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RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS.
A MINING PROJECT CASE STUDY

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Abstract: Religious leaders are being viewed as agents with influence over environmental opinion and attitude building. In public environmental project impact debate the Christian religious leaders may play an increasingly complex role due to their anthropocentric position. Roșia Montană Gold Corporation is such a project where The Romanian Orthodox Church has taken a position right from the beginning. Our study explores the local impact area religious leaders' attitudes as to the mining project in particular and the overall view of environmental concerns in religious sermon in general. Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed and Baptist representatives have been interviewed. The main conclusion we drew is that environmental concerns can create leadership style dissonances between different hierarchical levels of the same religious hierarchies, but with benefits at the communitarian-religious levels. The practical implications that arise from this and the possible directions for future research are outlined in the final chapter of our study.

Key Words: environmental concerns, environmental stewardship, mining project, local community, the Christian religious leaders, Roșia Montană Gold Corporation

Introduction

In communist countries where religion was marginalized, shunned-off or outright banned, clerics were left with little role to play as formal community leaders, having to confine themselves within the boundaries of state-regulated arena of opinion. Sidelined by the anti-theist official ideology of the communist state, they nevertheless continued to develop informal roles as facilitators of local relationships, especially in small rural communities. The fall of the iron curtain ended forty years of “dark age” of religious freedom of opinion¹, and religious leaders are being once again summoned to participate in various (and sometimes new) roles in the life of their communities. Reflecting upon the contribution of the religious thought of the agrarian age on their perspective of the environment, rural communities of today find themselves wondering if environmental guidance couldn't become one of these roles.

A telling example is that of Roșia Montană village, of Alba County, in ex-communist Romania. Roșia Montană is a relatively remote village in the Apuseni Mountains, very rural, but with a tradition of precious metal mining going back to roman times. Although a small community, it displays a variety of Christian confessions, most churches being built during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Gabriel Resources, a Canadian mining company, purchased a mining stake in the 1990's and launched the *Roșia Montană Gold Corporation* (RMGC) project. The company's stated goals are to invest in a large open-pit mining operation of primarily gold, but also of other minority metals.

The project is meeting resistance though, due to relocation pressures on inhabitants, social impact worries, archaeological and cultural degradation dangers, and environmental concerns resulting from the ambitious scope of the project.

The environmental perspectives of religious community leaders will be examined in this study.

Rationale

In the past we focused on examining the connections between religious affiliation, public participation and civil society on one hand², and on the Church's role as mediator in local governance communication on the other³. The effects of globalization forces on local communities have also been a subject of interest to us and we researched several such issues in the rural communities of the region⁴. The current study is an attempt to unify our research in the area of public space religious leadership with our assessment of environmental attitudes to large-scale, large-impact industrial projects like the one at Roșia Montană.

In this paper we will examine several types of religious leadership at both the top-level of the church hierarchy and the bottom-level of parish priests and pastors. Two types of leadership are defined in particular, the spiritual type (or *servant leadership*) and the *transformational* type. We will then narrow our attention to religious leadership in environmental matters, including the issue of environmental activism. We will present the variety of environmental attitudes that the RMGC project generated in the local debate, particularly among the religious leaders of the local communities. The research methodology will be described and some of the results interpreted both in the environmental and the leadership style perspectives. Three fundamental questions are raised: 1) to what extent do local religious leaders acknowledge the existence of a defined doctrine behind their environmental attitude and actually use this doctrine towards ecological education?; 2) what type of leadership emerges when confronted with the particulars of the project in question?; 3) is this resulting type of local leadership aligned with the doctrinal line of their church's official position?

Religious Leadership in Contemporary Debate

The question of leadership in general has provoked a prolific variety of studies in the last decades. The issue has been researched under a variety of paradigms, including the theological one. In attempting to identify a common language to both theology and leadership Ayers⁵ notices the existence of significant precedents particularly in the areas of anthropology and sociology of religion. Wondering on the ideal type of local parish religious leadership, Cormode⁶ concludes that it would require an ingenious blend of qualities which would rather inspire and give meaning to actions than take decisions in the name of the parishioners.

