

The Social and Pastoral Role of Monasticism in the Romanian Society

Archimandrite Emilian NICA, PhD*

**"Al. I. Cuza" University, "Dimitru Stăniloae" Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
Closca Street, No. 9, 700066, Iasi, Romania
E-mail Address: premilian@yahoo.com*

Abstract

The present article provides an overview the role that monasticism has played in the history of Romania as a factor contributing to the development of society, by providing guidance and proclaiming and promoting the values of Christian life. Emphasizing the biblical teachings of Christ, the ultimate example of service, and the writings of Church Fathers, the author discusses the role past and present role and place of monasticism in the Romanian society, especially in terms of its engagement in the social and pastoral area.

Abrégé

L'article offre une image d'ensemble sur le rôle que le monachisme a joué dans l'histoire de la Roumanie en tant que facteur qui contribue au développement de la société, par l'orientation et l'affirmation et la promotion des valeurs de la vie chrétienne. En réitérant les enseignements bibliques du Christ, l'exemple suprême du service au bénéfice du peuple, et les écritures des Pères de l'Eglise, l'auteur discute le rôle passé et présent du monachisme dans la société roumaine, en ce qui concerne l'engagement dans le territoire social et pastoral.

1. Introduction

Monastic life can be referred to as being "a special way of seeking perfection in Christianity by professing one's total commitment to following Christ into the holiness of His Church. Those who opt to live with Christ in the holiness of the ecclesial community have taken on the tremendous responsibility of being bearers of Christ, *christophoros*,

enjoying the freedom of their own choice"¹. Without exaggerating, just by observing the features of monasticism, one can argue that "The Saviour Himself was the initiator of monastic life, giving it unique spiritual value and starting our journey towards perfection"². In this respect, we shall recall Christ's attitude towards the rich young man (Matthew 19: 16-22) who had obeyed all the commandments, yet to attain perfection he had to abandon all his wealth. The Lord Christ told him: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19: 21).

"In every person, be they Christian or of another religion, living on the earth, there should be a monastic element. When Jesus Christ said: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10: 37) or "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16: 24) or "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5: 48), he did not speak to monastics, as there were none in those times"³. His commandments were directed at everyone, including those who were married. Monastic virtues, "such as humility, obedience, purity, patience and even the indifference to material things are all qualities worthy of a genuine family. St. John Chrysostom states that it is a delusion to think that certain things are for the lay only, while others are for monastics"⁴. Even though there are two paths leading to the same Kingdom, the virtues enumerated above are required of both monastics and lay persons.

It is well-known that among Church members, those who belong to the monastic community, the monks and nuns who have devoted their whole life to the Saviour Christ occupy a foremost and highly significant place in Christian life and the activity of the Church. "Monasticism, as a way of life founded on a special spiritual calling, participates in the life and activity of the Church

¹ Rev. Augustin Rusu, *Dimensiunile duhovnicești-spirituale ale monahismului ortodox* [*Spiritual Dimensions of Orthodox Monasticism*], in the B.O.R. journal, year CXIV, issue 7-12, 1996, p. 361.

² *Ibidem*, p. 363.

³ Archimandrite Roman Braga, *Foreword* to Nicolas Stebbing, *Purtătorii Duhului – duhovnicie și duhovnici în Ortodoxia românească*, translated into Romanian by Rev. Dan Sandu, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

in the world and has greatly contributed to the defence of the right faith, the growth and enrichment of Orthodox spirituality and to the social and pastoral care of society of all historical periods”⁵. “Monasticism emerged in history as a new dimension of the life in Christ at a time when in the Christian world surfaced a series of movements towards reducing and neglecting certain Christian moral values”⁶. Monasticism is essentially the ecclesial organisation of the observance of Gospel counsels (of which three stand out, i.e.: freely chosen poverty, chastity and complete obedience) aim to guide those who yearn to attain perfection.

