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SUMMARY OF PHD THESIS

DESACRALIZATION - MAJOR CHALLENGE AT THE ADDRESS OF THE CHURCH MISSION

COORDINATOR:
Prof. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe ISTODOR

CANDIDATE:
Ionel COJOCEA

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1. Argument and objective of the research

This doctoral thesis proposes a theological analysis of the recurrent problem of desacralization and, implicitly, of secularization. Today we speak of secularization not only as a simple challenge to the Christian Church, but as an indisputable reality that combines not only the Church as an institution, but also other cultural and social subsystems. The desecration generated by secularization is placed in two patterns: desecration on an individual, micro level, ie desecration of man as a person and desacralization on a general, macro level, desecration of society by separating the article between State and Church / religion. After all, secularization is not a phenomenon that targets exclusively Christianity, but religion itself.

The proposed task is extremely topical: specific and relational development between the State and the Church, implicitly religion, between sacred and secular, are a central topic of public, theological, sociological, cultural, philosophical debates. Desacralization, as an effect, but also a concomitant cause of secularization, is a subject that deserves to be analyzed and explored in the complexities that it imposes, given the changes and transformations in the society of the 21st century.

The reality of secularization and desecration entered European attention more strongly from the second half of the twentieth century after the experience of the first two world wars, when society entered a process of political reconfiguration and socio-cultural reconstruction. Thus, the need and urgency of developing a missionary perspective on what is usually the heart of Christianity, Europe, arose among several theologians and leaders of the Church in Europe[1]. European nations are now full-fledged mission fields and not "based on missions that send loyal armies to mission fields in the African, Asian area." "The mission on six continents", "the reverse mission" and "the mission from everywhere to everywhere" are the new realities in missionology. Moreover, evangelism and mission in Europe is no longer just a somewhat dubious hobby of so-called "free churches" or "church movements." Since the beginning of the millennium, "Building New Churches," "New Church Expressions," "Missionary Experimentation," and "Pioneering Projects" have been recurring topics on the list of traditional churches.[2] Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Christians are involved in such ventures, ensuring a steady flow of new converts to the church and participating in the development of its diversity and expansion among the population who have become estranged from the Christian message. Such ventures also raise many theological and organizational questions, bearing the promise of the renewal of Christianity in the ancient world.

The deep secularization of many European nations has been the background to many of these tendencies towards mission. However, in Europe, secularization cannot be seen as a historical contingency that somehow took us by surprise. It has been pointed out many times that the "secular" makes sense only in a Christian way of thinking, while secularization as a historical process was launched primarily in societies

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[1] Stefan Paas, *"The Making of a Mission Field: Paradigms of Evangelistic Mission in Europe",* în *Exchange* 41 (2012), p. 44–67

[2] *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

that were previously Christianized.[3] In other words, while secularization has instead been seen as an enemy of the faith or as a logical result of it, there can be no doubt that it is combined with long centuries of Christian mission. Secularization in Europe thus has a post-Christian and post-Christian character. Therefore, the adoption of Europe as a field of mission should lead to a reflection on the significance of the Christian mission on a continent that is in many respects "post-Christian".[4] Morals, cultural and structural societal and political identities of European nations have been deeply influenced by Christianity, even though the majority of their population has rejected the basic Christian beliefs and not church attendance. There is also a history to deal with - a long, complicated and disorderly history in which Christianity has informed the laws, customs and politics of European nations, thus becoming involved in their greatest successes but also in their worst moral failures.

All of these present huge challenges to the Christian mission in secular, desecrated Europe, which are reinforced by the practical experience of many missionaries whose "successes" in growing the Church or creating an impact on society are few and far between. Any success would be checked on a missionary level, but it does not compensate for the losses that are still suffered. In the Netherlands, for example, churches can welcome hundreds of new Christians each year, but at the same time the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (the largest Protestant denomination) loses about 70,000 members a year. Of course, the general statistical decline may overlap with hopeful new beginnings and trends at the local level, but these statistics also indicate the harsh reality that many missionaries in Europe do not perceive as much measurable success as their counterparts in China, Brazil, or Saharan Africa. , no matter how much prayer, love and hard work they invest.

