Religious Implications of the Migration Phenomenon. An Orthodox Perspective

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Abstract

From a problem that concerned only a small number of people, migration has become a constant concern both nationally and internationally. The concrete realities in different regions have become over time subjects of analysis and reflection in order to find solutions that meet the many theoretical and practical issues raised by migration. In Romania people are increasingly discussing about migration and its implications on all sectors of human life. In this context, the Romanian Orthodox Church is called by his priests, to contribute to the integration of people of other nationalities, cultures and beliefs that are established here and at the same time, to help her spiritual children living and working in different parts of the world to preserve and to confess their Orthodox Christian faith. Moreover, it should take care of their families in the country and to contribute to the education of children, whose parents are away, in the spirit of the Christian tradition.

Keywords: *pluralism, globalization, migration, religion, Romanian Orthodox Church*

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Introduction

The profound transformations that have been recorded lately in all sectors of life have led to increased migration phenomenon that can be observed across the globe. Massive migration of people is based on different causes, with reference both to the social, political and economic life, as well as religion. Commodity exchanges led to exchanges of ideas and movements from one region to another in order to have a better life led to meetings between different civilizations, cultures and religions. Faced with these new insights they needed to live with people of other faiths and ideologies, which one often does not understand, but feeling the need to know, man had to open their heart and soul to accept the person that he meets daily in public and private life. So, from a matter of concern for only a handful of people, migration has become a constant concern locally, nationally and internationally. Concrete realities from different regions over time become subjects of analysis and reflection in order to find solutions that meet the many theoretical and practical issues raised by migration.

Pluralism, globalization, religion

A topic of great interest nowadays is related to how the Orthodox Church preaches in a pluralistic world. In the context in which we live, Christian values, as confessed by Orthodoxy, are restated in new terms so we can speak of a "new theology" not in the sense that a new Christian teaching is rising, but in the sense that our teaching must be confessed to a world in constant change and transformation, using a new language. "We discover the true dignity of speech. This conversation on pluralism is also an opportunity to discover and to promote the true dignity of speech, in addition to producing a performant speech act" (Demetrios of America, 2004: 2). Analyzing the concept of "pluralism" we notice that it is closely linked to that of "globalization", together representing some of the most important challenges of our times. "The word globalization has acquired a special meaning and is used to summarize certain developments and trends that have characterized the final quarter of the second millennium. In the area of economics in particular, this term denotes the process by which the economies of different countries have become fully integrated into a worldwide economic system, one that has concentrated production, trade, and information around the global in a few geographical centers. The ensuing process of internationalization has led to a greater degree of mutual dependence among societies around the world" (Yannoulatos, 2003: 179).

The researchers emphasize that globalization has, on the whole world, both positive and negative effects, from the economic to the social and political life, without neglecting the profound changes in the cultural field. Among the positive effects of globalization are: the development and advancement of technology, goods traffic and achievements in all areas, ease of communication between people, fight against certain diseases globally, limiting illiteracy, repositioning the role of women and youth in society, freedom of thought, promoting democracy, proximity between people etc. Among the negative effects one highlights: the gap between countries, deepening by the day, the economic gap, people living at the edges of poverty, environmental disasters worldwide, developing crime and corruption, many democratic institutions do not respect fundamental human rights and freedoms last but not least, "we are seeing new, major shifts of labor power, with new waves of immigrants and economic refugees flooding the prosperous countries. The increase in unemployment is becoming a significant threat, and xenophobia and racism have reached dangerous proportions in many countries" (Yannoulatos, 2003: 183).

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The effect of globalization is felt everywhere, from the simplest acts and human needs, to the most complex of its actions, the phenomenon is present throughout life as a constant that changes it every day (Alfeyev, 2006: 227-251). The challenges that the Church is facing are not necessarily observing and preventing the negative effects of globalization, but you emphasize values and exploit them positively. The pluralistic world is not an obstacle for Orthodoxy; it is rather an opportunity, in the sense that the Church is challenged to confess its own doctrine that changed the world for 2000 years (Demetrios of America, 2004: 2-3). The words of St. Paul should be interpreted: "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I become as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9.19-23).

