

UNIVERSITATEA DIN BUCUREȘTI

**A Christian Response to Some Contemporary
Challenges of the Romanian Society**

**Summary of the habilitation thesis submitted by:
Lect. univ. dr. Emanuel Adrian SÂRBU**

2017

1. Summary

The habilitation thesis, entitled *A Christian Response to Some Contemporary Challenges of the Romanian Society*, has been made as a part of the requirements for habilitation in the area of theology, according to the Romanian rules and regulations in the academic field. The introduction and the first part present the candidate and his research contributions. The author has a multi-disciplinary background, which allowed him to develop a deeper understanding of both Theology and Sociology and challenged him to find meaningful ways to approach the society's needs in a Christian manner, promoting the values of faith, Church and religious community. His education includes a BA in Theology and Philology granted by University of Bucharest in 2000, a BA in Sociology and Psychology and an MA in Organizational Management and Human Resources granted by Spiru Haret University, an MA in Practical Theology and an Master of Divinity granted by TCM International Institute, Austria, in 2006 and 2016. In 2010, he received his PhD in Theology with a thesis focusing on the topic of suicide, regarded from the protestant perspective of the twentieth century and recently defended his second PhD Thesis in Sociology, also focusing on the topic of suicide, with an analysis of the self-destructive behavior of the post-communist Romanians (1990-2014).

As a result, the author's research is focused mainly on practical aspects of the religious studies, in areas like practical Theology, Christian counseling, moral Theology, social Theology, religious studies, religious communities and, partly, in confessional theological identity. He developed a deep interest in issues like suicide prevention, substance use, Christian counseling, social research and social work, due to his involvement in both theoretical/ academic sector and in the practical field, as a senior lecturer and associate professor of Bucharest University, teaching a variety of courses at the Baptist Theology and at the Sociology and Social Welfare Faculties, and also as the Head of Department for the Relation with the Civil Society and other Social Actors from the General Directorate of Social Welfare – Bucharest Municipality. As a researcher in Suicidology, he is the President of Euthopia Association (a research-based NGO), the Research Director of the Suicidology Association – Romania, and also the Central and East-European Representative of the Icelandic Center for the Social Research and Analysis (whose main program, The Youth in Europe, is considered one of the biggest health promotion programs in Europe).

2. Academic research contributions and research interests

The author's major academic efforts are in two directions he considers to be complementary to each other. First, towards the Christian community, to mobilize the Church, the Christians, students, researchers in being relevant in their attempts to offer a meaningful contribution that could transform the society, by using research methods and techniques that are being recognized also by the secular academic environment. Secondly, he is addressing to the secular academic environment, trying to document and provide arguments in the favor of the added value that could be brought in

the science field by the contributions of the Church, of Theology, of the Christian practices/traditions and of the involvement of the religious communities in different social activities. This has been aimed also in his academic research contributions and through the research interests that are being presented in the habilitation thesis.

In the first part are being presented, as required, the *Scientific Achievements: thematic directions of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, publications*. The research activity started with the PhD thesis entitled *Suicide. A theological analysis on the determining factors and on the crises it generates, from the Protestant-Evangelical perspective of the XXth century* (2010). In it, three thematic directions have been proposed. First one came up after noticing that, unlike in the historical churches like Catholic or Orthodox, most of the Evangelicals don't have a clearly stated and affirmed position on the delicate topic of suicide. So, after analyzing the biblical and theological literature in the field, **an Evangelical Baptist, Theological perspective on suicide** has been proposed, to serve a basis of future discussions and approaches. Then, with the concept of **the Integrative Suicidology**, a plea is made to the academic world who is studying the suicide issue to include Theology in the paradigm of these contributing sciences. By offering strong arguments, the aim is to persuade that the understanding of the suicidal behavior is not being complete unless the spiritual, religious perspective is not added to the current bio-psycho-social paradigm. Finally, the Christian counseling, as the practical part of theological/ religious studies, is emphasized as a powerful and effective tool that can assist the needy people in the society. **Christian counseling of disfavored categories** like suicidal people, youth, elderly, subjects of different kinds of violence, bullying, social exclusion or marginalization is emphasized as a continuum of the two-millennia of Church existence, embracing different approaches, instruments and intervention tools that can bring a significant contribution in nowadays' context.

Substance use prevention and, also, **Ethnography and Ecclesiology** are other directions of research. Through comparative studies between religious communities like the Baptist youth and their peers, has been shown, for instance, that religion plays an important role in the substance use prevention (people attending to church services, reading the Bible, praying more often are having lower consumption rates), and also emphasized significant differences of the Baptist group (like, for e.g., a more distant relation with their parents, which is probably due to a higher monitoring rate and to the existence of more rules that needs to be respected).

In the second part of the thesis, *Plans for an evolution and development of own professional, scientific and academic career, or research / teaching / practical applications directions and likely ways of action for the implementation*, the author manifests a strong belief that the current Church, living in the post-modern and post-communist Romanian context can and should be relevant to the

current needs of the society. For this reason, it is important that the students and researchers learn, understand and apply in their day-to-day activities both the theological knowledge and tools from areas like the social work, social research, psychology etc. In this way, the added value of faith and spirituality can be brought even in areas that are now being perceived as secular, in spite of the fact that the Church never ceased its presence and interest in those fields. For this reason, the thematic directions that the author will focus on in the near future are: Integrative Suicidology, Christian counseling of disfavored categories and, also, Ethnography and Ecclesiology, a field that is been actively promoted by the Faculty of Baptist Theology from the University of Bucharest in partnership with Regents Park College, University of Oxford.

Lect.dr. Emanuel Adrian Sârbu