

# The Human Person, Facing the Spiritual and the Social Crises

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## Introduction

**S**INCE THE Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church declared the year 2021 as the Solemn Year of the Pastoral Care of Romanians outside Romania, we thought of a missionary approach to the social challenges faced by the Romanians who emigrated abroad and of the spiritual crisis which the Romanian society is experiencing, and also of the Romanians estranged from their native country.

In the last thirty years, the world has been facing numerous transformations, and people moved from one country to another to live a better life. Therefore, the family has been challenged to adapt and to adopt changes in its attitude. Definitely, life and death are two different states which man chooses freely and conscious of his calling from nothingness to existence on an earthly world as a place for preparation for the eternal life or eternal death.

The human existence between life and death brings many trials, crises, achievements, and moments of searching for life's meaning, in a confused, consumer, and individualistic world dominated by the media.

The Covid-19 pandemic deepens these social and spiritual crises and faces the people with situations which affect their health, spiritual life, communion, communication, and understanding. Taking care of the earthly life is natural, and the care for the soul is normal, but we still have to consider the human person's value before God. The theology of life and death passes through the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life," and He was Resurrected from death for our salvation.

Nowadays, more than ever, the media speak and write about *crises*, and their diverse forms of manifestation within human society. Indubitably, the world and the people have gone and are going to through several crises, due to the historical context which was actually caused by them. Crisis means sufferance, shortages, material and spiritual poverty, so we consider what our Savior Jesus Christ said: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). Therefore, people could overcome any crisis with God's help, in the faith that if they do His will, they will overcome the difficult moments of their earthly life.

## The Spiritual Crisis from Person to Family and Community

**T**HE SPIRITUAL (Christian) crisis is caused by man's secularization, in the sense that he wants to live without God, only by his own powers, and according to what his reason dictates. It is self-evident that the spiritual crisis influences the social one, and vice versa. These crises can influence and determine one another. However, a social crisis can bring man closer to God, especially when he realizes that life on earth is transient, and his professional and material achievements are ephemeral.

Therefore, we can understand that a materialistic-scientific society without God, or which excludes God, is in a spiritual crisis. Of course, in this information era, we are tempted to see the consequences of the social and spiritual crises rather than their causes; and not because we ignore these crises, or because our generation is not aware of the motives which these crises are triggered by. Collapses of empires, natural calamities, uprisings, wars, the exploitation of other peoples, embargoes, the fall of governments, terrorist attacks, informational war, the deeper gap between rich and poor, the lack of jobs and low wages, totalitarian ideologies, these are some of the reasons for social crises during the history.

The first people's fall into sin, the "wandering" of the chosen people, religious formalism, persecutions, heresies, iconoclasm, crusades, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, religious fanaticism, Satanism, the sexual revolution, or spiritual relativism are some of the causes which have been determining the spiritual crises within society, group, and family. All these crises were overcome, while some of them have come returned among the religious preoccupations, but we notice they have left wounds in the mysterious body of Christ which is the Church. Thus, throughout history, and besides the One, Holy, Universal, and Apostolic Church, a multitude of Christian confessions and "small" churches appeared.

The family crisis<sup>1</sup> is the source of these crises, sometimes of personal nature. This is the conclusion the Church's servants and the Christian laymen also agree, no matter the social positions they occupy and the political affiliation they have.

Due to the two World Wars and to the creation of political spheres of influence, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there took place extraordinary mutations and changes at international level: a democratic Western Europe, and Central-Eastern Europe placed under the influence of socialist-communist regimes.

