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FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

ISIDOR TODORAN" DOCTORAL SCHOOL

**THE FACE OF THE PRIEST IN THE
ROMANIAN COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY
(19TH-20TH CENTURIES)**

Summary

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Contents.....	p. 2
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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Motivation for choosing the research topic.....	p. 5
I. 2. Motivation for the choice of the title.....	p. 7
I. 3. The rationale of the research topic in the discipline of Pastoral Theology.....	p. 9
I. 4. Importance and topicality of the research topic.....	p. 10
I. 5. The current state of research.....	p. 10
I. 6. Scientific objectives of the research.....	p. 11
I. 7. Research Methodology.....	p. 12
I. 8. Is there a major stake of this research?.....	p. 12

II. PRELIMINARIES

II. 1. Portrait of the pre-Christian priest.....	p. 13
II. 2. The Face of the Priest in the Old Testament.....	p. 15
II. 3. The face of the priest in the New Testament.....	p. 18
II. 3. 1. The Savior-The perfect portrait of the priest.....	p. 18
II. 3. 2. In the Vision of St. Paul the Apostle.....	p. 21
II. 4. The Priest in the Vision of the Holy Fathers: John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianz.....	p. 23

III. THE PORTRAIT OF THE PRIEST IN THE ROMANIAN UNCONSCIOUS COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY

III. 1. The portrait of the priest in Romanian folklore.....	p. 26
III. 1. 1. The face of the priest in folk traditions and beliefs.	p. 27
III. 1. 2. The face of the priest in Romanian legends.....	p. 34
III. 1. 3. The image of the priest in folk songs.....	p. 37
III. 2. The portrait of the priest in Romanian paremiology.....	p. 41
III. 2. 1. The role of the proverb in the description of the priest.....	p. 41
III. 2. 2. The positive portrait.....	p. 43
III. 2. 3. The negative portrait.....	p. 46

IV. THE PORTRAIT OF THE PRIEST IN THE ROMANIAN CONSCIOUS COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY

IV. 1. The figure of the priest in Romanian poetry: between tradition and symbol...	p. 54
IV. 1. 1. Andrei Mureșanu (1816-1864).....	p. 55
IV. 1. 2. Dimitrie Bolintineanu (1819-1872).....	p. 56
IV. 1.3. George Coșbuc (1866-1918).....	p. 62
IV. 1. 4. Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967).....	p. 68
IV. 1. 5. Octavian Goga (1881-1938).....	p. 72
IV. 1. 6. Vasile Voiculescu (1884-1963).....	p. 76
IV. 1. 7. Ioan Alexandru (1941-2000).....	p. 80
IV. 2. The face of the priest in Romanian prose: between idealization and irony.....	p. 88
IV. 2. 1. Ion Creangă (1837-1889).....	p. 88
IV. 2. 2. Ioan Slavici (1848-1925).....	p. 92
IV. 2. 3. Gala Galaction (1879-1961).....	p. 97
IV. 2. 4. Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961).....	p. 102
IV. 2. 5. Ion Agârbiceanu (1882-1963).....	p. 104
IV. 2. 6. Damian Stănoiu (1893-1956).....	p. 119
IV. 2. 7. Virgil Constantin Gheorghiu (1916-1992).....	p. 126
IV. 3. The priest in contemporary Romanian literature: between vocation and desacralization.....	p. 133
IV. 3. 1. Ioan Groșan (1945-present).....	p. 133
IV. 3. 2. Ovidiu Pecican (1959-present).....	p. 137
IV. 3. 3. Cătălin Țirlea (1964-present).....	p. 141
IV. 3. 4. Cezar Paul-Bădescu (1968-present).....	p. 143
IV. 3. 5. Bogdan Suceavă (1969-present).....	p. 146
IV. 3. 6. Ion Aion.....	p. 148
IV. 3. 7. Iuliu-Marius Morariu (1991-present).....	p. 150
IV. 4. Main features of the portrait of the priest in the reference literature.....	p. 155
IV. 4.1. Positive features.....	p. 155
IV. 4. 1. 1. Defender of ancestral faith and national ideals.....	p. 155
IV. 4. 1. 2. Fighters by deed and word for the emancipation of the people...	p. 166
IV. 4. 1. 3. Servant and philanthropist.....	p. 173
IV. 4. 1. 4. Scholar and community intellectual.....	p. 177
IV. 4. 1. 5. With a precarious material condition.....	p. 183

