



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Romanian Religious Press in the Early Years of the Communist Regime: Elements of the Official Political Discourse in the Editorial Content

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Abstract

The events of August, 23, 1944 would change the Romanian course of history, leading to the instauration of a communist government, with the aid and following the model of the Soviet Union political regime. Until December 1947, the new regime coexisted with the old democratic state structures, but from that moment on, the communist government would start the procedures to abolish the old government institutions, bringing rough changes that would affect every aspect of the Romanians' life, including culture and day-to-day existence. The utopian ideology of the Communist Party, based on a sustained plan to reinvent the human condition itself, would be soon noticed in every sector of activity, even in the theological discourse, that is usually meant to speak about divinity and its relationship with humanity. The only political party is promoted as omnipresent and omniscient, the supreme value and the depository of the whole human wisdom and thus it justifies its authority to control the evolution of individuals (Cozma, 2010: 21). From this point of view, the new ideology would attack the very essence of religions that relies on divinity as the source of truth, knowledge and life itself. In these conditions, many of the Romanian religious magazines would be eliminated, others would refuse to continue and few of them would find a compromising solution in allowing elements of the communist wooden language discourse to penetrate their contents. The goal of this research is to reveal how the relationship between the state and the religious cults affected the theological discourse of the Romanian religious press and the way the editorial content of four prestigious religious magazines is parasitized by the wooden language of the official political discourse of the new regime. Through the discourse analysis method, the main aspects of this political intrusion will be underlined: new themes of the articles, new interpretations of the biblical precepts, new vocabulary.

Keywords: *communism, religious press, wooden language, political ideology, language*

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Premises

“The sovietisation process” (Popescu, 2010: 35) in Romania starts with the events in August, 23, 1944, when Marshall Ion Antonescu was removed from the government and Romania declared war to her former ally, Germany. Until December 1947, the new regime coexisted with the former democratic structures, but from that moment on, the communists would start the procedures to eliminate them, up to the constitutional system itself. The cultural environment would also be affected by the changes in the political system; everything would be subordinated institutionally and ideologically to the new regime, whose main goal is to “abolish the moral traditional values” and to “eradicate the former society” (Verzea, 2010: 47). In this political context, one of the means of establishing the new regime of “popular democracy” was the press (Nicolaeescu, 2001: 126). From the communist perspective, the press is “nothing but a weapon of the political power, with precise missions and tasks: to educate the population, to mobilize it to the accomplishment of political and economic objectives, such as combating the political enemies and praising the achievements of the regime” (Coman, 2007: 133). The reality itself is replaced with the Communist Party’s reality, one and the same for every aspect of an event, nothing is left to the unpredictable and uncontrolled; there is only the official information or lack of information. But silence is not a choice, the duty of the regime and of every citizen is to speak out loud, in a noisy discourse that states nothing but its affiliation to an ideology. So the press should speak up: “to objectively describe a particular fact, but this description should leave such an impression on the reader as to make him assume the spirit of the Party” (a recommendation of M.I. Kalinin, the president of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Leadership Council, to the journalists, apud Petcu, 2005: 73). The religious press would not make an exception and it would not escape the tentacles of the wooden language, because mastering this language was more than a way to state that the religious cults approved the new regime, it was also a recommended way to participate and to exercise the so called democracy of the people (Thom, 2005: 136). In addition, the impact and the authority of the cults in their congregation was a valuable resource for the communist government in terms of easily reaching an audience.

Methodology

Through the discourse analysis method, the article will reveal the intrusion of the communist ideology in the contents of four Romanian religious magazines: *Păstorul ortodox* (“The Orthodox Shepherd” – Pitesti, 1904-1947 with pauses, 1995-present, the new series), *Foaia bunului creștin* (“The Good Christian’s Gazette”, Sibiu, June-December 1953), *Glasul Bisericii* (“The Voice of the Church”, Bucharest, 1942-present) and *Revista cultului mosaic din R.P.R.* (“The Mosaic Cult Magazine in R.P.R.”, Bucharest, 1956-1957). The methodological approach of the discourse analysis takes into consideration the fact that lately the discourse is defined as an interdisciplinary concept, far beyond the old approach of the structuralism that used to limit the discourse to its phrase structure, in a context free formula. Nowadays, social, cultural and situational factors define the discourse, bringing a complete significance to all the participants in the communication act as a social discourse (Roventă-Frumușani, 2005: 70). Thus the discourse, as a complex entity that carries the historical, the social, the cultural and the communicational context, contains an ideology (Maingueneau, 1998: 2).

