

CĂTĂLIN RAIU

Public Governance and Religion. Key Historical Turns in Modern Romania
(Bucharest: C.H. Beck, 2023), 193 pp.

The volume presents a critical analysis of how the Romanian Orthodox Church and other forms of institutionalized religious faith have defined themselves within the modern Romanian space (1860 to 1990s) in relation to the nature of political regimes, developing their own political visions, or participating in the formation of incipient indigenous forms of democratization. The volume is prefaced by Professor Daniel Barbu, whose text, published shortly before his untimely death (March 2024), describes Cătălin Raiu's research as "beyond the prevalent methodological assumptions" and delving into a "scientifically uncharted territory" (VII).

The volume fits into an older endeavor of the author to identify segments of the interaction between the political and the religious in the Romanian space, with previous extensive research dedicated to similar topics such as the relationship between neoliberalism, post-communism, and Eastern Orthodoxy; the embryonic forms of consecrating a Christian-Democratic political formula in the Romanian space; the tension between restricting religious life during the pandemic and international standards regarding religious freedom; as well as research on the way the post-communist political regime has developed a theopolitical interest for technocratic ministers.¹

¹ Cătălin Raiu, *Ortodoxie, postcomunism și neoliberalism: o critică teologico-politică* [Orthodoxy, Post-communism, and Neoliberalism: A Theological-political Critique] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012); Cătălin Raiu, *Democrație și statolatritie: creștinismul social la Bartolomeu Stănescu, episcopul Râmnicului Noului Severin (1875-1954)* [Democracy and Statism: Social Christianity and Bartolomeu Stănescu, Bishop of Râmnicu Noului Severin] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2014); Cătălin Raiu and Laura Mina-Raiu, "How to Cope with Counter-performance in Public Administration. The Case of

The volume employs language that is accessible to the general public interested in the discussed topics, while simultaneously utilizing terminology specific to the history of political thought. In the context where the specialized literature dedicated to the relationship between the state and religious denominations in the Romanian space has been either largely confined to a strictly biased confessional approach, portraying the Orthodox Church as a fully meritorious institution in the nation-building process, or as an obstacle to the political and social modernization of the country, Raiu's research fills an important gap in the literature for all those studying the relationship between democratization and the interaction between politics and religion by rejecting both previous approaches.

Drawing his inspiration from the French political scientist Marcel Gauchet, the author reconstructs a chronology of the political history of religion in Romania, analyzing at the same time several episodes of the relationship between the political and the religious.² His endeavor is based on original documents and follows a Foucault-inspired conceptual archaeology.

Raiu places the debate on the complex relationship between religion and politics under the sign of mutual imprinting, considered a "fertile tension" within the (liberal) paradigm (13, 30, 161): the political often seeks additional legitimacy from religious organizations, which in turn seek to secure at least their own autonomy and more resources from the political establishment.

The author uses the term "public governance" to cover a wider range of political instances, and to point out that the religious phenomenon not only interferes with classical political or constitutional actors, but also with the broader domain of public decisions, therefore transforming the public sphere and generating a significant impact on the way in which the political regime and some branches of public administration have been conceptualized.

Freedom of Religion or Belief during the Pandemic", *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 18, no. 66 (2022): 81-98; Cătălin Raiu and Laura Mina-Raiu, "Who Runs Public Administration? A Longitudinal Study of Technocratic Ministerial Appointments in Post-communist Romania (1991–2021)," *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 19, no. 70 (2023): 109-127.

² Marcel Gauchet, trans. Oscar Burge, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

To pursue such a broad objective, Raiu draws on a wide range of primary sources such as laws, Church internal regulations, opinions, reflections, analyses, statements of different political and ecclesiastical actors from the press of the time, or in various publications whose traces have long been lost in the public sphere or have been overlooked by mainstream (and sometimes) politicized historiography.

Therefore, the approach is to critically (re)read a period of the Romanian history (the years 1860-1990s) not from the perspective of the established historiography, but by following the traces of documents quiescently forgotten in the corners of public libraries. Another aim is to reinterpret the political history of the state-church relationship in the Romanian space by focusing particularly on two dimensions that have so far been rather neglected until now: the impetus of the Romanian Orthodox Church towards democratization identified through the presence or absence of the principle of subsidiarity within Church own regulations and institutions (7-28), respectively the manner in which various political regimes have related to the Church, borrowing its popular legitimacy in the nation-building process (67-99).

The volume's working hypothesis is that in democratic regimes, Churches have no other legal status than that of voluntary associations of civil society, they do not stand isolated in the sphere of private life and convictions, but through their political presence in the Schmittian sense (social public worship, challenging the political regime) they create a general framework for public governance not only when they are in close connection with political power, but also when they are absent from the proximity of political power.³

The first two chapters of the book theoretically systematize two subthemes of political science. In the first chapter, the author constructs a conceptual history of the principle of subsidiarity as an instrument of public decision-making (23-26), embedded not only from a constitutional perspective but also at the level of public administration. This chapter dedicated to explaining the principle of subsidiarity is titled "Religion as

³ Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Politics,” as subsidiarity constitutes a substantial reflection of the theological establishment on how society should function politically and administratively. In the second chapter, by analyzing the (re)establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania under metropolitan bishop Andrei Șaguna, respectively in the Old Kingdom under Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Raiu observes that the principle of subsidiarity is deeply embedded in the first case and rather absent in the second one (59).