The uniqueness and “beauty of monastic life lie in the distinction between **counsel** and **commandment**”⁷. **Commandments** are binding for everyone and their “observance is necessary for salvation and for the love of God and for one’s neighbour”⁸. “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14: 21); **Counsels** urge one to completely renounce the world in order to pursue Christ freely: they are “urgings that appeal to our will, in order to achieve the higher good, the perfection of love”⁹; “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

“The life of a monastic consists in the actual realisation of three counsels: 1. freely chosen poverty; 2. chastity; 3. complete obedience, called evangelical counsels, as they are founded on the Lord’s Gospel and are an item of evangelical moral.

1. The counsel of freely chosen poverty is founded on the Saviour’s words: “If you want to be perfect” (Mark 10: 21; Matthew 19: 21).

2. The counsel of chastity is given by Christ during the discussion with the Pharisees and the apostles on the issue of divorce; he also refers to eunuchs (Matthew 19: 10, 19: 12).

⁵ Rev. Dumitru Radu, *Învățătura despre Biserică* [Teachings about the Church], in „Îndrumări Misionare” [Missionary Guidance], Ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1986, p. 405.

⁶ Rev. Augustin Rusu, *op.cit.*, p. 364.

⁷ Rev. Dumitru Radu, *op. cit.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ *Ibidem.*

3. The counsel of obedience emerges from the overall spirit of Christ's teaching: „If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16: 24, 10: 37 – 38; Luke 14: 26).

Self-renunciation means the abandonment of the ego, of one's self-importance and of the desire to be dominant. The following of Christ means total self-sacrifice in obeying Him”¹⁰.

Monastic vows have deep historical roots and arose out of the need for order, at the time when Christian monasticism passed from a mainly anchorite organisation to a cenobitic (communal) one first in small and then larger monasteries. Monastic vows encapsulate what one may call the battle plan in the struggle against the seven deadly sins thus named by St. John Cassian.

1. Obedience means not placing trust in oneself; while it must be absolute, commandments must not be absurd.

2. Freely chosen poverty is viewed as a virtue, a life norm, an ideal to attain and not as a situation to avoid. It does not mean evading the duty of labour.

3. In Christian Orthodoxy, the vow of chastity is reserved for monks, while priests are free to either marry or be celibate.

“Monastics live in monasteries, abiding by special rulings, based on the Church's spiritual experience acquired in the Apostolic and patristic times”¹¹. The prominent fathers of Christian monasticism include: St. Paul of Thebes, St. Anthony the Great, St. Macarios of Alexandria, St. Macarios of Egypt, who were representatives of anchorite (eremitic or recluse living) monasticism, while St. Pachomius the Great, St. Basil the Great, St. Benedict of Nursia, St. John Cassian were the forerunners of cenobitic monastic life (life in monasteries).

“The Romanian people has a special monastic calling which goes back”¹² to the earliest Christian centuries, after the Holy apostle Andrew preached the Gospel on the territories that now form Romania. During those times many Christians in the historical region of Dobruja chose the monastic way of life, among them St. John Cassian, St. Dionysius Exiguus, St. Germanos, collectively known as the “Scythian monks”. “The general features of Romanian monasticism are considered: the balance between eremitic

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 406-407.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 408.

¹² Archimandrite Roman Braga, *op. cit.*

and cenobitic life, the tradition, the adaptable style of life rather than rigid rules, with alternating worship, labour, asceticism and contemplation. Its main contributions relate to: a). artistic creativity; b). culture; and c). the promotion of a national ecclesial, cultural, social and pastoral life. Monasteries emerged as centres of the emerging state authority (they acted as citadels, fortresses of prayer and of defence against enemies of the state) and of feudal economy, while also promoting Byzantine arts, manuscripts and printings, first published in Slavic and increasingly in Romanian, and generally supporting the national unity of Romanians¹³.

Generally, Romanian monks are not isolated. They are present everywhere: in monasteries, in parish churches, in diocesan centres, in cultural and pastoral centres, in the cities and in the public milieu.

A feature of Christian Orthodox monasticism is that "it is not ordered by rules, but rather by the spiritual father and the disciples around him (...) It is true that St. Basil the Great established in writing several important principles for attaining salvation, which inspired St. Benedict in setting strict rules. (...) There are general and local monastic rules in Orthodoxy, determined variously by the abbot, the bishop and generally by the local spiritual context"¹⁴. For example there are in general certain differences between the monastic rules applied in a monastery located in the mountains and those of a monastery-cathedral in a city". The monastic community attaches importance both to the serving of people and to asceticism. Both attitudes aim at banishing selfishness and attaining holiness, through constant service and love of people"¹⁵.

