

## THE NOTION OF DIASPORA: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND MISSIONARY PARADIGM

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### ABSTRACT

*As the diaspora concept has overgrown, so has its meaning spread to host different intellectual, cultural and political agendas. This concept has led to a so-called diaspora's spillage – a spillage of term's meanings in the semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space. An attempt was made to summarize the extensively used theoretical approaches with regard to the term's content. On the basis of these theoretical landmarks, we want to further illustrate an enhanced type of community which is being build based on typical diaspora elements. The scope of the paper is not to approach in a comprehensive way a Romanian orthodox community of diaspora as it is virtually impossible in a single paper, but to illustrate a diaspora structure. The research method is theoretical (fundamental), "the pure research" for theoretical, conceptual development and shall be based on making abstract ideas. We have concluded that: from a categorial point of view, the Italy's orthodox community embodies defining characteristics for an economical oriented diaspora. This community is going through pressure felt by every diaspora community: adapting to the new conditions, temptation of assimilation and at times the problematic relations with the host society. On the other hand, from an ecclesial perspective, Romanian Orthodox Bishopric from Italia co-exists in the same area along with other parallel Orthodox jurisdictions conducted on ethnic records used to find common ways of societal expression.*

**Keywords:** concept, community, communion, diaspora, Christianity, mission.

### DIASPORA. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The debate on diaspora and its meanings, significance, defining elements and implications has witnessed a real boom in the last decades. As the concept has overgrown, so did its meaning spread to host different intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the services it was enlisted for. The concept has led to a so-called *diaspora's spillage* – a spillage of term's meanings in the semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space<sup>212</sup>.

The *Diaspora* concept derives from Greek and is founded on the translation of the Aramaic word (*Galut*). It is based on the verb *speiro* (to cut) and the prefix

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<sup>212</sup> See widely Rober Brubaker's point of view in *The "diaspora" diaspora*, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, January 2005, p. 1.

*dia* (on) in Ancient Greek (this term referred to migration and colonization). In Aramaic the term initially referred to Jewish colonization outside Palestine after Babylonian slavery, but it has also acquired a new general connotation which designates people who set away from the settlements of ancestors<sup>213</sup>.

According to Gabriel Sheffer, the first theory about diaspora originated with Amstrong's paper entitled "Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas" published in *American Political Sciences Review* in 1976<sup>214</sup>. In his book entitled *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, Sheffer argued that using the diaspora concept just for the Jewish nation is wrong because there may have been other people before, such as the Nabataeans, Phoenicians, or Assyrians. Furthermore, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several groups very similar to the Jewish diaspora appeared in Europe, such as the Greek or Chinese. From this point of view, Sheffer proposes three criteria according to which he defines the diaspora concept:

1. maintaining and developing own collective identities in the people's diaspora;
2. the existence of an internal organization distinct from those existing in the country of origin or the host country;
3. significant contacts with the motherland: real (trips) or symbolic contacts as in the saying: "next year in Jerusalem" at the end of the Easter prayer<sup>215</sup>.

More recently, in his book entitled *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*<sup>216</sup>, Robin Cohen went on to emphasize the lack of sufficient theorizing in publications about the diaspora and suggested that the "Jewish archetype" may be a basis for reflection. In his vision, the following common features belong to the diaspora:

1. Spillage / leaving the mother earth, often traumatic, in two or more foreign regions;
2. Alternatively, expansion in search of a job, in search of trade or of other colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and a myth about the originating land that includes the location, history and achievements;
4. The idealization of a supposed ancestral home and a collective commitment to maintain it, restore it, provide security and prosperity even through creation;
5. Development of shares of return to gain collective approval;
6. A strong ethnic group, with a long-held conscience based on a distinctive sense, a common history and a common faith;

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<sup>213</sup> Lisa Anteby-Yemini & William Berthomière, Diaspora: A Look Back on a Concept, in *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, 16/ 2005, pp. 262–270.

<sup>214</sup> Mohamed Dorai, *La circulation migratoire*, in *Migrations etudes*, no. 84, dec., 1998.

<sup>215</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, Saint Martin Press, New York, 1986.

<sup>216</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An introduction*, UCL Press, London, 1997.

7. A problematic relationship with the host society, suggesting at least a lack of acceptance, or the possibility that another calamity will fall on the group;
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members from other countries where they have settled;
9. The possibility of a distinctive but creative and enriched life of the host countries with a tolerance towards pluralism.

The list is conscientiously called “common traits” to indicate that no diaspora has all these traits. Rather, it unwinds the methodological devices and (no less than) includes important cases that are intuitively part of, or supposed to be part of the diaspora phenomenon<sup>217</sup>.