In line with these clarifications, which is also the argument of the research, I propose the following objectives: analysis of the theological relationship between sacred and profane; highlighting the metamorphoses of religion, especially the Christian ones, in the postmodernist culture on current sociological data; presentation of secularization theories in sociological and theological research in the second half of the century. XX and the beginning of the century XXI; specifying the current relationship between the State and the Church in contemporary Europe; exposing the new tendencies of desecularization and reconfiguration of religion in postmodernity; presentation of missionary measures and models for the restoration of Christian values in the public space.

2. The relevance of research in the Romanian and international space

The theme of desecration, whether we decipher its sources, expressions in society or motivations in religious order is one that opens in new and new valences in tandem with the vectors of society. Desacralization as an effect and intention of secularization produces mutations and challenges in missionary and pastoral terms,

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[3] Stefan Paas, *"'Notoriously Religious' or Secularising? Revival and Secularisation in Sub-Saharan Africa" Exchange* 48 (2019): p. 26–50.
[4] Stefan Paas, *"Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences," Mission Studies* 28:1 (2011), p. 3–25.

being a reality that covers both the sphere of interest of religion and politics, philosophy and culture. The relevance of the research also results from the fact that the latest theorizations of the theories of secularization and post-secularization in sociology are involved.

Many theological and philosophical analyzes were occasioned by a question from Josef Ratzinger in a dialogue between him and Habermas (2004) on issues of reason and religion: "The gradual dismantling of religion, its overburdening, should be conceived as a human progress, a necessary step for humanity to enter the path to universal freedom and tolerance?[5] The analysis focuses, first, on the situation of Christianity (most generally) in the long period of secularization and the "defense mechanisms" it used in that period and, secondly, on the tendency to de-secularize. in the current era. The central interest is the relationship between secular / civic values and Christian values, as found in the two historical periods mentioned above, trying to answer and reformulate Ratzinger's question: "The unexpected revitalization of religion can be conceived as an advance of humanity. in the light of the state of Christianity in today's world? "

The tendency of secularization is the basis of the foundations of Christianity, proposed by dividing life into two spheres - the sacred and the secular / profane. The split that this dualism inevitably produces in the souls of those who are members of this "Christian" society is facilitated to a considerable extent by the obligatory character of the Christian vision of the world, by the normative position of this vision of the world. The guiding principle of the Christian perspective minimizes the conflict between man and society, even if medieval theocracies - papal and imperial - were never an enlightened combination of secularism and the Kingdom of God.

Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg points out that this balance between religion and secularism was violated after the Reformation - or, more precisely, after the religious wars. To the extent that no religious party could impose itself on the whole of society, the social order had to be established for non-religious reasons: "Therefore, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the thinking people decided that, if social peace is to be restored, religion and the controversies associated with religion should be in parentheses. In that decision was the birth of modern secular culture. In time, it would lead to secularism and a culture that is properly described as secularist. "[6]

There is a predominant opinion that secularization signals the decline of traditional society and the rise of modernity, that it is a phenomenon inherent in modernity and that it has replaced theonomy with the autonomy of human reason. Pushing religion to the margins of society is one of the issues on which Habermas

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[5] Josef Ratzinger, „Holding the World Together", în Habermas, J., Ratzinger, J. *Dialektika na sekularizaciata. Za razuma I religiata* (The Dialects of Secularization: On Reason and Religion). Sofia: Iztok – Zapad, 2006, p. 51.
[6] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "How to Think about Secularism", 1996, http://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/06/002-how-tothink-about-secularism.

focuses his special attention: it has long been indisputable."[7] This thesis was based on three considerations:

1. First, scientific and technical progress has nurtured an anthropocentric understanding of the world that is incompatible with the cosmocentric or theocentric;

2. Second, during the growing functional functioning of society's subsystems, religion has tended to lose its public importance and become a private matter;