*The relation between religion and other components of religious life had a different trajectory in Romania and in the other ex-communist countries, compared to Western Europe . . . The secularization in this region is not only a result of the modernization, but also of the policies undertaken by the communist regime. The result was the elimination of the Church from the public and political life, since the socialist state built up the most bureaucratic, centralized, and secularized society which ever existed.<sup>2</sup>*

In comparison to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania is the least secularized country.<sup>3</sup> After 1990 the situation changed and, apart from the spiritual crisis from the Western Europe, the former communist countries from Central-Eastern Europe face “other negative factors which strike the family: poverty, unemployment, proselytism of the sects, violence, an uncertain future, and emigration to richer countries.”<sup>4</sup>

After Romania and other countries joined the European Union, the social crisis was not solved, and the spiritual crisis even less so. On the contrary, if we compare the historical periods in our country, we cannot speak about a major spiritual crisis, but about an accentuated secularization of Romanian religious life. This social-political action of joining the European Union has created risks and has offered opportunities: the risks of globalization, the deterioration of tradition, the decrease in productivity and the increase in consumption, along with Christian secularization. But there were also opportunities for economic development, for promoting the Christian-Orthodox values, and for conveying the cultural traditions.

The crisis of the Christian family in our country is due to parents or children abandonment, to the increased number of divorces, abortions, violence, juvenile delinquency, to consumerist advertisement, migration, and other factors. The spiritual crisis drives to desacralization, to the cessation of working the Holy Spirit’s gifts, depersonalization, and even to religious intolerance.

Nevertheless, the consumerist society, egotism, the total sensory bombardment, the decay of interpersonal relations affect the friendship amongst people and the possibility of founding an authentic Christian family. This happens because

*The today world lives in an era placed under the sign of individualism. To the individualistic spirit, “the other one” has nothing to say, but only to give. The “self” becomes a savage and solitary entity, animated by the fire of a dynamism having a sole finality: discretionary freedom. The individualist person does not want to think, or to change his self. It is enough to survive every day, to “vegetate” in an ephemeral world; he prefers isolation, and to ignore his own identity, he prefers the death of enthusiasm, indifference, the eclipse of life’s meaning, the trivialization of existence etc.*<sup>5</sup>

The decrease in the Christians’ faith in God and in the trust amongst people has led to the decrease of communion and to the accentuation of individual life and egotism. People’s loneliness brings them a lot of sufferance and despair, and that is why there are more suicides. His Eminence Bishop Gurie has approached the problem of the people’s communion, saying that the lack of communion represents “one of the great crises of today’s world.”<sup>6</sup>

In such situations, the Christians are urged to be open to the Church, and to Christ’s help, to pray, and understand that they are not alone. They are together with the Saints, with the holy people, with our Friend Christ, Who said: “You are My friends, if you do what I command you . . . This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:14, 12).

In the difficult moments of life, “the friend is a witness, and a landmark, he is a hope, and a source of trust or a powerful motivation for continuing the fight till sacrifice. When people are not alone, they can bear any sufferance, pain, or trial more easily.”<sup>7</sup> Even more, there must be love, balance, understanding, mutual support, communion, and completion in works within the family.

The manipulation of both man and family deepens the gap between people, and leads to a decrease in trust and to antisocial attitudes. The world offers what belongs to itself: materialism, passions, temptations, and perishable beauty, but the Church wants to defend the Christians against: death, sin, division, darkness, and falling, for it partakes God to us, who is the Source of our existence and the Creator of all things, seen and unseen.

The Prayer of Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane reflects the condition of the world, and the struggle between grace and sin, good and evil, Divinity and devils:

*And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one . . . I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. (Jn. 17:11, 15)*

The past world and the world of today means that which opposes God, what resists His work and does not obey the Son of God:

*In this respect, the word “world” is equivalent to secularism. Secularism is man’s disfiguration by the spirit of flesh and by passions. Secularism means that our life is penetrated by passions, and by the world of injustice, but we still live within the Church and we believe, trying to be theologians of this kind. Secularism means the estrangement from God, our exit from the communion with God, our attachment to material things and seeing all things and problems in our life as outside the will of God.<sup>8</sup>*

If we analyze only what the media present, we can see that many Romanian Christians are in the situation above. Man’s exploitation by man, drugs and alcohol addiction, verbal and domestic violence, the exacerbated desire of enrichment and power are some of the impediments which cause the social and spiritual crises and which endanger the efforts to overcome them. The new tendencies, non-values, and practices of the modern society attack the Christian tradition, and the Christian and Romanian identity. Some persons regard the Christian tradition as obsolete and outdated. We have passed from a dictatorial regime to a free society. We have freedom and responsibility. Irresponsible freedom and the disregard for the social laws lead to corruption and theft, to destruction, disorder, deceit, lies, mistrust, etc.

