

THE PARISH AS AN EMBASSY: THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA IN THE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AFTER 1990

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Title: The Parish as an Embassy: The Role of the Diaspora in the Cultural and Religious Diplomacy of the Romanian Orthodox Church after 1990

Abstract: This article examines the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Romania's cultural and religious diplomacy after 1990, focusing on the function of diaspora parishes as spaces of identity preservation, cultural representation, and social engagement. Building upon the renewed significance of religion in international relations after the Cold War, the study explores the relationship between public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and religious diplomacy, highlighting the contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the maintenance of transnational ties between Romanian communities abroad and their homeland. Particular attention is given to the Romanian Orthodox diaspora as a religious and cultural actor operating within increasingly secularized and multicultural societies. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines ecclesiastical history, diaspora studies, and the sociology of religion, the article analyzes several interpretive tensions characteristic of contemporary diaspora life, including secularization and faith, tradition and acculturation, canonical identity and civic integration. The study argues that Romanian Orthodox parishes abroad function not only as religious institutions but also as informal cultural embassies that facilitate intercultural dialogue, promote social cohesion, and contribute to Romania's international visibility. At the same time, the article examines the challenges facing the Romanian Orthodox diaspora, including secularization, generational change, multicultural integration, and institutional limitations. The conclusion emphasizes that the effectiveness of Romanian Orthodox religious diplomacy depends upon the Church's ability to preserve its confessional identity while constructively engaging the cultural and social realities of contemporary host societies.

Keywords: *Romanian Orthodox Church; Diaspora; Cultural diplomacy; Religious diplomacy; National identity;*

Introduction

After the fall of communism and throughout the 1990s, religion became one of the factors whose influence has continuously increased on the stage of international relations, ideological confrontation being replaced by cultural confronta-

tion, with religion becoming a criterion that defines certain civilizations and nations (White & McAllister, 1997). In this paper, we attempted to highlight the emergence of the religious factor in the sphere of international relations following the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, as well as the implications of the Church as an institution, specifically the Romanian Orthodox Church, in cultural diplomacy through the preservation of values, history, and culture after 1990 and following Romania's accession to the European Union, from the perspective of the Romanian Orthodox diaspora. The Orthodox Church played an important role in the life of Romanians throughout history, a role recognized by the first constitutions of the Romanian state (Gutan, 2021).

Regarding its diplomatic role abroad, the main activities of the Romanian Patriarchate focused on cultivating and deepening its traditional ties with the sister Orthodox Churches, as well as promoting inter Christian cooperative relations on the one hand, while on the other hand, an important component of the Romanian Patriarchate's activity has also been represented by pastoral care for Romanian Orthodox communities abroad, aimed at preserving and cultivating their identity and connection with the mother country and at affirming the values of Orthodoxy and the Romanian ethos in relations with the people of those respective countries (Administrația Patriarhală, 2018). Thus, alongside the external diplomacy promoted by the Romanian state through embassies and consulates in different countries, the Romanian Orthodox Church also ensures and shapes a socio cultural diplomacy through Romanian Orthodox parishes abroad.

The external activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church is coordinated through the Sector for Church Relations, Interreligious Relations, and External Church Communities within the Romanian Patriarchate, which, among other responsibilities, collaborates with state institutions that have competencies in the field of foreign affairs (M.A.E., S.S.C., Presidential Administration, etc).

Defining the Main Concepts

This section provides an overview of the definitions and meanings of the main conceptual frameworks that will be used throughout this paper. In defining these concepts, we begin from meanings and definitions already established in the specialized literature. Nevertheless, for some of these concepts, where necessary, we will attempt to propose our own definitions, based on the objectives and the specific nature of this study.