"The openness of Romanian monasticism reflects the fraternal love, which characterises the life of the monastic community founded on God's love for man. The paradox of the missionary vocation of monastics lies in their life and work, as they renounce the world, dedicate themselves in solitude to God and brings to the outside world the testimony of their spiritual life and experience, sharing with the world the spirit of love and beauty discovered by serving and living together

¹³ *Mărturii de sfințenie românească – Monahi îmbunătățiți din secolele trecute* [Examples of Romanian Sainthood – Righteous Monks of Centuries Past], preface and editing by deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 7.

¹⁴ Archimandrite Roman Braga, *op. cit.* p. 7.

¹⁵ Rev. Augustin Rusu, *op. cit.*, p. 371, *apud* Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Istoria Lausiacă (Lavsaiçon)* [The Lausiak History], introduction, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1993, p. 8.

with Christ"¹⁶. It is indeed necessary to experience life in a monastery and afterwards serve the Church and its social, cultural and pastoral activity. This is also a condition for those who desire to go into seclusion and live a solitary life.

2. Development

Romania has been blessed by God with many monasteries. The fathers who founded or later reordered Romanian monasticism include St. Nicodemus of Tismana, St. Basil of Poiana Marului and St. Paisius of Neamt. They believed that the essence of monastic life did not lie in ascetic virtues, as these may be practised by lay people also. The specific aim of monasticism is the social and pastoral relationship, creating a new world within this world yet also beyond this world. Monastics act as lights guiding the world towards salvation or as models of virtue that show the path to spiritual growth.¹⁷ The Lord Jesus Christ is the extraordinary living model for the pastoral actions that monastics carry out among the faithful, especially in Romanian monasticism. Mark's Gospel, chapter 6, states that the Lord Jesus Christ fed a multitude of around 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Yet before satisfying their hunger with food, he nourished them with the word of God, the words of eternal life. According to the apostle Mark: "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. **So he began teaching them many things.** By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place", they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat". Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray" (Mark 6: 34-36, 41, 42, 46).

¹⁶ Dan Zamfirescu, *Paisianismul, un moment românesc în istoria spiritualității europene* [*The Hesychast Movement of St. Paisius, a Romanian Moment in the History of European Spirituality*], Bucharest, 1996, p. 71.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 371-372.

St. Mark's account shows the many acts of Christ our Saviour:

- his pastoral work, i.e. teaching the multitudes about the mysteries of God;
- his social and philanthropic work: He fed them, multiplying the loaves and the fish; He healed their sick (cf. Matthew, chapter 14);
- his prayer which makes the connection with God; Christ went on the mountain to pray, he retired from the world into the tranquillity of the mountain.

The example of the Lord Christ is followed in monasticism in general and in Romanian monasticism in particular.

Monasteries have been called "mirrors of the kingdom of heavens" for their beauty and also "laboratories of resurrection"¹⁸ due to their very dynamic religious life.

In Romania, "there are thousands of faithful who go to monasteries not as tourists but as pilgrims who seek a higher dimension of their earthly lives"¹⁹. As such, the cooperation between the parish and the monastery is very close.

One way of understanding the pastoral relationship between monasteries and parishes is to view it from the perspective of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage to monasteries deepens the commitment of the lay Christian to the life in Christ. When parish members face great problems or sins, parish priests themselves advise them to visit monasteries and meet spiritual fathers who lead holy lives. This is because spiritual fathers have a higher moral and spiritual authority and people respect their counsel. Taking into account the visits that the faithful (the lay people) make to monasteries for pilgrimages, to attend religious services or regain peace of mind, Romanian monasticism carries out a pastoral activity of spiritual guidance towards the kingdom of God. Although monastics have retired from the world to pray and to seek peace and perfection, they teach the many people who come to