Undoubtedly the local priest must be a spiritual leader above all. Spiritual leadership is treated in the current scientific discourse under the servant leadership conceptual theory. The purpose of the spiritual leadership - Fry claims - is to create vision and values that are congruent to the ethical well-being⁷. Later on, Fry expanded the theory of spiritual leadership to include concepts as values, attitudes, and behaviours necessary for positive human health and psychological well-being⁸. A review of the existing literature on servant leadership is undertaken by Wallace⁹ who states that theoreticians have proposed attributes and values, have offered models and have achieved comparisons, creating a philosophical foundation for servant leadership. In his work Wallace provides a comparative analysis between the perspective on servant leadership of five of the broadest world religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism). His conclusion is that all five have some sort of incompatibility with the secular concept of servant leadership, but ...

“...it is possible to use a broad Judeo-Christian or biblical worldview as a foundation which would be compatible with servant leadership [...] the broad biblical worldview is compatible with personalism, servant leadership as well as many other leadership styles expressed in leadership literature. Rather than linking a theory like servant leadership to a specific teaching, linking it to a comprehensive worldview provides a stronger philosophic base. Even Jesus’ command to be servant leaders grew out of His understanding of Hebrew worldview.”¹⁰

As a matter of fact within the Christian community, servant leadership has always been the most influential leadership model. While exploring scriptural models of early church leaders Malphurs¹¹ finds servant attitude to occupy a central spot, although not to the expense of other qualities like the power to influence. In Stark’s work¹² is stated that leadership must be the prime objective for Christian leaders.

The literature that explores the pedagogical qualities of Christian leaders is vast. The character, the competences and the challenges faced by the religious leader in his role as teacher are widely described in Bredfeldt book¹³. The majority of works dealing with Christian leaders’ power of influence also caution on the dangers of influence and invite to prudence¹⁴.

The concept of transformational leader is a secular one. The religious transformational leader is one who invokes goals and vision, who manages change and who offers row models. He is actually a strategist, a supporter and a fighter for its cause¹⁵ and as such, an opinion setter. One cannot ignore the modern interpretation of the Christian leadership also, the type of leadership which promotes the coach model, as a radically different approach to leading people. Rather than provide answers, leaders ask questions, learn how to create powerful conversations to assist others to solve their own problems, reach goals, and develop leadership skills in the process¹⁶.

Notwithstanding the above models, we will be framing the domain of religious leadership as a three-dimensional space in which one axis has the spiritual model of leadership at one pole and the transformational one at the other, the second axis follows the hierarchical institutional structure and the third axis, the different domains of interest. The mix of leadership styles can be the same or can vary across the Church hierarchy and so are the domains of interest. For our purpose we will be focusing on the single domain of environmental leadership.

Religion and Environmental Concern

The relationship between religion and environmental concerns has been a subject of academic interest for some time now. A review of the major approaches to the study of the relationship between religion and ecology is being undertaken by Jenkins and Chapple¹⁷, who conclude that a robust, interdisciplinary field in that regard has emerged. Dekker, Ester and Nas¹⁸ also review a provocative essay of White in light of the findings of a cultural research study of Inglehart. Although with mixed results - the reviewers claim - the latter contradicts in essence the conclusion of the former: that the Judeo-Christian cultural heritage and its associated anthropocentric view of the world would be the main culprits for the modern environmental crisis. Inglehart's cross-country study rather concludes the emergence of a post-materialist inter-generational value shift in favour of environmental issues and of a new environmental ethic. Arguing that White's conclusion - that religiously-endorsed, Genesis-based dominionism has led to the neglect of environmental concern - is too general to confirm through quantifiable measurements, Greely¹⁹ chooses to limit himself to the study of a single, verifiable variable - the willingness to spend money on the environment. He remarks not only a fairly good correlation between religion and concern for nature, but also differences between religious views in that regard. The more gracious image of God in Catholicism seems to correlate more positively with the propensity for environmental spending than the more conservative view of denominations like Protestantism. But the crucial predictor, he concludes, is not as much the religious affiliation, but the *literalism* in which different denominations of the Judaeo-Christian faith interpret the scripture. More precisely the author contends, it is the rigidity of the political and religious interpretation of the biblical "story" rather than biblical literalism itself.