Without much exaggeration, we as a society might say that we have reached a valley of tears, as Jean-Pierre Denis stated:

*Our freedom is paid, consequently, with a sentiment of increasing unreality; we have never taken so much care of our own person and neither the identity has seemed so fragile before:*

*if studied, the development in itself could appear even equally irrational and even more despaired than the faith in God; everything goes towards fiction, even inside us.<sup>9</sup>*

Confusion, stress, the lack of prayer, superficiality, superstitions, relativism, religious syncretism, Satanism, indifference and others are the cause of personal crises which are reflected in family and society.

If we uttered more often and properly understood the prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian: "O Lord and Master of my life! Take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant,"<sup>10</sup> it would diminish the challenges of human crisis. The Christian Church confesses the importance of the faith in God in order to defend us against the idols of this world: love of power, pride, enrichment at all costs, rapid success, and idleness.

## The Social Crisis in Connection with the Spiritual Crisis

**T**HE SOCIAL crisis is caused by other crises: economic, financial, military, political, domestic etc. The surveys show that we live in a consumerist world, which takes great care of physical and material consumption. If in 2005 the number of active Christians increased,<sup>11</sup> after we joined the European Union their number decreased considerably. Behavioral changes appeared in personal life, which modified the hierarchy of social values and religious orientations. The modernization of Romanian society, the job crisis, the Romanians' migration, and the secularization of religious life led to a decrease in practicing the faith. Despite the fact that there are more churches than in 1990 and these churches are filled with believers on Sundays and on holidays, we have to admit that the parish churches in the rural areas are almost empty. The main causes of this situation are that the young people went to foreign countries, and many of those who remain feel no interest in Church worship. On the other hand, one can notice that the churches of the Romanian parishes from abroad are full of children and young people. Most marriages and baptisms are celebrated in those communities.

From the Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican West, the spiritual crisis stretches towards East too, because some Christians no longer want to meet God in Church and in prayer.

*This is because they do not really search for God; modern man is content with a precarious faith, which is rather reduced to a presupposition of His existence, and it is not a perpetual, real, and conscious experiencing of His presence.<sup>12</sup>*

The people have changed their way of thinking and their attitudes. "Contemporary society has acquired an ethos quite different from that of the societies in which the

established traditional religions arose.<sup>13</sup> Eliminating the fasting, not attending the Church religious services, the technologization of society, new religious movements, and a freedom full of immorality have changed the traditional rules which were normal and useful to both family and society.

*The modern man did not want to be either anti-pagan or Christian, so he refused both nature and grace, cosmic order and the law of God and His divine plan. Foreign both to the natural ancient city and to the supra-natural city of God, the modern city wants to be only a "man's city," a new political body, created by the man's autonomous will which replaces the authority of the natural or of the supra-natural good.<sup>14</sup>*

This finding brings to mind the states that enact laws against the truth, Christian morality, family protection, etc. Man's liberty to do whatever he wants, even to issue immoral laws, generates long-term consequences.

