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# Characteristics of Adventist-Millenarian Proselytism in Romania, in the Aftermath of 1989

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## Abstract

Post-Decembrist religious effervescence might be deemed as a form of missionaryism addressing a dechristianized society. Unfortunately, this is only partially true. Authentic mission, which is strictly about preaching and never about constraining, is paralleled by an unprecedented recrudescence of sectarian proselytism, which is an irreparable distortion of genuine missionaryism, and actually opposes it. As a counter-testimony, thus, proselytism is defined by the endeavour to divert and estrange the faithful (be they Orthodox or members of other historical denominations) from their Church, and affiliate them abusively to sects and new religious movements. It is a brutal action, breaking traditional spiritual bonds, by conveying the harmful message of antisocial defiance. This is why proselytism poses a serious challenge marking the course of a society in transition. To illustrate this fact, the present study undertakes an analysis of the most aggressive form of proselytism in post-1989 Romania 1989: the adventist-millenarian one.

## Keywords

Proselytism, Adventist-Millenarian Movements, Mission, Romanian Orthodox Church

## I. Introduction

After the collapse of communism, a spiritual vacuum was created in the Eastern European space, from which the New Religious Movements took full advantage. The severe bans that marked the impotence of the religious education of the population had already determined, in the collective mind, a state of indifference to the phenomenon of lived faith, instead of a kind of traditionalism that testified to belonging to an ancestral religion, but without concretely assuming its precepts. We could frame, without mistake, such a situation, in the sphere of defining the broader concept of secularism, developed in modern societies and transposed into paroxysmal forms in postmodernity. But there is a clear difference between the secularism imposed by communism - caused by an obvious spiritual constraint - and that freely and consciously assumed by the hedonistic and autarchic man of radical capitalism.

In the first situation, the prohibition of any form of religious education and the restriction of the role of the traditional Churches only to the performance of simple acts of worship determined, after the fall of communism, an increased appetite for the religious phenomenon. Thus, the pastoral-missionary field reopened and the dawn of a new evangelization arose. Romanian Orthodoxy rediscovered the value of catechesis, missionary preaching, individual dialogues in the field of spirituality and religion in school. In parallel, however, with the pure wheat of the ancestral faith grew the weeds of false teachings, under the spectrum of an unprecedented diversity of religious movements whose proliferation occurred against the background of the aforementioned spiritual vacuum.

It could be said that the post-December religious effervescence is a form of missionary work addressed to a de-Christianized society. Unfortunately, this phrase is only partially true. In parallel with the authentic mission, whose vocation is strictly preaching, not at all compelling, there is an unprecedented resurgence of sectarian proselytism, seen as an irreparable deterioration of the authentic missionary meaning, in the opposite direction. Being called counter-testimony, proselytism is defined as

“the act of snatching Orthodox believers or other historical denominations from their Church and their affiliation through complex methods, indoctrination, fanaticism, misleading, threat,

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bribery, deprogramming, mixed marriages, the exploitation of material deprivation where there is an economic-financial gap with Western civilization, to sects, new religious movements or various religious leaders”<sup>1</sup>.

Without exhausting the review of proselytizing tactics, the above definition draws attention, in a worrying way, to the phenomenon itself. The brutal action of breaking traditional spiritual ties by cultivating the degraded message of antisocial revolt is alarming. Therefore, proselytism remains a serious problem that further marks the fate of a society in transition.

To illustrate this fact, the present study aims to make an analysis of the most aggressive form of proselytism in Romania since 1989: the Adventist-millennial.

## **II. Basic traits of the Adventist-Millenarian movements**

As its name suggests, the Adventist-millennial movement emphasizes two defining coordinates of an aberrant eschatology: 1. the imminence and predictability of the Parousia; 2. the establishment of a millennial earthly kingdom of Christ, returned in glory, with His elect.

