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## DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

THE CANONICAL RELEVANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
PASTORAL MINISTRY AND COMPLEMENTARY PROFESSIONAL  
ACTIVITIES

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#### SUMMARY

The 21st century brings new changes and challenges for the Church and its ministers. Thus, there is a need to understand the trials and risks to which the ministers of the Church will be subjected, or are already subjected. This aspect will argue the motivation behind the choice of this topic, with the aim of observing what kind of solutions the Church must prepare for any crisis, solutions that correspond to its status and mission in the world. Clearly, the research is relevant to the future ministry of the Church and to the desire to show openness to its members, both lay and clerical.

It is important to note that one of the aspects that highlights the necessity of this topic is the remuneration of clerical personnel, that is, how ministers secure their income from the state and parish contributions. During our research, we did not intend to address or deal with this topic, as it is an extremely broad area that could be developed on many levels. In the present work, the relevance of this aspect is given by the fact that it already represents, as we have pointed out, a major challenge for the current and future attitude of society towards the Church, but also of the Church towards society.

It is necessary for the Church, as an institution with an administrative apparatus, to provide a source of income for those who serve, but the reality of our times is becoming increasingly difficult.

We also believe that identifying solutions starts with understanding this reality, which the Church and its ministers are experiencing. From this perspective, we can also emphasize the importance of this issue. There are certainly a significant number of priests who have already sought a professional alternative to pastoral ministry. Even if there is no exact number, the reality of the problem is well known, thus requiring the Church to present its perspective, in this case the canonical-legislative one. Based on this assumption and knowing the current trends regarding the approach to this project, we believe that in the future more and more ministers will seek to orient themselves towards a professional activity. Smaller communities,

without a secure budget, cannot ensure the livelihood of a priest who is active only there, so pastoral ministry combined with professional activity is a clear and definitive trend for the life of the Church. The changing culture and society are prompting the Church to ordain priests for communities who also work and who wish to be servants of God.

The title of this paper – "The canonical relevance of the relationship between pastoral ministry and complementary professional activities" – places our research in the field of canon law, with certain necessary connections to biblical, patristic, and missionary theology. It addresses a theologically and canonically grounded investigation of how contemporary Orthodox clergy relate to non-church professional activity within the canonical tradition and current ecclesial practice.

The term canonical relevance refers to the current relevance and application of canonical norms in the life of the Church. The word relevance does not denote mere existence, but indicates the living, operational, and contextualized validity of the canons. It implies a dynamic interpretation of canon law, not as a static set of prohibitions, but as a tradition that interacts with the pastoral challenges of real life. Thus, there is a desire to explore how canonical tradition should be understood and applied today, especially when faced with new social and economic contexts. In addition, the relationship between the two is an element that focuses on the basic vocation of the clergy, especially priests, whose identity and mission are based on service, preaching, and spiritual guidance. Pastoral ministry is understood as a full and total commitment to the Church and its faithful, including liturgical, theological, and community responsibilities. Therefore, the title invites reflection on the nature and integrity of priestly identity, on what it means to serve fully and faithfully in the Church today.

Of course, the term "complementary" is essential: it suggests professional roles that do not contradict or replace pastoral ministry, but rather support or coexist with it. These may include roles in various fields of activity, as long as they are compatible with the spiritual and canonical responsibilities of the clergy. This section opens the door to examining the criteria for compatibility, the limits set by canon law, and the pastoral implications of the clergy's engagement in the lay workforce.

In terms of the temporal and spatial scope of the research, we focus on situations within the Orthodox Church in Romania as our main case study. Particular attention is paid to the pastoral and canonical realities of clergy serving in diverse contexts: rural and urban parishes, in the country or in the diaspora, and in economically stable or precarious communities. This broader geographical scope allows for a more nuanced understanding of how complementary professional activities are perceived and practiced in different ecclesial settings. All of these