*The free-wheeling sense of freedom in the moral sphere has profound social consequences, and it is perhaps to the issue of personal responsibility, and the attempt to find new paths to social order, that the new religious movements particularly address themselves. For we have a curious hiatus between the apparent freedoms from the old moral controls associated, especially in the work sphere, and the constraints imposed by the new technological order itself. Whilst technology has freed men from the arbitrariness of ancient and perhaps anomalous local custom, it has imprisoned them within a new set of exacting obligations and demands. And these new constraints appear, in large part, so much less humane than those of the past; for, whereas the old morality was mediated by known persons, who could buffer the exactions of custom by human concern and sympathy, in the new situation the law behaves with impersonal coldness, and often with a new and quite arbitrary force, conditioned by statistical procedures, computers, and other inhuman, and often inhumane, apparatus. Society becomes increasingly abrasive, and sensitivity, moral awareness of each other, and interpersonal caring concern is given less place in the conduct of our affairs.<sup>15</sup>*

It is true that after 1990, the Romanian people experienced an enrichment of religious life through the programs and projects implemented by our Church. Worship has been freely practiced, without any restriction, the clergy have had access to public institutions, and the thirst for Christian life had been fueled up by the multiplication of parishes and of monasteries, by the construction of churches and by missionary, cultural-educational, and social-philanthropic activities.

Despite all these, lately, the Romanian's lack of relating to the Gospel and to its teachings has led to material enslavement and it tends to transform the Romanian society in a lifeless mechanism. Facing the spiritual crisis, the Christians are called upon to take an attitude.

This is why, after the fall of the communist regime, the Romanian Orthodox Church has been undertaking a multitude of actions in order to spiritually revitalize the Romanian society, and it continues this sanctifying work. The spiritual problems

cannot be solved only with the help of psychology or other humanistic disciplines, but mainly through the grace of God.

Introducing religion in schools, organizing catechesis in schools, building churches, granting religious assistance in the army, in hospitals, and penitentiaries, founding the *Lumina* (The Light) newspaper, the Trinitas radio-television stations, multiplying the seminaries and the faculties of theology, with double specializations in social-theology, sacred art, didactics and history, carrying out cultural, educational, social-philanthropic activities, all of these were planned and desired in order to support the Romanian Christians during their life on earth, as preparation for the heavenly life.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our Church's high hierarchy had the conscience of its mission in a state of freedom:

*In order that hope become a cultivated and fruitful gift within our Church, we need programs of catechesis and pastoral assistance for children and families in crisis within parishes and eparchies, catechesis cycles preparing the young people for marriage, pastoral catechesis for the newly married and for their parents, so that the preparation for marriage is not reduced only to the beautiful ceremonial of the wedding. We need a program of catechesis for godparents, in order to involve them in continuously upholding the families for whom they witness at the wedding. Through all these programs we must affirm and cultivate the holiness of marriage, organize the solidarity within family and amongst families, affirm the dignity of maternity and paternity, of filiation and brotherhood, as gifts of God's love which must be cultivated.<sup>16</sup>*

All of these must be strengthened with much prayer, which we can achieve through the power of love, we can forgive, and reconcile with one another, and we can give, endure, and sacrifice ourselves. The prayer means also a request: "I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (Jn. 16:24–25). The dialogue with God (through prayer) and with people, the exchange of gifts and the reconciliation consolidate the communion, solidarity, and personal identity of the filiation to Christ.

Through the Church's work (the Holy Liturgy, the Holy Mysteries, and the other religious services), the Son of God shows us the purpose of His coming into the world: "I have come in order they have life, and they to have it plentifully" (Jn. 10:10). Thus,

*the fundamental message of the holy 'gesture' of God that is descending into history as man, is that God considers man a priceless being. . . . He is a 'God for people,' and not One opposed to the inwards aspirations of man, it is a God Who makes out of man's life and happiness the most eloquent expression of His glory. He is a God Who finds His supreme delectation in man's happiness and in his existence as full of achievements as possible.<sup>17</sup>*

God descends, He humbles Himself, He heals the man of death, and He builds up a ladder to the heavens for man. Actually, God is continuously descending to His creature—He is in a continual kenosis.