There is disagreement though with some of Greely's findings. A study conducted by Hayes and Marangudakis²⁰ on the 1993 British Social Attitudes Survey claims no significant difference between Christians and Non-Christians in their attitude towards the environment. The study also states that contrary to Greely's findings, Catholics seem more sceptical towards nature, and that the pro-Dominion attitude is a result of lower education and of poor scientific understanding rather than of religious indoctrination.

There also are a few things to be said about environmental activism in the context of religious implication. An examination of new religious roles in the American environmental movement is undertaken by Shibley and Wiggins²¹. Their analysis of the resources, education, and action levels generated by the church and synagogues partnering within *National Religious Partnership for the Environment* (NRPE) organization, concludes the

emergence of a new religious force in American environmental activism. While the practical contributions (like energy savings and recycling) of this new presence is acknowledged, the authors voice their doubts nevertheless, as to the ability of the partnership to provide the prophetic leadership force required to meet true demands of the eco- social justice ideals. Also within the cultural perspective, Bergmann²² argues that Christian theology, which in the western culture has consistently paid more attention to the notion of time, is now switching that attention to the notion of space. This new “soul-searching” undertaking of theology in spatial coordinates may influence the position on environmentalism which traditionally rests on the central image of Earth as our home. Viewed from the radical ecologic perspective, as the Zimmerman²³, Christianity appears as profoundly anthropocentric and thus in opposition to the eco-centric view of the secular environmental position. One does notice though an abandonment of this polarization during the last decades in initiatives like *The Alliance of Religions and Conservation* (ARC, n.d) which presents itself as

“... a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. We help the religions link with key environmental organisations – creating powerful alliances between faith communities and conservation groups.”²⁴

Starting from the premise that world religions may play a crucial role in the rethinking of the relationship of humans to the natural world, Tucker²⁵ sets to highlight the call for cooperation between all environmental stakeholders, including the religious ones, and to document some of the responses of religious entities to that call. Not necessarily specific to environmental concerns, Lunn questions though the neglect of spirituality and faith in social development theory, policy making and practice. The author argues for a larger role of religion in shaping future social development, with particular regard to appropriateness of action and sustainability²⁶.

Roșia Montană Gold Corporation Mining Project. Religious Organizations' Reactions

In one of the subchapters of our book *Habitatul risipit de globalizare* we mentioned that RMGC is a mixed corporation with the National Copper, Gold and Iron Company – Minvest S.A. Deva holding 19.3% of the shares, Gabriel Resources Limited of Canada - 80%, and minority shareholders the remaining 0.7%. The mining company started prospecting in 1997. Because the body of ore is partially located right beneath the village of Roșia Montană, real estate buy-outs have gradually taken place, so that the local population could be moved. Also, an archaeological inventory of artefacts

has been undertaken, the area having been populated since roman times. The mining operations were supposed start in 2005 and would have continued during a period of 17 years, according to the reserve estimates²⁷. However, the mine is not operative for several reasons, fierce local opposition to controversial relocation practices and environmental concerns being just two of them. Political posturing is also in the mix, accusations of “politicians’ cowardice” made by the country’s president being an example of it²⁸.

Aside from company’s profit and state royalties, certain *economic benefits* specific of this type of projects are expected for local communities: 1) the increase in local tax revenues; 2) steady employment for local population; 3) business opportunities for locals which are not necessarily direct employees; 4) some contribution to community infrastructure development. Social benefits should result by releasing some pressure off the local administration in providing poverty relief, unemployment and old-age services; also by contributing to the cost of local infrastructure.

Some of the project’s criticism is centred on the core environmental issue, but also has cultural and religious undertones. Both national and international organizations have voiced such opposition, Greenpeace, The Open Society Foundation, The Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest and the Romanian Academy, to mention a few. Some of the criticism has been highlighted by us in previous work²⁹.

In the current study we will focus on positions voiced by different religious confessions and add the findings of our latest survey.

