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DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTIONS BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

Valuing the professional literature, the paper highlights in its first part, the main factors that influence the demographic behaviours, especially birth-rate, meaning the cultural, biological, economic, social and political factors. I have tried to focus on a possible supremacy of the religious and political factor in comparison to other factors which have an influence on demographic evolutions.

In the second part we approached the religion and the projections regarding the youngsters' demographic behaviour. Referring these results to statistical data on this issue, that are to be found in the Statistical Annual of Bihor County, we tried to reveal the trends of the evolution of birth-rate and to make the difference between objective statistical data and subjective echoes of 18 year old high school students way of thinking, regarding the potential impact of religion – nowadays studied in the Romanian schools – on the demographic behaviour .

Theoretical issues

In the European space, together with the birth of the modern state, the influence of religion has decreased as a consequence of the ideas promoted by the French humanists and afterwards, by the American ones who believed in the power of reason as a means of solving all the humankind problems. Subsequently, the decline of religion appeared in the context of secularisation processes, meaning a rupture between man and God, respectively laicisation, a process of separation of the state from religion¹ However, religion hasn't disappear from man's life; nowadays we even assist to a religious rebirth as a "reaction against laicisation, moral relativism, lack of self-esteem, and a reaffirmation of value, order, labour discipline, mutual help and human solidarity"². Religion continues to play a very important part, together with politics. What I think has changed, is the place these two claim: politics – the public, collective, communitarian one, religion – the private, personal, individual one, the one of human condition, both claiming relationships of power: with the divinity, in the case of religion, with the laic power, in the case of politics.

On the level of demographic evolutions, politics acts by means of demographic policies, charting the interest of the state, whereas religion acts in order to adapt the demographic behaviour to the divine prescriptions using for this purpose the religious teaching and the constraining religious practices. The effects of political and religious actions on the demographical level were and still are more or less visible in

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different periods of time, often according to specific means used for this purpose.

Birth-rate, fertility rate, marriage rate, divorce rate, mortality rate are terms and facts invoked in any demographic analysis and found in an interdependent relationship to one another. The attempt to perceive and explain the evolution of one of them proves to be a much more complex trial, getting beyond demographic borders.

Birth-rate represents the frequency of live births among a certain population, while fertility stands for the frequency of births among fertile age population, females (15-49 years) and males (20-60 years).

After 1960 the birth-rate decreased in the developed countries so much that, in these countries, except for the USA and Ireland, the simple rate of generation change is not assured any longer (2,1 children per woman). The decrease of birth-rate brings along, in its turn, deterioration of the age structure of the population with long term negative consequences.

The low birth-rate in in these countries is due to a multitude of factors, such as: the emancipation of woman and her increasing participation to economic activities outside the household; the increase of the schooling period and level; the weaken of cultural norms influence; increasing social mobility, the high child cost; the reduction of the economic function of the child and especially of its role for the economic security of older persons; the apparition of modern contraception etc.

Meanwhile, the population increases in undeveloped countries from where an important migratory flux towards The Occident. Paradoxically, the increasing number of atheists in the developed countries, meaning the giving up of the national religion, determines the decrease of birth-rate and implicitly, of the population, attracting a greater number of immigrants that bring along with them their own religion and impose it in the countries they settle in.

In our country, if the fertility mutations were radical, the marriage rate proves a specific evolution, following a genuine "Romanian cultural pattern"³, characterised by: universality of marriage; the fast pace of contracting a marriage; insignificant celibacy; a relative family stability translated into a moderate divorce rate, leading to a moderate number of remarriages (approx. 15%) out of the total number of marriages.

The weight of the married population for the 25-29 year category is extremely high (even though it went down between 1977 and 1992 from 79.25% to 75.2%⁴). The average age at first marriage, 28.6 years for men and 25.3 for women is greater compared with the pre-modern marriage regime (characterized by an average age for marriage under 18) but smaller when referring to Western Countries where the age of women when they first get married is 25-28 years⁵.

Most unwed women are under 20 in the case of women and under 25 in the case of men, becoming minority after turning these ages, while

definitive celibacy (the ratio of the unwed population of 45-49 years old) of 4.2% in 1992 though increasing in relation to pre-modern standards (1%) is a lot inferior to the situation in Western Countries, where it varies around 10 and 20%⁶.

The decrease of birth-rate in Romania was not the result of the increase of the number of women who did not give birth; it was the smaller number of children per woman. Thus, consistent with the 2002 census, women with children fall into the following categories: with 1 child, 31.68%; with 2 children, 38.36%; with 3 children 14.48%; with 4 children 8.17%; with 5 children and more 7.28% .

One third of families with children choose to have one child only, the birth motivations of this first child being, though different, very strong: family perpetuation, family integration, parental responsibility, the heir etc. Only the second child had by only a third of the families with children and his birth is determined to a less extent, by rational calculations and often by extremely varied circumstantial factors. I case of the third child there are already cultural, religious, educational factors interfering.

Consequently, the factors influencing birth-rate do not have to be treated as a whole, but differentiate according to the child's rank. We also have to make the difference about the action these factors perform on different time shares or even geographical spaces. In the "old" regime the birth-rate used to be equal to the mortality rate, around 40%, and when birth-rate overcame mortality, famine, diseases, wars rebalanced the number of population. only beginning with the XVIIIth century, life defeats death, nevertheless the "new regime" has self-correcting means that do not come from outside, from environment like they did previously, they come from inside, being contraceptive means, abortion, for and against birth-rate policies.

In Romania of the last decade, 1-2 children families are predominant, fertility recording lower and lower values reaching 1.25 children per woman in 2002, due to the decrease of the living standard, uncertainty about jobs, increase of unemployment, stress, individualism, consumerism, as well as changes of behaviour and values regarding marriage, divorce, family, children born outside marriage. This is explicable not only from the transition perspective, but it is also due to a number of other factors that determined a blow back of fertility in The Western Europe since 1960-1970⁷, years when these factors were inhibited by aggressive pro-natality policies of the communist regime.

Attempting a review of the factors determining the evolution of the birth-rate, these could be classified as follows:

1. Psycho-cultural factors (religion, culture, traditions, passion, duty, interest, mentality, will)
2. Biological factors (instinct, fertility, virility, physical health)

3. Economic factors (movements within the structure of the economy, of jobs, of labour characteristics, level of income, cost of children oriented services)
4. Social factors
5. Education
6. Family structure
7. Political factor (for and against natality policies, public health policies, care for mother, family and child).

