The Orthodox Premise of European Culture and Construction

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Abstract
History, like time, involves not only the past but also the present and the future. If we were to engage in a biological comparison, we could say that the past is the root that gives stability, the present is the trunk that maintains the structure of the whole tree, and the branches are the projection of a more or less distant future. The phenomenology of time translates the above into three notions: memory, retention and protention. We find them in what we call the musicality of time. However, in order to discuss lucidly the European project in full swing, and to intuit the fugue lines of this social carrier that produces history in real time, it is important to do, from time to time, an exercise in memory. Why is it so necessary? The answer is logical deduction: so as not to disconnect us from our vital source, from our roots. And the roots are the Christian religion and the culture it has produced and which has shaped our society in concrete terms.

Keywords
Orthodoxy, culture, european construction, byzantine symphony, Church, State, european integration, unity in diversity.

I. Introduction. A little known Church

The privileged ground of Orthodoxy has often been stressed. The dead-end conflict between Protestant and Catholic theologians often stems from the use of the same categories of thought. Orthodoxy offers a special patristic terrain where the same problems can be posed differently and given solutions that are otherwise inaccessible: the question of faith and works, freedom and grace, authority and prophethood, celibacy and marriage. Finally, it does not ask anyone to submit to the power of a historical institution, but urges us to embrace the truth (for example, the Nicene Creed and the definitions of the seven Synods). It is not the theologians who make their demands, but the truth that welcomes and introduces into communion with Orthodoxy. It in no way prevents the preservation of the proper historical image and valid traditions of the Fathers[1].

The choice of this debut text is not at all accidental because, as Olivier Clement once said, the Orthodox Church is "a poorly known Church". Unfortunately, a template has been created, a kind of ideological and intellectual fashion in which Orthodoxy is seen as a religious reject, a second-rate Christianity that has found its place in the East, in Europe's "shadow cone".

Nothing could be further from the truth. Orthodoxy is one of the major expressions of Christianity, fully aware of the fact that it is home to the "one, holy, sovereign and apostolic" Church. It enjoys a quality that the other "neo-Christian" confessions that have emerged since the 16th century cannot enjoy, namely that "Orthodoxy is not defined in any way in relation to Roman Catholicism. It feels a complete continuity with Christ, with Pentecost, with the apostolic preaching and, moreover, it counts numerous episcopal sees founded by the apostles"[2].

Caught for centuries between two great conquering powers, that of the West and that of Islam, Orthodoxy has had to restrict itself to a ritual

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[1] Paul Evdochimov, *Ortodoxia,* Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 373.

[2] Olivier Clement, *Adevăr şi libertate. Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate. Convorbiri cu Patriarhul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I,* Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 11.

and popular transmission. On the other hand, nationalist tensions have ended up masking it, even though Orthodoxy has its own ecclesiology of communion, a fact confirmed by the Synod of Constantinople of 1872, which condemned ethno-phyletism or religious nationalism, which could be likened to "the idolatry of an ethnic group, as parallel to the right faith as any other variant of «chipped face»"[3].

Fortunately, the cultured Christians of Europe and America marvel at its treasures, and Catholic and sometimes Protestant believers pray before its icons. After many years of fervent search for the "New Testament Church", as they called it, and thus for the apostolic truth, a group of Americans in 1987 resorted to a mass conversion and embraced Orthodoxy. At the end of their research they exclaimed, "I guess that makes us Orthodox!"[4]. Their case is not a similar one because others also confess, in a combination of faith and intelligence, the praise of Orthodoxy: "Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. Orthodoxy is the fulfilment of all that is good and true in Protestantism, because what is good and true in Protestantism is a remnant of the Orthodox past of the West"[5].

Whenever history has given it the opportunity, Orthodoxy has not ceased to be creative, proving that it is not a passive treasure. To be convinced of this idea, one need only think of the mystical theology of 14th-century Byzantium, the insights of Dostoevsky (whom Nikolai Berdiaev said knew everything Nietzsche knew and more), and of the religious philosophers who followed in his wake.

In these lines we intend to propose an objective analysis of Orthodoxy, by what it defines itself, the elements that make up its resistance structure, using as a key to interpretation the contribution of this Church to the European construction and to modernity.

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[3] Teodor Baconschi, *Efectul de lupă: câteva priviri asupra culturii contemporane,* Polirom, București, 2020, pp. 119-120.

[4] Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox. A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith,* Conciliar Press, Ben Lomond, California, 1992, p. 54. The Romanian version is published by Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2006 and 2016, in translation by Fr. Ioan-Tănase Chiș.

[5] http://www.ortho-logia.com/Romanian/Calea/Introducere.htm (accessed on 9 of March 2023).

II. Christianity: religious and cultural premise of European unity

"Let it be said, then, that Europe is quintessentially messianic, being a product and an expression of the Christianity that sprang from under the mantle of Paul of Tarsus and the Judeo-Greek rhetoric"[6].

Being European is a much older reality than European structures, which are at most three or four decades old. Robert Schumann and Jean Monnet are not the beginning of a European doctrine, although they were remarkable people and did very good things. But Europe is a Christian construction that began more than a millennium ago. And anyone who ignores this risks (consciously or unconsciously) taking an anti-European stance. Because being anti-Christian is an anti-European attitude. Many Europeans are anti-Christian, but as participants in a world created by Christianity. ... Before Christians, Europe was not Europe at all. ... The mythological name of Europe only exists as a continental consciousness since Christianity[7].

On the occasion of his pastoral visit to Sofia, Pope John Paul II made the following statement:

> "It would be unjust and false to limit the importance of the Christian religion in the process of European unification, which has made such a great contribution to the development of the continent's culture and humanity. ... Europe can no longer ignore its Christian roots"[8].

This view is shared not only by people whom we would be tempted to judge in terms of their socio-professional background, in our case clerics, but even modern philosophers express in unison, in full consensus, what

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[6] Ovidiu Pecican, *Europa – o idee în mers,* Editura Efes, Cluj-Napoca, 1997, p. 20.

[7] Alexandru Paleologu, *Moştenirea creştină a Europei,* Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, pp. 65-66.

[8] Pr. Albert Rauch, "Să descoperim împreună sufletul Europei"*,* in: *Spiritualitate şi consumism în Europa unită,* Editura Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2004, p. 246.

has been said above to the effect that the very cognitive structures of the formation of modern consciousness in Europe were due to Christianity.

> "Christianity was for the normative self-understanding of modernity not only a precursor or catalyst. The egalitarian universe, from which the ideas of freedom and coexistence in solidarity, of autonomy in the guidance of life and emancipation, of individual morality of duty, of human rights and democracy have emerged, is directly a legacy of the ethics of love"[9].