The importance in the history of the Romanian religious press of the four

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publications chosen for the analysis is defined by the following aspects: representativeness – in terms of the religious belief of the majority of the population and, respectively, of an important minority at that time, the longevity and continuity of the printed editions and the official character of the magazines. A brief presentation of the four magazines will demonstrate the significance of the case analysis and thus the relevance of the results.

In January 1900 a monthly publication called *Păstorul* (“The Shepherd”) is edited in Pitesti by “Frăția” (Brotherhood) Arges Clergy Society (Păcurariu, 1997: 302). In December 1904 its name was changed to *Păstorul ortodox* (“The Orthodox Shepherd”). It is initially printed until 1912, written by Plato Ciosu, the future bishop, it is reprinted from 1 January 1931 to 1937, then in 1938-1944, 1946-1947 (Barangă, 2003: 107; see also Răduică, Răduică, 1995: 314) and in 1995, the new series, as the official magazine of the Archbishopric of Arges and Muscel, under the guidance of Archbishop Calinic Argatu (*Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei românești*, 2010: 475). The frequency, as well as the editorial content, varies depending on the period and the editorial board. From 1 January 1905 it appears bimonthly. During the period 1907-1912 it is edited by a committee of priests. In the pages of the “The Shepherd”, the editors included theological, historical, literary and topical articles about the Church. In 1945, 1946 and 1949, on the front page, under the magazine’s title the reader can see this phrase: “Approved by the Press Military Censorship, no. 2115 from November, 30, 1944”.

Lumina satelor (“The light of the villages”) was an important gazette of the Orthodox Church, with a large circulation and a consistent summary, edited by the Archbishopric of Sibiu, starting with 1922 until 1948 (Păcurariu, 2011: 282). In June, 14, 1953, under a new series, it changes its name to *Foaia bunului creștin* (“The good Christian’s magazine”). Its new appearance in A3 format has a modern layout and illustrations. A new name is now justified by new objectives, on the one hand considering the old editorial policy of a gazette addressed to the large rural Christian public, regardless of their intellectual training, and on the other hand dictated by the new social and political conditions in Romania, established by the new government and its ideological orientation.

Revista cultului mozaic din R.P.R. (“The Mosaic Cult Magazine in R.P.R.”) appears in Bucharest from October, 19, 1956 (“14 cheshvan 5717), in an A3 Romanian-Hebrew bilingual bimonthly four-pages. The editorial staff was located in D. Racovița Street, no. 8, District 23 August. In the program-article in the first issue, the editorial board declared their “purpose and aim”, bringing into discussion the person of the first patriarch, Abraham, who “planted a tree at Fountain Oath and there he invoked the name of God, the Master of the world”. Nothing in this article would anticipate the political direction the magazine was about to take.

Glasul Bisericii (“The Voice of the Church”), the official magazine of the Bucharest Archbishopric, appears from 1942 to present days. Initially it was meant to be a weekly magazine, in a newspaper format. In 1945 it was changed into a B5 book format, with 22 issues per year. From 1948 until the present days it will have a monthly apparition. In the period we analysed, the magazine appeared with the blessing and guidance of Justinian the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Results

There are three main aspects of the political intrusion in the editorial content of the Romanian religious magazines in the early years of the communist regime: new themes of the articles, new interpretations of the biblical precepts and new vocabulary.