IV. 4. 2. Negative traits.....	p. 188
IV. 4. 2. 1. Tempted by the greed of the womb.....	p. 188
IV. 4. 2. 2. Tempted by the sin of the love of silver.....	p. 196
IV. 4. 2. 3. Overtaken by the lust of lust.....	p. 200
IV. 4. 2. 4. Lack of vocation.....	p. 209

V. CAUSES OF THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE PORTRAIT OF THE PRIEST

V . 1. The changes that have taken place in the Romanian milieu of priestly mission.....	p. 214
V. 1. 1. The Romanian village of yesteryear.....	p. 214
V. 1. 2. The contemporary Romanian village.....	p. 220
V. 1. 3. Romanian postmodern society mirror of the world.....	p. 226
Socio-political causes.....	p. 229
V. 2. Is there a real metamorphosis?.....	p. 235
V. 2. 1. Portrait of the 21st century priest	p. 235
V. 2. 2. The face of the contemporary priest: between the real and the ideal	p. 238

CONCLUSIONS.....	p. 246
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BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	p. 248
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Summary

Keywords: priest, image of the priest, face, collective imagination, Romanian literature, folklore, metamorphoses, Romanian village, desacralization, ideal portrait.

This doctoral thesis is divided into three chapters, preceded by preliminaries and followed by conclusions and bibliography. Following the chronological thread of the thesis, we summarize significant elements corresponding to each part, mentioned before:

In the first part of the thesis called Preliminaries, we are presented with the image or portrait of the pre-Christian priest, this presentation has an important role in the general iconography of the work because elements of this image are found as reminiscences still today in the Romanian collective imaginary. Then the biblical image of the priest is presented both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, here we find the perfect portrait of the priest in the image of our Savior, but also the image created by the Apostle Paul in the pastoral epistles, which reveals to us in the two epistles addressed to Timothy and another addressed to Titus, as in a mirror, a face of the priest that remains valid forever. The part of the preliminaries ends with the image that St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory of Nazianz reveals to the world about the perfect model of the priest, identifying also negative elements, these being the reason why St. Gregory of Nazianz flees from the priesthood, not wanting to be part of such a class.

In the first chapter entitled: "THE PORTRAIT OF THE PRIEST IN THE UNKNOWN ROMANIAN COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY", the thesis presents how the collective imaginary has painted the portrait of the Romanian priest. The collective imaginary is considered to be a repository of information, having also a dynamic role that reactualizes and refreshes this repository in each historical period through new images and symbols. Starting from the biblical image of the priest, we also arrive at a folkloric image, because the biblical image is received by the Romanian village, the revealed image, contained within the Holy Scriptures, then undergoes mutations because of the space in which it is received and is preserved within the folklore, as the rural community has managed to understand this image. To begin with, in our research, we stop on the portrait found in Romanian folklore, here we are talking about a whole spiritual culture of the Romanian nation, of course, an important role in the composition of this face is played by popular traditions and beliefs, in which when the priest

is presented in the exercise of his priestly duties he is seen as a bringer of blessings, and as a human person the collective image links him to something evil. Although we are talking about a fictitious plot or some historical events, Romanian legends present us the image of the priest as it was received in the Romanian village world, having a moralizing role, they are based on hearsay and observation. Romanian *snoavele românești* as part of Romanian folklore try through satire to punish and correct through ridicule, through comedy, some of the metishness or failings found in the servant of God. The last part of the first chapter deals with Romanian paremiology and the way in which the Romanian proverb creates the image of the priest. We can notice that the church figures, especially the village priest, do not escape popular irony, in general we can see that in Romanian proverbs we can find a slightly anti-religious attitude. Romanian proverbs are syntheses of popular wisdom, with a moralizing role, so that when people notice a moral decline in the life of the priest, through exaggeration, this habit is highlighted by the desire to be corrected. The Romanian proverbs that have in the center the image of the Romanian priest can be divided into two categories: some Romanian proverbs that describe the positive image, in which the priest is seen as a preacher of God's teaching, as an organ seen as God's presence through which divine grace is transmitted, the sanctifier of people, nature and objects, as a proverb would say "Man of God". And others that express the negative image of the portrait of the Romanian priest, much more than those that portray the positive moral portrait, they portray a negative portrait with a moralizing role.