3. Third, existential security, which increases as a result of modern scientific and technical progress, decreases the human need for protection that comes from beyond.[8]

In his reflections on the influence that religion exerts on society, the historian René Rémond identifies the concrete historical steps that led to the creation of a secular society.[9] He comments on the political history of France and more precisely the year 1790, when the Constituent Assembly adopted a law called the Civil Constitution of the clergy. The title itself, Rémond points out, defines a certain conception of the relationship between religion and society. It also traces the history of the French Revolution, which opened a rift in the system of traditional society, in which religion played an intimate role. The first secularization, according to Rémond, consisted in the choice made by France, "the decision on a unique and neutral civil status. Society is beginning to lead a life separate from the church community and religious differences."[10]

As a crisis of trust in religion (in the most general sense), secularization is expressed in the "unraveling" and desecration of the world, the rejection of the divine legitimacy of political power, the separation of public institutions from religious traditions and the demotion of religion in a "private matter".[11] Religion becomes a "personal business"; but isn't Christianity really a "personal business," a "personal religion"? Charles Taylor defines the effort for a personal religion as part of the drive for secularization. Being an important, essential social change, secularization concerns the public importance of religion and marks a different organization and functioning of modern society. Brian Wilson defines it as a process in which religious institutions, actions and opinions lose their social importance.[12] Habermas, in his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize (2001), defined the phenomenon as follows: "First of all, the word secularization has a legal meaning that refers to the forced appropriation of church property by the secular state. This meaning has since been extended to the emergence of cultural and societal modernism in general. Since then, the word "secularization" has been associated with both opposing judgments, whether the successful taming of ecclesiastical authority by worldly power or rather the act of illegal appropriation is

[7] Jürgen Habermas, „The Revitalization of the World Religions. A Challenge to the Secular Self-Understanding of Modernity?", în *Hristianstvo i kultura*, No 42, 2009, p. 38.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 38.

[9] René Rémond, *Religion and Society in Modern Europe. Essay about the Secularization of the European Societies in the 19th and 20th Century*, Sofia, LIK, 2006, p. 21.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 73.

[11] Charles Taylor, Varieties of Religion Today, Sofia, Kritika i humanizym, 2006, p. 22

[12] Brian Wilson, *Religion in a Sociological Perspective*, Sofia, Praxis, 2001, p. 160.

emphasized."[13] In the aforementioned discussion with Josef Ratzinger, Habermas proposed an understanding of secularization as a process that makes Enlightenment traditions and religious doctrines reflect on their own borders.[14]

Secularized society has begun to assert its new values - rationalism, individualism, liberalism, universal human rights, democracy, etc. They have been established in a lasting way and define the life of today's citizen. On the other hand, Christianity becomes private and continues to uphold its unchanging values: love, salvation, cooperation with God (synergy), θέωσις as the supreme vocation of man.[15] A very serious division takes place in person as a member of secular society and of the Church. Since "even the most radical disappointment does not affect faith, which is essentially paradoxical," the meeting of the two types of confirmed and confessed values causes mental disharmony. Of course, the problem concerns only religious people, for whom the two spheres, the two Cities, are truly separate worlds: secular society has revoked any transcendence and seeks happiness within the limits of this world, but the community of religious longs for the Kingdom of God beyond. The division cannot be resolved, the two aspects of the world cannot be harmonized again; he must pay the debt to each of them independently. As Berdiaev wrote: "Extraordinary creative development has taken place in the world in science, philosophy, art, state and social life, technical progress, people's moral attitudes, even religious thought, in frames. mystical mental. All of us, not only unbelievers but also faithful Christians, all participate in this development of the world, in this development of culture, and dedicate a significant portion of our time and effort to it. On Sunday we enter the Church. We dedicate six days a week to our creative and constructive work. And our creative attitude towards life remains unjustified, unholy, not co-dependent on the religious principle of life."[16] This text cannot exhaust the diversity of the answers coming from Christianity, while it was forced to exist in the conditions of modernity, which, imposing civic values, produced imitations of religion (Marxism, communism, liberalism, nationalism, anarchism). As secular religions of salvation, they enter into intense competition with Christianity.[17]