The themes are not new, they even represent directions of theological reflection in the old Church, abandoned with the synthesis of the doctrine. However, keep in mind the aggressiveness with which their content is capitalized, in a proselytizing sense. The calculations of the Second Coming, supposedly justified by haphazard juxtapositions of figures sprinkled in the biblical texts, have fallen into disuse with their repeated errors. More recently, the promotion of an Eschaton of imminence is preferred: the coming of Christ is already understood in fact, in a spiritual way, opening the way to the near visible Parousia. Obviously, planetary cataclysms, of natural or human origin, are scrupulously inventoried, in order to conclude that their increased incidence is certainly the initiating signal of the final transformation of the cosmos. The coagulation of the followers is therefore carried out on the basis of a skilfully induced existential anxiety, in order to manipulate their consciences.

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<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe PETRARU, *Ortodoxie și prozelitism*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2000, p. 165.

Going through the bad experiences that precede the end of the world (assimilated or not to the concept of “Armageddon” - the final battle between good and evil) are the obligatory premises of a palpable reward: earthly heaven. Speculating on the unprecedented rise of hedonism and the pursuit of contemporary man after material agony, Adventist millennial groups compete to propose paradisiacal states in which God is almost absent (as in the earthly “kingdom” of Jehovah’s Witnesses, ruled by Christ from ... heaven, with an elite of “elect”, while the rest of the righteous would lead a mundane earthly life, even being able to procreate!) or completely absent (in Mormons, where the “elect” attain various stages of “glory”: terrestrial, celestial and celestial - even claiming that, at the highest level, they become planetary “gods”, populating other celestial bodies).

Another dominant feature of Adventist millennial groups is their predilection for Old Testament teachings and practices, additions or truncations of Scripture texts, all aimed at tarnishing the image of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Redeemer, and Lord. In fact, the Jehovahists declare nonchalantly that, for them, Christ is a simple man (it is true: “the greatest man who ever lived”<sup>2</sup>) - at most, an incarnation of the Archangel Michael. Thus, the dogma of the Holy Trinity is destroyed, in a clear Neo-Aryan manner. Therefore, theologians are entitled to challenge the Christian character of their organization<sup>3</sup>. Seventh-day Adventists are not far off: although they claim to promote faith in the Holy Trinity, they disregard Christ’s omnipotence, upholding the sanctuary’s doctrine: Jesus came on the clouds and carries out a work of cleansing the so-called “Heavenly Sanctuary”. They fail, on the other hand, to show what kind of labour and sanctuary it is, nor why Christ is so late in completing a work that could have been done instantly. To this doctrine, Adventists add other mosaic prescriptions, absolutely mandatory for them, which also minimize the saving action of Christ: the worship of the Sabbath, the selection of “clean” foods, tithes, and so on. For their part, the Mormons added to the Scriptures the “Third Testament” - the “Book of Mormon”, in an attempt to justify a particular work of Christ for them as “elect” and “Latter-day Saints”.

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<sup>2</sup> This is also the title of a propaganda book published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2002<sup>2</sup>, 448 pages

<sup>3</sup> Mons. Jean Vernet claims that Jehovahists are forcibly claiming the title of “Christians”. See: Jean VEMETTE, “«Jésus» dans la nouvelle religiosité”, in: Michael A. FUSSELL (ed.), *Rethinking new religious movements*, Pontifical Gregorian University Research Center on Cultures and Religions, Rome, 1998, p. 185.

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The Jehovahists, on the other hand, created their own bible, simplified by purportedly purging controversial texts and modifying others in the spirit of convenience with their heretical doctrines: The New World Translation (N.W.T.).

### III. Proselytizing tactics

The starting point of the proselytism of the cults of Christian origin is the misinterpretation of the biblical passages that refer to the sending of the disciples to preaching. The classic text of the reference to the preaching of the disciples - Matthew 28, 19-20 is considered an exhortation to proselytism. In reality, the act of teaching all nations, by preaching the gospel, is not to be confused with becoming followers (proselytes), by the simple fact that one does not intervene in their will, but only communicates some information, which they can assume them or not.