¹⁸ Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, *Dăruire și dăinuire – raze și chipuri de lumină din istoria și spiritualitatea românească* [*Devotion and Permanence - Rays and Faces of Light in the Romanian History and Spiritual Life*], Trinitas, 2005, p. 380.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

monasteries, serve them and pray for their health and salvation. Even the Church services held at monasteries include prayers for the entire world. Indeed the sheep (the faithful) whom the priest shepherds are not his own, but Christ's: "Take care of my sheep" the Resurrected Christ tells the apostle Paul (John 21: 16). Pastoral care signifies the spiritual guidance of rational people in the process of salvation: *freeing oneself from passions, being enlightened by the sanctifying and redeeming grace of the Holy Spirit and uniting with God in the uncreated Light of His Heavenly Kingdom*. This unique and eternal work demands absolute devotion and constant care. That is why the Holy apostle Paul says that the shepherds "keep watch over you as men who must give an account" (Hebrews 13: 17). Indeed, spiritual shepherds know that they will account to the Arch-shepherd Christ about their faithfulness or indifference to their mission.

Romanian monasticism has had a highly important pastoral role, as people will come to monasteries with confidence and hope to be assisted in their spiritual growth and to learn how they can heal their bodies and souls of sins. Almost all monasteries keep holy relics or miracle-making icons, which are venerated by the faithful who receive spiritual joys for their adoration. Moreover, there are spiritual elders in monasteries who through their service of God and their holy lives help the Church in her pastoral mission. For example, Sihăstria monastery and the late fathers Cleopa and Paisie, Sămbăta de Sus monastery and father Teofil Pârîian, Techirghiol monastery and father Arsenie Papacioc etc., are "sought by the faithful for their philokalic spirituality"²⁰, for their constant prayer and the wise counsel they provide.

In past centuries also Romanian monasteries carried out pastoral activities given that:

- many localities (villages) belonged to major monasteries and monks attended to the spiritual needs of those communities;
- the monastics (through their Metropolitan) were engaged in the pastoral activities of the diocese (at the prince's court);

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

- in the Middle Ages in Romania, monastics copied manuscripts and printed books on theological topics to minister the faithful.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, well-known monastics and priests were involved in local social revolutions.

The divine service itself of the Romanian Orthodox Church has a deeply philanthropic nature, owing to the memorial prayers for the dead and the offerings given for those who have passed away²¹. The Holy Church Fathers recommended to the clergy and the monastics to establish social care institutions, one of the most remarkable achievements being the *Basiliad* founded by St. Basil the Great. The care of Romanian monasteries for people in need was evidenced since the Middle Ages by the establishment in Vallachia of hospices at Sarindar and Ghergita Monasteries, near Bucharest²², homes for the sick at the monasteries Cozia, Bistrita, Hurezi, Polovragi, Dintr-un Lemn, Sadova, Tismana, Vodita, hospitals at Coltea and Pantelimon monasteries and Brâncoveanu Hospital in Bucharest, and the orphanage for girls at All-Saints' Monastery²³. In Moldavia too the local princes, founders and benefactors of monasteries, sought to set up social assistance bodies such as the homes for the sick at the monasteries of Putna, Neamț, Patrauti, Secu, Dragomirna, Rasca, Slatina, Horaita, Văratec, Agapia, Adam, the hospices at the monasteries of Neamț, Galata, Golia, the hospitals at Dragomirna monastery (17th century), St. Spyridon (Iasi, 18th century) and the one at Targu Neamț, under the patronage of Neamț Monastery (19th century)²⁴. All these social care centres, as well as other minor ones, required the involvement of monks and nuns to care for the sick, the wounded, orphaned children, the elderly and all those in need.

