ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN TEACHERS' PERSONAL AND
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS. AN
AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

by

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Abstract

This study explores the role of significant others in shaping and developing Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional identities. I examine how relationships established between children and their significant others (parents or primary carers) may affect their personal adult lives and professional identity development. This study also explores the role of the spiritual father as a significant other in Romanian teachers' personal and professional development.

The exploration of the lived lives of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers requires the collection of rich and thick experience. Therefore, I took an auto/biographical approach to the interviews. By recognising the individual uniqueness of teachers' lived lives, alongside the influence of personal and professional past and present experiences, my role as a researcher has been to give meanings to other teaching colleagues' experiences through my own experiences.

The findings show that the impact of parents and the spiritual father is more complex than previously thought. The spiritual father's influence is found to be determined by the degree in which both the spiritual father and children are involved in the relationship. The findings also show that the relationship between a spiritual father and an Orthodox Christian is built around shared spiritual experiences. A spiritual father "shares" his spiritual experience through the way in which he approaches his spiritual children, and spiritual children share their spiritual experiences through naming them to their spiritual father. Therefore, the relationship changes the lives of both, having as primary aim the influence on teachers' perspective on their lives and their profession.

The findings have implications for Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' professional development, concluding that professional development is not a simple cause and effect model suitable for all teachers. Importantly, for the particular case of the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, it arises in relationship with their spiritual experiences as a result of a personal and deep relationship with their spiritual father.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Teachers' professional lives may be shaped by many factors, such as their personality, their contexts (political, social, cultural, religious), education, families, faith and spirituality, the schools where they teach, and other particular aspects of their lives. Romanian teachers are and have been part of an extended story of Communist oppression within Eastern Europe, which has lasted for more than 44 years (1945–1989). The number of years is not as significant as the intensity of the events which changed the lives of millions of people across Eastern Europe. However, the Communist regime could not abolish Eastern Europeans' identity because of their faith, which was kept in secret, for fear of the communist regime's atheistic policy.

Romanian teachers were born and raised in the context of a Communist and post-Communist Romania, and their lives and profession were influenced by the effect this policy had on the families where they were educated. This study's aim is to explore stories of Romanian teachers, who lived and worked in Romania, and who were influenced by Orthodox Christian faith. Secularised European society ignores traditional Churches because of various reasons. In a Europe where fluidity of anything tends to become imperative and the canons of traditions (national, religious) tend to become fluid, there is still something that determines people, who live and profess in this new context, to remain themselves and to be not thoroughly influenced by the continuous political ideologies that change frequently. Here, I refer to their faith as a personal encounter with the divinity within the context of their daily lives and profession.

Although people, in general, have progressed towards a more secular view of the world since the French revolution, I considered, based on my personal, spiritual, and professional experiences, that research on Orthodox Christian spirituality and professional development may bring illumination for those teachers who have some religious beliefs and who are confronted with challenges, whether secular or not, in their lives and profession. Therefore, this research aims to explore the life histories and stories

of Orthodox Christian teachers from Romania and to give meaning to their personal and professional experiences in the context of their religious belonging. Additionally, I intend to give meaning to my own personal and professional experiences in the light of my Orthodox Christian spiritual experiences. In this context, at the outset of my research, my assumptions were, based on Orthodox Christian dogma on the creation of humans, that people with a religious belief tend to be more thoughtful to others, mindful of the people around them, and conscientious at the workplace.

In my research, there are three main focuses: profession, personality, and spirituality. For the spiritual life of Orthodox Christianity, I base my work on Archimandrite Sakharov (2013), Metropolite Antony Bloom (1970) and Dumitru Staniloae's (1993) reflections on prayer and confession. These three authors understand confession and prayer as two Orthodox Christian practices meant to establish a personal relationship with God. Bloom (1970), as well as Sakharov (2013) do not see them as two practices that a Christian should perform formally without a profound personal implication, but rather they understand prayer and confession as a mystical encounter with God. I discovered in their writings that I knew less than I thought about confession and prayer. Also, I understood that although it may sound simple to 'pray and confess', the personal engagement that these practices require has more complex and more profound implications. For understanding notions about spiritual fatherhood and personhood Barbu (2013), Ware (1974) and Zizioulas (2006) provided my study with rich information about the possible influence a spiritual father could have on one's personality. Further, to understand the role of significant others in teachers' lives and profession, scholars such as Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991), Sullivan (1953), Klein (1932), Honneth (1995) and Andersen et al. (2015) offered deep knowledge about the role and influence of significant others in future adults' perceptions about themselves. The deep knowledge refers here to how their theories enabled me to better understand much of my participants' actions, their behaviours, and their professional practice and relationships.

Having explained the background of this study and outlining the prominent scholars whose work I have drawn on, I will now explain the rationale behind researching the importance of significant others in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development.

1.2. The rationale for the research

At the beginning of my research journey, I intended to research the role of Christianity, in general, in the lives of teaching professionals, looking particularly at the role of reflection and of being reflexive in the professional development of Romanian teachers. At that time, I aimed to demonstrate the usefulness of a Christian way of life for the teaching professionals. However, my title did not fit my writing entirely, as the first was too general, and the second referred more to some practices of particular Christians, the Orthodox Christians. Thus, I narrowed my research to Orthodox Christian teachers only. Also, I used a different methodology at the beginning of this research, the action research, which I considered perfect for me as a researcher and as a teacher who wants to grow professionally. In time, this changed too, as I eventually conducted an auto/biographical research. Another difference is the place of data collection, which was not defined at the beginning, but later Romania became the field of my research. As a consequence of these alterations, my rationale for researching the professional teaching field has changed as well. Together with these changes came a personal change and development. I moved from being a student to being a researcher. As a student, I expected that my teachers to guide me step by step, to show me what I should do next. However, I changed that mindset and I understood that I am the "expert" in this research, and it is only me who could make decisions regarding the development of my thesis.

For this reason, this research became of personal interest, a journey towards myself, an expedition towards those corners of my personal, spiritual, and professional experiences which have not yet been discovered, and an exploration of my inner thoughts, experiences, and understandings about my Orthodox Christian faith, my personal and professional identity, as Kelchtermans (2009) asked: "who am I in how I teach?" Hence, the extrinsic motivation of conducting this research became intrinsic, aiming to understand those personal and professional experiences that defined my life until the moment of starting my research. I became interested in how I could give meaning to my personal and professional experiences through my Orthodox Christian spiritual

knowledge and experiences, and wanted to understand what role significant others played in my formation and professional development.

I aimed to go beyond my conception of considering myself a good Christian who encounters challenges because of others (either students, parents, or headteacher). I began to question how deep and honest my faith was, how much I engaged in my spiritual life, ceasing to compare myself with others, and began to question my personal, spiritual, and professional life.

Thus, one rationale for conducting an auto/biographical research was to give meaning to my own personal, spiritual and professional experiences and my relationship with significant others who have influenced my personal and spiritual development. This aim could not be fully accomplished without others, in this case, the participants in my research. I wanted to understand how significant others (such as parents, spiritual father) may impact on the teaching professionals' personal, spiritual and personal lives. Listening to their stories, and reflecting on my own story, I began to understand how valuable one's life story may be and how much researchers could benefit from interviewees' stories. Listening to their stories made me reflect on the easiness with which we, as researchers, may approach people's experiences. They may be important for us to demonstrate our hypothesis, but they remain behind the closed door where we meet for interviews. The auto/biographical research made me think how important each aspect is for the whole, like a painting which is beautiful because of the harmonious tiny bits that create the whole. What I mean to say is that, in order to understand people's lives, a researcher needs first to know and understand the details of their lives, just like an artist imagines the details in a painting, acquiring in the end the image of the whole painting. Therefore, the second rationale for conducting this research was the intention to honour my Orthodox Christian and teaching fellows' lives, by giving voice to their experiences and by making them known.

The third rationale refers to the role and impact of significant others in teaching professionals' lives. There is currently significant literature on the role of significant others (Andersen and Przybylinski, 2014; 2017; Andersen and Miranda, 2000; Andersen et al., 2008). However, the role of spiritual fathers in the teaching professionals' lives has not been given attention in research. Thus, this research explores that corner of the Orthodox Christian teachers' lives which has not been studied enough until now.

The fourth rationale refers to the research of Orthodox Christian Spirituality in the context of the teaching profession. Studies involving the Orthodox Christian Spirituality may offer much to teaching professionals from the 21st-century: In this context, I also aimed to understand how much influence the Orthodox Christian Spirituality has on teaching professionals' identity and development.

And finally, the fifth reason for conducting this research, it is to better understand a specific context, such as a post-communist country, where teachers might influence the path of their lives, either personal or professional. In other words, I wish to understand how the political context has influenced and still influences Romanian teachers' personal and professional lives. In this case, Romania is a country with a strong Orthodox Christian background and a past full of political and social challenges. Also, being a Romanian teacher myself facilitated my access to Romanian teachers, and allowed for a better understanding of Romanians' history and mentality.

I could summarise the rationale for this research this way: a personal interest to give meaning to my personal and professional experiences as an Orthodox Christian teacher (the auto); to value other Orthodox Christian teachers' experiences (the biographical); to explore the possible influences of the Orthodox Christian Spirituality on teachers' personalities and profession; to understand more about the teaching profession's issues and how teachers' development may occur, and to understand more about the influence of a national context in teaching professionals' lives. Having elucidated the rationale behind this research, I will illuminate this study's aim, which is to talk about the influence of significant others (parents and spiritual father) in the lives of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development. I will also present and explain the research questions of my thesis in the next section.

1.3. The Aim and Research Questions

It was not straightforward to get to these research questions, but after I read enough literature and after reflection on some questions that I consider essential when doing a PhD, or conducting research, I thought: why this research? Did I have an intrinsic or extrinsic motivation? How did I remain motivated despite criticism? Finally, I answered: this research enabled me to give meaning to my personal, spiritual, and professional

experiences (some positive, others full of pain) through other teachers' experiences. Simultaneously, I aim to give voice to Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional experiences, understanding how they coped with challenges and using their religious belief. This aim led me to think of these four research questions.

1.   In which ways do significant others influence the Orthodox Christian teachers' personal identity and development?

2.   How does the relationship with significant others influence the spiritual understandings of the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers?

3.   How does the Orthodox Christian spiritual life influence the relationship with significant others?

4.   What is the impact of significant others and Orthodox Christian Spirituality on Romanian teachers' professional development?

I aim to answer these research questions in the context of the Romanian education system, which continuously changed after the fall of communism, in 1989. After illuminating the aim and the research questions of my thesis, I will now move on explaining how this study is organised.

1.4. Organisation of the study

This thesis is organised into eleven chapters. Chapter one, as presented here, offered a general introduction to the research. It started with an explanation of the study's background and how the study moved from "Reflection and reflexivity for teachers' personal and professional development" to "influence of significant others in teachers' personal and professional development". The chapter justified the decision to focus the research on the importance of significant others in Orthodox Christian teachers' lives from Romania, and concluded with the research aim and research questions. Also, I provided information about the theoretical friends (detailed in Chapter 3, the Literature Review) who enabled me to understand the theoretical concepts about significant others, interpersonal relationships, self, social cognitive theory, and processes involved in the teaching practice, such as self-regulation, self-efficacy and agency. The second chapter

is dedicated to understanding this study's political and historical context, namely post-Communist Romania, where policies are continually changed after the fall of Communism in 1989. I also discuss historical information to understand the link between the importance of Christian faith in Romanians' lives since Christianity has been brought to Romanian ancestors.

Chapter three outlines how Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers develop, personally and professionally, under the influence of their significant others, mainly parents and spiritual fathers. Here, I review the literature related to the main concepts of the research. I explore various perspectives and theories related to the central concept of significant others, such as the interpersonal theory of Sullivan, attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth, object relation theory of Klein, recognition theory of Honneth, Bandura's social-cognitive theory, with particular attention given to self-efficacy, self-regulation, and agency. In addition to these concepts from developmental psychology, I discuss notions of spiritual fatherhood, confession, and prayer.

Chapter four is intended to develop the concept of paradox, showing its usefulness for this study and giving more details about its historical and conceptual evolution, starting from the ancient Greek philosophers. I will show that paradox is a tool used by many areas of knowledge, such as theology, philosophy, or even organizational theories. I will use it to illuminate those parts of knowledge that, put together, could have seemed illogical (more detail is given in chapter four).

Chapter five discusses the methodology and methods of data collection. I start with situating myself as an insider researcher, justifying my position in the context of auto/biographical research (section 5.2). Afterwards, I present this study's paradigm (section 5.3.), explaining why the existing paradigms were insufficient to position my research in the more extensive philosophical world views. In this context, the paradox was a useful tool to facilitate better positioning within the research, as it provided me, the researcher, with a way in which I could posit my research in order to understand teachers' professional development in the light of the Orthodox Christian spirituality. Next (section 5.4), I provide information about this research strategy, namely the auto/biography, justifying my choice (sections 5.4.1. and 5.4.2.) and the challenges and limitations of using it in this study (section 5.4.3.). It enabled me to gain understanding and give meaning to Romanian Orthodox Christians' stories and professional experiences (section 5.4.4.). In the following section (5.5.), I explain the use of a reflexive journal in this study.

Furthermore, I provide more practical information about the selection process (section 5.6.) and the data collection in this chapter (section 5.7.). The next section (5.8.) explains how the data was analysed and the constraints (section 5.8.1.) and the process of interpreting my participants' stories (sections 5.8.2 to 5.8.7.). Additionally, I give information about the role of paradox (section 5.8.8.) in the interpretation of teachers' stories. In the last two sections, I explain how I ensured the trustworthiness of my study (section 5.9.), how I dealt with ethical concerns (5.10.), and how remembering past experiences during narrative interviews might alter the outcomes of the research (5.11.).

In Chapter six I provide detailed information about my autobiography, to better understand how I gave meaning to my experiences through my participants' stories. Everyone's life is unique, as it is composed of events, people, experiences, mindsets, knowledge, emotions that are lived in a unique way by each person. The same was true for me. Writing about my life was useful as I could have the whole image of my life and therefore, it was easier to give insight through my participants' experiences.

Chapters seven, eight, and nine are all dedicated to my participants' stories (Zoe, Melanie, and father Agapios). The stories had commonalities and idiosyncrasies. They revealed how parents and spiritual fathers, as significant others, impacted their lives and how they influenced their personal and professional development. I discovered how tight the connections between significant others (especially parents) and perceptions of spiritual and professional life were, and vice-versa, and how the spiritual life may influence personal and professional relationships. In Chapter ten, I discuss the findings of the research relating to the research questions. I attempt to identify commonalities from my participants' life stories, but at the same time, I underline the importance of their uniqueness. Through this research, I open the door to deepening the study of Orthodox Christian spirituality and the teaching profession, by emphasising the role of parents and spiritual fathers in their private and professional lives. Additionally, I accentuate the importance of honouring each experience of teachers as being unique and valuable.

Chapter eleven is dedicated to conclusions, where I give more information about the usefulness of this research for both Orthodox Christian theology and teaching professional development, I reflect on the usefulness of this research, emphasising the strengths and being aware of its limitations, and ending by reflecting on the lessons I learned during this PhD journey. I also note that I consider this research as the beginning

of a new research area, namely the link between the Orthodox Christian spirituality, developmental psychology, and teachers' professional development.

Having explained the background of this study, the rationale, the aim, the research questions and having outlined how this research was organised, I will now move to the second chapter of this study, the research context. It aims to understand more about the research's historical and political context, namely post-communist Romania. I have organised the chapter in three sections: religious context (section 2.2), to understand why Romanians are more than 90% Christian of all denominations (86% being Orthodox Christians); social, political and economic context (section 2.3.), to understand how Romanians' life conceptions have been shaped by the Communist regime's mentality and the poverty in which people were led by the Communist leader; and the continuing educational changing context (section 2.4), to understand Romanians teachers' struggles to adapt, to cope, and to develop.

Chapter Two: Context of Research

2.1. Introduction

I have organised this section into three units: first, the religious context, in which I will present how Romanian people became Christian and why their faith was an essential feature of their lives across history and the influence of the Christian faith in their lives. Next, in the Romanian context, I will discuss the social, political and economic features of Romania to provide a contextual understanding of where the research took place. Finally, in the educational context, I will discuss how education has developed before and after the fall of communism, which was the influences of the dictatorial regime on education and on the teachers' professional formation. I present them in the order in which one influences the other: the religious context, the Romanian context and the educational context; the first influenced the second and both, first and second have influenced the third.

2.2. Religious Context

I start with religious context because spirituality, together with the teaching profession, is my main research focus. Romanians' faith and Christian religion have influenced their political, social, and cultural life, and religion. In turn it has also been influenced by these. Staniloae (1992) states that for Romanians, faith and Christian religion have influenced their lives in all its aspects (political, social, cultural). However, it seems that recently (since the 20th-century), the process has changed, and Romanians' faith has been more and more influenced by political regimes, social changes, and new cultural challenges.

In terms of faith, Romania is a country with strong Christian roots, as 86.5% people declared themselves Orthodox at the last census in 2011 (Recensamantul populatiei si al locuintelor, 2011). Although the majority are Orthodox Christians, Romania is religiously

diverse. People of other Christian denominations or faiths are spread in different areas of the country. The main reason is that different empires have conquered some parts of Romania during the centuries, which brought, apart from its people, a different worldview in the country and influenced Romanians' faith. For example, the East and the North part of the country have the most significant number of Orthodox Christians, followed by the South. In the South-Eastern area (close to the seaside), there are Muslims, due to the Turks (13th–14th century) and the Tatars (13th century) who came here for trade, and some of them continued to live there after the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire (Ibram, 1998). The Western and the Central areas of Romania have been influenced by Austrians and Hungarians, who were Roman Catholics or Protestants. Therefore, together with the Orthodox Christians, other Christian denominations (Roman Catholics, Protestants) and other faiths (Muslims, Jews) live together (Pacurariu, 1992).

Romanian Orthodox Christians are proud of their apostolic Christian origins, as Saints Apostles Andrew and Philip brought Christianity to our ancestors, the Dacians and Getae (Eliade, 1985; Popescu, 2018). For this reason, there is a notion that the Romanian people was born Christian and was not converted at some point during the centuries, as other Orthodox Christian countries such as Russia (Rapov, 1988) (see more in section 2.3., where I mention how Romania was founded). For this reason, the Christian faith has accompanied Romanians over the centuries, modelling their lives, their traditions, their culture, their political views, and life conceptions. For example, the prince of Moldavia, Stephen the Great (1457–1504) built a monastery or a church after each victory he had against Turks who wanted to conquer Moldavia. However, during the centuries, not all rulers acted and led the country as followers of the Christian faith. For example, Radu the Handsome betrayed his brother, Vlad the Impaler, the prince of Romanian country, to take his place (Djuvara, 2013).

Today, the presence of the Christian faith in public space is questioned increasingly. Therefore, professionals working within public spaces are challenged to find a way to cope with the new realities of the 21st-century. Nonetheless, not all Romanians who declared themselves as Orthodox Christians practised their faith regularly or engaged in their faith's spirituality. On the other hand, the majority proclaim their faithfulness and celebrate the most important feasts. Therefore, for these Romanians, Christianity seems to be more a matter of culture and tradition than one of religion, faith or personal commitment to Orthodox Christianity.

Romania's religious path has not been smooth, and Romanians have been confronted with many challenges, like the invasion of other countries or empires, who intended to impose its religion on the people. Most of these invasions were also due to Romania's geographical position: at the crossroad of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe. Despite these challenges, the religious configuration has not changed considerably. However, in the last years, there have been many fluctuations and challenges, as stated previously. If before the Second World War, faith was important for both public and private life, after the communists came to power (1945–46), faith and the expression of the faith in public spaces were prohibited. Even in their private lives, people were fearful of practising their faith as they could have been denounced to the communist rulers and imprisoned for being considered enemies of the nation (Courtois et al., 1999).

For this reason, priests, monks or any other people who declared their faith publicly were imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. This situation brought some unexpected outcomes; there was a renewal of spiritual life, arising in secret. Feeling the constraint, people began to approach faith and relationship with God in a more personal, rather than formal, way. Much religious literature was written at the time and afterwards (Radu Gyr, Nichifor Crainic), illustrating the importance of personal and spiritual experience, especially in difficult times. However, the communist regime produced a decline of Romanians' faith, as was expected, and education in schools became atheistic and anti-religious. Therefore, some people adopted atheistic perspectives on life, whereas others continued to practice and express their faith in private (Stan and Turcescu,2010). The fall of communism in 1989 brought the freedom of religious expression but, lately, there have been discussions about excluding religion, religious symbols, or religious expression in public spaces, especially in schools.

Within educational institutions, this new situation has caused and continues to cause significant pressure on religious education teachers and on Christian teachers who declare a spiritual identity. The pressure comes from humanist associations or political parties which advocate a secular view in education and the exclusion of religious symbols in public institutions (Stop indoctrinarii religioase in scoli, 2011). The intensity of this pressure depends on the school's area; the more significant pressure exists in the capital city and the country's big cities (especially in Bucharest, the capital city).

Apart from this new challenge, the wrong and inappropriate behaviour of some priests is highlighted by the media, for instance priest charging people for funeral services

(Magradean, Mediafax). Additionally, there are essential changes in understanding the role and place of traditional, cultural, and religious values. All these movements show how Romanians perceive Christian (Orthodox) values in their lives and society. I observed that, although most Romanians are Orthodox Christians, these new views influence their perspective on their faith and produce significant changes in all areas of Romanian society, including education. After presenting the religious context, in which Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers have been educated and raised, I will move to the social, political and economic context, in order to better understand how professional challenges may arise in Romanian teachers' lives.

2.3. The Romanian context (social, political, economic)

Romania's social, political, and economic context has changed numerous times over the centuries. To better understand the setting of my research, I will discuss how Romania developed socially, economically, and politically. As a nation, Romania was founded through the symbiosis between Dacians and Latins (Klepper, 2002). Although a country with Latin roots, Romania has been isolated from other Latin countries (such as France, Italy, Spain, Portugal), and surrounded by Slavonic nations (Bulgarians, Ukrainians) and Hungarians. Additionally, many empires (Ottoman, Austrian, Hungarian, Russian) have tried to conquer Romanian territories, mainly because of its geographical position (the Black Sea) across centuries. Numerous times, these empires succeeded in conquering Romania and imposing their political views, which changed the country's social and economic features, along with religious influences. However, none of them transformed Romania as much as the communist regime, which abusively took power after the Second World War, in 1947 (Wolton, 2015).

It is not my aim here to discuss the historical events that led the country into the hands of communists and the Soviet Union but to emphasise the changes that intervened in society. Four words could summarise the situation of communist Romania: constraint, manipulation, poverty, and betrayal. Constraint, because people were deprived of their right to express personal opinions and beliefs, either political, religious, or social. All those suspected of having different aspirations were imprisoned, tortured, and even killed

(Wolton, 2015). They were considered to be 'enemies of the nation' and, therefore, a public danger. People who suffered in communist prisons and camps came from all walks of life: politicians, intellectuals, priests, ordinary people, poor or rich people. The torture had the aim to re-educate 'the enemies of the people' to such an extent that they became partisans of the communist party. The methods communists used in prisons and camps were the physical and psychological torture and the forced labour to exhaustion. People who survived the terror confessed that faith in God alone had attenuated the sufferings they experienced during years of tortures (Ianolide, 2006).

Another method used by communists was manipulation to such an extent that people would only encounter eulogistic news about the country and its rulers on TV and on the radio (especially about Ceausescu). For example, the country's economy was portrayed as flourishing; Romania's political relationships with other European countries were powerful and Romanian ruler, Ceausescu, posed as appreciated by European powers, such as the United Kingdom. People were forbidden to listen to other radio channels than the national radio. However, people had illegal access to a radio post called Free Europe, which presented Romania's reality and what was happening in Europe (Rad, 2008).

Although communist Romania was portrayed as flourishing, people were poor and essential foods, like bread, oil, sugar, milk, and meat were hard to find in shops. Therefore, Romanians had to queue for hours, hoping they could manage to buy milk or bread for their children. Grain and meat were marketed abroad because Romania had an external debt to pay. Moreover, Romanians were not allowed to cultivate their lands, and their properties were taken by the communist regime and turned into cooperatives.

Finally, an atmosphere of distrust characterised relationships between people during the communist regime. People were fearful that, for material benefits, their peers or family might betray them. The communist regime has intentionally induced the idea that their peers could betray people. Therefore, Romanians lived with the fear of betrayal and mistrust.

Romanians have lived in this context for 44 years. The communist period changed the features of the country in many ways. On one side, Romanians became more aware of their traditional and cultural values, such as faith, from which they were barred. Many were imprisoned, tortured, and even killed for their political and religious beliefs. Most of the convicts were intellectuals, politicians, academics who would have been able to

bring a contribution to the development of the country. They were replaced by people with no education, no culture, and no values (Banu, 2006). For instance, the president himself had no university qualifications and his wife, although she finished only primary school, was awarded by the University of Bucharest (the most important in Romania) with the Doctor Honoris Causa decoration.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Romanians hoped that the situation would change. Politicians who took political control were still communist; however, their speech was about democracy and freedom. The transition period was prolonged until the present time, 2021, and no coherent change occurred, especially in education (more about this in the next section). However, there have been positive changes: Romanians were free to express their faith, their opinions, to travel abroad again; the freedom of the media; other Christian denominations came to Romania; people could now find food to buy; properties (lands, houses) were returned to their owners. On the other hand, a negative change was that the unemployment rate rose, so that Romanians could not afford to buy properties anymore, and food prices increased compared to their monthly income. Not only the social, political and economic changes influenced teachers' professional life but also the educational situation of the country, which after the fall of communism was continuously changing.

2.4. Educational context

In addition to the religious and the political-social context, the educational context is vital to understand the development of Romanian teachers. If religion had an essential role in children's education, during the oppression, the communists annulled it, as Novak et al (1998) pointed out. Teachers were trained to praise and glorify the communist leader (especially during Ceausescu totalitarianism) and teach their students about communism and its leaders' greatness. It was a manipulation and brainwash of a few generations of people. Religion in schools was prohibited, and any suspicion of specific religious practice in students' or their parents' lives were closely watched. After 1948, and until the fall of the communist regime, the educational system copied the USSR. However, after 1968, a new reform was adopted, and communist Romania returned to a traditional

education system which existed before 1948, with the European influence of those times (Novak et al., 1998). Nonetheless, after 1980, the economic crisis of the 1980s altered the educational development and brought the educational system into a real crisis whose consequences worsened after 1989, the year when the communist regime fell.

After the fall, a period of instability followed, with numerous reforms and 30 different Ministers in place. Educational policy had become complicated, convoluted, and fuzzy. Each new Minister and his staff changed the political priorities, bringing their own views on education, on teachers' training and children's formation. One significant change was the reintroduction of Religious Education in the curriculum, in 1992, and the permission of religious symbols in schools. Therefore, religion and faith became important in Romanian education.

In the last ten years, teachers' pressure (Religious Education teachers, primarily) has increased gradually. For the last 20 years, there has been an escalating pressure on Christian teachers. This pressure was reached in 2010 when a Romanian Humanist Association (ASUR), started a public fight to eliminate any religious manifestation in public spaces, especially in schools. Eventually, parents decided to support the presence of Religious Education in their children's education and agreed to keep Christian religious symbols in schools. Nevertheless, there is still a continuous pressure on Christian teachers who are challenged not to express their personal and spiritual identities in their profession for fear of being accused of indoctrination and discrimination. However, as declared in the 1992 census, 86.5% of the population is Orthodox Christian, suggesting that a great number of Romanian teachers identify as Orthodox Christians.

The changes put in place by more than 30 Ministries, which changed the perspective on education, have also influenced teachers' professional formation. Although teachers are confronted with these changes and challenges on a daily basis, they have not been trained in Universities to deal with tense situations such as how to deal with criticism regarding their faith, how to defend their identity, how to confront and adapt to new challenges regarding fight against faith in general. Additionally, in Romania, not much time is dedicated to teachers' practice in schools to make contact with real-life in schools. Moreover, in teachers' formation, not much time and importance is given to the management of students' behaviour (Planuri de invatamant, 2021). When newly qualified teachers get to teach, there is not much support in schools to help them cope with the profession's challenges.

Despite all these changes, challenges, and pressures, I observed that Christian teachers showed much resilience and managed to adapt their strategies to develop as persons and professionals, as I will discuss in chapters dedicated to my participants' stories (seven, eight and nine). However, what makes these teachers resilient, and what helps them cope with this century's challenges? Is there any connection between Romanians' spirituality and their resilience and personal and professional development? The history of Romania shows a particular interest in Christian religion and Orthodox Christian spirituality, especially in the nation's most challenging and demanding moments.

Moreover, given this setting where Romanian teachers develop as persons and as professionals through their spirituality, a question arises: how do teachers' religiosity enable them to develop personally and professionally? Within Orthodox Christian spirituality, relationships with others are of primary importance for personal development. Put into developmental psychology terms, this other is represented by significant others, who are parents and spiritual fathers in the case of this research. These concepts will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter three), which sets out the conceptual framework of this research.

Different aspects of significant other concepts are analysed together with other contiguous concepts, such as the self and spiritual fatherhood. I will begin by presenting the conceptual framework of this research, discussing the concept of significant others and the theories that emerged around this notion, such as interpersonal theory (Sullivan, 1953), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), object relation theory (Klein, 1932), transference in relationship with significant others (Andersen et al., 2012). Then, I will discuss the notion of the self, offering a brief historiography of the concept in order to use the next section to analyse how the self can be influenced by relationships with significant others who, in the case of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, are especially parents and spiritual fathers. Additionally, I offer a detailed explanation of what a spiritual father is and will discuss his importance and influence in Orthodox Christians' lives. Finally, I will establish a connection between the significant other and Orthodox spiritual life, in order to understand how a spiritual father and spiritual practices, such as confession and prayer, may influence Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development.

Chapter three: Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis (section 1.3), this research aims to understand the role of significant others in the lives of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development. Acknowledging that aim, this chapter will discuss the developmental, social-cognitive theory, which emphasises the role of interpersonal relationships and social experiences in shaping personality and professional identity. In Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives, an essential role is played by parents (or primary carers), in childhood (who set up behavioural patterns which may be manifested in adult life), and spiritual fathers, who become significant mostly during Christians' adulthood.

The idea that parents (or primary carers) influence children's lives has been widely recognised and deeply studied (Sullivan, 1953; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Klein, 1932; Andersen et al. 2012; Honneth, 1995). Acknowledging their influence on the lives of teaching professionals is not a novelty. However, the novelty in this study exists in how this influence interacts with the Orthodox Christians' faith and spirituality in the lives of these adults. Hence, addressing the idea of the spiritual fatherhood as a significant other in this chapter becomes useful for several reasons, which I will explain further below.

First, within Orthodox Christian spirituality, relationships with others are highly important because it makes a person a part of a communion and community. Therefore, looking at how a spiritual relationship may influence one's personality and, later, his or her profession, is a step towards understanding how Orthodox Christian spirituality may contribute to Orthodox Christian teachers' professional development. Secondly, before comprehending how the leading Orthodox spiritual practices (such as Confession, Prayer and Communion) may influence one's personal and professional behaviour, it is highly essential to understand how people involved may shape a person's perception of life and profession. These views may be influenced by how significant people in teachers' lives have shaped their values.

To understand the place of theory about significant others and their influence on Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development, I shall be drawing on several theories. One of these is Sullivan's (1953) interpersonal theory, as it sets the scene for other theories I shall be using in my research. I will refer to it to emphasise the role of love in interpersonal relationships. Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory (1991) emphasises how the intimate relationship between primary carers (parents) and children sets the patterns in adult life (either personal or professional), just as Sullivan discusses about the role of love in developing interpersonal relationships. Another scholar I shall be drawing on is Klein (1932) and her object relation theory, which emphasises the internalisation of the relationship between carers (parents) and children and how this relationship influences people later in their lives.

Further, Andersen et al. (2013), as well as her latest research (2017) on significant others, updates the previous theories and expands on the importance of significant others in teaching professionals' lives, and discusses how the relationship with these others determines personal and professional patterns. Finally, Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory, with concepts such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, agency (self-agency, divine proxy agency), contributes to a better understanding of the process Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers may have to go through to overcome their past, to understand their present, and to build their future. The first step in this direction is to understand how past relationships with significant others may affect present personal, spiritual, and professional life. Then, once this has been acknowledged, one may start the process of repairing, manifesting the agency in this process, collaborating with others in order to regulate emotions caused by past experiences, and making use of their spiritual life, through the practice of confession and prayer. Once that is done, the influences can be noticed even in their professional life, giving teachers a sense of self-efficacy.

To elucidate the role of the spiritual father as a significant other in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives, I draw on authors who studied and researched the concept of spiritual fatherhood in the Orthodox Christian spirituality in depth, such as Ware (1974), Zizioulas (1985) and Barbu (2013). These scholars are complemented by religious-spiritual literature which makes sense of the spiritual life in the Romanian teachers' personal and professional lives.

It is necessary to identify present challenges and needs with which teachers from Romania are confronted in their daily professional lives, to trace back the trajectory of their

personal lives. Further, given that people's personality may shape their profession, this identification may allow researchers to understand possible professional behaviours which are constantly repeated. Additionally, it will be shown that people unconsciously develop behavioural patterns, including their interpersonal relationships (Mitchell, 1983; Bainbridge, 2015) which are also likely to reoccur in their professional relationships. Finally, through the process of transference, people could interpret a person's behaviour as being similar to past behaviour and, unconsciously, they may repeat that behaviour with new people in professional contexts (Andersen et al., 2002, 2006, 2013).

Therefore, understanding how significant others shape people's personalities in general allowed me to better understand how Romanian teachers' behaviour has been shaped by significant others, and how they might understand their profession in the context of their personal life experiences.

In the first part of this chapter, I will analyse the concept of significant others, starting from Sullivans' interpersonal theory (1953) before reaching the most recent research of Andersen et al. (2017). Sullivan's early work on interpersonal theory was developed during many years of research in developmental psychology. He argues that humans develop in relationship with m(others) or with their primary caregiver. I also draw on the attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991) who highlighted that this primary caregiver becomes a secure base through a safe attachment. Klein's (1932) object relations theory deepens, even more, the idea that this study seeks to emphasise, namely the importance of significant others in one's life. In her object relation theory, she highlights the importance of the relationship between m(other) and child, who views the mother as an object and gives meanings to the relationship created between them and then internalises this relationship.