Robin Cohen also proposed a typology based on several empirical observations consisted of four types:

1. Working diaspora
2. Imperial diaspora
3. Diaspora exchange
4. Cultural diaspora

This latter type of diaspora – the cultural diaspora, has become the most stimulating and productive one. It comes from the fact that most of the leaders were (and still tend to be) intellectuals, writers and very active in the public sphere. The discourse of the diaspora, in its cultural dimension, has reserved a large space for the term *hybridity*, used by post-modern authors to show the evolution of new social dynamics as mixed cultures.

In this field, conceptual research is developed with reference to the “traveling cultures” theorized by James Clifford<sup>218</sup>. Cohen summed up this movement by quoting that from this perspective:

“Diasporas are positioned somewhere between *non-states* and traveling cultures due to the fact that they involve living in a nation in a physical sense but traveling in an astral or spiritual one which extends beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the area”<sup>219</sup>.

William Safran, one of the first authors to publish in the *Diaspora* journal and edited by Kachig Tololyan, suggests that from this point of view the term in question can be considered a “metaphorical name” and can be applied to various populations, expatriates, political refugees etc. In his papers, Safran defines the diaspora as *expatriate minority communities*:

1. which are scattered from the original *center* to at least two *peripheral* locations;
2. who maintain a *memory*, a vision or a myth of the original homeland;

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<sup>217</sup> Robin Cohen, *Diasporas and the state: from victims to challengers*, in *International Affairs* 72 (3), July 1996, pp. 515–516.

<sup>218</sup> James Clifford, *Diasporas*, in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1994.

<sup>219</sup> Robin Cohen, *op cit.*, p. 516.

3. who “believe that they are not – or may not be – fully accepted by the host country”;
4. who see the ancestral home as a possible place for return when the time is right;
5. who are involved in maintaining or restoring this birthplace and;
6. whose conscience and solidarity of the group are “importantly defined” by the continuous relationship with the homeland<sup>220</sup>.

During the 1990s, many typologies were proposed to understand and describe the diaspora. For example, Alain Medam proposed a typology based on a degree of cohesion and dynamism of the diaspora organization. From this perspective, Medam differentiates between “crystallized diaspora” and “fluid diaspora”<sup>221</sup>.

For another specialist on this issue, Michel Bruneau, the typology must be based on a diasporic organization. He defined three major types of diasporas:

1. anteprenorial
2. religious
3. political<sup>222</sup>.

Recently, to clarify the matter, Nicholas van Hear proposed that the diaspora should be defined based on at least three criteria:

1. cross-border presence is long-lasting, although exile is not necessarily permanent but may include movement between the motherland and the new host countries;
2. the persistence of cross-border presence, although exile is not permanently necessary, as long as the travels between the country of origin and the new home countries can develop;
3. there is a kind of exchange – social, economic, political or cultural – between or along spatially separated populations in the diaspora<sup>223</sup>.

Rogers Brubaker<sup>224</sup>, in an integrative effort, comes to synthesize the multitude of theoretical approaches and to conclude that there are three basic elements that remain widely understood as constituting the diaspora. Some subsets or combinations of them, weighted differently, emphasize most definitions and debates of the phenomenon. The first is the dispersal in space, the second is the orientation towards a homeland, and the third is the retention of identity. Taking into account the important change given to these elements and the various ways in which they have been interpreted provide a leverage for an analytical assessment of the diaspora’s spillage.

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<sup>220</sup> William Safran, *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and return*, in *Diaspora*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1991; Idem, *Comparing Diasporas: A review essay*, in *Diaspora*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1999.

<sup>221</sup> Alain Medam, *Diaspora / Diasporas. Archétype et typologie*, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, vol. 9, no 1, 1993.

<sup>222</sup> Michel Bruneau, *Diasporas*, Montpellier, GIP Reclus, 1995.

<sup>223</sup> Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*, UCL Press, London, 1998.

<sup>224</sup> Roger Brubaker, *The „diaspora” diaspora*, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, January 2005, pp. 5–7.

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## DISPERSAL

This is the criterion that is most widely accepted today and also the simplest. It can be interpreted strictly as forced or traumatic dispersal and, more generally, as any dispersion in space provided that it passes through the state borders; or broadly so that it is sufficient within state borders.

Although dispersion is widely accepted as a diaspora criterion, it is not universally accepted. A substitute division defines the diaspora as “ethnic communities divided by state borders”, or “that segment of people living outside the homeland”. This allows established compact populations to be counted as diaspora even when a part of the population lives as a minority outside the ethno-national “homeland”.