Public Diplomacy

With regard to public diplomacy, this is a relatively new concept, yet one whose roots in terms of content and purpose can be found throughout history, referring to winning the goodwill of a foreign public, including everything related to policymakers, through transparent and open presentations, discussions, and communication that replace unpredictable and endless secret negotiations and even the

use of military force in order to achieve a certain political objective (Naumescu, 2014). Hans Tuch, former director of the United States Information Agency, defines public diplomacy as a process through which the governments of a country communicate with foreign publics in an attempt to explain the ideas and ideals of that nation, its institutions and culture, as well as its national interests and current policies. Diplomat John Brown considers that public diplomacy is a process involving three main roles: information dissemination, education, and cultural exchanges (Gugeac & Porcescu, 2010). Specialists who have addressed this subject further argue that three essential preconditions must exist in order to speak about public diplomacy:

1. the existence of democratic regimes,
2. the formation of multilateral frameworks of communication among state actors, and last but not least,
3. the establishment of the information technology era in which information circulates with astonishing speed (Gugeac & Porcescu, 2010).

Christopher Ross Pillars considers that public diplomacy is based on seven extremely important pillars. These seven principles are the following:

1. Ensuring that the external audience understands policy as it truly is, and not as others say or think it is,
2. The necessity of explaining policy by demonstrating the rationality and justification of its fundamental values,
3. Advancing consistent, truthful, and convincing appeals to the international community,
4. The ability to adapt appeals to the target audience, whose constituent elements are constantly studied,
5. Carrying out activities not only on narrow target segments, but also through written and electronic mass media aimed at broad audiences,
6. Cooperation with various partners in order to reach new representatives of the target public, and
7. Active international communication and exchange programs (Ross, 2021).

Public diplomacy is no longer the exclusive mission of career diplomats. It may also be carried out by a series of elite individuals, either within governmental agencies or within civil society and nongovernmental organizations. The role of the diplomat is being redefined. The diplomat becomes a facilitator in the creation and management of the trust based relationships that emerge. The theory and practice of public diplomacy have been dominated by American, Canadian, and British experiences (Diplomația, 2021). Western public diplomacy primarily targeted regions of conflict, closed systems, and areas with significant informational deficiencies behind enemy lines. The evolution and practice of public diplomacy were significantly shaped and contextualized by the Cold War and by the political context in Central and Eastern European countries. Scholars and practitioners in the field of public diplomacy remain cautious in attributing credit for the success achieved with the fall of communism. Nevertheless, it is certain that Western and

American public diplomacy succeeded to a certain extent in exerting influence through radio broadcasting, cultural and educational exchange programs, as well as other instruments of public diplomacy (Snow, 2009).

Cultural Diplomacy

The meaning of the concept of cultural diplomacy cannot be properly understood without explaining the terms culture and diplomacy, which lie at the foundation of this concept. In practice, the term culture is often associated only with art, literature, and other “visible” components of culture. In the context of cultural diplomacy, however, culture should be viewed in a broader sense as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or of a social group” which “encompasses, in addition to art and literature, ways of life, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs” (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001). The term diplomacy has different meanings within theories of international relations: it may refer to diplomatic activity or to a foreign service as an institution, or it may be used as a synonym for foreign policy. In the context of cultural diplomacy, the term diplomacy should be understood in the third and most common sense, namely as an instrument for implementing foreign policy through peaceful means (Pajtinka, 2014).

Cultural diplomacy is often positioned as the most important subcategory of public diplomacy. Thus, it may be defined as the sum of those connecting actions between governments and people abroad established specifically through artistic and intellectual resources and activities. In his classical definition, Cummings characterizes it as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (Zamorano, 2021). Louis Bélanger summarizes cultural diplomacy as “those foreign policy activities concerned with culture, education, science, and to a certain extent technical cooperation; in other words, those related to the spiritual sphere.” Cultural diplomacy also involves the systematic intervention of governments in the fields of the arts, sciences, and other cultural expressions as the basis for an official categorization of national identity (Zamorano, 2016).