The author places the reforms of Metropolitan Bishop Andrei Șaguna in Transylvania to introduce laypeople into Church public governance under the imprint of liberalism, a historical process that unfolded simultaneously with the reforms of Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s generation. It was characterized, from an ecclesiastical aspect, as a conservative option of the modern state formation on two levels: on the one hand, a firm domination and control of the state over the organization of the Church (67-72), and on the other hand, ensuring a monopoly of the Church in social domains where the state needed legitimacy for the nation-building process (education, culture, etc.) by granting the Orthodox Church the status of “prevailing Church” (109).

Subsequently, with the Great Union of 1918, the two separately developed models were juxtaposed to administratively unify the Orthodox Church following the model of the unitary national state. The compromise resulting from the asymmetrical amalgamation of the two models was defined by a superficial assumption of the Transylvanian model at the level of public discourse, while, in the depths of its organization, the Romanian Orthodox Church remained tributary to a Constantinopolitan type of Christianity that mimicked the politico-administrative architecture of the state: the Church shaped its societal manifestations through adherence to the values of the state and subsequently emulated the institutional architecture of the modern Romanian state, both institutions defining themselves as unitary, national, centralized, etc. in the spirit of Constantinian theology.⁴ The historical-political consequences are presented through several case studies from the interwar period, underlining the synonymy between Orthodoxy and nation, but especially the incorporation of elements of corporatism from the religious imaginary into the political one.

⁴ Daniel Barbu, *Pia libertas* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2023).

The second part of the volume systematizes academic knowledge on the nature of political religions and analyzes the way in which the communist regime in Romania sought to unfold as a political religion by borrowing religious scenography in the political display, also by imitating structures of religious governance (118-128). The author makes this incursion to contextualize the last chapter of the volume which brings to light an under researched topic in the academic space: The Reflection Group for the Renewal of the Church (1990-1992), constituted within the Orthodox Church in order to reform the institution towards democratizing decision-making and the refinement of governing bodies and ruling instruments based on the principle of subsidiarity. Raiu reveals a series of statements, opinions, parliamentary speeches, and debates held in the public space between Church members and politicians regarding the way of connecting religion to democracy, a process that simultaneously imprinted both the nature of the political regime and the ecclesiastical organization. The author's conclusion regarding this case study is that, despite some isolated insider voices, such as Patriarch Daniel⁵ or Teodor Baconschi⁶, the Orthodox Church in the early 1990s rather aimed to return to its interwar status – characterized by a corporatist relationship with the state – and relatively easily abandoned the interest in democracy as a space for the natural exercise of religious freedom.

In conclusion, the author identifies two main causes for the lack of subsidiarity in the Romanian Orthodoxy: the existence of a political culture favoring centralism, statolatry, submission, etc., and a reluctance to democratize the Church from within, as a defiance of the center to delegate levers of power and access to resources to the periphery. The principle of subsidiarity, although fully embedded in Orthodoxy, had been largely overlooked and obstructed by ecclesiastical centralism.

The volume is therefore neither polemical nor theological. It constitutes a conceptual archaeology and a critical analysis of the confrontation of different publicly expressed visions regarding the "fertile tension" between

⁵ Daniel Ciobotea, *Confessing the Truth in Love: Orthodox Perceptions of Life, Mission and Unity*, (Iași: Trinitas, 2001).

⁶ Teodor Baconsky, "Gânduri încă fugare", *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei românești* [The Herald of Romanian Orthodoxy], anul I, nr. 2, (1990).

politics and religion, aiming to be an alternative to mainstream political historiography in the field so as to identify methodological tools for further analysis of the process of democratization in Romania.⁷ The volume does not represent an exhaustive political history of the relationship between the state and religious institutions in the Romanian space, but it lays the groundwork for future debates and research, especially regarding the methodology of addressing the relationship between politics and religion. This volume is positioned in an intermediary space between confessional historiography, which has over time brought to light only the positive contributions of the Church to the establishment of the nation, and the anticlerical positions of some political scientists and historians, who have seen the cultural and political preeminence of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Romanian society as the main obstacle in the way of political modernization and democratization.

IONUȚ-CIPRIAN NEGOIȚĂ
(Bucharest University of Economic Studies)

⁷ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* [The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church], vol. III, (Bucharest: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1981); Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Biserica de stat, sau Biserica în stat? O istorie a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1918-2023* [State Church, or Church within the State. A History of the Romanian Orthodox Church], (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2023).