are analyzed first and foremost from the perspective of Canon Law and the effect of the provisions they contain in relation to the research topic. The first series of references is based on how the biblical text presents work as a way of serving God, as assumed in the Old and New Testaments. Likewise, the Apostolic Canons, together with the Canons of the Ecumenical Councils and Local Councils, express the most important norms concerning the situation of clergy and their relationship to the pastoral and missionary context. It is important, given the topicality of the subject, to use the appropriate ecclesiastical legislative framework, starting with the Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, approved by Government Decision 53/2008, updated in 2020, and republished with annotations in 2022. At the same time, the legislative framework is supplemented by a series of synodal decisions that complete the series of references to compatibilities. Among these we mention: Decision of the Permanent National Church Council of March 4, 2021, regarding the incompatibility of clerical ministry with public functions and/or dignities; Synodal Decision No. 2347 of July 23, 2021; Decision of the Holy Synod No. 1731 of February 29, 2024; Decision No. 4218/2010 approving the text of the solemn public confession (declaration) made at ordination, with a uniform character in the dioceses of the Romanian Orthodox Church, drawn up on the basis of proposals from the metropolitan synods (Working Session of July 7, 2010). In addition, the ecclesiastical legislative framework is supplemented by the legal framework through a series of norms, starting with Law 489/2006 on religious denominations, but also through norms contained in labor legislation.

An important and innovative aspect of the research is that it highlights the fact that professional activities are not in themselves reprehensible, but become questionable only when they contradict the nature and mission of priestly ministry. Agricultural activity, for example, found even in the first pages of the Bible, can be perceived, in the light of scriptural and patristic texts, not as a deviation, but as a continuation of an important tradition, as suggested by the ecclesial history of the first centuries. Even in the post-Constantinian period, when the status of the clergy became more clearly defined from that of the laity, we find echoes of this dual belonging, to the sacred sphere and to the everyday world.

The novelty of this approach also lies in the recontextualization of this issue within a paradigm that takes into account the fundamental texts of the Orthodox Tradition and the practical needs of today's pastoral life. In a context marked by economic challenges, secularization, and legislative changes, addressing the compatibility between the priesthood and work can contribute to the formulation of an ecclesial discourse that is both updated and faithful to tradition.

This synthesis opens the way for further canonical and pastoral research to systematically analyze the limits and conditions under which a complementary professional activity can coexist with priestly ministry without altering its identity and mission with . There is a need to reevaluate current practices in light of spiritual criteria, but also of concrete pastoral realities, in the spirit of authentic economy and effective and credible pastoral care in the 21st century.

The biblical and patristic analysis carried out in the first chapter highlights the fact that pastoral ministry, in the context of the Orthodox Church, is not absolutely incompatible with the pursuit of complementary professional activities. On the contrary, both in the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments and in the writings of the Church Fathers, a balanced and realistic understanding of the relationship between the priestly vocation and involvement in the socio-economic realities of the time emerges.

In the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, the examples of the patriarchs and prophets offer a concrete perspective on how divine work could coexist with occupations such as shepherding, leadership, or even agriculture. These occupations are not only not condemned, but seem to be blessed by God, since they do not contradict but rather support the spiritual life, as long as they do not become an end in themselves. Amos, a shepherd and sycamore grower, becomes the bearer of God's word in a context of moral and religious crisis, demonstrating that the prophetic calling does not nullify the human condition or previous professional activity.

In the New Testament, the eloquent example of St. Paul, who combined his apostolic mission with his profession as a tentmaker, remains a fundamental reference point. Far from abandoning his mission, the apostle preferred to work "*with his hands*" so as not to be a burden to the newly founded communities. This attitude does not diminish the dignity of his ministry, but rather enhances it, offering a model of personal responsibility and autonomy that can also be relevant in the contemporary pastoral context.

Patristic literature, especially in the writings of Fathers such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great, emphasizes first and foremost the high calling and responsibility of the priest, urging a life wholly dedicated to the service of God and neighbor. However, there is no absolute prohibition on engaging in complementary activities, but rather a warning against the danger of dissociating oneself from the sacred mission and becoming distracted by an exclusive concern for material things. Therefore, they insist that the priest should not be concerned with worldly things, but recognize material reality as part of life. This nuance allows for a contextualized and balanced interpretation of the canons.

Chapter II highlighted, through a detailed analysis of canonical tradition, that priestly ministry is viewed in the Orthodox Church as a holy vocation, totally incompatible with

worldly activities that can compromise the holiness, integrity, and pastoral availability of the clergy. Through a systematic review of the main apostolic and synodal canons, we found that the Church sought to protect the priesthood not only from a disciplinary perspective, but also from a theological and eschatological one, constantly reflecting the Gospel teaching that "*no one can serve two masters*" (Mt. 6:24).