## ORIENTATION TOWARDS A HOMELAND

The second constituent criterion is the orientation towards a real or imaginary homeland, as a source of valuable authority, identity and loyalty. A significant change can be identified in the recent discussions. Previous discussions strongly highlighted this criterion. For example, four of the six criteria mentioned by Safran concern the orientation towards a homeland. Firstly, these include maintaining a collective memory or a myth about the homeland. Secondly, “as regards the ancient homeland as real, as the ideal home and the place to which it may eventually return”. Thirdly, “the collective commitment to maintain or restore the homeland and its security and prosperity”. Fourthly, “goes on to refer personally or indirectly to the homeland in such a way that significantly shapes its identity and solidarity”<sup>225</sup>.

## RETENTION OF IDENTITY

The third criterion is what is called identity retention involving a separate maintained identity vis-à-vis the host society. Armstrong invokes Barth's seminal contribution to underline the importance of boundaries for authorities that do not have their own territorial policy:

“Obviously a diaspora is something more than a group of people who distinguish themselves through some secondary characteristics such as all people with Scottish names in Wisconsin. The diaspora deployed ... they have often constituted a separate society or a quasi-society for centuries”<sup>226</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> William Safran, *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and return*, in *Diaspora*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1991, pp. 83–84.

<sup>226</sup> Mohamed Dorai, *La circulation migratoire*, in *Migrations etudes*, no. 84, dec., 1998, p. 2.

The deliberate resistance can maintain limits to the assimilation through self-applied inbreeding or other forms of self-segregation or as an unintended consequence of social exclusion.

The preservation of identity is an indispensable criterion of diaspora. This allows everyone to talk about it as a separate “community”, which is united by a distinct, active solidarity as well as dense social relations, which crosses state borders and connects diaspora’s members from different states in a single “trans-national community”.

Intense discussions also emerged in the literature on the appropriateness of using the “orthodox diaspora” concept. Maria Hammerli<sup>227</sup> is the author who is questioning this concept. According to her, the catchphrases that fall under the issue of the orthodox diaspora is designated in the pre-synodal discussions: “the issue of the orthodox diaspora”, “the so-called orthodox diaspora”, or the mere use of the term in “...” suggests that the juxtaposition of the words *orthodoxy* and *diaspora* is considered to be rather inappropriate.

#### WHAT IS MEANT BY THE “ORTHODOX DIASPORA”?

- a. The territory of the spillage, i.e., areas which are traditionally not Orthodox (Western Europe, America, Australia, certain parts of Asia);
- b. the orthodox in diaspora are people who are dispersed in these territories, emigrants and their descendants.
- c. an ecclesiastical state or situation which is characterized by the extension and overlapping of national church jurisdictions<sup>228</sup>.

The term “Orthodox diaspora” consists of two levels of analysis. The first is a historical and sociological reality marked by:

- migration of the orthodox population to countries that are not traditionally Orthodox;
- the creation of national diaspora in host countries;
- the potential of developing a religious diaspora clustered around the orthodox faith, a common characteristic of ethnically different emigrants.

The second level of analysis concerns the theological substance of the concept. The term diaspora, initially a religious concept related to Judaism, is used to describe the structure and sacramental life of Orthodox religious institutions outside traditional territories, aiming at the orthodox ecclesiology and canonical organization<sup>229</sup>.

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<sup>227</sup> Maria Hammerli, *Orthodox diaspora? A sociological and theological problematisation of a stock phrase*, in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10: 2–3, pp. 97–115.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Romanians, Greeks, Russians, and Serbs have spread all over Western Europe, especially in France, Britain, Germany and more recently in Spain and Italy. Their presence in these territories can be traced back until the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Greeks) or 17<sup>th</sup> century (Russians), but these ethnic groups only began to count demographically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when political and economic factors have caused more waves of emigration from people seeking a better life.

The Orthodox Church played a leading role in clotting the concerned ethnic communities and, in many cases, took over the role the state should have played in bringing together its dispersed citizens. A careful analysis of these communities reveals that among their features we can find the elements that diaspora theorists display in their studies<sup>230</sup>:

1. these populations have in most cases been deployed against the background of unpleasant circumstances;
2. the structural unit of these communities derives from the establishment of religious institutions, cultural centers, language schools and ethnically-oriented charities. The number, size and purpose of these institutions vary according to both ethnicity and the host country. These institutions are both an expression of the existence of a collective memory about the motherland and the environment for reaffirming and reclaiming this conscience which allows a perpetual reinvention of national identity.
3. The motherland remains the reference center both by its desire to return to the homeland supported by the country's interests in international lobbying, but also by directing economic resources towards the it.