1. The decrease of birth-rate and implicitly the demographic decrease in The Occident (in spite of the concomitant decrease of mortality) is often being explained on account of spiritual causes, linked to crises regarding the meaning of life, lack of an ideal that could be induced by a dominant philosophy or religion. We can exemplify with the situation of Greece after the IVth century when birth-rate dropped simultaneously with the decline of the traditional Greek religion. There was a similar circumstance in Rome or in the case of Indians in America after The Conquest and even in the case of the countries defeated after the Second World War (Japan, Germany, and Italy) that knew the most significant demographic decrease in their history. Essential characteristic of a nation's identity in the past, religion is nowadays facing a number of threats that wear down its status: secularization and individualism, decrease of the social influence, fanaticism.

In "Faith and Knowledge", 2001 and "Time of Transitions", 2002⁸, Jurgen Habermas suggests an approach of religion as "premise and catalyst of modernization", different from perspectives like: exceeding religion through philosophy (Hegel), science (Comte), culture (Nietzsche), social emancipation (Marx) or individual psychisme (Freud).

Taking into consideration the birth-rate, religion has been having an important ascended in what other factors are concerned. Within traditional societies, religion, culture, traditions, mentality all hold a major influence, whereas in the modern societies, simultaneously with the decline of the religious belief, we witness the decrease of the social and psychological impact of religion, especially regarding the birth-rate. In a world characterised by image, by audio-video media, while Christian religion, for instance, promotes the image of the traditional family and its values, associating it with the divine family, Virgin Mary holding her son, media abounds in other feminine models with a physical appearance that does not have anything to do with maternity, this being considered even harmful to the physic and the appearance of young women.

There are religions, such as Islamism, still holding a considerable position within societies nowadays; and religion in general, continues to stand for hope for the population in some less developed countries on account that man does not only feed on bread, but also on ideals, faith, uplift, religion being easily able to offer all these. Catholics, Orthodox, Moslems, Hindi, Buddhists, atheists etc. coexist in the contemporary world,

with different conceptions about relationships between God and individual, group, state, about relationships between people, children, parents, about liberty and responsibility, about human rights, authority or equality. Religion is not marginal; religion, culture in general, can become, according to Samuel Huntington, the most important source of inter-civilisation conflicts. Religion is “fire- and, like any fire, it warms, but it can also burn you”. Politicians have the power, religion has influence⁹.

In spite of all these, even Moslem populations face a decrease of birth-rate, generated by similar causes: decrease of infantile mortality, the increase of the schooling period for women, increased marriage age knowing and using contraceptives. Yet, there are differences also among Arabian countries: birth-rate is lower in immigration countries (due to the contact with the Western civilisation), whereas the emigration, wealthier countries are more conservative, and thus, the birth-rate is higher. A special case is that of Palestine where the high birth-rate constitutes a means of survival.

2. The biological factors proved their importance for birth-rate in time. We take into account the sexual instinct, responsible with the birth-rate in the poor areas, as it is among “the few pleasures that do not cost” (Guyau), or in the underdeveloped societies where the protection against the unwanted pregnancies is either unknown or dangerous, or unaccepted on religion account. We refer to the instinct for species perpetuation which is more active and present after natural or social cataclysms determining a boom of the birth-rate. An illustrative example is the “baby boom” phenomenon at the end of the Second World War, also the growth of the birth-rate as a consequence of wars, or major episodes of cholera and especially plague epidemic. The Black Death and the catastrophes that came together with it throughout “the sinister XIVth century” Europe¹⁰, that diminished a fifth of the European population (about 69 million people) were followed by a spectacular growth of population in the XVth century. It is about a “revenge of the biological”: the attempt on the biological is being answered, more or less consciously, or perhaps even instinctually, with a birth-rate growth.

Following the evolution of birth-rate in Romania and the potential confirmation of this theory judged according to some demographic indicators registred in 1977, the year of the strong earthquake and the following year, 1978, we noticed that there were registered more live births (423.958 in 1977 as against 417.353 in 1976, following a continuous descendant trend) and more marriages (199.794 in 1977 and 201.103 in 1978 – the greatest number of the whole period 1960-2006).

The physical health, as the result of numerous factors, also plays itself an important part in the evolution of birth-rate, having a special influence on the parents’ capacity of procreation, the number of the live births and their biological quality. Moreover, we have to deal with a real vicious economy-health circle: in the poor countries, a numerous population,

benefiting from precarious sanitary services make productivity and economic growth inadequate, and this fact interferes with the improvement of the quality of social and sanitary services. While birth-rate is high, the quality and the life expectation of children are low.

Relatively recent and extended studies performed on different animal species living in different environments, ground, air, water, revealed important biological mutations such as the apparition of feminine characteristics on masculine individuals, fact that determined researchers to proclaim the collapse of virility. Following this pattern, researches started to be extended on human species, too, as there were signals to predict similar results: efemination of greater and greater number of men, the birth of more females than males.

3. As for the “old regime” we witness cyclical fluctuations, meaning that a flux, a growth of population often brings along a growth of economy and standard of living, which, in their turn determine an excessive growth of the population, followed by its depletion, the increase of mortality rate, then a reflux of the population and economy.

“Epidemics and famine (the latter anticipating and accompanying the former) re-establish the equilibrium between the mouths to feed and the difficult supply, between the workforce and its use and these adjustments of an extreme brutality are the characteristic features of the previous regime” stated Fernard Braudel¹¹.

If during the “old regime” (until the XVIIIth century) population was hand in hand with economy, following a flux-reflux pattern, the “new regime” plays according to new rules, the economic factor losing its importance for the birth-rate. The industrial revolution, mechanization, urbanisation they move the economic activity outside the household, in workshops and factories. The economic function of the family is being diluted, and the economic importance of children decreases, and for this reason they are not wanted in great number any longer.

Nevertheless, even in the recent Romanian history we can see a correspondence between the evolution of birth-rate and economy. Thus, on the background of the economic decline during 1990-1996, birth-rate decreases, too. In the following years, 1996-2001, when the economic situation seems to stabilize, birth-rate stabilizes, too, and during 2001-2006, parallel with the economic expansion, we witness a slight growth of birth-rate. All this period, mortality reached relatively constant levels, just like the number of the dead births¹².

The 2002 Report of the United Nations for population underlined that the developing countries with a slow demographic growth face a more rapid economic runaway while a rapid demographic growth does not allow economy to keep pace with it, fact that affects the population’s quality of life. A steady phenomenon in the family sociology is the decrease of the birth-rate even in the prosperous families with adequate economic and educational means. The capital “in its selfish being” (Guyau) can be an

enemy of the population, its growth determining the share of the wealth. Meanwhile, sometimes birth-rate grows excessively within suburban, poor, unstable families. Most abandoned, uneducated, socially disintegrated, potential criminal children come from these families. Studying the reproduction and contraception behaviour of women in Bihor County, in 2004, A.Hatos reached the conclusion that it is possible that poor families even to pursue the increase of their income using children, this behaviour doing nothing but perpetuating misery they have to face, using fertility in order to obtain material advantages, especially from the state¹³.