From the content of the Savior's activity, two other moments tend to emerge, which, on a superficial analysis, could support the proselytizing persuasion. The episode of the wonderful fishing (Luke 5, 1-11), after which the apostles are called to become "fishermen of men", is considered eloquent. But on closer inspection, it is seen that the disciples, by their own strength, caught nothing: the fish were caught in nets as a result of the concrete action of Christ. Similarly, in the act of preaching, conversion is understood not as an act of human coercion, but as a divine work.

In a similar way, the message of the parable of those invited to dinner must be understood (Luke 14, 16-24). Here, the imperative "force them to enter" is interpreted in the brutal sense of annulling the freedom of will. In reality, however, a method of assertive persuasion is indicated, but not limited to free will. Those who rejected the invitation to dinner, for various reasons, the decision was respected and were not brought to the table by force.

Jehovah's Witnesses declare that if they did not proselytize, they would be "guilty of blood"<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, defying the Romanian Constitution, which in art. 29, para. 4 prohibits religious enmity, they passed in their own Statute, validated anachronistically as an annex to the Law of Cults

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<sup>4</sup> \*\*\*, *Cunoștința care conduce la viața veșnică*, Second edition, Edited by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1996, p. 105.

no. 489/2006, that they have the right to spread their teachings in public places and from door to door. In the situation where the specification is not made: from the Jehovahist door to the Jehovahist door, it is clear that the doors of the houses of the members of other cults are targeted - and from here the action of religious enmity is clearly seen.

Jehovist proselytism is an obvious act of conflict. Orthodox believers who are verbally assaulted in their own homes, with blasphemy against their sacred values, tend to retaliate, at which point a very skillful technique of self-victimization of “witnesses” is orchestrated. If the local priest is among the appellants, he is dragged into unfair trials, in order to be discredited before the parishioners.

The entire Jehovahist doctrine is based on maximum intolerance of other religions, churches and cults, generically framed in the apocalyptic phrases: “the world empire of false religion”, “Babylon the Great” or “prostitute”. Obviously, any form of ecumenical dialogue is compromised from the start: “Would you drink a glass of poisoned water solely on the grounds that someone would guarantee you that most of its contents are water?” - ask the “witnesses”<sup>5</sup>. This is why Prof. Diac. Petre I. David calls Jehovahism “a hard and vindictive sect, rigorous in principle and dangerous to any society. Practice unscrupulous mutilation and murder...”<sup>6</sup>.

Socially, Jehovah’s fanaticism is at the root of a real drama: isolation in the predetermined patterns of a small circle of people, deceived by the salvation of Armageddon and the inheritance of earthly paradise. The denial of hell and eternal torment gives birth to moral relativism in the souls of Jehovah’s Witnesses, being the auspicious leaven of their antisocial actions and, in particular, of the violence of proselytism.

The family is usually a favorite target of persuasive approaches to religious coercion. There are many cases of mistreatment of wives<sup>7</sup> and inappropriate treatment of children<sup>8</sup>, out of a desire to attach to Adventist-millennial groups. Jehovah’s Witnesses provide their children with an

<sup>5</sup> \*\*\*, *Să aducem argumente din Scripturi*, Edited by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989, p. 303.

<sup>6</sup> P. I. DAVID, *Invazia sectelor asupra creștinismului secularizat și intensificarea prozelitismului neopăgân în România, după decembrie 1989*, Vol. 1, Crist-1, București, 1997, p. 214.

<sup>7</sup> Șerban CONSTANTINESCU, *Năzbâtii teologice sau Falsa mărturie a așa-zișilor Martori ai lui Iehova*, Dillensburg, Germany, 1990, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> \*\*\*, *Treziți-vă!*, Edited by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 22 Oct. 1997, p. 26.