Anderson et al. (2017) provide the developmental psychology research with rich information about the role of significant others, especially the role played by the mother. Andersen et al.'s (2017) research on significant others is acknowledged and frequently cited in this work for its abundant information about transference, significant others' representations, interpersonal relationships, and relational self. The 'self' concept discussed in this chapter is approached from William James' (1890) perspective about the 'known' and 'knower'. His work is used in this study for its genuine way of approaching a new concept at his time. James' understanding of the 'me' as the 'empirical self' has several implications for this research. First, referring to the spiritual self suggests that

teachers (or any other person) will have their unique beliefs, thoughts, values, and feelings, which may define who they are. For example, in this study, Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers may be shaped by their Orthodox faith in God, by their engagement within the spiritual practices of this religion, or by their own spiritual experiences and by the interpersonal relationships with loved ones. Secondly, the material self may imply that teachers will strive to attain what they value the most in their profession, for example money, status, love of their students, or even the love of "loving their students". The social self suggests that teachers will form an image of themselves according to their relationships in their personal and professional lives and the image these others create in their minds about them.

To these authors, I add Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), which posits that parts of an individual's knowledge acquirement can be directly related to observing others in the context of social interactions, experiences, and even media influences. He has also developed a theory about the role of spirituality and religion in modelling one's personality (Bandura, 2003) in which he entails the idea of a divine proxy agency on which believers may rely in difficult times. Although there is no precise research about the role of significant others in Christians' lives within Orthodox Christian theology (except non-academic religious literature), I examine a particular aspect, namely spiritual fathers as possible significant others for Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers. Therefore, they could be important to their professional development as well. In this sense, Barbu's (2015) recent studies on spiritual fatherhood and theological orthodox seminal authors, such as Ware (1974) and Zizioulas (2006) will clarify the understanding of significant others' role in the personal and professional development of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers.

In order to explore this further, I will first describe why and how a particular person becomes a spiritual father (or even mother, but this is less common). After clarifying the process of becoming a spiritual father (or mother), I will explore how the relationship between a spiritual father and Orthodox Christians may become a significant and influential one for a person's life and profession. Following this, I will analyse why and how the relationship between spiritual father and children is constructed and how this may be influential in Orthodox Christians' teaching profession. Next, I will consider how Orthodox Christians' professional development may grow through a relationship with spiritual father. For this, I also look at professional relationships developed by teachers at

the workplace, with peers, students and parents, and how their relationship with their spiritual father may influence these interactions.

Finally, in this chapter I create new possible links between social psychology and Orthodox Christian spirituality, exploring how Orthodox Christian teachers may regulate their emotions, behaviour, and religious views. In this sense, I connect Bandura's social-cognitive theory about self-efficacy (1997), which refers to the beliefs a person holds regarding their power to change situations, self-regulation (1991), which refers to control one's behaviour, emotions and thoughts and personal agency (2006), which refers to one's control over actions, to Orthodox Christian conceptions about confession (Bloom, 2014) and prayer (Sakharov, 1977). The aim is to gain new insights into the processes through which significant others (parents and spiritual fathers) may influence Romanian Orthodox Christians' lives and profession. Thus, new possible links between developmental psychology, Orthodox Christian spirituality and teaching professional development will be established.

3.2.   The Significant Other – conceptual framework

Before understanding the formation and development of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional identity, it is vital to understand what actually triggers this development. Scholars have argued that interpersonal relationships and social experiences are significant in shaping personality and their professional identity in adult life (Andersen et al. 2016, 2017; Bandura, 1986). Developmental and social-cognitive psychologists argue that, in personality development, the primary triggers are significant others (Anderson et al. 2016, 2017; Bandura, 1986; Sullivan, 1953). Babies do not or cannot perceive the world outside their mothers' arms. Then, as they grow, they manifest their parents' (or caregivers) attitudes, or with any other experiences lived with parents, they construct profound convictions about themselves.

In other words, in the early years of life, humans are unlikely to perceive the world beyond their caregivers. Thus, political, social, cultural, and religious components will come later in their lives when they are cognitively and affectively enough developed to understand the wider world. Apart from significant others influence and society, genetic factors are

also acknowledged as essential. However, social and genetic influences will not be considered in this study, as its focus is on understanding the role of significant others in teachers' personal and professional development.

In the last three decades, the concept of significant others has mostly been discussed in social psychology, by many researchers (such as Andersen et al., 2017; Bandura, 1991; Horberg and Chen, 2010; Glassman and Andersen, 1999). Susan Andersen, together with other researchers (Chen and Andersen, 1999; Glassman, 1999; Miranda et al., 2013; Przybylinski, 2015 and others), have studied the role of significant others. They have also been interested in other matters linked to significant others. One of these refers to relational selves, described as embodying aspects of the self-concerning significant others (Andresen and Edwards, 2013). In other words, relational self means that the knowledge one has about the self is linked with knowledge about significant others. We know who we are in relationship with significant people from our lives. Andersen and Miranda (2000) intended to understand more about the process of transference, which is a process through which a person directs remembered feelings or desires to people when triggers appear. The shared reality, understood as the product of experiencing a commonality of inner states with significant others about the world (2012) was another area of interest for Andersen et al. Finally, Andersen, Glassman and Gold (1998) showed an interest in studying the representations of significant others, which refers to the representation in memory of the knowledge one has of significant others.

One of Andersen's primary interests is to examine how, through the unconscious process of transference, people attribute to new people characteristics of others in whom they once invested emotionally. Thus, people develop patterns in interpersonal relationships. She has also developed a theory of IF-THEN processes or a social-cognitive model of transference. This theory refers to cognitive-affective systems models of personality. IF suggests a situation or set of triggering clues, both the actual physical setting and the psychological situation (as the person transfers to the real situation). THEN is the reaction to the situation, both psychological experiences and observable behaviours (Andersen and Thorpe, 2009). Andersen and Thorpe (2009) built this theory on Mischel and Shoda's (1995) cognitive-affective personality system model. According to their cognitive-affective version, behaviour can be best anticipated from a comprehensive understanding of the person, the situation, and the interaction between the person and the situation.

Although Andersen and her team showed a great interest in researching the influence of significant others, they are not the originators of the concept. Mead's early work (1934) linked the notion of significant others to another idea, namely the self and its development, which I will explore more fully later in this chapter (section 3.3.). He stressed the importance of 'other(s)' in one's experiencing and knowing oneself. Nearly twenty years later, Harry Stack Sullivan, a Neo-Freudian psychiatrist, developed an interpersonal theory of psychiatry (1953) which elucidates how people create an image of themselves, developing their personalities, either healthy or neurotic. In his argument, he emphasised the critical role of significant others in creating interpersonal relationships and how these relationships are mentally represented. In other words, these relationships are the engine that leads people to have different perspectives on their personal and professional lives and, through 'parataxic distortion' (which is the disposition to distort perceptions of others based on imagination), affects new relationships. Hence, significant others become key people in one's personal and professional development. Therefore, understanding who these significant others are and how they may impact on teachers' personal and professional development becomes essential for this study.

Yet who are these people, these 'significant others' as they are called by developmental, social- cognitive researchers? Sullivan (1953), Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991), Klein (1932), and Winnicott (2007) showed through experiments, done with children and their mothers, that significant others are those people who mothered children from their birth and who have influenced, through their emotional state (loving or anxious), the infant/child's emotional development. They assert that these people (especially the mother or a primary carer) affect how one develops understandings of self and life. Thus, this relationship becomes vital for a person to gain knowledge and build new relationships (Woelfel and Haller, 1971). Rosenberg (1973) claims that the role of significant others can be attributed to anybody valued and trusted by the subject and through whom he or she can construct and develop their self-image.

In other words, there could be various significant others in a person's life, both people from their family and people encountered outside of family relationships. Research on significant others (Andersen et al., 2002, p. 160) shows that these are individuals who have been "deeply influential in one's life, and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested". In other words, any person with whom one has been connected affectively,

involved emotionally, with whom a bond has been created in the past, or is created in the present, becomes significant and influential in one's life.

There are other significant people, besides parents and a spiritual father, who may influence the lives of Orthodox Christian teachers (and others), such as brothers, sisters, spouses, friends, teachers, or any person in whom one has emotionally invested at some point (Andersen, 2002). Exploring all influences coming from all possible significant others would make this study too broad, and it would make it difficult to follow a line of argument. Additionally, given that this study focuses on the role of significant others in the lives of Romanian teachers with an Orthodox Christian background, I will focus on parents and spiritual fathers. Although the people mentioned above may also be influential, the role of parents and spiritual fathers is more decisive and may affect people's adult personal and professional lives. On the other hand, a spiritual father may help believers heal spiritual and psychological wounds and contribute to their personal, spiritual, and professional development (Krause et Ellison, 2003; Hope, 1987).

So far, I have noted that generally, people develop when they have relationships with significant others. This implies that we are social and cultural creatures, who develop at a social-cognitive level, as Bandura (1986) emphasised in his social-cognitive theory. Moreover, he showed that people represent internally and interpret mentally the interpersonal relationships they are involved in. People develop internal representations of significant others and the self, cultivating intimacy with one another. According to Sullivan this intimacy creates interpersonality, and this is the foundation of a fulfilled life (personal and professional):

> This highly developed intimacy with another is not the principal business of life, but is, perhaps, the principal source of life satisfaction (Sullivan, 1953, p. 34).

This statement implies that relationships with significant others are based on intimacy, which brings emotional wellbeing and satisfaction, and in which people can express themselves on a syntactic and semantic level, which is a mature style of emotional interaction (Sullivan, 1953). This level of expression is the foundation for personal growth. The emotional intimacy one feels in relationship with significant others secures a sense of self-worth (which is the feeling of being a good person who deserves respect) and self-determination (the process by which people control their own lives), which are vital for one's personal and professional development. Moreover, as one's personal and

professional identities are linked together, the former is likely to influence the latter (Beijaard et al., 2004; Mihovilovic and Boulton, 2019). Following this line of argument, I hypothesise that teachers' personal and professional development is firstly conditioned by the interpersonal relationships they develop with significant others (parents, spiritual fathers, or any other person who is important to them), and secondly by other factors (such as environment, culture, society, or religion).

These complementary factors can be traced in Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory, which is an extension of his social learning theory. Here, he argues that parts of an individual's knowledge may be directly connected to observing others within the context of social interactions and experiences. In other words, when someone notices somebody else performing a behaviour and the consequences of that behaviour, he or she will remember the order of events and use the information to drive subsequent reactions. Seeing a practice can also encourage the observer to engage in behaviour they have already learned (Bandura, 1986). That means people do not solely discover new practices, but they replicate other people's actions, depending on whether people are socially rewarded or punished for the outcome of the behaviour.

Andersen's 'IF-THEN' approach to significant others, Sullivan's (1953) theory about interpersonal growth and Bandura's (1986) theory about social-cognitive development have two implications for this study. Firstly, the interpersonal theory and the IF-THEN approach underline the value of significant others in teaching professionals' lives, as early childhood experiences may shape the emotional world of their adult life. Secondly, Bandura's social- cognitive theory implies development through relationships as well. This development occurs through modelling after another's behaviour and social experiences. Therefore, it seems likely that teachers partly construct their professional identity and develop it through the experience of social interactions and the interpretation of these interactions. In other words, people, especially during infant and childhood stages of development, interact socially with those who permanently take care of them, in most cases with their mothers (but that is not a rule). Likewise, when they become adults, they will repeat the pattern of interactions and interpreting daily interactions. The interpretation of daily interactions will further model their personality, and create a way of conceiving reality and behaviour both in personal and professional interactions.

However, this idea is debatable, as it may suggest that significant others influence one's personal and professional identity and development in a predetermined way. In other

words, if the influence is positive, that would not that necessarily lead to a fulfilled personal/professional life. Or if, to the contrary, the impact is negative, that would not inevitably lead to a person's failure. Sullivan's (1953) interpersonal theory about getting the personal fulfilment through interpersonal relationships could be countered by Bandura's social cognitive theory of self- agency and self-regulatory processes, in which one acknowledges what is happening and tries to find solutions to fix what is wrong. Bandura's (2006) argument is that people are agents of their change, and through self-regulation (see section 3.5.3.5.), they can change the course of their lives. Monitoring, judging, and responding to one's own behaviours, thoughts, and emotions are the three steps of the complex process of self-regulation (Bandura and Simon, 1977). By undertaking the steps self-regulation implies, people are enabled to manifest their agency. Monitoring refers to a person's observation of his or her thoughts, behaviour, and emotions. Careful attention needs to be given to this step, as the person who does it should only observe how thoughts interact with emotions, and then how they transform into behaviours. The next step is to judge what has been observed in order to know and decide how to regulate the emotions and thoughts that transform into behaviours.

Further, a manifestation of agency shows that people are agents of their own lives and not trapped by the past, although the influences exerted by significant others in childhood cannot be neglected. Moreover, extensive research, which is used in this study, has demonstrated the enormous influence significant others exert on people even in their adult lives. Furthermore, Bandura argues that religious experiences enable people, through the divine proxy agency, to overcome unpleasant events of their life, such as a harming relationship with parents, or professional challenges. Within Orthodox Christian spirituality, Kragiopoulos (2005, 2008) showed that faith and an intimate personal relationship with God might help people to heal emotional wounds resulting from unhealthy relationships in childhood, and even to use the unpleasant events to develop spiritual skills such as empathy, love, forgiveness, which are all virtues in the Christian faith. These virtues, then may contribute to one's personal and professional development.

Sullivan (1953), together with Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991), Klein (1932) and other scholars, asserts that developing healthy relationships through a loving connection is the engine for generating a healthy personality. Sullivan (1953, p. 42-43) describes what he means by love:

when the satisfaction or the security of another person becomes as significant to one as it is one's satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists. So far, as I know, under no other circumstances, is a state of love present, regardless of the popular usage of the word.

In other words, when their significant others perceive a person's needs and satisfaction as important as theirs, then the latter's love will enable the former to acquire a sense of fullness, and this state may create the premise for personal and professional development.

For this research, it is vital to understand the contexts in which Andersen's, Sullivan's, Bowlby's and Bandura's theories apply, and to identify where the interpersonal theory of significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality intersect, in the context of the professional development of teachers from Romania. It is also essential to comprehend how significant others influence the professional development of teachers they work with. A first conclusion is that significant others may affect one's professional development, through the influence on the self's image (Mead, 1934; Sullivan, 1953; Rosenberg, 1973; Andersen, 2016; 2017). In the next section, I will approach the concepts of self in order to understand the connections between self/identity, personal/significant others, spiritual/ significant others, and professional development in the context of Orthodox Christianity in Romania.

3.3. The Self

Self-related concepts have primarily been discussed in studies concerning the philosophy of religion and developmental psychology (i.e. James, 1890; Andersen et al.1995; 2002; Sedikides and Gebauer, 2013). The self's concept is closely linked to personal and professional identity formation and development, which are the focus of this study. The long history of the self can be traced back to the Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato. The concept has been much debated across the ages. However, in modern literature, the American psychologist William James is considered by Richardson (2012) to have laid the foundation for modern conceptions of the self, and to have developed and organised ideas about the 'self' into an area of research. Rosenberg (1989, p. 35) describes James' approach to what was a new concept at that time in these terms:

when one reads this chapter nearly a century later, one finds that it is crystal clear, elegantly written, packed with stimulating insights, and rife with testable propositions.

In other words, the self-concept as proposed by James was a clear description still useful and illuminating for psychologists over a century later.

According to James (1890, p. 291–292):

> …a man's (sic) self is the total of all he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, his yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast-down— not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all.

James suggests that one's self is constructed from what it is considered to belong to him or her. In other words, an object may be internalised as one's self. That entails the idea that the self is also rational, therefore it can be affected by a person's feelings. Further, James asserts the idea that the self incorporates two fundamental components, the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' is the knower which does the thinking and reflects the self as the subject of experience, while the 'me' corresponds to the self as an object of knowledge. The 'me', or the 'empirical self', incorporates three components: the spiritual self, the material self and the social self. Briefly, the spiritual self refers to people's subjective being (dispositions, thoughts, beliefs, feelings). The material self refers to any material possessions to which people are attached. The social-self refers to the recognition that people may get in other people's minds.

This last aspect is what Honneth (2005) has called recognition theory. He emphasised the importance of recognition for activation and realisation of one's abilities and skills. People's struggle for recognition manifests through three aspects: love, respect, and social esteem. This concept implies that teachers will not view themselves as solitary, but rather through a prism of others' perception of them, i.e. based on how much love, respect, and social esteem is shown to them. These judgments may be successfully incorporated into the sense of self (Aldiabat and Navenec, 2011). More precisely, the social self is constructed upon others' images about them upon how much recognition others show, contributing to their self-formation.

On people's self-formation and significant others there is much research which shows (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Klein, 1932; Sullivan, 1953; Andersen and Chen, 2002; Andersen and Thorpe, 2009) that self-formation is a continuous process. As Berger (1967) suggested, "humans are the only unfinished creatures". Sullivan (1953), for example, distinguishes between seven stages, which he calls 'developmental epochs". During these epochs, one develops different and various perceptions of the self: infancy, childhood, juvenile, preadolescence, early-adolescence, late-adolescence, and adulthood. He stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships in the development path. He also highlighted the importance of the parents' (particularly the mother's) role in modelling the self. The relationship with parents (or caregivers) constitutes the main factors which may trace one's life and, later, profession.

Nevertheless, one's self is an agent which can foresee, react and reflect (Bandura, 2006). Due to a person's agency, they become aware of who they are, their skills, and their actions, thus being self-aware. Moreover, during one's life, the process of personal development never stops. Therefore, one's self is continually developing. Personal agency is that part of humans' personality that might have an essential role in promoting good relationships, either professional or personal (Bandura, 2006). According to Bandura, humans are primarily agents of change for themselves. However, agency could be influenced in its turn by others, as humans are social beings. We develop their self-image, both cognitively and emotionally, in relation to others (parents, friends, or other influential people in their lives).

For an Orthodox Christian, the divine plays a vital role in self-perception. If for children parents are essential in forming an image about themselves, in constructing the self-image, similarly for an adult believer the divine plays a critical role in developing self-perception. Thus, for them, it becomes essential to know what God 'thinks' about them. Within Orthodox Christianity, the relationship with God is, at the same time, both direct and mediated by a spiritual father. Thus, the spiritual father may contribute to Christians' self-perception and self- development. In section 3.4. I will develop and analyse parents' roles and the nature of spiritual father (in section 3.5.), and how he may influence teachers' selves and their further personal and professional development.

As shown above, significant others are primary contributors to personal identity formation and development, which has consequences for a teacher's professional identity development (Keltchermans, 2009). As Berger (1967) and Luckmann and Berger (1991)

suggested, humans are the only beings born 'unfinished'. As such, they must continue to develop to become a "fully formed and functioning human being in relationship with society" as Tamdgidi (2012, p. 63) suggested. Following this line of argument, personal identity, and also professional identity, is a continuous process. Furthermore, people build and develop their identity through social interactions (Bandura, 1986) through symbolisation of these interactions and the meaning- making of others' interactions (Prybylinski and Andersen, 2012), primarily through relationships with significant others. In other words, people usually interpret their experiences with others as being good or bad, and use these past experiences to construct new experiences, as outlined in the section on conceptual framework (3.2.). I will introduce and analyse these ideas later on in this chapter, as they connect significant others and the teaching professionals' development in the context of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers.

Having presented the connection between significant others and self-formation, the next section will explain and detail the role of parents as significant others and how they may shape Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personality and professional development and practice.

3.4. Parents and the Spiritual Father as Significant Others

Parents and children relationship is a topic that captivated the interest of many researchers (such as Klein, 1932; Sullivan, 1953; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Andersen et al. 2012), and especially the relationship between mother and child has been researched extensively, and new theories have emerged. However, research (Andersen et al, 2002) suggests that there may be other influential people, such as spouses, friends, spiritual fathers/mothers, or many other possible significant people in a person's life. All of these potential significant others could influence one's personal development (self-image, identity) through social interaction, cognition, modelling, and the personal meaning-making, as mentioned at the beginning (Bandura, 1986).

This study shows that Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers may invest emotionally in their spiritual father during their lives. So far, no research has been conducted into this intersection between Orthodox Christian spirituality and the teaching profession (this will be discussed later in the chapter). Therefore, this study seeks to illuminate this area, which

has not been given sufficient attention. Although there is some lack of information, the non-academic religious sources show that the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children can be of such an influence that it can shape their perspective on their lives and professions (Barbu, 2013; Sakharov, 2013; Bloom, 2015). The use of the modal verb 'may invest' points to the difference between 'theory' and 'practice.' In theory, people baptised into a specific religion or adherents to an individual spirituality trust the principles of that religion or spirituality, and organise their lives according to that religion or spirituality's dogmas (Loser et al., 2009; Huber, 2007). However, in practice, many people adhere to a religion or spirituality, or are baptised into a religion, and will consider themselves 'Christians', 'Muslims,' 'Jewish,' but their lives are not compatible with the laws of that specific religion or spirituality (Walker, 2013).

Similarly, for some Romanian Orthodox Christians, the faith they proclaim to have is not a 'lifestyle' but more a matter of national or family culture, or tradition. This way of understanding faith in life's context is different from a committed way of seeing the role of faith in one's life, because of the lack of personal commitment in the actions undertaken within the Orthodox Christian religion. Alternatively, another assumption is that organising life according to religious norms, understanding, acceptance, and a deep engagement with its teachings, may be transformational. This perception entails the idea that understanding people's relationship with their faith is a continuous process that believers undergo their whole lives, some of them more, some of them less. However, this study discusses teachers who attach importance to their faith. For these Romanian Orthodox Christians, a spiritual father may gradually become a significant other (more about the spiritual father's process becoming a significant other and how this relationship may impact the teaching profession is discussed in section 3.5.).

In the next section (3.4.1), I discuss the role of parents in self-formation, personal identity, and professional development. In section 3.4.2, I develop in-depth the idea that a spiritual father could also be a significant other or, in Andersen's terms, a person "deeply influential, and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested" (2002, p. 160). In other words, if in infancy and during childhood parents play an influential role, in teenage and adult 'epochs' (Sullivan, 1953), other people take their place, and through the significance that is given to them, they play a vital role in shaping and modelling personality. For Romanian Orthodox Christians, these people may be spiritual fathers (Barbu, 2013;

Sakharov, 2013; Bloom, 2015). This idea will be discussed in more detail in section 3.5., which gives attention to parents as significant others for Romanian Orthodox Christians.

3.4.1. Parents

As mentioned earlier, there have been various theories concerning the influential relationship between parents and children within developmental psychology. The seminal authors interested in studying the mother-children relationship were themselves marked by their relationship with parents, especially with their mothers (Evans, 2005); thus, we may assume that they were personally interested in understanding and giving meaning to their experiences through the experiences of others. The information about their personal lives is relevant for my research, as it emphasises the importance of the mother-infant relationship for how the future adult will develop and will be influenced in the choices he or she will make.

Harry Stack Sullivan, the American Neo-Freudian psychiatrist who, through his interpersonal theory, laid the foundation of interpersonal psychoanalysis (Evans, 2005), was emotionally affected by the relationship he had with his parents in childhood. The only surviving child of a poor Roman-Catholic Irish farmer, Harry had an unhappy childhood. He lived together with his parents in a small anti-Roman-Catholic community in Norwich, New York. Carrying the stigma of being Roman-Catholic, his friends and playmates consisted mainly of the farm animals. His loneliness was increased by his mother's lack of affection, although he was the only remaining son of the family. These personal experiences seemed to have influenced Sullivan's professional views in his adult life. In his theory, Sullivan emphasised the critical role of mothering in personality development and that the early childhood years are crucial for adult life.

Nevertheless, Sullivan (1953) argued that individuals' personal identity is built over the years by perceiving how significant people consider them in their environments. To the infant, the most significant person is his/her mother, and if disturbances arise in the parental relationship, then anxiety may result. Furthermore, the child develops a manner of conduct that reduces the anxiety resulting from the parental relationship. These behaviours will establish the personality characteristics that may predominate in adulthood (Sullivan, 1953).

Around the same time, John Bowlby was developing another theory in the United Kingdom, the attachment theory, which connects with his personal life (Bretherton, 1992). Unlike Sullivan's social status, Bowlby was born and raised in a British upper-middle-class family. For fear of not spoiling John, his parents spent only a small amount of time with him each day. His father was preoccupied with his business and his mother with her social life. In her children's relationship, she was unfair, giving only attention and affection to her older son and depriving the other children of maternal love (Bretherton, 1992).

Moreover, Bowlby was sent away from home at seven to a boarding school, which he later described as a traumatic experience. The theory he developed, and to which Mary Ainsworth contributed, in 1973 (Bretherton, 1992), refers to maternal attachment and security, enabling the child to become an autonomous, self-confident person. Furthermore, they argue that the behaviours, developed by a child, establish the personality characteristics which will predominate in adulthood (Ainsworth,1973). Ainsworth herself did not have a good relationship with her mother because of the latter's jealousy of the bond she had with her father (Bretherton, 1992). Her father encouraged his daughter's precocious thirst for knowledge and showed her much affection and attention. Thus, Mary was deprived of her mother's love, just as Sullivan and Bowlby were and, in her professional life, she showed much attention to developing Bowlby's attachment theory, maybe as a way to understand her own childhood.

Another scholar who researched the interaction between mother and child, and its importance for human's personal development, was Melanie Klein (Segal, 2004). She had a distinctive approach to developmental psychology and established a new theory called the object relation theory, which later inspired Bowlby. Her impact on developmental psychology was indirect but profound. Her biography (Sayers and Forrester, 2013) shows that her life was not as happy as she would have wished. Although an intelligent young woman, her dreams to go to university had been shattered; however, this was not the only reason for Klein's sufferance; her marriage was also unhappy, although she and her husband had three children.

Furthermore, Melanie's parents told her, in childhood, that they preferred her brother and that she had not been planned. Despite this declaration, which hurt Melanie, she was close to her mother her whole life. In her biography, published by Sayers and Forrester (2013),

she praises her mother. This emotional distress led her to suffer from depression later in life.

Moreover, Klein's life story continued down a sad path. She divorced her husband, left Austria, and moved to Berlin, together with her children. She was not entirely accepted there, so she moved again to the United Kingdom, but taking with her only her younger son, and leaving behind her other children, who were enrolled in undergraduate education. Sadder events occurred, as her younger son passed away and, years later, the relationship with her older daughter broke down when the latter publicly opposed Klein's psychoanalytic ideas. They remained separated until Klein's death. Her emotional state, and maybe her unfulfilled childhood, led Klein to study the mother-child relationship. In her autobiography, Klein describes herself as being an ambitious woman who yearns for praise and recognition. In her work, Klein emphasises the importance of early infancy and childhood experiences in forming the adult emotional world (Klein, 1932). Klein's seminal object relation theory, demonstrates that children do not internalise the object itself solely, but the entire relationship around it. The object Klein is speaking about could be parts of the mother's body, the mother herself, or other people or things that baby/infant interacts with. She highlights that the infant internalises two sets of object relations (positive and negative), including representations of the self, the object, and the emotion that links the two. Klein's contribution to developmental psychology was and continues to be influential, especially because she demonstrated how human experiences in infancy are introjected and form the base sense of the self.

In this study, these scholars' contribution is notable, as their theories illuminate in more depth the connection between parents (particularly the mother) and children, and how this relationshipnmay set up behavioural patterns and influence their emotional world as adults. These behavioural patterns will be manifested in personal but also in professional life (Bainbridge, 2015). Thus, the infancy stage of development appears to be of much value, and Klein's is one of the first studies in this field. Her influential work inspired Bowlby who, together with Ainsworth (1973), emphasised the critical role of the mother in comforting her children and how her response may affect these future adult lives. Ainsworth (in Bretherton, 1992) contributed to Bowlby's attachment theory providing it with the new directions it is now taking. As Bretherton (1992, p. 759) suggested, Ainsworth "contributed to the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world."

In other words, 'good' attachment, which provides the infant with self-confidence, enables them to move away from the 'secure base' and challenge him/herself to explore 'unsafe' experiences. In this case, it is also essential how the mother related to her child. Another concept attributed to Ainsworth and related to the attachment theory is 'maternal sensitivity.' This concept refers to maternal sensitivity to infants' signals and their role in developing infant-mother attachment patterns. In other words, in the mother-infant relationship, the mother's responses to the infant's signals will influence how the infant (a future adult) will develop patterns in future relationships (either personal or professional) and how they will perceive themselves in those relationships. Just as Sullivan emphasised the essential role of 'love' as a developed intimacy between child and mother, as the engine for a fulfilled life, Bowlby (1951, p. 13) highlighted a similar idea through attachment theory. He based his theory on empirical evidence that to grow up mentally healthy, the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.

Seemingly, Bowlby (1951) and Sullivan (1953) augmented the mother's role, leaving apart the father's role in the child's self - development. Nonetheless, Bowlby (1953) developed the idea that although a child is looking first towards his/her mother, the father's role is still of great significance through the emotional support he provides to his wife, the child's mother. Therefore, a secure, loving relationship with the mother, supported emotionally by the father, may enable a future adult to develop functional and healthy relationships with people, especially with those in whom they will invest emotionally at some point in their personal and professional lives. On the other hand, if the infant's needs of being comforted and having a secure base, where he or she can come back after exploring the world, are missing, then dysfunctionalities in the self- formation may occur (Sullivan, 1953; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991). Sullivan (1953) uses the term 'anxiety' in interpersonal relationships to describe the psychological process within a child who does not receive satisfaction from the 'secure base,' as Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) showed. For example, according to Sullivan, anxiety appears when there is no regular relief from stressful situations. He believes that anxiety, produced by a malfunctioning relationship with the 'attachment figure,' or the mother, is the primary disruptive force blocking the development of healthy interpersonal relationships. This results in people not being able to learn from mistakes, a persistent pursuance of a

childlike wish for security, and situations in which they will not learn from experiences. All these malfunctions in one's personality may have an impact on the professional life as well. A malfunctioning relationship with the mother, and then with both parents, could lead to psychological disorders, or it could lead a person to not develop as well as possible, because the memory of anxieties kept in the unconscious may become a trigger to fail in new relationships.

Thus, in his interpersonal theory, Sullivan (1953) emphasised that a person develops continually through the interpersonal relationships they develop during their lifetime. Therefore, the behavioural patterns established in childhood become essential. He highlights the idea that what is a person is at a given moment in the process of becoming a person is determined by his or her relationships with people who loved her or him or who refused to show love.

In other words, people develop through social interactions (Bandura, 1986), developing interpersonal relationships (Sullivan, 1953), and bearing in their minds unconsciously the 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988) to which they continuously return mentally in their experiences with other 'objects' (Klein, 1932). Each interaction, developed with mothers (or main carergiver) from birth, is, unconsciously, interpreted by the infant and later by the child, and this interpretation of the relationship models the child's conceptions about him/herself, about life, about relationships. The 'secure base' is the interpretation of the relationship the child has with their main carers. If the interpretation reassures the child with a feeling of security, of being loved, of being valued, of being 'enough' for his or her main carer, then the 'secure base', although not physically present, reinforces him or her during difficult times in life.

Sullivan entails the idea of constructing an outside world in which relationships are built on the image of the inside world, which in its turn is constructed starting from the relationship with the mother. During the first years of life, children perceive and understand themselves through the mother, or the primary caregiver. Therefore, they see themselves, like a 'looking glass mirror' (Cooley, 1902, cited in Aldiabat and Navenec, 2011, p. 1077) in their mother. As Bowlby noted, "What cannot be communicated to the mother cannot be communicated to the self." This deep attachment to the mother, an idea developed by Bowlby et al. (1956), implies that the mother has been considered the ultimate reality of an infant's instinctual responses to the events that occur into his or her life. Besides the mother, as an 'object' to which an infant attach, the relationship and the

emotions experienced in that relationship affect the infant and child's personal development, even more than the mother herself (Klein, 1932).

As children grow up, the mother is internalised (Holmes, 1993, p. 78), meaning that she remains a (symbolic) secure base in the sense that her image and the way she influenced the self-development will remain a reference point to which an adult will refer for a lifetime, consciously or unconsciously.

> A securely attached child will store an internal working model of a compassionate, loving, reliable caregiver, and of a self that is worthy of love and attention and will bring these assumptions to bear on all other relationships. Conversely, an insecurely attached child may view the world as a dangerous place in which other people are to be treated with great caution and see himself as ineffective and unworthy of love. These assumptions are relatively stable and enduring: those built up in the early years of life are particularly persistent and unlikely to be modified by subsequent experience.

The adjective 'unlikely', used by Bowlby to stress the significance of the attachment between mother and child, may conjure up the idea of an implacable destiny. This may then lead to another idea, namely that if a child has developed a good relationship with his/her mother, then a happy and fulfilled life is guaranteed. Conversely, if a person has not developed safe relationships in childhood, the consequences may affect them throughout their lives. Andersen et al.'s (2002) recent work supports the early work of Sullivan, Bowlby, Ainsworth, Klein, and other developmental psychologists. Their theory of IF-THEN emphasises the idea that people attribute to new people the qualities of significant others through unconscious transference, stored in their unconscious. As mentioned in the previous section, IF suggests a situation or a set of triggering clues, both the actual physical setting and the psychological situation (as the person transfer to the real situation). THEN is the reaction to the situation, both psychological experiences and observable behaviours. (Andersen and Thorpe, 2009). Andersen and Thorpe (2009) built this theory on Mischel and Shoda's (1995) cognitive-affective personality system model, which was considered a contribution to the psychology of personality in 1995.

According to the cognitive-affective model, behaviour can be best anticipated from a comprehensive understanding of the person, the situation, and the interaction between the

person and the situation. In Klein's (1932) words, the situation becomes an object, and people involved in the situation, who are emotionally invested/involved in the situation, will develop a relationship with that fortunate or unfortunate situation. Through memory, people store their experiences into their unconsciousness and, according to Andersen's research, these experiences can be healed but cannot be forgotten. In other words, people can heal themselves from harmful relationships, but the healing is not equivalent to erasing them from memory.