Another important aspect of the influence of economy on the birth-rate is the high rate of inactivity of women aged between 24 and 54: 23.6% in UE27, compared with only 8.1% of men. Half of the women belonging to this category declare that their inactivity is due to familial responsibilities¹⁴.

4. From the social point of view, the emancipation of women, their economic independence, the extension of the schooling period, the increasing interest for material goods, the decline of the traditional cultural and religious values, determined important mutations of the reproduction behaviour. A new social paradigm rose in the last years, disclosing as main characteristics:

- the shift of the major fertility weight from 20-25 years old to 25-30 years;
- the increase in the average age at first marriage, on the same intervals;
- the increase of the number of divorces;
- a reproduction behaviour set on one child at an older age¹⁵;
- new life styles (the use of contraception on a larger scale, increased tolerance for celibacy or for homosexual couples);
- difficulties when harmonizing family life with professional life, especially for women;
- the change of social and individual values.

All these changes reflect the decrease of fertility and implicitly of birth-rate, with consequences on the demographic decline and the structure of population. Lack of love, respect, marital happiness in many families, the small number of children, loneliness, lack of communication, domestic violence are all expressions of family decline and distrust in its values and meanings. It is also possible for all these aspects to be side effects of the emancipation of women, reconsideration of the role and responsibilities within the family and consequently, of the conflict states generated by the change of the paradigm; in the meantime, they could be the results of the difficulties of adjusting to the exigencies of modernity which destructures the durability, birth-rate, trust, security, while exalting the ephemerae, risk, change and emergency. In other words, the long term values are replaced with short term characteristics, the time imperative being more and more acutely felt.

5. Authors like John Caldwell (*Theory of the Decline of Fertility*, 1982) or Norman Ryder consider public schools guilty for the decline of fertility, the ideas propagated by them encouraging the child to be more devoted to the state that teaches him and less to the family incapable to assure a quality education; the two authors base their statements on data registered in America between 1871-1900 indicating an inverse ratio between women fertility and the increase index of public schooling¹⁶. This theory makes us think about Rousseau's "Social Contract" about honesty of the state goals regarding the individual. Nevertheless, such a subversive strategy of the state proves difficult to accept, but does not imply that education is not "guilty" for the evolution of birth-rate. There is no doubt for anyone that, while in developed countries, family planning is being promoted in schools, in other countries, poor education and lack of contraceptive means make the number of undesired pregnancies uncontrolable .

Yet, it is necessary to draw a conclusion, even a partial one: more elements of progress favouring life (women emancipation, sexual liberty, rights of sexual minorities, contraceptive means, legalisation of abortion) have become in time instruments of the death in the developed societies. That is why, it is compulsory for education to aim at presenting to young apprentices the good parts of marriage, family, children beside information regarding the freedom to decide about the own body and the future family.

6. Numerous changes appeared within the family structure regarding the roles played by the husband and wife and they way they share them, i.e. these interfere more and more in the urban environment especially, but also in the rural one as well. There is no clear delimitation of the roles of the husband and wife in the household or society, as a consequence of the evolution in economy, society, education, mentality. Over the last 150 years, the traditional human family has faced major pressure coming from two sources mainly: 1. industrialisation which separated the workplace from the house, substituted household production with factory production; 2. state education. In the larger context of the decline of institutions we witness a phenomenon similar to what happens to the family, meaning that it plays an ever smaller part, most of the educative role being transferred to schools ("is this how they taught you at school?"), the role of socialisation and the assurance of affectivity support is rather found among friends, the role of learning and guidance is laid upon specialists, media, the alimony role is valid up to an ever smaller age. On this background the feeling of fruition, of responsibility of parents for their children diminishes, and this fact is reflected both by the parents' social behaviour and by the reproductive behaviour of youngsters, of potential parents, implicitly by the decrease of birth-rate.

7. The demographic policies promoted by the state in certain periods of time play an important part in the evolution of birth-rate, depending on their content and the way they meet not only the social and political needs

of a country (for instance, the increase of the ratio of population able for work out of the total number of the population, or counter-balancing the phenomenon of the population aging), but especially the needs felt by the population, by the family; economic needs, bringing up and schooling needs, needs of harmonisation the professional life with the personal one. In Sparta, a man served in the army until he gave the state three children, after the fourth one being set free, in Rome the bachelors were forced to marry the widows of those dead in wars, public functions were reserved only for the married ones, and taxes of the numerous families were allotted to bachelors. In China the last years policies meant to reduce birth-rate have started to prove their efficiency, whereas the pro-natality ones, in Germany, for instance, have not; that could make us draw a conclusion regarding the reverse relationship between the evolution of civilization and birth-rate. A gloomy conclusion if we think that what is happening today in the civilised countries will soon happen in the underdeveloped ones, breaking the Biblical bidding: “And you be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.”

The demographic policies follow the interest of the state to a too great extent whereas there are few proper conditions created for applying them. For instance, policies supporting the birth-rate cannot become productive unless there are also changes of the economic and social pattern able to prevent children from failing in the claws of poverty, to enable the harmonisation of the family interests with the professional ones, to prevent mothers, especially the single ones from being excluded socially and professionally.

Attempting a hierarchy of these factors under the aspect of their impact on demographic behaviour, especially on nativity, we notice that they have always influenced more or less the demographic evolutions and that during certain periods of time, or in certain geographic areas, one factor or another has acquired greater importance.

Even if the present study started from the hypothesis of the supremacy of the religious and political factors in comparison with the other analysed factors, the analysed data and the studies do not confirm this fact. Surprisingly, even if the political factor has a specific target, usually a precise demographic objective, it seems that the measures taken for this purpose (except the totalitarian regimes that take these kinds of measures with a strongly constraining character) do not have the wanted effectiveness. Nor religion – especially nowadays, represents a guide of demographic behaviour, the latter being the result of some coincidental factors that act in a different way on each individual.

Therefore, the demographic behaviour is not susceptible to influences of religious or political factors and has in a small degree a collective dimension and in a greater amount an individual, particular dimension and for this reason it should be approached as it is, respectively on the level of small groups or even on individual level by means of qualitative research.

This is what I have tried to accomplish through the case study presented below, which aims at verifying the degree in which the conclusion stated above regarding the decreased impact of religion on the projection of the demographic behaviour in the case of high-school 18 years old adolescents is a valid one. The sample of investigated subjects (18 years old high-school adolescents from Bihor County, in a representative sample for this category) was chosen because I consider that it expresses an important position, worthy of being investigated in order to foresee a possible evolution of a future demographic behaviour in Romania.