The intrusions in the religious discourse are first of all visible on the themes: the reconstruction of the society, the superiority of the popular democracy, the time of the great changes, the necessity that the clerics get involved in those historical processes and the myth of the peace protection are now the leitmotifs of the majority of the preaches. Some titles are relevant: "The priests of the Capital city, working for the public benefit, are restoring the cells at Plumbuita Monastery", „Following the new spirit" (*GB*, no. 1-2/ Ianuarie-Februarie 1949), „Teachings from the gathering of peoples" (*FBC*, no. 1-2/14 June 1953), „The Patriarch who opens a new road in the life of our Church, the road of connecting our healthy Orthodox tradition with the effort for development and flourishing of the Popular Republic" (*FBC*, no. 3-4/1 September 1953), „The Youth and the Peace", „Harvesting, threshing and collecting" (*FBC*, no. 5-6 / 15 September 1953), „The month of the big friendship" (the Romanian-Soviet friendship) (*RCM*, no. 1/19 October 1956: 1), „August 23" (*RCM*, no. 17/1 August 1957), „Collecting is a patriotic duty" (*FBC*, no. 3-4/1 September 1953), „A call to the priests and the believers of the Popular Republic of Romania" (*FBC*, no. 3-4/1 September 1953: 1), „The notes of a partisan" (*FBC*, no. 9-10, 1 December 1953: 3), „The deputies elections in the Popular Councils/ The believers give a strong support to the flourishing and empowering the Mother Country" (*FBC*, no. 9-10, 1 December 1953: 4), „For the development of the villages – Collaboration", „The attitude of the B.P.D. (The Democratic Parties' Block) and of the Romanian Communist Party towards the Church", „A Christian social economical action", „The Constitution and the freedom of religion in U.R.S.S." (*PO*, no. 11-12/ November-December 1946) etc.

In the issue 7-10/1946 of *Păstorul ortodox*, in articles such as „The freedom and the universality of work", „The democracy and the Church", „The Gospel and the democracy", the biblical foundations for the new doctrine are emphasized. Some aspects about the Eastern political power that is, according to the writers of the articles, supporting "a vivid and fruitful activity of reorganization and invigorating" of the religious life; one particular aspect of this reconstruction is the restoring of some churches. Stalin is considered "the greatest supporter of the Orthodox Church". And the propaganda continues. According to a leading principle of the press, the rule of the present topicality or the temporal proximity, but also being compelled to follow the censorship's directions, most of the articles in *Păstorul* contain explicit or implicit references to the new situation the country was facing and to the ideology of the Communist Party: "Although it might seem – on a superficial view – anachronistic and futile to talk about sects and their adepts in the democratic Romania after August, 23, 1944..."; "The times of today, with their struggles toward a new age"; "For the development of the villages – Collaboration" – the entire article, a pleading for the new founded cultural institution, the Community Center (*căminul cultural*), which was actually a new means of propaganda; "The position of B.D.P. [The Block of the Democratic Parties – our note] and of the Romanian Communist Party toward the Church" under the heading "Internal news"; "A Christian social-economic action" and "The Constitution and the liberty of religion in U.S.S.R." under the heading "External news". In "The position of B.D.P. and of the Romanian Communist Party toward the Church" we can notice the abbreviation when the author refers to the other parties and the full phrase when he refers to the Communist Party. It is another way to divide the two entities into two categories: "they" and "us". On the other way, the situation reminds the author of the study about a particular aspect of the job as a religious press editor. One of the first things a newcomer in the editorial staff of a religious magazine learns is the fact that it is not recommended to abbreviate the names of God the holy persons, so if we think about the position the Communist Party as the centre of the

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people's existence, as the source of truth and wellness to all those who embrace its values, as a "Big Father" who decides the direction of the individuals. Later on the Romanian history, when the Communist Party would become the only legal party, the abbreviation would be used and would become a very well-known formula to designate the political establishment in Romania until December 1989. Anyway, these articles didn't seem to advantage the editorial board of *Păstorul ortodox*, since the magazine ceases its appearance, along with many other religious magazines and other media products, in the years 1947-1948.