The anthropological revolution in the theology of the twentieth century is one of the "axial" moments in the history of the relationship between Christian and secular values. Karl Rahner - an eminent Catholic theologian and philosopher and one of the authors of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (dedicated to the dialogue between Church and World) - formulated the concept of so-called "anonymous Christianity" and also "everyday Christianity", the experience of the Holy Spirit in the

[13] Jürgen Habermas, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2001,
http://www.ucc.ie/archive/hdsp/Habermas_Faith_and_knowledge_ev07-4_en.htm
[14] Jürgen Habermas, *Pre-Political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State*), în Habermas, J., Ratzinger, J., *The Dialects of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, Sofia, Iztok – Zapad, 2006, p. 18-19.
[15] Vladimir Gradev, *Transcendings*, Fondacia Komunitas, 2010, p. 189
[16] Nikolay Berdyaev, „Salvation and Creativity", în *Put*, No. 2., 1999, p. 28.
[17] Gottfried Küenzlen, „Secular Religion and Its Futuristic-Eschatological Conceptions", în *Studies in Soviet Thought*, vol. 33/2, 1987, p. 211.

things of life. day by day. The goal is for Christianity to be immediately equated with the human, which holds deep within itself (albeit in a hidden way) the religious. Rahner declares that salvation can be accomplished not only within the Church, but also in the world of daily life, in the sphere of the profane. Thus, religion cannot be a private matter, a local section of human life, but is again the primary foundation of life. When he declares himself against the "privatization" of religion, Rahner's "anonymous Christianity" is accused of an anti-secular attitude.[18] The tendency to anthropize theology became common to the two major Western Christian denominations, and to a large extent narrowed the gap between them. The culmination of this trend was in the 1960s, when Christian thinkers developed a theology of "God's death."[19] Among the currents that gained popularity are Hans Küng's new Christology, Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope, Johann Metz's political theology, [20] Harvey Cox's radical theology, Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology, "black" theology, and so on.[21]

So far, this discussion has referred to the two Western segments, Catholicism and Protestantism. Orthodox Christianity was not part of these tendencies. Its historical destiny has been different and it faces different challenges. As theologian Radovan Bigović points out, "... mainly for historical reasons, the Orthodox world did not participate organically in the phenomenon called modernity. He had no taste for the Renaissance, the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation, the religious wars and the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, the triumph of reason, human rights and a neutral nation-state. What modernity recognizes as its basic contribution seems to have remained outside of orthodoxy, which later remained suspicious of modernity. This certainly helps us to understand the difficulties that Orthodoxy has in its communication with the contemporary (post) modern world."[22]

As our analysis is concerned not with religion in general, but with Christianity, we should say that the most important fact that has again made Christian values of current importance is the postmodern critique, in many respects, of instrumental reason - a critique undertaken by the leading theorists of our time. Matching the absolutist claims of reason (of which the most extreme tendencies have been completely discredited) has again made it possible to sustain and spread the belief that there is another truth, that reason and religion can be mutually beneficial. Mutual concessions are not a pragmatic compromise, but a necessity, the realization of which has had a considerable cost. As Habermas says (and his view is particularly interesting insofar as his views have evolved), "secularized citizens, insofar as they enter the role of citizens in the state, have neither the right nor the right to, in principle, to deny that the religious

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[18] Corneliu C. Simuţ, „Dismissing the Otherwordliness of God: Karl Rahner", în *Secularization in Contemporary Religious Radicalism*, Brill, 2019, pp. 34-42.

[19] Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God. The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*, New York, George Braziller, 1961.

[20] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope. On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, New York and Evanston, 1967, p. 294.

[21] Nina Dimitrova, „Christian Values in the Context of Secularization and Post-Secularization", în *Balkan Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, 2016, p. 152.

[22] Radovan Bigović, *Cyrkvata v syvremennia sviat* (The Church in the Modern World), Sofia, Pokrov Bogorodichen, 2013, p. 214.

images of the world have the potential to possess the truth, nor can they question the right of their religious citizens to contribute to public debates through religious language."[23] He proposes that religion be recognized as an alternative rationality.