At present, cultural diplomacy is characterized by the multitude of agents promoting it at different levels and by the increasing importance of supranational organizations. Apart from the government of a nation, people, artists, emigrants, and others also participate in this complex activity. Their exchanges are usually predetermined by official definitions of culture and are operationalized by governmental institutions and agencies that shape and promote a group of artistic and cultural goods and activities identified with official cultural policy and national identity. This combination of governmental policies of international cultural promotion, rooted as a general strategy, may constitute established cultural diplomacy (Zamorano, 2016).

Religious Diplomacy

An entire range of diplomatic initiatives may fall under the umbrella of what is called “religious diplomacy”. In the language of diplomats, faith based diplomacy is referred to as “track two diplomacy”, meaning diplomacy practiced by nonstate actors, officials, nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, and private citizens. In particular, it is rooted in religions, their texts, practices, traditions, and spirituality, with two guiding vectors around which everything revolves: first, the proper orientation of politics toward the transcendental, and second, the active role of the divine in human affairs. Practitioners of religious diplomacy will certainly rely on secular expertise in conflict resolution and analysis, political science and philosophy, as well as experience in national security, diplomacy, community building, development, and related fields. However, their center and guiding compass will always be their faith (Cox & Philpott, 2003). This type of approach can also be understood within the broader framework of political theology, a topic that has been extensively investigated since its first modern formulation in 1922. Authors belonging to different confessional and cultural spaces have reflected on the manner in which religious principles, especially the Christian ethic of love and responsibility toward the other, may shape political discourse and practice, contributing to the creation of bridges between theology, culture, and the public sphere. In this sense, religious diplomacy may be regarded as one of the contemporary expressions of the dialogue between faith and politics. (Morariu, 2017).

At the core of religious diplomacy lies an old and rather rhetorical question: “how does my particular religious tradition contribute to a universal agreement regarding issues of human conduct and political community?” (Rees, 2004). Resources therefore consist in the tradition of monotheistic religions, which may enable adherents to reflect upon their history and religion in a redemptive manner, to give meaning and dignity to suffering, and to offer the promise of authentic healing and forgiveness. Religious diplomacy is therefore, at its core, always oriented toward the divine (Troy, 2008).

Diaspora

To begin with, etymological analysis shows that the term “diaspora” is of eminently Greek origin. The Diaspora concept derives from Greek: διασπείρω (diaspeíro), and is founded on the translation of the Aramaic word (Galut). It is based on the verb speiro (to cut) and the prefix dia (on) in Ancient Greek (this term referred to migration and colonization). In Aramaic the term initially referred to Jewish colonization outside Palestine after Babylonian slavery, but it has also acquired a new general connotation which designates people who set away from the settlements of ancestors (Lazăr, 2021). Thus, the verb διασπείρω (diaspeíro), which translates as “to scatter,” “to spread,” “to separate,” or “to disperse,” forms the basis of the modern term “diaspora.” Historically speaking, this term first designated

the dispersion of the Jews. We refer to several events in the history of the Jewish people: first, in the years 722 and 597 there occurred the two deportations to the lands of Assyria and Babylon. Second, similar movements took place in countries such as Persia, Armenia, and others. Third, several centuries later, during the time when Christ was already among the Jews, they had spread throughout the most important cities of the Greco Roman world. On another note, the Jews themselves used the same term offensively and with superiority toward other peoples. Very often for the Jews, the Gentiles or non Jews were regarded as a scattered multitude of little value. Christianity in turn used the same term to designate communities living in different provinces of the Roman Empire. For Christians, the diaspora, meaning the entire earth, was nothing other than the place of pilgrimage (Constanțelos, 1979).