In the issue 2-3 of *Revista cultului mozaic*, from January, 15, 1957, the Jewish editorial board assumes its required mission to be a social mobilizer. On the upper side of the front page there is the following appeal: "Citizens! Verify if you were counted on the electors' lists. No citizen who has the right to vote shouldn't be left out the list!". The layout is neat, the content is various, with different particular elements in the text settings, illustrations (pictures, portraits of Dr. Moses Rosen, Chief-Rabbi, and of Solomon Schechter, important rabbi, academic scholar and educator). A large news story on the front page, continued in page 3, approaches the application of Dr. Moses Rosen for the Grand National Assembly elections. The text, chronologically written, is completed with discourse fragments in which we can recognize wooden language formulations used in that period, as a proof of the political intrusion in the cult's activity. Here are some specific phrases, both on the political-administrative level of language and also as standard formulation with no particular reference to reality: "citizens assembly", "officials, workers on various institutions, factories and plants", "the liberties that the large popular masses of this country enjoy", "the supreme instance of the state power", "the best sons of the people, elected from all social classes", "widely representative character of the Grand National Assembly", "make a statement", "the word of peace and fraternity between peoples", "the fruitful and restless activity", "the attachment for the cause of democracy and peace", "to commit to his mission" etc. The new format of *Lumina satelor*, named *Foaia bunului creștin*, welcomes the reader with an almost natural combination between an archaic language and standard phrases of the wooden language, this time inspired by the Church language: "with the occasion of this anniversary of *Telegraful român* ("The Romanian Telegraph"), His Holiness Patriarch Justinian writes that after the accomplished apostleship today he has the duty to «follow the same road as our people towards peace, light and the happy future that our Mother Country is building». His Holiness the Archbishop Nicolae of Transylvania guarantees that «today *Telegraful român* will continue his religious traditional way for the moral and material development of the true believers people and for the defence of peace». And his editorial board commits to «serve even more willingly the Church and the Mother Country, to the benefit of the true believers, to the prosperity of the working people and to the victory of peace throughout the world»" (*FBC*, Year XXXII, no. 1-2/14 June, 1953: 1).

The elements of the wooden language can be found in the following phrases: *road towards peace, light, the happy future our Mother Country is building, the moral and material development, the defence of peace, to serve even more willingly, the prosperity of the working people, the victory of peace throughout the world*. Some of the words belong to the religious vocabulary, such as *peace, light, victory*; they were borrowed by the political discourse and became phrases of the wooden language. The religious origins of these phrases makes them easy to combine with the rest of the religious language of the article, thus no discrepancy is noticed. The words *duty* and *commit* are though disturbing because they break the natural language rhythm of the text.

In *Glusul Bisericii*, we can find an example of how any particular event, more or less important in the existence of the Church, can be exploited as an occasion for the communist political propaganda. The New Year's Eve is not usually such an important celebration in the life of the Church as it is in the laic word and a pastoral preach with this occasion is not a common gesture. We think that it was imposed to the Church's hierarchy and thus the New Year's Eve would get a bigger significance, compared to the significance of Christmas, a celebration when the Patriarch addresses a pastoral to the clergy and the congregation. The lack of a very obvious religious significance allows the hierarch to approach a social and political theme: "the Church is invited by the times to bring into the people's life the spirit of peace, of brotherhood, of social justice and of the sacrifice for the development of the Mother Country, for the reinforcement of solidarity between the peaceful and freedom loving peoples in the world [...]. The leaders of our Republic, considering that our Church request is right, have passed a law to abolish the Concordat imposed to our Country by the former monarchy, the instrument of the bishop of Rome – who calls himself the Pope. [...]. On New Year's Eve – the Leaders of our Country have ruled the whole year development plan, through the planning rule and the new budget law. All the people and thus the Church and its clergy are called to accomplish this plan" (*GB*, Year VIII, 1-2/ianuarie-februarie 1949).