General context of the demographic evolutions

Nowadays Eastern Europe faces a worrying demographic decrease which cannot be associated with the feeling and especially with the religious behaviour of the population, influenced by the process of secularisation understood as “process by means of which the religious thinking, the religious service and religious institutions lose their social meaning”¹⁷. Thus, in Catholic Europe (The Western part) and the Protestant one (The Northern part) studies underline that in spite of a feeling of belonging to a religion, the religious participation is very weak.

Niklas Luhmann tried to explain the poor religious attendance: “Religion does not offer any guarantee either against inflation, or a change unexpected by the government, or against the decay of a love... It cannot fill in other functional systems. It is a function system for itself and only being part of this functional system offers specifically religious security... The individual cannot give up the economy, education, law, but he started to give up religion”¹⁸.

A longitudinal research carried out by The European Union in 1981, 1990 and 1999, regarding the values cherished by Europeans, shows that, for the citizens, the most trusted are the educational system, followed by the sanitation system, army, church, police, economic and union organisations.

Among other things, the research assumed as a premise of the study, the fact that “religion represents the main meaningful institution of the society when referred to the transcendent” and underlined the following indicators of religiousness: 48% of the surveyed declared themselves “very religious”, 17% “religious”, 12% “rather not religious” and 23% “not religious” (the latter being relatively equally distributed in Western Europe – 22%, and in Eastern Europe 25%); in Western Europe 80% of the citizens declared themselves members of the religious community, whereas in Eastern Europe 65%; the greatest number of the participants at the religious Sunday service was that of Catholics (37%), followed by Orthodox (14%) and Protestants (10%); it is rather surprising to notice that there is a tendency to return to the Christian spiritual values in big European cities¹⁹.

In Romania, a poll made by the Office for Social Research in 2000 underlined that 62% of the interviewed prayed daily and only 4% did not pray ever. In the meantime, although the church urges families to give birth to as many children as God gives them, the same poll showed that 78% of the Romanian population declared for the liberty of abortion and only 19% against (fact understandable as a reaction against interdiction of abortion before 1989 and lack of knowledge of less aggressive contraceptive means). It is compulsory to reconsider the religion -society relationship. Individuals no longer adapt their life style to religious dogmas; they “buy” from the religious goods market only what suits their own system of values.

A recent study of the Institute for Research of the Quality of Life of The Romanian Academy (IRQL) on “Romanians’ values” (January 2009) shows that the family remains our number one priority. The second place goes to work, followed by religion, whereas politics is the Cinderella in the top of Romanian values.

The IRQL study follows up the importance Romanians grant to classical social -cultural values: family, work, religion, free time, friends, and politics. 86% of the Romanians consider family as being “very important”. “Work and religion register insignificantly different scores (56%, respectively 51%), free time and friends are almost even (35% and 29%), while the research shows that politics is considered very important only by 6% of the Romanian respondents of the 2008 “European Values Survey” wave. The close scores obtained by family and religion enable us, once again to assume the dependence of religion upon the demographic behaviour.

The relationship of the young people with religion

Even if the demographic situation of Romania after 1989 is more special as the demographic decrease with almost 2 million inhabitants is due to a complex of factors that acted differentially on certain time shares between 1989-2007, we tried to render only the impact of religion upon the evolution of birth-rate in Bihor County, being aware that religiousness, as a meta-empirical reality proves rather difficult to analyse with instruments (quantitative especially) proper to sociology.

Before 1989, in Bihor County, too, the official level of religion coexisted together with a hidden, illegal level of religion, especially in the case of Neo Protestant religion, but also in that of the unknown ones, characterised by a poorer religious participation still, there was a forceful perpetuation of religious values, enabling the easy recapture of normality of the religious activity after 1989, even ostentatious manifestations, religious propagandas, tensions between religions about patrimonial issues, and dogma as well. The resistance of the religious values at this level, is, undoubtedly an element of synchronism with the Western values,

consisting of a high interest for the spiritual problems of some populations in highly industrialised areas, that being the case of Romania as well. We assumed that after 20 years from the abolition of communism believers, especially the young ones, with quality education are less interested in religion and more inclined towards rationality, towards economic, professional, social problems. We also assumed that confessional high school students and those from the rural environment manifest a more pronounced religiousness, and thus will prefigure a higher birth-rate.

The subjects of the research were 851 XII grade students from high schools in Bihor County because they have to make a decision: either to continue their studies or to enter the labour market, and thus, we believe, they have to analyse their options and to try to harmonise them with their wishes and cherished hopes, but also to prepare both their personal and professional future. We consider that the analysed category is representative in order to capture the tendencies of the Romanian demographic behaviour in the near future. Some of the answers got after they answered the questionnaires were analysed according to the statistical data found in the Statistical Annual of Bihor County, and also the data revealed by other national studies to add value and offer credibility to the conclusions drawn.

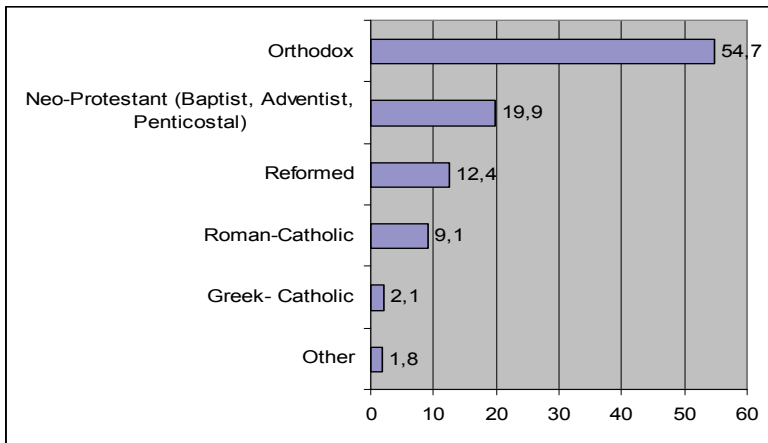
Out of those interviewed, (26.4%) are students in confessional high schools of Bihor County, all coming from the urban environment (I specify that the questionnaires were filled in by all XIIth grade students in those high schools in order to be able to carry out the best possible survey of the relationship between religion and the demographic behaviour of young people), and 139 (16.33%) come from rural high schools. We obviously take into account that students coming from other high schools affiliate to other religions, and some of them come from the countryside. The questioned items and, implicitly the analysis of the research fell into two compartments: religiousness of the young people and the demographic behaviour, especially the issues regarding birth-rate.