Konstantin Leontiev adds a further argument to our thesis, showing that the Christian religion is one of the supporting pillars of European culture, even if this reality subsists for some only at the level of the cultural, collective subconscious: "European civilization was formed by the fusion of Byzantine Christianity, German feudalism, Greek philosophy and aesthetics, the legal and municipal principles of Rome"[10]. Christos Yannaras goes on to state categorically that the source of European culture is Christianity par excellence. Europe experienced a wave of migrating peoples who were civilised through Christianity. Beyond that, he says, if in the Christian East there was a university as early as the 4th century, in the 11th century in Central and Western Europe there was still anthropophagy, according to the French historian Georges Duby[11].

II.2. Cultural Europe: symbiosis between Western Christianity and the Christian East

Europe is, without doubt and in antithesis to the intrinsic specificity of its culture, a unitary space, managing to assert itself as such, paradoxically, through spirituality[12]. Europe is also the birthplace of democratic Hellenism,

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[9] Jurgen Habermas, in: Andrei Marga, *Religia în era globalizării,* Editura Fundaţiei pentru Studii Europene, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 85.

[10] Konstantin Leontiev, *Bizantinsmul şi lumea slavă,* Editura Anastasia, Bucureşti, 1999, p. 123.

[11] Christos Yannaras, *Ortodoxie şi Occident,* Editura Bizantină, Bucureşti, 1995, pp. 70-71.

[12] Professor Andrei Marga states that "European culture was delimited from Asian cultures, in relation to which it was formed, precisely by the fact that it objectified

the originator of Ideas, Categories, the pantheon of fire or water, which Christianity will irrevocably overthrow by its own forces. Europe is the Roman civilisation that succeeded in creating a very solid system of law, legalising the exemplary divorce between *jus* and *fas*[13] and turning Rome into that *verbum regens* of ancient and medieval European relations. The Great Roman Empire, in its integrating impetus, also brought with it the first distinctions between East and West[14], arising from the inability of the times to cope with the movement of expansion or, more precisely, from the perspective of approaching the great space - which included territories as far as the Danube, the Euxine Bridge, the Euphrates or the Persian Gulf - which was very different from the Greco-Roman Byzantine, which immediately followed, which acted more as a synthesizer than a dictator. Staying with the category of East versus West, we say:

> "Orthodoxy became for modern Western Europe not so much a confessional problem as a political one, because of the permanent confrontation, after 1700, with the military might of Orthodox Russia of the Tsarist empire until 1917 and of the Soviet one in the 20th century and post-Soviet after 1988. Imperial, despotic, bureaucratic, stagnant, collectivist, Orthodox, Byzantine Russia is seen as the representative of Asia, in the face of modern, dynamic, liberal, individualistic, capitalist Europe (and its American extension), resulting from Western Latin Christianity and the recovery through humanism, renaissance and Enlightenment of Athens and Rome"[15].

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spiritual culture in its components and institutions". See: Andrei MARGA, *Filosofia unificării europene,* Editura Apostrof, Cluj-Napoca, 1995.

[13] The distinction between legal norm and religious norm.

[14] The idea is also found in Maria Todorova: "Starting with the era of Diocletian, Rome introduced the division between East and West in the administration. ... In the medieval period it was used in a narrow sense to describe the opposition between Catholicism and Orthodoxy and in a broader sense between Christianity and Islam. ... societies that existed but were opposed for political, religious or cultural reasons are juxtaposed". See: Maria TODOROVA, *Balcanii și balcanismul,* Humanitas, București, 2000, p. 27.

[15] Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR, "*Civilizația ortodoxă* în viziune geopolitică*",* in: Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR, *Canonul Ortodoxiei. Sinodul VII Ecumenic*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2020, p. 1118.

Anchored in the everyday, we express our conviction that the "clash of civilizations" thesis seen as a conflict of "incompatible Christianities"[16] undergoes revision, especially in the direction of a "dialogue of civilisations"[17]. At the same time, in the European "spirit", we are sceptical about the success for the time being of a single, unitary European culture, as long as it removes Christian morality from the value grid, replacing it with the alternative, more convenient to "diversity" and "inclusion", of political correctness. We can accept a certain degree of subjectivism, according to which there is a Western Europe and a European East, with the proviso that they are both intertwined and differentiated, without being mutually exclusive. We find such a position, not without subjectivism, in Max Weber: "Compared with the German, the Pole performs less well in physical work, namely the more eastern the region he comes from"[18]. Here we find an interpretation in economic terms on which Europe is vehemently divided, not between Germans and Poles, but gradually from Germans to Poles, and which simultaneously discusses a difference of mentality, also evident on a cultural level: "For in such cases not only a high sense of responsibility is needed, but in general a mentality which, at least during work, is detached from the constant concern to earn the ordinary wage with a maximum of convenience and a minimum of yield"[19]. We found the passage eloquent in portraying a civilizational aspect [20] which we circumscribe to culture - diverging from the orientation of the German school - and which supports the thesis of a European culture that is sensitively differentiated from East to West, from Western to Eastern Europe, without, however, creating the possibility of a partisan understanding or opening up European cultural gaps in favour of one area or another.

It should not be overlooked that Weber's thesis goes beyond the purely lucrative aspect of the problem and leads to a spiritual side, in the context of a religiosity assumed as a personal relationship with God; this aspect involves a more complex and deeper process of existence. As a stage

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[16] Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ jr, "*Civilizaţia ortodoxă* în viziune geopolitică", p. 1118.

[17] Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ jr, "*Civilizaţia ortodoxă* în viziune geopolitică", p. 1119.

[18] Max WEBER, *Etica protestantă şi spiritul capitalismului,* Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1993, p. 45.

[19] Max WEBER, *Etica protestantă...*, p. 45.

[20] Max WEBER, *Etica protestantă...*, p. 45.

conclusion we say that, in our understanding, we consider culture as those values that reopen man's access to primordial reality[21].

II.2. Orthodox nostalgia for the West

Christianity in the first millennium had been providentially prepared by the first unification work carried out by Alexander the Great, then by Augustus and his successors. Alexander the Great, three centuries before our era, prepared the bold project of making all men citizens of a single state and of a single government, of bringing about universal peace, good understanding and the facilitation of communication between people. From his project was born Hellenic civilisation, that melting pot in which the contributions of Iran, India and Egypt melted into the European heritage of classical Greece. In their time, the later Caesars sought to combine Hellenism with Roman art for the peace and well-being of the empire, justice and righteousness. In 313, the principle of cohesion of the empire became the Christian faith, instead of the Roman religion:

> "Christianity was not adapting itself to a pre-existing civilisation, but was doing something else altogether; Hellenism and ancient Romanity were not, of course, destroyed, but were undergoing, little by little, a reopening and a transfiguration which would give rise to another, specifically Christian culture"[22].

These processes later led to what we call today the "Byzantine commonwealth", that is, the area of cultural and religious communion of the Christianised Roman Empire.

Throughout this period, the West had Saints and Church Fathers recognised by the whole of Orthodoxy. Countless monuments - baptisteries, churches, relics of all kinds - bear witness to the Orthodox origins of the

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[21] Nichifor Crainic considered that "man no longer has direct access to the reality of the uncreated world, as he had in the paradise of primordial enlightenment, but mediated, in and through those cultural creations that allow him to actualize his aspiration towards the paradisiacal perfection of the uncreated world". See: Nichifor Crainic, *Nostalgia paradisului,* Editura Moldova, Iași, 1994.