There has been a shift in modern relations between secular and Christian values, a shift that has resulted from the return of religion to the social stage - unexpectedly for sociologists and political scientists. Desecularization seems irreversible, at least insofar as there is a renewed respect for Christian values and an acceptance of their inclusion in the total thesaurus of values. However, in the post-secular world, Christianity faces competition from various alternative forms of spirituality that assert seemingly identical values - e.g., easily achievable love and salvation and a beyond that is achieved through meditation and psychotropic substances. As Radovan Bigović points out: "Post-modernism has its own special values that are supposed to be accompanied by the inner feeling of relaxation, enthusiasm and contentment. These values are: comfort, humor, youth, cosmopolitanism and mobility. Man no longer feels that glory, dignity and exaltation are of any importance to him."[24] The religious tolerance of the postmodern era proved to be no less a challenge than the aggressive motive of the Enlightenment.

3. Short framework of the paper

In order to develop a pragmatic approach to the topics addressed, the paper is structured in four chapters, each chapter being a segment of research that aims to provide a better and current analysis of desacralization, secularization. For the introduction, Chapter I - Sacralization and desacralization. The phenomenology of the sacred - is reserved for the conceptual definitions of the terms with which we will operate throughout the work: sacred, profane, secularization, secular, secularism. Also here we presented a historical framework of the transition of post-modernity in the pre-secular - secular - post-secular structure, specifying the peculiarities of post-modernism as a post-secular paradigm: skeptical deconstruction of all systems of thought, relativism and emotivism, moral fragmentation , the lack of meaning and the new context on theodicy, the consumerization of the Church and religion, the crisis of legitimation, globalization as a "new" great narrative. The sacred-profane polarity from the point of view of religious phenomenology is adapted to the concrete condition of life in the configuration of the relationship between State and Church, as poles of the secular and the sacred, in the sense of evading from the speculative theoretical plane the way of human society, especially the European one where secularization has proliferated.

All these clarifications announce the analyzes from chapter II - Secularism as a form of expression of desecration. Although at first glance, secularism could be easily and erroneously confused with secularization, in reality it is a political philosophy that generates and maintains the process of secularization, expressing the radical intention of separating the field of religiosity from the secular in society. A separation that, more

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[23] Jürgen Habermas, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[24] Radovan Bigović, „The Church and the Postmodernism", în *Sabornost*, No 3, 2009, p. 178.

than the articulation of a dichotomy, operates an exclusion of the authority of the Church, of religion from the public to the private space. The 8 sections of this chapter present the processes, arguments and effects of secularism in society. Today we are talking about a benevolent secularism ("soft", "moderate", "passive", "negative", "procedural") and a hostile secularism ("hard", "radical", "assertive", "programmatic"). Thus, the secular order introduces structural (institutional) and "trans-value" (ideological) separation between sacred (religion, Church) and profane (humanism) based on the vectors of secularization: demystification of the world through rationalization, stage consciousness, decrease or minimization of religious authority. in society. Steve Bruce's thesis on the disappearance of religion seemed relevant to me. The emptying of the religious world has, implicitly, three derivations: individualization as a change in the location of religion, fragmentation and separation of spheres, and articulation of religious fundamentalism and the construction of a civil religion. A point reached in this chapter, which we found relevant in the structure of research is the issue generated by the question of whether a secular state is neutral to religion. In the last section we presented the theories of secularization in the XXI century developed by sociologists of religion, highlighting the factors that provide continuity or discontinuity in the presence of religion in contemporary society: insecurity and societal (sociotropic) and individual (egoropic) risks, education in the sense a competition between religion and science, socialization as a predictor of adult religiosity, secular transition in D. Voas's analysis, secular competition, agent pluralism that undermines the plausibility of religion and erodes the norms that prescribe religion.