From the very beginning, we clarify that the situation regarding the religious affiliation in Bihor County (so including the respondents) is different from the one existent at a national level, meaning that the number of the Orthodox is considerably smaller, that of the Reformed is greater, and so is that of the Neo Protestants.

Religion	Percentage at the national level	Percentage at Bihor County level
Orthodox	86.7%	60%
Romano-Catholic	4.7%	9.24%
Greek-Catholic	0.9%	2.26%
Reformed	3.2%	18%
Penticostal	1.5%	5.71%
Baptist	0.6%	3.7%
other	2.4%	1.09%

Referring to the subjects of our research, the difference occurs when dealing with a higher number of respondents affiliated to the Neo Protestant religion, explicable because we applied the questionnaire to all XIIth grade students of confessional schools (not only to the classes resulted after sampling) and also due to the fact that the school attendance was higher at the moment of the survey.

Fig.1 Which is your religion?

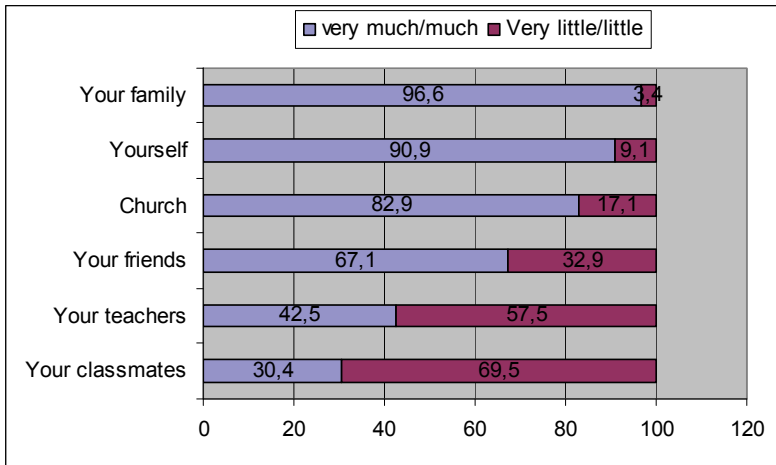


The main and rather surprising conclusion resulting from this research refers to the highly religious behaviour of the respondents. First of all, they trust the church in proportion of 82.9%; the church comes on the third place in the trust hierarchy, after family and their own person. A similar case to those encountered in other researches on the same topic at the national or European level²⁰.

I consider it rather surprising because we do not usually associate the young people with the traditional and religious values, being more inclined towards hedonistic values or to a superficial surface religiousness. Facts are not like that in our sample and this is proved by the results got from other items; and this entitles us to admit Peter Berger's opinion on "a world desperately religious"²¹.

Some authors (Introvigne, 1994) explain the high level of religiousness due to the lack of trust in the values of modernity, the difficulties to adjust to it, or because even nowadays religion offers answers to the existential issues of individuals. Thus, secularisation "understood as progressive rationalisation, is no longer a phenomenon attendant to social evolution"²².

Fig. 2 In general, how much do you trust in:

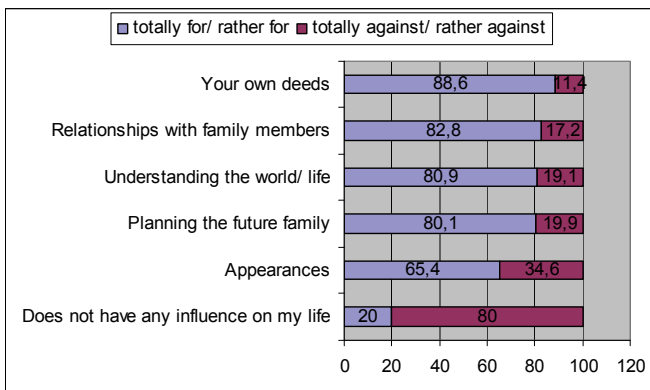


The close score of the trust of the young people in the church and in their own person is also surprising, as it is well-known that researchers rather associate the trust in the church with the lack of trust in oneself.

The young people surveyed appreciate the role of religious education from a rather early age (about 5.97 years old) considering that it should be performed in church (93.8%), within family (84.6%), but also in the school (81.3%); thus, the three institutions are held responsible with religious education, the young people appreciating that the greatest role falls on the church, followed by family and school. We consider this a reflex of the fact that they themselves benefited from religious education and they appreciate it for its support throughout the period of the building their own personality.

This is a fact also certified by the young people attending the religion classes in proportion of 95.5% (even if this could be avoided if parents choose so), the Sunday services, religious feasts, the frequency of prayers, and most of all by the influence of religion upon their lives.

Fig. 3 In your personal life, religion mostly influences:

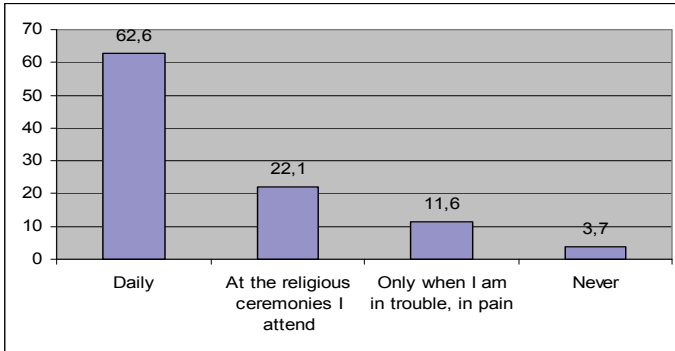


As it is easily noticeable, religion is quasi-present in the lives of young high school students, to a greater extent in the essential aspects of their lives (facts, relationships, the approach of the world, family) and to a lesser extent it has no influence at all. We can read a growth of “the quality of religious identity”. Paradoxically, the superficial influence of religion is more important among rural inhabitants (70.3%). Yet, this is explicable for those who live (or lived) in the rural environment, as there are still some vivid behaviour norms imposed by the church whose inobservance bring about the others’ reprehensure, even if only formally. And that is a quite unpleasant issue taking into account the whole context of inter-human relationships developed in the rural environment. The conclusion is not that the young people in the rural environment are more interested superficially in the influence of religion upon their lives; it is that appearances are very important for them. In fact, the percentage of those who declare that religion has no influence upon them is lower than in the case of those in the urban environment (only 16.7%, as against 22.5%).

Once again the great percentage of those who pray daily (62.6%) is sort of surprising and especially the percentage of 57.5% are boys and only 3.7% of them do not ever pray (situation almost identical to that developed in the poll of the Office for Social Research in 2000). We can wonder what factors determine this fact as most of the items of the research are young and so we do not believe they see a hope in religion. Their daily prayers may be the result of what they have learnt during religion classes, or they may continue the family tradition, nevertheless, the most likely explanation is that religion makes up for the lack of hope in their lives. I state this fact also considering the lack of interest which school students manifest for subjects (especially philosophy) that might guide them when trying to build up a perspective on life, and world in general. Unlike philosophy that requires considerable intellectual effort, religion proposes simple, more accessible solutions, one of them being the prayer, often taken as a sure way of getting some educational and professional results.