The Romanian Orthodox Church in State Diplomacy

History attests to the fact that within the medieval state formations preceding the establishment of the Romanian state, Orthodox Metropolitans played an active role in political and diplomatic life (Patriarhia Română, 2018). The national and social revolution of 1821, which led to the creation of the modern Romanian state, also opened a new era for the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Organic Regulations prepared, in an initial phase, the unification of the Church organization in Wallachia and Moldavia. In January 1859, the first stage of the Romanian political unification process took place through the union of Moldavia and Wallachia under the leadership of a single ruler, Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859–1866). On December 3, 1864, through a decree signed by him, the “autocephaly” or “independence” of the Church within the new state and the establishment of a General Synod of this Church were proclaimed, a measure absolutely necessary for the achievement of ecclesiastical unification. For the same purpose, on January 11, 1865, Metropolitan Nifon of Ungrovlahia was granted the title of “Primate Metropolitan”.

After the proclamation of Romania’s state independence on May 9, 1877, new negotiations followed with the Patriarchate in view of the recognition of autocephaly, which was merely a formal act, since the Romanian Church had already enjoyed a special status in comparison with other Orthodox Churches, namely a relative autocephaly in relation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Only on April 25, 1885, did the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim IV issue the customary “*tomos*” recognizing the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Romania (Patriarhia Română, 2018). Following the achievement of state independence and the recognition of autocephaly, the Romanian Orthodox Church supported abroad the Romanian Church in Bukovina, specifically the Diocese of Chernivtsi, while Bukovina was under Habsburg rule, as well as the Church in Moldavia beyond the Prut River, where it supported Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni in opening the theological seminary in Chișinău and printing a new Romanian edition of the Bible, under conditions in which the Church in Moldavia beyond the Prut was under the authority of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in Saint Petersburg (Patriarhia Română, 2018).

The interwar period marked the establishment of the Patriarchate. The Law for the establishment of the Patriarchate was promulgated on February 25, 1925, and on November 1, 1925, the investiture and enthronement of the first Patriarch, Miron Cristea (1925–1939), took place.

After the events of December 1989, the Romanian Orthodox Church, through the voices of lay intellectuals, clergy, and through the support and involvement of the hierarchs of the Holy Synod, became concerned with European issues and Romania's integration into the North Atlantic structures and the European Union (Conovici, 2005). Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania stated that "we have always been Europeans and that it cannot be a matter of our 'entry into Europe,' but rather of rediscovering ourselves in Europe, or more precisely of Europe rediscovering itself in us" (Anania, 2021).

In March 1997, His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church, responding to the national interest, requested through a letter addressed to the two high hierarchs of the Romanians in America, organizations which continued to function separately even after the fall of communism in Romania (Gârdan, 2014), namely Archbishop Victorin and Archbishop Natanael, as well as Archbishop Spyridon of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and Canada, to undertake *démarches* on behalf of Romanian Americans before the United States Congress in support of Romania's accession to NATO (Goga, 2006).

Likewise, the Romanian Orthodox Church was among the signatories of the Declaration of Religious Denominations regarding Romania's integration into the European Union, signed at Snagov on May 16, 2000. The leaders of the religious denominations in Romania expressed their support, as well as that of their Churches and denominations, for Romania's integration into the structures of the European Union (Gabor, 2006).

Furthermore, the diplomatic role of the Romanian Orthodox Church between 1990 and 2007 was also manifested through the decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church on February 23, 2000, to open a permanent Romanian Orthodox representation to the European institutions. This representation had the role of supporting Romania's accession process to the European Union, and after accession, of improving the informational flow between the Romanian state and the European Court of Human Rights (Carp, 2005).

Last but not least, through the international conferences and congresses in which they participated, the hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church, through sustained lobbying efforts among sister Churches and denominations from states already members of the European Union, contributed to Romania's foreign policy and its efforts to integrate into European and North Atlantic structures (Streza, 2006).