Carefully analyzing the concept of "pluralism", its implications in the everyday life of man, advantages and disadvantages brought along recent history of mankind, we can say that it "is not an ideology, not a new universal theology, and not a freeform relativism, Rather, pluralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences" (Eck, 2004: 19). The society in which our Lord Jesus Christ lived and the Apostle of the Gentiles preached love was a pluralistic, with mixed population and with multiple widely spoken languages, with freedom of movement and the right to demand equality for all. Furthermore, "this global perspective is in the blood of the Orthodox, blood that is constantly cleansed in the Eucharist by the blood of Christ, the redeemer of the world. Instead of a globalization that transforms nations and people into an indistinguishable, homogenized mass, convenient for the economic objectives of an anonymous oligarchy, the Orthodox religious experience and vision propose a communion of love, a society of love, and call on people to make every effort in that direction. The truly Christian thing is to continue believing when there seems to be no hope, by grounding oneself in the certainty that ultimately there is Another who controls the evolution of the universe – he *who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*. The truly Christian thing is to live with the certainty that a global communion of love between free persons is an ideal that deserves to be struggled for. The truly Christian thing is to be active and productive at the local level by maintaining a perspective that is global, and to fulfil our own obligations responsibly by orienting ourselves toward the infinite – the God of Love – as the purpose and goal of life" (Yannoulatos, 2003: 199).

Universality, as it is understood globally nowadays, was the spiritual space of Orthodoxy over time, being an essential part of our faith as we confess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith ("We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church"). If you look closely at the history of the Church, we notice that, "during the first phase of its spread throughout the world, the Christian message was set down in the Greek language and expressed through Greek culture, one of whose basic characteristics was its universality. It was this universality, above all, that permeated Greek philosophy, science, and art, as well as the Greek language, and that made it possible for individuals and entire peoples to communicate more easily in diverse ways. This universal consciousness was cultivated with new power by the great hierarchs and ecumenical teachers of the fourth century, who achieved a synthesis between the universalistic thought of ancient Greece

and Christian faith. Later, in its encounter with the peoples of southeastern Europe, The Byzantine empire sacrificed the ecumenical character of the Greek language in order to preserve the universality of its culture" (Yannoulatos, 2003: 195).

Migration challenges for contemporary religious world

Migration occurs as a consequence of pluralism and globalization. Migration has existed in all times, but has increased in recent years especially in the broader context of the exchange of ideas and products, of good transport possibilities, of the rapid circulation of information, etc. At the same time, at global level the problems that affect people have widened, which include conflicts in most territories, difficult economic situations in many regions of the world, leading up to the financial crisis and major social changes, in which the majority populations in different territories must live with minorities which, most often, they do not know and do not accept them. Demographics of our world has changed radically also influencing our way of seeing religions, cultures and ethnicities with which we interact repeatedly. Given these realities the phrase "clash of civilizations" has crystallized, which has become reality every day.

A separation must be done between refugees and migrants, the first being those who, for security reasons, have left their countries and cannot return, unlike who migrants who left their native places having economic reasons. But regardless of these concrete situations that led some people to leave their country of origin, one can speak of the same problems faced by refugees and migrants. It seems that our society was not sufficiently prepared for what happened worldwide following the massive population movements, especially in the millennium in which we live. Important changes occur not only in the everyday life of those who migrate into new territories, but also in that of the people among whom settle populations from other geographical regions. "The map of the world in which we live cannot be colour-coded as to its Christian, Muslim or Hindu identity, but each part of the world is marbled with the colours and textures of the whole" (Eck, 2004: 12). Immigrants bring with them not only the language and the wish for a better life, but also their beliefs, Muslim, Hindu or other, which are different from the beliefs of those in the middle of which they establish. Under these conditions, only listening to the neighbour and the dialogue with him can testify true Christian faith in a pluralistic world. "Whether we like it or not, foreigners constitute a mirror in which societies and churches can see their own reflections. Our behavior towards them, individually and collectively, shows clearly how we measure up to principles of equality, justice and respect for the human person in practice and not simply in theory. Their presence constitutes a call to solidarity, justice and respect for human rights within a profoundly unjust world. They are a challenge to civilization and culture" (Jacques, Farris, 2002: 769).

Over time there have been several attempts to make connections between different migrant organizations and companies working towards defending their rights. Often these meetings ended in failure, but important steps have been taken in order to find solutions to the main difficulties raised by the issue of migration. Thus, on October 1 and 2, 2013, some 100 representatives of sixty-one grassroots, local, regional and international organizations of migrants and religious and ecumenical groups met at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City for the Fourth International Consultation of the Churches Witnessing with Migrants. The consultation was held in conjunction with the 2013 Second High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

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The declaration signed in October 2013 states that human dignity is a divine gift that cannot be taken by anyone, person, government, public or private entity. Human dignity requires respect for human rights, which include freedom of movement to find a job anywhere, regardless of race, sex or social class. Thus, human dignity entails the freedom to live without fear anywhere. Any affront to human dignity is an affront to God. Under these conditions, migrants are human beings with dignity which no one can threaten. Dialogue with migrants must consider human rights compliance, as provided in all acts recognized throughout the world.