[22] Placide Deseille, *Nostalgia Ortodoxiei,* Editura Anastasia, București, 1995, p. 225.

Apus, because they date from this period. However, we must recognise that the Appalachians never fully embraced the theology of the Greek Fathers, nor the progress of post-Chalcedonian Christology.

Going further and trying to stay within the ideological framework of the title, we can recall that the Cistercian authors who gravitated around Bernard of Clairvaux were even initiated into the elements of the doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor, and Thomas Aquinas nevertheless wanted to pass himself off as a disciple of the Holy Fathers more than of Aristotle. A thorough knowledge of the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, helped him greatly to qualify the too exclusive Augustinianism of his predecessors.

Thus, in the West, the experience of prayer and the spiritual life gave birth to its own theology, drawing generous inspiration from the Eastern Fathers. The lives of the desert fathers, St John Cassian, John the Scary, Dorotheus of Gaza are among the sources of Apusian ascetic doctrine along with Gregory the Great and Augustine. The Apollonians never ceased to concern themselves with the Fathers of the Church and the common tradition of the early centuries, a fact which is also demonstrated by the enormous work of editing the two Patrologies, Greek and Latin, by Abbot Migne[23].

The Orthodox nostalgia of the West is confirmed by the following daily reality, which is not limited to aspects of the stylistic appetite for Orthodox heritage:

> "There is no religious shop in which icons are not to be found; in France, they have almost entirely replaced statues and traditional imagery in Catholic homes. One Catholic monastery, the Abbey of Belefontaine, publishes a collection of patristic and orthodox texts which is very widespread. ... Catholic monks who have adopted the Byzantine rite can sometimes be heard saying: I don't need to become Orthodox because I already am, while remaining Catholic"[24].

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[23] Placide Deseille, *Nostalgia Ortodoxiei*, pp. 228-229.
[24] Placide Deseille, *Nostalgia Ortodoxiei*, p. 239.

Despite divisions and conflicts, the Europe of common roots has not ceased to exist. It is often forgotten that the Orthodox countries served as its stepping stones. It does not mean that gratitude has faded into the mists of time. A few years after 1204, the second Latin Emperor of Constantinople, Henry I, Count of Flanders and Hainaut, resolutely opposed the Pope's legate, Cardinal Pelagius, to save the Orthodox clergy from persecution. He also saved the monasteries of Athos, which is why the monastery of the Great Lavra has long remembered him as a great benefactor. Even if 1204 was a wound in the body of Orthodoxy, the events of 1204 facilitated a true cultural-religious import from the East to the West, which was conquered by Byzantine art. The mosaics that can be admired in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, in the baptistery in Florence, and elsewhere, bear witness to this. As a cultural consequence, the tetrad of the Eastern Fathers was added in the 13th century: Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom. "Uniatism caused a transfusion of Eastern blood into the Western Church, which thus began to emerge from the isolation of Latinity"[25].

II.3. Orthodoxy - the catalyst of Byzantium

"The old Greco-Roman municipality, the old Roman Caesarism, the new Christianity and the new Asian-inspired administration are the foundations of Byzantium's millennial life. As a state, Byzantium has always lived on the defensive; but as a civilisation and religious culture, it has long led the way in conquering new worlds. ... It was young and powerful through its religion, and it is precisely in the religious sphere that the characteristic feature of Byzantium must be sought"[26]

II.3.1. Cultural aspect. Without claiming to be a monograph of Europe - besides the fact that we do not have the space necessary for such a synthesis, the intention would also betray a lack of modesty - we propose, starting

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[25] Olivier CLEMENT, *Adevăr și libertate*, p. 155.
[26] K. LEONTIEV, *Bizantinsmul și lumea slavă,* p. 149.

from the cultural aspects, to outline some ideas that support the opinion that Byzantium left a much more pronounced ontological imprint on its inhabitants than other cultural-historical perimeters, such as, in particular, the West. The awareness of the past combined with the dimension of becoming/development (associated with the modelling role of Orthodoxy) or with that of failure (put in tune with the sense of resignation which then degenerated into passivity), encouraged by the geopolitical conditions of centuries of Ottoman rule and even the communist period, became a way of life.

We can therefore recognise in Byzantium, after the break-up of the Roman Empire in 395, the place where the horizontal components of Hellenic culture met, for the first time, the vertical component of Christianity[27]. The values of antiquity are, in this context, not only revealed, as in the case of the Renaissance, but transformed into Christianity. It is particularly important to recognise that this metamorphosis of the Greek pantheon, as "teluric" as it could be, was completed by that "Before" and "After"[28] of the Holy Cross. This, we believe, was the reason why the Greeks not only accepted the Empire, but also appropriated it. What does the above idea have to do with Past consciousness? The Greeks knew that "any advance into the future is a fall down the time scale from the golden to the bronze age"[29]. The Holy Cross did nothing more than fix their gaze on the Resurrection, thus making it necessary to go

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[27] Christianity becomes the legal religion in the empire through the Milan Edict of 313 given by Constantine the Great so that, under Theodosius the Great (379-395), it becomes the state religion, proclaiming Orthodoxy the official confession of the empire. See: Ion Rămureanu, Teodor Bodogae, Milan Șesan, *Istoria Bisericească Universală,* vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 152.

[28] Jacqueline Russ, *Aventura gândirii europene. O istorie a ideilor occidentale,* Institutul European, București, 2002, p. 63. The author talks about the fact that the ideas of „before" and „after" in history were invented by the Greeks. We use these terms in the sense indicated by the author that „the city of men finds its purpose only through the city of God".

[29] Mr. Ilie Bădescu distinguishes two types of societies: some oriented towards the future (destructive through the will to exit, to break free from structures, acquisitions), or oriented towards the past (constructive, manifesting at the opposite pole through the will to enter structures). See: Ilie Bădescu, *Cu faţa spre Bizanţ,* Editura Evex, 1998, pp. 144-145.

forward, while at the same time turning it into a climb towards salvation. Drawing a parallel with the history of the Romanians, in this case, we can explain the assumption of the legitimate relationship of identity between Orthodoxy and Romanianism, the possibility of perpetuating culture in an environment oppressed by the Ottoman conquests; a culture which, in this context, becomes more conservative than evolutionary, and not a culture of resignation of the "head bowed the sword does not cut it off" type. Historical destiny was incorporated into the eschatological dimension of existence and, whenever the Gate tried to touch the reverie of identity, the hero saints were awakened: Stephen the Great, Brancoveanu.

The Byzantine legacy seems to have been perpetuated, leaving Eastern Orthodoxy "in liturgical contemplation of heaven"[30].