As we can notice in the previous examples, even the main journalistic principles in the gathering and selecting information and the news writing are eluded in the communist press. If the positive perspective on reality usually represent the rule, and often the news are usually negative in the democratic press (the watch dog metaphor), this criteria does not stand in a communist regime. The press as a means of propaganda shows the positive events in the context of the regime's great achievements on the way to development and progress of the society. From this point of view, the religious press in general and the communist press have something in common, because they both write about positive events. Only the nature of the events is different and the political themes placed in the editorial content of the religious magazines look out of place. Another artificial solution is to give new significances to the biblical parables as to coincide with the "new spirit" in the Romanian society, a society whose main ideals are labour and peace. The massive use of the themes of labour and work is a technique specific to the wooden languages – the pre-treated reality (Thom, 2005: 85). In the issue 11-13 from November-December 1946 of *Păstorul ortodox*, the priest Marin Braniște, a well respected theological voice in Romania, signs an editorial entitled "The present meaning of Christmas". The main idea of the text is "perfectly working together to praise and pray for peace, as to be able to see together not only the various human social classes, but also the elements of nature". Some articles try forced interpretations of the biblical parables - The Parable of the Sower, The Parable of the Vineyard Workers, The Parable of the Ten Virgins and The Parable of the Wicked Workers:

"Christ, the Sower of Joys.

Everywhere, the Saviour sowed joy, proclaiming the communion of the faithful to God and pouring happiness in their hearts.

His teachings guided believers so that even in this life they can reach a satisfactory happiness, doing goodness to their fellows and helping each other for everyone's well being. He showed everywhere that contentment and joy brought industrious work, understanding between peoples, and how many moments of happiness the contemplation of nature produces, as nature is so endowed with riches, which calls upon man to harvest and use them thus contributing to their increase" (*FBC*, no. 5-6 of 15 September 1953: 1).

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The mobilizing discourse of the religious press gets new valences according to the official political discourse about the dawn of a new era, an era of peace, progress, liberty and democracy of the people. For example, in the article “The Orthodoxy and The State”, the theological content is overwhelmed by the political content: “The man is led to be a comrade to his kind. Thus, he needs his people. This is the new state, the popular state, the most advanced form of organization. In our democratic popular state, the individual can get a better living through honest labour. [...]

R.P.R. is a state that loves peace and fights for its instauration in the world. [...]

In the biblical places, the Orthodoxy teaches us:

1. The duty of each citizen is to obey the state.

2. The right of the state to be obeyed and to punish the insurgents. [...]

Briefly: The Orthodoxy acknowledges the state, serves it and works together with it, in good understanding and support, it uses the language of the people as a liturgical language, it prays for the leadership of the state and for its army, it supports the state and it gets support from the state; it embraces the people’s ideals” (*FBC*, no. 9-10, 1 December 1953: 1). On the language level, the main characteristics of the religious press discourse are the lack of stylistic consistency and the large use of the political terms, mainly neologisms, terms inadequate to the specific of the religious language and its archaic character. Here are some examples: *coordonare* (coordination), *factori* (factors), *supreme* (supreme), *divergență* (divergency), *aspirațiuni* (aspirations), *revendicări* (revendications), *contemporană* (contemporary), *architect* (architect), *camarazi* (comrades), *cetățean* (citizen), *oscilare* (oscillation), *alternativă* (alternative), *examenul* (exam), *deficiențe* (deficiencies), *epuiza* (exhaust), *convorbire* (conversation), *dezarmare* (didarmament), *separațiuni* (separations), *intoleranță* (intolerance), *ateism* (atheism), *intuiție* (intuition), *evidență* (evidence), *originalitate* (originality), *independență* (independence), *doctrină* (doctrine), *expresiunea* (expression), *propagandă* (propaganda), *polarizează* (polarize), *ostilitate* (hostility), *predominant* (preponderant), *exclusivism* (exclusivism), *consecvente* (consistent), *stimulare* (stimulation), *insinuări* (insinuations), *calomnii* (calumny), *asistență* (assistance), *pedagogie* (Pedagogy) *introdactivă* (introductory), *eficacitate* (efficacy), *prioritate* (priority), *anacronic* (anachronic), *inutil* (futile), *chestiune* (matter), *interdicție* (interdiction), *periclitau* (endangered), *agenți* (agents), *dezertori* (deserters), *confiscate* (confiscated), *adversar* (opponent), *relativă* (relative), *ideologic* (ideological), *arsenal* (arsenal), *nimbat* (nimbed), *progresist* (progresist), *complexitate* (complexity), *abdicare* (abdication), *equivalentă* (equivalent), *absorbită* (absorbed), *mixtură* (mixture), *să solidarizeze* (to make common cause with), *instrument* (instrument), *armonizeze* (harmonize), *faliment* (bankruptcy), *instrucțiune* (instruction), *prestigiu* (prestige), *alarmante* (alarming), *clandestine* (clandestine), *rapoarte* (reports), *prostituție* (prostitution), *pauperism* (pauperism), *proporții* (proportions), *cortegiu* (procession), *comisiuni* (commissions), *celule* (political cells), *partide* (parties), *animat* (animated), *să discrediteze* (discredit), *comandamente* (commandments), *considerațiune* (consideration), *avantagii* (advantages), *constituție* (constitution), *sovietice* (Soviet), *fasciști* (fascists), *guvernamental* (governmental), *marcant* (prestigious), *mondiale* (global), *emancipeze* (emancipate), *component* (component), *marxism* (Marxism), *mandate* (mandatory), *solidarizare* (solidarity), *abnegație* (self-abnegation), *obiecțiune* (objection) etc. The texts are stylistically marked by the antithesis *old/new*, *past/present*, which is specific to the socialist ideological discourse, completed by the religious opposition *darkness/light*; *bankers*, *landlords*, *capitalists*, *the stuffed* versus *the patient and hardworking people*, *the working class*;