Freedom of movement is a human right and any violation thereof is an affront to the human person. Migrants must be protected from abuse caused by racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, with the same rights as peoples among whom they settle. Religious communities must fight to defend the rights of migrants which are the rights of every human being. Therefore, conditions of migrants should be known and the causes that led to their decision to leave their home country. Only continuous and open dialogue can lead to an adaptation of migrant populations to the new social, economic, political and religious conditions of life.

Migrants talk best about their problems, expectations and failures, and this can only be achieved if the community is perceived as a real family, as taught by St. Paul: "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality so strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13.1-2).

Migrants are not just some foreign neighbors, but equal with us, with the same rights and obligations as us. Finally, we can say that an important point in addressing the problem of migrants is at the intersection of human rights and respect for justice, both seen through the eyes of faith in God. At the same time, nothing is possibly without the earnest prayer to God for everything and for everybody. "Our call is to do justice as we oppose forced migration and speak against clear and present violations of the rights of migrants and their families. We pray that our responses remain true to faith imperatives for compassion and hospitality, for justice and peace, for human dignity and human rights, and for freedom and sustainability, which we hold and share with other religions and faith communities. We pray that our responses do not fall short of the abundance of God's unconditional love and profuse radical hospitality" (Church Center for the United Nations, 2013).

Migration has been a concern in World Council of Churches (WCC) over time (Van der Bent, 1983: 69-75). Thus, one of the first recommendations regarding migration dates from 1956. At the third General Assembly of WCC from New Delhi (1961) and at the Church and Society Conference (Geneva 1966) was examined, in particular, the issue of migration and its implications for the world. In this sense, a secretariat to migration was created within the WCC's Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service which published the magazine "Migration Today". In 1999 the activity of the sector dealing with migration has been incorporated into the International Relation team. In Europe was created the body the Churches Commission on Migrants in Europe (CCME) acting for the purpose of encouraging employment of local churches to address migration issues in each region (Jacques, Farris, 2002: 770).

The same care for migrants was manifested at the 10th General Assembly of the WCC held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from October 30 to November 8, 2013, who had the theme *God of life, lead us to justice and peace*. During the meeting, the issue of migrants was treated in the broader context of the rights of religious minorities. After analyzing biblical arguments underlying human rights in general, and the rights of

minorities in particular, and are highlighted the main historical moments in which this issue was addressed, and the current state of the discussions on the situation of minorities in different regions of the world, the statement of the General Assembly of WCC reaffirmed that religious freedom is a universal human right for which the Church must fight. Also, freedom of religion must remain an important theme in the ecumenical meetings, emphasizing that it should be respected regardless of the historical, social, political or economic context in which people live, whether minority or majority in the territories where they live daily. Furthermore, it is specified that "we have reiterated the principles and values of freedom of religion and the duty of states and governing authorities to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief, in all its dimensions, for all individuals under their jurisdiction or control without regard to their religion or belief. It is with these convictions that the WCC emphasizes the need to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and devise effective safeguards against violations of national and international law relating to religious freedom. We are of the opinion that there should be concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to protect the right to freedom of religion. In the current context, the fear is quit real that religious minorities may be further suppressed in certain countries by a rising wave of religious extremism. The rights of minority religious communities to live in peace and harmony amidst their neighbors belonging to majority religious communities is vital not only for the people belonging to faith minority groups but also for overall stability and democratic governance, especially in countries that are liberated from past elements of authoritarianism. Rights of religious minorities in all contexts should be rooted in a democratic principle that majority and minority are to be treated as equal beneficiaries of the state, and that dignity and human rights of all people are respected and valued" (World Council of Churches, 2013).

