

EP webinar on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Churches



An online event was organised on Wednesday, 24 June 2020, by the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Churches, as well as the Churches' social teachings in response to the current crisis.

The panel included representatives of the three major Christian traditions in Europe – Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox – who shared their observations and reflections on how the Churches coped with the new situation and the specific manner in which faith could further contribute to the recovery of our societies after the outbreak.

The Orthodox Church was represented by Rev. Fr. George Valcu, General Secretary of the Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union (CROCEU).

The event was opened by Mr. György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairman of the EPP WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue, who emphasised both the huge impact that the pandemic had on the life of religious communities throughout Europe, and their significant contribution to dealing with the crisis.

Speaking on behalf of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE), Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, emphasised the potentially positive outcomes of the difficult situations we have been going through, not least a general rediscovery of our solidarity as societies, as well as of the inherent vulnerability that characterises us all, in spite of the various advances humanity has achieved over time. He also saluted the fact that, overall, human life proved to be prior to economy throughout the decision making processes related to the management of the pandemic.

Also taking part in the panel was Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), who talked about the diversity of ways in which CEC member churches felt the effects of the pandemic, as well as the variety of responses, each according to the theological specificities of a given tradition.

Fr. George Valcu

Fr. George Valcu, who took part in the panel on behalf of CROCEU, underscored the specifically strong impact of the pandemic on the Orthodox communities, given their strongly liturgical and sacramental character. As well as the significant social contribution of the Orthodox Church to alleviate the suffering caused by the crisis.

Further on, referring to the various restrictions imposed by the States to religious communities, Rev. Valcu raised a question on the proportionality of these measures to their scope, as well as on their discriminatory nature, when related to those imposed to other social actors.

“How exactly did the State determine which activities are essential for society and which are not? Does the State have the authority to decide upon this matter for all of its citizens? And, when the State does decide that religion is not essential to one's life, doesn't the State become an organ of a secularistic approach to life and society, to the detriment of a religious one? And isn't this precisely the upside-down version of the danger that secularism itself claims to want to protect us from, i.e. giving

to another the right to decide on what should I believe?," he wondered.

Finally, emphasising the overall cautious and responsible attitude that the Church has shown throughout this time, Fr. Valcu called for a serious re-evaluation of the epidemiological situation, aiming at achieving the optimal balance between limiting the harm done by the virus and the harm caused by the measures meant to contain it, while always keeping in mind the paramount guiding principle in this search, from a Christian perspective, i.e. the unique and priceless value of each and every human life, from conception to natural death.

[The program of the webinar can be seen here.](#)

[Rev. George Valcu's full contribution can be consulted here.](#)

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