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education that is conducive to proselytizing. From the age of 3, they are assigned to “field service”, study the literature of the organization, and have a “healthy fear of Jehovah”. We could rather say that this is a terrible anguish, as long as the children of Jehovahists suffer a series of major restrictions: they are not allowed to celebrate their birthdays, they are not allowed to believe in Santa Claus, their joy of any holiday is restricted, they do not have access to cultural events, sports, theater, cinema, etc. Any form of profane culture is rejected from the beginning, and fictional reading is considered useless. Access to the computer is allowed in completely exceptional situations, suggesting rather the ban on its use, and especially the connection to the Internet, seen as a source of extremely dangerous information, but also as a waste of precious time, which could be allocated to proselytizing activities.

The practical development of Jehovahist proselytism is an extremely well-prepared activity, orchestrated in detail by the pyramidal management structure of the organization. In fact, many scholars have noted that Jehovah’s Witnesses have raised proselytism to the rank of dogma - and not just any, but even a major one. The five weekly meetings that Jehovah’s Witnesses are required to attend are focused on the successful implementation of proselytizing strategies.

Within this organization, there are several categories of members, strictly divided according to the minimum number of hours allocated to the “field service”. The first are those who dedicate their entire lives to proselytism: the “special pioneers” march over 140 hours a month, being maintained from external sources, both from their own reserves and from the organization. Next are the “regular pioneers”, who spend 90 hours a month in the field service, and who usually arrange light or part-time services to support themselves. The “auxiliary pioneers” carry out sporadic activities, 60 hours a month, in areas that require additional effort. The latter are the “heralds of the kingdom”, who are, in fact, the great mass of followers, who do not give up their services, but are not exempt from the proselytizing program. They must report a minimum involvement of 10 hours per month. In perfect accordance with the number of hours set for the field is the number of magazines to be placed; they are bought by placers and are offered free of charge or for a small contribution. According to Wilbur Lingle, most of Jehovah’s Witnesses “hate the need to go from

door to door”<sup>9</sup>, but they cannot oppose the dictatorial rules of the Brooklyn leadership.

Any proselytizing travel is carefully managed. The route is established in advance, providing the most accurate data about the territory concerned. Teams are built based on impact and credibility; they often include children. The outfit is impeccable: gentlemen must wear a suit and tie, ladies a decent toilet, being allowed ornaments, provided they do not exaggerate. Each location is scrupulously inventoried: the descriptive elements and especially the dialogues are recorded in field reports, which are handed over, at the end, to superiors. This explains the fact that, if a person rejects the dialogue with the “witnesses” due to lack of time, he will certainly be visited later. And “where they find understanding and hospitality on the part of the interlocutors, they stubbornly return several times, bringing additional arguments, in the hope of a proselytizing result as the effort goes”<sup>10</sup>. Even if they face a categorical refusal, they will return, after a while, in the hope that things will have changed, and the person in question may have suffered a disappointment from his own religion, being willing to change it. According to Radu Antim, “the decisive moment in Jehovahist propaganda is precisely the one in which, out of curiosity or politeness, we show an interest in what is said”<sup>11</sup>.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are aware that the chances of a conversion are slim, without the application of a predetermined scenario. A true textbook of proselytism is *Let’s Bring Arguments from the Scriptures*, edited by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, printed in pocket format, but with special paper, like a Bible sheet. Here are structured real discursive strategies, meant to offer the “witnesses” the chance to pre-determine any answer, channeling the discussion in the desired direction. Their purpose is to introduce their own proselytizing strategy, starting with usual statements or falsely mimicking interest in irrelevant topics: spokespersons to accept a series of home Bible studies. Once admitted, they are, in turn, limited to fixed rules: any sources of distraction are interrupted: television, telephone, radio, etc. The only means of dialogue allowed are: *New World Translations*

<sup>9</sup> Wilbur LINGLE, *Abordarea cu dragoste a Martorilor lui Iehova*, Agape, Făgăraș, 1997, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> David PESTROIU, *Ortodoxia în fața prozelitismului „Martorilor lui Iehova”*, Insei Print, București, 2005, pp. 32-33.