From the studies presented above, it is evident that parents' mental representations, especially of the mother, are influential in people's lives. In the next section, I will analyse the ways in which parents influence their children's self-development. Then, I will consider the consequences of these influences on their self in adult life.

3.4.2. Parents' influence on children's self-formation

As mentioned previously, children learn about themselves through interactions with the social environment, which are mostly their parents in the first years of their lives. Two aspects need to be understood here. One is the relationship with the social environment, and the other is the central attachment figure involved in the relationship. As stated previously, the mother, or the person who mothers the infant, is the most prominent and influential person in one's life, with lifelong consequences (Sullivan, 1953; Bowlby, 1951). How do the parents (mother) influence children's adult personal identities? First, it is through the physical and emotional contact they share in the first years of life. Through physical contact with the mother, a baby experiences feelings of trust and tenderness. Here is a crucial moment in one's life. On the one hand, if the mothering response is positive, the infant develops a healthy attachment with the mother, which further develops the child's self-worth and self-confidence. The infant begins to feel confident enough to explore the world around him, even being physically farther away from his mother, but having 'the mothering' inside him as a secure base, which allows him to feel confident to explore and understand the world around him. However, if anxiety is induced in the infant by the lack of empathetic feedback to its needs, these can affect the infant in the long term by developing a self that lacks self-confidence. Thus, the infant will not feel safe enough to explore his surroundings because the 'secure base'

inside him is missing or is not safe enough. This lack of self-confidence will lead to consequences in adult life and manifest in an adult's profession as behavioural patterns that they will tend to repeat.

The parents' influence does not stop when a child reaches three, but continues during childhood, and the juvenile, preadolescent, and adolescent stages of development. Suppose in infancy, parents, as significant others, play an essential role in developing a healthy relationship between them and their children in the following developmental stages. In that case, they may influence their children's self and personality development in other ways than only during childhood.

One of these ways is the control that parents may exert on their children. The term 'control' has been used negatively in research on parenting, referring to intrusiveness, pressure, or domination, contrasting to parental support of autonomy (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). This 'control' refers to psychological control, rather than a behavioural control, which has been perceived as positive, as it includes parental guidance, monitoring, and rule sets.

Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that there is a universal need for autonomy, and the satisfaction of this need is vital to the best psychological functioning. This perspective is evident in Rohner et al. (2004), who believe that parental control may negatively influence children by conveying rejection—for example, when parents withdraw love because children have not met their expectations, children may feel that parents no longer care about them. Parental acceptance- rejection theory postulates that children's feelings of being rejected (vs accepted) by parents play a role in their development (e.g., Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2004). The influence is important because parents are significant for children (future adult professionals), and these influences may be manifested in the long term. Indeed, the influence is so great that the image children construct about their parents is stored in their memory for a lifetime. In this context, Andersen et al. (2002, p. 160) state:

> Mental representations of them are influential because they are laden with effect and because they define how one's expectancies, affects, motives, and behaviours to other people arise - whether the other person is a new boss, neighbour, love interest, or acquaintance.

Therefore, significant others' representations are linked to the knowledge people have about their relationship with significant others (parents in this case). The existence of such connections implies that the activation of a significant-other representation should spread to aspects of the self that are associated with this other. In other words, people will manifest themselves in relationships with new others, depending on the similarity between people they interact with and the extent to which these people resemble significant others.

Thus, children develop a sense of self in relationship with their parents, when they could be considered worthy or unworthy of love, of trust, valuable or non-valuable, capable of taking action and making decisions or not. People develop the idea of who they are first through the relationship with their parents (especially the mother), and this self-conception further leads to how they behave, how they conceive their lives. As stated previously, not only parents (or those who mother the child) influence the self-formation and one's conception about the self, but they are the first to lay the foundation of personality. Nonetheless, there are also other factors, such as genetics, environment, culture. However, these are not to be discussed in this study because, as stated previously, the focus is on how significant other impacts on teachers' personal and professional development from Romania.

Having explained the role of parents as main significant others in childhood and whose consequences can be observed in adult life, next I move on to explaining the role of another person who may become significant in Orthodox Christians' lives, especially in the adult life. This person is called spiritual father.

3.5. The Spiritual Father – a Possible Significant Other within Orthodox Christian Spirituality

The Spiritual Father is that significant other who influences those Orthodox Christians for whom spiritual life is important. Although there could be other influential people in their lives, such as spouses, friends, or spiritual fathers, and although many of these may exert their influence to a certain extent, those Romanian Orthodox Christians who engage with their religion's spiritual life may give greater importance to their spiritual father. It is known within Orthodox Christian spirituality that spiritual mothers can also be present

in Christians' lives and can have an impact on their personal and spiritual development. However, this is quite rare as, for most Orthodox Christians, the relationship with their spiritual father becomes significant and influential through the practice of confession. The significance of a spiritual father in the lives of Orthodox Christians is so great that his advice becomes even more important than their personal beliefs, as I will show in this chapter. In this study, spiritual fathers are more relevant than spiritual mothers because non-ordained Christians interact with them in practising the sacraments of the Orthodox Christian Church.

Before clarifying how spiritual fathers may influence the self-image and the personal and professional development of teachers from Romania, it is vital to understand who spiritual fathers are from a historical and Orthodox Christian perspective. The historical background is essential for this study because it is crucial first to understand the evolution of the relationship between spiritual father and spiritual children within Orthodox Christianity, in order to fully comprehend the existing relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children and the effects of this relationship in the latter's lives. Then, I will continue with an analysis of spiritual fathers' influences on the formation of the self-image. The impact of a spiritual father and parents' influences on the self-image and professional development, and possible regulatory processes for a better self-efficacy in teaching, will be developed further in this section.

So far researchers have not paid attention to the relationship between spiritual fathers and the teaching profession. However, there is much theological literature, both academic (Barbu, 2013; 2012; Ware, 1974) and non-academic (Bloom, 2015; 2014; Sakharov, 2013; Emilianos, 1999), on the matter of spiritual fatherhood within Orthodox Christianity. This literature is interested in the spiritual development of the human personality. Nevertheless, components that form human personality interact and influence one another, resulting in a person's identity. Therefore, one of the claims this study makes is that the spiritual father, perceived as a significant other, can influence one's personality and, further, can also influence a person's professional identity and its development, given that he may be an essential person for Romanian teachers with an Orthodox Christian background.

3.5.1. Spiritual fatherhood in Christianity– historical approach

Spiritual fatherhood, one of the most considered subjects in Orthodox Christian theology, is a biblical concept, primarily found in Christianity. It is based on God's Christian dogma conceived as the father of all things created and invites to an intimate parental relationship with God. In Orthodox Christianity, this personal relationship with God is reflected in the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children. The central teaching of Orthodox Christian spirituality about the spiritual father is that he stands in place of Christ. One researcher who has studied this role is Sakharov. Lockwood (2014, p. 109) states that central to Sakharov's (1980) writings is the discovery of, and obedience to, the divine will and that: "Throughout this process, the spiritual father relationship is of primary importance."

According to Christian dogma, the teachings about spiritual fatherhood in Orthodox Christianity have their roots in the teaching about God the Father who, according to Christian dogma, is the source of the godhead (Staniloae, 1996) in the form of the Son, Who is born of the Father before all ages, and the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father. Through the Son's incarnation, he revealed to humanity his ontological relationship with God the Father and our human filial relationship. The names of Father and Son "define a mode of being in relation." (Barbu, 2013, p.256). In other words, Christians understand their relationship with God as a parental relationship. Zizioulas (2006, p.123) points out that:

> If we keep it and refer to it in theology, it is on the one hand, because this is how God calls and indicates himself in revealing himself to us, and on the other hand, because this is the only way for us to express, indeed, to experience, our Saviour Jesus Christ and our sanctifier, the Holy Spirit, as God.

This perspective on God, the loving Father of the Son and the human creation, has impacted how Christians refer to their relationship with divinity. In Scripture, God's love is compared to a father's or a mother's love for their children (Isaiah 49, 13–18). Given this biblical reference about the origins of conceiving God as a loving and kind father, it is vital to point out that the ministry of spiritual fatherhood aims to follow and work on earth the love of God for humanity (Barbu, 2013, p. 257):

> The 'job' of the spiritual father is to transmit this fatherly love of God to the people, to make it real and tangible in the life of each Christian seeking spiritual guidance and nourishment.

This statement implies a relationship based on a non-judgmental, caring, empathetic attitude towards any person. In other words, it is similar to Sullivan's (1953) interpersonal theory in which he highlighted the importance of intimacy based on love, which he called 'the principal source of life satisfaction' (p. 34). Moreover, it can also be compared to Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory and secure base which, paradoxically, reinforces the idea of autonomy. Here we find a tension rather than a contradiction between obedience and autonomy. It implies, on the one hand, that the spiritual children owe obedience to their spiritual father. Obedience is perceived as a consequence of trust and the faith that the spiritual father is the representative of Christ.

On the other hand, through a loving and respectful attitude, the spiritual father allows his spiritual children to act and behave without restraint and present themselves as they are without the fear that they will be judged or rejected. Staniloae (1993) compared the loving interpersonal human relationship with the love of the Holy Trinity. This God-like love is why, in the Early Christian Church, not all ordained priests were considered spiritual fathers. This attribute was given more for one's holy life than by ordination (Barbu, 2013). Thus, the spiritual father's 'job' is to remind people about God's fatherly love for them.

Historically, spiritual fatherhood can be traced back to apostolic times (1st century), when Christians considered the apostles as spiritual fathers and teachers, following Christ's model, the Son of the Father of all and the Teacher of all (Barbu, 2013). Barbu (2013, p. 257) argues that the image that Saint Paul uses to convey the love of God in the reality of daily lives is "one of the most eloquent examples of spiritual fatherhood the Church ever had". Thus, Saint Paul places spiritual fatherhood above any other activity in the Church: "For though you may have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers […]." (1Corinthians 4:15). One century after the apostolic age, Saint Ignatius of Antioch emphasised the importance of spiritual fatherhood, as the image of God the Father's love for all humans. He considers that the bishop embodies that God-like image and, consequently, he should act in relationship with people, as God Himself would act or as Saint Athanasius (2012, p. 109) said, "in the way of God Himself".

Analysing the understanding of spiritual fatherhood of Christians of the early Church, it is interesting to note that spiritual fatherhood incorporated the mystical and sacramental dimensions of Christian life, both in Church and in acts of personal care for others (Barbu, 2013). Later, under monasticism and the ancient practice of the confession of sins, spiritual fatherhood acquired new dimensions. The practice of the confession of sins became central to the pastoral practice of the Church and, thus, the confessor priest gradually became considered to be a spiritual father.

The confession of sins was linked to spiritual fatherhood in the Orthodox Christian Church and, under monastic influence, this has been associated with a priest. In monasticism, a monk (or nun) may still be considered a spiritual father or a spiritual mother (Barbu, 2013) without necessarily being a priest. However, apart from monastic tradition, Eastern Churches do not have lay directors. This "reveals the concerns of these churches to maintain an intimate link between spiritual direction and participation in the sacraments" (Barbu, 2013, p. 259), which can be delivered only by an ordained man. Nevertheless, the ordination into priesthood does not imply the acquisition of virtues (such as wisdom, love, patience) held by a spiritual father. The historical development of spiritual fatherhood within the Orthodox Christian Church could be reduced to the following outline: spiritual fatherhood = apostles --> bishops--> priests. Zizioulas (2006, p. 148), summarises the historical development of spiritual fatherhood, outside of monasticism, as follows:

> We note that its original use was related to the Eucharist and it was for this that it was applied, in the first instance, to the bishop, as the president of the Eucharist assembly, and then was eventually transferred to the presbyters when they became presidents of Eucharist assemblies (and in this way 'priests'), with the appearance of parishes in the fourth century.

In other words, the spiritual father's central role in the lives of lay Christians was to administrate the Christian Church's sacraments (such as the Eucharist and Confession). For monks, the same name translates into abba (man) or amma (woman), referred to spiritual father or mother who gives birth, inspires, and leads the disciple to holiness (Barbu, 2015).

Both types of relationship, in the monastic and lay Christian life, imply interactions. If we consider Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory about personal development in

interaction with others, then a discussion about the role and the significance of a spiritual father in the Orthodox Christian teachers' lives becomes essential for this study. Therefore, if a spiritual father becomes essential or a 'significant other' in a teacher's life, he may also impact on the teacher's professional development, as will be explained in more detail in section 3.5.3. Additionally, if we consider Andersen's (2013) theory about the transference of significant others' memory onto new people, then a more in-depth analysis of how a spiritual father may contribute to one's self-image becomes vital for this study, as transference may also be manifested in teachers' professional practice (as detailed in section 3.5.3). Furthermore, if we consider the importance of significant others in people's self-image formation, then analysing the link between the spiritual father and the self-image formation becomes essential as well, as it allows for an understanding of any further implications for the teacher's professional development. The next section will focus on the spiritual father's influence on the self-image formation in the lives of Orthodox Christian teachers.

3.5.2. The Spiritual father and the self-image formation

Self-image, according to Bejaard et al. (2004, p.108), is constructed over a lifetime, which means that identity is always in the making, shifts depending on context and relationships, and may be varied and multiple. They have also shown that teachers' professional identity is relational, shifting and continuously in the process of becoming:

> [identity] is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon. Identity development occurs in an intersubjective field and can be best characterised as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognised as such in a given context. In this context, then, identity can also be seen as an answer to the recurrent question: "Who am I at this moment?

However, Winnicot (2007) suggests that there is a 'core self' or a 'core identity', signalled by continuity and coherence: 'multiple identities' are connected to one's performance in society. Polkinghorne (as cited in Bruner, 1990) spoke of the self as 'a configuring of personal events into a historical unity' (p. 116).

In Rodgers and Scott's view (2008, p. 739) the self and identity are two sides of the same coin, and the self might be thought as the meaning maker, and identity as the meaning made, as Rodgers and Scott (2008, p. 739) suggest:

> There is an unknowable core, something that resists sociality, and can only hint at itself. I would not locate this core in identity, which I tend to think of as the social clothing plus desire for recognition. Within this clash or conflict, there is something called the private self, which I would call "being." Here is where I would locate interiority that may fuel the need for identity but in and of itself the self is not coextensive with identity, or another way of saying, this self is not identical to itself as the philosophers might say.

In other words, there is a 'true self' (Winnicot, 2007), and one or maybe more identities people create during their lives. This "self" seems to be more complex than "identity", and the self may influence the identity (or identities). Related to this, I have argued in the previous section, based on historical and theological evidence, that the spiritual father has an essential role in the lives of those Orthodox Christians involved in the Christian Church's spiritual practices. Based on the same theological evidence (Barbu, 2013; 2012; Zizoulas, 2006), I also claimed that Christians had perceived the spiritual fatherhood as the image of God's love for people. If that is the case, this study needs to understand how a spiritual father may influence a teacher's image about themselves to comprehend further how this self-image could influence one's identity and professional development.

Considering Zizioulas'n(2006) and Barbu's (2015; 2013; 2012) claims on spiritual fatherhood, it could be argued that the spiritual father could influence the self-image people may have through being shown a compassionate and loving attitude. This interpersonal relationship can increase a person's sense of worth, value, confidence, and self-esteem in both their personal and professional lives. For this study, it is vital to understand how a spiritual father can contribute to self-image formation, in order to understand later how this self-image may alter the development of the teaching profession. On the other hand, if connections are made between the information on spiritual fatherhood to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory about shaping behaviour through interactions and modelling, it becomes necessary to deepen the understanding of the spiritual father's role in the lives of teaching professionals.

Before providing a more in-depth analysis on how a spiritual father may contribute to one's self-formation, it is essential to note that, according to Ware (1974, p. 309):

> what the spiritual father gives to his disciple is not a code of written or oral regulations, not a set of techniques for meditation, but a personal relationship.

In other words, his fundamental role is not to provide his disciples with religious rules and norms, and not even to guide them in meditation and prayer. His essential responsibility is to create a personal relationship with each of his spiritual children, laying the foundation of the spiritual relationship between them and God. Further, participation in the sacraments, prayer, or any other spiritual expressions will be the consequence of this intimate relationship. Ware's argument connects to Barbu's (2013) claim about the spiritual father's 'job'. He states that the spiritual father's main 'job' is to transmit God's fatherly love to the people. Barbu's (2013) and Ware's (1974) arguments entail the idea that the spiritual father's attitude towards his disciples   replicates (or should replicate) the loving relationship between God the Father and the Son.

Ware, Zizioulas and Barbu's claims link partially to my study although these authors' expertise is neither in developmental psychology nor in professional development. Nevertheless, links can be created between their theological arguments, developmental psychology and professional development theories. It is valid for all of these three areas that the spiritual, personal, and professional development arises under certain circumstances. These are presented and analysed below.

A spiritual father should, by definition, influence his spiritual children in a positive way, regardless of their personal and spiritual development stages. According to Ware (1974), if the influence is negative, they cannot be called spiritual fathers. They could be called spiritual guides, directors, or confessors, but not 'fathers'. There are several premises under which the spiritual father may influence people's image about themselves. These circumstances apply to both the spiritual father and his children. A spiritual father must fulfil the following conditions: first, he must listen to his spiritual children with genuine authority and eagerness, ensuring, through intuition, a secure and intimate atmosphere for the disciples' disclosure of thoughts. Secondly, a spiritual father should show the ability to love others and to make others' sufferings his own, otherwise, as Ware (1974, p. 303) argues:

unlimited insight into the secrets of men's hearts, if devoid of loving compassion, would not be creative but destructive; he who cannot love others will have little power to heal them.

Thirdly, a spiritual father should have the power to transform the human environment, both the material and the non-material. The perception people have of their environment, and of the people within, influences their relationships. In other words, a spiritual father must create a safe, intimate, loving space where people can express their fears. They can confess their sins without feeling judged; they feel listened to, valued and respected. For a spiritual father to become significant for Christians, he should fulfil people's natural/instinctual need to be recognised (Honneth, 2007) as distinct, autonomous human beings, to be loved for who they are, building therefore an interpersonal relationship (Sullivan, 1953), to provide them with a safe space where they can express their fears and joys, and to become himself a secure base, ready to nourish his spiritual children with unconditioned love (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1956).

Nevertheless, these three conditions could be quickly challenged and labelled as idealistic and, to a certain extent, they are. If listening with careful attention is possible, as it is professed even in other professions, such as psychotherapy, the second implies a quality which is not effortless, namely, to make the other's suffering one's own without being affected by them (Sakharov, 1977). These are the conditions that a spiritual father must fulfil to influence his spiritual children positively.

On the other hand, spiritual children also play their role in their self-image construction. The original condition they need to fulfil is obedience, which must be willing and voluntary. That leads to the second condition, which is the free choice to be involved in this spiritual relationship. Thus, spiritual children must fulfil two conditions without which the relationship cannot be influential: obedience and the free choice to enter into this spiritual relationship. Without these conditions being fulfilled, the bond between spiritual father and spiritual children cannot be productive and cannot contribute to both personal and spiritual growth, and therefore cannot lead to the possible development of the teaching professional.

Although this is the theory (which, as any theory, is based on experiential testing), in real life both the spiritual father (confessor) and spiritual children are not at all times ready to love, to listen, to accept, to be patient, and to be obedient. Like all relationships, this

requires a process that aims to reach God the Father-God the Son relationship image. This idea implies that both spiritual father and children must learn as they go, because the disciple is called to give and receive (Ware, 1974). If the two of them are in a relationship of personal and spiritual development, then the spiritual father's role is to guide by example and not impose rules and laws. Thus, this relationship may contribute to the construction of Christians' self-image, in which they can develop a better and mature image about themselves. Ware (1974, p. 308) describes the influence of the spiritual father on his spiritual children this way:

> The task of a spiritual father is to assist man (sic) to see the truth for himself not to suppress a man's personality but to discover himself, to grow to full maturity and to become what he really is.

The last words of the quotation, 'what he really is', are challenging because it suggests a unitary self, which may be manifested in the same way for everybody. Alternatively, it could lead to Winicott's (1965) idea about the 'true self'. One of the questions which arises at this point is: does Orthodox Christian spirituality suggest that a person reaches a point where he or she expresses the self in the same way in any circumstance, regardless of the person, the environment, and the circumstances? Therefore, does that imply a theory of the unity of the self? Does a theory of the unity of the self find its place in the context of this study? The answer is not easily accessible, but by answering the initial question, namely how does the spiritual relationship father- spiritual children influence the construction of a self-image, I hope to arrive at a satisfactory answer for the implications of the relationship between spiritual father and spiritual children in my study.

Before analysing how the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children may influence the construction of a self-image, it is useful to remember the conditions under which the self's image is constructed in the spiritual relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children. As previously noted, the relationship is two-way. Therefore, both spiritual father and children find themselves under certain conditions. On the one hand, a spiritual father should be intuitive, can love others empathetically, and have the power to transform the human environment. On the other hand, spiritual children need to willingly and voluntarily show obedience and trustfulness in their spiritual father. Thus, for the relationship to impact both spiritual father and children, it is vital that both give importance to and value the relationship. Although these conditions may not be fully fulfilled, either by one or by both participants, there will still be an influence of the

spiritual father on his spiritual children. As Bandura (1986) noted, people influence each other through social interaction, and these influences may be manifested in both personal and teaching professional development. Further, they give meaning and interpret the relationships, constructing an image about the self, due to these interactions. There will still be an influence on the self-image, regardless of both the spiritual and personal developmental stages. Below, I analyse the possible influences in the case of a healthy relationship that imitates God's relationship with the Son.

As previously stated, researchers in social psychology (Sullivan, 1953; Bandura, 1986; Andersen et al. 2015; James, 1890) argued that people form their self-image in relation to people who have an emotional impact on them and in whom one was or is emotionally invested. If the relationship between spiritual father and spiritual children is established on a God the Father and God the Son kind of relationship, the self-image will be conceptualised based on a loving relationship. Further, I am first interested in understanding how such a relationship contributes to the formation of the self-image, and how it could be portrayed as a self-image formed in the likeness of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Secondly, and most importantly for this research, is to understand how this kind of self-image will impact on the professional development of Romanian Orthodox Christians.

There are two possible directions when examining how the relationship between a spiritual father may influence self-image construction. The first direction is when one received love and was valued by both parents (caregivers) and the spiritual father. The second direction is when a person was brought up in a less loving atmosphere with his or her parents, but the spiritual father showed love. In these two possible situations, the spiritual father remains a positive figure because people will seek a spiritual father only if he provides them with love and emotional security.

Nonetheless, there is a disconnect between spiritual fatherhood and the self-image construction and development in research. Therefore, new links need to be created between knowledge coming from Orthodox Christian spirituality, developmental, socio-interactionist psychology, and further professional development. On the one hand, there is the need for understanding the Orthodox Christian perspective on spiritual fatherhood in the context of the teaching profession. On the other hand, there is an enormous amount of research in the study of self and identity (personal and professional).

3.5.3. How does the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children influence the professional development?

The relationship with a spiritual father aims to enable Christians to see themselves objectively, understand more about their 'true self' (Winnicott, 1960), and value others in their relationships in a professional space. A healthy self-esteem may further enable Orthodox Christian teachers to be aware of themselves and their actions in personal and professional spaces. Through awareness, a person can understand him or herself and see the triggers that generate negative or positive behavioural patterns.

The analysis of the spiritual father's influence on his spiritual children's self-image and professional development is done from the premise of a loving relationship, where the spiritual father seeks spiritual and personal well-being for his spiritual children. Then, professional development can be understood within this spiritual, loving relationship. It should be noted again here that according to the Orthodox Christian theology the spiritual father's role is to imitate God's love and goodness in the world, "by taking upon himself, like Christ, the burdens of people, "enlarging" his heart to contain both the joys and sorrows of the disciples." (Barbu, 2012, p. 33). Person (1988, p. 23) noted that love could be considered an agent of transformation, creating "the possibility for dramatic change. It is, in fact, an agent of change", acknowledging that significant others' love enables the loved person to be responsible for and reverential to that relationship. In other words, the spiritual father can ensure his spiritual children with a 'secure base' (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1956). This secure base can further enable disciples to develop self-confidence, in both their personal and professional life.

The feeling of being loved gives a sense of security - of being accepted as one is. This loving relationship involves several consequences. The first consequence of a genuine loving relationship is the feeling of worthiness, which has been defined using the value people, generally, give to themselves. Having a sense of self-worth means that one values oneself and has a sense of self-value that conveys worthiness. The differences between self-value and self- worth are minimal enough that both terms can be used to describe the same general concept. Nonetheless, I will provide both definitions here in order to understand how they differ. Hunt (2013) defines worth as "the value, merit or significance of a person or a thing". On the other hand, self-value is "more behavioural than emotional, more about how you act toward what you value, including yourself than how you feel

about yourself compared to others" (Stosny, 2014). Self-worth is at the core of people's 'true' selves, as their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are thoroughly entwined with how they perceive their worth and value as human beings. Hence, self-value and self-worth are both used to convey the complexity, the depth and the valuableness of human being, in general, but also in Christianity, in particular.

For Christians (Ward, 1984; Kragiopoulos, 2008), self-worth refers to a person's acknowledgement of his or her value, as he or she is valued by God the Father. Their worth is given by the image after which humans were created. This image refers to the inborn qualities that God the Father has given to His children at their creation: firstly, rationality, the quality which enables the individuals to distinguish between what is right and what is bad for their souls, making those choices that help them to grow spiritually and personally; secondly, free will, which refers to human agency (this can be manifested as personal, proxy, and collective agency), through which he or she can transform the environment (Bandura, 2013); and, finally, it is the power of emotions, through which he or she can experience relationships and contribute to his or her personal and spiritual development. All these three qualities are acknowledged as personal qualities that enable one to feel their worth regardless of their status in society and in educational settings. Self-worth is essential in acquiring self-confidence, with which a spiritual father can influence his spiritual children. This influence refers to humans believing in the divine proxy agency to strengthen them in challenging times. Bandura (2013) speaks about danger here, namely that relying on the proxy divine agency may inhibit people's personal agency.

Nonetheless, Orthodox Christian theology speaks about a collaboration between human and divine agency to overcome personal difficulties in life. In Scripture, Saint Paul (Philippians, 4:13) says "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me". Thus, self-worth and self- confidence are two essential components in personal and professional development, as they set the type of relationship teachers will have with their students, with their peers, and with their profession.

Self-worth, value, and confidence may help to develop one's self-esteem, yet all these also influence one another. Self-esteem was defined as how one evaluates himself or herself. In other words, it is an internal assessment of one's qualities and attributes. Psychologists (Baumeister and Leary, 2013; Clark, 1988) distinguish between healthy and unhealthy self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem is when a person evaluates himself or

herself honestly and realistically. The self- esteem is built upon the evidence gathered and gained about who one is as a person.

On the other hand, unhealthy self-esteem manifests itself in two extremes: either a person thinks too highly of themselves or they have low self-esteem, when they ignore their qualities, perceiving themselves through a negative filter. This attitude has consequences not only in their personal life but also in professional life. These will be discussed later, in sections on professional self-perception (3.5.3.1), on relationship with students and peers (3.5.3.2), and on self-efficacy (3.5.3.3).

In this study, the influence of a spiritual father manifests also on the level of self-esteem that one has about himself or herself, which further is reflected on their personal and professional development. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that a person develops as a whole, meaning that the influences of the spiritual father do not cancel out the influences of other significant people (in this study parents), and the vice-versa. Thus, all influences on professional development will be analysed as a whole and not separately, even though some may be greater than others. These influences on the self and personal identity development influence a person's profession; influences their daily professional practice through self-efficacy; influences the professional relationships they develop at the workplace and, finally, influences how Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers try to repair any malfunctions through a self-regulatory processes. In the following sections all of these influences on personal and professional identity and development will be discussed further.

3.5.3.1. Professional self-perception

The personal self and the professional self are distinct concepts, but one influences the other. The first refers to who a person is based on social interactions, the internalisation of these interactions, and the mental representations of people a person has emotionally invested in (i.e. significant others). Within an educational setting, the personal meets the professional, maybe more than in other professional settings. The teaching professionals will understand their own professional identity through human interactions with other peers, students, and students' parents, but also between themselves and their spiritual father. Here, an essential role may be played by psychological mechanisms, such as

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transference (Andersen and Miranda, 2000), through which one will develop a specific type of relationships with new people.

It is not always evident if a personal identity will define who one is as a professional. A personal identity can be reflected in a professional one, but this does not necessarily imply that unhealthy relationships with parents will lead to unfulfilled careers and, conversely, an ideal relationship with parents (as significant others) does not necessarily lead to a successful career. The versatility of life shows that many other aspects may influence one's professional development, such as other significant others or life events. However, here I refer to a particular aspect of parents' influence, as significant others, in the teaching profession.

The importance of the sense of self to the teaching job is far from a new idea. Nias (1989) has argued that a teacher's self-image is more important to them as practitioners than "is the case in other occupations where the person can easily be separated from the craft" (Nias, 1989, pp. 202–203). Nevertheless, precisely because of its almost self-evident and presumed character, any attempt to conceptualise teaching needs to include the teacher's concept as a person or and their own sense of self.

Kelchtermans (2009) poses an interesting question: 'Who I am in how I teach?' He tries to find answers to how teaching professionals seek to find understanding about their personal and professional selves, in the context of vulnerabilities and reflection on their personal and professional experiences. In other words, in which ways is the personal identity merged with professional identity? For this study, it is vital to understand the influence Romanian Orthodox Christian parents may exert on their children, and how the relationship with a spiritual father influences his spiritual children, to the extent that this influence can be recognised through behavioural patterns in the children's later professional life.

In the next section, I will analyse how the influence of both parents and spiritual father may manifest itself in the professional practice of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers. Aspects such as relationship with students and peers and self-efficacy will be analysed in detail for a more in-depth and more precise understanding of their influence on professional development.

3.5.3.2. Relationship with students and peers

Bejaard et al (2000) argued that professional identity is linked to teachers' concepts of self. He claimed that the self-image determine how teachers develop their teaching practices, professional relationships, professional development, and attitudes toward educational changes. It is essential to note that the relationship between teachers and students, although professional, is interpersonal. This implies that both teachers and students will bring their own experiences to this relationship. Although teachers have gained a broader life experience than their students, because of their age, people are, as Berger (1967) suggested, "unfinished creatures", which implies that development is a whole-life process. In this relationship, teachers will bring their self, which has been influenced by others, and their behaviour towards their students as a consequence of these influences. In return, relationships with students will be influenced by the teachers' behaviour towards their students. Therefore, the teachers' teaching style and their conception of what the relationship should look like will influence how students' relationships with their teachers are constructed.

In this relationship, teachers act not only on the knowledge they received during their teacher training, but also according to the kind of people they are (Acker, 1999). Thus, there is a relationship between their professional identity as a teacher and the relationship with their students. Because of this relationship, teachers may ask themselves a fundamental question about their professional relationship with their students: "Who am I in this situation?" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999, p. 3). Emphasising who they are rather than who they are not will impact positively on their practice and their relationships with students. For teachers to create development and progress opportunities for their students, they must possess a definite sense of who they are as persons and as professionals (Dewe and Cooper, 2012; Sachs, 2003).

Teachers who express a positive identity in their job are more likely to enable their students to become interested in their education and initiate creative ideas for the lessons (Beijaard et al., 2000). Therefore, a positively influenced self will further influence teachers' relationships with students and, as Keltchermans (2009) argued, they may reflect and interrogate themselves: 'Who am I in how I teach?' The conception a teacher has of himself or herself will affect their trust in others, their relationships and their work. As mentioned previously, it is linked to how people value themselves and to what extent

they have feelings of self-worth. But what would happen with the relationship between teacher and student if the teacher has low self-esteem?

A teacher's self-esteem is important in their relationship with their students, as research has shown. Research (Hargreaves, 2001; Zembylas et al., 2014) showed that the relationship between teacher and students might be a critical 'emotional filter'. If a teacher has been negatively affected personally, he or she may negatively affect the learning of his or her students due to psychological interactions between personal and professional identities. For example, teachers with negative emotions tend to reduce the chances of students utilising a deeper level of cognitive learning approaches (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2011).

In other words, the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, whether positive or negative, will affect the latter's interest, motivation, and ability to learn. We might argue that the lack of a loving relationship (as between spiritual father and spiritual children) will inhibit students or produce anxiety in them. On the other hand, a positive classroom environment that supports students' learning and is initiated by the teacher is more likely to produce a better learning background. The relationship between teachers and students in the classroom could be imagined as the relationship between a spiritual father and spiritual children in the sacred and secure space of confession. This way, the ideal classroom becomes a loving and secure space where students may gain a sense of worth, inspired by the supportive and caring attitude of their teachers.

How teachers behave in the workplace is influenced by the ideas they have about their profession and people with whom they work, be their students or colleagues. As Andersen and Przybylinski (2014) showed, the relationship with significant others might affect future relationships through transference. In other words, a teacher may be inclined to accept, to like, or to dislike students or colleagues based on the similarity between students/colleagues and those significant others that have influenced them in their childhood or adult life.

The professional relationships established at the workplace are also influenced by the perception a teacher has about himself or herself, and possibly by the extent to which one will identify his or her colleagues to significant others. As Hargreaves (2001) pointed out, many jobs that involve interactions with other people call on workers to hide their emotions on many occasions. Teaching is one of those professions that involves

emotional investment. Although teachers may mask their real emotions, a question arises: will that make them feel frustrated or, to the contrary, is it more a matter of managing negative emotions in professional relationships? Therefore, the influence of parents and spiritual father, as significant others, in shaping a self- image which is manifested in professional life, is essential: it may shape professional relationships. The way Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' selves formed positively or negatively due to the relationship with their parents (caregivers) and the relationship with their spiritual father will find expression in their professional relationships as well. If a teacher has developed an understanding of self-value, self-worthiness, self-confidence and self-esteem, they will present themselves with more ease and naturalness in their professional relationships.

