

CONTRASTS AND UNBALANCES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN AND ROMANIAN RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

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The current paper aims emphasising the contrasts and unbalances representing integral parts of the European religious framework during the last decades, as resulting from the European Commission surveys or from specialised bibliography. We have taken into consideration some of specific religious indicators, namely: religious faiths, religious belonging, attendance to the worship ceremonies, but also another criteria as the regulation of the relationships between the state and the church or the residing environment. The second part of the study intends to argue the idea sustaining that also Romania may be seen as an actor within the contorted and controversial frame implied by the early European membership, at least under the existent regional disparities from an ethnic and religious point of view.

*“Reflecting on Europe and
religion is inexhaustible”
Raimun Panikkar*

1. RELIGIOUS CONTRASTS AND DISPARITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The last decades seems to be marked by an increasing tendency of the socio-spatial disparities, under the regional, inter-regional and intra-urban level. The mentioned disparities are changing from country to country and the measurement of their evolution is fulfilled by using some of very particular indicators of social, economic, socio-cultural or religious nature, etc.¹. To the European Union level we can discuss on a high degree of heterogeneousness and breaking up, not only for socio-economic or demographic level, but also for a historic, ethic or religious one as well. Regarding the last mentioned issue – the religious one – the current

¹ From more than 30 years, the European Commission Eurobarometers, for example, represent a reference instrument for analysing the main European issues. *European Social Survey Data* (ESS Data) carry out biennial surveys for the European Union countries offering statistical data allowing to measure and explain the values, attitudes, faiths and behaviors variations of the European states citizens, inclusively comparative studies between those countries.

religious pluralism, seen in this case under its own sociologic meaning, as contingent datum, historic and social, illustrating enough the diversity and expansion of the instruments by which the Europeans citizens are setting their relations to divinity.

1.1. Christianity. First of all, obvious disparities may be seen to the Christianity level-the common *religious* inheritance of Europe. North Europe is a prevailing protestant one, Southern Europe has a catholic majority while the eastern remains orthodox. On the other side, although the Jewish-Christian structure continue to remain determinative, it seems that the European Union is aiming now to convert more and more into a religious entity, complex and syncretic enough. Under the influence of the present demographic dynamics, based on the work force flood from the underdeveloped economic countries to the western European area, but also within the context of globalisation, the diversity and religious contrast between the European Union member states tends to become more prominent.²

1.2. Report State-Church. Major differences can be remarked regarding the way the European Union member states understand to settle the relationship between state and church, precisely the position and the mission accomplished by the Churches within society, and also the way the religious worships are legally settled. The traditional classification regarding the type of these relationships is a tripartite one and is based on three categories: the systems of separation, composition and state church. The subject requires a special attention and consequently it will not be detailed at the moment, not being an object of herewith study. Therefore, we mention that, taking the example of France as a recognised laic country, the religion is systematically removed from the public area. As it is the case for Great Britain, the king is considered the head of the Anglican Church but without financially supporting it. Italy, Spain and Portugal could be seen as holding a intermediary position between separation and protection of worships but, as prevailing catholic countries they are paying special attention and support for the catholic church³. In this case we are not entitled to consider with no reason as having a single European pattern when referring to the relationships between church and state in the enlarged Europe.

A particular case is represented just by Romania, a country with a clear orthodox majority where the relations between State and Church are regulated by the principle of autonomy and neutrality but in fact the state financially gives support to the Romanian Orthodox Church together with the other legally recognised worships, giving financially support for the remuneration of the

² The statistics of the last years, for example, stress a serious increase within the European Union countries of the number of muslims, sikhs, budhist, other non-Cristhian adherents for the recent date. By the presence of a numerous community of Romanian emmigrants in Italy, we can discuss in the recent years about a significant orthodox presence in this country.

³ For a more complete overview over this extremely special issue see Margiotta Brolio, C. Mirabelli, F. Onida, (1997). *Religioni e sistemi giuridici*, Bologna, Il Mulino.

worships members remuneration and also for building and consolidating their worship houses etc.

1.3. Religious beliefs. We sustain also that important disparities may to be found as regards the religious beliefs belonging to the European nations. According to the information provided by the European Commission Special Eurobarometer, *Social Values, Science and technology*, from January-February 2005, one of two Europeans have declared they believe in God (52%), roughly one of four sustain they believe into a supreme spiritual force, impersonal one, (27%), but 18% from them declare they do not believe neither God nor other spiritual supreme, impersonal force.