<sup>11</sup> Radu ANTIM, *Societatea „Martorii lui Iehova” în contextul fenomenului sectar*, Arhidiecezana, Cluj Napoca, 1996, p. 46.

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forged scriptures, magazines and books brought by “witnesses”. A session lasts between 25-40 minutes, with breaks.

Housing is not the only destination for proselytism. Jehovah’s Witnesses can often be seen in parks, train stations, airports, bus stops, local fairs, and popular events. Great attention is paid to cemeteries, where they approach those whose emotional pain makes them more vulnerable to fake sectarian compassion. They urge approvals to preach in prisons, where they also invite the families of detainees. They roamed the hospitals, filling their wards with Jehovahist literature. *Awake!* often contains articles on medical topics. In fact, they have developed strong partnerships with representatives of the medical world, starting from the application of their directive to ban transfusions, benefiting from support and media coverage, without caring about human lives lost in this stupid way, many of them children, about which the whole world found out with concern.

Particular attention is paid to disadvantaged social groups. Taking advantage of their vulnerability, an avalanche of “offers” of a spiritual nature falls on them. Widows, for example, are dedicated to specific proselytizing strategies to encourage family rebuilding in the earthly paradise. Honey speeches become even more effective if they are accompanied by small “attentions” of a financial or material nature, meant to buy their consciences. Similar strategies are used for people with visual or hearing impairments. In addition to material aid, they are offered a wide range of proselytizing materials, distributed by specially trained preachers.

Recently, there has been a focus on Jehovahist’s attention on office and business buildings, realizing their enormous financial potential as possible future sponsors of the group.

The Mormons do the same, present in Romania under the auspices of the “Liahona” Association, with communities cohesive in the main cities. Thousands of Mormon missionaries received a visa to stay in Romania for two years, as long as the proselytizing activity lasts. Their tactic is to walk, in small groups (usually two people each), through busy public places, where they annoy passersby with their teachings, taught according to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Missionary Handbook. They often share brochures. Their generally peaceful and neutral attitude has led some researchers to say that they are not proselytizing, but missionary. A careful analysis, however, shows that behind the “innocent” initial dialogues, are hidden offers from the most diverse: material aid (on investment system,

Mormons then strictly applying tithing), free English courses, operating PC, music and dance evenings, etc. According to Fr. Dr. Sorin Marinescu, “the media is not favorable to them, accusing them of being polygamous. In Romania, however, there are no cases of deviation of members from moral principles or the family code”<sup>12</sup>. He does not insist on visiting people’s homes, considering that they must come to know their “true” religion, at the offices scattered throughout the country. There are also Mormon “temples” in Romania, but they are only accessible to those who are initiated. If invited, they do not hesitate to travel to the applicant’s home to discuss the basic principles of their faith in several meetings, taught by a team of two Mormons.

Seventh-day Adventists prefer to hide their intentions behind charities, such as free blood pressure or blood glucose measurements - at strategically located stands in malls and other crowded spaces, where literature published under the auspices of “Viață și sănătate” (*Life and health* Publishing House). Here, masked by the initiative of balancing the body, through diets and alternative therapies, are inoculated Adventist heresies.

Proselytizing is also done directly from home, by sending religious literature or letters by mail, but also by telephone conversations, starting from the columns of obituaries in newspapers. More recently, great attention is being paid to the internet, blogs and social networks, which are of real interest, especially among young people. Thus, another fundamental conception is successfully capitalized: Jehovist anonymity. True to the idea that “only God should have a name”<sup>13</sup>, “witnesses” wrap their actions in anonymity: both their version of Scripture and all books, publications, and tracts appear without indication of the authors, mentioning only the publishing society. On the other hand, Adventists emphasize to the point of idolatry the personality of the controversial Hellen White, whom they call the “prophetic spirit” and whose books are normative to them, like the Bible.

