

FINANCING SOURCES CHARACTERISTIC RELIGIOUS UNITS BELONGING TO THE ROMANIAN PATRIARCHY

Theoretical
article

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Abstract

In our approach we will make reference to the financial sources specific to each ecclesiastical institution belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church, meaning the eparchies, the cluster of parishes, the parishes and the monasteries.

The financial sources specific to the central units (B.O.R., 1979, a) are the following: state budget subsidy, income from the believers` donations to support the cult, income from the religious subunits` donations, income from the adjoining household and other economic activities specific to the eparchies.

The second part of the study focuses on the joint financing sources of the religious cult units provided by the agricultural and economical activities.

1. State budget subsidies

Budget state subsidies represent the fixed contributions used to remunerate the clergymen and the non-ecclesiastic personnel. These fixed amounts of money are transmitted annually by the State Secretary for the Cults.

The amounts of money are necessary for the partial monthly remuneration for the clergymen from the eparchies and the subordinate units. In addition, other subsidies from the state budget may be given for various actions initiated at the level of the eparchies, respecting the current law regulations.

2. Income from the believers` donations to support the cult.

The religious services which take place in the cathedrals generate effective incomes for the eparchies. The following income categories can be mentioned here:

❖ **Financial income coming from charging for the various religious services.** The religious services, in turn, are divided into individual religious services and also collective religious services. For instance, the baptism or the wedding services are categorised as being individual religious services, while the liturgy performed daily, with the typical exceptions specific to the Orthodox Church, is considered to be a collective service.

❖ **Collective contributions from cathedrals;** Money collections take place during the divine public services by using different methods according to the customs of the place. Therefore, these are usually organized under the form of dish offerings or the mercy box. The amounts collected are written in the Minutes of the Church and constitute an effective income for the eparchy.

❖ **Giving exemptions or the eparchy consistory meetings;** These amounts of money are charged as a consequence of giving the religious blessing for performing some individual services in the lives of the Church members such as the second or the third marriage, or the church divorce, but also from the taxes established as a result of constituting the judgement and discipline organs which belong to the eparchy.

❖ **Income from selling candles, calendars, religious cult objects and religious magazines or prints.** The costs of production for these products, but also the effective income from the distribution of these products to the eparchial cathedrals, but also to the religious cult units subordinated to the eparchial centres, are established by the economic department of the parish.

❖ According to the current statutory regulations or the parish decisional organs a **special fund for the support of the eparchial centre** may be constituted. This special fund will be the

responsibility of the religious cult units and subunits subordinated to the eparchial centre.

❖ **Donations** received from the believers in the country or those abroad.

3. Income from the adjoining household and other economic activities specific to the eparchies

Important financial resources for the Eparchial Centre consist of the amounts of money which are charged from the religious cult units and subunits subordinated to the eparchial centre, coming, for instance, from selling the products from the their own workshop, shop, fields or orchards belonging to the eparchy.

In addition, the eparchial centres can increase their financial resources with the help of the following activities:

❖ **Renting** locative spaces or spaces having a different use

❖ **Visiting fees** and other economic activities specific to the eparchies

❖ Money collection for the **Central Missionary Fund**; according to a release issued by the Romanian Patriarchy (http://basilica.ro/stiri/colecta-pentru-fondul-central-misionar-_15035.html, accessed at the 1st July 2014) the Central Missionary Fund is destined to support the social, missionary and pastoral activities of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The establishment of this Fund had in view numerous objectives. Therefore it pursues the continuation of the programs unfolded by the Church and for supporting the poor parishes. The decision of establishing the Central Missionary Fund was made during the Patriarch Justinian Marina`s period, during the Meeting of the Sacred Synod on 18th September 1956. The parishes from the central-west area (Ardeal) were affected by the lack of financial resources. As a consequence, as it is presented in the release of the Romanian Patriarchy, it was decided that the Ardeal parishes should be subsidised in order to complete the wages of the priests in the poor parishes and this would be done from the Central Missionary Fund which would be established as part of the Patriarchal Administration with the help of The Biblical and of Orthodox Mission Institute of the Romanian Patriarchy. The feeding of the Central Missionary Fund is done, according to the release, by taking into account the existing churches. Therefore, besides the donations of the eparchies from their incomes, carrying a dish in all the country`s churches, in the Orthodoxy Sunday, has the aim of sensitizing the believers of the religious cult to the needs of the Church in its entirety. We mention the fact that, for the first time, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, in 2011 the money

collection took place outside the borders of the country, as well.

❖ **Other incomes** established by the management of the religious cult unit; here we mention, for instance, the subsidies which can be received from the Painting Commission. These subsidies are given through the Patriarchal Administration as a result of the standards decided upon and sanctioned, which have the purpose of painting the church. Numerous other sources of income can be established following the current legal regulations which can aim at the religious assets insurance fund or at those with other purposes.