On the other hand, the frequency of saying prayers expresses a gradual retreat of religion to the private sphere. Even if for the Orthodox the prayer is more important than going to the church, the performance of religion services at home (weddings, baptises, communications etc.) by family priest, as well as organising special places for prayers at home support the previous statement.

Fig. 4 How often do you pray?



The trust in church is correlated with the professional status of the parents, the greatest trust in religion coming from the young people whose parents are unemployed, pensioners, housewives, workers or agricultures that are families with low income. That means this trust is also the result of the religious attitude of the family they come from, statistics demonstrating that religiousness is more conspicuous with individuals who do not get economic, political or professional successes.

The impact of religion on birth-rate and demographic behaviour in general

When planning the future family, an important part of the interviewed (80.1%) declare that they are influenced by religion. The answers to this question correlate very well with those regarding the projection of the demographic behaviour: marriage and number of children, attitude towards abortion and use of contraceptive means.

The average age at first marriage	male	female
XII grade high-school students of Bihor	25.8	23.2
Average of Bihor County	27.8	24.5
National average	28.6	25.3

The great trust in family and church, as well as its influence on the present and future family determine young students of Bihor County to consider settling down at an earlier age, comparable with that in the 80s and 90s for men and 2000 for women, less than the county average, which is lower than the national level. The rural respondents (43.3%) consider the age of 24.5 for men and 22.6 for women as the proper age for marriage, proving that even nowadays old customs regarding marriage and the optimum age for it still function in the rural environment.

While the Romanian family has continuously reduced its size: according to the last censuses, if in 1996 the average size was 3.2

persons, in 1977 – 3.16, in 1992 - 3.07 (values under those between the two World Wars), the surveyed young people imagine a more numerous family with an average of 2.43 children, and in the rural environment even 2.7 just like among Neo-Protestants, far above the average number of children of 1.9 desired in a couple at the national level²³ and almost double compared with the dramatic situation registered in Romania at present, 1.25 children per woman. This is the situation taking into account that most are interested in family planning, 75.6% of them agreeing the use of contraceptive means, students of confessional schools being included (60.2%). It is likely that such a situation should also be influenced by the religious education they have been given since their first school year. Considering religion, this is the situation regarding the desired number of children, and the number of brothers within their own family:

Average number of children – answers considering religion

Religion	Orthodox	Greek-Catholic	Roman-Catholic	Reformed	Neo-Protestant
Average	2.31	2.24	2.25	2.45	2.91
Std. Dev	.87	.75	.78	1.15	1.07
Maximum	10	4	5	10	8

Average number of brother considering religion

Religion	Orthodox	Greek-Catholic	Roman-Catholic	Reformed	Neo-Protestant
Number of brothers	1.52	1.67	1.29	1.18	2.68

Nationally, consistent with the data provided by the last census, there are notable differences between the fertility of 15 year old women and above coming from different ethincal and/or confessional groups. For example, the average number of children per 1000 15 year old women and above is 1647.5. When using the confessional criterion, Penticostals are on the first position (2706 children per 1000 women), followed by Gospel Christians (2536 children per 1000 women) and Evangelists (2082 children per 1000 women). Depending on origin the first places are filled by the gypsy (2454 children per 1000 women), Csango (2392 children per 1000 women) and Ukrainians (2267 children per 1000 women).

Our research poses two observations: 1. the number of children of the family the respondents come from is greater than the future family (a close number is registered among the Orthodox and Roman-Catholics and a significant difference among Neo Protestants); 2. the number of children considered desired is correlated with the number of the brothers in the family, according to religion. Hence the conclusion that religion still plays

an important part in the family planning, and young people are up-to-date regarding the family planning possibilities.

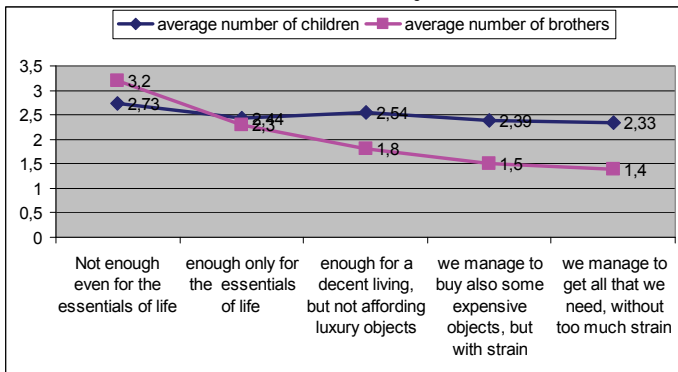
Undoubtedly, the Neo-Protestant religion keeps on having a more pertinent discourse than the other religions, at least as far as the moulding of the reproductive behaviour is concerned. Nevertheless whereas the average number of children in the nowadays Neo Protestant religion is of 3.68, in the one imagined by the young people reached only 2.91. Students are certainly more interested in the family planning and more informed about these aspects, and religion itself is probably more open to dialogue on this topic, without giving up some fundamental beliefs. The influence of religion in the case of students of confessional high schools is even more striking, as we notice higher scores than the average on each and every religion.

Correlating the opinion regarding the number of children that a family should have and the financial competence of the respondents' origin family we notice that the two variables evolve in inverse ratio, just like in the case of the confidence in religion.

Results are similar in the relationship between the number of brothers and the family competence. Consequently, poorer families are more religious and respectively, want more children. A. Hatos reaches the same conclusion and he calls this situation “reverse economy of fertility where the poor competence makes the large number of children not to seem nonsense”²⁴. Whereas this is an acceptable situation when it comes to gypsy families, for the families that are part of our research, it is more likely that the religious influence determines a higher birth-rate.

On the other hand, in case of the well-off, if in the past they opted for a small number of children (benefiting from material and informational means enabling them to achieve this goal) so as to prevent their fortune from being shared among brothers and rather to do their best and richen, nowadays they may consider children an impediment for the welfare of their business.