The second chapter of the thesis entitled: " THE PRIEST'S PORTFOLIO IN THE ROMANIAN CONSCIOUS COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY " is structured in four parts, each of these presents us how Romanian literature, from classical literature where the works present us a world of the traditional Romanian village, and the priest has an important presence most of the time the literary works bringing out some defining features and the important role of the priest in the social, cultural and religious life of the Romanian people. When we talk about the Romanian priest, we must inevitably remember him as a pole of intellectuality, a founder of the Romanian school, a defender of the nation and of the faith, we see him as a moral landmark but also as someone who himself went through the pain, suffering and troubles that his fellow Romanians went through. Going then to the modern, contemporary, which in its pages paints the portrait of the Romanian priest this time, we would say, desacralized. It is very important to note that in order to understand the image of the priest in Romanian literature we need to take into account the author's biography, his culture, social life, religious elements, but most importantly the historical context in which the author lived. In the first part of the second chapter, the image of the priest in Romanian poetry is presented, highlighting the works of

seven authors: Andrei Mureșanu, D. Bolintineanu, G. Coșbuc, T. Arghezi, O. Goga, V. Voiculescu and I. Alexandru. As we can see from the works of the aforementioned authors, the image of the priest in the selected works was that of a leader and supporter of the realization of Romanian ideals, who taught and inspired the people, who prayed for his shepherds and who did not hesitate to take up arms in defense of the Romanian faith, nation and language. Many of these poems can be considered to be patriotic poetry, with the aim of awakening national consciousness. This trait is most readily identifiable in the poets of Transylvania, where the national aspirations for unity put the priest in the position of leader and illuminator. The second part of the chapter presents the image of the priest as it emerges in Romanian prose, an image between idealization and irony, as we can see in the following authors: Ion Creangă, Ioan Slavici, Gala Galaction, Mihail Sadoveanu, Ion Agârbiceanu, Damian Stănoiu and Virgil Constantin Gheorghiu. Ion Agârbiceanu is the most prolific of these authors in terms of depicting the image of the priest. The first authors present us with an ideal image of the priest, who is concerned about his pastors, about culture, changing the mentality of the society in which he lived. Perhaps the most uplifting image is the one Virgil Constantin Gheorghiu uses in describing his father, a priest, as the most beautiful image he has ever seen, an iconic image, which loses its sacredness due to moral lapses as we can see in Agârbiceanu's work, or in the irony with which Damian Stănoiu presents the world of Romanian monasticism, seen through his eyes. The third part of this chapter brings us closer, in contemporary times, where: Ion Groșan, Ovidiu Pecican, Cătălin Țîrlea, Cezar Paul Bădescu, Bogdan Suceavă, Ion Aion or Iuliu Marius Morariu, present us the image of the priest, between vocation and desacralization. The last part of this chapter presents the main features of the priest, as reflected in the selected literature, finding some positive aspects such as: defender of the ancestral faith and national ideals, fighter for the emancipation of the people, servant or philanthropist, teacher and intellectual, but also negative aspects, such as the priest tempted by the greed of the womb, by argilophilia, by the passion of fornication, or priests lacking priestly vocation.