Roșia Montană, although a relatively small community, displays a surprisingly wide array of religious faiths, including Greek-Orthodox, Romano-Catholic, Greek-Catholic, Reformed and Unitarian confessions. The village has an Orthodox Low Church built in 1741, a Unitarian Church, built in 1796, a Roman-Catholic Church, built in 1866, an Orthodox High Church, built in 1871, and a Reformed Church, built in 1800. In the neighbouring village of Corna there also are a Greek-Orthodox and a Greek-Catholic church.

The Greek-Orthodox Church has voiced its opposition to the project since 2003 through a Holy Synod communiqué which we are reproducing here (in translation) in full:

“During November 11th through the 12th of 2003, at the Patriarchal Residence and under the presidency of the PF Patriarch Father Teoctist, the works of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Romanian Church have taken place. Taking into consideration the biblical position that the Earth is the Creation of God and that the project of the Canadian company Roșia Montană Gold Corporation is set to ecologically and humanely disfigure the area of Roșia Montană and by extension, the whole region

of Apuseni Mountains, and taking into consideration that the Roșia Montană project will involve the relocation of churches and cemeteries of the area, fact which is in contradiction with the Orthodox cult and tradition, The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church pronounces itself against the realization of the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation project and hopes that the area will remain intact in its holiness, purity and beauty.”³⁰

The Mitropolit³¹ Bartolomeu Anania has addressed the environment minister, mass media quoting that

“Roșia Montană is now in a hot period, of maximum tension between those who think that in Romania everything (including peoples’ consciences) can be bought with money and those who struggle hard to protect a very precious historic, cultural and economic patrimony as well as our national dignity. (...) I make it a duty of conscience to ask you Minister to make all effort and to use all legal avenues available to your post to save Rosia Montana, Transylvania and the neighbouring areas from a certain environmental disaster. We know that Roșia Montană is under threat of poverty, but now it has to choose between being poor and not being at all. Against poverty we can find solutions, but not so against environmental crime for which enormous sums are being spent, back stage intrigues are being consumed, expert documents are being falsified and specialist documentation is made to disappear.”³²

The Evangelical Academy Transilvania organized an ecological conference at one point, the theme being „Roșia Montană - El Dorado or Apocalypse”. The press has mentioned the presence at the conference of IPS Andrei, Archbishop of Alba-Iulia. The Archbishop would later be the one who will develop a more pragmatic approach to the project, by allowing some flexibility in exchange for compensation offered to the Orthodox churches for parishes affected by it.³³

Roughly during the same period in which the Orthodox Church’s communiqué was issued, the Bishop of The Reformed Eparchy of Ardeal, Pap Gheza, according to the media, was stating:

“We bring to public attention that the Reformed Eparchy of Ardeal is following the situation at Roșia Montană with concern for the Reformed Church’s

property in the area, for the archaeological and historical aspects of the affair and also for the perspective of a major environmental catastrophe.”³⁴

What is to be noticed from the positions taken so far is that Orthodox members seem to place environmental concerns above others, as opposed to the non-orthodox confessions who seem more concerned with the loss of patrimony. The Orthodox Church appears to manifest a more radical activism at the top, a position which we correlate with a more spiritual type of leadership, as opposed for example to the more practical positions of other confessions (like the Reformed one) which we associate to a transformational type of leadership. Starting from this premise we set to explore if these fundamental positions are shared also by the lower levels of hierarchy, where the community leaders are.

Field research

The research employed a qualitative methodology instrument of a semi-structured interview guide. The interview had some questions on *the concern of the church over environmental issues and on the existence of an official position of the respective church as to the RMGC project*. Five religious leaders from the Roșia Montană area have been asked to participate in our research: two Orthodox, one Reformed, one Baptist, and one Pentecostal pastor.

Religious Doctrine and Environmental Concerns

All the interviewed religious leaders stated a certain environmental concern based in most cases on doctrinal arguments.

For the Orthodox, the original sin meant not just the break of the moral law, but also the disturbance of the whole natural balance of the divine creation, the restoration of which did not happen until the coming of Christ. The restoration did not save the man's soul however and did not rebalance the natural equilibrium either. Man still faces the dilemmas of choosing between good and evil and of managing his natural environment diligently. Things are not that obvious in Orthodox priest's sermon as long as...