Fig. 5 Average number of children and brothers – answers according to the assesment of family income



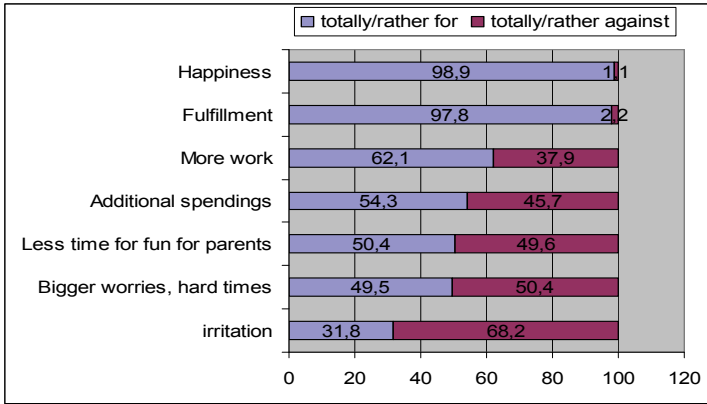
It is interesting to notice that a larger number of both children and brothers are to be found in families where, out of different reasons, not both parents are present. In such circumstances it would be expected that if the number of brothers is large, at least the number of children imagined for the future family to be smaller. I can think of one explanation only: that in such situations they help each other, filling the place of the missing parent, and that strongly bonds the members of the family, consequently, the larger number of children (especially of different ages) could be considered as welcome.

Do you live with your both parents?

Average number of brothers	of	Average number of children
yes	1.6	2.4
no	1.9	2.5

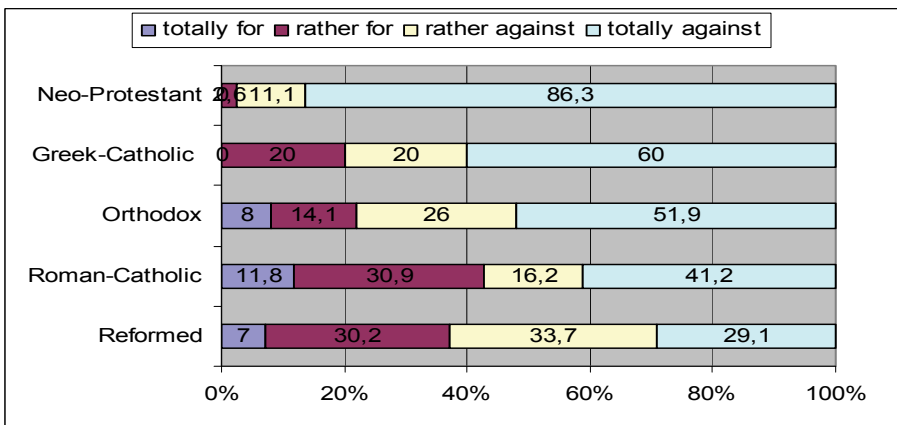
Analysing answers given to the question of “the benefit” children bring to a family from this perspective, we notice that the surveyed young people consider children, almost unanimously, as a joy, a happiness and fulfilment for the family; the same idea is being promoted by the church, too, where a child, far from being a burden, is a blessing and a reflection of God’s love, a reflection of the love of the husband and wife, conferring the feeling that they are “co-authors” together with God. Nevertheless, almost half of them are aware of the less pleasant aspects of the family with children: more work, additional expenses, less time for having fun, more worries, responsibilities, even frustration and irritation. It is just that they do not necessarily come from disorganised or mono-parental families, they rather have parents running family businesses, who consider that the business asks for their entire attention and care, children being perceived as an additional source of worries, issues and stress.

Fig. 6 Which of the following situations does best express "the benefit" children bring to a family?



As it was expected, most declare themselves against abortion and admit the use of contraceptive means, a radically different opinion from that registered in 2000 when 78% of the total population of Romania opted for the liberty of abortion and only 19% against it. It means that, especially in the case of the young people, the campaigns for sexual education attained their goal to a great extent.

Fig. 7 The consent to terminate pregnancy - answers according to the students' religion



Yet, the 22% who are still for abortion (among them being 15% of the students of confessional high schools) are puzzling and so are also the 25% (40% coming from confessional high schools) who are against contraceptive means. For this state of being we incline to accuse the deficient education in this respect, the very close score of the two categories letting us believe that, at least to a certain extent, the young people do not make the

difference between abortion and contraceptive means (it is also true that religion condemns them equally). It might also be possible that those who admit the abortion think of exceptional situations when it is compulsory, and most of those who condemn the use of contraceptive means are students of confessional schools. The circumstances given, we expected the latter category to think of a greater number of children for their future families, whereas the research shows that there is no important deviation from the average (2.66 as against 2.43).

Finally, as far as the attitude towards divorce is concerned, the Orthodox, Greek-Catholic and Reformed young people are the most open to this perspective, only 13.8%, respectively 14.3% and 12.3% considering this as unacceptable in any circumstance. A higher score is registered among those of Roman-Catholic religion 26.9% and a very high one among Neo Protestants, 50% high when compared with the other categories; in fact, if half of the surveyed Neo Protestants accept the divorce in some circumstances, it means that this category of believers, too, accept the prophecies of the church selectively, the young people being attracted by the alternative of making their own decisions about personal issues.

Among the causes accepted as grounds for divorce, the first place is held by violence in the case of the young Orthodox, Roman-Catholics, Reformed and Greek Catholics, respectively adultery in that of the Neo Protestants. Important scores are registered also for alcoholism and disregard of family, respectively lower scores for incompatibility. We consider that these answers reflect the effectiveness of education, the religious one included, for high-school students; it is well-known that a series of researches mention the presence of domestic violence within Romanian families and a high level of tolerance related to this reality. The fact that young people do not agree with the idea of divorce on account of incompatibility (a phrase that often hides minor shortcomings of the couple life) as we might have expected based on the teribilism of the respondents age demonstrates that most of them were interested in the issue approached by this research and in the outcomes resulting after the data processing. We can thus conclude that the interviewed young people manifested a considerable interest for the future, issues of family life, social relations.

It is interesting that they do not consider the lack of love between partners as being equally important as we also expected. A possible explanation could be, in our view, the fact that they noticed in their own family how love was replaced by respect, trust, solidarity, understanding, concern for everyday life, for the raise and education of their children, though without excluding the presence of love. There is also the left 18.2% of the respondents who do not live with both parents, some, of course because of the divorce which probably occurred, at least at the surface out of reasons more tangible than the lack of love.

The mistake some of the young people make is that they imagine that, if a marriage is based on love, it will always be like that, when in fact it is well-known that love has to be kept on just like a fire, not to go out; young people should learn that in order to be alert at many of the worries of the life as a couple.

The attitude towards divorce considering the criterion of sex underlines a great availability for divorce in case of girls (only 18.6% state divorce as unacceptable under any circumstances, as against 23.17% in case of boys), perhaps also due to the fact that it is them that are most often the victims of violence, adultery, family neglect or alcoholism. Nevertheless boys, too in their overwhelming majority, reprove these weaknesses, considering them as grounds for divorce.