The Christians relation to the imperishable values of life within the Church protects man against the world's temptations and challenges.

*It is well known that there are two great books of the mankind: Nature and the Scripture. Both of them lead the one who lives in ascesis to "read" them, namely, to "know" and "understand" them towards worship, culture, and science, activities which elevate the spirit and the quality of life through the truth, good, and beauty which they convey . . . The love for God, for the fellow humans, and for the entire creation, the preservation and the experience of the ancestral faith, the preservation and the valuing of the traditions shelter us against the temptations of the age we are living in: faithlessness, carelessness, and forgetfulness. They prepare us for confession and for partaking of the Holy Mysteries towards the true life, useful to our fellow humans and pleasant to God.<sup>18</sup>*

Rev. Prof. Ioan I. Ică Jr. made an interesting statement: "The paradox of the modern and postmodern man is that he affirms a will lacking ontological content, and a struggle of liberty against the truth."<sup>19</sup> Does man know the truth he fights, or does he only ignore the truth? It happens sometimes that he fights against the Lord's words: "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn. 8:32).

## Conclusions

**T**HE CHRISTIAN experience shows us that any spiritual crisis causes sufferance both to the body and to the soul (cf. Mt. 9:2–8; Mk. 2:1–12). The Christian's sufferance can be considered as a pedagogical measure taken by God, or it can determine an uprising against the world and the Creator within man. For two millennia, the Christian Church's martyrs were models to be followed for their reaction in especially difficult moments of their life on earth.

In our days, the Christian (in general) in the Romanian society faces diverse anxieties, he asks questions about his destiny, he takes an interest in the zodiac and the future, in his job, and social justice, in fulfilling his requests... This is why we believe he should not forget Christian love, faith in God, prayer, and be rather preoccupied with establishing a hierarchy of his main objectives on a long term, according to the words of our Savior Jesus Christ: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt. 6:33).

The earth is full of graves and common graves, watered by the martyrs' blood and the sacrificial spirit of the people, but some persons are in crisis, are prey to a narrow vision and despair, loneliness, fear, and insomnia, intrusive thoughts, and other problems. The solution for solving the crises can be found in our powers of believing in change and of asking for God's help. Faith, good deeds, prayer, and communion with other persons help the man who is in a crisis in order to find the way to heal more quickly. The personal crisis is not solved by looking at the past, but by living realistically in the present in God's love.



We can already notice the consequences of isolating people in their homes, of the restrictions against attending the Church's religious services, of online schooling, and of wearing masks etc. The struggle for normal survival continues.



## Notes

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16. † Daniel, 370.
17. † Georgiu and Tia, 84.
18. † Vasile Someșanul, “Cuvânt-înainte,” in *Sfintele Evanghelii și rugăciuni alese*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2010), 5–6.
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### **Abstract**

#### **The Human Person, Facing the Spiritual and the Social Crises**

The present study covers several aspects regarding the human person who has experienced and will experience diverse crises occurred in society, namely social and spiritual crises, and it also includes aspects related to families which suffer because of the crises which emerge in the world, in the country, and in the community. The spiritual (Christian) crisis is caused by man's secularization, namely, by his desire to live without God, only through his own forces, and according to what his rationality dictates. In an extended statement, we notice that the social crisis is determined by other crises: economic, financial, military, political, the crisis of the family, etc. Nowadays, these crises are deepened by the Covid-19 pandemic, by the restrictive measures taken in order to stop the pandemic from spreading. Through the Holy Church, God offers solutions to the people in order to surpass the spiritual crises: faith, prayer, alms-giving, and love. The social crises can also be overcome through communion, sacrifice, trust, and wisdom. The Christian, the family, the Church, the School, and the community have experienced and will experience crises which thoroughly challenge our love of God and of people. If people are anchored in the imperishable values of life, this will create real possibilities for overcoming the crises emerging into the world.

### **Keywords**

crisis, Church, Christian, family, secularization