Like any cultural, philosophical process, it has a history according to social transformations and evolutions, and secularization has a history. Today, at the beginning of the third millennium, sociologists are increasingly advancing a reversibility of desacralization through the theory of desecularization. Basically, there is a paradox of religious revitalization. This is the theme of Chapter III: The Reversibility of Desacralization - From Desecularization to Secular Spirituality. This revitalization of religiosity, which has caused great disappointment among adherents of theories that religion will disappear from the social plane with scientific progress, must be mentioned, taking syncretic forms advancing a spirituality rid of the traditional, a spirituality in the condition and limits of postmodernism . In this order of ideas we presented the defining attributes of secular spirituality, as well as the types of secular spirituality. Attention in this chapter was paid to the theory of desecularization stated by Peter Berger.

The last chapter, The Mission of the Church in Postmodernist and Desecrated Society. Principles and evaluations, it is thought in a constructive way of reporting to the phenomenon of secularization. Beyond the bulldozer attitude that the Church can have, has had and has towards secularization, a process that materializes regardless of religion, religious institution in the public space, I believe that this phenomenon can also be an opportunity for critical reflection of the mission , discourse and the presence of the Church in society. In this regard, the six sections of this chapter provide a range of approaches to the missionary assessment of secularism. First of all, we brought to the fore the need for solidarity and common ecumenical effort of the European churches

to collaborate in streamlining the mission in secular Europe, by specifying the missionary models starting with the second half of the twentieth century after the tragic experience of world wars, the translational model, the ecumenical and complex model, reconciled diversity, regionalization, the ecclesiocentric uncultural model, the cosmocentric dialogic model, the bibliocentric translational model. Secondly, we intended the possibility of a proactive approach to secularism from a missionary point of view, concluding with highlighting the ambiguity of the sacred in syncretic avatars and presenting an orthodox missionary vision integrating towards secularization.

4. Methodology used in research

The research of the issue of desacralization, secularization and post-modernity implies a complex methodological register, of interdisciplinary nature. To treat these three issues only from a theological spectrum is reductionist and risks coherent treatment, as there are organic inter-relations between Church, State, culture, philosophy. In this order of ideas, sociological analyzes represent a consistent segment of the paper, as they bring us up to date with the reality of secular society. Regarding the research methods of the proposed topic, we will combine the systematic, historical-critical and comparative approach, highlighting the content and expression of secularization, secularism, desacralization, current missionary models.

The systematic analysis of the topic proposed for research has the advantage of providing a coherent and careful presentation of the factors generating desacralization, namely secularization and secularism. The historical-critical method offers us the possibility to understand the development of the secular ideology in the European culture and society and of the missionary methods articulated in the sec. XX and XXI as an attitudinal response to the new way in which religion is situated in secularized society.

We mention the fact that in terms of the bibliography that was consulted in writing this doctoral thesis, it is mostly in English, given the fact that American and Western sociologists have developed a substantial literature that revolves around the topic analyzed. This does not mean that Romanian literature is excluded. In this sense, we will use authors who have written on the issue of secularization, desacralization and postmodernity, especially relying on those who have been concerned with the metamorphoses of the Christian religion in the new post-secular condition.

Last but not least, the interpretation of key concepts, of technical terms, will involve the use of specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias and contemporary authors who have made a career in the relationship between secularization and Christianity, mentioning here: Rex Ahdar, Eileen Barker, Daniel Bell, Peter Berger, D. Bosch, S. Bruce, JD Caputo, G. Vattimo, José Casanova, Mark Chaves, H. Cox, Grace Davie, Roger Finke, R. Fuller, Brandon Gallaher, J. Habermas. We cannot overlook the substantial contribution of contemporary Romanian missionary theologians who approached the issue of desecration / secularization from the perspective of Orthodox theology: Fr. Mihai Himcinschi, Fr. Istodor Gheorghe, Fr. Aurel Pavel, Fr. Gelu Călina, Fr. Nicolae Brînzea, Fr. Gheorghe Petraru, Fr. David Pestroiu, Fr. Cristian Sonea, Fr. Radu Petru Mureșan, Fr. Valer Bel.

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