Another very effective proselytizing tactic is numerical overwhelm, at a certain time and place. In countries like Romania, where there are strong majority religions, tiny groups set off with an obvious handicap. Many

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<sup>12</sup> Sorin MARINESCU, *Prozelitismul grupării mormonilor în vremea noastră. Atitudinea Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Edit. Episcopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara HARRISON, *Visions of Glory*, p. 253, apud D. PESTROIU, *Ortodoxia*...., p. 42.

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people prefer to remain anchored to a religion because it is a majority option, a family legacy, a form of stability. They are extremely shocked when they notice, around them, an impressive number of converts to another teaching: they are given the false impression of a major paradigm shift, which must be followed.

From this premise start the Seventh-day Adventists, the promoters of the “Hope” tournaments, with which they spread the whole country, but also the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the organizers of grandiose religious congresses. Such a convention, entitled “Messengers of Divine Peace”, was scheduled to take place in Bucharest in the summer of 1996, with the participation of 80,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses from the country and around the world. At the last moment, through the active intervention of the Church as a whole, but also of some orthodox missionary structures, present in the civil society, it was possible to stop the phenomenon. The dissatisfaction was very diverse, culminating in the refusal of the first lady of the USA, Hillary Clinton, to visit the Cretzulescu Church in Bucharest, as a sign of opposition to the Romanian “religious intolerance”:

“The US State Department reproaches the Romanian Government that it does not respect religious freedom, and the Orthodox Church is criticized for «showing hostility» to non-Orthodox churches and condemning the «aggressive proselytism» of Protestants, neo-Protestants and other religious groups it calls «sects»”<sup>14</sup>.

However, large-scale Jehovist conventions have been organized and continue to be held annually, benefiting from the rental of generous spaces, to take advantage of the pooling of so many members: suddenly, the number of followers in a certain place grows ten times! The social impact is enormous: public markets, accommodation and meals, means of transport are full of propagandists. They themselves strengthen their relationships of solidarity, uniting thousands of voices in prayers and songs or attending new baptisms in specially prepared pools. The effect

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<sup>14</sup> Radu Petre MUREȘAN, *Atitudinea Bisericilor Tradiționale Europene față de prozelitismul advent. Impactul în societatea contemporană*, Edit. Universității din București, 2007, p. 585.

on the locals is summed up in the exclamation: “I didn’t think there were so many!”<sup>15</sup>.

Aware of the importance of disseminating proselytizing messages through the media, Adventist-Millennial groups are increasingly present in the magazines, newspapers, radio and television, on the Internet, but also by publishing audio-video materials: cassettes, CDs, DVDs. Seventh-day Adventists own the “Speranța” Radio and TV stations. Jehovah’s Witnesses have not given up their own publications, of which they are proud to report, annually, the breaking of world records in terms of magazine circulation. Both in their content and in other media sources, praises are published to the Jehovist group, its teachings and practices, coming from the most diverse categories of people: doctors, lawyers, scientists, writers. All of them do not forget to mention that they are “not” members of the organization. However, the style of these descriptions indicates that they appear to be written by the same person, who finally suddenly converts and declares that he is looking forward to the next issue of that publication ...

Each new convert is determined to show hatred and contempt for the values he had previously shared. He is urged to publicly destroy icons, crosses, religious books in the house, to throw them in the trash or in places of dishonesty, to let everyone around him know about his conversion. The Jehovists even urge the composition of a letter to the Church previously attended, by which the new convert renounces his former status as a member of that Church.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Prophylaxis of proselytism and pastoral-missionary solutions**

As the majority Church, Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate needs to be more aware that it is the major target of denigrating proselytizing attacks. Although they are largely unfair, there are still quite a few negative aspects that the followers of the new movements skillfully speculate on. The questionable morality of some priests, the weakness of pastoral involvement, the lack of attention given to sermons and catechesis lead to the proselytizing success of other cults. Poor theological training often

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<sup>15</sup> David PESTROIU, *Martorii lui Iehova - sunt ei creștini?*, Edit. România creștină, București, 1999, p. 82.