Returning to the Byzantine Empire, an attempt must be made to answer the question as to how it was possible to maintain this methodology of life, which sprang from it. In fact, syncretism was much broader than has been presented so far. Byzantium is the fantastic symphony of freedom that left room for the affirmation of Hellenic culture, Jewish and Oriental influences, the Court, the schools, the Church, the great synodal questions[31]. Let us imagine the public square in which the echoes of the theological controversies rose, taken up by the Court through the Byzantine emperors who were well versed in theology, the preservation of works of literature, history, Greek medicine, the palace ceremonies full of the typical oriental pomp, the trade maintained by the Jews, the schools that trained in the spirit of free thought. A "methodology" that we hold accountable: "for truth [that] belonged to all"[32]. It is true that Greek philosophy suffered under the Christian impulse of the Byzantine emperors. However, culminating in the abolition of the school of philosophy at Athens in 529 by Justinian (527-565), it is acknowledged that there was still access to the works of Greek philosophers, sophism, neo-Platonism continuing to manifest themselves after Constantine the Great. Justinian's very action was interpreted as

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[30] Paul EVDOCHIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, p. 330.

[31] Idea supported by Prof. Martin Hausser in a lecture held as part of the Master's Degree "Intercultural Communication in the context of European integration", which took place at the Department - UNESCO Chair, Bucharest, October 2003.

[32] John MEYENDORFF, *Teologia bizantină. Tendințe istorice și teme doctrinare,* Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 15.

prohibitive of pagan worship rather than as being against lovers of wisdom (philosophers).

II.3.2. The Byzantine Symphony. What gave cohesion to the Byzantine Empire system, in our opinion, is the relationship between the State and the Church. A model was created which was perpetuated in Eastern Europe and which we find even today (e.g. relations between State and Church in Romanian society, with the necessary nuances, specific to the particularities of the time). Of course, from a canonical point of view, the Church understood that it had to stay away from politics, but at the same time, the prestige it had acquired among the people could not fail to make its presence felt in the sphere of interest of the state. Of course, there have been deviations from the rule, in the sense that not infrequently patriarchs have tried to ignore the letter of ecclesiastical law but, just as often, they have met with the opposition of a powerful state. It all began with the OT rule: "Behold, the Lord has anointed you ruler over his people" (1 Kings 10, 1), through the genius of a king "bishop in external things"[33]. This is Constantine the Great, who is considered by the same author as a great diplomat who had the vision of the importance of the Church and recognized it as such. The subsequent eradication of paganism was of primary importance in the recognition of the Church as "the only one", and from this principle the system of reciprocity was born[34]. Against this background, for example, the Orthodox Church in Eastern Romania was proclaimed, individually or together with the Greek Catholic Church, as the dominant[35] or as having a recognised national character, with all the consequences for the life of the state that such a provision would have, consequences that the Byzantine system perceived as beneficial.

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[33] The Byzantine emperors were not only well-versed in theology, but, unlike the realities in the West, they saw themselves as clerics. Constantine the Great said that "he is a bishop in external affairs", just as Emperor Leo III said that "he is both emperor and priest". See: Romulus Cândea, "Organizarea bisericească în Constituţie", in: *Noua Constituţie a României. 23 de prelegeri publice organizate de Institutul Social Român, Constituţia din 1923 în dezbaterea contemporanilor*, p. 338.

[34] R. Cândea, *Organizarea bisericească în Constituţie,* p. 338.

[35] R. Cândea, *Organizarea bisericească în Constituţie,* p. 338.

This is why we believe that the Church-State relationship developed in a spirit of balance, thanks to the realities of society which brought together a very rich Church, appreciated by the people, i.e. by each individual, and a State represented by emperors who skilfully managed the benefits of good administration. We are far from any suspicion that the emperors could be intellectually manipulated by the Church, in whose spiritual life they were fully manifest. The usurpations that swept through Western Europe in the Middle Ages did not happen here, which is why the identity of the East was perpetuated until the 19th century.

It should be noted that in the previous references to the Church, we are not limiting ourselves to the administrative meaning of the term. We give to Caesar what is Caesar's and in fact acknowledge the influence of Christianity, pointing out that it was the quintessence of the success of the Byzantine symphony, including in cultural terms. We can therefore say that Byzantium was the most important period of accumulation for Eastern Europe, where European culture was formed under the sign of the "Noun'" "European culture grew in Byzantium apparently from Greek culture, but in reality through a categorical break with it; the new name came to change not only the thoughts but the whole world in the end"[36].

At a time when the West had become a barbarous forest, illuminated, from time to time, by a spiritual glimmer from monastic circles, when new peoples were preparing for a history that was to be glorious - but was still only an impossible promise - with a spirited reflex and a barbarous physiognomy, Byzantium meant the refined and flourishing civilisation of Rome. By its unbroken continuity, by its massive domination of the continent at certain intervals, Constantinople was for a time the very image of power in Europe. In its torch the fire of the culture of antiquity continued to burn, in a new synthesis and acquiring a Christian colouring[37].

This is why personalities such as Alexandru Paleologu reject unfounded cultural accusations against the Balkan East of Europe, confessing that they are proud of their Balkan identity:

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[36] Constantin NOICA, *Morfologia culturii europene,* Humanitas, București, 1993, p. 27.
[37] O. PECICAN, *Europa – o idee în mers,* p. 55.

"You cannot legitimately show an anti-Balkan attitude if you are a cultured man and if you love the essences, the voluptuousness and the juices of culture. ... I respectfully ask you to revise your historical notions and note that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle were Balkan. ... I for one am very proud of being Balkan. I find that a very honourable thing. After all, what is Balkan? Well, the Balkan Romanian, or rather Balkanized, is a Frenchman via Constantinople!... That is to say: a full-blooded European"[38].

II.4. The Sunset of Rome

Rome, to which all roads converge; the city, in the absolute sense of the word, which attracts the eyes of the world and which, in its evolution from city-state to republic and then to empire, has not shed any of these attributes; European culture in general. Rome, nicknamed the Eternal City, which lent the model to the world. Undoubtedly, Antiquity could not break away from the cultural model that Greco-Roman civilisation had imposed. Memorialism, rhetoric, law, the obligation of education, the knowledge of writing and reading, trade routes, the genius of leading armies and peoples, all stem from the wealth of resources of Romanity. The city, with its baths and fountains, in whose schools the Greek language was also taught, "the treasury of Roman legal thought, made up of concepts with a rigorously precise meaning, of categories created by a great force of synthesis, of symmetrical and evocative principles"[39], are values that define Europe.

The division of the empire in 395 between Arcadius and Honorius, sons of Theodosius I, will mark the epilogue of the Western Empire. August 410 will find "a betrayed Rome for some, a dishonoured Rome for others. A Rome whose sufferings were due to the will of deities abandoned, in the opinion of the pagans, to the justice of a God of the Christians, exemplary in His judgments, or to that of a half-barbarous man who acted cunningly, pretending to be a Roman citizen"[40]. This is how the attack of Alaric I

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[38] Alexandru Paleologu, "Între Orient şi Occident"*,* in: *Renaşterea*, 5/2000, p. 7.

[39] Emil Molcuţ, Dan Oancea, *Drept roman,* Editura Şansa, Bucureşti, 1997, p. 53.

