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SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

The Arab Spring and the Impact on Christianity

PhD Supervisor:

Pr. Prof. univ. dr. Emil JURCAN

PhD candidate:

Pr. Drd. Cosmin LEAH

Alba Iulia

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Introduction

The work “The Arab Spring and the Impact on Christianity” is a political-religious work and deals with a part of a geographical area in which the relationship between state and religion is completely different from the European perspective. The present research can be divided into three parts. The first part deals with the explanation of the phrase “Arab Spring”, the importance of the Internet in triggering riots and the distribution of messages in the multimedia space. Also, the first part could also include the exposition of political-economic interests and the implications of Western states in the East. The second part can be considered a political analysis of the period between Napoleon's military incursion into Egypt and the present day. The third part covers the religious analysis of the same period.

Motivation

This research was based on the desire to contextualize the lives of Christians in the East and to report to them the political events of both the pre-Arab Spring period and, especially, during the Arab Spring. Our objective is to accentuate the challenges of Christians in relation to the imperialist policy of the 19th century and until the middle of the 20th, in connection with the nationalistic movements that overlap over the interwar period and, most importantly, with the popular uprisings of 2011. Each of these three periods meant for Christians the need for elections and their adherence to the camps that represented their interests.

As we will demonstrate in our thesis, Christians have had to make different choices, and our aim is to analyse whether the choices made by them have had the desired result or were wrong moves on the part of Christians. Unfortunately, Christians have been caught in the middle between supporting or not supporting imperialist forces, nationalist movements in the East, or one of the camps involved in popular uprisings.

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the religious situation of Christians could not be independent of the political situation in Egypt and Syria, forcing them to make certain choices by which their life and status tended to a higher level. They were caught in the net of political games, between supporting imperialist forces or nationalist movements in the interwar period. They sought to join the camp that best represented their interests, and these were simple. Christians sought a rise from the status of dhimmi they had in the Ottoman Empire to a status equal or almost equal to that of Muslims in the mentioned countries.

We also want to highlight the view of Christians in the context of the onset of the 2011 riots and what their attitude towards the riots has been, which camps have decided to support them, what the Christians have pursued during this period, what role they have played in the development of events and whether the choices made, have delivered the expected result. The Arab Spring marked a turning point in Christians' view of the political situation in Syria and Egypt. Moreover, after the 2011 riots and Muslim perspective on Christians underwent changes, and the situation of Christians became increasingly dangerous. For this reason, it is necessary to investigate and explain why the Muslim perception of Christians has changed.

Also to express a vision of the future of Christianity in a world fundamentally changed following the riots of 2011. The question of the future of Christianity is an open question, a question to which the answer is not definitive at the moment and which may undergo significant changes over the years.

Research stage

Unfortunately, on the domestic level, the subject did not represent a massive interest for historians, theologians, sociologists or political scientists, although the subject is extremely complex. However, the subject aroused interest especially on the external level. Internally, the sources proved to be limited. Fortunately, externally, the research was at a high level. If we refer to the political analysis of our subject, then the bibliography is abundant. On the political level, the bibliography is updated, the newest works used in our research being from the year 2022. In this category we do not integrate the web articles as they represented for us the newest bibliographic source. Internally, the sources were limited, and among the most important local authors we mention Nadia Anghelescu, Dumitru Chican or Emanuel Peterliceanu. Unfortunately, the limits of the research can be seen when the question arises of analyzing the situation from a religious perspective, that is, of the situation of Christians in the East.

Research methodology

In this paper we are talking about both an analytical and a historical method. We are talking about a historical approach because the present work considers the research of a historical period starting with the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon at the end of the 18th century and up to the year 2023. We took as a benchmark for the beginning of our research the moment of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt since that was the moment from which the relations between the Western states and the Ottoman Empire grew more and more in all aspects, both economic and religious. Starting with the end of the 18th century, the Muslim view of Christians will

undergo changes, and these will be caused by the policies that the Western states had when they entered into political and economic relations with the Ottoman Empire.

The part of thesis

First chapter (THE ARAB SPRING: A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL WITH A FUNDAMENTALIST TENT IN THE FACE OF WESTERN CHALLENGES)

The first part of the paper considers the explanation of the term "Arab Spring", who first used it, what it expresses and what is the view of the Arabs vis-a-vis this term. The term first appeared in Western media, being used in Foreign Policy Magazine. The origin of the term is related to the massive protests in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, which took place in 2005 and which represented a turning point for Syria's foreign policy, since after that time Syria was forced to withdraw its troops from Lebanon. The idea of using this term came to the American chain, being used by conservative commentators who referred to a "short-term flourishing of democratic movements in the Middle East". But in the context of the events of 2011, the one who used this term was Marc Lynch in an article he published in Foreign Policy, entitled Obama's Arab Spring, but the references of this to the concept were also related to the time of 2005. The Arabs never used this term in the context of the 2011 uprisings. The Arabs used different terms. They used three terms to refer to the 2011 uprisings. Thus, they mainly used three terms: karama, which means "dignity"; thawra that means "revolution"; Hakooq; which signifies "rights". In other words, the representative term for the Arabs was not the "Arab Spring," but rather the "Dignity Revolutions."