Significant differences are provided especially by the results concerning the religious beliefs of different nationalities: for example in Malta, country with an important catholic tradition, the majority of the population (95%) believe in God. We confront with a similar situation for all other countries with a prevailing religion, especially for the orthodox ones. For Cyprus, with a majority of Greek Cypriot Orthodox citizens, 90% from the total population declared they believe in God. Considerable data percentage can also be found as regard Greece (81%), Portugal (80%), Italy (74%), Ireland (73%).

Concerning Romania, a country with a majority orthodox population, strongly attached to the institution of church and tradition, 90% from the respondents sustained, according to the quoted survey their belief in God. The record in the field belongs to Turkey, candidate country to integration in the European Union, having a Muslim population in proportion of 95%.

Countries as Czech Republic (50%) and Estonia (54%) offer a strongly contrasting case by the increased percentage of persons believing in God – both ex-communist countries, but also Sweden (53%).

Representative for outlining the respondents believing in God are also the data as regards the socio-demographic status of the interviewed (age, level of education, gender, etc.). We notice from the total amount of persons declaring their belief in God, 58% are woman and 45% men, 63% with age of 50 years and over, 49% between 40 and 54 years, 46% between 25 and 39 years, 44% between 15 and 24 years. The highest level of those believing in God is noticed for persons having graduated their studies at 15 years, and the lowest (45%) to the subjects at the age of 20 years and over this age being still involved into a different type of studies⁴.

The existent discrepancies regarding the way the European are relating to religion are highlighted by a European survey dated June 2005, achieved also under the European Commission auspices according to which for the majority of Polish (86%), Italian (74%) and Portuguese (72%) individuals religion holds an important position in their lives. In the mean time, “religion has an important position in life” only for a minority of French (46%), British (40%) and Czech Republic (34%). (Table 1)

⁴ Special Eurobarometer. (Jan.-Feb. 2005). *Social Values, Science and technology*, TNS Sofres European Commission.

Table 1

What do you think about the following sentence: "Religion holds an important place in my life"

	European average	Czech Republic	Finland	France	Germany	Italy	Pays Bas	Poland	Portugal	Spain	Great Britain
In great measure	29	16	23	18	26	39	26	53	42	25	23
Less	29	18	30	28	30	35	20	33	30	35	17
Yes (average)	58	34	53	46	56	74	46	86	72	60	40
Almost not at all	15	21	20	18	13	14	16	10	12	11	20
Not at all	27	45	26	36	31	11	38	3	13	28	40
No (average)	42	66	46	54	44	25	54	13	25	39	60
Without opinion	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	0

Source : "Le Valeurs des européens". Surveys TNSS Sofres-Euro RSCG. 3. June 2000 (table adopted by the author).

1.4. Religious practice. Regarding the European religious practices, some of the surveys achieved within the European countries have revealed that countries as France, Belgium, Pays Bas and Northern countries are recognised as being areas with a less level of religious belonging and practice. It can be seen sustained, also, the existence of a Scandinavian pattern differentiated by a high degree of religious affiliation but a minimum religious practice. For Ireland, the statistics are showing an exceptional religious behaviour. The Orthodox churches (Greece or Romania, for example) present a similar case as well. (Table 2)

Table 2

Attendance of church in 1990 (as percentage)

	Once by week or less	Once by month	To important religious ceremonies etc.	Once by year	Never
<i>European average</i>	29	19	8	5	40
Catholic countries					
Belgium	23	8	13	4	52
France	10	7	17	7	59

(Continued table 2)

Ireland	81	7	6		5
Italy	40	13	23		19
Portugal	33	8	8		47
Protestant countries					
Spain	33	10	15		38
Great Britain	13	10	12	8	56
West Germany	19	15	16	9	41
Pays Bas	21	10	16	5	47
North Ireland	49	18	6	7	18
Evangelic countries					
Denmark		11			
Finland		-			
Island		9			
Norway		10			
Sweden		10			

Source : table adapted by Ashford S., Timms N. (1992). *What Europe Thinks: a Study of Western European Values*, Aldershot, Dartmouth, p. 46. apud: Grace David, Danièle Hervieu-Léger (coordinators). (1996). *Identités religieuses en Europe*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris, p. 53.