[40] Antonie Compagnon, Jacques Seebacher, *Spiritul Europei. Date şi locuri,* Polirom, Bucureşti, 2003, p. 40.

and his Visigothic army was interpreted, which would put an end to the myth of Urba. The collapse of Rome after a millennium of construction[41], is relentless. The almost abrupt transition from the exchange economy to the rural and then to the natural economy, coupled with the collapse of communication networks, slave revolts, the terror of attacks by migrating peoples[42], is tantamount to the destruction of the Western Empire.

II.4.1. Church and State - the cultural contribution. The Middle Ages finds Western Europe in search of its former glory. The Carolingian Empire, the Roman Empire failed to rebuild, but they inadvertently succeeded in building the state. Culturally, however, both "the Carolingian revival in the ninth century [and] the Ottonian revival in the tenth century - both were less significant by themselves than by comparison with the night of previous eras"[43].

It is important to dwell for a moment on the relationship between the State and the Church. In fact, we believe that the continuous harassment and oscillations of political power between cross and sceptre have deprived the West of the time and inclination to recreate the old Empire in a cultural sense. Thus the German concept, in its efforts to revive the Roman Empire, omits a fundamental institution which, since the age of kingship, distinguished in Roman law between ager publicus - public arable land - and private property. The concept of the German "state" was exclusively patrimonial in nature, making the court the central organ of the Empire, subordinating all inhabitants and creating relations between lords and vassals, with the monarch at the head of the hierarchy. On the other hand, the conditions were already in place for the Pope to seize political power, given the Eastern Empire's inability to manage the problem of the West. Thus, although the papacy's jurisdictional ties to the Byzantine Empire are preserved, they become ineffective over time, creating the impression and

[41] The year 753 BC attests the foundation of Rome.
[42] The year 476 marks the dethronement of Romulus Augustus, a 13-year-old boy, from the throne of the Western Roman Empire by Odoacer. This fact, which happens in the context of repeated attacks by migratory populations, starting as early as the 3rd century, marks the end of the ancient society.
[43] Charls DIEHL, *Bizanț- mărire și decădere,* Editura Naţionala-Ciornei, București, 1942, p. 306.

then the reality of papal sovereignty[44]. It is certainly a question of space, which in the context of the priority of securing Byzantium's borders from migrating peoples - a much more pressing need - leaves aside the question of the papacy[45]. The Bull of Pope Gregory VII illustrates very clearly the tendencies of the papacy:

> "There are two swords - the political sword and the ecclesiastical sword. These two swords are both given from God, but both are held by the pope, and therefore the military sword, 'gladius militarii', is also given to the pope, who gives it to whom he sees fit. Civil, military and political power rests with the pope. The superior factor, therefore, is not the emperor, not even in political matters, but the superior power, not only spiritual but also political, is held by the pope"[46].

Of course, culture was also created during this period. Just as we don't want the Byzantine reverie to be interpreted as a creative slumber, because it was not, we don't even want to imply that the Middle Ages meant a cultural vacuum. The Church and the Court, these are the two cultural poles around which literature was created, ancient texts copied or the Latin text of the Bible revised. All this was to the detriment of the people, who found themselves increasingly inhibited by the impossibility of access to the culture promoted by the two poles, in order to subjugate the masses, mainly because they did not know Latin. Legends, ballads and mysticism are the cultural remedies of the peoples of the Middle Ages.

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[44] It is true that for several centuries the pope was subject to the Byzantine emperors, but the ties of subjection were so weak that the pope could regard himself as a true sovereign, which he was for a long time, more precisely throughout the Middle Ages. See: R. Cândea, *Organizarea bisericească în Constituţie,* p. 478.

[45] An identical situation, of the papacy's inability to control this time, we meet in Transylvania of the 14th century when, between 1543 and 1568, the Diets of Turda, in three lines, and Aiud, proclaim the principle of religious freedom (1543), recognizing as religio it accepted Lutheranism (1550), Calvinism (1564), Unitarianism (1568), in a context in which ecumenism had not yet been invented and the persecution of the Orthodox majority, whose domination was actually aimed at. The great confessional peace was impossible to achieve.

[46] R. Cândea, *Organizarea bisericească în Constituţie,* p. 486.

We can say that the medieval period in the West could not enjoy the lights of Byzantium, just as the East did not feel the current of the Renaissance or the Enlightenment. This is where we find the great differences in European culture, which under the auspices of the Renaissance and Enlightenment made Western Europe "run towards the eshaton"[47] while the East remains staring at the miracle of the Resurrection. What seems important to us about the medieval period is that the Middle Ages basically constructed European identity. The anguish of the West, the freedom of the East, built Europe through Christianity. This seems to us to be a fantastic contribution of Christianity, which succeeded on the one hand in transforming the migratory invasions into a Carolingian Empire, thus converting nomadism, and on the other hand in making Byzantium the new European cultural centre, until the West was to find itself, and then in perpetuating the European cultural tradition, after the Ottoman conquests, in the East until the 19th century.

The assertion that Europe cannot rid itself of its cultural legacy does not give rise to totalitarianism, but only to an awareness of substance. The European value system will not oscillate between Christianity and something else according to the individual's preferences; this is not the reference system, we are not the measure:

> "The place of the believer who owes a debt of love to God and his fellow human beings and that of the citizen who owes a debt of patriotism and citizenship to nation and state has now simply been taken by the individual with his subjective desires, feelings and conceptions which have become the supreme value and the absolutely unique criterion of thought and behaviour"[48].

Moreover, it is precisely Christianity, as a defining and definitive cultural heritage for the European area, which must be at the heart of

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[47] Martin HAUSER, lecture delivered within the Master's degree in "Intercultural communication in the context of European integration", UNESCO Department-Chair, Bucharest, 2004.

[48] Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR, *Canonul Ortodoxiei. Sinodul VII Ecumenic*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2020, p. 1127.

European pluralism; Christianity is a religion of dialogue, of love of neighbour par excellence. In this context we understand to identify the European cultural heritage, to see the Europe of tomorrow. It is also from this perspective that we can analyse the political and economic guidelines on the one hand, and the possibilities of encounter between East and West on the other, and observe to what extent the paradigms of European integration represent the cultural heritage.

III. Orthodoxy "neighbouring" Europe - cultural truth or intentional error?

"European culture was therefore not born in the Germanic North with the «Faustian» man, as Spengler believed, but in the Byzantine Southeast «in 325 A.D. at Nicaea»"[49].

"Does the mysterious weight of Orthodoxy risk sinking Europe's boat?" - was the ironic and ignorant title of an article published in the newspaper "Le Monde" (June 1999), carrying with it the great question that has troubled masses of Westerners, intellectuals or not, worried about the fate of "their" future Europe. Surely they had not heard of Byzantine civilisation, the Fourth Crusade and the massive importation of cultural and economic capital from the Byzantine East, which had made the West drunk for several hundred years before. For "at the time when the civilization from which we Orthodox derive, the Byzantine and the Kievan civilization ..., was flourishing, the West was barbarous. ... Westerners learned from the Byzantines to use the fork and the knife"[50].

