

## On earth as it is in heaven



Born in Iassy in 1973, [Cristina Nichitus Roncea](#) was an early starter in photography. She began an apprenticeship in her own family and picked up her first notions on a Soviet-made compact camera, the famed Smena 6, developed and enlarged her films in a makeshift home-lab set up by her brother. She later attended a photography course with prof. Ioan Matei Agapi at the Photographic School of the Culture Centre Copou, in Iassy. She gave photography up for a while, but after she obtained her degrees in Law and Economic Studies at the "Al.I.Cuza" University in her native city, in 2004 she decided to go back to her old hobby and turn it into a profession. Her photographs were first published in the local press then got a place in the national press (Ziua, Ziarul financiar, Gândul, Business Magazin, Ce se întâmplă?, doctore?, The One, Descoperă?, Apostolia, Familia Ortodoxă...). She worked with the Buftea Film Studios. She is a founding member of the Association of Romanian Photographers Worldwide. She has been working for Mediafax, the Romanian press agency, since 2007.

### **Confesion about «On earth as it is in heaven». A photo journey into the Romanian Eastern Orthodox realm.**

My first time at the Petru Vodă Monastery was a Christmas Eve. The bright light of a sky full of stars fell on the freshly fallen snow, everything was white and the nuns were about to go out on their carol-singing round. So there I was, accompanying them up and down the hill, from cell to cell, "[Hallelujah, Lord my God, angels carol in the sky.](#)" I'd tiptoed right into the fairy-tale journey. Where most pilgrims were housed, a door opened and out of the cell came Father Christmas as I'd always known him: the tall patriarch, white beard and a heart-warming smile, looking at you like he'd know all about your life and how good you had been. I was in Paradise. I felt this encounter would change my life.



I wish this album to be a humble homage to the great spiritual guide Justin Pârvu, founder of the Petru Vod? Monastery, twenty years after the founding stone was laid for this place of worship dedicated to the martyrs of the Communist prisons. These photographs owe their existence to his blessing, his vision and his fatherly warmth.

For their hospitality and forbearance I wish to thank all priests of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bukovina, all sisters and nuns, friars and monks of the Monasteries Petru Vod?, Paltin, Sihla, Sih?stria, Secu, Neam?, Agapia, V?ratec, Humor, Vorone?, Moldovi?a, Sucevi?a, Arbore, Putna, Trei Ierarhi, Galata, Copou, Micl?u?eni, the Metropolitan Cathedral of Iassy, the Patriarchal Cathedral and Sfânta Maria of Techirghiol." (Cristina Nichitu? Roncea)

CRISTINA NICHITUȘ RONCEA



« Precum în cer, așa și pe pământ »

*« On earth as it is in heaven »*

Călătorie foto prin lumea ortodoxă românească

*A photo journey into the Romanian Eastern Orthodox realm*



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Foreword by professor Florin Constantiniu, historian and member of the Romanian Academy: "Mrs. Cristina Nichituș Roncea brings the Heavens nearer to the Earth"

"The album of Mrs. Cristina Nichitu? Roncea allows a fairly unusual insight of life within the Orthodox church of Romania. Such works mostly underscore the artistic value of the edifices in our country – monasteries or dedicated churches – and of the cultural patrimony in their keeping: icon paintings, manuscripts, books. This time the camera has other aims: the Christ-like way of life of those who seek Salvation by perfection and their connection with the faithful amidst whom their life progresses.

A return to the origins is indispensable to the understanding of these details of life within the Church – monastic life, for one thing. One characteristic feature of Romanian Christianity is the slow, gradual dissemination of the Teaching of Jesus after the times of the Apostles and until the end of the ethnogenesis of the Romanians. Whereas the precise historical moment is known when for instance a Bulgarian, Hungarian or Russian political leader – a tsar, a king, a prince – enforced the Christian faith on his subjects, the Romanians appear to have been Christians from the start. A miracle and an enigma not unlike the phenomenon of the Daco-Roman, then Romanian continuity North of the Danube at the time of the Migration Period (3rd-13th centuries A.D.) one may say. In fact, the spreading of Christianity and the formation of the Romanian people were closely knit, simultaneous developments. We have been Christians from the very beginnings of our existence.

In the Christian world of the Middle Ages any political authority was shadowed by a religious one: any voivode, hospodar or king had a man of the Church at his side – a bishop, a metropolitan, at least the elder of a monastery who had achieved spiritual authority. When the Romanian principalities emerged, the princes had at their side venerable hierarchs, recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Just as the Christianisation of Romanians occurred without much ado, the establishment of the Church in the territory between the Carpathians and the Danube, for reasons that remain unclear, stood under the sign of Hesychast mysticism – a movement which came into existence around the 4th-5th century and achieved its full expression in the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas. His goal was the rise, through ascetic experience, to the vision of the light of Tabor, of the brightness of the Saviour as evidenced in the Transfiguration. The attainment of such a high degree of spiritual cleanness and communion with the Lord, whom "the human eye cannot see", required a spiritual force capable of fighting temptation and finding its way to God through incessant prayer.

While the 14th, 15th and later centuries, until the revival brought about by St. Paisius, did not register any clerics that might equal the theological refinements of the followers of Palamas, the Romanian Hesychasts became hermits, solitary monks living in seclusion but always willing and capable of offering spiritual guidance or worldly advice. The word "sihastru" [hermit] itself and particularly the place it takes in popular imagination – which surrounds it with a high degree of reverence – is a measure of the strong connection between the Hesychast experience and its perception in the mass of the faithful.

This leads us to another specific trait of the Romanian Hesychasm: the unbroken dialogue between monks and nuns, and laymen. Three factors need to be taken into account for an understanding of this singularity. First comes social perviousness: the vast majority of monks

and nuns share the rural background with the bulk of the faithful. A peasant encounters a peasant, a common way of speaking, of thinking and of doing things appears familiar to both. The second factor is the result of adverse historical circumstances: as we always were "in the way of harm", only a very narrow elite attained a high theological culture; the vast majority of the clergy of the monasteries and the churches shared the same lay culture of rural origin as the flock of the faithful. Dialogue was easy. And finally, their way of life and their vow of obedience to their elder meant the monks had to do a kind of physical work which was typically connected to farming and cattle breeding. The peasant visiting the monastery saw "the father" toiling in the fields, tending to the cattle and minding the bees, just as he did in his own household.

All this "tore down" the walls of the monastery and helped integrate the monastic communities in the Romanian society. The respect of the common Orthodox Christian for the man in a cloak does not put a distance between the two. The man of the Church and the layman live in perfect spiritual and intellectual union.

These characteristics of life within the Eastern Church have remained unchanged since the Middle Ages. Which explains the unique place the Church occupies in society, the prestige it enjoys, the power of belief as evidenced by the large number of believers who attend every religious celebration.

The photographs of Mrs. Cristina Nichitu? Roncea are a perfect illustration of all aspects of the Orthodox way of life, especially life at the monasteries, the brotherly relationship of cleric and layman which is so natural to this religion of love. The monk prays and toils – ora et labora! – and the layman, the beneficiary of this toil, regards him with love and respect.

At times like these, when desecration, confusion and above all sin seem to gain the upper hand, Mrs. Cristina Nichitu? Roncea brings the Heavens nearer to the Earth through her art no less than through her spiritual force and makes us forget the vicissitudes of daily life by elevating us, be it just for the blink of an eye, into a purified world. This book is no less a source of inspiration than a call to share spiritual values. Whatever the option of the reader – whether a believer or not – this book is certain to become a faithful companion."

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