From a theological and canonical perspective, the existence of ethnic groups in the diaspora and their organization of churches on ethnic grounds poses several problems. Two canonical principles<sup>231</sup> have been bumping heads when the problem of organizing the ecclesial life of emigrants has been raised. This is about the ethnic principle and the jurisdictional or territorial principle.

The ethnic principle requires that the bishops of each nation should gather into a single Church under the leadership of a primate, according to the 34 apostolic canon<sup>232</sup>. This principle is met by the Romanian orthodox church, all Slavic churches and the oriental orthodox churches. That is why their orthodox diaspora throughout the world belong to the mother Church<sup>233</sup>.

On the other hand, the jurisdictional-territorial principle, according to Canon 8 of the first Ecumenical Synod<sup>234</sup> states that it is totally unacceptable that there

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>231</sup> For a presentation of the Orthodox Church's canonical organizational principals, see Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Drept canonic ortodox*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1990, pp. 191–205.

<sup>232</sup> Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe, note și comentarii*, 1992, p. 26.

<sup>233</sup> Pr. lect. univ. dr. Irimie Marga, *Principiul jurisdicțional în Biserica Ortodoxă*, în *Revista Teologică*, serie nouă, XIV (86), nr. 3, iulie–septembrie 2004, p. 61.

<sup>234</sup> Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan N. Floca, *op. cit.* pp. 56–57.

should be two or more Orthodox jurisdictions in the same territory. This has been achieved on the spillage's territory by respecting the principle of ethnicity<sup>235</sup>.

The emergence of ethnic jurisdictions opened up the era of ecclesiological contradictions in the life of Orthodox churches that share the same territory and divide believers on grounds of nationality, culture and language. The *jurisdictions's* energies have been channeled to preserve the various national-cultural heritage – Romanian, Russian, Greek, Syrian-Lebanese, Serbian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian and so on.

To these canonical and organizational contradictions, other theological contradictions are added, especially in the ecclesiology area. For example, these refer to Orthodox Christian eschatology which links salvation not to a nation nor to a terrestrial *topos*, but to the kingdom of God, and from this point of view it is about a situation of diasporas in this world, of removal from the heavenly homeland. On the other hand, from an ecclesiological point of view, ethnicity is not a fundamental criterion of the Church, but unity is achieved by the Church around the Eucharist and the Archbishop, therefore in the local community-church. Ethnicity also calls into question the universal character of the Church<sup>236</sup>. Nor should the powerful conflicts that the issue of the canonic status of the Orthodox diaspora generates be overlooked.

Based on these theoretical landmarks, we want to show two types of Orthodox diaspora. One arising from dramatic changes of historical order, which by successive changes of borders led to the emergence of diaspora structures, mentalities and organizational forms (this is the metropolitan of Basarabia) and another that is built on specific diaspora elements (the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate in Italy).

### **THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPRIC. THE MISSIONARY PARADIGM**

Two co-ordinates are fundamental for our development: the experience of a community that is praying and the experience of an imposed loneliness.

Neuroscience has found that we have structures called mirror neurons. How do these neurons work? When I see someone who has cut his hand, I have a pit in my stomach, I am ready for empathy because neurons are painting my mental landscape. The community is extraordinary. Inside a community, the neuronal structure helps me live what the other lives without speaking. What neuroscience

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<sup>235</sup> See Pr. prof. dr. Liviu Stan, *Ortodoxia și diaspora*, în *Ortodoxia*, XV, nr. 1, 1963, pp. 3–38; Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Diaspora ortodoxă și organizarea ei canonică, problemă pe agenda Sfântului și Marelui Sinod*, în *Revista Teologică*, serie nouă, VI (78), nr. 3–6, iulie-decembrie 1996, pp. 218–236.

<sup>236</sup> Maria Hammerli, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–112.



discovered: in 1992 it was found that when I look at a man doing things and someone photographed my brain activity, my brain looks the same as the brain of the one I look at, me doing nothing but looking, the only difference is that the last piece, the command center, is missing. (I have the cerebral aggression painted, I have the premotor cortical areas that plan the movement, but I lack the motor cortex). In the paper entitled *The Mystical Mind*<sup>237</sup>, Andrew Newberg made the research and found that no person who prayed alone had reached the intensity of mental and spiritual condition compared to when the person was in a community. Therefore, taking part in the church life improves the physical and spiritual state, and when it comes to the Romanian community in diaspora, it goes without saying that the church gives a better shape to the community.