The first part also highlights the massive influence of multimedia channels, and here we are talking in particular about social networks and the sharing of information through them. In our research, we highlighted the need for media literacy because not all the information appearing in the online environment was true. The massive opening up to the Internet has turned any Arab with internet access into a journalist. This abundance of information has made it impossible to verify their veracity. The Arabs started on the assumption that all the information that appeared in the online environment was true and impartial, when in the end things had been much more nuanced. There were voices, such as Malcolm Gladwell and Yvgeny Morozov, who argued that it was not the Internet that united people, but the cause itself. The first chapter also discussed the issue of the Western vision of the situation in the East. Alexandru Stănila, in an article in Q Magazine highlighted that the West had no reason to anticipate a series of revolts such as those of 2010-2011 because the relations between the States involved and the West

were cordial. On the other hand, Richard Engel drew attention to the lack of vision of Western interventions in the East.

Second chapter (THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE INVASION OF WESTERN POWERS BEGINNING WITH THE 18TH CENTURY)

The second chapter deals with the exposition of the geopolitical situation in the Middle East from the invasion of Napoleon's French troops to the dawn of the Arab Spring. We chose the nineteenth century as the starting point, since the military campaign in Egypt led by Napoleon took place between the 18th and 19th centuries. This moment is crucial in our analysis because it was the first major moment since the Crusades when Europeans became acquainted with Eastern culture. From this point on, the involvement of the states of the West, especially France and Britain, would be increasing, borrowing large sums of money from Egypt, making Egypt unable to pay its foreign debt. At the same time, we are talking about the issues that have defined the future of the Middle East. Among these defining moments is the Sykes-Picot Agreement concluded in 1916 between the representatives of Britain and France, with the tacit consent of Russia. By this agreement, part of the Middle East was divided into spheres of influence between the above-mentioned states. (Syria, Lebanon and the southern part of present-day Turkey for France, Iraq Kuwait, Jordan for Great Britain). This moment was extremely important because it was realised through the artificial division of regions regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. James Barr called these new borders "sand lines".

The next crucial moment for the East was the independence of the Eastern states and the departure of troops from the West. This meant for Syria the takeover of power by the Shia minority to the detriment of the Sunni majority, thus exacerbating religious divisions between these two factions. From 1970 until today, Syria has been and is still ruled by the Assad family, part of the Shia branch of Islam. For Egypt, it meant the transition from monarchy to military rule. From 1954 to 2011, only three presidents (Nasser 1954-1970, Sadat 1970-1981, Mubarak 1981-2011) ruled Egypt, the mandate of Hosni Mubarak abruptly ended in 2011 following popular uprisings. The heads of the above-mentioned states distinguished themselves by a dictatorial mode of rule. This meant a limitation of the political manifestation of Sunni parties or groups in both Syria and Egypt. While in Syria, a Shia family ruled the country, Egypt tried to govern the state according to more secular than religious provisions. All these aspects have to another level the sectarian disputes within the Muslims.

Third chapter (DEMOCRACY WITH ORIENTAL SPECIFICITY. FAILED ATTEMPTS OF WESTERN DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST)

Chapter III deals with the exposition of the Arab concept of democracy and how the Arabs understand it. According to them, democracy was only good when it served its own interests. Also in this chapter, we have presented the attempts at democratisation in Egypt and Syria and the regrettable failure of these attempts. Syria's constitution in the middle of the last century was one of the most liberal, offering gender equality, political pluralism, and respect for human rights, free press and freedom of expression. The status of the woman was privileged. In 1949, she obtained the right to vote, and from 1953 to be elected to public office, rights that some European countries did not grant to women at the time. The Syrians, after the departure of French troops and obtaining independence, tried to copy the French democratic model, but especially after the Assad family took power all these tendencies were suppressed. In the case of Egypt, we are talking about waves of democratisation and reverse democratization. These waves were short periods in Egypt's contemporary history. The periods of democratisation meant the periods in which they attempted to move towards democratic leadership, and the times of reverse democratization meant times of regression.

Also in this chapter were exposed and the bets of interventions of Western states in the East, and these bets were mainly of economic order. On the other hand, the last part of the chapter is called **the theory of constructive chaos**. This theory was intended to divide factions, societies and peoples, to create states of conflict, generated by the Western states, which they would also flatten. However, it turned out that no theory issued could be applied to the Middle East, because there we are talking about quasi-tribal styles of government, lacking any trace of democracy. This theory mainly appeared in the speeches of American politicians at the beginning of this century, and here we recall the former President George W. Bush.