An analysis of the Ecumenical and Local Canons, as well as the related patristic-canonical interpretations, clearly shows that the Orthodox canonical tradition has established, since the early Church, a rigorous framework of incompatibilities between pastoral ministry and certain worldly or professional activities. The motivation for these prescriptions is not purely legal or administrative, but expresses a profound theology of the purity and dedication of the clergy to their sacramental vocation.

One of the most important doctrinal points with canonical implications identified is that the priest, by virtue of his ordination, becomes a person chosen for holy things, and his involvement in secular activities would be tantamount to a descent from this high calling. Canons 6 and 81 of the Apostolic Canons clearly establish this principle, prohibiting clergy from taking on "*worldly cares*" under penalty of defrocking if they do not cease this practice.

Another fundamental aspect is the distinction between the principle of "*acrivia*" and the application of "*oikonomia*." Although the ideal remains the total renunciation of any secular occupation, *oikonomia*, understood as a pastoral manifestation of episcopal discernment, allows, in exceptional cases, the involvement of clergy in professional activities, provided that these do not contradict the teaching of the faith and do not overshadow liturgical service and pastoral mission.

The novelty of this research, from this point of view, lies in its emphasis on the contemporary relevance of these canons. While in the past such situations were marginal or related to the context of the diaspora, today, in many Orthodox dioceses, including in Romania, there is an acute need to reinterpret these rules in light of socio-economic difficulties. In this sense, the economic approach is no longer an exception, but often becomes a principle of pastoral functioning in modern realities.

At the same time, the study highlighted an essential theological criterion in defining incompatibilities: those professions involving violence (such as military service), coercive justice (such as judicial functions), or excessive financial concerns (such as usury, trade for profit, or guarantees for worldly interests) are expressly prohibited, as they are contrary to the evangelical spirit and priestly identity of the minister.

An important contribution of Byzantine canonists is that they have nuanced the application of these provisions, showing that discerning the motives behind a particular activity (e.g., personal interest versus love of neighbor) can significantly alter canonical judgment. Thus, activities such as the guardianship of orphans or the administration of property for philanthropic purposes can be accepted without prejudice to the integrity of clerical ministry.

In particular, canon 11 of the Synod of Constantinople and canon 76 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council emphasize the symbolic value of separating the sacred from the profane, either by prohibiting trade within holy places or by prohibiting the administration of property by clergy. These norms have a profound echo in the current practice of the Church and provide a solid framework for evaluating the discernment of the economy among the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

What emerges from the body of canonical regulations is a deeply theological vision of clerical life, which involves a radical renunciation of any worldly occupation that may become competitive or parallel to sacred ministry. At the same time, by opening itself to economy, the Church shows a capacity for pastoral adaptation without compromising the sanctity and uniqueness of the priestly vocation. This tension between rigor and economy will undoubtedly continue to be a major challenge for any effort at canonical updating in the contemporary Orthodox Church.

Based on canons 17 of the First Ecumenical Council, 3 and 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, 9 and 10 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, as well as local prescriptions (Canon 5 of Carthage, Canon 4 of Laodicea), the idea repeatedly and coherently emerges that any involvement of clergy in financial, administrative, or military activities aimed at personal gain is considered a serious deviation from the ethos of church ministry. Terms such as "*shameful gain*," "*greed*," and "*worldly cares*," used in canonical texts and in the commentaries of Byzantine canonists (Aristenos, Zonaras, Balsamon), clearly show the incompatibility between such activities and the clerical state.

Through sanctions such as defrocking or even anathema, the Church sought not only to preserve canonical order, but also to protect the dignity of the priestly ministry, which must remain wholly dedicated to the service of God and neighbor, in a humble and selfless manner. At the same time, the texts of the analysis also reveal a pastoral and pedagogical dimension of the canon: the cleric is first called to repentance and correction, showing that the Church does not automatically punish, but first offers the possibility of returning to order (*epitimia*, *iconomia*).

