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Multiculturalismul și pluralismul religios

Rezumat

În acest studiu abordăm tema pluralismului religios și modul în care aceasta se poate raporta la contextul mai larg al multiculturalismului, în situația în care schimbările sociale din Europa și din întreaga lume sunt din ce în ce mai intense. Aceste schimbări de care vorbim trebuie analizate în primul rând din perspectiva antropologiei sociale și culturale, având în vedere că problema pluralismului religios este un subiect esențial în acest sens.

Plecând de la conceptul de recunoaștere am încercat să arătăm că este premisa esențială pentru consolidarea societăților multiculturale sau interculturale, singurele organizări sociale ce își demonstrează capacitatea de a oferi soluții în ceea ce privește rezervarea și dezvoltarea culturilor minoritare, inclusiv a minorităților religioase. În asemenea societăți se poate purta un fructuos dialog între grupul majoritar și cele minoritare pentru că funcționează mecanismul recunoașterii reciproce ce validează statutul acestora de identități egale, dar diferențiate.

Am arătat, în același timp, că rezolvarea problemelor grupurilor minoritare (inclusiv cele religioase) se poate face numai în urma intervenției statului prin legiferarea unor forme ale afirmării și recunoașterii, prin susținerea posibilității minoritarilor de a-și exercita apartenența la grupul specific exact în același mod în care le este facilitată majoritarilor dezvoltarea propriului grup.

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Keywords: multiculturalism, pluralism, religion, majority, minority, society.

Multiculturalism and Religious Pluralism

Summary

In this study, we approach the topic of religious pluralism and the way it relates to the wider context of multiculturalism, in a situation where the social changes in Europe and around the world are becoming more and more intense. These changes should be analyzed primarily from the perspective of social and cultural anthropology, taking into account that the problem of religious pluralism is the main issue in this regard.

Starting from the concept of recognition, we try to demonstrate that it is the essential premise for strengthening multicultural or intercultural societies, the only social organizations that can offer solutions for the preservation and development of minority cultures, including religious minorities. In these societies, a fruitful dialogue can take place between the majority and the minority groups because of the mechanism of mutual recognition that validates their status as equal but differentiated identities.

Also, at the same time, we point out, that solving the problems of minority groups (including religious ones) can be done only after the intervention of the government by legislating forms of affirmation and recognition by supporting the possibilities of the minorities to perform their membership in the specific group, the same way as the majority's development is facilitated to their group.

Multiculturalism and Religious Pluralism

Religious minority communities can be represented by a diversity of religious identities that manifest themselves both within Christianity and in other forms of assumption and institutionalization of the religious phenomenon. The criterion frequently used to differentiate between majority and minority, in a certain cultural space, is the numerical criterion. However, the term *minority* does not have a strictly statistical connotation, but designates a socio-political category. This is how we can understand why, in certain circumstances, it is possible to identify a minority, given that, although from a statistical point of view, it is a numerically superior group, is still in a situation characterized by the depreciation of value and discrimination. That is why we could define the minority as an „ethnic or racial group, but also any other group characterized by a status of inferiority, discrimination and persecution”².

Overall, the main features that characterize the minority could be the following: 1) the disadvantage generated by the small number of members 2) the limited action capacity within society 3) disadvantages within the socio-cultural environment. Taking into account these characteristics of the minority, it results that such a group has an inferior status in society if there is no functional mechanism of political authority intervention. As a consequence of this status, the religious minority groups are confronted with powerful activism that sometimes reaches to aggressive attitudes in the criticism of the existing social order. For this reason, fundamentalist tendencies can be identified especially in the case of movements related to religious minority groups.

Our analysis will continue by using in the argumentation the concept of *recognition* explained below.

Recognition is a basic element that must be taken into account when analyzing the interference between theology and ideology. The practice of interhuman and community relationships shows that mutual recognition cannot be imposed by a dominant church, by a representative institution of certain religious communities, nor by the national state conditioned by traditional ideologies. There is no doubt, that a neutral intervention is required. This intervention can only be made by a sufficiently strong state of law that proposes alternative multicultural policies that will underpin a framework for the dialogue between majority and minority religious groups, as well as the dialogue between minorities.

The approach of multiculturalism involves, first of all, the analysis of the problem of cultural diversity. In this regard, there can be identified three forms of cultural diversity, as it follows: a) subcultural diversity that indicates that members of society participate in a common culture, but at the same time they share a series of particular beliefs and practices in certain aspects of life b) community diversity involving the presence of relatively organized and self-aware communities that promote a series of different beliefs and practices c) the diversity of perspectives in which religious communities are also included. It implies

² Camil Mureșanu, *Națiune, naționalism. Evoluție a naționalităților*, Fundația Culturală Română, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, pg. 36.

the existence of members of society who criticize the values and principles of the dominant culture and try to rebuild it according to other values.