Many invoke the superiority of the Catholic and Protestant West over the Orthodox East but, as the motto of this chapter suggests, Europe cannot be conceived of as a Europe without the image of its integrity. This is why the idea of a Europe half thought out and half accepted is contradicted by its very subject: "If we were to try to eliminate the Christian element from Europe, that is, to imagine a Europe without Christianity, then we would

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[49] Diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR, *Canonul Ortodoxiei. Sinodul VII Ecumenic*, p. 1135.
[50] Alexandru PALEOLOGU, *Moştenirea creştină a Europei,* p. 78.

find ourselves faced with a hideous"[51]. Alexandru Paleologu argues along the same lines, in a broader register:

> "For Europe and for the world that the European spirit has embraced, there is only one civilisation: the Christian one. In the Christian world there are not two or three distinct civilisations. There are certain stylistic variants. The main ones are Orthodox and Catholic, and there is a kind of stylistic appendage of Catholicism, which is Protestantism. ... The stylistic variants of Christianity cannot go so far as to constitute fault lines"[52].

So the three layers that Valery includes when he defines the notion of "European" - the spirit of Greek thought, the Roman imprint and Christianity - are true.

Even if some native Orthodox disavow their religious strand of identity as of inferior spiritual quality[53], out of academic elegance we can ask, in this context, whether Orthodoxy is really a factor of regression? In order to convince ourselves that this approach is not new, we draw attention to a 1912 remark by Nicolae Iorga:

> "For some time we have been asked to do this: to leave Orthodoxy, in various forms, appealing even to the interests of our nationality which would be better served by another form of Christianity. Orthodoxy would be an old, somewhat old-fashioned, barbaric, oriental form and, therefore, in connection with the Westernism of our time, in connection with the Romanians' advance towards civilization in the new times, with the changes of soul that have taken place in our country and which are bringing us closer to Western Europe, moving us away from the East, we would be

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[51] Gabriel INGEBORG, "Identitate creştină în contextul european", in: *Identitate creştină şi dialog în noul context european,* the volume of the International Symposium with the same name, Alba Iulia, 5-7 mai 2006, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2006, p. 119.

[52] A. PALEOLOGU, *Moştenirea creştină a Europei,* pp. 73; 75.

[53] Horia-Roman PATAPIEVICI, *Politice,* Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1996, p. 63.

obliged to westernize ourselves and religiously, to Catholicize ourselves in order to disorient ourselves"[54].

Closer to us, around 1956, Dan Zamfirescu wrote:

"Starting from the uncontested hegemony that in the so-called modern era the culture and civilization of the Western countries exercised over the European East from a political and especially cultural point of view, the conclusion was drawn ... that this hegemony is the indisputable mark of the superiority of Roman Catholicism over Orthodoxy"[55].

Professor Teodor M. Popescu gives us a first answer. Here is what he said:

"Orthodoxy is accused of cultural impotence, saying that no Orthodox nation has taken the initiative in promoting modern culture. The statement is correct in the sense that modern culture as such is not the work of Orthodox peoples, but it cannot mean that Orthodoxy is anti-cultural by its very essence. The inferior cultural situation in which the European East finds itself is not due to its Orthodoxy, but to the political and social circumstances in which it found itself through the collapse of the cultural empire of Byzantium, before an Orthodox state was sufficiently formed to secure for the Church the peace which the Western Church had secured from the barbarians of the Eastern - Asian - Byzantine Empire for a thousand years"[56].

As a quasi-official answer, which shows the superficial construction, even from a logical point of view, of this assumption, we will reproduce below excerpts from the lecture of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

[54] Nicolea IORGA, *Să părăsim Ortodoxia?*, conferinţă la Vălenii de Munte, p. 4.

[55] Dan ZAMFIRESCU, *Ortodoxie şi Romano-Catolicism în specificul existenţei lor istorice,* Roza Vânturilor, Bucureşti, 1992. p. 7.

[56] Teodor M. Popescu, *Istoria creştinismului ca istorie a culturii,* Bucureşti, 1927, p.42

I, delivered on the occasion of his visit to Romania, in the hall of the Patriarchal Palace in Bucharest, on 27 October 1999:

"This axiomatic sentence is a perfect example of a slogan that may appeal to the masses, but has nothing to do with scientific truth. First of all, it links two different notions: the geographical concept of Europe and the spiritual meaning of Orthodoxy, so that it establishes geographical boundaries with a notion that is not meant to designate geographical spaces but religious beliefs. The conclusion that the boundaries of the European continent are determined by the territorial area in which Orthodoxy is not professed is indeed highly original. Logically, it entails the unacceptable idea that Europe would cease to exist if its peoples became Orthodox.

The possibility of Europe ceasing to exist provokes a certain reaction from one who - instinctively - feels European, because it threatens his existence and therefore provokes an indiscriminate, subconscious hostility to Orthodoxy, as that which would threaten his homeland and consequently threaten himself.

The theory in question may suggest that Europe's cultural heritage is incompatible with the cultural heritage of the Orthodox Church and may induce the idea that Europe's political leadership ends where the spiritual predominance of the Orthodox Church begins.

As for the incompatibility of Europe's cultural heritage with the cultural heritage of Orthodoxy, no one would have any objection if the dark pages of European civilization, such as: Fascism, Nazism, Nietzsche-ism, the Jewish Holocaust, the Inquisition, the Crusades, the Church's denying the cross and taking up the sword of the 100-year and 30-year religious wars respectively, the gas asphyxiations in Abyssinia, the - not uninteresting - sovereignty over the colonies that once made up a huge part of the globe, indulgences, the two world wars, the rationalization and secularization of the faith, the theory of the

death of God, and so many other deviations which - surely - are not manifestations of a higher civilization, but atrocities from which God has guarded the Orthodox Church and - for the most part - the Orthodox peoples.

If, on the contrary, we trace the good elements of European civilization, we will see that they come for the most part from Orthodox Byzantium, which has been the defender of ancient Greek tradition and literature, their Christianizer and the transmitter of the Christian treasure to the West, so that, in the end, at the foundations of European civilization lies Byzantium, i.e. the dominant expression of the Eastern Orthodox Church. To give a relevant example, we recall that the famous Roman law, of which continental Europe is proud, was not preserved in its birthplace, but in Byzantium, where, under the Emperor Justinian, the famous Corpus Juris Civilis was compiled, restructured and improved with the help of the Novellae in a Christian manner. This Corpus - with the additions made - was translated into Greek and later published in the form of the precious Basilicas (in several volumes) and other collections of laws, and was transmitted to Europe, reworked and applied to the Orthodox, even during the Ottoman rule.

From the point of differentiation between Western and Eastern Europe, to the appropriation exclusively of the name Europe by the Western part of Europe, there is an important scholarly deviation.

Such points of view are tools of the political struggle, but they have no scientific or logical basis.