“...each priest in his sermon relies more or less on the surrounding nature. But nature is part of the intrinsic life of the parish and of that of the priest.”

Environment degradation is considered a mistake, but not a sin and people tend to become aware only when someone else is doing it. In another Orthodox priest's opinion, the concern for the environment is visible in the content of the agricultural parcel blessing sermons and in the materials recycling encouragements.

Reformed pastors prefer the power of example rather than preaching normative environmental behaviour. They don't consider preaching on this issue necessary.

The Baptist pastor also doesn't see it as being necessary since the Baptist doctrine implies the total transformation of the person through baptism.

“Nobody needs to tell me not to litter since this education is being triggered by the transformation undertaken under God's Holy Spirit!”

The Pentecostal pastor is of the opinion that all Christian confessions have an inherent concern for natural world that flows from the bible. He considers that more can and should be done to raise awareness in the parish churches and he offers the example of open-air youth activities that involve environmental education. He considers nevertheless that the community is not keenly aware of the environmental issues. There are also those that are sceptical of an official church stance and implicitly of priests' taking any positions in the matter. An example of such scepticism is an Orthodox priest's description of the Roșia Poieni mine launch³⁵, a debut which involved the flooding of the village of Geamăna and of its church, coupled with the degradation of the agricultural land supply:

“...the Church is not a deciding forum in such cases, if the state approves it, nobody will listen to the church, no matter what the church says. People never listen; they didn't listen then, even though the church opposed it.” (Orthodox priest).

Concerns about the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation Project

When Orthodox priests were asked if there is an official Orthodox Church position to the RMGC project, several lines of opinion emerged. The opposition stated at one point by the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy³⁶ is explainable - one priest comments - in view of all the media controversies on the subject of cemetery relocation:

“Because one was saying that the tombs will be dynamited, the dead will be blown up and the churches will be demolished - Things that were not true once we discussed them with the company representatives, because they will remove the dead nicely and one will be able to see how they are relocated to Alba [Iulia]³⁷, Abrud³⁸ for those that had died in Abrud, that is if the family brought the dead.” (Orthodox priest).

Out of the priest's discourse, both supportive and opposing arguments emerge. He supports the view of being a complex project whose impact cannot be accurately forecasted. As such, the priest concludes, he has chosen a neutral position, both in relation to his church and to his churchgoers. The second Orthodox priest also expresses neutrality, but also his support for their idea of mining as a legitimate occupation in Roșia Montană. The work however should be done underground the priest argues:

“God had man work [...] as miner, in the depth of the Earth, that's where he should activate. This way he will not alter God's creation. God had it there to be a lot of gold, or silver, or uranium, or other ores”.

The Reformed pastor approaches the problem in a more practical manner, from the perspective of the dialog between the Company and the Church on the subject of patrimony. As far as the Reformed church is concerned, the dialog had been initiated by the Company long before the impact assessment had begun. When the church asked for more detailed impact documentation, the dialog had been cut off:

“I think the Reformed Church expects or expected to have been informed directly at that time, which for all I know, never happened. The church has buildings, parish houses, cemeteries ...”

The fact that the reformed community is currently small and demographically aged, the Reformed pastor continues, results in a low interest in the RMGC project's controversy.

In the Pentecostal pastor's opinion, the project will result in environmental degradation, but a close monitoring process might help prevent excess. He also suggests that it is not just the state institutions that should do the monitoring, but the church could play a role also.

The Baptist pastor takes a supporting position in principle, but his position gets more nuanced on more precise issues. Starting from the material and social benefits of the project, he moves onto the issue of property prices and when arriving at environmental concerns, he declines his ability to judge the matters:

“So God gave us materials [...] and the Bible says: God gave them so we can enjoy them [...]. First of all, God created the Universe so we can take care of it. Now the experts are coming and say that a sedimentation lake will be formed under normal parameters and I don't know how, that I don't know, I can't verify it, that is not my responsibility,

it is the moral responsibility of whom comes to tell us the truth or to lie...”