The third chapter is entitled "THE CAUSES OF THE METAMORPHOSPHERES OF THE PRIEST'S PORTRAIT". This chapter is structured in two parts. The first part focuses on highlighting the changes that have occurred in the Romanian space, this being the environment of the priestly mission, presenting a current situation in which the Romanian village has changed. From the archaic environment, which Lucian Blaga presents us, a place where man was in communion with God, with his neighbour and with the surrounding nature, where relations were marked by peace, where the peasant Romanian peasant was spiritualized through work, to the contemporary village that today is going through a spiritual and material

crisis, which affects the traditional life, generating negative transformations both spiritual and cultural. We are presented with a transition from the nostalgic image of the village as the keeper of traditional and spiritual values to the modern Romanian village, which is in the throes of a spiritual and material crisis, a place affected by atheism during the communist regime and, more recently, by the great plague of depopulation through migration. We could say that Romanian society today can be considered to be the mirror of the postmodern world. The causes that have led to these changes are both socio-political and religious in nature, perhaps the most important aspect when talking about the changes in Transylvania are those related to political domination. We are talking about the Romanian village which at the present time is living on the memories of the past. Thus the elements of life such as the harbor, handicrafts, even shepherding or agriculture, today have become elements of a forgotten world. The communist period through the process of collectivization, industrialization and urbanization was a period of change, which unfortunately continued in the post-communist period through the process of migration, a uprooting of man through emigration abroad, so that the native places are abandoned by the younger generations, they lose their connection with the faith of their ancestors, with the customs and Romanian way of life, as a result we see an alienation from their own identity, from the ancestral land. It is sad to say that the contemporary Romanian village no longer resembles the Romanian village of childhood or the one presented in Romanian literature. We can clearly see that the village of which Lucian Blaga and Liviu Rebreanu spoke has undergone profound mutations and ruptures, losing touch with the spiritual, moral and cultural values that made the Romanian village a little corner of heaven. In recent times, Romanian society has been experiencing a spiritual crisis, moral disorder, and secularization, which is a phenomenon of desacralization. We are talking about the effects we feel as a result of all the factors that have affected Romanian society in general and, in particular, the Romanian village and religious life. When we try to find a solution to this problem, to the spiritual crisis, we must reconnect with the transcendent, this filial relationship between man and God from whom man came forth, and then rediscover the mediation of the priest who facilitates our living encounter with God and our experience in Christ, this encounter being given to us within the Church. In the Orthodox conception, the priest is the link between the faithful and God, nourishing them with the power of divine energies through the Holy Sacraments, which are conditioned by the Sacrament of the Priesthood. In order for the work to have the desired effect, those who fulfill the priestly mission must have a thorough intellectual preparation and a chosen life. Priests are honored with the trust to manage imperishable goods; without a priest there is no salvation, or salvation is completely uncertain.

Great emphasis is placed on the moral life of the priest. If we remember that Christianity changed the old world through moral force, the teaching of the priest would not mean much if they did not fulfill the moral principles of the Gospel in their lives. The life of priests must be exemplary. The clergy is called to share Christ and call people to Christ, mediating so that people can personally and subjectively appropriate the salvation accomplished by Christ in the Church. In this context, the priest brings us into communion with God, and through the Holy Sacraments leads us to deification. However, we are also witnessing a problem, not new but older, of the priesthood: the difference between the real and ideal image of the priest. The main problems found in the decline are vocation and training, with people sometimes entering the clergy without a vocation or without the necessary training. Some priests experience a crisis of vocation, even though they have a priestly vocation, due to disappointments, while others without a vocation may be overly motivated to become priests. During the research, we observed that in order to fulfill his mission, the priest must have certain qualities, the most important being: holiness of life, theological knowledge, missionary zeal, pastoral prudence, gentleness, patience, etc. However, these must be complemented and sometimes perfected through prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, the desire for improvement, and various means of learning. In recent years, it has been easy to observe that the media seeks to present the mistakes of some priests in the public sphere, highlighting their failings. It is a reality that there are failings and people who make mistakes, but if we analyze the percentage of unworthy priests, we will find that their number is very small. However, through generalization, it is said that "all priests are like that," "all priests are greedy," and "all priests are immoral." In order to be able to live up to his mission, today's priest must understand the spirit of the times and respond to current needs and demands. He is not called to become a professional of the altar, but a servant of God, sent to the parish not to perform religious services, but to form a Christian community around the altar, using missionary, liturgical, and pastoral means. The second part of the chapter presents us with a portrait of the 21st-century priest who, according to people of culture, writers, theologians, researchers, and others who have written on this subject, must retain the coordinates he had before, to which he must add a few elements related to contemporaneity. In other words, he should be the same as before, but with the addition of some knowledge of modern technology. The second part of the third chapter ends with the image of the contemporary priest, a figure between the real and the ideal, as presented by today's media, a metamorphosed figure. The paper concludes with the conclusions that can be drawn from addressing this topic, but perhaps the most important thing to remember is that we can overcome this spiritual crisis that Romanian society is going through only by rediscovering