The basic concerns of the state regarding the promotion of multiculturalism would be to recognize the cultural identity of minorities, to block any kind of assimilation tendencies and, finally, to remove the attempts of declaring the majority's national identity superiority over the cultural identity of the minority. However, at the same time, we must draw attention to the fact that if multiculturalism becomes a purpose itself, there is the possibility of slipping into isolationism, intolerance, or, why not, chauvinism; in other words, multiculturalism might create the attitudes it originally tried to remove from the majority's mentality. One solution to this unwanted scenario would be to support and promote interculturality.



Palermo Cathedral; photo: Corina Isabella CSISZÁR

This involves cultivating dialogue and communication between different cultures, overcoming any isolationism through a process of interdependence, mutual influence and enrichment, recognition of the values of each minority (whether ethnic or religious) and real respect for differences.

Multicultural societies are social realities in which different ethnic or confessional layers come together in a certain historical context. The mutual availability of those involved is a passive one, engaged without too many consistent links of exchange and cooperation.

However, this does not exclude the existence of a common set of values and principles regarding civic identity, beyond ethnic or religious identity.

Intercultural communities include ethnic, religious and cultural groups that not only share the same space but more, they are interested in cultivating mutually rewarding, open relationships of interaction respecting the values, traditions and ways of life of each other. According to C. Taylor, the multicultural designates the specificity of the interaction between social actors who live next to each other, as opposed to intercultural, which involves interactions in which the actors who relate, live with each other³.

We must emphasize the fact that there are two different attitudes of modern societies when confronting or facing diversity. Namely, a monocultural behaviour is being promoted, forcing the assimilation of various tendencies or cultures, or multiculturalist behaviour is being adopted, assimilating the cultural plurality. Multiculturalism starts from a few basic premises 1) democracy is an extremely functional system in terms of resolving multicultural conflicts 2) all social actors must accept that others act in good faith 3) acceptance and respect of the state norms in which communities live should be the starting point in any discussion regarding cultural differences 4) multiculturalism is the best solution to solve



Patriarchal Cathedral Bucharest; photo: Florin AVRAM

³ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, C.U. Press, Cambridge, 1998.

the problems of cultural differences⁴.

Starting from these premises, when different cultures coexist within the borders of the same state, there should be established equality relations, without imposing the rules of the dominant culture on minorities and, at the same time, minority cultures should come out of isolation and share their achievements and values. At the same time, both the majority and the minority need guarantees to support their own cultures, but also to establish how to interact with other cultures. From this perspective, we understand how important the intervention of the state of law is, by having the role to establish a very clear set of multicultural policies. In other words, it is necessary to create a functional mechanism in such a way that different communities can preserve their own „symbolic” worlds as an essential condition for a real cultural and identity survival.

Taking into account the premises of multiculturalism, it can be stated that the dominant church can no longer be the only promoter of a framework for dialogue and if there are certain tensions between the majority and the minority, they can no longer be managed by the dominant church. Therefore, it is necessary the mediating intervention of the state of law which, due to its neutrality and it's available levers, that will be able to cultivate an environment of mutual identity recognition.

Neutrality can be seen as some sort of multicultural ideology, which mainly takes into account the diversity of minority groups with a different culture from the majority. The term *culture* can have a very broad meaning here, which includes both ethnolinguistic practices and religious practices. Therefore, multiculturalism can provide solutions for the preservation and development of minority cultures, including religious minorities.

Often a majority religious group cannot have a dialogue with minority groups precisely because of the way they created an image of each other. In fact, the dialogue can be carried out only when partners recognize each other as equal but differentiated identities. In the situation where there is no identity recognition, we cannot talk about creating a framework for promoting dialogue.

A certain interaction between majorities and minorities is often attempted by appealing to tolerance. Tolerance is essential, but (unfortunately) it also has a negative component, more precisely it implies a relationship of power and subordination between the tolerant and the tolerated, which can give rise to postponed conflicts at any time, for a while.

Beyond this negative aspect, tolerance has a positive component even by the simple fact that it allows the acceptance of something that is seen as being of another nature, as something that is allowed or admitted in the name of coexistence.

It is very important, beyond any theological approach, to note that the social actors involved in such a dispute must support a dialogue based on tolerance, diversity, freedom and responsibility.

As mentioned before, problems of minority groups (including religious ones) can

⁴ George Schöpflin, *Pe căi diferite spre multiculturalitate*, în Lucian Năstasă și Levente Salat (ed), *Relații interetnice în România post-comunistă*, Cluj-Napoca, CRDE, 2000, p. 124.

be solved only after the intervention of the state. This can be done by legislating forms of minority affirmation and recognition, by offering the possibility to minorities to support and exercise their membership in the specific group in the same way that it is easier for the majority to develop their group.