Two currents that are different have developed, but at the same time, they also have points in common. The first of these theoreticians we will recall is Francis Fukuyama. Francis says the “post-historic world,” without nationality, religion and structure. In the East, it was religion that united, especially Muslims. The second current was developed by Samuel Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations". This political scientist and important exponent in terms of the foreign relations of the US government in the last century developed this “confrontation of civilizations” in which “at the origins of future conflicts of the world will be causes of civilizational order”.

Fourth Chapter (THE ARAB SPRING AS A REPLY TO WESTERN INTERVENTIONS IN EGYPT AND SYRIA)

Chapter IV presents the events in Egypt and Syria in relation to the popular uprisings that began in early 2011. If in the case of Egypt things were relatively simple, with the president

being removed shortly after the uprisings began, in Syria things were much more complex. Bashar al-Assad has managed to retain his position to this day. Egypt has faced serious challenges since Mubarak was removed in an attempt to establish a democratic regime. Unfortunately, this has proved impossible due to the flashing rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist extremist group. Unfortunately, even today what is in Egypt is not democracy even though members of the Brotherhood have been removed from the leadership positions of the Egyptian state. In addition, since 2014, Egypt, like the rest of the countries in the East and beyond, have faced the threat from ISIS. At the beginning of the protests, Egypt was marked by unprecedented solidarity between Muslims and Christians, but it did not last long.

In Syria, things turned out to be more complicated because all predictions about when Bashar would be removed from power were contradicted by reality on the ground. In addition, the camps fighting in Syria were much more numerous than those in Egypt, Libya or Tunisia. First, we have the **Free Syrian Army (FSA)**, which was one of the first opposition groups to form in Syria. Later, **the Syrian National Council (SNS)** was formed in Turkey, headquartered in Istanbul, and tried to represent Syrians' interests internationally, but unsuccessfully. Kevin Mazur says that this Council only managed in March 2012 to coalition the armed forces of the opposition into a **Military Council**. According to James Reilly, the regime's opposition activists had already crossed the Rubicon¹. For them there is no way back, either total victory or exile. Once returned, and this also applies to the soldiers of the ASL, they were sentenced to prison or even to death. Some were focused on fighting the regime, but others were disappointed and said they were sorry, but they had already "passed the Rubicon". One of those who felt sorry for him said: "if we had known he would have reached this point, we probably have dared to oppose the regime. But we did, and now we can't stop, because if we do, they'll kill us all." **The Jabhat al-Nusra Front (Djabhat Al-Nussra Li-Ahl Ash-Sham)** was the subsidiary of Al Qaeda in Syria. The group was formed in the early 2012, and consisted of Sunni jihadists, whose stated goal was to establish a caliphate based on Islamic law, Sharia. All with the idea of re-establishing the caliphate was also **ISIL/ISIS** (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, then Iraq and Syria). This grouping was fully formed in April 2013, but it has existed since 2006. Its highest notoriety has been since 2014. ISIS was a Sunni jihadist group merely rival to the al-Nusra Front. They wanted the same thing, but the two groups were rivals. According to information, the number of ISIS followers would have been around 150 000 during that period, here speaking of both Iraq and Syria. ISIS had the most opponents, even more than Bashar's

¹ Allusion to the event in Ancient Rome and the passage of Caesar's army through this river. The event took place during the civil war of 45-49 BC. "Crossing the Rubicon" means that a decision taken can no longer be changed.

regime. Then the **YPG** and **YPJ**, the Kurdish forces. They proved to be among the most effective against ISIS, but were attacked by Turkey. These groups are added to the forces of Bashar al-Assad's regime. At the end of 2012, **the National Defence Force (FNA)** was added to the regime's forces, which had the same role, namely to fight the opposition. There is still no peace in Syria, but the fighting is not as intense as it was a few years ago.

Attempts to democratize have failed because of the political context in these two states. In Syria, things have not changed as the old regime has remained in power, and in Egypt, the tendencies of democratisation have been blurred by the rise of the Brotherhood.