laziness vs. labour; analphabetism vs. schools; the darkness of the night vs. the electricity; the quacks vs. medicine; no cares for the public welfare vs. everyone is responsible. The abuse of the same epithets and metaphors make the texts lose their style value and words to become marks of the wooden language: *the hardworking people, the lack of knowledge is a weed, the light of knowledge, rich libraries, instructive conferences, flourishing collective farms, fresh agricultural associations, the bright sun of socialism* etc.

Conclusions

The religious magazines editorial content is characterized by a mixture of plans, by the presentation of the events in the life of worshipers through the reinterpretation of social values, even by trying a theological and biblical foundation of communist ideology. There isn't a clear delimitation between the religious-theological content and the social-political content of the magazines, between the mission of spreading the words of God and to inform the congregation on the one hand and the mission of the press as a social activist, as an agitator to make the citizens fight for the communist government's goals, as a propaganda means on the other hand. From this point of view, each article could contain marks of the relationship between the state and the religious cults and elements of the communist wooden language, even though some articles can lead the reader into error by neutral, religious or theological titles. The result is a split in style within the same publications, between "clean", pure theological articles and "parasitic" articles, or even within the same article. Although we have only pointed those contents with visible political intrusions in the pages of the religious magazines, there are still a large number of clearly religious and theological articles, enough to justify the titles and the affiliation to a religious cult. This aspect makes the intrusion even more disturbing and gives a new turn to the reader's expectations which can make him/her sometimes think that he/she is reading a political magazine. The political ideological intrusion in the religious discourse and the elements of the wooden language are the religious magazines' proposed or imposed solutions to coexist with the demands of the new communist regime. Because, under the appearance of a false freedom of the conscious and of religion, stated by the Constitution in 1948, actually the new regime was restraining them. Only 14 religious cults were admitted as legal; the Greek-Catholic or United Church, with a more than two centuries tradition, was abolished in the 358 Decree on December, 1, 1948 (Cârstea: 2012: 474).

Abbreviations

PO - *Păstorul ortodox* ("The Orthodox Shepherd");

FBC - *Foaia bunului creștin* ("The Good Christian's Magazine");

RCM - *Revista cultului mozaic din R.P.R.* ("The Mosaic Cult Magazine in R.P.R.");

GB - *Glasul Bisericii* ("The Voice of the Church").

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