At the same time, canonical exceptions (related to guardianship, the administration of church property, or the care of widows and orphans) emphasize that what is prohibited is not social activity itself, but involvement that springs from the love of money or neglect of the sacred calling. This balanced view reinforces the idea that priestly ministry must be sacrificial, free from personal interests, reflecting the image of the High Priest, Christ, the " " who *"did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mt. 20:28).

Thus, the entire canonical tradition constitutes a prophetic and pastoral voice that reaffirms the need for the priest to be an example of integrity, gentleness, and material disinterest, precisely so as not to compromise the trust of the people and the mission of the Church. The relevance of these norms lies not only in their letter, but above all in the spirit they convey: the service of God cannot be divided with the pursuit of worldly interests, and the cleric cannot serve *"two masters"* (cf. Mt 6:24) without endangering his soul and his work.

The analysis developed in this chapter has highlighted the complexity of the relationship between pastoral ministry and complementary professional activities, emphasizing the need for canonical discernment applied with pastoral realism. Faced with the economic and social realities of the 21st century, the Orthodox Church is called not only to remain faithful to the ethos of canonical tradition, but also to find solutions adapted through normative dynamism and the principle of economy, without compromising the sacredness and integrity of the clerical vocation.

The analysis carried out in Chapter III provides a complex and in-depth view of how current church legislation, in close connection with traditional canonical prescriptions, normatively structures clerical life in the context of the challenges of contemporary society. It is evident that the Romanian Orthodox Church not only remains faithful to primary canonical teaching, but also applies it dynamically through synodal decisions and statutory norms that reflect the current social, political, and economic context.

First of all, the Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, together with related church regulations, represents the institutionalized expression of canonical tradition in relation to modern realities. In particular, Article 123 of this Statute draws clear boundaries between clerical ministry and certain economic, financial, political, or associative activities, establishing, in a canonical and administrative manner, the incompatibilities that protect the priestly vocation from excessive secularization or functional distortions of ministry. The cleric is called to serve the Church fully, exclusively, and undivided, without being distracted by external, worldly interests, whether lucrative, ideological, or organizational.

Based on recent synodal decisions, such as those of 2021 and 2024, there is a noticeable strengthening of the Church's position regarding the clear delimitation of the priesthood from involvement in leadership roles in the political, administrative, or financial spheres. The motivation is fundamentally spiritual: the clergy, as "*men of God*" (I Tim. 6:11), are called to a life of witness, dedicated to the service of Christ and the shepherding of the faithful, not to the exercise of worldly power, the accumulation of wealth, or the support of ideological currents. Naturally, any im t ion in a position that involves coercive authority, party affiliation, or aggressive economic practices is contrary not only to pastoral duties but also to the sacred character of ordination.

The texts analyzed also highlight the principle of obedience to the bishop as the foundation of Orthodox ecclesial organization. The blessing of the hierarch is mandatory not only for undertaking secular activities, but also for involvement in associations or organizations, regardless of their nature. This requirement expresses the organic unity between the clergy and the hierarch, but also the pastoral and canonical responsibility of the bishop towards the life of his clergy. It is not merely an administrative measure, but an expression of a living ecclesiology, in which each minister is an integral part of the Body of Christ, subject to church order and communion.

On the other hand, civil legislation, with special reference to Law No. 489/2006 and the Labor Code, recognizes the autonomy of the Church and leaves it to her discretion to regulate the status of the clergy. Thus, although the Labor Code provides for the possibility of holding multiple positions, in the case of the clergy this freedom is limited by the nature of their vocation and their ecclesiastical status. It is commendable that the Romanian State has maintained a cooperative relationship with the Church, supporting its spiritual and social activities without violating its doctrinal and canonical autonomy.

At the end of this chapter, a particularly important element is the solemn profession of faith at ordination, which publicly confirms the clergy's free commitment to live in obedience and fidelity to the teachings of the Church, voluntarily renouncing any form of involvement in activities contrary to the priestly vocation. This solemn declaration goes beyond a mere formality: it is a personal commitment before God and the Church to serve with complete dedication and without compromise.

Therefore, the conclusion of this chapter is that current church legislation provides a coherent, balanced, and deeply theological framework for protecting the integrity of the clergy and pastoral ministry. Through fidelity to canonical tradition, applied in the context of contemporary challenges, the Romanian Orthodox Church preserves its vocation as the

mystical Body of Christ, in which ministers are called not to become functionaries of the world, but shepherds of souls and witnesses of the Kingdom of God in the midst of the world.