I have argued that parents and the spiritual father, as significant others, influence the process of the self-formation of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers. The relationship with these significant others is stored in the unconscious and later, when triggers appear, teachers may show an interest/or rejection of new people which who make them relive the experiences they had with significant others. At the workplace, teachers interact daily with students and other teaching fellows to build individual relationships according to the resemblance they have with significant others. Apart from the relationship with their students and peers, teachers' self- efficacy is another feature that may be influenced by the relationship teachers have developed or develop with significant others.

3.5.3.3. Self-efficacy

Bandura (1997, p. 3) defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required producing given attainments". It does not refer to one's actual abilities to perform specific tasks, but to his or her self-perception of being capable of accomplishing them under given conditions. In other words, it is not what they 'really' can perform, but what they think they can accomplish. There are different levels of self-efficacy, and this is the product of both external (i.e. environment) and internal (i.e., cognitive, affective, biological, and behavioural) factors (Evers et al. 2002). These teaching professionals have developed their emotional world connected to how they value themselves, first concerning their parents, and then, concerning their spiritual father. Thus, much of their emotional world could be located in their childhood. However,

Henson (2001) emphasised that humans are the product neither of biology nor the environment, but rather are the product of the influence of both external and internal factors. In other words, although parents may have a significant influence on Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' emotional world, they do not predetermine their professional lives.

Bandura (1997) emphasised that self-efficacy plays an essential role in people's development, both professional and personal. He underscored the idea that a person's behaviour, motivation, and outcome of their actions, whether success or failure, are the consequence of their self- efficacy. In other words, if Romanian teachers have suffered in their childhood from low self- esteem, or if they did not feel valued by their parents, and if they continue to feel the same way during adult life, and no other positive influences change the perspective of their self, then they will be influenced in their profession by their beliefs of inability to perform specific tasks in a particular context and time. Alternatively, if they strongly connect with a spiritual father and, thus, internalise faith in the divine proxy agency who can intervene in challenging times, then self-efficacy will increase. At this point, it is necessary to remind readers of the risk of relying on the divine proxy agency in an unhealthy way, namely by seeing God solely as an external force Who will intervene without human implication in the process of changing and becoming. Staniloae (1993) speaks about a collaboration between the divine and the human factors. Thus, God will enable people to use their natural gifts to overcome challenging situations or difficulties that arise in their personal and professional lives.

In this study, a link must be created between Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the Orthodox Christian approach to one's beliefs to succeed in a given situation based on the divine proxy agency. This connection must also be understood from the perspective of significant others' influences on the identity of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers. The self-efficacy of individuals plays a significant role in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached. Therefore, it is essential to understand the role significant others play in influencing teachers' self-efficacy. Bandura splits self-efficacy into two categories: strong and weak. He states that people with a strong self-efficacy sense perceived challenges as tasks to be mastered. These people develop deeper interests in their activities, are committed to their activities and interests, and recover quickly from disappointments and setbacks. On the other hand, people with a weak sense of self-efficacy avoid challenging tasks because they believe that difficult situations are beyond

their capabilities, and instead they focus on personal failures and adverse outcomes and lose confidence in their abilities.

To remedy a weak sense of self-efficacy, Bandura identifies four sources for developing it. The first is experiencing success, which is the foremost source of success, both in a person's personal and in their professional life. This success builds further success, and allows people to have a direct experience of mastering a task. The second source of self-efficacy lies in seeing others like us being successful. Seeing others fight challenges and succeeding, can inspire us to overcome challenges. The third source of self-efficacy is receiving specific encouragement, which enables individuals to believe they can accomplish the next tasks they will be given. The fourth source of efficacy is the ability to manage the emotional states that a teacher may experience in both their personal and professional lives.

The main point here is that self-esteem might affect the professional development of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers by influencing their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy expressed in their profession will influence their self-esteem and motivation to perform well in their jobs, even in a challenging situation. To put it differently, self-efficacy allows teachers to confront challenging situations without developing anxiety in new professional situations.

For Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, self-efficacy may be linked to their spiritual life, through their relationship with their spiritual father. In the end, it is about teachers feeling safe in emotionally unsafe situations. Their faith and trust can provide a feeling of safety through the divine proxy agency, which is inspired by their spiritual father. Consequently, overcoming challenging situations will enable them to feel motivated, secure, and confident in their profession, regardless of the challenges that inevitably will arise later. Thus, the relationship with significant others (parents and spiritual father in this research) may indirectly influence how Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers perceive their role in their profession and how they further develop as persons and as effective professionals.

3.5.3.4. The Self-regulation process

Self-efficacy is closely related to self-regulation because controlling behaviour and emotions are essential in being professionally effective, especially in challenging situations. According to Bandura (1991), self-regulation refers to a process through which people can control their behaviour. This process contains three stages: self-observation, judgment and self-response. Self-regulation is the process through which people aim to control themselves. Self-regulation enables people to take control of their emotions, their thoughts, and their behaviour. The emotional and behavioural responses are flexible and match their environment's demands (Bell and Deater-Deckard, 2016).

In Orthodox Christian theology, Bandura's system finds an equivalent in Aimilianos' (2014) interpretation of Saint Hesychios, one of the Early Christian Church writers, who wrote about watchfulness. He recommends that his spiritual children be aware and do not express the thoughts that arise in their minds, as a first step to take control over feelings, moods, and behaviours that may be caused by these thoughts. Instead, he invites them to focus on short prayers, enabling them to act unaffected by fleeting thoughts and emotions.

In the Orthodox Christian teachers' lives the knowledge about self-regulation may reinforce the spiritual literature about the power of watchfulness in taking control over feelings, thoughts and behaviours. The difference between these two ways of understanding self-regulation refers to the personal mystical experience of spiritual experiences and connection with the divine.

In Bandura's social-cognitive theory, human behaviour is considerably determined and regulated by the continuing exercise of self-influence. In other words, people influence themselves in the way they feel and in the way they behave in their given circumstances and environment. Bandura argues that the primary self-regulative mechanism functions through three main subfunctions. These mechanisms include the self-monitoring of one's behaviour, its determinants, and its effects; judgement of one's behaviour concerning personal moral values and environmental circumstances; and the affective self-reaction. In other words, for people to take control of their emotions and behaviour, it is necessary to acknowledge what makes them to feel and behave in a certain way. Monitoring behaviour and feelings, and how these affect one's life, and identifying feelings and behaviours will enable people to understand these feelings, thoughts, and behaviours in

relation to their values. For example, teachers confronted with students' misbehaviour may feel undervalued by their students, and this will produce a variety of feelings, depending on their emotional sensitivities. One teacher could feel frustrated, and another could develop a sense of low self-worthiness. In order to regulate these emerging feelings, they first must be acknowledged, understood, and named. After understanding the behaviour, thoughts, and emotions, teachers will be better able to undertake different approaches to control and regulate those emotions, thoughts, and behaviours that hinder their abilities.

According to Bandura (1991), self-regulation is connected to moral conduct. However, in the latter, the evaluative standards are more stable, the critical factors are complex, and effective self-reactions are intense. Bandura argues that people develop self-regulatory systems, and these systems are at the core of causal processes. Usually, people form beliefs about what they can do; they anticipate the expected consequences of their future actions; they set goals, and plan courses of action that are likely to generate the planned outcomes. Through the exercise of forethought, people motivate and guide themselves to achieve their goals proactively. Bandura (1991) argues that people's capability for deliberate and deliberative actions has its roots in a symbolic activity. Although future events cannot be causes of present motivation and action, they can be converted into current motivators and regulators of behaviour by being cognitively represented in the present.

Thus, people possess the ability to be self-reflective and self-reactive, which can support them in exercising control over their thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions (Bandura, 1991, p. 249). In the exercise of self-directedness, people adopt standards of behaviour that serve as guides and motivators and regulate their actions anticipatorily through self-reactive influence. Human functioning is, thus, an interaction between self-generated and external sources of influence.

Bandura argues that the self-regulatory system functions through a set of psychological subfunctions which should be developed and organised for self-directed change. Bandura and Simon (1977) argued that intention alone does not influence people's ability to change their motivation and behaviour. People need to develop self-control over their thoughts, behaviours, and emotions, which may transform into triggers when they do not accomplish their plans and intentions. The psychological subfunctions of the self-

regulatory system include monitoring, diagnostics, motivation, and self-reactive influences. In the next paragraphs, I will briefly describe each one of them.

The self-monitoring subfunction refers to the adequate attention that people should pay to their performances, the conditions under which these occur, and the immediate and future consequences they produce. The process of self-monitoring comprises pre-existing cognitive structures and self-belief systems, which determine which aspects of one's functioning (Bandura and Simon, 1977, p. 250)

> are given the most attention, how they are perceived, and how performance information is organised for memory representation.

In other words, in the case of this study, Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers will monitor their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in their personal and professional lives. This step is the first to be undertaken in order to be capable of regulating one's self. In this process, the person has to act as a researcher, to observe only, without emotional involvement. At the same time, it is vital to observe the mood state. Self- monitoring serves two essential functions in the process of self-regulation. The first is that it provides the information needed for setting up realistic goals; the second is its power to evaluate one's progress towards them. In other words, self-observation of acts and mood will offer the first piece in the puzzle of taking control over oneself. After observation of the thoughts, emotions, and acts, a diagnosis of the behaviour is needed.

The self-diagnostic function is the second subfunction of the self-regulation process. It is provided through a systematic self-monitoring activity. Observing thought patterns, emotional and behavioural reactions, and the conditions under which these occur, enable people to notice recurrent patterns. Analysing the covariation between situations and their thoughts and actions will enable people to understand their environment's psychological features that led them to behave in a certain way. In other words, repeated observation of the thoughts, emotions, and behaviour will lead to the detection of a recurrent pattern. People are used to repeating what they have learnt. For those who know how to alter their behaviour in different circumstances, the self-insights so gained can set in motion a corrective change process. To discover what features influence their psychological functioning and well-being, people need to systematically vary things in their daily lives and note the accompanying personal changes.

Simultaneously, people can understand how thinking affects their emotional states by altering their habitual patterns and observing the accompanying effects. As Bandura argued, "self- knowledge provides direction for self-regulatory control." (Bandura, 1991, p. 251). In Orthodox Christian theology, during the process of self-regulation, at this point one will confess to his or her spiritual father the recurrent thoughts, moods, and behaviours. The reason is that the spiritual father contributes to his spiritual child an understanding of himself or herself. He may give some advice, but his aim, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is to direct spiritual children to understand and know themselves in their spiritual relationship with God. Therefore, a spiritual father may guide a Romanian teacher if they find it useful to involve their spiritual father in the complex process of self-regulation. Nevertheless, the spiritual father's role is not to give them direction, but to help them find their direction in their personal, spiritual, and professional life.

Bandura and Cervone's study (1983) showed that when people are closely monitoring their performances, they are motivated to set themselves progressive improvement goals. For example, goal setting joins evaluative self-reactions that activate efforts toward goal attainment. Some people are informed by their performances and set goals based on that; other people set goals spontaneously (Bandura and Cervone, 1983). For Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers setting a personal, spiritual, and professional development goal is both informed and spontaneous. For example, one could be inspired to set professional goals after reading about Christian vocation in the world. Others, analysing their professional performances, will set other goals. However, this pattern can be applied to their personal and spiritual lives as well. For example, an Orthodox Christian teacher may set as a goal to react more positively in front of challenges brought by students' misbehaviour, and they may aim to behave according to their faith, meaning that they inspire love, trust, and a sense of security in their students. After observing and diagnosing the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, they will evaluate their validity, and thus reach the next phase of the self-regulation process.

Thus, the judgemental subfunction is the third essential component of a self-regulation system, which provides more profound information about one's behavioural and emotional patterns in given situations. Observing patterns of behaviour and effect is the first step in changing it, but without interpreting it, such information will provide little basis for self-directed reactions. Thus, interpreting the behaviours, thoughts, and

emotions is vital to know how to control them. In Orthodox Christianity, a person may seek guidance from his or her spiritual father again. Nonetheless, the spiritual father has the spiritual authority to judge those behaviours, emotions, and thoughts that may affect one's personal and spiritual life. He does not, however, have the professional competence to judge professional actions.

Nevertheless, he can use spiritual guidance to enable teachers to judge their professional actions by themselves. This judgmental subfunction has, in turn, several subsidiary processes, such as personal standards, social referential comparisons, valuation of activities, and perceived performance determinants. Personal standards are formed partly as a consequence of how significant people respond to one's behaviour. Eventually, they may also judge themselves by evaluative standards revealed in others' social sanctions (Bandura, 1991). In the case of this study, where parents and spiritual fathers are considered to be the most influential people in the life of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, significant others may represent a source of condemnation and/or appreciation. Thus, their behaviours, emotions, and thoughts will be judged by reference to how these significant others reacted to them in the past. Social referential comparisons, the second subsidiary process of the judgemental subfunction, refers to judging one in relation to others' attainments. If the activities people want to perform increase their self- esteem, then those activities are valuable, and people will show certain self-reactions and be motivated to self-regulate their emotions.

Self-reactive influences are another component of the self-regulation process. According to Bandura, they provide the mechanism by which standards regulate courses of action. Self- regulatory control is realised by creating impulses for one's actions and anticipative affective reactions to one's behaviour, depending on how it measures up to an internal standard. In other words, after a person will judge his or her performance, either personal, professional or spiritual, he or she will react based on that reasoning.

Self-incentives affect behaviour through their motivational functioning. Reaching specific goals influences people to be motivated to reach further goals and control their behaviour, emotions, and actions to attain that goal. The effective use of self-incentives is one factor that differentiated people who succeed in regulating their motivation and behaviour to achieve what they seek from those who are unsuccessful in their self-regulatory efforts (Perry and Richards, 1977; Zimmerman, 1989).

Moreover, this capability of self-regulating behaviour through self-evaluative reactions is uniquely human. Self-evaluation directs behaviour and creates motivators for it. Evaluative self-incentives are, therefore, used in the service of behaviour and reflect on personal competence. If these match their values, they will enable people to take actions to accomplish their goals.

To conclude, self-regulation is a complex process through which one becomes able to control himself or herself to develop either personally or professionally. This complex process involves, as has been shown, three main subfunctions: self-monitoring, self-diagnostic and the role of judgmental subfunction. These subfunctions determine whether a person is or will be able to control himself or herself in the process of becoming a fulfilled person and professional. In the case of this study, Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers will follow the same process as any other person, regardless of their faith. However, during this process of taking control over their thoughts, behaviours, and emotions, they may seek their spiritual father's support and guidance. The spiritual assistance a spiritual father gives to his spiritual children in this process is not controlling and influencing their way, but his support is meant to enable them to find the way they look for themselves.

3.5.3.5. Peer regulation and the sacrament of confession

The spiritual guidance a spiritual father gives to his spiritual children is most often encountered in the Orthodox Christian mystery of Confession. The sacrament of Confession is one of the seven sacraments within Orthodox Christian practice, as discussed in section 3.5. on spiritual fatherhood. Bloom (2009) has called it a personal encounter with God. In this sense, confession may become a place where teachers can regulate their emotions from the past, or even current events and challenges. In confession, Christians, ideally, learn to understand how to discern their thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. As Kragiopoulos (2008) argued, a professional transformation will follow these spiritual and personal transformations. This way, Christian teachers may learn how to regulate their emotions in relationship with their spiritual father, who represents Christ, in the safe and secure space of confession, just as a child feels safe and

secure in the presence of its loving mother (Bowlby, 1988). This way self-regulation transforms into peer-regulation, in which one is not confronted with the past and present alone, but stands in front of it accompanied by a spiritual father.

Peer regulation becomes possible in confession but only under certain conditions, and it works only if both spiritual father and believer are deeply committed to their relationship (Sakharov, 1958; Vlachos, 2013). Confession is not psychotherapy, and the spiritual father does not or should not act as a psychotherapist although, through his actions and behaviour, he may facilitate the psychological and spiritual healing.

The primary condition under which the relationship between a spiritual father and his spiritual children, manifested in confession, may contribute to teachers' self-regulation is a humble attitude (Kragiopoulos, 2008; Sakharov, 1958). Such an argument could sound paradoxical, as two seemingly opposing attitudes are joined together: being humble, which implies seeking for somebody else's support, and self-regulation, which implies a solitary process. At this point, a definition of humility within Orthodox Christianity is required in order to understand the place of humility in the process of self/peer regulation. Kragiopoulos (2017) defined humility this way: "Embrace yourself as you are. That's being humble".

In other words, he suggests that the acceptance of one's spiritual, emotional state, and at the same time the initiating actions for healing, which in spiritual terms is called repentance, are necessary for healing. The state and act of repentance are opposed to self-condemnation, self- contempt, sorrow, and continuous self-blaming. Thus, humility is the acknowledgement and acceptance of one's spiritual, personal, or professional state, without condemnation yet with a trustful attitude that things can be straightened. The second condition that teachers have to fulfil in the peer-regulation process is to show a deep commitment to their spiritual life and to their spiritual father. Bloom (2015) suggests that this second condition is essential. In other words, a deep commitment refers to a person's personal and spiritual engagement in their relationship with their spiritual father in confession in order to overcome or to regulate past emotions which affect their present personal and professional life. Humility and deep commitment to their spiritual life and to their spiritual father are the two necessary conditions that Christian teachers must fulfil to begin the process of self/peer regulation through the sacrament of confession.

Now, I will analyse and discuss how the process of self/peer-regulation works in Confession, through forgiveness, which is directed towards others and towards oneself. Kragiopoulos (2008) suggests that the healing from the past comes in confession through the act of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a healing process which has become of central interest in many areas of research such as psychology (Enright et al., 1998), psychotherapy (Vitz and Meade, 2011), sociology (Oliner, 2009) and, of course, theology (Gassin, 2001; Bloom, 2009). Therefore, the concept of forgiveness can be analysed from these angles. Berry (2005) defines forgiveness as "the replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive, other- orientated emotions that change one's life." In other words, forgiveness is a process, meaning that it does not happen suddenly, but rather consists of understanding the other, the self, the connection between the self and the other, and bringing the forgiver in a new state of empathic compassion. This process is a step by step one and requires time and effort to be fulfilled (Enright et al., 1998; Berry, 2005). An important detail has been noted by Worthington (1990): people have different levels of capacity to forgive. Therefore, the process will be slower or faster, depending on one's psychological and spiritual capacities to forgive.

Forgiveness becomes a process through which a person can self/peer regulate their emotions or to heal them from past hurt, as this action reduces the negative emotions, restoring a sense of wellbeing, improving physical and mental health, and restoring a sense of personal power (Enright and The Human Development Study Group, 1991). Forgiveness enables people to find a sense of equilibrium, inner peace and, finally, reconciliation with oneself. The process of forgiveness also implies a deep commitment to it, and a process based more on duty or fear of retaliation, as could be the case for Christians, will not bring any benefit in the more extensive process of self/peer regulation (McCullough & Worthington, 1994). Although the studies on forgiveness have different landmarks, they echo the same central idea: forgiveness enables people to restore themselves and regulate their past, present, and provide them with psychological and spiritual resources for their personal and professional development. However, the reasons why Christian teachers decide to regulate themselves will bring forward different paths in their personal and professional development.

Apart from the other's forgiveness, there is another type of forgiveness: self-forgiveness, or intrapersonal forgiveness. This process seems to be more complicated than the former (Trainer, 1981). Bauer et al. (1999) points out that the general movement of self-

forgiveness can be described as: "one from estrangement to feeling at home, from darkness to light, from deception and denial to honesty and acknowledgement."

In other words, self-forgiveness is a development in which one feels accepted and worthy of being loved. The process is neither smooth nor linear. Moreover, it involves struggle and fluctuation between acceptance and punitive judgment. The love of significant others, acceptance, and recognition are essential to overcome our anger, hatred, mistakes, and ignorance, to name just a few possible disturbing emotions. In the case of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, the spiritual father represents one of these significant others who may give the needed support to self-forgive, love, understand, and give space when one is struggling with forgiveness. Bauer et al. (1992, p. 156) cite from the experience of a woman who experienced fatherly love from her confessor:

> . . . the sacramental moment was when I confessed to being angry at my husband. . ..and the priest said it's not a sin to be angry. And I remember looking up at him just totally astounded that this was not a sin. ... As I looked at the priest   It was as though I was looking into the eyes of love.

Therefore, this woman experiences the feeling of being loved, although she found herself in a state of sinfulness. Feeling safe, feeling that she will not be abandoned for her sins, feeling that she is more than her actions and thoughts, feeling that she is worthy of love for who she is as a human being, she allows herself to be forgiven. She realises that her spiritual father's love, which echoes God's love, is not conditioned by her actions. Therefore, she receives forgiveness from herself and God through her spiritual father, feeling healed, recovered and transformed. Forgiveness and self-forgiveness do not mean excusing or exempting oneself from the responsibility of one's actions and mistakes. A pang of guilt can be forgiven without cancellation of the consequences. Forgiveness is an act of love that can restore the one who made a mistake and free them. In the free act of love, the one who forgives should freely acknowledge the choice he or she made and expect nothing from the forgiven person (Bloom, 2009).

However, to reach forgiveness there are a few steps that must be taken (Enright, 1991). The first step is the experience of awareness of adverse psychological consequences; the second step is developing a sense of need for resolution; the third step refers to deciding among resolution strategies; the fourth refers to examining reasons for forgiveness; finally, the last step is about the decision to forgive. Additionally, according to

Cunningham (1985), forgiveness requires the injured party to view the offenders with empathy, considering their context. Summarising the information about forgiveness as a possible transformational process within confession, then, we could argue that this complex process may improve a person's (teacher's) capacity to develop their psychosocial qualities and their ability to self/peer regulate their negative emotions. I will provide a concrete example of how these steps could work in practice, teachers may use the process proposed by Enright (1991) in the classroom when, for example, tensions arise between a teacher and a student. The first step a teacher may undertake is to reflect on how the student's behaviour, and their own response to this behaviour, may affect both of their emotional states. The second step would be that teachers should feel that they have to make a decision in order to change the tense situation. Then, they should decide what is most appropriate in the given context. After that, they can reflect on why they should forgive their misbehaving student, and in the end will come the decision to forgive the misbehaver. This decision will also change teachers' attitude towards their students, perceiving them with greater empathy.

The last point regarding confession and the process of self/peer regulation in this section refers to its practical outcomes in one's personal and professional life. According to Kragiopoulos (2008), one practical outcome is self-acceptance and the acceptance of others as they are, and the understanding of their actions in the context of their life stories, trying to perceive them with empathy and compassion (Cunningham, 1985). A good understanding of the process of self/peer regulation in confession will prevent teachers from the unconscious transference of their experiences on others (either student, colleagues). Being empathetic rather than remaining in a state of regret and unhappiness for what happened in the past, regarding relationships with significant others, will help teachers to become more resilient to daily tasks and professional challenges.

In this way, Confession (spirituality) becomes a place for transformation where teachers can learn how to regulate emotions experienced in relationship with significant others. Paradoxically, teachers' possible transformation appears to be both a rational and a meta-rational process, involving the various aspects of the self.

Therefore, confession (as a place and a process within the more extensive self-regulation process) is for Orthodox Christian teachers a place where they collaborate with their spiritual father to overcome the harmful effects of relationships with significant others and other damaging events in their lives.

In the process of self/peer regulation, a critical role is played by personal agency and divine proxy agency, about which Bandura (2013) has developed a new theory. In the next section, I will refer to Bandura's (2013) theory on personal agency and divine proxy agency, and then I will analyse different congruencies between these two types of agency in the act of prayer. Prayer, a spiritual practice met in all religions and spiritualties, will be analysed through the lenses of Bandura's (2013) agency theory.

3.5.3.6. Prayer, Personal Agency and the divine proxy agency

In the personal and professional development of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, an important role is played by the personal agency which Bandura mainly discusses in his socio- cognitive theory. The divine proxy agency plays a particular part here. As Bandura (2013) noted, in many ways people do not have direct control over conditions that influence their lives. In such circumstances, people turn to what Bandura called the proxy agency, which represents others who have the "resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire" (p. 6). For instance, those who manifest devotion to religious faith turn to a divine agency to change the possible events.

The connection between personal agency and divine proxy agency could be reached through prayer. Prayer is a religious or spiritual action which facilitates communication with the divine. Prayer, the very soul of any religion, was defined by Philips (1965) as an inner communion and conversation with the divine. In other words, prayer is an inner spiritual state in which one experiences communication with the divine. In Orthodox Christianity, prayer is an action through which one freely invokes the divine to respond to the calling. In this action of call and response two agencies are involved. The first is the personal agency of those who pray, and the second is the divine agency, which is always considered to be in the proximity, and this agency belongs to God. For this reason, Bandura uses the term 'divine proxy agency' to describe God's presence in humans' lives. In this encounter, people experience eternal life in a spiritual world where "the life of the Self-existing God flows into us" (Sakharov, 1999, p. 9). In other words, humans' personal agency opens to the divine proxy agency, in the act of freedom of both. This inner act of human spirit (Sakharov, 2013) can be expressed in the most diverse forms, keeping in mind what Phillips (1965) said, cited at the beginning of this section, about prayer being

"every kind of inner communion or conversation with the power recognised as the divine".

In this study, prayer as an Orthodox Christian practice find its place in understanding the influence of significant others in the lives and profession of Orthodox Christian teachers and the process of healing and the reconciliation of the past with the present. In this sense, Sakharov (1977, p. 9) reminds Christians about the power of God, Who "can see the depths of our hearts, all the wishes of our hearts that we are unable to express through words". In other words, prayer is not only verbal, but more an inner state of awareness of God's presence in humans' most painful experiences that cannot be expressed through words, however comfortable practising prayer may sound. Sakharov (1977) observed that contemporary people have an incapacity to practice prayer daily or even occasionally. He explained this phenomenon by the increase of their intellectual activities:

> Our mind is in constant agitation because of countless impressions of all kinds: visual and auditory. In the morning, people start working in villages and towns, which trains the mind and imagination in the events in which they participate.

In this sense, prayer becomes a spiritual activity that requires attention and awareness to provide the healing and restoration of the psyche and spirit or, in other words, to provide the person who prays with healing.

The influence of significant others can be observed at different levels of a person's personality: the rational level, which in this study refers to how one thinks about her or himself and the world; then follows the psychological level, which refers to how one experiences, perceives, and interprets the events in his or her life; and lastly we have the spiritual level, which refers to how one includes the first two in his or her spiritual understanding about the world. I will look closely at each of these aspects and their connections with agency and prayer.

3.5.3.7. Agency, Prayer and Mind

There is a close relationship between agency, prayer, and mind. According to Sakharov (2014), the mind has a vital role in prayer. The mind is defined in the Oxford Dictionary

as, the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, to think, and to feel; the faculty of consciousness and thought.

In other words, rationality deals with the cognitive features of the human personality, and enables us to conceptualise and understand the world around us, interpret the events in our lives, and be aware of who we are and of the experiences we go through. As mentioned previously, through the mind, people interpret their experiences. Therefore, in the context of this study, teachers interpret their personal experiences with significant others and give them a particular personal meaning, and then express that meaning in their personal and professional lives. The interpretation is an act of human agency in which one expresses his or her unique personality.

What is the link between agency, prayer, and rationality in regulating the emotions created by significant others and the teaching profession? According to Aimilianos (2014), a person cleanses his or her mind through prayer, which means that no thoughts occur in the mind, especially not any negative ones. Human minds are restless, which means it is almost impossible to stop humans thinking only through an act of will. Aimilianos also emphasises this idea, arguing for replacing thoughts by prayer to create a state of mindfulness (he recommends a short prayer that will allow the mind to focus, such as "Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me".

Therefore, an Orthodox Christian will express his or her agency through prayer in healing the mind from negative thoughts, which may come from past experiences, from a mental pattern developed in childhood in relationship with significant others and manifested in adult life, whether personal and professional. Although the mind is a significant factor in how a person conducts his or her life, an essential role is also played by emotions, which often dictate the state of mind. Often, what people feel influence what decisions they make. In this sense, the mind is influenced by the heart. On the one hand, negative emotions may induce insecurity, and therefore, one may develop negative thoughts. On the other hand, experiencing a state of faith, feeling loved by God may develop security thoughts. No matter what type of thoughts and emotions one may experience, it can be acknowledged that these influence one another.

3.5.3. 8. Agency, Prayer, and Emotions

Emotions have been given much scholarly attention over the years. Early studies by James and Lange (1922) understood emotions as reactions of the nervous system to specific events, where the nervous system creates reactions such as anger, fear, sadness, and happiness as a consequence of physical reactions (trembling, heart rate). As time passed, scientists moved on from this theory to other theories. Cannon (1927) considered the physical reaction as being simultaneous to the experience of emotions. A few years later (1962), Schachter and Singer (1962) brought a new element to understanding emotions, namely the reasoning, which seems to play an essential role in how people experience emotions.

Meriam and Webster (2016) summarise the various definitions of emotions as follows:

> a conscious mental reaction subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed towards a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological changes in the body.

In other words, emotions are a complex state, which involves a psychological state and physical manifestations and mental representations of the lived experiences. Kragiopoulos (2008) argued that emotions might shape one another and influence how one develops personality and profession.

In prayer, people experience and express their emotions frequently, if not always. Kragiopoulos (2008) argues that emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger or any other negative emotional expressions distort what he calls 'real natural emotions'. By 'real natural emotions' he means that the negative emotions people experience, such as anger for example, have different roots. For example, anger is rooted in the spiritual fight against passions. By redirecting the role of anger, anger is used against people rather than one's passions, as was initially intended by God. The difference consists in the interpretation of experiences. How can a person's agency, prayer, and emotions be connected to understand and find new meanings in relation to the influence significant others have had in Romanian Orthodox Christian lives and professions?

In prayer, as mentioned previously, people express their emotions about a certain day, event, or even their lives. Wilson (2012) encourages bringing emotions, especially

negative emotions, into prayer, as a method through which one's psyche can be healed. As a result, emotions can regain their natural purpose.

In prayer, agency should have more influence over emotions, and these should be silenced just as with thoughts, in a state of full awareness of the presence of divine agency. The negative emotions one may have experienced during childhood, which manifest as behavioural patterns (such as anxiety, fear), can be changed or tamed through prayer, in a state of full awareness of God's presence (Kragiopoulos, 2008) in their lives, either personal or professional.

3.6. Summary of the chapter

This chapter has explored the thesis' main concepts: significant others, spiritual fatherhood, self, and personal and professional development. Given that personal and professional are connected, at the beginning of the chapter I discussed the importance of significant others in people's lives, as well as who these significant others might be. Next, I connected the theory around the significant others to the theory about the self, in order to understand how significant others may influence self-formation and personal and professional identity. Here, it emerged that besides parents, whose influence has been given ample attention in research, a spiritual father may also become a significant other for Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, and their influence might be even more potent than the influence of parents.

The chapter also discussed how the influence exerted by parents and spiritual fathers could shape teachers' professional practice, such as their relationships with students and peers, with the profession itself and self-efficacy and, finally, how self-regulation can enable teachers to overcome possible negative influences coming from significant others.

The conceptual framework of this chapter was based on James' (1890) theory about the self, Sullivan's (1953) interpersonal theory, Bowlby and Ainsworth's (1991) attachment theory, Klein's (1932) object relation theory, and Barbu's (2015), Zizioulas' (2006) and Ware's (1974) conceptualisation of spiritual fatherhood within Orthodox Christian theology. These scholars' theoretical frameworks brought together valuable information from developmental psychology (Sullivan, 1953; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Klein,

1932), professional development (Bandura, 1986), spiritual fatherhood (Barbu, 2015; Zizoulas, 2006; Ware, 1974). The intersection between these three areas of research is the missing gap which this study aims to cover, namely the role and influence of significant others in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives, and the role of confession, prayer, and agency in teachers' professional development.

After explaining the conceptual framework of my thesis, I move to the next chapter, which was difficult to position within this thesis. It is the theoretical background of paradox, which can, paradoxically, be included in the literature review or to methodology chapter, as a tool to explain my participants' spiritual experiences and influences in their personal and professional lives.

Chapter four: Paradox

4.1. Introduction

This chapter comes as a supplement to the Literature Review and Methodology chapters. It does not fit in any of them, as the first deals with the main concepts of this research, which are significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality, and the second, presenting how this research was conducted and how data was analysed. Therefore, a chapter about paradox, which illuminates better why and how this concept illustrates my participants' spiritual experiences in the context of their personal and professional lives, was a necessity for my study.

The previous chapter explored the theoretical concepts that frame this research in the context of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development. Concepts such as significant others, self, personal identity, professional identity, spiritual father, interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, and self-regulation were explored and critically reflected on, in order to set up the foundation on which the experience of the teachers involved in this study will be examined.

In this chapter, I explore the concept of paradox. I aim to give meaning to my participants' stories, and to my story, with paradox as a tool used in Orthodox Christian theology to explain spiritual experiences. The need to write this chapter came as a consequence of the inadequacy of the auto/biographical methodology in understanding human spiritual experiences. It does not replace the methods I have used to analyse my participants' narratives (these are explained in chapter on methodology), but it completes them to understand what is difficult to comprehend. Paradox is not a concept to which much attention has been given over the years, except in Christian Orthodox theology, which has worked with this tool since the theological writings and theological debates (at ecumenical councils) of the Holy Fathers (Saint Basil the Great, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Gregory the Great) of the Early Christian Church from the fourth to the eighth century.

This short chapter consists of three main sections, which clarify the concept and the role of paradox in this thesis. The first section, which is more general, presents how ideas about this concept havs developed over the centuries. The second section, which is more

specific, looks at paradox as it is understood in Orthodox Christian spirituality, as it is the core of this research.

The last section is even more specific, and links the theory to the practice, by examining the role of paradox in the context of my research.

By using this concept to complete the auto/biographical methodology, for better understanding, human spiritual experiences do not guarantee a full and deep understanding of my participants' stories, as this is not possible to happen, given the complexity of human beings. Having explained why it was necessary the introduction of a separate chapter about paradox in this thesis, I will present in the next section how this concept evolved over centuries in order to understand its place and its use in my thesis.

4.2. Paradox over the centuries

The word 'paradox' comes from the Greek 'para' (beyond) and 'doxa' (belief) and, as Rescher (2001) stated:

> Paradox is literally a contention or group of contentions that is incredible - beyond belief. In the root sense of the term, paradoxes are thus a matter of far-fetched opinions, curious ideas, outlandish occurrences and such-like anomalies in general that run counter to ordinary expectations.