Looking at all these situations, challenges and attempts to find solutions to various issues raised by migration, diaspora the experiences of the diaspora Orthodox Church can be a real guide in terms of addressing the problems of the dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies of living together with Orthodox believers: "If we Orthodox expect others in a multicultural setting not only to recognize our presence but also to accept the particular gifts of our Church, are we in our turn prepared to accept the gifts of those others with their particular culture, religion or morality?" (Clapsis, 2000: 128). In the context of pluralistic democracy from the modern societies, dialogue is the only option to get in touch with those of other faiths, ideologies, nationalities, ethnicities and cultures. "The recognition that another person, despite his or her difference, is a genuine human person or that the life of a community is an expression of a particular culture implies, furthermore, that we recognize in the other some shared elements of common humanity or culture" (Clapsis, 2000: 138).

The migration phenomenon in Romania and his religious implications
The migration phenomenon in our country migration increases from one year to another leading up to significant changes in terms of economic cultural, social and religious realities. In Romania we can talk about an increase in migration especially after 1989 and in recent times, after joining the European Union in 2007. Migration does not refer only to people of other nationalities who come to our country (after the last analysis, about 60,000 foreign immigrants residing legally and thousands who have not regulated their status), but also the large number of Romanian migrants in other countries. Romania was a transit country rather than a destination (unlike, for example, the USA, which was

built by immigrants). However, with the entry into the European Union a new phenomenon has emerged: the increased number of immigrants from Asia, Middle East, Africa and the republics of the former Soviet Union who decide to stay in Romania. According to official data, most migrants with legal stay on the Romanian territory come from Moldova (28%), Turkey (17%), China (15%) and Syria (4%). With regard to illegal immigrants, 33% of return decisions were issued to Chinese citizens, 26% for Turkish citizens and 12% for Moldovan citizens (Gazeta Românească, 2014).

In connection with distribution in Romania, migrants settled mainly in cities: Bucharest, Timişoara, Sibiu and Constanţa. In some cases the religious element mattered more and, when referring to the Muslim community in Dobrogea, whose mufti is based in Constanta (in Romania currently live over 70,000 Muslims living, in 1992 there were 55,928, in 2002 the number increased to 67,257 and in 2011 there was a slight decline to 64,337). A special case is the Jewish community in Romania whose believers were in the past in large numbers in Moldova, increasing considerably from 134,168 in 1859 to 266,652 in 1899, reaching 756,930 in 1930. Historical situation of the interwar period, the loss of territory, after they had been part of Great Romania, and especially the Holocaust led to a reduction in the number of Jews in our country. After the communist period there were only 9,670 Jews in 1992, 6,057 in 2002, while in 2011 there were only 3,519.

Considering the negative consequences, migration of Romanian citizens to other countries, mainly in the European Union is more worrying. The reasons for the migration of Romanians are mainly economic, many citizens leaving the country in order to find better paid jobs. The reason for leaving their own country and family is, in most cases, the desire to have a better life. According to the latest statistics, in the last 10 years over 2,000,000 people have left Romania to work abroad; our country is one of the most important numerically in terms of immigrant labor in the European Union. Following this massive migration, over 81,000 minors were at the end of 2013 at home with grandparents or relatives. It should be noted that most migrants are young Romanian that are around 30, and among those with higher education are most doctors. On the other hand, 60% of Romanian migrants are women. Between 2002 and 2007, after the elimination of Schengen visa appeared the phenomenon that Romanians traveled to Europe for a period of 90 days, then return home to go after another period.

In September 2013, from nearly 60,000 families, one parent left to work abroad, and the children from 16,000 families remained in the care of relatives, both parents working abroad, according to data centralized by the Directorate for Child Protection in the Ministry of Labour. According to data from the National Statistics Institute (INS), at the beginning of 2012 nearly 1,100,000 Romanians were in Italy, about 800,000 in Spain and about 180,000 in Germany. This number has increased in recent years and migrant population has varied in different places in Europe (INS, 2014). There are also parents who chose to move permanently to another country, taking their children with them.

Migration of citizens from weaker economies to developed countries of Europe has led to the phenomenon by which, for example, English language in British schools ceased to be spoken by all students, given that the number of Eastern European children studying in the United Britain has almost tripled in 2008-2013, reaching 123,000 people. The number of Romanian students has increased more than five times in the same period, from 1,400 to about 8,900, according to the "Daily Mail". Therefore, Romanian ranks fourth among the most spoken languages in British education, after Russian, Lithuanian and Polish.

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Like any complex process migration has both positive and negative sides. For the families of Romanian migrants, the benefits are great in terms of the economic side of life, Romanians working in different parts of the European Union sending money to families left behind. The benefits can be seen in the economy, where a part of the budget is provided from this money. In this respect, Romania earned 3.6 billion euros only last year, according to the calculations of "Financial Newspaper" based on data from the National Bank of Romania. However, Romanians are among the lowest paid of European employees, with a net monthly income of around 360 euros, about five times lower than in Italy, Spain and Germany (countries with most Romanian immigrants).