With regard to understanding the fourth chapter, it is important to note that, in light of canonical prescriptions, it has been demonstrated that any professional activity of the clergy must be evaluated in relation to three fundamental criteria: theological coherence with the priestly vocation, pastoral impact on the community, and fidelity to the sanctifying mission of the Church. In this regard, the necessary distinction has been made between secular activities that can be tolerated or even blessed by the Church under certain conditions, and those that become incompatible, either by their moral nature or by the risk of compromising the spiritual authority of the clergy.

The study highlighted that medical, legal, entrepreneurial, or agricultural activities can take different forms of integration into clerical life, depending on the context, intention, and degree of involvement. Medical activity, for example, can become an expression of philanthropy and pastoral care, as long as it does not contradict Christian bioethical values and does not disrupt liturgical ministry. Similarly, the priesthood and legal work can coexist in a limited way, where legal knowledge is used to serve the Church or social justice, without exposing the clergy to insurmountable moral and legal contradictions.

In the case of the priest-entrepreneur, the Church faces the risk of identity confusion: instead of being perceived as a shepherd and spiritual father, the priest becomes an economic actor with interests that may conflict with his sacramental mission. The same risk arises in the context of involvement in agriculture, when this goes beyond subsistence work or becomes a dominant economic concern. However, both in business and in agriculture, the economy provides the necessary space for a contextual application of the norms, provided that episcopal discernment is exercised consistently, personally, and faithfully to the ethos of the Orthodox tradition.

In both cases, the fundamental criteria to be taken into account remain the same: the absolute priority of liturgical and pastoral ministry, the moral and spiritual integrity of the clergy, the avoidance of scandal and confusion among the faithful, and the conformity of the activity in question with the spirit and letter of the canons. The typology proposed in the present analysis shows that not all activities are equal: some are clearly incompatible, others can be tolerated temporarily, and others can even contribute indirectly to the mission of the Church when they are discerningly integrated into pastoral life.

The image of the farmer priest, in particular, evokes a profound traditional and biblical dimension that can be revalued today as a form of solidarity with the people, of witness, and

of humble service. However, even here, it is essential that the altar not be subordinated to the plow, and that the time and energy of the clergy remain anchored in liturgical service and the pastoral care of souls.

In this context, *iconomia* appears not as an arbitrary departure from the norm, but as a form of ecclesial discernment inspired by pastoral love and concern for the salvation of souls. Applied wisely and contextually, it allows the Church to offer concrete responses without renouncing canonical rigor. At the same time, canonical dynamism, understood as the Church's ability to interpret, adapt, and apply norms in the face of contemporary challenges, becomes an indication of its institutional vitality and maturity.

Therefore, the main conclusion of this chapter is that clerical life cannot be understood in static terms, but in the light of a living vocation, which must be lived responsibly, under the authority of the bishop and in communion with Tradition. The Church is not called merely to prohibit or tolerate, but to guide, accompany, and structure, so that every form of professional activity of the minister may ultimately contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ and the fulfillment of its mission in the world.

The tension between the sacred vocation of priestly ministry and involvement in entrepreneurial or agricultural activities profoundly reflects the confrontation between the ecclesial ideal and the economic realities of the contemporary world. While Orthodox canonical tradition has rigorously imposed a clear distinction between clerical ministry and worldly concerns, the application of this principle has never been lacking in pastoral discernment and economy. Far from being legalistic formalism, canonical regulations express a coherent theological vision of the identity of the priest as a minister of the Holy Sacraments, separate from the logic of profit, competition, and self-sufficiency.

In conclusion, the Orthodox Church is called to affirm, with lucidity and compassion, the integrity of the clerical vocation in a world marked by economic crises and social challenges. It is not a question of absolutely permitting or prohibiting the economic activities of the clergy, but of discerning, in each concrete case, whether they are expressions of need or deviation, whether they serve the mission of the Church or undermine it. In this delicate balance between tradition and reality, between ideal and economy, the Church exercises her mission not only as guardian of the canons, but also as a wise mother who knows her children and responds to their needs without compromising the sanctifying vocation of priestly ministry.