Analyzing comparatively the scores obtained by the young students from confessional high schools and the average of the scores of all respondents, we remark significant differences in the following directions:

- Only 13% state that religion has no influence upon their lives (we are rather reserved about the correct understanding of the question especially by Hungarian students) compared with the average of the surveyed people;
- The frequency of attending the church services is double (6.15 attendances in the last 30 days as against the average of 3.53); also the presence at the religious feasts in the last 4 years (only 5.4% did not take part, compared with the average of 11.6%);
- the ratio of those who pray daily: 72.5%, as against the average 62.6%;
- The average marriage age is younger: 22.9 years for women and 25.3 for men, compared with the average 23.2 years for women and 25.8 for men;
- The average number of children: 2.66 compared with the average 2.43;
- The shortcomings resulted after the births of children are less striking;
- 15% do not agree with the abortion compared with the average 22%;
- 40% are against the use of contraceptives compared with the average 25%.

We can conclude that religion offers some principles and values, and could contribute to a balanced, adequate growing up of the adolescent.

Analyzing comparatively the answers given by those coming from the rural environment compared with the average answers, we detect insignificant deviations, meaning that the assumption regarding “the predominantly rural location of religious values, the rural environment which are in favour of keeping a high level of religiousness, because of the increased control of the congregation”²⁵, is not proved in this research. It may also hold true because in our study the rural environment refers only to a few big villages where there are high schools, or the children from the

countyside who attend city high schools, they come from richer families, or from rural environments very close to cities.

Even if the Romanian society greatly relies on the traditional values of the village, even if the education in the rural environment is integrated in the traditionally religious environment of the community, secularization penetrates and deconstructs the village worlds as well, especially through these young people who study in the city and are swallowed by the urban spirit.

Conclusions

1. The results of the research, no matter how interesting, even surprising, or perhaps even because of that, must be accepted reservedly to some extent, taking into account that at this age, young people are often tempted to answer as they think they „should” and not necessarily the way they feel, especially concerning a “serious” issue like religion and demography.
2. We caught a considerable difference between the objective data contained in the Statistical Annual of Bihor County and the subjective projection of the demographic future as seen by the high school students of Bihor County. In fact, the reality a couple faces after marriage and after the birth of their first child greatly influences their further demographic behaviour.
3. Despite the assignations from 1. and the confessional structure in favour of birth-rate in Bihor County (the great number of Neo Protestants), we cannot elude, at least in point of ideas, the strong impact religion and studying it in schools has upon the demographic behaviour of the youth.
4. The influence of religion upon society has diminished in what the spreading norms are concerned, young people choose to have a word regarding their own life and family; nevertheless, the influence of religion is considerable when it comes to their own deeds, marriage, family (the increase of the quality of Christian identity); thus, the difference between the attitude regarding abortion is relevant, respectively regarding the use of contraceptive means, which, in fact, has the same effects
5. Young high school students do not manifest a completely traditional type of religiousness; they also pick up elements of modern religiousness and adopt religious norms selectively. The pronounced religiousness is not so much an extension of traditional forms of religiousness; it is rather a need (perhaps unconsciously) for legitimacy for the cultural time and space they live in, accomplished through religion.
6. We notice a certain coherence of answers concerning the recognition of family and religious values and this entitles us to

believe in the reverse of the birth-rate trend, at least in Bihor County.

7. The research accomplished led us to the idea of carrying it on, its main limit being the unilateral analysis of the religion-demographic behaviour relationship, with religion as independent variable. It would be important to know if and what does religion do so as to improve the birth-rate indices, the demographic ones in general, or if religion set up other priorities.

The demographic evolutions, at us just like in other parts of the world, continue to be influenced both by religion and by political decisions. As long as *zoon politikon* and *homo religiosus* co-exist within many human beings the harmonization of efforts carried out by the church with those of the state could determine positive, if not spectacular effects, at least long term ones.

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¹ Simona Nicoară, *O istorie a secularizării. De la cetatea lui Dumnezeu la cetatea oamenilor (secXIV-XVIII)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Accent, 2005), 19

² Samuel Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale* (București: Editura Antet, 1998), 142

³ Georgeta Ghebrea, *Social political regime and private life Regim social politic și viață privată*, (București: Universitatea București, 2003)

⁴ cf. *The Statistic Annual of Romania*, (1993), 99

⁵ *Recent demographic developments*, (1994), 17

⁶ *European Population Data*, 1991

⁷ Vasile Ghețău, *Anul 2050: Va ajunge populația României la mai puțin de 16 milioane de locuitori? O viziune prospectivă asupra populației României în secolul 21*, (București: Institutul National de Cercetări Economice, Centrul de Cercetări Demografice „Vladimir Trebici”, 2004)

⁸ Jurgen Habermas, apud A.Marga, *Religia în era globalizării*, (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2006), 79-83

⁹ A. Marga, 97-108

- ¹⁰ Fernard Braudel, *Structurile cotidianului*, (București: Ed. Meridiane, 1984), 24
- ¹¹ Fernard Braudel, 20
- ¹² The Statistic Annual of Romania 1990, 1994, 1997; The Report on the human development in Romania, The Government of Romania, Bucharest, 1995
- ¹³ A. Hatos, *Contracepție, dragoste și sărăcie. Practici și atitudini reproductive și contraceptive în context social*, (Oradea: Ed.Universității din Oradea, 2004), 111
- ¹⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
- ¹⁵ Vasile Ghețău, 7
- ¹⁶ L. P. Ayres, 1920, apud Allan Carlson, *How Home Schooling Strengthens Families*, <http://misesromania.org/321/>
- ¹⁷ B.Wilson, apud Mălina Voicu, „Modernitate religioasă în societatea românească”. in *Sociologia românească*, nr.1-4 (2001): 70-96
- ¹⁸ Niklas Luhmann , apud A. Marga, 2006, p.76-77
- ¹⁹ Hermann Denz, *Die europaische Seele. Leben und Glauben in Europa*, Czernin Verlag, Wien, 2002, apud Andrei Marga, 67-70
- ²⁰ cf. EUROSTAT, in 2005, Romanians were the most confident in the religious institutions, 83% double as against the UE 15 average score of 46%
- ²¹ Peter Berger, apud Elena Iulia Gheorghiu, 2003, p.104
- ²² Elena Iulia Gheorghiu, „Religiozitate și creștinism în România postcomunistă”, în *Sociologie Românească*, vol.I, nr.3 (2003): 102-121
- ²³ “Youth 94”, apud Georgeta Ghebrea, 2003
- ²⁴ A. Hatos, 112
- ²⁵ Mălina Voicu, „Modernitate religioasă în societatea românească”. in *Sociologia românească*, nr.1-4 (2001): 70-96