Fifth chapter (ORIENTAL CHRISTIANITY AND WESTERN INFLUENCE)

Chapter V examines the situation of Eastern Christianity in the context of increasing Western influence in the East. Christians sought the support of these Western forces in their desire to overcome dhimmi status. Christians were in a big dilemma: to support or not to support Western forces. On the one hand, the contribution received by Christians in Egypt was insignificant and below expectations. On the other hand, Christians were tempted to offer their support for the achievement of the Egyptian state's independence and the expulsion of European forces from the East. Muhammad Ali did much more good for Christians than the West. From one point on, Coptic Christians developed a repulsion towards Western missionaries because of the latter's challenging and arrogant attitude towards the Copts. It was Muhammad Ali who tried to secularise Egypt to the detriment of Islamist extremist groups. In this context, the Copts had a much more favourable attitude to the Cairo government than the Western missionaries who sought to undermine their authority. An important figure in the history of the Coptic Church was Pope Kyrillos IV, also known as Abu Islah. He placed emphasis on the education of the clergy. Unfortunately, he was influenced by Western missionaries, and ordered the burning of several icons to the satisfaction of missionaries in the West. He established, what was called the Great Coptic Schools or Madrasat al-Aqbat al-Kubra, these schools being "the first civil union between Copts and Muslims in free non-governmental education".

Towards the time of President Mubarak and Pope Shenouda, relations between the state and the church became tense. Unfortunately, the biggest problem was the tense relations between members of the Coptic Church regarding the view between the state and the Church. The Patriarch was on the president's side, contrary to the majority of the clergy who were in opposition.

In Syria, the Western invasion began following the Lebanese massacre of 1860. We are talking about a fight between the Druze, part of Islam, and Christians. It is not very clear who started the fighting, but the Druze's reaction was violent, killing thousands of Christians,

becoming one of the bloodiest attacks in the history of the clashes between the two camps. The conflict was used by Western states to intervene directly and establish themselves as protectors of the Christians of the Ottoman Empire. Later, during World War I, Armenians deported by the Ottoman Empire passed through Syria, witnessing the atrocities of deportations.

As in Egypt, after World War I, the French arriving in Syria sought support from the Christians, but were hit with their scepticism, with Christians more tempted to align themselves with the Sunni than with the West. Things in Syria were and still are extremely complex. First, the Orthodox and Sunni wanted full independence of Syria, without external intervention. On the other hand, the Shiites and the Maronites opted for France's intervention in Syria. At the same time, the Sunni wanted a Syria ruled only by them and the application of Islamic law, which would have led to the abolition of the rights of religious minorities, which was to the detriment of both Orthodox and Catholic Christians. The political context in Syria directly affects Christians, which is why for Christians of all faiths things were and are extremely complicated. During the interwar period, and until the departure of France from Syria, the Alawites managed to establish close ties with the French, even though they were a minority. After the departure of France, the Alawites remained in charge, which meant a good thing for Christians, but Christians were also persecuted. Although the Assad family presidents appeared alongside leaders of the Christian churches in Syria, Christians were subjected to persecution.

Sixth chapter (CHRISTIANS AND THE ARAB SPRING. STATE OF PRESSURE AND OPPRESSION THROUGH THE REVIVAL OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM)

Chapter VI deals with the situation of Christians in Egypt and Syria during the riots since 2011. Things were different in the two states. In Egypt, Christians were actively involved from the outset, creating an unprecedented unity between Christians and Muslims, protecting each other during riots. On the other hand, in Syria, things were complicated by the fact that there were many Christian churches, and Christians did not agree on their attitude to the uprisings. Some Christians remained on the regime's side, some chose to fight the regime, but most were those who sought to escape the calvary in Syria and leave the country. Christians in Syria have been united in their view of this conflict. The major problem for Christians in Syria was that some Christians chose to fight the regime, but anti-government military forces persecuted all Christians regardless of their position towards the regime.

Whether we are talking about Egypt or Syria, since 2014, Christians have been victims of the Islamic State (ISIS), a terrorist extremist group that has taken advantage of media exposure to attract new members. Aggression against Christians by extremist groups has

reached alarming rates especially in the period 2014-2018. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit Christians heavily, being accused by Muslims as the cause of the outbreak.

Conclusion

The future of Christianity in the East is being seriously questioned because of the lack of attitude and vision on the situation in the Orient. This lack of aid is translated into the number decrease of Christian communities in the above-mentioned countries and beyond. Unfortunately, the situation of Christians has deteriorated irreparably. The peace of communities has been damaged, and communities have been destroyed by the fighting of 2011. Unfortunately, at the global level, the problem of Christians and Eastern Christianity and the adoption of measures to support them has never been raised. Worldwide meetings on this subject have been extremely few compared to the gravity of the situation. Nor was there any talk in the meetings about the adoption of concrete measures to support those in the midst of the riots. Without support for Christianity in the East, we run the risk that in a few decades, we will only be talking about the past about the cradle of Christianity, the Middle East. Economic interests in the East have caused the fate of Christians to be overlooked. All this time, Christians have been forced to leave their homes and find peace elsewhere. The likelihood that things will return to normal is very low, which means that Christianity is also deeply affected. Unfortunately, with the expulsion of Christians from the East, a page of the history and civilization of the East is also expelled. We hope that at some point, things will turn out to be normal, but the prospects are gloomy.

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