The Baptist pastor also depicts a situation of social polarisation and of aggravation of poverty. He states his worry on these aspects and his support for a mining approach that will create opportunities, but under certain conditions:

“God created man not to be used as a tool, or to be stepped upon, or to have his life destroyed for someone’s purpose. I agree to the [mining] exploitation as long as people’s rights to life and property are respected [...] not be constrained, but create the possibility to develop in all directions, in that sense I’m for the mining, but it depends who’s doing it.”

Conclusions and openings

The answer to the question whether the religious leaders are aware of a doctrinal official church position to the environmental problems is a positive one. It’s just that when it comes to educate the church goes in environmental matters, they prefer to lead by example rather than by preaching. Based on the results mentioned above, we can also begin to sketch certain aspects in connection with the type of leadership employed by the different Christian confessions.

Firstly we noticed that all religious leaders that we interviewed seem to be the promoters of a transformational type of leadership. The concern for nature they argue – and notwithstanding the spiritual aspects – should be approached differently. The qualities of the transformational leader are probably those that should be intensively explored in studies of religious leadership and environmental concerns.

In the case of Orthodox Church the leadership type of the local priests is consistent with that at the top of the church’s hierarchy. The explanation may have to do with the more hierarchical structure of the Orthodox Church than that of the other churches. Perhaps the introduction of an organizational structural criteria that could be operationalised as a number of hierarchic levels, could offer firmer answers as to the type of leadership the confession in question employs in relation to environmental concerns.

As to the theoretical importance of our study we would mention the new hypothesis that environmental concerns can create leadership style dissonances between different hierarchical levels of the same religious hierarchies, but with benefits at the communitarian-religious levels.

As to the practical value of such research one can observe the following: 1) for the local religious communities is relevant the availability

of their religious leaders to support their short and medium-term interests, but less so for the support of their long-term sustainable-development ones and 2) for the company promoting the mining project may be relevant the fact that, at the local level, where the prevalent style of leadership is the transformational one, the opportunity for negotiation may be more open than it appears in the public discourse.

Further research could delve in more depth and detail of the negotiating space of opportunity and identify areas of interests for sustainable development purposes. The dissonance between the positions of the different levels of religious hierarchy is also an area that worth investigating further, together with its effects on local environmental awareness building.

Notes

¹ About religious behavior see also Roxana Pleșa, *Psihologie socială. Teme fundamentale și domenii de aplicabilitate*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2013), 125-128.

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- ³¹ Superior hierarchic rank in Eastern Orthodox Church.

³² “Mitropolitul Bartolomeu Anania: pentru salvarea Rosiei Montane, a Transilvaniei si a zonelor invecinate de la un dezastru ecologic sigur”, *Apologeticum*, 2 September, 2011. Available at <http://apologeticum.wordpress.com/2011/09/03/mitropolitul-bartolomeu-anania-pentru-salvarea-rosiei-montane-a-transilvaniei-si-a-zonelor-invecinate-de-la-un-dezastru-ecologic-sigur-rosia-montana-trebuie-sa-ramana-a-romanilor-este-un-foarte-pr/> (accessed 29 December 2013).

³³ “Biserica ia atitudine fata de proiectul de exploatare miniera de la Rosia Montana”, *CrestinOrtodox.ro*, 5 Jul 2007. Available at <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/stiri/arhiepiscopia-alba-iulia/biserica-atitudine-fata-proiectul-exploatare-miniera-la-rosia-montana-73413.html> (accessed: 2 Mar 2012).

³⁴ “Ecologie”, *Formula AS*, 554/2003. Available at <http://www.formula-as.ro/2003/564/ecologie-14/ecologie-4062> (accessed: 29 December 2013).

³⁵ A copper mining industrial colossus built by the communists in 1986 next to Roșia Montană, for which the village of Geamăna had to be relocated to make room for the Valea Șesii sedimentation pond.

³⁶ For details please refer to Buțiu and Pascaru, 2011.

³⁷ The town of Alba Iulia, the capital of Alba County, 75 Km from Roșia Montană.

³⁸ The town of Abrud, the closest town to Roșia Montana, 11 Km from it.

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