In other words, paradoxes go beyond regular thinking, and although not illogical, they become 'curious' in a group of ideas brought together, contradicting predictable expectations.

Scholars have defined paradox in various ways. Eliason (1996, p. 341) states that a "paradox is an affirmation, an argument or a situation self-contradictory or counterintuitive."

Smith and Lewis (2011, p. 382) defined paradox as "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exists simultaneously and persist over time". In other words, a paradox is composed of two components. The first component refers to underlying tensions, which individually seem logical, but when they are put together, they become inconsistent and

even absurd. The second component of paradox refers to responses that embrace tensions simultaneously (Lewis, 2000). As previously mentioned, the paradox is a concept that has come to us from Ancient Greek philosophers. It is known as an antinomy, a logically self-contradictory statement, or as Wesstein (2019) suggests, it is a statement that contradicts one's expectations. As noted, the concept of paradox goes back to Ancient Greece, although philosophers, such as Zeno of Elea (500 B.C.) never called it that, and Aristotle named them 'arguments' (logoi). Another term used by Plato and Aristotle to name such phenomena was 'sophisms' although, as Rescher (2001) said, it is improbable that the Sophists themselves used this to describe their arguments. Another term used by the Ancient Greeks to describe paradox was aporia, which designed a difficult problem to understand and solve. Greek stoics have dedicated much attention to the subject of paradoxes. In the Early Christian Church, Holy Fathers of the Christian Church such as John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, or Gregory the Theologian primarily used paradox to explain Christian dogma. For example, Christians perceive God as one being in three different Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; or, the dogma of incarnation, where Jesus Christ is human and God at the same time.

Later, in the Middle Ages, medieval scholars were intrigued by the concept, calling it 'insolubilia'. Kant treated these cognitive issues under the name of paralogisms or antinomies (Kant, 1997). However, in the nineteenth century, the concept of "paradox" began to be used in many areas, such as organizational theory (Quinn and Cameron, 2011). In Orthodox Christian theology, the concept of paradox has been used since its beginning (more about this in Section 5.3).

Rescher (2001, p.4) distinguishes between rhetorical and logical paradoxes. A logical paradox indicates a "communicative predicament – a conflict of what is asserted, accepted, or believed". For example, in Orthodox Christian dogma, God is conceived as one God, but with three consubstantial hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are one God in three Divine Persons, distinct yet of one substance, essence, or nature.

A rhetorical paradox is "an anomalous juxtaposition of incongruous ideas for the sake of striking exposition or unexpected insight" (p.4). For example, "Freud was not Freudian", "nature imitates art", "truth standing on her head to elicit attention", "the Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule" (Shaw, 1903), or "I can resist everything except temptation"

(Beckson, 1997). Rhetorical paradoxes are duplicitous formulations that cross the thin borderline between sense and nonsense (Rescher, 2001).

In the twentieth century, much attention has been given to paradox, both as a concept and as a tool, to understand tensions in other areas apart from Christian theology and philosophy where it has been used for more than two thousand years. In organisational theory, a paradox has become of great interest in the past twenty years, with scholars (such as Smith and Lewis, 2011; Quinn and Cameron, 1998) adopting the paradox perspective to understand the tensions within an organisation and how managers can use tensions to develop creativity and problem- solving.

However exciting and captivating the theory of paradoxes may be, this study is limited to understanding the paradoxes within Orthodox Christian theology and the teaching profession. Therefore, after illuminating how the concept of paradox developed over centuries and its use, the next section will discuss the literature about paradox existing in Orthodox Christian theology to make connections between theory about paradox and my thesis.

4.3.   Paradox and the Orthodox Christian Theology and Spirituality

Paradox and Orthodox religion have much in common. The 'dox', at the end of both words, has its root in the Greek word 'doxa', as mentioned in the previous section. 'Doxa' means 'belief' or 'opinion'. Parseinos (2009) argues that these terms have much more in common than the linguistic root, which in the later Christian usage meant 'glory', suggests, but only as an extension of its old philosophical meaning, which was 'belief'. If 'doxa' is 'belief' and 'orthe' is 'straight', then orthe doxa will mean 'straight belief'. Similarly, 'para doxa', or paradox, is 'beyond belief'. A paradox contradicts what it is commonly believed to be accurate. Orthodox theology presents us with things that contradict what might commonly be believed to be accurate. Thus, very often, what is Orthodox becomes a Paradox (Parseinos, 2009).

There are many paradoxes within Orthodox Christian theology. One of these refers to the Holy Trinity's Christian dogma (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), also mentioned in the previous section. The one God, in essence, is three in hypostasis. Jesus Christ, the Son of

God, born before all ages, is God, like His Father and the Holy Spirit. However, he was incarnated from the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit, and became man. Therefore, on Earth, He was man and God at the same time. The Church Fathers say that God became Man, so that men may be like God (Saint Athanasius, 2012). In other words, the immortal God became mortal so that mortals be immortal. He took our vulnerabilities upon himself, tolerating our faults and showing compassion, mercy, and acceptance when people thought they deserved less.

Another paradox within Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality is the combination between mercy and justice, because of our contemporary philosophical, psychological and political ideologies and commitments to these. Often, people fall on one side or the other of this division. We cannot easily imagine that mercy and justice can exist both at the same time. However, within Orthodox Christian spirituality God is considered merciful and just at the same time. He is just, meaning that he wants people to follow the commandments, whose main focus is the cultivation of love for Him and for all people. When people fail to follow the love commandment, consequences arise, and God shows His justice. However, at the same time He proves to be merciful because He supports people who show repentance and empowers them to overcome the consequences of their acts.

These are only a few of the multitude of examples found in Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality. We could ask ourselves a question now: what is the purpose of the paradox in Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality? Freeman (2016) argues that the purpose of paradox, which (together with mystery) often frames something unknowable, is the "knowing". However, the knowledge in Orthodox Christianity is not a synonym to information, but instead to participation, as becomes clear in John 17: 25–26:

> O, righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me. Moreover, I have declared to them Your name and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

It is a knowledge that dwells in people, and this knowledge cannot be acquired by information or by a system of ideas. Spiritual knowledge is experiential and transformative. On the one hand, people experience things all the time and are changed by lived experiences. On the other hand, the experience Saint John speaks about dwells

in people, and it communicates a new life to them. Paradoxically, this knowledge is Christ Himself. In Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality, He is considered the One who gives knowledge and He is the knowledge itself, which transforms one's life. Acknowledging this is difficult, but in chapters seven and nine, where the biographies of the participants Zoe and father Agapios are analysed, it becomes clearer how paradox explains participants' experiences.

Freeman (2016) argues that paradox is an inherent means of saving knowledge and that its presence in Scripture aims to provide access to a form of knowledge that cannot be communicated otherwise. At a practical level, in the Orthodox Church's liturgical life (the services), the paradox is often encountered. Moreover, the hymns of the Church delight in paradox and contradiction. They urge the heart to enter into this mystical bounty.

In other words, to experience an encounter with God in Church services, one is invited to be open to paradoxes and contradictions that they will hear in the church, and which speak about Christian dogma, mystery, and church life. The same author highlights that the experience encountered through paradox is often a necessary condition for accessing spiritual knowledge.

The tensions that exist in paradox are not frustrating and do not antagonise the Orthodox Christians who live with paradoxes in their lives. The teachings of the Orthodox Christian's faith are paradoxical, as is the language used in the liturgical acts of the Church and of its clergy and believers. Within Orthodox Christianity, accepting theological paradoxes is an act of faith and, additionally, according to the same Orthodox Christian spirituality, faith may bring more illumination to understand that which is logically incomprehensible.

The liturgical language of the Orthodox Christian services emphasises the paradoxicality of faith. For example, they express how the Creator became a creature, how the invisible became visible, how the immaterial became material or how eternity entered into time. There is no need to justify the existing paradoxes in the Christian Church. In Festal Menaion, December 25, Mattins, Lauds, a service book, we can read that:

Today Christ is born of the Virgin in Bethlehem. Today He Who knows no beginning now begins to be, and the Word is made flesh.

In other words, the chant proclaims the incarnation dogma of the Son of God from a virgin. The liturgical hymns' language is paradoxical and also the language of other writings, such those of the fathers of the Church or Christian writers. For example, Augustine enjoins two opposite states: "Dilige, et quod vis fac", which translates into English as "Love, and do what you please". At first sight, this command seems to be at odds with the central Christian teachings about love. On the one hand, doing things out of love is not always morally right, since, as Hopkins (2017) states, there is no guarantee that they are morally right. The second part of Augustine's formula opens the door to self-deception from a Christian perspective.

In Scripture, Saint Paul encourages believers to give God thanks for all things, which includes disasters, diseases, injuries, as well as good things. This advice is paradoxical, if not antagonising. In this context, Christians are exhorted to be grateful. Hopkins (2017) reminds that the concept of showing gratitude receives its ordinary meaning from contexts in which something good has happened, or something terrible has been avoided.

Similarly, in his epistle to Romans (8:28), Saint Paul claims that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" which also sounds morally confusing and counterintuitive. However, a person can believe that all of the things they suffer work together with the right things for their souls and others' well-being.

These are only a few examples of the Orthodox Christian Church's paradoxical language to express Christians' spiritual experiences and the teachings behind them. In the next section, I link the theory about the paradox to my study.

4. 4. Paradox and my study

There are three main connections that can be made between paradox and my study, which is why I decided to make paradox part of this thesis. The first refers to Romanian teaching professionals' development, the second aspect refers to these teachers' Orthodox Christian faith and spiritual experiences, and the last one refers to the Romanian Orthodox Christian relationship with significant others. These three aspects of the lives of

Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers intersect in this study and are better explained and revealed through paradoxes.

As mentioned in the previous section, Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality are full of paradoxes. Likewise, the practical life of the Orthodox Christians becomes full in paradoxes. In the teaching profession, Orthodox Christian teachers, for whom faith is an active part of their lives, encounter many paradoxes and contradictions which are resolved through understanding the role of paradoxes in their lives, which may be transformative (Freedman, 2016).

One connection refers to teachers' relationship with their students, especially with their misbehaving students. Saint Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to be grateful for all experiences they go through and to approach people with love no matter how much harm they might suffer. In the teaching profession, teachers have many occasions to experience Saint Paul's message. If generally human behaviour is unpredictable (Lieberban, 2013), then I would argue children's behaviour could be even more unpredictable than adults, giving that they are not fully developed, either affectively or cognitively. Therefore, teachers could be, most of the time, challenged by their students' behaviour. A question may arise at this point: How do teachers perceive their students in the light of their faith and in the context of permanent changeability? In the light of their faith, teachers may approach their students carefully, perceiving them with much responsibility and appreciation. They may see them as the image of God, as people who were placed into their hands in order to be educated and guided towards personal development. Teachers could learn to perceive their students beyond their actions and to understand the reasons why children misbehave. Or, at least, they will seek to approach them this way, as teachers themselves may have a past to contend with or to overcome. This intersection of teachers who struggle with their past, which interferes in the relationship with students, and their faith, gives birth to tensions and contradictions. On the one hand, they know that children need to be regarded with much understanding, compassion, acceptance, and love in the light of their faith. On the other hand, teachers may experience frustrations with (misbehaved) children who remind them about their past relationships, projecting onto those students the image of significant others (Anderson and Miranda, 2000). As Delors (1996, p. 145) stated: "The powerful relationship between teacher and learner is central to the teaching process". In other words, the teaching and learning processes are

characterised by interaction, reciprocity, and agency. Each relationship between teacher and student is specific and unique.

How do teachers solve these daily tensions they encounter? One possible answer (at the moment is an assumption) could be through acceptance and patience, or through healing the past by creating a deeper relationship with a new significant other who may, in their case, be a spiritual father, whose role is to guide people to know themselves, to accept themselves, and finally to love themselves (Barbu, 2015).

However, love does not exist without inner connectedness amongst human beings, as it seeks openness and mutual trust. Bratanic (1993) argues that the obstacle to the appearance of love is fear, which is very frequent in teacher-student relations. The presence of fear excludes love. To resolve the problem of love and fear in teaching it is necessary to solve the problem of paradox in teaching and learning. The same author (p. 58) argues that:

> becoming better aware of ourselves, we become more aware of the sources which produce paradoxes in everyday life and in teaching and learning as well.

In other words, knowing ourselves and giving meaning to our experiences will enable us to understand the causes of paradoxical states we encounter in our spiritual, personal, and professional lives.

4. 5. Summary of the chapter

In this short chapter, I presented the historiography of the paradox to better understand its roots and its function in various areas of knowledge. I showed how paradox has been used since Ancient Greek philosophers used it to explain knowledge that was difficult to comprehend Then, I showed how Christian Church fathers and theologians used paradox to explain much of the Christian dogma. Even in Scripture, apostles use paradox to explain the Christian faith to Christian communities. For this reason, paradox finds its place in my study because it has enabled me to give meaning to my participants' spiritual experiences, which otherwise cannot easily be explained. Additionally, paradox allows

me to see their experiences through a different lens. Therefore, the paradox is a useful tool for understanding and giving meaning to my participants' spiritual, personal, and professional experiences, as well as my own.

Having explained the role played by paradox in my thesis, I will move to the next chapter which examines the methodology and methods of data collection for this research. Here I will clarify the study paradigm and the strategy. Then, I explain how I selected the participants and how the data was collected and analysed. Further, I elucidate how I ensured the trustworthiness of the data. As the data collection required interaction with people, the chapter also examines the ethical issues encountered and how these were handled.

Chapter five: Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

5.1. Introduction

After shortly presenting the whole chapter in this introduction, in the second section (5.2.) I explain where I situate myself as a researcher in this study, in order to clarify the position from which this research has been undertaken. In the third section (5.3.), I locate this research in the bigger picture of philosophical knowledge. Given the particularities of Orthodox Christian spirituality and developmental psychology, I shall explain the novel territory of the border between interpretivism and paradox, as a possible thoughtful way of understanding religious experiences in the context of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development. Interpretivism finds its place in this thesis to interpret teachers' experiences. Nonetheless, given the specific nature and context of this research, the paradox is a useful tool in positing this research at the intersection between Orthodox Christian spirituality, professional development, and personal development, providing an insight for which interpretivism is not enough to explain Orthodox Christians' spiritual experiences.

The fourth section (5.4) provides the rationale for using an auto/biographical approach, focussing on its challenges and limitations, its place in the cultural, religious, and social context of Romanian teachers, and how I managed to control my involvement in conducting the biographical interviews. Auto/biographical research enabled me to answer my research questions using the lenses covered in the literature review, reinforcing the idea that people have used storytelling to understand their past and to give meaning to their present.

The section on reflexive journal (5.5) present this method as an intimate space of the researcher, where I noted my feelings, emotions, encounters, and much information about my experience as a researcher for this thesis, and remembered experiences with my own parents and spiritual father. It was useful because it enabled me to access information which otherwise would have been forgotten.

The next section (5.6.), on the study's participants, provides details about how they were selected, the ethical approval process, how they were contacted, and why they were chosen to be part of this research. Then, in section 5.7. I will discuss how the data were

collected. This is practical information that is useful in understanding how the whole process developed.

Further, in the eight section (5.8.) I write about how I analysed the data, using discourse analysis   to understand the particular religious language used by participants. I will place this in the bigger picture of their personalities and profession, together with proforma and paradox. In this sense, proforma proved to be a valuable tool in gathering the separate pieces and in reconstructing participants' lives as a whole, while the paradox gave understanding to those experiences which seemed to be contradictory.

Having explained how the data will be analysed, in the ninth section (5.9.) I will discuss how I ensured the trustworthiness of the data collected for this study, using Huberman's (1994) principles, namely using careful transcription and offering participants the chance to engage with their own narratives.

Then, I will consider the ethical concerns in my research (section 5.10), which can also be considered to be a part of a research's validity. Next, I explain the role of memory, remembering and narrative interviews, emphasizing the idea that the outcomes of the research might be influenced by the way in which participants have understood their experiences, how those have been stored in memory and how these have been remembered during the narrative interviews. Finally, the last section (5.11) summarises the whole chapter, and seeks to enable readers to have a clear image of this study's methodology.

5.2.   Situating myself

In this study I act as an insider researcher, given the auto/biographical nature of my study in which I bring forward my spiritual, personal, and professional experiences. As an insider researcher, I identify myself as an Orthodox Christian, a Romanian, and a teacher. As will become clear later in this chapter, all my participants are also Romanian teachers with an Orthodox Christian religious and spiritual background. As an insider, therefore, I analyse and understand my participants' experiences, both spiritual, personal, and professional, as I am familiar with the religious and professional terms they use, the context they live in, and the everyday professional challenges that Romanian teachers

encounter within schools. Moreover, I can better engage with their spiritual experiences in the Orthodox Christian tradition as I have practised them since childhood. However, given the uniqueness of human beings (Mele, 2014), being familiar with them is not the same as understanding how they refer to their own spiritual experiences, as each human experience is unique and unrepeatable. However, I will interpret their experiences in the light of the literature review provided in chapter 3, and I give meaning to my experiences through their experiences in the light of the same literature.

Adopting an insider's position has enabled me to access teachers and detailed information about their biographies more easily, understand their experiences promptly, and improve the connection between separate narratives of their lives, as there is a behavioural pattern that Orthodox Christians may tend to repeat. This behavioural pattern refers to their spiritual understandings about life, which they express in personal and professional life.

Embracing an insider researcher's role is a useful position to understand Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' experiences and personalities. However, there are also challenges associated with such a position (Armstrong, 2001; Green, 2014). One challenge is that being too familiar with the research setting might bias the data collection, as the researcher might not be careful with the participants' individual context. As Chavez (2008) noted, there might be barriers in recognising patterns because of familiarity with the setting and participants. Another challenge comes from the participants themselves, who may want to please the researcher, whom they know, and provide them with what is 'right to say'. Additionally, being enthusiastic about the subject one is researching may influence participants to consider certain aspects of their experiences more than others, as Armstrong (2001) noted.

The experience I had with selecting and interviewing teachers in the field was positive and beneficial for both participants and myself. However, it was not without difficulties. My background made them feel more confident, safe, and comfortable revealing personal and often painful personal life stories to me. It was not easy to listen, and sometimes I had to confront my fears and personal and professional experiences when they were similar to those of my participants. Another issue in my research was that I knew the people I interviewed: one of them is a friend, another was my spiritual father, and again another was somebody I met in Church (I will write more about the selection process in section 5.6.).

All of my participants are connected to my spiritual life; my friend is linked to my personal life, and my spiritual father to my spiritual, personal, and professional lives. From this position, my interviews could have been biased by the emotions and past everyday experiences we have shared. However, bias is likely to appear in the auto/biographical research because participants and researchers influence each other, enable each other to understand more about their experiences and give meanings to their present. The insider position, the auto/biographical research the Orthodox Christian way of understanding life and experiences were suitable for understanding the lives and personal and professional experiences of my participants and mine.

Additionaly, I position my research in relation to gender and how I, as a female, related to my participants, which were both male and female. Further, it is essential also to reflect and understand how, as a female researcher, I referred to my own experiences with significant others (my mother – female, and my spiritual father - male), and ultimately, with God.

 Having situated myself, as a researcher, and acknowledging the importance of gender in research, and especially in narrative research, I will now position my research within the philosophical framework.

5.3. The Study Paradigm

There are two fundamental methodological approaches in the social sciences: quantitative and qualitative. Willis et al. (2007) distinguish between these two approaches, highlighting the distinction made between a positivist and an interpretivist paradigm. Hood (2006) noted that most researchers do not fit perfectly into any category of research. In other words, most studies fail to fall into a quantitative or qualitative paradigm entirely. This is especially true when it comes to biographical studies, as is the case for my research, where researchers draw on a wide range of theoretical and epistemological perspectives (Merrill and West (2009) in order to understand and to give meaning to participants' lives and stories. In this study paradigm, I identified features that belong to qualitative research. One aspect refers to the world experience as it is lived, felt, and

undergone by people acting in social situations (Burr, 2003). Another characteristic that makes this study qualitative is the meaning-making process, constructed by humans who interact and engage in interpretation (Hood, 2006). The emphasis is on the individual, not on the group, and highlights how they construct and make sense of their world. However, given what Hood (2006) claims about neatly fitting research into one category, I identified some challenges regarding my position in the bigger picture of philosophical questions about the nature of reality.

As a researcher with an Orthodox Christian spiritual background and a teaching profession, positioning myself in the bigger picture of the nature of reality proved to be a challenge. After a few years of reflection on my academic research position, I am still reflecting on where I am. On the one hand, adopting a pure realist stance, or situating myself in the more significant scientific demonstrations area, would be inappropriate as spiritual experiences cannot be proved. They can be described and interpreted, but they are so complex that putting them in mathematic formulae would be impossible. On the other hand, positioning myself, ontologically, as a genuine constructivist researcher would not be appropriate and honest either, because spiritual experiences cannot be fully captured, interpreted, or generalised given the high level of subjectivism they suppose. Spiritual experiences, then, act paradoxically: they can neither be 'proved', nor considered to be solely human constructs. Although as a researcher I cannot deny my personal and spiritual identities, which influence me, I act also a researcher who seeks to find answers and give understanding to her experiences through others' experiences. As researchers are, after all, human too, they cannot be entirely objective, and so there may always be traces of subjectivity in their research.

Additionally, West and Merrill (2009) argue that biographical researchers draw on a wide range of theoretical perspectives. It could therefore be argued that I situate this thesis at the boundary between constructivism and paradox in order to approximate it on the axis Mundi. Paradox, in turn, can be located between realism and constructivism. By that I suggest that paradox is a concept that implies both objectivism and interpretation. Given that this research aims to explore and understand significant others' role in the personal and professional lives of Orthodox Christian teachers, the aim is to discover how significant others may influence teacher development. For this reason, the influence on personality and profession is more a matter of a reality constructed by teachers, based on how they perceive their significant others and the influence and importance they give to

them. In this bigger picture the spiritual experiences and the teachers' attachment to their spiritual father have a place as well. In that case, they can still construct a reality of their own, but according to Barbu (2013), Zizioulas (2006) and Ware (1976) there is a reality, or an objectivistic way of understanding and living that relationship. This reality refers to the belief that Christians (or those of any other faith) have about the divine, who has given its laws to the people. This research does not assume that Romanian Orthodox Christians will understand and live either in the divine objective reality or in their own constructed reality, but rather it simply acknowledges its existence. Indeed, this claim could be countered, as it could be considered a subjective reality constructed by Orthodox Christianity. However, given that this research is interested in understanding how significant others influence Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, one of these being a spiritual father, the Orthodox Christians' perspective will be considered and labelled as a paradox.

The concept of paradox has been mainly used in Christian theology, and more recently in organisational theories of institutions and medical research (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Quinn and Cameron, 1988). It refers to a tension between two seemingly opposing facts. Quinn and Cameron (1988) noted that, originally, paradox denoted a statement which was self- contradictory but not illogical or untrue on its own. For example, throughout history, the term has been used to highlight the tensions between life and death, good and evil, self and other. In this research, a tension arises at the discussion about the spiritual father as a significant other. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the relationship between spiritual father and spiritual children should be built on the belief that this relationship is similar to that between God the Father and God the Son. Alternatively, although their spiritual father is a human, spiritual children should hear Christ himself listening for their confession in the practice of confession. Therefore, although a man is visible there, they should perceive Christ instead. That does not mean they ought to consider the spiritual father as being Christ himself.

Above, I gave only one example of why paradox could be borrowed in this research to understand how I, as a researcher, position myself and understand Romanian Orthodox Christians' personal and professional development. Quinn and Cameron (2011) claimed that, by exploring paradox, researchers might move beyond simple concepts to recognise the complexity, diversity, and ambiguity of many research areas. The knowledge about how Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers develop will be acquired through interpreting

their personal and professional experiences, and through the lens of Orthodox Christian spirituality, as detailed in the literature review. Furthermore, the analysis of religious discourses will provide more insights into their personal and professional development. After explaining how and where I positioned my research within the knowledge, in the next section, I will explain in detail about the auto/biographical strategy which I adopted for this thesis in order to better understand the life stories of my participants.

5.4.   The Research Strategy

5.4.1. Why auto/biography?

As I wanted to answer the research questions using the lenses covered in my Literature Review, I chose auto/biography as my methodology for this research, because I believed this would enable me as researcher, person, teacher, and Orthodox Christian to give meaning to my personal, spiritual, and professional experiences. Auto/biography is a 'special case of life writing', as Smiths (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) noted, and it is rooted in the biography which, lately, has become of great interest (Merrill and West, 2009, p.2):

> biographical methods have claimed an increasing place and are alive and well in various academic disciplines such as literature, history, sociology, anthropology, social policy and education.

In other words, biographical methods have gained more recognition in research during the last four decades and have been used in various areas of qualitative research. However exciting and new it might seem, biography is an ancient genre, which has been used, for example, by the ancient Greeks to understand more about politicians', poets' and philosophers' lives (Momigliano, 1997). The use of the biographical genre can even be noticed in the Scriptures, where the lives of prophets, Jesus Christ, or Virgin Mary are detailed (i.e. Genesis, Kings, Job, Gospels). Later, the biographies of holy fathers in the Christian Church, the lives of martyrs, and saints' lives have been recorded and, even

later, were used by believers to support them in the context of pagan persecutions (Bixler, 1990).

In this study I make use of the auto/biographical method, as I aim to give meaning to my personal, spiritual, and teaching experiences through the biographies of my participants. Biographical research has been defined by Miller (2005) as a research method that pursues to collect and analyse people's life stories concerning the social structures they have lived in or live in and concerning historical processes within which they take shape and which they contribute to shaping. Apart from the oral story, personal documents can sometimes reinforce biographical interviews, as Roberts (2002) noted. It is essential to consider its aim to give meanings to people's lives and experiences, as Zinon (2004) suggested. Moreover, according to Merrill and West (2009, p. 4), biographical methods aim to 'place people and humanity at the core of social research.' Simultaneously, they noted a need for understanding in the social sciences by reference to the people involved, rather than observing and measuring behaviour without engaging in dialogue with those most intimately concerned.

In other words, understanding why people behave as they do, think, and why they live their lives in a certain way became increasingly more important than observing how they act. This research profoundly resonates with the purpose of biography in social science, as it looks to understand why and how significant others may influence Romanian teachers' personal and professional development with an Orthodox Christian background. Their biographies are a tool in giving meaning to their personal and spiritual experiences and how these have affected, or still affect, their professional development.

In qualitative research, biographical methods have several uses depending on the area in which they are used (psychological, social, religious). All of these areas share the same use: they help the teller, listener, reader, and the scholar to understand broad issues, and they all intersect one another. This research is also interdisciplinary, as it seeks to understand the intersection between psychological, professional, and spiritual traits of Orthodox Christian teachers, in the specific context of post-communist Romania. In the psychological area, the human endeavour is considered, as well as how the self evolves and the self as a meaning maker in society, history, and culture. This thesis also seeks to answer the question "Who am I?" Atkinson (in Gubrium and Holstein, 2002, p. 128) noted that:

The researcher can determine if the story tells who the person is, if there is a felt unity of experiences in the story told, how identity is defined, whether this is internally and externally consistent, and how these matches with identity -formation models.

In other words, the researcher who aims to find and understand the true self (Winnicott, 2005) of his or her participants will collect the individual elements of their stories, seeking to find the emergent Gestalt (the wholeness) of participants. Another use of biographical methods in psychology is to gain a subjective perspective on individual experience, which includes giving meaning to life experiences in a coherent order, by understanding how people construct and make sense of their life experiences through narratives. In social research, biographical methods are used to explain people's stories as a social construct, enabling the researcher to define participants' place in society, or as Atkinson (2002, p.129) suggested: "confirm experience through the moral, ethical, or social context of a given situation."

Additionally, the sociological use of biographical research could also be used to explain the story itself as a social construct, as Rosenthal (1993) noted. In religious research, biographical methods may give insight into people's greatest struggles with which they are confronted in their daily lives, in order to recognise their deepest values and how these are manifested in their interactions with other people and their professional context; it also seeks to illuminate and answer people's greatest quests. Biographical methods could also give meaning to religion and spirituality as lived experiences. Atkinson (2002) noted that how we tell our stories depends on our cultures. Therefore, in this study, apart from the psychological, religious and professional identity aspects of teachers involved in this research, it is necessary to acknowledge their cultural and national background, which might make a distinction between Orthodox Christian Romanian teachers and Orthodox Christian teachers from another country.

Turning to the auto/biographical research from an Orthodox Christian perspective, I could compare it with the climbing of a steep mountain by two or more people, who wish to reach the top together. They help one another, and they share their fears and the joy of climbing the mountain. The aim is familiar: to reach the top. Similarly, in auto/biographical research, both researcher and participant(s) seek to give meaning to their life experiences and understand what brought them to the present psychological, social, emotional, or professional stage. Moreover, once they understand the reasoning,

they move to the next level of their personal and professional lives. Therefore, this Orthodox Christian perception of auto/biographical research will provide an understanding of Orthodox Christian teachers' lives and profession.

5.4.2. Auto/biography as freedom in exploring significant others

The auto/biographical method, which seemed to provide me with freedom at first, confronted me with humans' real experiences which made me realise that I was not as free as I thought at the beginning. Auto/biography as a method used for exploring the impact of significant others in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives allowed me to liberate myself from the constraints imposed by academic research. It allowed me to use the intuition, patience, empathy, and creativity developed in the last years since I finished my teaching studies. The outcomes of research need to ensure that they are not skewed by the researcher's subjectivity. However, as Krieger (1991) suggests, in qualitative research, it is almost impossible not to feel the researcher's voice at all. Moreover, in the last years, researchers in the qualitative field speak more and more about the importance of subjectivity. Krieger (1991) observed how many researchers (from all fields, the biographical community included) have become discontented by the distant authority used in social science writing. Moreover, she has also pointed out that the researchers' personalities may get lost in their writing.

Additionally, West (2016, p.45) noted how social sciences had required the minimalisation of the researcher's self. He uses a metaphor to illustrate the absence of the researcher's self: "We paint pictures in which we hope not to appear, or if we do, are nearly invisible."

In other words, researchers in social sciences play the role of painters who avoid making their presence felt. This kind of painting is cold. However, when the painter makes his or her presence felt the painting's perspective is changed, it becomes more human and enables the watcher to connect more naturally to the painting and the painter. It is an unspoken feeling experienced by people who once in their lives have truly connected to a painting. This type of experience may immerse the watcher/the reader into a painter's/researcher's self, into somebody else's world. Through this experience, the watcher/ the reader understands more about the other and oneself. Moreover, connections

between readers and researchers may enable the former to give meanings to their own experiences. Tacitly, it crafts an intimate relationship between the researcher and the reader, with valuable consequences for both. To the researcher, it gives the satisfaction of having expressed themselves freely, to have given voice to their struggles and, this way, to be free from them. On the other hand, it enables the reader to reflect on their own life and find understanding and meaning of past or present experiences, whether personal, spiritual, or professional.

In the case of this study, the freedom gained through using this method refers to overcoming the feeling of constraint of not being able to express the fullness of my participants' lives, the constraint of not providing understanding and voice to that inner 'I' who was desperately seeking answers. Auto/biographical research, which has fortunately been accepted more and more in academia and has been adopted by researchers in social science, is a valuable tool for researchers interested in finding answers through people's stories, me being one of them. Understanding the connections between spiritual, personal, and professional identity and development is not research which might provide valuable and in-depth answers if another strategy had been used. It would have limited the broad and profoundly human experience, which is difficult to catch even through biographical research. Therefore, auto/biography allows freedom in understanding the Romanian teachers' personal, spiritual, and professional identity and development with an Orthodox Christian religious background. Nonetheless, as any research, auto/biographical research has its challenges and limitations which will be discussed in the next section.

5.4.3. Challenges and limitations of using auto/biographical research in this study

Although auto/biographical method was useful and beneficial for both me, the researcher and my participants, in this section I will discuss five challenges and limitations I have encountered. One challenge refers to how the data was collected. As is known, the data is collected through in-depth, unstructured interviews, which presume spontaneous, individual judgments while the interview is in progress. This might be challenging for

novice researchers, as they need to know how and what to ask, and how to listen carefully to their participants, digging into the memory of experiences to make sense of them in the broader context of their lives. For example, in this thesis, the whole life experiences of my participants were essential, but it was even more essential to see how their personal and spiritual experiences influenced their professional identity and development.

Another challenge that could be identified in auto/biographical research is the storyteller's unique experience and voice. It could also be categorised as a limitation to research as it does not allow for a generalisation of the findings, which is essential for ensuring reliability and validity in quantitative research. However, qualitative research has different tools to ensure a study's trustworthiness (more about this in section 5.9.). Auto/biographical research seeks to understand a particular experience, and it is important that auto/biographical research connects to human experience, which makes it have moral and ethical implications.

Another limitation is linked to how auto/biographical researchers can reconcile the benefits of interviewees' life stories with the benefits of their research agenda. In other words, it is essential to understand the limits between allowing participants to recall their life stories and to follow the research plan, which is also vital for completing research and to find a balance between them. Maintain consistency between the researcher's original intentions and the final product can also be a challenge. In other words, before starting the data collection process, a plan is made. However, while the process is developing and at the end of the data collection process the outcomes might differ.

Finally, it is imperative to understand the relationship between interviewer and interviewees, as determines what the interview will get out of the interview. In other words, the researcher must provide a safe environment for participants to allow them to open themselves up and express themselves without restraint. Trusting the researcher is essential in revealing sensitive aspects of one's life, which one seeks to uncover and understand in biographical research. This relationship might further impact the story itself in terms of consistency and clarity. In other words, the relationship can influence how the told story affects the teller to be clear and consistent with what is being related.

Despite these challenges and limitations, in this thesis, auto/biographical research can find links with Orthodox Christian spirituality aiming to give understandings to Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional experiences.

5.4.4. Auto/biographical research in the search for meanings in the Orthodox Christian teachers' profession

In the previous sections I provided some information about the history of auto/biographical research, and some tensions (paradoxes) that may arise between Orthodox Christian spirituality and auto/biography in my research. In this section, I will focus more on the aim of auto/biography and Orthodox Christian teachers' professional lives, and on how auto/biography may enable my participants to give meaning to their experiences and to help me, as a researcher, to give meaning to my own experiences through their narratives.