To conclude this subchapter, we mention that, at a smaller scale than the budget of an eparchy, the financing sources of the vicarages and the arch parishes, as intermediate units, can be classified as those of the eparchies.

4. Joint financing sources of the religious cult units provided by the agricultural and economical activities

4.1. Exploiting the agricultural fields of the religious cult units

According to a release of the Romanian Patriarchy, as well as the art. 169 and 170, *from the Status for the Organisation and the Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the joint assets of the parishes, the hermitages, the monasteries, the arch parishes, the vicarages, the episcopates, the arch episcopates, the metropolitan seats and the Patriarchy, the associations and foundations established by the Church*, among which the agricultural fields, the woods, the pastures, the vineyards, the orchards, the gardens etc. are part of the Church's belongings. These are managed according to their destination for maintaining the churches and monasteries, as well as for supporting the missionary-pastoral, social-philanthropic, educational and cultural activities of the Church.

The biggest part of the Church units (poor parishes and monasteries from the rural environment) which own agricultural lands *have them in a tenancy system (lease) and the land agent is the one who, according to the law regulations, receives the subsidy from the State budget and has the obligation to justify the manner in which the money received was spent*. The income resulted from the lease of the agricultural lands is used by the church units for the maintenance of the churches and their social-educational activities.

The church units which own larger agricultural lands and have the capacity of working them on their own, have to justify as well the subsidies received from the State, according to the current regulations. In this case, the harvest obtained is used for maintaining the church unit, personal use, as well as for catering for the social institutions of

the Romanian Orthodox Church (bakeries, canteens, shelters for children, the elderly people and for those with disabilities etc.)

According to the statutory regulations and the decisions of the *Sacred Synod*, the eparchial centres have the responsibility of supervise the correct management of the assets, belonging to the church patrimony, by each parish and monastery. In this respect we mention the fact that in the book-keeping of each church unit the income from the exploitation of the agricultural lands is registered separately and annually the eparchial centres check the book-keeping, the financial-accounting accuracy and the manner of managing the assets, including the income from the tillage of the agricultural lands and their usage.

In conclusion, the *active farmer* status invoked by the APIA (Agen ia de Pl i i Interven ie pentru Agricultur / Payment and Intervention in Agriculture Association) representatives, whose meaning is not legally defined yet, cannot be refused to the church units which own and cultivate agricultural lands, mentions the Press Department of the Romanian Patriarchy.

The role of the authorities which have to supervise responsibly the correct use of the money received as subsidy from the State or from European funds is not excluded. The release shows that some church units have founded, by associating themselves, agricultural production co-operatives in order to cultivate as efficiently as possible the agricultural lands which they own, being an example of modern and efficient management of the lands.

Currently, the main problem remains the fact that the church units have been returned to only a part of the agricultural lands and woodlands taken abusively by the communist regime, as the release emphasizes (http://basilica.ro/stiri/bunitatile-bisericesti-pot-indeplini-viitoarele-criterii-pentru-acordarea-subventiilor-agricoleb_15889.html, accessed on the 4th April 2014).

4.2. The Monopoly of the Church on producing some goods

The economical activities are organised separately and then they are capitalized by the church units belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church. The activity of the publishing houses, the workshops which manufacture religious cult objects and of the candle factories belonging to the eparchies is prescribed by the statutory settlements but also by the current law regulations.

Law no. 103/1992 (Monitorul Oficial no. 244 on the 1st October 1992) regards the exclusive rights of the religious cults to manufacture cult objects. Art. 1 stipulates that the Romanian Orthodox Church and the other religious cults have, exclusively, the right of manufacturing and selling

cult objects and garments, as well as printing religious cult books, the theological ones or those having a religious content, necessary for the practice of the cult. Art. 1, paragraph 2 mentions that by cult object, legally, we understand liturgical dishes, lithographic or metallic icons, crosses, crucifixes, church furniture, small crosses and pendants with religious images specific to the religious cult, religious spreading objects and other similar objects. The religious calendars are attached to the cult objects, as well as the incense and the candles, excepting the decorative ones and those used for weddings and baptisms. Art. 1, paragraph 3 mentions that by cult garments we also understand the specific fabrics and embroideries, necessary for tailoring the respective garments. Art. 1, paragraph 4 attaches to the cult objects the religious cult printings, the theological textbooks and courses necessary to the unfolding of the activity in the religious educational institutions of the respective cult.