However, "in 1863, the Romanian State secularised all the property and assets of monasteries (many of which were endowed to the Holy Lands and were headed by Greek abbots), ordered the closure

²¹ Rev. Ion Vicovan, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române [The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church]*, vol. II, Trinitas, Iasi, 2002, p. 271.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 276.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 277-286.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 289-297.

of many monasteries and imposed very restrictive measures as to the legal age for joining a monastery, i.e. 60 years for men and 50 years for women. Of the 250 monasteries and sketes only 75 continued their existence, the others being turned into parish churches, prisons or psychiatric asylums. At the end of the 19th century, there were only 820 monks and 2,250 nuns down from 3,500 monks and 3,045 nuns earlier in the century²⁵. Due to the harsh measures against Romanian monasticism and the crisis they entailed, monasteries continued their cultural and pastoral activity even though they could no longer be involved in social, philanthropic and missionary activities. During the First World War, many monks and nuns helped the Romanian army on the battlefields and in hospitals as healthcare assistants, nursing assistants and as military priests who performed religious services. Other hieromonks (monks ordained as priests) would administer the rites in parishes whose priests had been enrolled. Most monasteries set up field hospitals and orphanages, where nuns and monks joined by medical staff provided healthcare, material support and religious assistance. During the interwar period, Romanian monasticism “was called upon to be more actively engaged in the life of the Church. The larger monasteries had to establish religious art workshops, printing houses to produce and distribute worship books and publications on religious and moral issues, missionary schools to combat sects, monastic seminaries, schools for church singers, etc. Convents had to open special training schools for nuns, vocational schools, orphanages, retreat homes for the elderly, training institutes for charity nuns who cared for the sick and the wounded during war²⁶. Monks were required to make pastoral and missionary visits to villages to strengthen the spiritual life and preach the teaching of the Gospel of the Saviour.

“After the year 1948, the Church was no longer allowed to be active in the area of practical service, as in the communist view, the State was supposed to take care of everything. In a communist society there are no poor people or any social problems, therefore the Church had “no role to

²⁵ *Mărturii de sfințenie românească – Monahi îmbunătățiți din secolele trecute* [Examples of Romanian Sainthood – Righteous Monks of Centuries Past], preface and editing by deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, pp. 23-24.

²⁶ Metropolitan Efrem Enăcescu, *Privire generală asupra monahismului creștin* [An Overview of Christian Monasticism], Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House, Craiova, 2007, p. 147.

play”²⁷. During the communist dictatorship, Romanian monasticism went through a very difficult period, despite all the defending actions taken by patriarch Justinian and other bishops. Many monks were arrested and sentenced to prison. While in detention, **some managed to act as genuine shepherds of souls and keep alive the flame of the faith in Christ and in His Church.** The great trial for Romanian monasticism came in 1959, when through a state decree and a new highly restrictive regulation, monks over 60 years of age and nuns over 55 were forced to leave monasteries and many of these places were closed and some were turned into asylums, museums or tourist attractions²⁸. Most of the monks who were subsequently integrated in the civilian life were role models of Christian living for the faithful. The communist regime sought to abolish monasticism, a goal that was hard to accomplish. “The regime confiscated assets, sent monks away from monasteries and prevented young people from joining monasteries”²⁹ and becoming monastics. It sought to discredit monasticism in the eyes of the faithful and weaken its power and resistance against the communization of the Romanian society.

During those times of communist terror and control, the Rev. Prof. Dumitru Staniloae was able to publish five volumes of the *Philokalia* while Fr. Ioanichie Balan of Sihastria monastery published books “about Romanian monasticism”³⁰ which provided much support to Christians seeking spiritual development. Even during the communist times, many faithful would go to monasteries to attend services, to have their children baptized, to receive the sacrament of Matrimony, to confess and receive the Eucharist, because in their parish communities they feared being tracked by the secret police and non-believers. Monasticism therefore carried out a type of secret pastoral care which ensured the survival of the Church.

²⁷ Rev. Ion Vicovan, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

²⁸ *Mărturii de sfințenie românească ... [Examples of Romanian Sainthood ...]*, p. 25.

²⁹ Protosingelos Petroniu Tănase, *Foreword to Sensul desăvârșirii în monahism [The Meaning of Perfection in Monasticism]*, spiritual counsels compiled by Monk Ignatios, part of ‘Comorile Pustiei’ collection, Anastasia, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 5-6.

³⁰ *Mărturii de sfințenie ... [Examples of Romanian Sainthood ...]*, p. 25.

At the fall of communism in December 1989, Romanian monasticism was paradoxically in a relatively flourishing state, being organised around several dozen great spiritual fathers, who had survived persecution and were held in high regard by hundreds of thousands faithful.