We have thus arrived at the view widely discussed in this period, according to which the culture and civilisation of Western Europe, with the essential characteristics attributed to them, are founded on Catholicism and Protestantism and come into contradiction with Orthodoxy. The central idea of the approach of this much-discussed view is that the main foundation of civilisations is religious and, consequently, contradictions

between cultures and religions lead to armed conflicts or, in other words, conflicts have a religious underpinning.

The will of the peoples belonging to the Member States of the European Union was formally expressed in Article 128 (151 in another numbering) of the common text of the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union, which states that the European Union shall contribute to the development of the cultures of the Member States and respect their national and territorial polymorphism, and at the same time shall highlight their common cultural heritage and support and supplement the work of the Member States in preserving and safeguarding their cultural heritage of European significance.

This wording on the cultural heritage of European significance takes us back to the time before the Church schism, when Orthodoxy was present and active throughout Europe (Western and Eastern) and was therefore a very important part of the cultural heritage of Western Europe, regardless of the subsequent Church situation. Clearly, the Orthodox tradition in Western Europe of the last ten centuries is not a cultural heritage to be neglected.

The long list of holy men of Western Europe, honoured to this day and belonging to the undivided Orthodox Church, shows that neither Orthodoxy nor the quality of their faith can be ignored as part and basis of the cultural and especially the religious heritage of Western Europe, even if their descendants departed from their faith on certain points and created Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in opposition to Orthodoxy.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe - recently asked how to explain the fact that a political body such as this Council is dealing with monasticism at the end of the 20th century, the century of the technological and information explosion - replied, among other things, that "Western Europe cannot survive without truly spiritual sources", and that "the Orthodox Holy Mountain remains a common heritage and

a reference point for the whole of Europe". Orthodoxy has prevailed in Western Europe for ten centuries and is an essential part of Europe's cultural heritage.

This official, institutionalised position makes it clear that the European Union's statute does not provide for any kind of anti-Orthodox attitude. On the contrary, the European Union wishes to expand into the traditional Orthodox countries of Eastern Europe on the basis of economic and political, not religious, criteria. Therefore, the opinion of the Futurists on the other side of the Atlantic regarding the rivalry and religious conflict between Western and Eastern Europe does not express Europe's feelings, as this opinion promotes the disintegration, not the desired unification of Europe"[57].

Since, as we saw in the Patriarch's lecture, Orthodoxy is blamed for its absence from the European landscape for quite a long time, hence the conclusion that it does not qualify for recognition of any merit in the building of modern Europe, we advance the following reasoning:

This absence can be explained by the political situation of the time; at the Yalta Conference, Roosewelt and Churchill ceded to Stalin Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, which, apart from Greece - an exception paid for by an atrocious civil war - have since fallen within the Soviet Union's zone of influence. Driven by the political context, this "cold war" surrender and isolation is part of the continuity of the Christian East's painful millennia-long history: the Arab invasions, the Crusades, the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the fall of Constantinople, the five-century-long subjugation of the Christian peoples in the Balkans under the Turkish-Muslim yoke. They would not emerge from it - preserving their identity thanks to their attachment to the Orthodox Church - until the 19th century with the help of the West, which inoculated them with the nationalist virus of the Romantic era. After the First World War, triggered by the Sarajevo bombing, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece experienced an era

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[57] His Holiness Bartolomeu I, Lecture held in the great hall of the Patriarchal Palace in Bucharest on the evening of October 27, 1999, on the occasion of the visit to Romania carried out between October 24-27, 1999, in: *Ortodoxia*, LI (2000) 1-2, ianuarie-iunie.

of relative prosperity and economic and cultural development, with the formation of a very European intellectual class with liberating ideas. But Yalta and the Cold War led to a new break with Europe. Russia, whose elites had been nourished by European culture since the 18th century and which, through Dostoevsky, had given Western modernity one of its fathers, collapsed in 1917 into the barbarism of Soviet communism. Lenin, Stalin and their successors persecute the Church and violate human rights. The fall of the "Berlin Wall" in 1989 seemed to put an end to this isolation. The path to European unification seems open. But the effects of this opening up, greeted with enthusiasm, are ambiguous. As the Greek theologian Gheorghios Lemopoulos, deputy secretary-general of the OEEC, says, "sometimes it is easier to destroy than to build bridges"[58].

IV. Christianity - Europe's cultural vector

We start from the premise that the most cultured and civilised countries and nations on earth today are Christian ones: "Remarkably, the nations in which the cultural level is higher at present than in all others are precisely those in which religious reflection, in the strictest sense of the word, has had the greatest development"[59].

We therefore dare to affirm, together with Ilarion Felea, that "at the foundation of European culture lie: the book, school, science and Christian art"[60]. In Europe, all peoples, born of the mixture of native and invading nations, have the Christian book at their foundation. In the most ancient ordinance of monastic life, that of Saint Pachomius the Great of Egypt, it is laid down that no novice should enter a monastery without knowing and learning to read.

> "In the Middle Ages, at the time of the barbarian invasion ... only one establishment saved Europe from the danger of seeing its

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[58] Georges LEMOPOULOS, "Où donc l'orthodoxie s'arrête-t-elle?", in: *Le Service orthodoxe de Presse* (SOP), nr. 244, January 2000, pp. 24-26.

[59] Ilarion V. FELEA, *Religia culturii,* Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 1994, p. 226.

[60] Ilarion V. FELEA, *Religia culturii,* p. 227.

civilization destroyed: the Church. ... The monks taught children to write, read and write at a time when, apart from the Church, it was possible to live without a book, when the state had no cultural concerns and when an emperor, like Charles the Great, could barely read and never learned to write"[61].

Russia began its culture and progress through Christianity, with the Christianization of Duke Vladimir the Great. Thus the book and culture of the European peoples begins with their Christianisation. Then, from medieval church schools, universities are born. It should be remembered that the first known university in the Christian era of culture is the school of philosophy and science founded in 425 by the Byzantine emperor Theodosius II (408-450). In this cultural centre of Byzantium, science was taught (ten Greek and ten Latin professors, five Greek and five Latin rhetoricians, one philosopher and two jurists). On the initiative of Patriarch Sergius I, Emperor Heraclius founded a new high school called "Oikoumnikon Didacktikon", which was rebuilt around 850 by Caesar Bardas and protected by the emperors of the 10th century. By the 14th century, the higher schools of Constantinople had a beneficial influence on both the Arab East and the Latin West.

The first university, a higher school in the West, is that of Salermo, founded by the Benedictines in the first half of the 11th century. Then followed the universities of Sorbonne, Bologna, Oxford, etc. Universities are the creations of the Christian Middle Ages, which later gave birth to the Renaissance.