Romanian Diaspora and Religious Diplomacy

According to Article 4, paragraph 2 of the Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church

establishes relations of dialogue and cooperation with the State and with various institutions in order to fulfill its pastoral, spiritual cultural, educational, and social philanthropic mission. In this regard, externally, the Church cooperates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to support Romanian communities in the diaspora, which have become increasingly numerous following Romania's accession to the European Union. Thus, the Romanian Orthodox Church ensures socio cultural ties with the mother country on the one hand, while also culturally representing Romania through participation in conferences, exhibitions, concerts, and other events in various states (Sfântul Sinod, 2007). In Europe, socio cultural diplomacy is ensured through the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Western and Southern Europe, which territorially comprises Western Europe, and the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Germany, Central and Northern Europe. Romanian culture is also promoted in other parts of the world through Romanian establishments, as well as through hierarchical structures such as the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the United States of America, the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Canada, the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Australia and New Zealand, and the Orthodox representations in Tokyo, Osaka, South Africa, Jerusalem, and Damascus (Sfântul Sinod, 2007).

After 2007, the Romanian European diaspora experienced unprecedented development, as well as missionary involvement from the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church. However, this reality is the result of more than one hundred years of migration and political, economic, social, and other upheavals. According to current statistical data, there are approximately 3,400,000 Romanians in European states, spread both across European Union member states and in other Balkan and Eastern European states. Since 2015, Romania has had the highest emigration growth rate: 7.3 percent. The increased speed of intra European mobility makes it imperative for the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church to pay greater attention to this phenomenon, since, through joint cooperation, they can assist Romanian citizens in the European diaspora in their various needs. A particular characteristic of the Romanian European diaspora is that it is better assumed and understood by the institutions of the Romanian state, especially consulates, through the existing church structures there, especially parishes, which at the local level know best the realities and needs of the community and constantly take its pulse. For this very reason, parishes and dioceses are often consulted by embassies and or consulates regarding various aspects that beneficially influence the life of Romanian communities (Pop, 2021).

The past mission of the Church in the diaspora and its present mission share continuity, while what differentiates them is their scale. The contemporary Romanian Orthodox diaspora may also be understood through several analytical binaries frequently employed in migration studies and the sociology of religion. First, the relationship between secularization and faith illustrates the tension experienced by Orthodox communities that seek to preserve religious commitment within increasingly secularized societies (Berger, 1999; Davie, 2000). Second, the Romanian diaspora functions not merely as a dispersed population but also as an instrument of

confessional and cultural diffusion, facilitating the transmission of Romanian traditions, language, and Orthodox spirituality beyond national borders (Levitt, 2007; Vertovec, 2009). Equally relevant is the relationship between tradition and acculturation. Acculturation refers to the process through which migrants adopt certain cultural elements of the host society while preserving significant aspects of their original identity (Berry, 1997). In the case of Romanian Orthodox communities, this process is reflected in the gradual adaptation of pastoral practices to local contexts, the use of multiple languages in liturgical and educational activities, and participation in civic and cultural initiatives organized by local institutions. As recent hermeneutical approaches have shown, ecclesial spaces themselves become places where cultural identities are continuously interpreted, negotiated, and reconfigured through interaction with new social and cultural environments (Lazăr, 2025). Consequently, acculturation should not be understood merely as a process of assimilation, but as a dynamic encounter between tradition and cultural adaptation that allows diaspora communities to remain faithful to their religious heritage while engaging constructively with contemporary society. At the same time, diaspora communities frequently navigate the relationship between canonical constraints and civil rights, particularly in matters concerning religious education, public recognition, and cooperation with non-Orthodox institutions. Finally, the tension between intolerance and multicultural acceptance highlights the broader social framework within which Romanian Orthodox communities operate, encouraging forms of dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence while preserving confessional identity (Banchoff, 2008; Casanova, 1994).

Today, the Romanian Orthodox Church is not present only in the great European capitals, but makes itself felt through hundreds of Romanian Orthodox parishes in European Union states and beyond. The mission of the Church in the diaspora is an evolving process, still active, which developed from the spiritual need of those who left far from their country and from the necessity of a real spiritual life. In the diaspora, the Orthodox Church faces more intensely the challenges of secularization and their effects on its faithful. Therefore, the mission it carries out is one of adaptation and is sometimes atypical in comparison with the mission in our country (Pop, 2021). Although Chapter II, Section 1, Relations between the State and Religious Denominations, Article 9, states that “there is no state religion in Romania; the state is neutral toward any religious belief or atheistic ideology,” the Romanian Orthodox Church is the only one mentioned by name when addressing the role of Churches in Romanian history and society: “Art. 7. (2) The Romanian state recognizes the important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church and of the other Churches and religious denominations recognized by Romania’s national history and in the life of Romanian society” (Secretariatul de Stat, 2021).