1.5. Rural religiosity – urban religiosity within European Union countries. Although the distribution of the main religiosity indicators is less highlighted due to the high degree of urbanity for the rural areas, some disparities and contrasts have to be taken into consideration under the European level, inclusively between the population religiosity from rural and urban environment. For this case the special attention for the European sociologists is oriented to the changes taking place in the rural religiosity, in comparison with the phenomenon in full development of “cities urbanity”. Moreover, the analysis of the current aspects regarding the rural and urban space (social morphology, mobility, sociability, new transformations in the scope of religiosity) for the time being is more and more an element of interest and research for the European sociology. In 1966, for example, it was settled LADYSS (Social Dynamics and monopolisation of space) as a mixed centre of research composed of GRMS (*Groupe de recherche mutations des sociétés europeenes*) within CNRS and STRATES (*Stratégies territoriales et dynamiques des espaces*), body that will structure the foundation of an

“Observatory of rural space evolution” (*Observatoire de l’Evolution de l’Espace rural*) for the European Union countries.

Based on the departure point that the urban and rural are representing two categories that has not to be divided into the applied research, starting with 1997, LADYSS decided to enlarge the field of interest over the urban space. It was strongly pointed out that urban and rural, only taken together could really contribute to the “deciphering” of the main social dynamics and actual recomposition of the European framework, of the present social changes.

Consequently, according to the new tendencies, the idea of renouncing to the dichotomy theory, the traditional one for these two research fields already mentioned it has become very important. There is a change determined by the current deeply evolutions influencing the both levels: on the first side, the urban followers sustain the imminent disappearance of the rural, taking into account the accelerated development of agriculture and of a serious decrease of the people actively involved in the agricultural work and of the “*villages urbanity*”. On the other side, the adepts of the rural theory foreseeing a serious urban crisis and, as a consequence, a true “*rural revival*”, in the same time with the emergence of a special rurality of post-industrial type.

Within the rural environment, they state, as a resistance reaction to the globalisation process, it begins to appear some original economic and cultural changes which, being of little amplitude at the moment could in the future bring to a “*rural revival*” and finally, towards finding a rural “*hidden revival*”, to reconfigure a new rurality in the European framework.

As regards the rural religiosity in England, the results given by two successive field surveys developed between 1999–2000 by the researcher Josiane Massard – Vincent, entitled her to draw up the conclusion that the inhabitants of the British villages, either the most devoted of them or the habitual ones continue to react to the church as the central body for their social life, in the meaning of the most representative public and meeting place, for socialising as well.

Nowdays, within the rural England landscape, the Anglican Church continue to be, above the spatial and architectural pre-eminence, the institution ordering not only the individual time but also the civil one⁵.

In France, the specialists are considering we really assist to a diminution of the differences between the rural and urban religiosity, just as a consequence of attenuation of the distance between rural and urban. During the Old Regime they appreciate the contrast between the religious life of cities and villages was significantly much representative as is the case in the present when the discrepancies are progressively reducing.

⁵ Josiane Massard – Vincent, *Observations preliminaires sur une paroisse des Midlands (GB)*, (<http://halshd.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-0006821>)

2. CASE OF ROMANIA

With regards to Romanian map of regional disparities we could consider without doubt under ethnic-religious point of view that our country remain an extremely homogenous one, the 23 ethnic minorities representing only 10.6% from the total population. The most representative is the Hungarian one: 1 431 807(6.6%)⁶ with an overwhelming majority of reformed believers (Calvinist tradition) being concentrated especially in the Transylvania area. Within three counties: Harghita, Covasna and Mureş, Hungarian ethnics are prevailing.

The Western region unfolds a clear cultural disparity: Hunedoara counting 90% Romanians while the other three component counties : Timiş, Arad and Cara Severin are strongly cultural influenced by the dynamic of the Hungarian and German minorities.

An another distinct religious-ethnic group is represented by the Russians, according to the census from 2002, their number amounting to 35 764 (0.17%)⁷, their majority sharing the old Orthodox rite, and being especially concentrated in Dobrogea and Moldova. Outstanding discrepancies could be seen as regards the territorial distribution of this ethnic-religious minority. Notwithstanding this minority is spread all over the country, the most important concentration of Russians being found in Dobrogea: Tulcea county (13 326), Constanţa (3 709), Braila (2792). The second concentration is placed in Moldova: Iaşi (4410), Suceava (2880)⁸. From the residence point of view, the census from 2002 indicates a representative predominance of the Russians community within the rural area (25538) compared to 25 538 in the urban area⁹. (ibidem, p. 771, p. 781).