Speaking about the Romanians who left the ancestry country to live on distant lands, we can say that they keep a living connection with those of a nation and a tribe with them precisely through their presence at the church and sometimes, by discovering or rediscovering the Church on the land where they are given to live<sup>238</sup>. Most of them came to Italy for a better life, and seeing that it is not enough to make them happy, they returned to God as the only real source of happiness. Thus, many of them discovered the Church as they were in the West, and added to the already existing communities. Other Romanians discovered the Church they had little known in Romania, and another number of Romanians continued to be present in the Church, as they had been in Romania, or perhaps even more present and aware of the treasure they found.

At first there were few Romanian Orthodox communities in Italy. They were mainly in the big conurbations: Milan (1975), Torino (1979), Firenze (1984) and Bari (1983). After the revolution in 1989, the number of Romanians who emigrated to Italy has increased, so that new parishes were formed in other cities as well. The Italian parishes belonged to the Archdiocese, and since 2001 to the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of Western and Meridional Europe, having as archipasters his Eminence Adrian (Hritcu), until 1992, his Eminence Serafim (Joantă) of Germany, Central and Northern Europe until 1998, and his Eminence Josseph (Iosif Pop) until 2008. In June 2004, His Grace Bishop Siluan (then the vicar bishop of Metropolia mentioned above entitled Marsilianiul) was named vicar bishop for Italy where there were 34 parishes at the time<sup>239</sup>.

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<sup>237</sup> See in this regard Andrew B. Newberg's paper *The Mystical Mind*, Minneapolis, USA, 1517 Media Publishing House, 1999.

<sup>238</sup> The main source for this part of the paper forms the documentary material published by Pr. Dionisie Rusnac, *Episcopia Ortodoxă Română a Italiei, în Autocefalie și responsabilitate*, pp. 903–912. The information was cross-checked with exact data on the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate's website. [www.episcopia-italiei.it](http://www.episcopia-italiei.it).

<sup>239</sup> The Romanian Orthodox presence in Italy has recently become a topic of sociological research, with a PhD thesis being drawn up in this respect: Suna Gülfer İhlamur, *The Romanian Orthodox Churches in Italy: The Construction of Romanian-Italian Transnational Orthodox Space*, Trento, 2009, p. 438, Available at: [eprints-phd.biblio.unitn.it/74/1/PhDThesisSGI.pdf](http://eprints-phd.biblio.unitn.it/74/1/PhDThesisSGI.pdf), The thesis was drawn up at the Faculty of Sociology of the University in Trento. The bibliographical elements that have been the basis of this research are found in the final bibliography of this paper.

Currently, the number of parishes on Italy's territory has reached 122 and continues to rise monthly with another five ahead<sup>240</sup>.

From the point of view of the categorial diaspora, the Orthodox Community in Italy embodies the defining characteristics for an economically oriented diaspora. We know that the economic side has often put a strong emphasis on some peoples' migration. In this way the Church assumes to preserve identity and cohesion at a group level, to develop and maintain the consciousness of ethnic belonging to a well-defined group, to maintain contact with the motherland and to adapt continuously to the new social and religious context. The Church is in a position to respond to new challenges that society and the economic context has. If in an economically underdeveloped society the Church faces a certain type of needs, the Church is called upon to respond to the new challenges that impose a society or better yet a society in which money come first. So that the ancient Church is called upon to restore to the normal connections of faith and norms of moral and Christian conduct which believers have to obey. The Community is going through the pressures that any community in diaspora knows: adaptation to new conditions, the temptation of assimilation and sometimes problematic relations with the host society. On the other hand, from an ecclesiastical point of view, the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric in Italy coexists in the same territory with other parallel Orthodox jurisdictions, organized on ethnic grounds which are used in an attempt to find common ways of expressing in society.

We must also note that the Orthodox faith is not a factor that clots the ethnic communities, but rather acts as an element that strengthens every ethnic community. This fact still raises ecclesiological problems since, as we well know, the Orthodox understanding of the Church is based on the principle that every Christian local community gathered around a bishop who has jurisdiction over a defined territory and presides over the Eucharist is a local manifestation of the whole body of Christ. From this perspective, the relations between the ethnic Orthodox jurisdictions that share the same territory and at the same time their relations with the mother churches, we will find enough inconsistencies that are still awaiting resolution. But even if there are certain discrepancies, certainly they will be resolved in time, or the Church will know how to manage these situations, even the most delicate when asked.

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<sup>240</sup> The dynamics of church life in the Italian Episcopate is permanently illustrated by [www.episcopia-italiei.it](http://www.episcopia-italiei.it) and by the paper entitled *Merinde pentru suflet*.

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