The experiences I mention are not merely informative, but they may encourage teachers to draw connections between experiences, ensuring the continuity of experience. Moreover, Johnson and Golombek (2002, p. 4) argue that these experiences may also change the conditions under which "new experiences are understood so that a person's abilities, desires, and attitudes are changed if they reflect on their experiences". Simultaneously, Orthodox Christian spirituality emphasises the role of experience (especially the spiritual-mystic experience) in people's lives and, consequently, in their professional lives. In this regard, contemporary fathers of the church (such as Sakharov, Bloom) give the example of people who regularly go to church and who take part in the life of the church (see sections on Confession and Prayer). However, Bruner (1996) noted that not all teachers who reflect on their personal or professional experiences show their profession's particular development. He maintains that the act of reflection itself is not essential, but rather how one reflects, how he or she thinks. Narratives are not only stories of some individuals (teachers in my case) reflecting on loneliness. To the contrary, by nature they are social and relational and, as Johnson and Golombek (2002) mention, "they gain meaning from our collective social histories."

At this point, Orthodox Christian spirituality would both agree and disagree with Johnson and Golombek (2002), as the collective human dimension of narrative inquiry is acknowledged. Moreover, teachers (as participants) are involved in the research as well as the researcher, whose professional experiences may resonate with the teachers involved in the research. Johnson and Golombek (2002) consider that narrative (biographical and auto/biographical) inquiry may enable teachers to reflect on their profession and to understand more about the issues they may face at their workplace.

However, they do not mention what changes the interactions between teachers and researchers may produce on both sides. Merrill and West (2009, p. 2) state that "biography enables us to discern patterns but also distinctiveness in lives."

Using auto/biographical research in exploring Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development is, at the same time, useful and challenging. Given that the biographical method has been used mainly to give meaning to marginalised people's experiences (West, 1996; Merrill and West, 2009), and notably to women's life experiences, using it in this research about the role of significant others in the Romanian teachers with an Orthodox Christian religious view enabled me as a researcher, teacher, and Orthodox Christian to give meaning to my own experiences. The process of interviewing my participants was not as painful as it might have been for another auto/biographical researcher. I identified with them in trying to understand my relationship with my parents, which was neither painful nor happy but, overall, caused me some discomfort (more in the chapter six). Auto/biographical research enabled me, as mentioned previously, to gain new knowledge about myself, about my personal, professional and spiritual experiences and about my participants' stories.

5.4.5. Auto/biography and the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' stories

Auto/biography and the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' stories have several features in common. Firstly, the auto/biographical method puts more emphasis on people's experiences in their social-cultural and educational contexts than on external events. It is concerned with how they perceive or how they construct their reality. By this I mean that auto/biographical and Orthodox Christian spirituality emphasises the importance of what and how people perceive and experience events in their lives. For example, in the case of this study, how do they, as Orthodox Christians, refer to the negative implications of significant others' influence in their lives? This becomes more important than the influence itself. If a parent, who played the role of significant other in one's childhood, might have negatively influenced his or her self-image, then when a person reaches adulthood and has a Christian approach to life, they might try to give meaning to that adverse event to overcome the negative impact.

Secondly, the auto/biographical method is essential for the researcher as well as for research. Auto/biographical researchers reflect on their lives and experiences when they intersect with others' experiences similar to their own. This intersection between researcher and researched is beneficial for both, as it might reveal new understandings about their past and present experiences and illuminate future actions. Within Orthodox Christianity, reflecting on own experiences through others' experiences is essential in understanding where one stands in the path towards spiritual development. However, a distinction needs to be made here, namely that this kind of reflection is different from psychoanalysis.

Thirdly, auto/biography and Orthodox Christian spirituality both aim to reconstruct lives and find the 'true' self. The first uses the interaction between researcher and participants, who are in an open dialogue, to gather pieces from their lives, put them together, reflect, and understand how past events have shaped their present. Within Orthodox Christian spirituality, there is a dialogue between the spiritual father and his spiritual children, who meet in confession. Spiritual children open their souls in front of a spiritual father who listens carefully and actively to the confession. As in the auto/biographical researcher case, active listening is important, as the listener needs to empathise profoundly with the speaker while listening.

Given the reasons discussed above, linking the auto/biographical method and this study about the influence of significant others in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives is opportune. As I mentioned previously, the auto/biographical method was very useful for me to better understand myself and my experiences, together with my participants' experiences in the context of teaching professional development. Apart from this method, I employed a reflexive journal where I recorded my reflections on my research journey, in order to accomplish a meaningful PhD thesis.

5.5. Reflective journal

Consistently keep recording my reflections every time I had them it was not easy; thus, some of them remained in my memory and I wrote them down later. Ortlipp (2008)

pointed out the usefulness of a reflective journal when doing qualitative research. She underlined how important a reflective journal may be for such a study, given the possibility of subjectivity in qualitative research or, what Denzin (1994, p. 501) named 'the interpretive crisis.' Although qualitative research (as well as quantitative research) is confronted with the problem of reliability and validity, for qualitative studies the process is not linear. Thus, Ortlipp (2008) suggested that, instead of copying the quantitative research process, it is more useful that the researcher makes visible his or her weaknesses, emotions, thoughts, experiences and opinions, and uses them in writing up the thesis. This allocates a central role to the reflexive research journal in research.

A reflective journal is a place where (qualitative) researchers can write down their daily reflections about their research, about the people they meet in the research process, and about their feelings along the way. Additionally, one can reflect on his or her past experiences relating to the research. This journal can help researchers identify important events in their lives, which influenced the path of their lives and profession. In my case, the reflective journal proved to be a useful tool for gathering auto/biographical data. Two of my participants were people I knew before and with whom I have had a relationship. Reflections on the feelings I had for them, emotions I have experienced before, during, and after interviews brought to light how I perceived them as people and as professionals. I provide an excerpt:

I am on the train, travelling to Melanie's hometown. I am with my husband. I remember how much I used to enjoy travelling by train from home to Bucharest. I always loved to be in a state of travelling. I wonder why...anyway...Melanie and I will see each other after two years...many things have happened during this time...she gave birth to a baby girl. She seems to be changed. I thought maternity is a period full of joy solely... She was a bit sad and disappointed when we spoke on the phone. I wonder if she is still the strong women I knew, always being focused to reach personal and, especially, professional aims. (20/10/2017)

Rereading the except, I realised how a person's perception might change because of events that intervene between people or lack of communication between people. A researcher needs to be as transparent as possible and reveal their personal feelings and experiences. This becomes even more critical when the research is auto/biographical.

Moreover, researchers who keep a reflective research journal can record information about the process of collecting data or about their participants and the process of their research. Critical self-reflection can change the research path, or the methodology one can adopt for their research. It is how I recorded my thoughts about embedding my research into an epistemological stance.

I am reading about these epistemologies, and I feel my mind is overwhelmed. It seems to be too much. Nothing resonates with what I am writing about and with what I am researching. I find positivism cold and rational, yet constructivism (and its companions) seems too loose. Do I have to choose one? Is there any other alternative to all these? Now I am stuck. However, I have to write something because my supervisors wait to see how I intend to conduct my research. (14/02/2016)

Rereading this excerpt, I realised how focused I was on doing, rather than thinking before doing. Later, after being told about my methodology chapter, "it seems that you are picking items from the shelf," I realised I was walking down a wrong path. Reading my journal, I decided to be more thoughtful and to consider if my research was indeed necessary for me. Therefore, writing in my journal became a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2012, p. 516). In the case of some researchers (see Ortlipp, 2008), written reflection in a journal has helped them to clarify their research aims, approach, and methodological questions about what they could know, their relationship to what could be known, and how they might come to it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In my case, I wrote less about theories I read about, and more about my thoughts about those theories, and even more about the feelings and emotions I experienced during my research.

I began to see the relevance and suitability of this reflective writing process and unstructured interviews, leading me towards the freedom of expressing myself as an individual with particular experiences, aspirations, and ways of understanding the world.

5.6. Selecting participants

Finding participants for this study was not difficult, as I relied on my experience as a teacher, and I thought that colleagues of mine would respond positively to my proposal. Despite my assumption that my teaching fellows would respond positively to my

proposal, there was the main impediment in choosing any of my Orthodox Christians participants. This impediment refers to selecting those Orthodox Christian teachers who were deeply engaged with their spiritual life. But how could I know who was deeply engaged in Orthodox spiritual life? I could have supposed that their membership to the Orthodox Christian Church, their weekly participation in Sunday services, would be clues for their spiritual engagement. I knew from my own spiritual experience that attending church every Sunday, or even more often, confessing regularly, and taking Holy Communion often might not be enough to consider my participants deeply engaged with their spiritual lives. Therefore, I adopted a risky strategy which might have biased my research. I contacted those teachers that I considered potentially having what I needed because I had a little information about their spiritual lives, thus giving me clues. At the beginning, there were four participants: three women and one man. In the end, there were three who remained: two women and one man. One participant has a son with special needs, and she had to dedicate her time between the school she was teaching and her son's treatments and therapy. Therefore, she could not participate further in my study.

Membership of the Orthodox Christian community was, then, the first criterion. Participants had to adhere to two more criteria: to be Romanian by nationality and to teach, or to have taught, in a school setting in Romania. It did not matter if it was a public or a private school, although this could have also made a difference in school culture and climate.

At the moment of writing, I was aware that the relationship I had with father Agapios during the interviews was a gender issue, as Archer (2002) stated. Choosing father Agapios as a male participant was also due to my relationship with him. As my spiritual father he had supported me over the years, made me feel loved and secure. In other words, I looked to see in my participants motherly, or at least feminine features, which made me feel comfortable. Although as a female researcher, I felt comfortable choosing other females as participants in my research.

5.6.1. Contacting the participants

After selecting participants who view their nationality, religious belonging, and profession according the terms outlined above, they were contacted through various

methods. One female teacher was contacted via email, the other two (one of whom withdrew from the study) were approached directly at the church at the end of a Sunday service, and the male teacher was contacted via phone. After explaining the study's aim to them, and after they had agreed to be a part of it, the ethical forms were sent to them to be signed officially. I explained the aim of this research, I assured them that for confidentiality their names would be changed, and I reassured them that, although they signed the forms, they would be able to withdraw from the research anytime without explanations.

5.6.2. Brief information about selected participants

As mentioned previously, three participants were selected for this study: two women and one man. I will briefly describe them in the next paragraph, but their whole stories will be developed in the chapters dedicated to their stories (chapters seven, eight, and nine).

The first participant is Melanie, a Religious Education teacher in her mid-thirties, mother of two children at the moment of writing this chapter, and the wife of an Orthodox Christian priest. The second participant was Zoe, a 40-year old French teacher, married to a doctor and without children. The last participant was father Agapios, lecturer of Dogmatics and Orthodox Christian spirituality at the University of Theology in Romania, formerly a teacher in a vocational high school, a priest, husband, father of three, and grandfather of two. All three were born, raised, and educated in different regions of the country, making them different in some aspects of their personalities as well as their cultural backgrounds. All three participants have their Orthodox Christian faith in common, their teaching profession, and their Romanian nationality.

5.7. Data Collection

Data collection is one of the essential stages of a research project. It is crucial for bringing novelty; poorly designed and conducted data collection may fail to contribute to knowledge, which includes choosing participants who will not give relevant data. Not all possible ways to collect data are suitable for all areas of research. For example, for a researcher with a positivist worldview and positioning, data will be considered valid if

subject to repeatability and invariability. Therefore, the outcomes are more important than the process (Moser, 2005). A constructivist researcher, on the other hand, will emphasise the process more than the outcomes (Polkinghorne, 1988). For a qualitative researcher, the emphasis is on how data is collected rather than the data collected (Bainbridge, 2015). Nonetheless, my research brought some tensions as, for me, both process and data were equally important. The process was necessary due to the outcomes a good relationship between researcher and participants brings, and the data were meaningful because of the novelty of my research for educational and theological areas.

For my research, I collected data following these steps:

a)   First, I made a list of possible participants. I chose them for their nationality (all Romanians), their teaching profession, their Orthodox Christian religious background, and their interest in spiritual life. Their age, their experience as teachers, or the relationship I had with them were not relevant (although in the end, I selected a friend, my spiritual father, and a teacher I knew from the church).

b)   Then, I contacted them via email, phone, or personally. In the end, the participants were contacted personally, one via email, one via phone and one personally. After positive feedback from their part, I undertook the next step.

c)   Then, I applied for ethical approval. I sent the forms filled in by my participants in terms of this process, and I had them back signed. After the ethical committee sent me their approval via email, I was ready to start my fieldwork.

d)   After informing my participants about the approval, we established together when and where the interviews would occur. At the same time, I was aware that unforeseen issues might arise, which would require a change in plan. During the fieldwork, such issues arose, for instance some interviews had to be rescheduled.

e)   After the date and time were established, we chose a place where we would both feel safe. However, I gave the participants the first option to choose the meeting place, so that they could feel comfortable imparting their experiences and feelings to me. The only criterion that mattered from my end was that I would listen carefully and mindfully to their narratives.

At the interview:

a)   After greeting each other, we sat down. I was cautious with the position of our bodies and how we sat down. The best position to ensure security and comfort to my participants was the 45 degrees' posture since certain proximity and distance were ensured (Merrill and West, 2009). The face-to-face posture may intimidate either the researcher or the participants.

b)   Eye contact was made as much as possible (Merrill and West, 2009).

c)   I reassured my participants that they were in a safe place by smiling and having a positive and open attitude towards them. However, this was not easy because, at some points, my attention was attracted by other details of the posture, or I recalled experiences from my teaching profession.

d)   I tried not to express enthusiasm directly when my participants recalled exciting experiences for my research. For example, when talking about confession and prayer, I tried, at times, not to show my excitement when my participants emphasised the importance of confession and prayer in their professional lives. Having this attitude is more appropriate to avoid a possible influence on the participants.

e)   I was friendly with my participants, thanked them at the beginning and the end of each interview.

f)   I tried to avoid repeatedly saying 'as you wish', when I asked them to give more details regarding specific aspects of their lives which were directly linked to my research. The expression may sound defensive and could switch the power in the interview.

After the interview

After the interviews had finished, data and field notes were analysed in-depth (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000; Merrill and West, 2009; Webster and Mertova, 2007) following a few necessary steps I will detail next. It is not necessary for all biographical research to follow these steps exactly, but this is how I aimed to ensure that I would not lose any essential information. The first step was to listen three times to each recorded interview. Then, I transcribed the interviews in Romanian. In the beginning, I thought to translate the whole transcripts from Romanian into English. Then, thinking of how time-consuming this would be, and how essential information might be lost in translation, I decided to translate only those fragments introduced in the analysis chapter. After the transcription process, I listened to the recording one more time to check the accuracy of

the transcription. Having done that, I sent the transcripts to my participants, asking them to check the accuracy of their stories. They have not modified anything. Therefore, I could move on to the next step, which was the data analysis, and which I will explain in detail in the next section.

5.8. Data Analysis

5.8.1. Constraints in analysing 'my' 'data.'

The title of this section maybe seem inappropriate, or at least I feel it as being unsuitable. Inspired by one of my research fellows, while writing this section, I analysed my feelings, thoughts, and what my body was experiencing at the moment of writing. I could say that even now I am analysing myself concerning my writing and my approach to the 'data', or my participants' life stories. Before and during writing this section, I felt a sort of resistance; something inside me was opposed the 'analysis'. A research fellow inspired me to write this section, as it could illuminate why I felt constraint.

In my case, analysing the lives of participants sounded cruel and incompatible with my faith, which supposes valuing people's uniqueness and not dissecting their lives and actions, which is how I perceived the process of analysis. Why did I feel so reluctant to analyse my data, when this was the process through which I could answer my research questions and through which I could 'demonstrate' the importance of this study?

Reading my research fellow's PhD thesis helped me to gain new understanding about why I felt guilty. I felt guilty for not being a real researcher who looks objectively at his or her 'data'. In this case, as in the case of much qualitative research, the data means humans. How could I then detach from my Orthodox Christian identity and my professional identity? The auto/biographical method was liberating from that constraint, as I mentioned in the previous section. It allowed me to reconstruct my participants' lives and my own life. Gestalt is about gathering the pieces in order to form a whole. However, how about those tiny pieces that are lost when I'm trying to gather the whole? How

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important are they for the whole? Where do they go? Do those details differentiate what is understood about a person and what that person is?

Let us take things one at a time. What does analyse/analysis mean in qualitative research? What is the role of data in qualitative research, and what does it imply in this research?

Analysis of the data is an essential part of a study. It is maybe the most important, as it is defined as the process in which the researcher interacts with the information gathered on the field, searching and arranging the transcripts, the observation notes, field notes or any other non- textual materials gathered by the researcher in order to increase the understanding of the phenomenon (Bogdan and Bicklen, 1982). Concretely speaking, the analysis process helps to verify if the research questions have been answered and if the study has brought anything new to the research. Nevertheless, how about analysing human experience? All studies in qualitative research seek to understand parts of the human experience. When one tries to understand the whole of somebody else's life and experiences, things become more complex. They are complex because humans are the sum of unique personal experiences, cultural and educational influences, particular beliefs, religion and relationships. Therefore, capturing one's whole life and trying to generalise becomes impossible.

The next word, 'my', is a possessive pronoun that implies possession over something or somebody else. I felt that doing that will make me not feel comfortable with my personal and spiritual identity. How could a researcher possess somebody else's life and experience? The last word which my research fellow and I found intriguing was 'data'. How could I, an Orthodox Christian by spiritual identity and a teacher by professional identity, look at my participants as something that was waiting to be dissected, cut into pieces to see what is inside of them and them put back again, even missing small bits of blood, lost in the cutting process and which are part of that cut flesh identity.

These are my reflections on how I understand and position myself regarding the data analysis. Fortunately, the biographical researchers understood these struggles with which many qualitative researchers are confronted. I will further explain the steps I undertook in order to show how I gave meaning to the information gathered during the interviews with my participants.

5.8.2. The transcription process

The transcription process is the first step to be undertaken, before analysing the data. The researcher must create a transition from vocal material to written material. Before I began to transcribe, I listened to the recordings one more time. I put on my headphones, closed my eyes, and imagined myself back at the time and place of the interviews. Hearing the participants' voices again made me even more familiar with what they said during the interview. Everything they revealed was now fresh in my memory. I could even feel and see them sitting in front of me, opening their hearts and entrusting me with essential information about their lives. Completing the relistening phase, I could move on to the next stage, namely the transcription of the audio into words. The researcher should transcribe the interview by himself or herself, because what was said is crucial and the sounds, pauses, sighs, and the other non-verbal clues, often say more about the person than the words. The interviews were transcribed the next day, so that the information was fresh in my memory, for example the feelings experienced, what participants expressed using nonverbal messages, and what I myself experienced during the interview. Some of these were recorded in my research journal, but not all of them because I feared intimidating my participants. This information was recollected from memory at the time of transcription. After this I read the transcripts, which is considered a process because, at that time, the researcher interacts once more with the participants and relives the interview experience. I read the interviews three times each, so I immersed myself again in the interview experience.

5.8.3. Translation

The interviews took place in Romanian, as it is our shared language. At first I intended to translate the whole interviews into English. I translated the first interview with each one of my participants. However, I realised that some words were difficult to translate, such as 'dor', which could be translated as 'missing somebody or something'. In Romanian, 'dor' is a more profound and a deeper feeling of missing a person or a thing. I struggled to find appropriate synonyms in English to retain the same meaning but, as I noted previously, sometimes that proved to be impossible. Thus, I decided not to translate the

whole interviews, but only those fragments that made their way into the thesis. Apart from the 'lost in translation' reason, I adopted this strategy because, although I write in English this thesis, I think and I feel in my own language. Besides the linguistic aspect, it brings its influence regarding the culture, the mentality, the experience. Therefore, I was able to interact better with the information in my native language.

5.8.4. Coding

The next step, which usually follows the transcription of the interviews, is Coding. Through Coding, the researcher labels and organises qualitative data to identify themes recurrent in the interviews and the relationship between them. As an auto/biographical researcher I believe that human beings' lives are more than a set of recurrent themes and patterns, although I am aware that conducting research requires a structure which enables the reader to understand past events that influence the present. For this reason, I considered Coding as an essential step in order to identify those recurrent patterns in my life and my participants' lives. The patterns, the non- verbal clues, and the theory will enable me to get closer to their stories, although I am aware that I will never catch their wholeness. Nevertheless, I will be able to make sense and give meaning to their lives and their experiences to understand how significant others influence the personal and professional development of Romanian teachers with an Orthodox Christian background.

A few years ago, when I first started analysing what is called 'data' in research, I was enthusiastic about NVivo, one of the software tools that helps researchers to deal with large amounts of qualitative data. Initially it was useful, as it helped me to notice the repetitive words quickly, which may indicate something about the person who tells his or her story. However, it was not completely satisfactory, as my aim was not only to catch those pieces of information that would put my participants in a specific category, but also to understand the person and their personal and professional experiences in the context of their Orthodox Christian faith. To reach that aim, I read the transcripts a few times. The text's first reading was combined with the listening to the interviews again, to make sure that I missed nothing. I did not write anything down, although researchers usually put some preliminary thoughts on paper. I decided not to do this because I wanted to immerse myself again in the interview moments and to try as much as possible to relive the

experience of meeting my teaching fellows and listening to the intimate details of their lives. Then, I read the transcripts a second time and underlined what I considered necessary for my research questions and wrote some preliminary codes. For example, participants' stories about their parents were underlined and coded as 'significant others', their teaching experiences as 'professional', and their faith as 'spiritual'. After this first Coding, I reread the transcripts, and this time I wrote more detailed codes or sub-codes to the main ones. For example, religious experiences were detailed in 'prayer', 'confession', 'communion', 'Jesus prayer", because all of these have a particular significance within the Orthodox Christian faith, as detailed in the Literature Review Chapter. Finally, I read the coded transcripts one last time before going to the next phase, which initially was theming the data.

5.8.5. Themes and interpretation of data

When I first analysed my participants' stories, I divided their stories into themes, such as the teaching profession, vocation, prayer, confession and significant others. I did this to have my research questions answered and to emphasise the importance of these aspects in my participants' lives. In that process, I moved forward and backwards among the data, literature, and research questions until no new theme emerged. However, at some point I felt that they were not simply 'data' useful to answer my research questions, they were more than that, as I detailed in the introduction to this section. Dividing data into themes is a useful method in qualitative research as it enables the researcher to explore those themes in greater depth and to offer a better structure to the study.

Nevertheless, it did not work for this study. I felt as if I was desecrating my participants' inner world's holy space and their deep relationship with divinity. Moreover, I wanted to honour my participants' lives in their wholeness, as people created in the "image of God" (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, I took the risky path of a more experienced researcher, trying to find an emerging 'Gestalt' in my participants' lives. For that, I used a proforma, which included themes, the process of the interview, the ethnographic dimension of the interview. Merrill and West inspired this approach (2009), but more concretely I borrowed West's technique. In addition to his approach, I adopted two more tactics, namely discourse analysis and paradox. Embracing discourse analysis was a natural

consequence of the religious language used by my participants during the interviews. The second, the paradox, was adopted in order to emphasise the existing tensions and paradoxes in the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives. In the next three sections (4.8.6., 4.8.7., 4.8.8.), I will develop each one of these in more detail. I start first with proforma, before continuing with discourse analysis, and finishing with paradox.

5.8.6. Analytic proforma for interpretation of data

Analytic proforma is a tool which enables auto/biographical researchers to collaboratively analyse themes, while at the same time paying attention to the research process and incorporating the feelings and the fantasies of the researcher, in what Freud termed the counter- transference (Freud, 1910). The proforma was employed first to build an emergent Gestalt of participants. This research worked very well combined with the analysis of my participants' religious discourse and tripled by paradox, as a concept used to illuminate those conflicting parts from my participants' stories.

Proforma helped me recollect the whole parts of stories spread out through the interviews in order to foresee the 'Gestalt formation'. I looked at how I could engage myself in the ongoing process of losing and then re-establishing an 'organismic equilibrium' (Mortola, 1999; p. 308)—telling my story in this PhD, together with my teaching fellows' stories, with troubling events, with the aim to enable us to regain a sense of equilibrium in our lives. The primary purpose of Gestalt is to make sense of the disequilibrium in our experience. Similarly, in this study, the primary purpose of using proforma was to find that emergent Gestalt, which allowed my participants and myself to make sense of the mixed and entangled experiences, beliefs, conceptions, troubles, fortunate or unfortunate events in our personal and professional lives, in which the most considerable influence comes from significant others, and from how we refer to them in the present.

Although one's personality is more than a group of themes emerging from in-depth interviews, they do say something about the interviewed person. The recurrent themes can be likened to patterns in one's life. There were common themes in my research, such as spiritual fatherhood, confession, prayer, the teaching profession, teaching vocation, and more particular themes, such as motherhood. Each one of these was emphasised, more or less, by participants, once again revealing the uniqueness of their lives.

Within proforma, the researcher makes sense of all aspects linked to the person whose story is told during a narrative interview. The process of the interview is fundamental, for it provides valuable information about the "nature of interactions" (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 138), which here includes issues of power (interchanges between research and participant) or defensiveness. The observations about the nature of interactions between the researcher and participants constitute useful material to complement participants' told stories.

Another important aspect of using proforma was the ethnographic dimension that centres on the interview's circumstances (Merrill and West, 2009), including the interruptions and any impressions of the setting where the interview took place and what might have been happening in there. Additionally, if the setting is where participants live, it might say something about their personality or how they interact with others in that space and with the space itself.

Using proforma in making sense of the interviews enabled me to find an equilibrium in my own story's disequilibrium and my participants' stories. However, given the Orthodox Christian particularity of this qualitative research, I needed more tools for an even deeper understanding of our stories, both mine and my participants. Therefore, I made use of a critical analysis of my participants' religious discourse. Their discourse was considered together with my own inner religious discourse, as my thoughts are often inked into religious speech and information.

5.8.7. Critical analysis of the religious discourse

A critical analysis of mine and my participants' religious discourse complemented the information gathered through proforma. Discourse analysis refers to how language is used and how meaning is created in different social contexts (Fairclough, 1992). It applies to any language, whether written, oral, or non-verbal. Unlike linguistic approaches, which focus only on the role of the rules in language use, discourse analysis emphasises language's contextual meaning. It is used to analyse entire conversations, texts, or collections of texts.

In the interviews I had with the Orthodox Christian teachers from Romania, the language used was more often than not religious in nature. Therefore, I felt the need to supplement the proforma, which focused on the themes, the process, the ethnography of the interview, and the emergent Gestalt, with an analysis of the participants' religious language. Their language was critically analysed in the context of their professional, personal, and spiritual life.

Fairclough (1992) argues that the central concern in using critical discourse analysis for conducting research is to discover an "explanatory connection" between the language used and social reality. His position assumes that there is a dialectic connection between discursive and non-discursive (discourse and reality), to use Berger and Luckmann's terms (1966, p. 78). Generally, discourse analysts are not interested in participants' perspectives as such, but more in how their perspectives are related to the social positions of the participants (Wijsen, 2010). In this thesis, I do not act as a discourse analyst, although I do use discourse analysis to complement the understanding of my participants' lives, to be able to see myself and my participants' emergent Gestalt. I am interested in understanding how the religious language they used has (or does not have) the power to transform the societal order (Fairclough, 1992, p. 65; Wetherell, 2001, pp. 383–387) of their personal and professional lives.

Consequently, I look at the individual dimension (micro perspective) to understand how their religious language is shaped and in turn shapes my participants' personal and professional identity. Then, I consider their religious language within the church space (meso perspective) and, finally, I explore how their discourse might transcend the micro and meso and go beyond the border of private and church spaces, into the larger space of society, for example in the schools where they teach. Fairclough (1992), on the one hand, distinguishes between three levels of analysis of the discourse: individual, institutional, and societal. On the other hand, he looks at these levels descriptively, interpretatively, and explanatory. I have adopted his polymethodical model in analysing the multidimensional perspectives of the religious language used by my participants during the interviews. Below I will briefly explain how I did that, but a more detailed explanation can be found in the chapters dedicated to participants' stories.

Firstly, I described the religious language they used, making sense of the words accessible to those unfamiliar to Orthodox Christian language. Words and phrases such as 'confession', 'Jesus prayer', 'humility', 'God's will', 'put me in front of God' are

translated and explained in detail. I chose those words that were repeated more times because they were significant for my participants. There were words commonly used by participants, such as 'Jesus prayer', 'prayer', 'spiritual father', 'God's help', but there were also words mainly used by some participants more than by others.

The second phase was to interpret the religious language they used and to indicate what that meant in the context of their lives and their profession. For example, Melanie, who mentioned 'God's will' many times, reflected her spiritual and personal state at the moment of interviews. She was going through a difficult time emotionally, and the only hope for her to overcome the personal difficulties she was experiencing at the moment of interviews was God. To use Bandura's terms, she was relying on a divine proxy agency to strengthen her own sense of agency. Lastly, I tried to explain the implications of using that language in shaping their lives and profession. I will take Melanie again as an example. Her language implied a few things. First, she was repeating to herself the belief that things will work better for her with God's intervention, as she felt so down that she could not do anything just by herself. Further, this belief strengthened her to perceive light at the end of the tunnel. Then, modifying the perspective on her life's unfortunate events would make her more optimistic, which would improve her behaviour and relationships with people around her. Building positive relationships with people around her will increase the feeling of value, further developing her sense of self- efficacy, which will then produce more efficacy and increase self-esteem.

Apart from this, within Orthodox Christian spirituality, saying the prayer, or the Jesus prayer, is how one engages in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, whose name he or she is calling incessantly. By calling Jesus' name, people bring Jesus into their hearts. Being inside, Christ does the work for the person who calls Him to come inside. As God, He is almighty and omniscient and all-loving. Thus, He will enable that person to change for the better, developing those personal skills that make them feel fulfilled.

The decision to complement proforma with critical analysis only of the religious discourse used by participants in this study was made in order to illustrate the influence a spiritual father, as a significant other, might exert on an Orthodox Christian teacher. Although the main interest in the interpretation of my participants' stories and my own story was to understand the role of significant others (parents and spiritual father in particular) and to give meaning to the experiences (personal, spiritual and professional) connected to these, the necessity of better understanding of the influence of a spiritual

father underlined the need to understand the language better. More importance was given to the analysis of the religious language and not to another type of language (such as professional).

As Berger and Luckmann's terms (1966, p. 78) suggested, there is a dialectical relationship between discursive and non-discursive language. In other words, each mechanism has its logic and should be analysed on its own terms, using appropriate tools. For that reason, I decided to borrow the concept of paradox from my ontological positioning within the bigger picture of the philosophical framework. In the next section, I aim to illustrate how I used paradox as a tool to give meaning to my participants' stories and to my own story (In the previous chapter, I gave more details regarding the theory on paradox).

5.8.8. Paradox

As mentioned in the second section of this chapter and in the previous chapter, paradox defines a state of apparent contradiction or tension between two opposing facts that are connected. These two opposing facts, analysed on their own, have logic and make sense. I used paradox as a tool in my journey towards my participants and my Gestalt.

Across the interviews, my participants revealed to me moments of their lives where I identified contradictory states, experienced at the same time. For example, Melanie experienced a deep emotional state of sadness, but at the same time, she confessed that in that state, she experienced hope and confidence, especially during confession and prayer. Addressing those sensitive aspects of her relationship with her new status, being a mother, made her hopeful, although depression was still there with her in confession to her spiritual father. In Zoe's story, she felt down so often in her profession because she could not achieve her idea of being a perfect teacher, according to her mother's never expressed but felt expectations. For father Agapios, paradoxes arose many times in his life and his teaching career. He revealed an event from his youth during the interviews, when he was 15 years old and wanted to study at a theological high school. He prepared well for the admission day but, unfortunately, one day before the exam took place, he suddenly felt so sick that he could not get out of bed. He felt miserable thinking that everything was now lost. With his remaining strength he prayed hard and decided to go to the

examination, feeling a paradoxical state inside: on the one hand, he knew that his physical state would not allow him to pass, while on the other hand he trusted that he would achieve his dream. And he did. He entered the theological seminary, and he was the first to be admitted.

Above I provided three excerpts from my participants' stories to illustrate the paradoxes from their experiences. I interpreted the paradoxes in the light of Orthodox Christian spirituality, in which the idea that in the human life, God is still present in the darkest times is emphasised Although teachers may still experience challenges, constraints, or other troubles in their lives, all of these are altered when the person puts himself or herself before God, uncovering that 'true self' which is kept inside for fear of not being loved for who he or she is. In that inner safe space, within oneself, one experiences a relief from sorrow, learning in this way how to be and to act outside, in other relationships, as he or she acts in the intimate relationship with God.

This was only one example of how I analysed the surfacing paradoxes in my participants' stories. I will develop this more in each chapter dedicated to their stories.

5.9. Ensuring the Trustworthiness of Data

All research, qualitative or quantitative, requires passing a scrutinous examination through which it is validated as trustworthy. There are two concepts used in research, especially in qualitative research, to appreciate the study's level of trustworthiness, namely reliability and validity. Given the different nature of qualitative and quantitative research, the tools used for ensuring validity and reliability are different as well. If quantitative research reliability is given by the extent to which results may be reproduced when the study is repeated under the same conditions, in qualitative research with diverse paradigms, such a definition of reliability is challenging. However, reliability can still be confirmed in qualitative research by ensuring the consistency of the study. The other facet of the trustworthiness of research, validity, is also ensured differently in qualitative and quantitative research. In quantitative research, validity refers to the accuracy of using a

method to measure what is planned to be measured, whereas, in qualitative research, validity refers to the suitability of the tools, processes, and data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In my qualitative research, using a singular paradigm was challenging, which also meant that ensuring trustworthiness was challenging again. Firstly, the auto/biographical method is problematic for those areas of research because personal bias is entirely missing. Secondly, this research aimed to give meaning to teachers' spiritual experiences, which influenced them in their personal and professional growth. Both approaches can, and maybe are, being covered in personal bias. However, I was able to ensure trustworthiness in my research in a particular way used to certify reliability and validity in qualitative research. In the next section, I will detail how I established that my research is reliable and valid.