Monks always prayed for the world both in times of peace and in times of persecution and a living bond between monasteries and the faithful in the world (in parishes) has been maintained. Many times, with the agreement of the local bishop, hieromonks acted as parish priests in villages or cities, becoming friends of people. "Monks must become friends of people, just like Jesus"³¹. Therefore, we can say about monasteries that they must be "places of radiating, generous friendship, wholly dedicated to pastoral service"³². Monks and spiritual fathers do not share with the faithful only evangelical teaching, they also help them to become familiar with Christ the Saviour and resurrect their souls through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The daily celebration of the Holy Liturgy in monasteries ensured that God did not turn His face away from the downtrodden Romanian people. The whole service of the Church revolves around the Holy Liturgy. The core of parish and monastic Christian living is the Liturgy, the communion with the Flesh and Blood of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Those who serve the Church use the Sacraments and also the other Holy offices (blessing the home, the Lesser Blessing of Waters, blessing the natural environment) as means and occasions to pursue the individual and shared pastoral care of Christians. A 20th century theologian said: "Give me good spiritual fathers and I will change the face of the world." Twenty-five years ago spiritual fathers were building churches in the hearts of people, while in Bucharest churches made of stone were demolished"³³. The visits that monks made among families through the years brought many spiritual benefits to the faithful. Their well-ordered visits in the outside world, the counsel they provided, the commitment to their monastic

³¹ Dr. Antonie Plămădeală, Metropolitan of Ardeal, *Tradiție și libertate în spiritualitatea românească* [Tradition and Liberty in Romanian Spiritual Life], including excerpts from Romanian Patericon writings and a preface by Rev. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, 1995, p. 302.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

duties and the spirit of fraternal aid all had a positive impact among the lay people and strengthened their faith that it was possible to live their lives according to Christ's teachings³⁴. In developing and engaging monasticism, our Church was able to transform the Romanian society and put it on a path towards the higher goals of life in Christ our Lord. The people of this century need monasteries and monks willing to devote themselves to the Church's pastoral work. That is why monasteries are open to pilgrims, while certain monasteries and sketes have been built in the proximity of villages to provide pastoral, missionary and social assistance to Christian communities.

Nowadays the Romanian Orthodox Church comprises 637 monasteries with more than 8,000 monks and nuns. In the Archdiocese of Iasi, the diocese (in the Orthodox world) with the largest number of monasteries), there are now 107 monasteries and sketes with 1,939 members (825 monks and 1,068 nuns). They include 56 monasteries, 39 sketes; 48 monasteries for monks and 13 monasteries for nuns; 43 sketes for monks and 4 sketes for nuns. The great number of monasteries here is due to the fact that after the fall of communism many monasteries and sketes were reopened or established, some in secluded areas, others in cities (for example there are 8 monasteries in the city of Iasi). Also, at the diocesan centres throughout the country, monks who serve as priests and deacons celebrate the holy services and provide spiritual guidance to the faithful. Both the monasteries in the mountains and those in the cities carry out various pastoral, missionary and social activities, aiming to preserve Christian values and live out the Gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Parishes and monasteries have organised pastoral care activities for the benefit of the sick, of alcohol and drug addicted persons, of families where parents are abroad for work, of women, to prevent abortion and the use of

³⁴ Hierodeacon Ioasaf O. Popa, *Viața monahală la Sfântul Vasile cel Mare [The Monastic Life in the Works of St. Basil the Great]*, in the collection 'Comorile Pustiei' [Treasures of the Desert], Anastasia, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 136-137.

contraceptives. Monasteries have also set up homes for the elderly, social centres and canteens and medical surgeries.