Regarding the practice of cultural diplomacy by the Romanian Orthodox Church, the activity of the religious institution is evident especially in the case of the Republic of Moldova, where part of the Orthodox clergy is subordinated to the Patriarchate of Bucharest. In this regard, the Romanian Orthodox Church cooperates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to facilitate the activity

of Bessarabian priests. One example is Patriarch Daniel's intervention to obtain diplomatic and service passports for a number of prelates from the Republic of Moldova. Through such actions, the Romanian Orthodox Church not only supports the promotion of Romanian culture in the neighboring state, but also ensures points of political and social influence through the subordination of the Metropolis of Bessarabia (Necșuțu, 2021).

Following Romania's accession to the European Union, the external activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church diversified. Thus, within the socio cultural diplomacy promoted by the Romanian Orthodox Church in the new European context, Orthodox religious NGOs play an important role. They undertake humanitarian actions in the social sphere at the level of the European Union, while also promoting social cohesion and the integration of the Romanian diaspora abroad. Romanian Orthodox religious NGOs such as Diaconia (Catalogul Resurselor, 2021), whose aim is to fulfill the social and charitable dimension of the Romanian Orthodox Church by helping disadvantaged categories of society, including the elderly, children, and needy families, and Federația Filantropia (Catalogul Resurselor, 2021), which functions with the blessing of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church and brings together 16 of the most active NGO's working in the social field in the dioceses of the Romanian Patriarchate in Romania and abroad, signed a Framework Partnership Agreement with the Directorate General of the European Commission for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion for the period 2018 to 2021. Thus, these religious nongovernmental organizations, supported by the Romanian Orthodox Church and the European Union, ensure a favorable social framework for Romanian communities and others throughout the European Union, with a view to obtaining employment and ensuring a decent standard of living (Perhoc, 2017).

There are actions encouraging cultural associations that carry out ethnic preservation activities in those areas, but the future of these communities does not appear very encouraging (Armași, 2011). For Romanians in Serbia, namely in the province of Vojvodina, the Timok Valley, and the Morava Valley, where Romanian communities are numerous and better organized, both the political authorities of Romania and the Romanian Orthodox Church are involved in supporting their identity by obtaining legitimate religious rights, sending priests, providing contributions to their salaries, donating books and liturgical objects, and offering scholarships to young people who wish to study theology in Romania (Armași, 2011). For Romanians in these areas, faith has been and remains the strongest element for preserving not only religious identity, but also national, cultural, and linguistic identity. "Maintaining ties with the mother country gave them the hope and peace that they were in permanent spiritual communion with the community from which they had separated and that, through this, they were in communion with the entire Church" (Moraru, 2006).

The Romanian Orthodox Church, through its priests and parishes in Europe, is permanently present among Romanian communities, and this continuous contact decisively contributes to solving certain social, economic, identity related,

cultural, and other problems. It should be emphasized that the Romanian European diaspora also contributes economically, socially, and demographically to the wellbeing of the Romanian state and of the Church. Thus, there is mutual support: Romanian citizens are supported by the Romanian State and the Church, and, conversely, the Romanian State and the Church are supported by Romanians. Therefore, cultivating good relations and the social, ecclesial, identity related, cultural, and other wellbeing of Romanians in the European diaspora is self evident (Pop, 2021). The Romanian European diaspora involves a scheme of at least three elements that must not be separated: the people, namely Romanians, the Romanian State, and the Romanian Orthodox Church. In this sense, no failure to assume the responsibilities belonging to each constitutive element of the scheme outlined above can be accepted, especially since in the West Romanian Orthodox believers encounter an autonomous conception of life: “God no longer has any spiritual significance for human life, and the secularized world in which we live is dominated more by earthly and bodily values and less by heavenly and spiritual ones” (Sima, 2007).