Science was also the focus of these schools, as evidenced by the large number of men of science who grew up in these schools, often dressed in monastic or priestly garb. Monk Hucbald is the creator of polyform music. The monk Alciun in the time of Charles the Great organised the education of France. Patriarch Mesrop established the Armenian, Caucasian and Gerogian alphabets in the 5th century. The priest Alexander Despina discovers the first optical lens, and the monk Roger Bacon is the father of modern optics. Monk Joffre founds the first neurological and psychiatric

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[61] Ilarion V. FELEA, *Religia culturii*, p. 228.

hospital in Valencia. Jesuit Bonilau laid the foundation for infinitesimal calculus in 1618. Monk Berthold Swartz discovered gunpowder. The priest Regio Montanus and the canon Copiernicus established the solar system. Mendel is the discoverer of the laws of heredity. The first bill for workers' pensions is due to Bishop Freppel. In the 20th century the Abbé Rousselot is the creator of experimental phonetics. All this reveals the creative genius of Christianity in that it "puts to work all the creative energies of the human spirit and is thus the first and most powerful factor of progress in the culture of Europe, both in its beginnings and in its imposing development"[62].

Christianity has not only not been a hindrance to progress but is the most important stimulus and the most obvious creative, inspiring and guiding factor of European culture. The history of Christianity is the history of European culture, right up to the present day:

Will you realize the influence of the Christian religion on civilization [asks Ernest Legouve]? Imagine for a moment that it didn't exist. ... Start with the plastic arts. Go into all the museums and take off the walls ... the icon of Christ. Make all the paintings of the Virgin and God disappear. Take away all canvases and statues of saints, martyrs and apostles. After painting and sculpture, move on to architecture and tear down the cathedrals. After architecture, music. Delete Handel, Palestrina, Bach and many other composers. Remove the works of Bethoven, Mozart, Pergolesi, Rossini and all those who were inspired by the Christian religion. Then enter the sphere of thought and poetry. Leave out Bossuet, Pascal, Fenelon. ... Follow the name of Christ in the verses of Lamartine, V. Hugo and Musset. But that's not all. Take a step further. Destroy the hospitals built under Christian inspiration. Finally, wipe away all the traces left on the earth by the blood flowing from the wounds of the one who is also called the Crucified One. After this work, turn your eyes. Embrace with a glance the twenty centuries that are behind you and look without fear, if you can, at the void that the Cross would leave in the world[63].

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[62] I. V. Felea, *Religia culturii*, p. 234.
[63] I. V. Felea, *Religia culturii*, p. 244.

V. Conclusion: Christianity - a paradigm of integration (Unity in diversity) but also a vector of cohesion

The topic of culture and, implicitly, of Christianity as cultural heritage, depository and cultural vehicle alike, seems to be a sensitive subject rather than a unifying policy. The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe is one of the first-rate documents that outline the orientation and priorities of Europe today and tomorrow. However, the legislative discourse focuses mainly on guaranteeing cultural diversity. Nothing serious, as long as we don't cling to the elements that differentiate us, at the expense of those that bring us closer. We observe, with some sadness, that the European legislative regulations regrettably focus around the notion of a "humanism" emptied of the transcendent. In this way, the premises of a Europe fragmented and atomized down to the level of the individual are created; an intelligent, non-cultural but, at the same time, ultra-democratic, ethical and rational individual, and each individual must embrace the vocation of a European "common destiny". It seems that reality claims other colors, because the entry into one is announced: era of de-Westernization and de-secularization, ... [in which] neither the future of the world nor that of Christianity anymore belongs to the West or to a secularized Europe, threatened extremely obviously by the very real specter of physical extinction by suicide represented by the phenomenon of its demographic implosion. ... Traditional European Christianities were ... rather cultures of life, which provided the rise of European civilization and culture with its indispensable demographic base. Secular totalitarian citadels turned out to be giant factories of death. ... the European secular individual runs the risk in a very physical sense of becoming the last European man[64].

In this situation, can we consider changing the integrative message to a Christian one as a possible solution? Maybe in this way the West will revise its attitude towards Christianity. That Messianic Pax that Mr. Pleșu described as a supranational principle in Christ means, first of all, "bringing back to the fore the «next gender», the similarities"[65]. Therefore,

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[64] Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei. Sinodul VII Ecumenic*, pp. 1154-1155.
[65] "Christ manifests as a unifying principle, bracketing the multiplicity of angels. In

any xenophobic discourse stops here, and this is also where Christian Europe begins, as unity in diversity. Or, this notion also includes, at least from a cultural point of view, Eastern Europe. Eastern culture was formed as a depository and continuation of the values of Byzantium. The only valid model for all of Eastern Europe from 1453 to the 19th century remains the Byzantine one. The period of the Ottoman conquests did not let the East plunge into the adventure of the spirit. If we look at the Eastern cultural problem in the parameters of freedom, which is important for our approach, in comparison with the perspective of the West, then we will discover a different approach: the East remained on the model offered by Byzantium. Further it did not evolve, but settled, Christianity becoming not only the only form of freedom that, under the Ottomans, the Easterners still allowed, but also an identity problem: "The Church saved the language, culture and customs of the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and Romanians. Then the realization of a true fusion - even confusion - between ethnic and religious affiliation was completed"[66].

From this perspective, it seems to us that the meeting of the Orthodox East with the European community should not feed discourses of the Catholicism vs. Orthodoxy. We believe that the mission of Eastern Europe is to restore the doctrine of freedom and solidarity in a genuine and Christian way.

Of course, the European space enjoys the benefits of pluralism in general, religious pluralism not being a reality that affects our approach in any way. Christianity in Europe is threatened not by the danger of totalitarian discourse, but rather by the danger of its minimization, of its passing into the sphere of ridicule. If the West of Europe suffers from a certain terrible individualism, which makes faith a strictly personal problem, which gathers individuals in the Church and transforms them into communities, but also segmented ones, subjects of mergers and segregations, then the current social mutations have all chances to turn faith into a taboo subject.

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every gesture and in every word of His, the model of a communion of a different type than that of blood is proposed, a spiritual communion, whose theme is of a universal, supra-ethnic order". See: Andrei Pleșu, *Despre îngeri,* Humanitas, București, 2016, p. 165.

[66] Olivier Clement, *Adevăr și libertate*, p. 120.

In this context, our discourse becomes decidedly inappropriate. But this is also where the contribution of Eastern Europe comes into play. In the East, the Church still claims the community, a community that is already identified and identifiable. Eastern Christianity was and is a problem of cultural identity and more. Therefore, Eastern Europe has the potential and the responsibility to bring the issue of European cultural heritage to the fore.

Summarizing, we affirm that the success of the European project, in the long term, will be facilitated to the extent that it learns to promote - because the West of Europe must learn -, and capitalize - because the East of Europe must be aware of and preserve -, Christianity as cultural heritage, as an integrating element, as what unites us in the European space.

We believe that we need a return to older, but not ancient realities, without abandoning the present. Under the phrase "Responsibility for the truth rests with everyone" a different European project could take place, a Christian one par excellence, as it highlights Christianity as what brings us closer; a challenge and a finality at the same time, which could give us the measure of what we want to be, the direction we advance and the destination we want. What seems to us that we can restore in the European paradigm is not the problem of circulating harmful doctrines, but that of the responsibility of the soul.