5.9.1. Reliability

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, in research, especially in quantitative studies, the outcomes' truthfulness is accepted if the results or observations are repeatable and replicable. Quantitative and qualitative researchers employ different ways of ensuring the reliability of their research. Referring to quantitative research, Kirk and Miller (1986), identified two types of reliability, which concern the degree to which a measurement, given repeatability, remains the same: the stability of a measurement over time, and the similarity of measurements within a given time. On the other hand, a qualitative study aims to enable researchers (though not exclusively) to "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). If quantitative research aims to explain, in qualitative research the intention is to "generate understanding" (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551). Hence, according to Stenbacka (2001), the concept of reliability in qualitative research becomes different from how it is understood in quantitative studies. He states that the concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research: if a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is that the study is no good.

In other words, in qualitative research, the criteria used by quantitative researchers becomes irrelevant and misleading because of the epistemological stance in which qualitative research is embedded. Additionally, the reliability of qualitative research

becomes even more difficult to confirm than in quantitative research, given the dynamics of human behaviour and the subjectivity of the researcher who interprets human experience. Likewise, qualitative data can be interpreted differently, depending on the researcher's epistemological and ontological positions. Hence, there is no standard to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense (Patton, 1990). Qualitative researchers use triangulation to ensure the reliability of their studies.

Nonetheless, Ortlipp (2008, p. 697) disagrees that triangulation could guarantee the reliability of research. She says that, concerning interviewing, a researcher should be non-reactive in order to increase the reliability of the interviewee's responses, that is, that the same answers would be given if the questions were asked at another time, in another place, even by another interviewer.

Given these contradictory opinions within qualitative research, finding a way to certify my research's reliability was challenging. Thus, to ensure an acceptable level of reliability, I paid much attention to how I collected the data, how I analysed it, and how I presented my findings. For a qualitative researcher, the process of data collection is more important than if the data were repeatable and invariable, as Polkinghorne suggests (1988). Therefore, the emphasis is on how the data is collected rather than the data collected (Bainbridge, 2015). In other words, a researcher must thoroughly prepare the interviews, the meeting with participants, and mentally and emotionally prepare himself or herself before the interviews.

In this sense, to ensure the reliability of my research, I undertook the following steps for preparing for the interviews with my participants. I contacted possible participants via email, phone, or personally; I applied for ethical approval; I agreed with my participants when the interviews would occur. Moreover, I tried to be aware of any possible, unforeseen issues that might arise and made sure I had a back-up plan. I chose a comfortable and familiar place for my participants to open themselves up, and for myself so that I could listen to their narrative in a mindful way. Then, I paid attention to physical positions. The best position was the 450 posture, since there is a certain proximity and distance at the same time. The face-to-face posture may intimidate both the researcher and/or the participant. Therefore, shifts in a power position were less likely to happen so that the researcher could not intimidate or become unable to ask insightful questions; eye contact was made at all times or as much as possible; I reassured my participants by smiling and having a positive attitude. I would only add: 'I am happy for you that your

spiritual father was a support and a guide through your life', rather than showing the excitement of a researcher who craves for data which answers his or her research questions. This reassuring, yet detached attitude, is more likely to keep the researcher's influence away from participants' narratives and the data.

Additionally, the accuracy and efficacy of the field notes gathered, and their in-depth analysis, was another tool used to ensure the reliability of my research (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000; Merrill and West, 2009; Webster and Mertova, 2007). These were reflected in the procedure adopted for the recording and transcription of the interviews. For recording interviews, I used two devices each time. The devices used had an appropriate size, not too small and not too big, to avoid possible intimidation of my participants by the recorders' presence. After a first listening and immersion into the interviews, I transcribed them on paper by myself, adding information which captured participants' nonverbal gestures. These were detailed in a notebook during the interviews.

In qualitative research, reliability is also determined by the level of compatibility between the collected data and the developed understanding of this data. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) argue that biographical researchers can enhance reliability by testing their claims. Hence, any claim must be sustained by the awareness obtained from participant's narration. Therefore, during the analysis of the interviews, I made connections with the literature and the research questions to understand how the data responded to the research questions. Consequently, this research attempts to find consistent evidence for the interpretations made by evaluating the data, gathered through both techniques, to validate its main assumptions.

Each time I met my participants, they showed a developed understanding of their lives and past experiences. This is because human nature and the process of giving meaning to past experiences which influences the present are dynamic. It was a promising sign of the influence my presence, as a biographical researcher, in that particular stage of my participants' lives. It gave me hope that, although past experiences may not be all that we had hoped for, talking about them and naming them in a secure space invited both participants and me to reflect and find meaning and equilibrium in the disequilibrium of our past lives. Therefore, as a qualitative researcher, I took all possible measures to ensure as much reliability as possible in my study.

5.9.2. Validity

Apart from reliability, any research requires validity in order to be seen as trustworthy. In qualitative research, validity is related a wide range of terms, such as rigour, quality, trustworthiness (Davis and Dodd, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stenbacka, 2001). As Winter (2000, p. 1) argues, validity, in qualitative research, is not a fixed concept but:

> rather contingent constructs inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects.

Although researchers such as Creswell & Miller (2000) suggest that validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his or her choice of paradigm assumption, there is still a need for some qualifying check for their research (Golafshani, 2003). Huberman and Miles (1994) suggest that a reassessment of the principles of conducting biographical research recommends notions such as accuracy, honesty, authenticity, familiarity, transferability, and the economy when appropriate, to assure validity of the research process. In my research, I applied Huberman's principles by using careful transcription and offering the participants the chance to engage with their narratives by reading the transcripts and summarising the analysis.

The research process can be internally and externally validated. Internal validation refers to how the research findings are congruent with reality if the findings genuinely capture what is there or/and if the researchers are exploring what they think they are exploring. Therefore, internal validation centres the meaning of reality. In qualitative research, there are two different positions in assessing the validity of a study. Ratcliff (2002) argues that data do not speak for themselves. Therefore, an interpreter is needed, whereas Maxwell (1992) claims that nobody can capture reality.

Moreover, Ratcliff suggests that the interpreter influences reality and, hence, he or she may change it. On the other hand, Maxwell considers that validity is only a goal, and that nobody can guarantee it. Additionally, for Ratcliff, the words that researchers or even ordinary people use are only symbols and not the reality itself. On the other hand, Maxwell emphasizes the same idea of the relativity of the validity, which should be assessed concerning the aims and the context of the research. Denzin (2005) proposes triangulation as a strategy to confirm the internal validity of a study. He envisages four triangulation types: multiple methods; multiple sources of data; multiple investigators;

and multiple theories to confirm emergent findings. It will be clear, therefore, that scholars are not in agreement about (internal) validity.

For my research, I used the model of multiple sources of data to confirm this study's internal validity. The first strategy refers to how data was collected, namely from follow-up interviews. Moreover, Ferber (2000) argues that the biographical research is internally valid as the whole process is centred on giving the meaning of a person's lived experience, emphasising the interviewees' world. Furthermore, Holloway and Jefferson (2000) and West (1996) consider discussing the findings from narratives with the participants as very important for good practice. Therefore, I shared with my participants the interviews transcribed and parts from the analysis of their interviews.

The second strategy for ensuring internal validity is to obtain feedback from the participants by giving them the transcription of the interviews and preliminary analysis. However, not all researchers fully agree with this strategy as the analysis may allow participants to influence the research by not being honest about declarations that may damage their reputation. In my research, I gave the transcriptions to my participants and a summary of the analysis, in order to ensure that the data was valid.

The third strategy to establish the internal validity of the research is making sure there's enough engagement in the data collection. This is based on the assumption that the researcher spent enough time on the interviews and that there is variation in the understanding of the phenomenon. In the context of my study, this mean that I had three interviews with each participant, lasting at least one hour each. The fourth strategy is reflexivity, through which the researcher reflects on their self as researchers. He or she should explain the opinions, biases, and assumptions regarding the research. Finally, the last strategy is called peer review, through which a colleague is asked to examine the raw data and consider whether what, if any, findings are likely to emerge from the data.

Although researchers consider these strategies to be useful to ensure internal validity, validity is not guaranteed, as each person is unique and one experience cannot be compared to another. However, human experience is worthy of being explored, valued, and considered as a possible example.

Apart from internal validity, external validity is required when a researcher conducts a qualitative study. This idea refers to a generalization of the results collected beyond the individual. This could be problematic for biographical research, because this type of study

uses small samples only. However, a biographical inquiry may have a broader vision, as the understanding gained through the process could lead to better life choices for those who have contributed their narratives. Individual narratives have a greater application than the small group or individual involved in the research (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Perakyla, 2004; West, 1996). Therefore, in biographical research, the purpose is not to generalise findings, but to understand the particular elements in-depth rather than uncovering general truths. Rustin (2000) supports the validity of biographical research by arguing that individual case studies help us understand our experiences. Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 298) recommend the notion of transferability:

> in which the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know which transferability sites might be sought, but the appliers can and do. The investigator needs to provide sufficient descriptive data to make transferability possible.

In other words, biographical researchers will provide the stories and seek to give them meaning and understanding. However, the stories they deliver could further provide new insights for others who read the research. Therefore, their task is to give enough information to make transferability possible for the readers.

Therefore, in biographical research, generalisability means to think in terms of the reader of the study. The person who reads the study may decide if the findings can apply to his or her situation or not. In this thesis, the Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional experiences could help me, as a researcher, to understand their experiences and maybe the experiences of other similar people. Moreover, if they also have an Orthodox Christian background, or maybe another Christian background, the readers of my study could confirm or dispute the findings for themselves.

Ensuring the reliability and validity of research is essential for that research to be considered valuable. In qualitative research, ensuring reliability and validity is not as straightforward as quantitative research, since the human subject is continuously changeable, variable, unique, and surprising. However, I am aware of the necessity of ensuring the reliability and validity of my research and of the improbability of doing so in a precise way, like in quantitative research. The reasons are twofold: the first refers to the qualitative/ interpretive nature of my study and the second concerns my participants'

spiritual experiences, which are at the core of my study. These two reasons prevent me from asserting the complete reliability and validity of my research, yet they also offer the possibility of more unique research.

To conclude this section, I would assure my readers that I have used the appropriate qualitative research methods, which may confirm the trustworthiness of my research. To summarise, these were: using appropriate tools for recording the interviews, multiple readings of the transcripts, paying attention to the preparation for the interview meetings, the transcription and analysis of the data, and sharing the transcripts and summaries of the analysis with participants. Not only ensuring trustworthiness is essential in research, but also being aware of ethical concerns, which, for this thesis, will be discussed in the next section.

5.10. Ethical concerns

Generally, qualitative research, especially biographical research, has a precise ethical dimension, according to Plummer (1983, pp. 140–145). Measor and Sikes (1992, p. 223) highlight this idea, emphasising the nature of data in biographical research.

> a life history did deal with confidential material and carried a high ethical load as a result.

In other words, biographical researchers usually work with private and confidential information, finding themselves in "face to face relationships with other human beings in which ethical problems of the personal and professional are bound to arise" (Soltis, 1989, p. 127). Therefore, in this relationship the concern of intrusiveness arises. Kelchtermans (in Handal, 2005) wonders about the degree to which an experienced biographical researcher may 'seduce' participants to reveal their personal and professional experiences. Thus, the dilemma of a biographical researcher refers, as Keltchemans (2005) highlighted, to how a researcher can collect sufficient information for the reconstruction of teachers' stories and their professional roots and development without improperly penetrating their private sphere. Answering this dilemma is not easy, and much emphasis is put on the researcher's tact and 'social sensitivity' (Keltchermans,

2005). In other words, the researcher must be aware of the limits of the field, as much of the information is not predictable.

In my research, ethical issues were treated with much responsibility, as an essential component of any study, ensuring the protection of the people involved in the research. The ethical element is a requirement for researchers to show how they plan to conduct their research. The ethical issues that a researcher should be aware of are: informed consent, respect for anonymity and confidentiality, respect for privacy, beneficence ('do not harm,'), and referencing the literature, to name only those I have treated carefully in my research. I will now discuss how I applied each one of them in this study.

5.10.1. Informed consent

Informed consent is the fundamental ethical issue in conducting research. Armiger (1997) states that "it means that a person knowingly, voluntarily and intelligently, and clearly and manifestly, gives his or her consent." In other words, through informed consent, a person decides if she or he is part of the research and is aware of the purpose and methods of the study. Informed consent aims to inform the participants about the study's whole process, seeking to incorporate the individuals' rights through self-determination. Additionally, informed consent seems to protect participants' integrity as well as their personal liberty and honesty (Jameton, 1984).

In my study, I told my participants about informed consent, and I explained the purpose of the study to them, the methods used, the selection process, how the data would be analysed, and who the readers of the thesis would be. I thought it essential to inform my participants about any emotional discomfort they might experience during the narrative interviews (Burns and Grove, 2005).

Finally, in the informed consent form sent to my participants, apart from providing information about how the research and interviews would be conducted, I assured my participants that they would have the freedom to withdraw from the study if they so wished, without giving any explanations. Ford and Reutter (1990) highlight the importance of this aspect of informed consent, but raise an issue that may appear while

collecting data through narrative interviews. This issue refers to the difficulty of withdrawing after developing a personal and friendly relationship with the researcher. It may be difficult for the researcher when any participant decides to withdraw from the research because the whole process may be affected.

5.10.2. Respect for anonymity and confidentiality

Additionally, I assured my participants one more time of my respect for their anonymity and confidentiality to the informed consent. Their real names have been changed into pseudonyms, and their identity was kept secret. Their gender was not changed because of gender issues, such as particular features that belong to men or women. Keeping them accurate will help me give meaning to my own personal, spiritual, and professional experiences as an Orthodox Christian woman, as a female teacher and as a wife, mother, and daughter.

The recordings of the interviews were kept safely on my laptop under a password known only to myself. These will be deleted after the completion of my postgraduate studies. The full information was shared only with my supervisor. However, I am the only one who has the whole interviews, recordings, and transcription, as they were in Romanian. I have never shared my participants' real identity with other people, although one felt confident about being open about his real identity and even made his story public. I have not done so because I decided to keep all of them protected from any unforeseen possible consequences of publicising these stories. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality were two of the criteria I promised to my participants.

5.10.3. Benefice-do not harm

Another ethical issue refers to avoid harming my participants in any way. Narrative interviews can sometimes be problematic, as they remind participants about events in their lives that could be full of pain and charged with emotional distress. Relationships with significant others, as is often the case in this study, are not always happy. Instead, they may be full of distress, negative feelings, remorse, and even contradictory emotions.

In this sense, narrative interviews may psychologically harm participants. For that reason, I assured participants that they had the freedom to stop recalling disturbing experiences if they felt they had to. Additionally, I created an emotionally safe, non-judgmental environment where they felt safe to share even the disturbing memories from their lives and their profession.

I considered this feature as essential in my research because, as I have mentioned several times already, I wanted to honour my participants and obtain the data I needed from them. For that reason, I made sure I did not harm my participants, but rather made them benefit from our meetings.

5.10.4. Respect for privacy, honesty, and integrity

This right does not belong only to participants but also to me as part of this study. It was challenging to keep information that may have an impact on the whole thesis private. However, being ethical was more important than disclosing private information that participants had asked not to be shared publicly.

Additionally, in my own story, there was valuable information that I decided not to include in the thesis for fear of harming people emotionally close to me. I considered this decision an act of wisdom rather than a lack of courage. In that respect, I did not record what my participants disclosed to me outside of the interviews and I also did not include sensitive personal information in my story.

Furthermore, I imbued my thesis with honesty and integrity, meaning that I reported the methods I used, my data, and the results with precision. All the data is real; nothing has been made up or construed in such a way to mislead my readers through extrapolating some of my results.

Having outlined how my research design has been conceived and constructed, another methodological aspect needs to be clarified. How narrative interviews and the process of remembering interact and may determine the outcomes of the research. In the next section, I will offer a short explanation about the role of memory and remembering in narrative interviews.

5.11. Memory, Remembering and Narrative

Understanding the relationship between narrative research and the role of remembering requires, first of all, the understanding of the definition of memory, remembering and interpretation. Memory refers to the processes used to archive, store, preserve and later retrieve information, and it is a significant component of the self (Conway, 2005). Keightley (2010, p. 56) ascribes to memory not only the function of recalling past events, but she considers memory and remembering as

> a process of making sense of experience, of constructing and navigating complex temporal narratives and structures and ascribing meaning not only to the past but to the present and future also.

The next concept that follows the memorizing of information is remembering, defined as the conscious recollection of a past event that a person can mentally travel to the specific time and place of the actual event and retrieve the details (Sam, 2013). The last concept is interpretation, which is defined as explaining the meaning of something that happened and is remembered. These three concepts are essential in understanding the dynamic process between narrative and memory in auto/biographical research.

Another aspect that concerns the role of memory was highlighted by Bruner (1990, p. 108). He said that between mind and society, there is an essential link (Bruner 1990, p. 108):

> Self too must be treated as a construction that, so to speak, proceeds from the outside in as well as from the inside out, from culture to mind as well as from mind to culture.

In other words, there is a close connection between one's interpretation of the events in his or her life and the events in that person's life, which may well influence their interpretation and how later he or she will remember them. To be more concrete and understand its place in understanding the role of remembering in my research, I would point to how children interpret the world around them through their interactions with primary caregivers. According to Bruner (1990), knowledge about the self or existence presupposes shared intentionality. Olson (1992) understands Bruner's idea in the sense that all that is incorporated into consciousness is first agreed interpersonally. For example, the child constructs different concepts, such as milk, cat, dog, only if the adult with whom

he or she interacts had brought that thing into a "shared intention" (Olson, 1992, p. 31). The child will represent in his or her mind only those things on which he or she is sure of the shared agreement.

Moreover, narrative and memory are two processes that provide rich information about how people make sense of themselves and give meaning to their experiences and relationships. It is knowledge that people gain through shared intentionality (Tomasello and Carpenter, 2007). As Bruner (1990) argued, human beings are storytellers. It is how we understand ourselves and our worlds. Moreover, our stories define who we are in our families, nations, and history. For example, the experience with my parents influenced how I further behaved in my family of origin and the family I formed with my husband and my child. How my parents influenced my personality can be seen in how I further constructed my adult relationships, personally and professionally (more can be read in my story, chapter six).

Furthermore, Fivush (2008, p.50) suggests that stories individuals tell "are both shaped by and shape the very understanding of history in the making and the past. The stories we tell shape ourselves and the world in which we live." In other words, there is a close connection between human beings and their world in which one influences the other. This world begins in the family, and the family is the world where people begin to construct memories about significant others, themselves, and relationships and how they "should" look. Inverted commas for "should" are since children perceive the reality of their existence through interaction with their parents or their primary carer. Therefore, as Fivush (2008) emphasises, the family has great importance in how people begin to construct memories that may influence their development.

For example, it is essential to understand how the stories people tell and hear about their lives help them make sense of their experiences. Additionally, remembering past experiences and interactions with others, especially with significant others, can also influence how they make sense of themselves. Remembering is influenced by emotions; hence events will not be remembered exactly but instead are influenced by feelings that occurred during that event, including how people made them feel. Keighley (2010, p. 56) defines memory as a "lived process of making sense of time and the experience of it." In other words, memory is also how people interpret events and interactions with others. This way, memory may become subjective and possibly 'unreliable'; however, it will not be the subjective interpretation solely. An event or interaction determines the individual

to experience of feelings that further influence the memory of that event, as Bruner (1990) emphasised society influences memory and further memory influences society. It might not be the "truth", but this is how individuals understand and use those memories. Individuals can use those memories in their personal and professional lives (interactions, identity, practice).

Therefore, a connection between the nature of narratives and their construction through remembering needs to be done during the participants' narratives and the author. In other words, recalling memory during the interview is a level of reality. In the case of my research, participants remember and recall events from the past about their significant others. It is essential to acknowledge how their parents acted upon them and how they interpreted, coded, and stored in memory that experience.

At this point, it becomes essential to understand how interviewees (in the case of this research, Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers) recall their past experiences in a research context (in the case of this research, the relationship with significant others). Knowing the research topic, a participant may tell the researcher what they want to know about them. In narrative research, the relationship between the author (researcher) and participants can also influence how participants will remember events from the past. It is vital to understand how participants in narrative research construct their remembering. Also, it is necessary to apprehend that the researcher will construct their own memory of the interview.

The narrative research design should enable participants to tell their stories safely. First of all, a narrative researcher has to provide participants with a safe environment where he or she can feel free to speak about their experiences, even trying to give meaning to them, and where he or she feels they are not judged or derided for who they are or for how their story is. Another aspect in remembering refers to how participants perceive the researcher. Although there could be a connection between them, the relationship could change as the researcher acts professionally during the interviews. It is, especially, the case of those researchers who interview their friends or close people. Participants might say what the researcher wants to hear about their story.

My participants may have also interpreted the relationship with their significant others later in life compared to other people who became significant in their lives. In the case of my research, Zoe's mother and father relationship, the expectation she had from Zoe, the

pressure she put on her daughter's shoulders may have determined Zoe to interpret her experiences subjectively. She may have felt as a child that she and her mother do not have a good relationship, but she could realise, as an adult, how their relationship should look like, which are the reasons for which it does not look that way, which may be the reasons behind her parents' behaviour. She may have drawn on the memory of her mother's relationship with her father to make sense of "all men", and that is, they are weak. She could think, "I am not good enough to make my mother love me. Otherwise, she would not quarrel with me". These are only my subjective presupposition of how memory, remembering and interpretation could have worked in Zoe's mind and how she might have constructed her story. Furthermore, of course, Zoe could be remembering in the context of being interviewed by an Orthodox Christian female.

Thus, the child constructs an image about himself or herself in a relationship with adults who raise him or her. This construction is what Bruner catalogued as self-construction from the outside in. However, Bruner also stated that the self proceeds from the inside out, from mind to culture. In the context of this research, I might interpret Bruner's argument from an Orthodox Christian perspective. Any human being has been brought into this world with features that express his or her uniqueness. Hence, the mind is influenced by society (small or large scale), but also the self might influence society.

Therefore, humans create memories about their experiences that are interpreted and stored in memory. It is not necessarily how things happened, but how the child has interpreted that event and how they felt. Nonetheless, it is also possible that the memory of certain events to be influenced by how significant adults have reacted, interpreted, managed different situations common to children and them. Therefore, how those memories will be remembered depends on different circumstances and different interactions.

Moreover, Bruner (1990, p. 109) argues that

> the first is human reflexivity, our capacity to around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present. Neither the past nor the present stays fixed in the face of this reflexivity.

He argues that humans may change their interpretation of particular events or relationships throughout the life span through reflecting on past events or on how they remember them.

Therefore, reflexivity is necessary for narrative research, based on asking about life stories and drawing on remembering. Recalling past events and relationships with significant others might enable participants to give them new interpretations. Simultaneously, they might make new meanings about what happened in the past, the nature of the relationships with significant others, and how these have changed their lives.

5.12. Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I discussed and argued the use of auto/biographical methodology starting by situating myself as a researcher in the wider context of ontology and epistemology. I explained why I situate myself at the borderline between subjectivism and paradox, explaining that my work involves two different ways of understanding the world. The first position refers to the psychological and educational field, which works with human experiences, either personal or professional. In this case, a subjective framework for understanding the world was necessary, as each human being is unique, and no human experience can be generalised, although it can serve as an example to others. The second field I tapped into was Orthodox Christian spirituality, which refers both to spiritual experiences and religious knowledge. In that case, I needed a different yet valid way of understanding the world, and paradox came as a useful tool that provided me with a better understanding of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' spiritual, personal, and professional experiences.

Further, I positioned myself as an interpretive researcher who gives meaning and understanding to participants' experiences through her own lenses. These lenses belong to a researcher who has acted as a teaching fellow, as an Orthodox Christian fellow, as a companion to participants in our path towards understanding spiritual, personal, and professional experiences. In this context, I located myself as an insider all the time. Although there have been essays to detach entirely from being personally involved in participants' stories and understandings, it was not possible in the end. I thought of being ethical and honest to reveal my real position as an auto/biographical researcher. By nature, an auto/ biographical researcher is involved personally in the research process. Data collected through in-depth narrative interviews is not only "data", but it also becomes stories of real people with whom the researcher interacts, creates relationships and

empathy, and is a partner in the complex process of giving meaning to past experiences that affect the present. As mentioned, auto/biography was the method I considered best for understanding Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives and experiences and giving meaning to my personal, professional, and spiritual struggles and the connection between these struggles and significant others' influences in our lives.

To the auto/biographical method, I added a reflexive journal where I recorded my emotional states during the interviews, information about the process, participants, and various feelings and memories about myself and my relationship with significant others.

Although the qualitative research accepts subjectivism and bias, and the auto/biographical method as a valid method has been used increasingly by qualitative researchers in the last four decades, its tools and aim are different from those of quantitative research. Therefore, validity and reliability, although still valid concepts, refer to different aspects. For example, if in quantitative research, repeatability and generalisability are essential for research, in qualitative studies these features cannot be applied as human experiences cannot be generalised. However, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of their studies, qualitative researchers approach the whole research process carefully, for example through the preparation of and for the interviews, body positioning during interviews, the relationship built during the interviews, the transcription, and the analysis of the interviews and the collaborative process of transcription and analysis with participants.

Another critical aspect of any qualitative research in general, and of biographical research in particular, is the ethical concern, which appears especially when working with sensitive and personal information that participants disclose to the researcher during the interviews. In that sense, I took several steps to reassure my participants that ethical issues were addressed and any possible deviation from the ethics was kept under control. These steps were: an informed consent where I provided complete information about the research purpose, its tools, its process, and its questions; assurance that my participants would not be emotionally affected by recalling painful experiences from their lives or profession; assurance that I respected my participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Thus, their names were changed, and the interviews kept on a laptop protected by password. Furthermore, I ensured the privacy, honesty, and integrity of my research and participants in order to provide readers with real-life experiences. And last but not least, I have been consistently careful to reference the information with the right literature, which is listed in the bibliography. Further, I considered necessary to understand the connection between

how people construct memories, how they remember them during the narrative interviews and how this interaction may alter the outcomes of the research.

This chapter discussed how I answered research questions and how I made sense of my own story through my participants' stories. In the next four chapters, I will reconstruct and analyse the lives and the spiritual and professional experiences of myself and of the participants involved in this study, in order to see the emergent Gestalt and, therefore, to find and understand the influences of significant others (parents and spiritual father) in our lives.

Chapter six: My autobiography

6.1. Early memories

In this chapter I will present my story with the aim to show how it links with my participants' stories. I was born in Romania in 1985, as the second and last child of my family. My father worked as a builder, making houses and other things needed in a house, such as furniture. My mother worked as a dressmaker in a garment factory until the age of 35, when she got sick and my father decided that she should stay at home, taking care of us and the household. This is what she has done from the age of 35 until now (at the age of 63). She took care of the garden, of the house, of the small farm my family had that provided us with food. Having a garden and a small farm is a custom in all Romanian villages. Nearly all people have vegetable gardens and raise animals to provide food for families.

Although I was born in Romania's capital city, because of lack of available places in my town, I grew up in the countryside of Baragan, a place where, during summer time, the temperature rises to 40 degrees. This is where my story starts, a story about me, significant others, spiritual father and God. I do not remember much of the early years, there are only a few fragments that remain in my memory. Not all of them were happy memories. Because of my lack of time to take care of my hair, I remember how my mother cut my hair off, very short. People were asking if I was a boy. It made me feel terrible, as it seemed to suggest that I was not as pretty as other girls. It was probably a gender issue I lived within at that time. I was a girl and enjoyed being a girl; however, I felt frustrated because I looked like a boy, feeling that I had a problem that stopped people from loving me like I did not deserve to be loved because of my physical aspect.

Additionally, when I was around eight years old, I used to have a negative opinion about my physical appearance. That happened because of some thoughtless words shouted by an old neighbour. I was standing behind the gate of another neighbour. I do not recall if my parents were there or not. I do remember that another adult was around. She shouted from her backyard: "go away from there, you damn ugly girl!". It was so difficult to hear that voice and those harsh words. That came out of thin air for me, mainly because I could

not explain why I had a skin different from my friends. I had some café-au-lait spots. My parents did not know why either, only that I resembled my mother.

Doctors did not have any interest in this. I found out later when I was 25 years old that it was neurofibromatosis, a genetic disease with which 1 out of 10000 people is born. Another important childhood event took place when I spent my holidays with some cousins of mine. There, some children said the same harsh words to me, namely that I was ugly. I grew up with those words in my mind, and it made me perceive reality in the distorted way the old neighbour and those children have presented to me in the context of my disease. I was sure that was the reality.

Moreover, I cried about that many times in my life, because at the time I believed that ugly people are not loved. Unfortunately, my mother, who was a good enough mother, did not know and did not try to support me in that sense. I remember my father saying to other people that he has a beautiful daughter, and his words encouraged me at that time. However, now the paradox enters the scene. I felt down so many times during my life because of those words, and even now, as a married woman, a mother, a teacher and a researcher, I still hear those words echoing in my mind. Whether it was coincidence or not, it was at that age that I started going to church. When I first entered the church space by myself, I felt so much at home, and I experienced a state of freedom, of being accepted, loved, and appreciated for who I was.

6.2. Memories from Nursery and Primary School

I started nursery school at the age of four, and I enjoyed going there every day. I remember my teacher praising me for my behaviour and my good learning. When I began year 1, I already knew how to write and read, and had learnt some poetry by heart from a book my parents bought me. In primary school, we began to learn religious education from year 2. Our teacher was the priest from the village, who advised us to go to church on Sundays. The next Sunday, I remembered what he said to us, but it was 10 o'clock, in the morning, too late to participate in that Sunday liturgy, which generally would finish around 10:30–11:00. So, I postponed my first independent church trip to the next Sunday. As I mentioned earlier, entering the church was like entering a space of freedom for me, where

I felt at home, I felt loved for who I was, despite my "ugliness", which now I consider as being a false thought that made my childhood and adolescence sad.

In school, we had a young and kind teacher. We were her first class she took charge from the beginning. She only had two years of teaching experience, but she was the best primary school teacher I have ever known. I enjoyed learning very much and also I liked memorising. As a child, I did not have many friends, neither at school nor at home. I was a shy girl, but only older people rather than children lived on my street. At school, I was very preoccupied about learning and did not go outside too often during breaks. I used to stay in the class with other students talking or preparing for the next lessons.

Some would say I was a sensible and hardworking child. I was indeed, but I was also timid, and I did not feel comfortable being with big groups of children. I had friends in my class who were like me. Outside school, I did not have many friends either, as on my street there were older people than young people. I enjoyed going to church very much, as I felt at home and I felt I belong there. I experienced this feeling when I was only eight years old. The priest was very kind to me, as I was the only child who came to church every Sunday. I could not wait for Sundays to come. My parents never accompanied me to church, neither did my older brother. After a while, I felt that I wanted to share my joy with them, but they never accepted it. They even argued against it, telling me that they had work to do and had no time. I felt so sad many times when I came from church and saw my father working hard on Sunday. I cried because of this rejection many times without telling them anything. I did not trust them to share my feelings as I always rejected my own feelings.

Sometimes, when my father was in a good mood and did not have to work or come back home very late, I could share a tiny bit of my feelings or sorrows. Unfortunately, I could not communicate my dreams, my feelings, my sorrows to my mother. She always rejected sharing uncomfortable things. Furthermore, I also felt very uncomfortable with sharing everything myself.

On the other hand, I was brave enough to say what I wanted to do: to go to church every Sunday. Although they did not always agree, they allowed me to go to church every Sunday, to say my prayers in the morning and evening without being disturbed, or to show my interest in studying theology.

In this context, I met the priest who has been my spiritual father for more than 17 years and whom I have known for 23 years, since I was 12 years old. At that age my spiritual journey started. I remember that it was on 6th August 1997 when I first confessed to the young priest who had come to our village for a few weeks. It was then that I met Christ in person for the first time in my life. It was not the priest Christ (I never confused Christ with my spiritual father), but I felt a loving presence there in the mystery of Confession, who accepted me just as I was. From that moment on, my spiritual father became a significant other, whom I trusted more than my parents, more than myself and more than anybody else. I must recognize now, after 23 years that I never go wrong in listening to his advice. I trusted him because I knew Christ himself communicated with me through him.

6.3. Memories from High School

I had my final exams for entering the best secondary school in the town close to my village. I scored less than expected, but it was a good mark to enter the third in the sciences profile of my secondary school. I was the second best student, which was a good and acceptable result for me. My high school years were a continuation of my primary school years. I had only a few friends, and, as it happens in most secondary schools, children are divided into cliques. I was in the group with sensible girls who liked learning, who do not go out in breaks to smoke secretly, who were appreciated by their teachers but not by their famous high school peers.

I continued learning and studying hard and finishing every year as the best in my class. This aspect made me respect my teachers and, in a way, my fellow students, who asked me for help with their homework every day. Furthermore, I used to give them my homework with much joy because I enjoyed helping them, and also it gave me a sense of superiority. I was sometimes mocked for my faith, but never felt discouraged from being who I was showing my faith and my Orthodox Christian identity.

Away from school I continued my spiritual life path. My spiritual father became my confidant, my friend, my support, and both my mother and my father. In a word, my

spiritual father became and continued to be a significant other for me. The feelings and the experiences a teenager goes through in becoming a young person requires good support from an adult. I wished I had my parents on my side, and to receive emotional support from them. Unfortunately, they could not give that to me. Now, as an adult, full of preoccupations, worries, and lacking time or a better organisation of my time, I can understand them.

Additionally, they did not have the knowledge I have about children's emotional development. On the one hand, I understand their frustrations, their needs, their sorrows, as they were poor. On the other hand, I still feel frustrated for not have received that emotional support I longed for my whole childhood.

However, as I mentioned, my spiritual father replaced that need for emotional support and enabled me to develop a personal relationship with God. I also remember how much I liked reading, mostly religious books, and listening to religious music. When I was between 13–16 years old, a desire to become a nun was born in me. For more than ten years, I had that desire in my mind and lived as if I would become one someday. I also wanted to do something with meaning in my life and help poor people, orphans, older adults, and whoever was in need. Likewise, I wanted to get closer to God through study. Therefore, I decided to study Theology at university. I never planned to become a teacher, but I became one later.