Calvinist Reformed Church Baia Mare; photo: Florin AVRAM

The discourse of multicultural policies must take into account not only the simple tolerance of the other but also real support for valuing differences. Therefore, identities can be not only asserted, but even, to a certain degree, negotiated in order to reach a non-conflicting, harmonious relationship, beneficial to both parties involved. This can be achieved if, along with the politics of toleration, there are also politics of dialogue and politics of recognition.

Recognition and identity politics necessarily involve establishing and stimulating dialogue with others. Especially since there is a strong connection between recognition and identity, more precisely identity is partially shaped by recognition. If recognition is missing or there is a wrong recognition, the effect will be that of a very negative impact on self-perception. More precisely, we are talking about another form of oppression, isolation and reduction to a way of being inauthentic.⁵

In this modern period, the role of identity and recognition is becoming increasingly important, and this has happened with the disintegration of honour-based social hierarchies.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, P.U. Press, 1992, p.70.

The notion of honour, structured on both inequality and preferentiality, is opposed by the modern principle of the person's identity, used in an egalitarian and universalist way as the dignity of the human being. The politics of dignity, as the essence of the politics of equal recognition, is fundamental in any democratic culture. Another contribution of the modern period is the new perspective in approaching and understanding individual identity. The importance of recognition was emphasized by the individualization of identity, which strengthens the inner dimension of the identity structure, linking it with the ideal of authenticity. In this context, we can notice the strong dependence between identity and recognition starting from a defining feature of the human being: the ability to have a dialogue. A dialogue endowed with a special virtue that allows man to learn the language of art, love etc.

The assumption of recognition has been essential in the process of understanding that identities are structured as a result of an honest and open dialogue, which has made politics of equal recognition socially central.

Within the concerns of the state regarding the initiation of public policies, the politics of recognition can be understood in two ways: a) as politics of equal dignity, starting from the premise that all human beings should be equally respected, beyond any differences. Extrapolating the same principle to the scale of a community, it should work also on the relationship between religious groups; b) as politics of difference, in which the recognition of the unique identity of the individual or group and the difference compared to others are being required.⁶ Regardless of how we approach the two perspectives, it is essential to understand that the perspective of egalitarian neutrality cannot be accepted because the difference cannot and should not be ignored, but assumed and valued; the „politics of difference” should be supported and stimulated at all levels of community life.

Finally, we must note that in today's Europe, the religious situation is changing, as a result of massive immigration.

The variety of religious experience⁷ should be taken into account when analyzing the spiritual evolutions that marked the second half of the 20th century, but especially, the first two decades of this century. Today's religious life is no longer dominated by a single religion. In Europe, we have a true mosaic of religions, practices and beliefs, each of them preaching the truth of a path to the absolute. In the Western social mentality, the idea that a certain religion (Christianity) has a soteriological monopoly is no longer valid, so the religious experience has diversified and the idea of a unique path to salvation has been dissolved. Or, this reality in today's Europe forces us to a deep knowing of the otherness.

Even if the full assumption of the multiplicity of religious experience and subtle communication with the other continues to be the privilege of a rather small group of intellectuals, nevertheless, important steps have been taken. It is primarily about the social respect determined by the exotic figures of otherness and about the real desire to know them. Assumption of the multiplicity of religious experience is necessary but, not a

⁶ Charles Taylor, op. cit., p. 31-32.

⁷ See Mircea Eliade, *Gânduri pentru un nou umanism*, Manuscriptum, Nr. 3, 1986.

sufficient condition for dialogue. It must be accompanied by a genuine spiritual willingness to believe in the chance of salvation of the Other.

The recent mass emigration to Western Europe has brutally reconfigured the old figures of otherness. The other is no longer the „heathen” situated at a great distance, but the everyday neighbour and the problem to be solved is what we do when the member of a culture, whose principles we have learned to respect, comes to live in our home. In other words, we speak of a „clash of civilizations” the well-known phrase of Samuel Huntington⁸.

The acceptance by the political factor of the ideology of multiculturalism establishes the normative framework that allows a dialogue of the religious minority with the majority, as well as the interreligious dialogue. The strongest basis for genuine openness to interreligious dialogue is the responsibility of the national and multicultural state of law, to provide the necessary environment for the integration of interfaith and interreligious dialogue into cultural dialogue. This allows for a real openness to a framework in which dialogue is possible as a practice of individuals and communities.



Interior of the Grand Mosque of Constanța (Carol I Mosque); photo: Corina Isabella CSISZÁR

⁸ See Samuel Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*, trad. R. Carp, Editura Antet, București, 1998.

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