In this sense, without giving life a theonomous meaning, human beings will not find peace, wellbeing, or fulfillment in society, regardless of the European country in which they live, nor will they find their purpose in this world, since “in his freedom, man decided to bind the world to himself instead of binding it to God. Through his decision to direct the world toward himself, man limited himself and nature to the framework of the laws that govern creation” (Zizioulas, 2008). The Romanian diaspora in Europe has a special vocation (Brie, 1989) to restore to this continent its Christian seal and to be, in the midst of the European polis, without becoming a super diaspora or a sum of super communities, a spiritual ferment. For this, however, the Romanian Orthodox Church, through its mission, must imprint upon the Romanian diaspora a well defined purpose, namely that of being a path for Europeans toward the true path: Christ the Truth (In 14, 6). We are aware that this was not the goal of the Romanians who came to European countries, since their goal was economic and social. Yet the current missionary reality demonstrates that there is a search for the supreme goal, a spiritual stirring above the European bustle, a spiritual tremor translated into the gathering of Romanian believers around the altars of more than 600 Orthodox parishes and branches in Europe, precisely because, beyond worldly living, there is a powerful ascent toward the heavenly homeland.

Romanian Orthodox Diaspora in an Ecumenical and Multicultural Environment

One of the most significant transformations experienced by the Romanian Orthodox diaspora after 1990 has been its integration into increasingly pluralistic and multicultural societies. Unlike the historical context in which Orthodoxy represented the religious tradition of a majority population, Romanian Orthodox communities in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania function as minority

religious groups within societies characterized by cultural diversity, religious pluralism, and advanced secularization (Davie, 2000).

This new context has generated opportunities as well as challenges. On the one hand, Romanian Orthodox parishes have become important centers for preserving religious and cultural identity. On the other hand, they have been compelled to interact continuously with representatives of other Christian denominations, public institutions, and civil society organizations.

Consequently, the Romanian parish abroad has gradually acquired a role that extends beyond liturgical and sacramental functions, becoming an intermediary between Romanian communities and the host society (Levitt, 2007). In many Western countries, Romanian Orthodox communities initially lacked adequate worship spaces. As a result, numerous Orthodox parishes developed cooperative relationships with Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed communities, which offered church buildings for religious services. These practical arrangements contributed to the development of mutual trust and facilitated forms of ecumenical coexistence based on shared Christian values. Although doctrinal differences remained intact, cooperation at the local level often generated constructive dialogue and mutual understanding (Casanova, 1994).

The Romanian Orthodox Church has also participated in various ecumenical structures and inter-Christian initiatives through its dioceses abroad. Such involvement has enabled Romanian communities to become visible actors within the broader religious landscape of their host countries. Participation in public debates concerning migration, social integration, family values, religious freedom, and social justice has strengthened the Church's capacity to contribute to the common good while simultaneously promoting Orthodox perspectives (Banchoff, 2008).

At the same time, multicultural societies require a delicate balance between preserving identity and encouraging integration. Romanian Orthodox communities face the challenge of maintaining linguistic, liturgical, and cultural continuity while avoiding isolation from the surrounding social environment. In this regard, successful diaspora communities have demonstrated that the preservation of religious identity does not contradict civic integration. Rather, a strong religious identity may facilitate social participation by providing moral resources, social networks, and a sense of belonging (Vertovec, 2009).

Therefore, Romanian Orthodox parishes should not be viewed exclusively as institutions preserving national identity. They also function as spaces of intercultural encounter, contributing to social cohesion and promoting constructive relations between Romanian communities and the wider society. In this sense, their diplomatic role acquires both a cultural and an ecumenical dimension, extending beyond the boundaries of the Romanian ethnic community.

