the social institutions and so on.

A very important thing that I observed and remarked within the activities of catechization and information nowadays is communication through internet and other modern means of communication: YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, radio, television, publications etc. The Church’s openness to this new area represents a huge possibility of constructive activity, of information, catechization, guidance. The Church’s activity in the on-line area is necessary in order not to lose connection with a large number of people who are attracted by this virtual environment and spend a lot of time using these means of communications, especially the young generation.

In **Chapter III** our study continued with the evolutional presentation and description of the manner in which the catechization process develops within the Greek Orthodox Church. As I did in the second chapter, I wanted to underline the catechetical activities developed nowadays, which can be used as models in the elaboration and development of the catecheses and to prove the applicability of the catechetical activity.

After a brief presentation of the history of the Greek Orthodox Church and, implicitly, of the manner in which it developed its teaching activity, I formed a subchapter dedicated to the catechesis after 1850 – when the Greek Church is acknowledged as autocephalous Church. We remark here the enthusiasm with which several “Catechetical schools” were founded, which had an important role in the development of the catechetical activities dedicated to the young.

In the subchapter on the catechesis nowadays, I underlined the fact that the Greek Orthodox Church had, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a well written program in which it wanted to create a proper environment where young people could enjoy the fruits of a both intellectual and moral growth<sup>9</sup>.

In the past years, teachers of the theological faculties such as: Konstantinos Frankos, Panaghiotis Hristu, Savvas Aguridis and Evangelhos Teodoru, who were and still are in charge of the organization of the catechetical mission developed in one of the Greek Mitropolies, and also occupy important positions within the Faculties of Theology or the Ministry of Education, had important interventions in the process of catechization through the direct involvement and through the presentation of the best solutions in order to improve the catechetical activities, as well as to prevent and solve the problems that may occur in this field of activity.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, the catechetical activity has an essential role. Each eparchy has a special office dedicated to the catechetical activities with the young and adults within the eparchy. Each parish organizes weekly catechetical activities such as: the catechetical class with the young, activities within the parish with the young, study of the Holy Scriptures with the faithful, feasts and excursions, proficiency classes of the catechetes, as well as catechetical camps within that eparchy.

The catechetical class is one of the main activities developed with the young, but, as one may easily understand, it is more cherished by the young if it takes place within a camp. To this respect, father Atanasie Tzikopoulos of the Mitropoly of Katerini stated that “a one week camp is the equivalent of ten years of catecheses”. Furthermore, I presented the concept of “City Camp”, a new concept through which it is intended to involve as many young as possible in the catechetical activities that take place during the holidays.

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<sup>9</sup> V. KALLIAKMANI, „Χρειαζόμαστε το Κατηχητικό σχολείο?” (Avem nevoie de Școala catehetică? – Do we need a Catechetical School?), *Efimerios*, 58, no. 4, May, Tesalonic, 2009, pp. 16-17.

The beginning of every school year is marked in Greece by sending a circular letter with the decisions and urges of the Holy Synod referring to the year that is about to begin. To this respect, the Holy Synod emphasizes the importance of developing intensive activities regarding the education of the young, advising to respect and use the curricula established to this respect by the Archbishopric of Athens. The care for the catechetical schools is especially important, it is thus underlined the necessity of an intense activity, not only an informal activity, but also a formative one, with the purpose to lead the souls eager for knowledge and guidance to God.

Within this chapter I presented some of the catechetical guides that were published starting with the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (by the Greek Church's publishing house) and culminating with the most recent ones, published by the catechetical publishing houses of the eparchies. Moreover, I also pointed out a few new editions, although they are not published by the official publishing houses of the Church, since they left a mark on the catechetical activities, being used by the catechetes as additional material or as bibliography. The virtual environment is an important instrument in the action of catechization. For this reason I presented the most important catechetical sites used in the Greek Orthodox Church.

**Chapter IV.** Synthesizing the results of the two previous chapters, I had the possibility to accomplish a comparative study on the activities with the young from the two sister Churches. Thus, I put an emphasis on describing the main programs and projects developed within each of them and I underlined the examples of good practices that may serve as a model of implementation, by identifying the similitudes and differences within the catechetical activity.