Therefore, “the serving monk is the model of the monastic for the present age. A serving monk in a serving Church. The monk as a volunteer of service ready to help desperate people, orphans, elderly persons with no means of support, isolated sick persons (a role monks embraced in the past centuries as well, *author’s note*). The monk should be an angel with a human face. Such people are rare, but they are much needed in the world.(...) The type of serving monk is attainable and may be a progress compared with the traditional model, all while maintaining their example and not being in contradiction with it. This is not something completely new. Rather, it is a type of Christian who is closer to Christ’s teachings. The Lord came in the world to serve, he washed the feet of those who were lesser than Him (cf. John 13:5 – 17) and stated that this way of being was equal to perfection”³⁵. Monks help the Church in its pastoral mission carried out in schools, in the army, in hospitals, in prisons, wherever generosity, love, compassion and strength are needed. There are villages located near to monasteries where the monks teach religion classes in school, there are also military bases where monks carry out pastoral activities and Church hospitals where nuns work (certain monasteries have also established dental surgeries where monastics are employed), while competent hieromonks provide services in detention centres. We can see that the pastoral dimension of the service of monks is closely associated with the social, philanthropic and missionary dimension of the Church.

In certain monasteries, such as Durău, Miclăușeni, Neamț, Văratec, Ia Suceava, Alba Iulia, Techirghiol etc. pastoral-cultural or pastoral-social centres have been established, where children, young people and the elderly are welcome to receive religious, pastoral and social assistance. Worthy of note are *The centre for orphan girls* at Ramet monastery (Alba county), the homes for the elderly established by Suceava Archdiocese, those at Recea monastery (Muresc county), Pasarea monastery (in Bucharest), at Varatec monastery (Neamt county). Varatec Monastery organises *Social summer camps* for disadvantaged children with outstanding results in school. The *Christiana* Christian Medical Organisation with branches throughout the

³⁵ Dr. Antonie Plămădeală, Metropolitan of Ardeal, *op. cit.*, pp. 302 – 303.

country has nuns among the staff members, just as *Providenta* Centre for Diagnosis and Treatment in Iasi. These social activities of the church are coordinated by the Departments for social assistance of each diocese, while some Faculties of Theology also provide specialised degrees in *Theology-Social Assistance*³⁶. One can therefore see that the Church cares for the faithful both from a pastoral and a social point of view. "Liturgical piety has no effect unless it impacts the social behaviour of Christians, the Liturgy being an icon and a paradigm of *social liturgy*, which must be effectively applied in the life of society"³⁷.

3. Conclusions

Monks, as people devoted to obedience, chastity and poverty, have put themselves in the pastoral and social service of the Church, to help each Christian confess Christ, Who has become incarnate, suffered, was crucified and resurrected for our salvation.

Romanian monasticism has an ancient tradition and many outstanding figures, who are the saints of the Romanian people such as: John Cassian, Germanus, Dionysius Exiguus, Nicodemus of Tismana, Daniel the Hermit, Varlaam and Dosoftei, the Metropolitans of Moldavia, Antim Ivireanul, Calinic of Cernica, Teodora of Sihla, Ioan Iacob and many other saints, monastics with many virtues and bishops who throughout the centuries "have been the forever burning candles of prayer, role models for holy life and givers of spiritual, pastoral, social-philanthropic and missionary assistance to the people"³⁸. At the same time however, our monasteries now face an unpleasant situation. In a consumerist society, which caters to bodily needs, the number of those who assume this mode of life is declining.

³⁶ Rev. Ion Vicovan, *Dați-le voi să mănânce! Filantropia creștină – istorie și spiritualitate* [You Give Them Something to Eat. Christian Philanthropy – History and Spirituality], Trinitas, Iasi, 2001, pp. 200-215.

³⁷ Rev. Cristian Muraru, *Diaconia socială la moment aniversar* [A celebration of social diaconal work], in the volume „*Priveghind și lucrând pentru mântuire*” [Praying and Working for Salvation], Trinitas, Iasi, 2000, p. 166.

³⁸ Prothosingelos Petroniu Tanase ..., p. 5.

The calling to monastic life has declined due to various reasons related to the secularisation of Christian life. Nevertheless, Romanian monasteries continue the Church's tradition of pastoral and social care of the faithful. Even though in our Church there is a remarkable cooperation between parish and monastic communities in the area of pastoral and social care, greater collaboration is needed for the Christian education of families. Indeed, only genuine priesthood and a serving monasticism will ensure a sound human society, which is much needed for the kind and faithful, yet unfocused Romanian people. We conclude therefore that Romanian monasticism, with its resources, can continue to help the Romanian society in its spiritual development, of serving the Lord and his people.

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