The same phenomenon of migration also shows its dark side: families break up, children are left home alone without the support and parental love, and the level of education in these families has suffered much. If in 2008-2009 the high school dropout rate was 3.6% in 2009-2010 and 2.9% in the 2011-2012 school year it rose to 4.2%, according to data from INS (Iftime, Iftime, 2011).

Considering all these facts, the State must promote policies that protect migrant populations and protect the human rights of these communities. At the same time, we must be actively involved in protecting families where one member or more are working abroad and in the education of children who remain in the care of relatives.

In this context and taking into account all these statistics, the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church is extremely important, both in terms of populations of other nationalities that are established in Romania and also regarding Romanian migrants and the social realities that arise from the fact that more and more Romanian leave the country. Migration produces numerous social and economic effects that can be understood and controlled only by a collaboration of Church with the Romanian state authorities, because changes produced by migration have strong religious overtones.

The family has suffered most from migration, and the Church, through her priests who know best the local realities of any kind, can help prevent and solve many problems that can occur, which include: collapse of the family home, loss of ties between parents and children, education increasingly lower in territories where migration is a general phenomenon, etc.

In EU countries local churches working with secular institutions to respect fundamental human rights and rapid integration of immigrants in the new communities in which they want to live. Lately in Romania, the cooperation between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the State has intensified regarding immigrants and the measures of our Church did not fail to appear. The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has established that every year the first Sunday after June 1 to be devoted to parents and children, and a Sunday throughout the year to be named *Sunday of Romanian immigrants*. Our church prays in its holy service for the "faithful Romanian people from everywhere", thus focusing on the idea that every Romanian believer is part of our church, no matter where he lives or works. To help the Romanian migrants worldwide, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in our country founded more Metropolitanes and Episcopates in Paris, Rome, Madrid, Nuremberg, Stockholm, Gyula, Chicago, Melbourne and Jerusalem. In these dioceses, newly established Romanian parishes develop pastoral-missionary and cultural-philanthropic activities for Romanians living or working across borders.

Having always in mind and soul the difficulties and problems posed by migration, Romanian Orthodox Christians living abroad are urged "to foster mutual help and mutual respect, to promote family unity and fraternal cooperation with all people, regardless of ethnicity and social status, and help the poor, elderly and sick that they met in Romania,

to help parishes who build churches" (Daniel, 2013a: 199). Also, the Orthodox Church insists in its teachings on strengthening ties between church, family and school to educate and promote the true Christian values. "The family needs the holy blessing of Church to be sanctified, and the church needs the participation of family in its life and work to strengthen itself" (Daniel, 2013b: 159). Programs of catechesis and pastoral care of families in need carried by the Romanian Orthodox Church including "Christ shared to children" and "Choose School!" which "strive to educate children for the purposes of helping neighbors in distress, to prevent school dropout in poor families and in families where the parents are working abroad, to discover and encourage talented children to develop their skills for the benefit of the Church and society. Also (...) through the creation camps (...), the Church seeks to supplement the lack of parental affection, to cultivate genuine values and strengthen the bonds between parents and children, between the school and the Church" (Daniel, 2013b: 160).

Conclusions

Carefully analyzing the implications involved by migration we can see that this problem has become global, arousing the interest of the population in most countries. At the same time, although the main causes of migration are economic, social and political, religious connotations are not neglected at all. This happens because people belonging to some beliefs and ideologies must manifest and maintain traditions among different populations that often are not aware of these new realities that they encounter every day. In our country people are increasingly discussing about migration and its implications on all sectors of human life. In this context, the Romanian Orthodox Church is called by his priests, to contribute to the integration of people of other nationalities, cultures and beliefs that are established in our country and at the same time, to help her spiritual children living and working in different parts of the world to preserve and to confess their ancestral Orthodox Christian faith and culture. Moreover, it should take care of their families in the country and to contribute to the culture in the spirit of the Christian tradition of children whose parents are away, because "Romanian culture, with everything it has as its specific and major features, is a Christian culture, based on and rooted in the Gospel" (Cândea, 1996: 107). Only through active involvement in these issues and by good cooperation with the Romanian authorities, the Romanian Orthodox Church can fulfill and realize the quality of spiritual mother for all its believers in the country and abroad.

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