Challenges and Limits of Romanian Orthodox Religious Diplomacy

While the Romanian Orthodox diaspora has achieved remarkable growth and institutional consolidation after 1990, several challenges continue to affect its

long-term development and its capacity to function as an effective instrument of cultural and religious diplomacy.

The first challenge is secularization. Most Romanian Orthodox communities abroad operate within societies where religious participation has significantly declined over recent decades (Berger, 1999). The secular environment influences not only relations between Church and society but also the religious practices of Romanian migrants themselves. The younger generations born or educated abroad are often less attached to traditional forms of religious life and may gradually distance themselves from ecclesial participation.

A second challenge concerns the transmission of identity across generations. For many first-generation migrants, the parish functions as a space where language, traditions, and religious customs are preserved. However, subsequent generations frequently develop hybrid identities that combine elements of Romanian heritage with those of the host culture. This process may generate tensions between the desire for cultural preservation and the realities of social integration (Levitt, 2007).

Another limitation derives from the fragmentation of Orthodox presence in the Western world. The coexistence of multiple Orthodox jurisdictions often creates administrative and pastoral difficulties. Although Orthodox communities generally maintain cordial relations, the absence of a unified Orthodox administrative structure in many countries may reduce the visibility and effectiveness of Orthodoxy as a collective actor within public life. Financial and organizational challenges should also be considered. Many diaspora parishes depend heavily on volunteer work and limited financial resources. (Johnston, 2003). Priests frequently assume multiple responsibilities extending beyond pastoral ministry, including administrative, social, educational, and cultural tasks. Such realities may limit the capacity of local communities to develop larger cultural and diplomatic initiatives.

Finally, the relationship between ethnic identity and religious identity requires careful management. Excessive emphasis on ethnicity risks transforming the parish into a primarily national institution, while excessive adaptation to local contexts may weaken the distinctive characteristics of Orthodox tradition. The future success of Romanian Orthodox communities abroad will largely depend on their ability to maintain a balanced relationship between these two dimensions.

Consequently, the diplomatic potential of the Romanian Orthodox diaspora should not be idealized. Its achievements are significant, yet they coexist with structural challenges generated by secularization, demographic change, multiculturalism, and institutional limitations. Recognizing these realities allows for a more balanced and academically rigorous evaluation of the Church's role in contemporary international and intercultural relations (Johnston, 2003).

Conclusion

The Romanian Orthodox Church has become an important actor in Romania's cultural and religious diplomacy after 1990, particularly through the development of its diaspora structures. Beyond their primary pastoral mission, Romanian

Orthodox parishes abroad contribute to the preservation of national identity, the promotion of Romanian culture, and the strengthening of ties between Romanian communities and their homeland. Through cooperation with state institutions, civil society organizations, and local religious communities, these parishes often function as informal cultural ambassadors of Romania.

At the same time, the Romanian Orthodox diaspora operates within increasingly secularized and multicultural environments that require new forms of pastoral engagement and public presence. The interaction between religious identity, civic integration, and cultural adaptation represents one of the defining characteristics of contemporary diaspora experience. Consequently, the role of Romanian Orthodox communities should be understood not only in terms of identity preservation but also in relation to their contribution to intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

Nevertheless, the diplomatic and missionary activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church abroad faces important challenges, including secularization, generational change, organizational limitations, and the need to balance ethnic particularity with broader social integration. These realities demonstrate that the future development of Romanian Orthodox communities abroad will depend not only on institutional growth but also on their capacity to respond creatively to the changing religious and cultural landscape of contemporary societies.

Therefore, the Romanian parish abroad may legitimately be regarded as a form of cultural and religious diplomacy. However, its effectiveness ultimately depends on its ability to remain simultaneously faithful to its Orthodox tradition, open to dialogue, and actively engaged in the social realities of the societies in which it operates. This balance between continuity and adaptation represents both the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for the Romanian Orthodox diaspora in the twenty-first century.

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