From the residence point of view, the religious landscape acquires some special features: the territorial distribution of the Orthodox believers in the rural area, keeping into consideration the development regions, shows that, also preponderant within all eight, is still unequal distributed from a region to another. The most intensive presence of the Orthodox believers in the rural area is found in Oltenia (98.7%), Moldova (98.4%), Bucureşti (98.2%), Dobrogea (94.3%) and Moldova (93.5%).

The area counting the lowest Orthodox presence in the rural environment is represented by the followings: Banat (72.0%), Crişana (69.2%), Transylvania (61.7%). Within all these areas, we find the biggest Roman-Catholic concentration: Banat (14.8%), Transylvania (12.1%)⁹, Crişana (10.3%). And another contrast is

⁶ National Institute of Statistics. (2002). *The census of population and of their houses*, p. 802.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ National Institute of Statistics, *The census op. cit.*, p. 767

⁹ ibidem, pp. 771, 781.

represented by the regional territorial diffusion in the rural area of the New-Protestants: Transylvania (10.1%), Cri ana (5.5%); in all other areas, their presence is statistically irrelevant: Banat (1.7%), Moldova (0.7%), Bucure ti (0.3%), Muntenia (0.1%), Dobrogea (0.0%), Oltenia (0.0%).

As regard the Muslim believers from the rural areas, also for this case they are not homogenous distributed across the development regions: 3.9% in Dobrogea while in all the other regions they are less represented.

Interesting elements are provided by the statistical data concerning the diffusion area for the believers belonging to an “another religion”. For this situation, their distribution in areas as Transylvania (13.3%), Cri ana (9.8%), Banat (9.2%) proving the reality of multiculturalism and religious syncretism recognised for these areas of Romania. (Table 3)

Table 3

Religious belonging of believers, on development areas, in the rural environment
(percentage from the total amount of the region population)

What is your religion?	1. Moldova	2. Muntenia	3. Dobrogea	4. Oltenia	5. Cri ana	6. Transylvania	7. Banat
Orthodox	93.5%	98.4%	94.3%	98.7%	69.2%	61.7%	72.0%
Roman-Catholic	3.9%	0.2%	1.0%	0.1%	10.3%	12.1%	14.8%
New-Protestant	0.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%	10.1%	1.7%
Greek-Catholic	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%	4.6%	2.5%	2.0%
Muslim	0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Another religion	1.5%	1.2%	0.7%	0.6%	9.8%	13.2%	9.2%
Without religion	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%
Unspecified religion	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%

Source: National survey CURS 2003. Data processed within the Institute of Sociology of the Romanian Academy

A comparative study between the distribution of the believers within the rural and urban environment, based on the development regions entitles us to sustain there are not major discrepancies from this point of view, but by contrary we can

notice a clear percentage similarity. Therefore, we distinguish a discrepancy as regards the distribution of the Neo-protestant believers in the Transylvanian area: 10.1% in the rural environment and only 3.5% in the urban environment. (Table 4)

Table 4

Religious belonging of believers, by development areas in the urban environment
(percentages from the total population of the region)

What is your religion?	1. Moldova	2. Muntenia	3. Dobrogea	4. Oltenia	5. Cri ana	6. Transylvania	7. Banat	8. Bucure ti
Orthodox	94.5%	98.0%	94.4%	98.0%	66.3%	68.7%	79.1%	95.0%
Roman-Catholic	3.0%	0.3%	0.6%	1.1%	12.2%	12.9%	9.5%	1.6%
New-protestant	0.7%	0.4%	0.6%	0.3%	6.8%	3.5%	2.1%	0.6%
Greek-Catholic	0.5%	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	5.4%	4.1%	1.7%	0.9%
Muslim	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%
Another religion	0.9%	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	8.5%	9.9%	6.6%	0.7%
Without religion	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%	1.0%
Unspecified religion	0.15%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%

Source: National survey CURS 2003. Data processed within the Institute of Sociology of the Romanian Academy

The religious landscape within European countries offers, as we have tried to explain, one of the most significant indicators regarding the religious evolution. The development of what we can designate as **sociology of Europe** or of the European construction, based on the comparative information provided by, for example, the *Observatory of the social changes in Europe* and by settling a European comparative library, would really contribute not only to the building of the united Europe, but, in a compulsory way, to find the answer for one of the most important inquiry still seeking the answer, precisely, if Europe goes towards discovering their homogeneity or for emphasising the differences and diversity.

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