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makes the ministers themselves in difficulty when engaging in an apologetic dialogue, not knowing how to perform the exegesis of controversial texts correctly.

Another problematic issue is the understanding of a majority Church as an oppressive, exploitative force - a mentality inherited from communism, but fueled by the greed of some of today's ministers, whose opulent life is in stark contrast to the poor of the majority. The lack of a transparent parish accounting situation, as well as the weak involvement in philanthropic actions paved the way for religious propagandists, who pretended to be "popular", bringing tons of "aid" from abroad, but failing to show that it is, in fact, an investment: what they offer so generously at the beginning, will be returned to them in the form of tithes - constant subsidies that feed the budgets of the new movements. From the period proposed for this research, we chose the year 1992: then the number of followers baptized annually by Jehovah's Witnesses in Eastern Europe tripled. 27,000 people were then attracted with the modest price of only 400 tons of aid!<sup>16</sup> There is, therefore, an adaptation of capitalism to proselytizing needs, taking into account the deepening crisis in which impoverished populations are sinking<sup>17</sup>.

The revival of the missionaryism of the Orthodox laity is another great resource in combating proselytism, which is insufficiently exploited today. Many authors insist on this aspect. There are also enough missionary structures, which carry out their activity in a rather worrying form, of semi-autonomy from the Church. The creation of a link between the basic ecclesial cell - the parish or the monastery - and these structures failed. As long as they do not collaborate with priests, parish councils and committees, their activities are inefficient, as they do not take into account the concrete missionary problems in a given territory.

We also note the laudable initiative of Fr. Lect. Dr. Radu Petre Mureșan, who proposes, with solid arguments, the foundation of an Observatory of Religions in Romania,

“whose role should be to monitor, analyze and interpret field data in connection with the impact of the message that the

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<sup>16</sup> \*\*\*, *Turnul de veghere*, Edited by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1 ianuarie 1993, pp. 26-27,29.

<sup>17</sup> See: Vasile RĂDUȚĂ, „Misiunea Bisericii Ortodoxe azi - provocări, dileme, sugestii”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, LV (2005), 1-2, pp. 11-21.

Church has today in society, with the activity of the new religious movements, etc. It must have an academic level and a constructive critical perspective<sup>18</sup>.

In all possible ways, it is necessary to expose violent proselytizing means, aggressive tactics, physical or other constraints, media manipulation, political or economic interference, and the exploitation of critical situations. At the same time, we will not respond to proselytizing aggressions in the same way, knowing that Adventist-millennial groups are artisans of victimization, but also have fearsome legal divisions, which will rush to action in court to established a climate of terror among church ministers. Both priests and lay missionaries must be aware of the limits imposed by the legislation in force and must not obstruct in any way the free movement of religious propagandists, especially Jehovahists. The only effective pastoral-missionary measures in these cases are two: 1. A permanent training of the faithful, through public and individual catechesis, in order to refuse from the beginning any dialogue with a heterodox; 2. If they appear within the parish, the priest, together with a small group of counselors, has the duty to follow in their footsteps, to observe in which dwellings they are allowed access, to dialogue immediately with the persons concerned, in order to clarifies the possible oscillations in the faith, while collecting the heretical literature spread in the parish. After a thorough reading of it, he has the duty to present the Orthodox teaching, through sermons, catechesis or in the parish paper (where it exists), combating the heresies discovered in the broadcast materials.

We must not neglect the constant work of prayer, the mystical living in Christ, the image of the spiritual priest, *the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5, 13-14)*, whose work speaks for itself and to which proselytizing tactics, no matter how crafty would be, they remain ineffective.

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<sup>18</sup> Radu Petre MUREȘAN, *Atitudinea...*, p. 592.