The indicators that stood at the basis of the comparative study were:

- national catechetical projects;
- eparchial catechetical projects;
- parochial catechetical projects;
- implementation of Christian catechetical camps, organized both by the Churches and by religious Associations, as well as the existence of the space necessary for this activity;
- formation sessions for the catechetes in order to develop corresponding catechetical activities, as well as sessions of implementation of certain catechetical projects with an impact on the religious life of the community they belong to;
- elaboration of catechetical guides necessary for a proper organization of the catecheses;

- elaboration of didactic materials, books and auxiliaries necessary in the activity of the catechetes and catechumens during catechesis;
- dedicated sites with additional materials, both for catechetes and for catechumens;
- catechetical experience and tradition;
- advertising the catechetical activities with the help of the internet, as well as through social media;
- financing several catechetical projects by attracting European funds through the support granted to the Mitropolies, but also through sponsorship by individuals, legal persons and by the local community;
- the existence of centres for free tutoring for children in need;
- organization of meetings with the young and with students;
- organizing feasts, excursions, pilgrimages and local initiatives;
- the need to implement weekly parochial catecheses.

The **results** of the research confirmed the hypothesis of the study according to which the catechetical tradition which is strongly rooted in one country such as Greece, influences the degree of implementation of the catechetical activities. After a careful analysis of the catechetical activity in the Greek Orthodox Church, as well as the direct involvement in the organization of this activity, I identified the following aspects: preoccupation for the development and support of the activity; existence of a positive attitude towards catechesis and a good cooperation of the catechet with the children; the children are involved in activities that allow them to adapt to the changes in society; a good communication within the catechetical activity, but also between the catechumens; periodical analysis of the catechetical activity, which allows an improvement of the actions; presence of a strict program of developing the catecheses locally, parochially.

To have a broad image of the process of catechization from the Romanian and Greek Orthodox Churches, I made a **SWOT analysis**<sup>10</sup> for each of the sister Churches. This instrument I used offers the possibility of building a general image by a quick emphasizing of the strengths, but also of the weaknesses that the catechetical activity has, as well as to identify the external forces with a positive or negative impact on the development of the catechesis. The importance of this instrument of research consists of the fact that it helps us identify the strengths, it gives us

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<sup>10</sup> S.W.O.T. = Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats represents a model of analysis (commonly used by the business environment) to identify the peculiarities of the “business” in order to improve it.

the possibility to formulate some recommendations to improve the aspects which constitute weaknesses, to identify the external opportunities which may contribute positively to the proper development of the catechetical activity, as well as to avoid the menaces that can have a negative influence on the process of catechization of the young.

Through this comparative analysis, I was able to identify what are the main similarities and differences in the catechetical activity of the two sister Churches, what examples of good practices can be implemented and what are the challenges that need to be overcome. To this respect, a last subchapter, named “Challenges and solutions in the catechization activities”, tries, based on the research, to emphasize the manner in which the catechetical mission of the Church can be accomplished nowadays. Here I talked especially of the online environment, which becomes for the young – and not only for them – a way of life, to which the Church has to have an answer and an alternative. The On-line must not be demonized, but used in good judgment, as it can have an important role within the community – as it had, for example, during the pandemic.

In **Conclusions** I present briefly the main results of our research. One may observe the fact that, from a methodological point of view, the comparative analysis of the two Churches regarding the catechetical mission offers several perspectives: a better knowledge of the two ecclesiastical structures, the identification of the positive and negative catechetical aspects, finding solutions to the challenges of the times. To this respect, we consider that certain examples of good practices from the Greek Church can also be implemented in the Romanian Church (starting with the administrative organization, to specific activities); in the same time, the Greek Church can also improve its catechetical mission by adopting several Romanian projects (for example, the national meetings of the young).

Studying the history of these activities with the young developed in Greece and Romania, one may observe a flourishing and a more attentive preoccupation especially in the past decade. The care for the beautiful growth of the young – and not only of them – can already be felt within society and in the participation of the young to the services and activities of the Church.

We consider that our thesis constitutes a landmark for the catechetes, students of theology, priests, students in the Theological Seminaries, Religion teachers, and also for those laics that are actively involved in the process of catechization, offering them examples of good practice, supported theoretically and practically. We also hope that this research will enrich the

specialized literature through the theoretical and practical information it contains, being a starting point for future researches in this field.

This thesis is based on a rich **Bibliography**, in which one may find both Romanian and Greek works, which have been an important help in writing this thesis.

The **Appendix** presents several Guides and catechetical initiatives from the two Churches. For the catechetical guides of the Greek Orthodox Church I translated the titles, contents, as well as some examples and exercises.