Art. 2 mentions that the manufacturing or the selling of the goods presented at Art. 1, by people or companies other than the religious cults, can be done only with the previous authorization given under the conditions established by each religious cult regarding their own exclusivity. The decision of the Sacred Synod no. 10.831 on 29th October 2013 concerning the endorsement by the eparchies of some mutual manners of selling the liturgical wine produced in the eparchy or taken from other eparchies, especially prescribes this situation. (http://patriarhia.ro/images/pdf/HotarariSinodale/2013/10_831_29_octombrie_2013.pdf, accessed today, the 7th of June 2014)

Art. 3 stipulates that the picture postcards, the brochures, the art albums and the documentaries presenting churches or religious art objects, excepting those which belong to the national cultural patrimony, can be produced only with the previous authorization of the respective cult.

Finally, art. 5 stipulates that the manufacturing and the selling of the objects and products necessary to the cult activities mentioned in art. 1 are exempt from taxation.

In any democratic State, the authorities support actively and differently the religious cults for their important role in society. In Romania, such a support is constituted by Law no. 103/1992 concerning the exclusive right of the religious cults to produce cult objects. The income resulted from the selling of candles and other cult objects are used for the maintenance of the churches, the social-missionary or the educational and cultural activities of the church. Because of the juridical status of the cults as private right units, but having a public utility, these develop numerous social activities; therefore the exemption from taxation is

a necessity. This exemption is clearly conditioned by using the funds obtained from the donations of the believers and other economic activities (manufacturing and selling candles, calendars, religious books, liturgical wine and other church objects). In addition, we mention the fact that the church units pay taxes and social contributions for the wages of their personnel, exactly as every social-professional categories in Romania.

4.3. The problem of patrimony retrocession

In what concerns the State-Church relation regarding the retrocessions, we still expect “a truly fair solution for all those involved, because the real estate asked by the cults are not holiday cottages abandoned on the picturesque Romanian hills, but headquarters of some vital institutions such as schools, hospitals and museums. On the other hand, the state has to offer real alternatives, to make justice for the religious communities which accumulated, while waiting, not many passing assets “(Preda, 2002, p. 73).

“ In what concerns the patrimony concerns existing between some religious cults in our country, these are difficult to understand for those who have not been confronted during their history with imposing by force of arms some religious beliefs or with the situation of abusive takings by the state of the church fortune. Therefore in the majority of the democratic states there has not been reached an absolutely fair solution in what concerns the patrimony situations determined by some historical phenomena (the Reform, the Counter-reform, the Uniatism, the religious persecutions, massive migrations etc.) In this context, for a correct informing of the public opinion, the Romanian Patriarchy wishes to present the real situation of its relation with the Greek-Catholic Church. The situation of the Romanian Orthodox Eparchies in Transylvania and Banat, which have made the object of litigation between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Greek-Catholic Church, is presented as it follows:

- Real estate (churches, parish houses, agricultural lands etc.) whose juridical situation was resolved through dialogue: a number of 111
- Retro cessed real estate through verdicts in the court: a number of 20
- Real estate which has become the possession of the Greek-Catholic Church by abusively occupying these: a number of 81 – churches in which there are alternative services: a number of 15.
- Cases in which, although there are final court verdicts favourable to the Romanian Orthodox Churches, the respective verdicts could not be applied: a number of 14. [...] Having the conviction that the Romanian and international public opinion will be able to know, objectively and impartially, the realities of religious life in

Romania, we hope that those who write such annual reports regarding the religious freedom in Romania, will take into consideration, in the future, the information offered by the Romanian Patriarchy, so that the credibility of these reports will not be diminished even more.” (http://www.patriarhia.ro/ro/documente/comunicat_46.html, accessed in October 2013).

The articles 23 and 24 from the Ordonan a de Urgen no. 96/ 2012 regarding the establishment of some reorganizational measures in the central public administration and alteration of some normative documents, establish that the Autoritatea Na ional pentru Restituirea Propriet ilor (National Authority for the Estate Retro-cession-special body of the central public administration, having a juridical status) and the Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte (State Secretary of the Cults-public institution having a juridical personality totally financed from the state budget) are reorganized as special bodies of the central public administration and pass from being subordinate to the Ministerului Finan elor Publice (Ministry of Public Finance), respectively of the Ministerului Culturii i Patrimoniului Na ional (Ministry of National Culture and Patrimony), to being subordinate to the Government, under the coordination of the Prime Minister, through the Office of the Prime Minister.

Conclusions

The viewpoints on financing the Church are quite varied. After the secularization of the fortunes, the Church had to bear the intrusion of the state in its affairs. The State, said the historian N. Iorga “has taken possession over it, sometimes step by step, but at other times with large, unexpected hits, taking one after the other its estates, the other fortune, the rights, the autonomy supported by the canons, its own culture, its special schools, the authority and the prestige, following with these actions, at times the Russian examples with the Enslaved Church, and at other times the Western example with the church being in some cases totally banished from the official life, but only after they have taken almost all its through which it could have supported itself” (Iorga, 2011). The Church has the right to own material goods and to access them (Harosa, 2011).

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Notes:

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