God, and then the priest as the mediator of salvation and the instrument of divine work in the world, a work that the priest has been doing since the establishment of the priesthood, as we can see.

The image of the priest that Romanian society has is closely linked to divine revelation, with prehistoric beliefs having only a vague idea of the priest's portrait, as was their belief. In the Old Testament, the image of the priest takes shape, but it is only in the New Law, when Christ reveals himself completely, that the priesthood receives its true image, which the Holy Fathers treat in their writings, showing the importance and honor of this great ministry.

The Romanian people, through their popular wisdom, manage to paint a complex portrait of the priest, highlighting both his intellectual and moral qualities, as well as his moral, material, and intellectual shortcomings, shortcomings that do not go unpunished by the Romanian people, who use proverbs to chastise every transgression of the priest. As we see in Romanian folklore, the image of the priest was bivalent, he was seen either as the one through whom God's gifts are transmitted, therefore the one who blesses, or as the one who brings bad luck by his mere presence, receiving some evil traits.

Romanian literature presents us, through the works selected for analysis, with a nuanced image that is closely linked to the image of the traditional Romanian village. Literary works reveal the important role that priests played in the social, cultural, and religious life of the Romanian people. The image of the priest, as it emerges from literature, is linked to the way in which the author related to social life, faith, and historical events. Based on short biographies, we can see how the author's life influences the image of the priest that he projects in his works.

As there is a historical evolution in terms of the chronological time in which the author lives or the work is published, we see that a kind of motif of desacralisation of the image of the priest appears, which, if at first it appeared as a national symbol, as history evolves we see that it loses the significance it had at the beginning. The priest's bright image is further altered by the negative images of decline that authors capture in their works.

The image of the priest as a fighter alongside his people for unity of faith and national unity is a very topical subject, which helps us to identify a well-defined feature of the Romanian priest's image, namely that of sacrifice for the ideals of the nation, in terms of unity of faith and nation. I have mentioned only a few spearheads, but the struggle was fierce over a long period of time in which clergy and believers fought for their ideal. Although they were punished, they did not capitulate; although it was a difficult struggle, they sought to carry it out with dignity. From those who fought alongside rulers, to those who fought in various

revolutions, to those who fought on the front lines, to the moment of the Great Union, when some of the militant priests were honored with various honors, to those who were included in our calendar as saints of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Moving through history, we have arrived in the present day, and in the last chapter I have tried to highlight the role that the priest plays today in today's Romanian society, the environment in which the priest, as the visible organ of Christ's saving work in the world, carries out his activity, the current state of postmodern man closed to the transcendent, showing the need for the mediating presence of the priest between man and God, now that we see society increasingly separating itself from God. The priest must be rediscovered as indispensable for salvation.

In the last chapter, we saw that the environment of the priestly mission, that is, Romanian society, has changed. Whereas in the past, in the Romanian village, everything had a good order and arrangement, today things have changed. We have shown that due to external factors such as industrialization, communism, demographic decline, and migration, Romanian society has suffered greatly, not to mention political changes, so that Romanian society is also part of a trend in which postmodern man has changed his view of God and, implicitly, of his servant, that is, the priest.

The final conclusion would be that although there has been a transformation in the world's perception of priests, in this sense, the mass media of today plays a decisive role, the intellectual part of the Romanian collective imagination confirms that it would like the priest to remain the same as we have seen him throughout the history of the Romanian people, with only a few elements of modernity added to his portrait.