Thus, towards the end of my high school years, year 11, year 12, I prepared hard to study Dogmatics and French for the admission examination. My parents initially disagreed with my decision, but they later supported me and paid for French tuition lessons and Dogmatics. I was so eager to study Theology that I read and prepared for the examination in my spare time, during break times, and when any lesson was cancelled.

One month after the Baccalaureate examination, in year 12, I had the examination for entering University. It was an adventure to go to my exams with my father and my brother.

6.4. University years

I spent six years in the Faculty of Theology. Now 12 years have passed since I finished my Bachelor degree and my Master degree I can say that they were blessed years.

I enjoyed the classes, all of them, as I felt as if I was part of a family together with my fellow students and teachers. We had early morning liturgy and late afternoon vespers every day. I liked to go to the liturgy every day, but I could not stay for vespers in the evening, as I rented a room in an old lady's house. She was nice, but she did not allow me to come home later than 7–8 p.m. My parents acted very possessively; they did not allow me to spend time with other students outside of those hours. This frustrated me, but I never said anything to them or my landlady because I did not want to upset them.

I remember how once I went to sing carols with some other students to people in hospital. We finished quite late, around 10 p.m. That time, I did not have a mobile phone. My parents panicked when they called my guesthouse and found that I was not at home, although I had told them where I would be going. The guesthouse waited for me at the bus station, and when I got home, I called my father to tell him where I was. He screamed at me telling me that I should not upset my landlady and give up on my friends, which I did for fear of not upsetting them. I obeyed, but I was very disappointed and sad. I liked doing charity and getting involved in such activities.

I did not have privacy in the guesthouse. My landlady and her husband slept separately. In her room, she had two beds, one table, and a wardrobe. She gave me one shelf. She slept in one bed, and I slept in the other bed. For that reason, I used to leave early in the morning and come back late in the afternoon. Every weekend I left for home, where I had my own room and more privacy. My parents also wanted me to come home every weekend. I think they were afraid of giving me freedom, fearing they would lose control over me. They did not lose control. When I was a professional, a married woman, a mother, a researcher, they still wanted to maintain control over me. Their behaviour gave me much trouble. I still believe they did not have bad intentions, but that they acted through fear.

I finished my Bachelor studies in 2008 and immediately afterwards submitted an application for a job in teaching. It was a national contest that I passed with a good grade. This allowed me to get a full-time, permanent job in Religious Education. It was a big

surprise for me that I passed that examination and got a permanent full-time teaching job. I was very excited about my new start and imagined how great teaching children about God would be. I had no clue about the challenges I would face as a teacher.

6.5. Teaching Religious Education challenges and rewards

I began my teaching career at 23 years old without having much teaching experience. In our faculty, we did not receive much teaching training due to the Romanian system, which focused on theory rather than practice. I had big hopes and ideas about what my teaching, lessons, students, and school would be like. It was not a total disappointment, but it was not what I dreamt of. I taught a few classes that gave me headaches, and felt immense distress because of what I experienced. I remember having a year 1 class which gave me much trouble, and another year 8 class in which I could not make my voice heard. In the year 1 class, I had two or three students with special needs but no specialised support. In Romania, teachers are on their own in the classroom, without a teaching assistant or other assistant for special needs children. The teacher has to face all challenges on his or her own.

Additionally, I had no experience with working with special needs children, and I knew no strategy for approaching them. My head teacher and the other experienced teachers expected me to act as they would do. I had a few younger colleagues who supported me through my first year. The more time passed, the more experienced I became, and I began to understand how I should approach my students, and we created a professional relationship. With the other challenging class, the year 8, things were more challenging, as they were believed to be the top- class in the school for Maths, Romanian, and Foreign Languages. However, they had not been encouraged to respect other teachers and other subjects, such as RE, Music, Arts. They had a good opinion about themselves, and most of them were self-sufficient. Therefore, I rarely could find a way to communicate with them. Sometimes, they were so chatty that they did not listen to me at all. It was tough to go through such a feeling of being ignored. In that first year of teaching, I considered giving up teaching or moving to another school several times.

At the end of my first year of teaching, I gained the respect of my colleagues, the headteacher, and most of my students and their parents. As a consequence, the

headteacher decided to give me more responsibilities that next year. Thus, I became a class tutor for the most misbehaved year 5 class in the school, and the head of the Humanities department. Naming me a class tutor for the most misbehaved class was not due to my management of their behaviour, but to the fact that I was the newest in the school and the more experienced teachers wanted to have practical classes to guide. I stayed with that class throughout all of their whole gymnasium years, which is from year 5 to year 8. In this class they placed children who repeated the year because of their bad grades, children with bad behaviour, and children whose parents were abusive and disinterested in their children's education. I remember that I had to stay with the class every break to make sure they did not hit one another or destroy anything.

As the years passed, many of the children left the class, so that in year 8 they were only 14 students left in the class. Only one or two children were troublemakers, but the rest were generally sensible, but there was not much learning. At least, now I could have breaks during the day.

Although things settled down, I was not very satisfied with the children's behaviour, and I was still thinking of leaving the profession or moving to another school. Leaving the teaching profession was not easy, as I felt I would betray my vocation. In 2012–2013, something unexpected happened: I met my future husband, and from that moment, things began to change for me.

6.6. Meeting my husband and teaching in the United Kingdom

I met my future husband on the internet, on the 9th of December 2012, but we met in a flesh for the first time on the 4th of April 2013, in Bucharest. He was not from the same city as I was but from Iasi, which is 600 km from the capital city. We first met each other at a tube station, after a trip he had made to the UK. He brought me two lovely gifts. One was a ring with a Greek prayer on it, Κύριε Ιησού Χριστέ, ελέησόν με ('Kyrie Isou Christe Eleison me', which translates into English as 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me'). We continued to visit each other for the next year, when I decided to take a break from teaching for a year, but luckily I could keep my role at that school in Bucharest. I

took unpaid leave for a whole year. In the same year, I was admitted to doctoral studies at Canterbury Christ Church University. We decided to leave for the UK, in June 2014. In October, I should have started my studies, but I could not afford it, so I had to postpone the beginning of my doctoral studies, as I did not have the money to pay. In July of the same year, my husband suggested that I do some teaching in the UK, that way I could earn some money for my studies. I followed his suggestion and, in the summer of 2014, I registered with many teaching agencies to do supply work in London. On the 8th of September 2014, I got a call from an agent who asked for a supply teacher at a primary school in Slough. That day was unique, as in Orthodox Christianity, we celebrate the feast of Virgin Mary birth. It also came after I prayed to God to help me to get a job. I took the job, and I went there without knowing what a lesson should look like in the UK. I just went as a soldier without any weapon. However, my experiences in Romania helped me understand and learn quickly how to teach in a primary school.

My first days were close to a disaster, and the school said that they did not need me anymore. The agency suggested me to begin as a teacher assistant, to see and learn about teaching in the UK. I then worked for two weeks as a TA in a primary school. After that period, I felt ready to begin teaching a class by myself. I took every job that came my way, from Nurseries to secondary schools. I enjoyed teaching Nursery, EYFS, Year 1 to 4 very much. I did not enjoy year 5 and 6 much, and disliked teaching in secondary schools. I remember how once I had a supply job at a secondary school in Wimbledon. It was awful. Children were very disrespectful, and I was out of my depth. I was unable to manage their behaviour. They knew I was a supply teacher who does not have much say in the school and may not come back the next day. So, they did whatever they liked. I taught in various schools, faith schools, primary schools, secondary schools, private settings, and children centres. I gained a vast teaching experience in the UK in a year, from 1-year olds to 17-years old.

In May 2015, I got fantastic news. I received an email from Canterbury Christ Church University for an interview for a scholarship. I was nervous at the interview, but I trusted in God, whose support I felt not only then but also throughout my whole teaching career. I passed the interview successfully and got a scholarship.

I saw the scholarship as a gift from Christ himself. It was a blessing. The years spent at the University were beautiful and challenging, as I dealt again with much novelty. The system was different from the Romanian university system. Academic English was a big

issue in expressing my thoughts and ideas. Understanding notions, such as critical thinking, was also tricky at the beginning, because it translated wrongly in my mind. These reasons, and other personal challenges, made me repeat all examinations I had: first proposal, the upgrade, and the final review. Although it was painful to repeat, it was good to learn a lesson every time. I feel that any failure in my PhD took me to a next level, personally and professionally. I understood that doing a PhD also requires maturity. I was not mature enough, and that was reflected in my writing. Also, I tried to follow certain "writing norms", which made me sound inauthentic. Later, I decided to be honest with myself about my writing and about my research. This decision changed my writing, and I could now be honest, while at the same time respecting academic standards.

I had to extend my studies by nearly three years. One reason was my slow pace, and the second was the birth of my baby boy, which brought even more challenges into my husband's and my life.

6.7. Becoming a mother

In 2018, I received fantastic news: I was pregnant with our first child. I was so happy and excited about it. My boy came as a miracle in our life, after much prayer. We decided to move back to Romania for his birth, so that he could be born in his parents' country, hoping at the same time that our parents will now be a support for us, and they would help us. I imagined that my parents would change my husband's and my attitude to parenthood, and that my mother-in- law would help us with baby and cooking and house cleaning. This way, I could write my thesis   and spend time with my baby.

I searched for a private hospital which would provide me with similar birth services as in the UK. I found one and paid much for holding my baby in my arms and breastfeeding him straight after birth. In Romania, new-born babies are taken from their mothers in public hospitals and brought back after a few hours.

In our house, however, things were not as we hoped to. My mother-in-law did not offer us much space to put our things, which made my husband and I feel very frustrated. We could not move into a rented house either, as we could not afford it. The birth of my baby

was a blessing and a challenge at the same time. I took holy communion on 6th January and that day the birth began. Around 10 p.m. I went to the hospital. I was in significant pain, and I thought I would give birth immediately. But it was not as I had expected. Although I had big contractions, my body was not ready for giving birth. They gave me injections for dilatation and pain. They were a significant relief. When I was close to giving birth, my baby was too tired of the contractions, so he could not continue travelling out of my body. The amniotic fluid was turning green, and my baby was in danger. The doctor decided that I should have a C-section to save the baby. I accepted. They brought me to the surgery room, gave me more injections and performed the C- section.

When I first saw him, it was terrific. He had such white skin, like snow, while I'm not very white. He cried, and then when they brought him to me, he smiled at me. I will never forget his beautiful, cheeky smile, which he shows even now. In the hospital, things were all right. I could have my baby with me and feed him during the night when he needed. Unfortunately, the private hospital took cost us more than 2000 pounds for the birth and hospital days. When we left the hospital, it was a stormy, snowy day. The next day, we had to go back to the hospital so that our baby could be vaccinated.

After my baby was born, things became worse in the house. My husband felt very frustrated, and sometimes angrily replied to his mother, which hurt her pride and left us without any help. There were days when she did not speak a word to us and would look at us in an accusatory way. My baby had just been born and needed space. My husband also needed his space to continue working. So, there were three of us in a room, myself, our baby and my husband who needed to do work. Because of the light coming from my husband's computer, our baby woke up sometimes and started to cry. My husband needed silence to work properly. We did not sleep well as the baby would wake up a few times during the night to eat. But this is normal.

What was not expected was our psychological state: we felt frustrated and abandoned by our parents. My parents, who were not nearby, wanted us to provide them with photos of our baby, to come to visit them, to make them feel grandparents. They never asked me if I needed any help. We had to manage things by ourselves and to face my parents' pressure and my mother- in-law's pride when she wasn't treated the way she wanted. In this context, my husband had to work, I had to write my thesis, cook, take care of the house, take care of the baby, support my husband and, what was worse, face our inner conflicts and emotional wounds caused by our parents in childhood, which made us incapable of

getting out of that situation. Months passed, and things in our family became worse and now, two years afterwards, we are still trying to recover our sense of peace, our relationship, our trust, and our love. We had our spiritual father, who often nourished us with his love and trust in us during this time. He remained the only source of stability in our lives. He allowed us to confess whenever we needed; he prayed for us and supported us.

I realise that my life was and still is dictated by my relationship with significant others, especially with my parents and my spiritual father. Unfortunately, my parents did not know how to support me and allow me to be an autonomous person. On the other hand, my spiritual father allowed me to manifest myself as I was, without conditioning his love for me.

Before moving to my participants' stories, it is worth acknowledging again the gender aspect. I experienced all these events of my baby boy's birth as a woman. The tensions that arrived into my life, the new feelings that I experienced, the nights I did not sleep for fear of anything happening to my newborn baby boy, my instinct of defending him from all the hostile atmosphere in our house, between my husband and I, and between our parents and us.

There were all sorts of new responsibilities that came all of a sudden for me as a female: feeding my baby boy, changing his diapers, changing his clothes, holding him as much as possible into my arms to create between him and me emotional bonds and to make him feel loved. Although I became a mother, I was still a female and my husband's wife. Unfortunately, I forgot that and, to some degree, I have compromised my relationship with my husband. That was another tension that females experience when they become mothers, especially for the first time in their lives.

Furthermore, I was tense because of my new role and how I had to understand my new role in relation to my secondary roles. I was still the daughter of my parents, but now I was a wife-female and a mother-female, with new responsibilities and challenges which have changed the relationship with parents, who have never accepted that they were not anymore in the first place.

Moreover, I was also a researcher, a Ph.D. student engaged in writing a valuable thesis, which turned to be a valuable lesson for her own life and participants' lives. How could I, as a female, manage to cope with so many challenges: being a new mother, a wife,

keeping on her shoulders the household, supporting her husband, trying to maintain a good relationship with her very demanding parents, and to please them, trying to please her mother-in-law, trying not to ruin her Ph.D. studies. I experienced all these new and old responsibilities as a woman, which is a different experience from a man's experience, who would go through all these new challenges and changes in his life. The new experiences I went through after becoming a mother, and still being a novice researcher, have changed the perspective and the understandings about relationships with significant others and about the teaching profession I had in the beginning of my research. I developed a sort of deeper intimacy and empathy for them through re-reading the transcripts and re-listening the recordings. These new insights made me remember differently my experiences and our interactions during the interviews. I became more aware about the impact the relationships I had with significant others have influenced my personal and professional lives.

All these experiences of being a daughter, wife, mother, daughter-in-law, researcher made me better understand, in particular, Melanie's personal challenges and how she approached them, which I will give more reflections on in Chapter eight.

From a Christian Orthodox perspective, a new situation would be considered challenging, and females are considered to live a life of sacrifice for their children and her husband, prioritizing things and people in their lives (Atanasiu, 2012). Women must not suffer but are called to change the challenging events and times of their lives into ways of discovering themselves and discovering God's love into their lives through learning humility.   This insight links to how I understand my experiences and Melanie's experience, as women, wives, mothers and teachers, in the light of Christian Orthodox faith.

Chapter seven: Zoe's Story

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a summary of Zoe's story, starting with how we met (section 7.1.), then continuing with Zoe's early life, and her relationship with her parents (section 7.2.); next, I will look at her professional development, from the moment she became a teaching professional and the challenges with which she was confronted (section 7.3.); then, I will develop some themes concerning her parents and spiritual father, as significant others (section 7.4). After that, I will pay attention to Zoe's religious discourse (section 7.5.) and the paradoxes in her life and profession (section 7.6.). Finally, in the last section of the chapter (7.7.), I will provide a summary of the whole chapter.

I met Zoe for the first time in the church where my husband and I used to go when we were in his home city, Iasi, in Romania. It was the same church where his parents got married, where he and his brothers were baptised, where we were married on a Sunday, during the Liturgy, when all church members were there attending the Sunday service, and where our son was baptised. Therefore, it is, in a way, a family church. I knew Zoe before, because she was very active in the church, both setting up and participating in activities, such as groups of discussion for Christian couples who attended that church. Being a shy woman, I had never dared to introduce myself to her. I realise now that I had a lack of confidence. After the marriage service, she congratulated us on our marriage. It was only then that I dared to speak to her and to create a connection. We did not become friends, but I could, a few months after my marriage, ask her to be a part of my research.

We met three times in a year, each meeting lasting an hour and a half. We spoke in her living room, where a big bookshelf was right in front of us, full of books. As a French teacher with a doctor for a husband, she had French titles, medical treatises, and religious books. She was welcoming every time I came to her place, offering me chocolates and herbal tea, which I enjoyed a lot. I liked the furniture in her living room for its classical woody style, which made me feel safe and comfortable. When we met the first time, she was very nervous, maybe because of the two recorders I put between us, maybe because of my position, a researcher from the United Kingdom, although Romanian, with a

notebook and a pen in my hands, ready to 'check' if she was or was not the teacher I expected to find (this will make more sense later in the chapter).

As in any narrative interview, we did not follow the story of her life chronologically, but rather we went back and forth, trying to focus on her narrative and openness more than following a strict and rigid structure. As she said after our first meeting, the interview was not what she had expected it to be (questions and answers, a structured interview) and she felt, in the end, comfortable with the approach and opened up quite quickly. We talked a lot about her profession, about her spiritual life and her family of origin.

7.2. Early life – the quest for perfection

Zoe was born in North-East Romania, one-hour driving distance from Iasi, the city where she currently lives. Her mother was married twice, and these marriages resulted in two children, Zoe and her older brother. Her mother's relationships with men were not good, as she divorced from both husbands. I do not know why, as Zoe did not mention, or maybe she did not know herself or never dared to ask her mother about them. The only particular fact was that her mother had a negative opinion about men, which influenced Zoe's perception of men.

> It is a reference point in our family. Boys to be rejected by women and men to be marginalised very much. It is a fight I have with myself; I mean, I have noticed many times a tendency in myself to despise men for being weak, whiny, not being real men, not coping with life; anyway…all kinds of thoughts. From the female point of view, this attitude is compelling; I mean, negative phrases and devaluing thoughts about my husband come into my mind; especially, my mother's words.

Her mother's experience was influential, as she recognises her internal struggle to temper her distrust in men. She spent the early years of her childhood in a family where her mother despised her father and her father was an alcoholic, the reason for which her mother, I presume, divorced her father. I put myself in Zoe's place and saw her mother, a tough woman, independent, arguing with her father because of his addiction. After this image, I imagined Zoe's father, a sad man, probably not fulfilled professionally, overwhelmed by his wife's expectations, by the judgement of his children, finding his

escape in alcohol. Moreover, finally, my feeling was of Zoe as a little girl seeing her dad drunk and her mother arguing with him for not being a proper man, because of his addiction, and dominating him. This little girl sees a negative image. She sees her mother suffering because of her father's addiction, imagining that they would be a happy family if her dad would not drink.

Zoe's parents broke up when she was five years old, and since then she travelled between her mother's and father's house, especially during the summer holidays. At her dad's house, she felt good, and she experienced happy moments with him and her grandmother. They were all sleeping in the same room, although the house had more rooms (a custom in Romanian countryside families was to sleep in one room to keep the other rooms clean).

> I remember that we all used to sleep in a big room with a kitchen, the only room they used, although the house was big enough. I used to sleep in the same bed as my grandma, and dad slept in a different bed. In the morning, I woke up, and dad was next to our bed because the light was there, and he covered the light with a newspaper, so that it would not disturb us…and he was praying. I enjoyed seeing him like that…these were his good moments…he had that kind of strong faith that if he prays the prayer is listened to.

In childhood, Zoe admired her father's strong faith in God, and the image of him kneeling for prayer has remained in her memory. She felt happy when he was in a state of faith and peace. At her father's house, she had her grandmother whom she remembers taking her at church on Sundays and on Christian feast days for confession and communion.

These moments were happy for Zoe and her friends who were inspired in their faith by her grandmother and by her father. There, in the countryside, at church she met her friends, and they confessed together. It is called "collective Confession", and during this kind of confession several people, especially children, are asked a couple of fundamental questions about their behaviour or attitudes, such as: did you lie? Did you steal? It is a continuation of how Christians of the Primary Church were practising confession, stating their sins or faults out loud in front of the Christian community.

> My grandmother and father used to confess, so I also did…I also went through collective Confession when I lived in the countryside with my father and grandmother. We all laughed at the priest's epitrachelion (i.e. an Orthodox

> Christian clothing item for priests)…he used to ask us: did you steal? So, we
> would answer: yeeess!! It was so easy to say 'yes' or 'no' and then to laugh and
> giggle. It was much fun.

I tried to understand who provided a secure base in Zoe's early life, and to whom she was more attached, in order to understand the influence of significant others and to make comparisons between her experiences and my own. Looking at her mother's influence in Zoe's life (this will be done more explicitly later in this chapter), the answer should be her mother. Her father and mother had different approaches to life, one was kind, but alcoholic, whereas the other was tough but without addictions. She lacked love for her children and never inspired her children to have faith. However, her father's kindness was not enough to convince Zoe to appreciate him. He suffered his dramatic life in silence, never discrediting his wife in front of his daughter. The divorce must have been a tragedy for him, as his wife despised him because of his addiction, which pushed him further into the addiction.

Young Zoe loved her mum and her dad, but she felt frustrated because of his father's addiction; because of this they could not be a family. Throughout her life she imagined what the situation would have been if her father had not been an alcoholic, so she judged him for that many years until he died in a car accident, being drunk.

> Dad drank a lot, and for many years, I judged him for this. He died in 2008 in a
> car accident, drunk, but …so still through my mother's eyes, seeing him through
> her frustrations because she used to bring all these difficulties from their
> relationship to me.

How painful would it have been for little Zoe to hear her mother frequently speaking about her father in such a way? It was painful enough that she still thinks about those words today, inspired by her mother. I felt sorry for little Zoe, who reminded me of little Cristina, a sensitive girl, whose mother did not know how to communicate her love, or rarely, whose mother was fearful that her daughter would do things which she felt would bring shame to them in the eyes of the people from her village. Nevertheless, this was only her fear that prohibited me from expressing myself, and the consequences are still felt today. For sure, both Zoe's mother and my own mother have their unresolved emotional conflicts, their reasons, their justification for their actions, but the consequences of their actions have resulted in Zoe's contempt for men (which has led to

a distorted image of God as well), and in my inability to express myself and the fear to say what I think.

Apart from our mothers' own possible emotional wounds or unresolved conflicts, it may have been a matter of communist ideology's impact on their generation's personal psychological development. Both her mother and my mother have nearly the same age and have been brought up and educated in the communist so-called "syndrome" (Klicperova-Baker, 1999). Klicperova-Baker (1999) argues that people educated in the communist regime show "authoritarian readiness," "suppressed individuality," or "incapacity to deal with dissonance" (p.6), to name just a few of characteristics. I encountered Zoe as an adult woman who still feels the effects of her mother's lack of love and her father's addiction, being frustrated about not being part of a happy family. At the same time, I perceived Zoe struggling to become a perfect daughter, a perfect student, a perfect Christian and a perfect teacher. What would happen if it turns out she is not perfect? She might think that she will not be loved anymore, because one has to deserve to be loved, and only perfect people are loved; therefore, she must become a perfect person.

7. 3. School and Becoming a teaching professional

School life was good for Zoe, as she was a good student, doing "the right thing" every time, as her mother expected from her. Her mother's expectations and her brother's libertine behaviour made Zoe feel frustrated. She first realised that a few years ago, when she already was a teacher, and she was confronted with a student whose behaviour was strikingly like her brother's behaviour. Not only was he impolite, but he used to do whatever she had wanted to do, but escaped the consequences.

Becoming a teacher was not Zoe's dream. She suggested that being a teacher was "perhaps, mother's hidden dream" (Zoe, interview 1), though never overtly expressed. During her school years, she had a French teacher, who became an inspiraton to Zoe. It was not her French teacher's professionalism that inspired Zoe to become a teacher, but rather her kind attitude and her motherly features which Zoe wanted to see in her own mother. As a professional, Zoe's French teacher lacked classroom management skills,

and even her physical appearance was weak and fragile, which is why students misbehaved. Zoe could not learn French from her teacher in the classroom:

> She was small, petite…poor her; very fragile and spoke very gently and we were such a terrible class with very noisy and mean boys. So, she was there, at the whiteboard, in front of us, trying to make herself heard, but it was a total failure. So, in the class, I never learned anything. However, she was such a delicate being. Then, I had tuition hours with her, and those meetings were strictly for French, not as I do with my students. However, I felt she cared about me and that I mattered a lot because I had a childhood so full of pain…so her attitude mattered. Mom was very authoritative and very rigid; so, for me, this delicate and feminine presence .... mmm...I do not know; I do not know... how to describe her warm, for me it was… WOW.

Her words made me think again of her painful relationship with her mother, and how her career path may have been determined not by professional aspirations but by emotional needs. It can be argued that the inner need of being shown love and care by her mother was directed towards a teacher who had the traits of a mother: gentle, kind, caring, and interested. A deprivation of love made Zoe suffer consistently in childhood. She admired her teacher for her kind, loving, motherly features so much that she decided to become a French teacher. Maybe because Zoe wished to become a gentle, kind, caring women as well? This is only my supposition, as I imagined Zoe as young women, constructing an image about who she was and what she would like to become, and having in front of her two women: a tough mother and a loving teacher.

Zoe admired her teacher's gentleness, even in how she treated the financial aspects of tuition classes with her students. Zoe paid a lower fee to her teacher for her French tuition lessons because she did not know the right price. Her French teacher did not want to embarrass Zoe for not paying the right price, which she never communicated to Zoe. Zoe admired her teacher's gentle attitude, which made her feel special. My comment here is that Zoe felt special just like a daughter feels special for her mother, who does not apply the strict rule of discipline with her children, but instead shows them love and understanding.

> I think just from the way she talked to me or ... I think at some point I realised that I paid her less than I should... well ... the teacher expected me

to know the correct price and I did not know the correct price and paid her less, and then she had to... and I realised that I paid a little less.

Zoe then completed her Bachelor degree and a Master degree, which she studied in Iasi, her current city, which was not too far from her mother's influence. She did not speak about her studies, but she spoke mainly about becoming the teacher she is today and her evolution as a person towards becoming a teaching professional. Her French teacher inspired her so much that she was always careful to try and understand her students beyond their behaviour.

> I want to believe that I am a teacher who cares about her students; I mean, I hope I do this with the help of God. So, always, the more I find out about my students' lives, the more I understand their misbehaviour.

For Zoe, caring about students does not mean being a strict teacher. She mentioned several times that she used to be very firm with them, especially with their noise, though more in the past than in the present. I saw in Zoe two women fighting for supremacy. One was her mother, who asked for perfection, no matter how much harm that could potentially do to others, and the other was her French teacher. I see these attitudes as being at two different extremes. It is evident in Zoe's story that her mother won this battle inside her. I felt that she worked hard to become a perfect teacher, just like she felt the need to be a perfect daughter. Therefore, her professional life flooded into her personal life, spending time and much money preparing outstanding lessons for students. Because of her eagerness to be a perfect teacher, she even ignored the relationship with her husband.

> For many of the 12 years of my teaching career and marriage, I have been a teacher 24 hours a day. I mean, I used to work a lot at home; I used to prepare all kinds of sheets. So, in the beginning, I thought it was my duty and role to save my students (through teaching French), the poor children from my classes (here she was ironic, red.). I invested much time in my teaching, spending my afternoons doing extra lessons with them, and that took up much of my family time.

I asked myself why teachers should 'save' their students? As a teacher, I confronted myself with that idea for many years. But doesn't Religious Education suppose a kind of 'salvation'? I understood Zoe's actions as her effort to unconsciously make her mother

happy and gain her love by being perfect. At the beginning of her career, she struggled with children's misbehaviour, shouting at them to make them silent and to gain their respect. I had the same problem myself, as I struggled to make misbehaved listen and to get their attention. At that time, I judged myself for my weakness, for my inability to make children, especially secondary school children, listen and be interested in the lessons I taught. Nevertheless, now I think I judged myself, and Zoe did the same, too harshly, as beginning teachers are frequently confronted with students' misbehaviour, especially when the school is not supportive:

> They were year six (12 years old) and noisy. They were very noisy. They could not sit still; they were saying nonsenses in the middle of the lessons. I was desperate. I started to yell at them, to threaten them, but nothing changed. I had four hours every week with them. I preferred any other class for no matter how many hours but not that class anymore.

I felt Zoe's distress when she told me about students' misbehaviour, and I wondered whether she was exaggerating in asking perfection from her students and herself.

However, Zoe's perception of her teaching and of her students changed during the course of our interviews. If during the first interview she still seemed attached to her profession and willing to change students and to improve her teaching, during the last interview she seemed more detached from all her professional challenges, expressing her will to abandon them when she leaves school and not bring them into her personal life anymore, putting her personal and spiritual wellbeing first:

> I don't know what happened. It came naturally. I feel increasingly more detached now than before. I have been waiting for a long time to get to this point and to accept things as they come, without expecting to control them and only to be calm afterwards. At school, the burden of excessive responsibility has gone a little bit. In the past, I used to think: 'I have to save all children, I have to teach them, I have to sacrifice myself for their good.' I do not want this anymore, and glory be to God for this. So now, I think I should take care of myself and then the children will be all right.

Listening to Zoe, I believed her. She sounded convinced that, to reach the professional state she was looking and longing for, she should pay more attention to her own wellbeing. Zoe seemed more detached and reconciled with her failures and successes.

During our final interview, she had decided to take better care of her personal and spiritual life, to find inner peace with herself, being convinced that, this way, she will be able to face professional challenges better, which of course will never stop.

Later on in our interview, Zoe said that she had stopped over-planning what she would do in the classroom with the students, because no matter how hard teachers prepare, they would still need to look at themselves, at who they are, at their personal identity, as children will perceive them and, ultimately, that aspect would matter for students. She said:

> This way, I think they would receive more from me than if I planned and communicated information that does reach them. However, what gets to them is who we are.

Zoe's new attitude towards her teaching changed due to both disappointment and a better spiritual understanding of her life. She said that she felt disappointed in how parents contributed to damaging her plans to educate children. Parents whose behaviour was far from what they asked from their children have ruined her plans to help children get a better understanding of life and the purpose of learning.

> It came because of tiredness and because of some personal sorrows caused by some of the parents' reactions, but it also came out of a personal need. I have been focused on school for so many years, I was a teacher for 24 hours a day, I spent so much money on books and resources for teaching French. It was a sort of activism to save children and now not feeling fulfilled by that I gave up and felt much calmer, and I am better at school as well.

Even though Zoe was much preoccupied with her teaching career, wishing to be always outstanding, she never considered teaching as a vocation for her, as I wrongly assumed, based on my personal conception about teaching profession, before interviewing her. Guided by her story, I asked Zoe in two different interviews if she sees teaching as a vocation, and she answered both times that she does not believe in the teaching vocation and that this term is old fashioned:

> I do not believe in vocation; maybe it exists for other people, but not for me. I mean, I do not think I am crucial for the school. I feel that society no longer supports the school and the teachers. Maybe here and there may be students who appreciate some of their teachers, but I do not think it is so important to be a

teacher and that we have our unique mission, our vocation, anymore. Vocation…I do not like this word…it seems to be from another age for me.

Because of my assumptions, I was surprised to hear Zoe's opinion regarding her teaching. She based her new conviction on the disappointment about how students' parents generally treat teachers:

> We are insulted, sabotaged, and even obstructed by parents in doing our job. It has not happened to me, yet it has happened to some of my colleagues. Parents came to dispute the marks their children got, and they have been in distress for that.

Teaching is a challenging profession, and I empathised with Zoe, as I struggled with children's behaviour during my first year of teaching. Leaving my career for a few years made me more aware of my professional situation and my struggles and made me wonder what teaching means to me. Similarly, Zoe's professional situation made me think of her reasons for remaining in the teaching profession if vocation was not the reason, especially knowing how teachers are paid in Romania. I could add that her monthly income was also not a motivation for her to continue being a teacher. So, I asked her why she continued to remain in this profession if neither money nor the sense of vocation were the reasons:

> I could have any profession I would like to, but it is more comfortable for me to be a teacher because I can have more free time, I have the holidays. Teaching is demanding, but we can balance that with the holidays.

She gave me a sincere answer, and her reason was the free time she could have, a time that no other profession offers. While listening to Zoe's story about her professional experiences, and on how she perceives vocation, I remembered fragments of episodes from my time as a teacher. I remembered how I was struggling with some of my students' behaviour, and how frustrated I felt because of my inability (which I believed it to be) to manage it, improve it, and make children to love the subject I taught. Moreover, I tried to find different options to escape the disappointment I felt. It was not what I imagined. I blamed children, their parents, the school management, myself. I should quit the job or find a different school. However, various thoughts crossed my mind: what would I do about my teaching vocation? Would that be a betrayal of my vocation? Alternatively, would it be a betrayal of the God I taught about? Reading Zoe's story again and again I came to a different understanding. All of the sudden I thought: am I serving God, or am I

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serving my desire to feel I was a chosen person, even a better person than others? I was serving God, wasn't I? That would make me different, better, superior to other teachers. I realise now how focused I was on the outcome rather than on the process. I realise that I was focused on achieving my own goals, although I also had the impression that I was following God's will. I do not say it was not His will to be a RE teacher at that time. Nor am I suggesting that I was focused on myself only. I understand now that it was a mix of factors: I was young, I created an image of how different I could be if I would do something special, I was also honest regarding my desire to serve God through my work. My current opinion about the teaching vocation is that all people have a general vocation, which is accomplished through a profession or an occupation for which they were gifted. Zoe's story made me more aware of myself as a professional and Christian at the same time and how people (myself included) could imagine themselves to be someone who could grow personally and professionally.

Having presented Zoe's life story alongside my own has highlighted how teachers' personal lives and childhood experiences may influence their professional understandings about practice and professional relationships. I shall now draw on the themes that emerged from the review of the literature in order to consider the role of the significant other, such as parents and spiritual father, in Zoe's personal and professional development, particularly the role of the spiritual father due to the important part they play in Orthodox Christian spirituality.

7.4. The role of significant others: mother, father, spiritual father

Zoe's life was influenced by the relationship she had with her parents. Her mother's influence was so strong that Zoe's adult life reflected their relationship. Her "secure base" (Bowlby, 1988) was not secure enough to make her an independent adult. Her parents, especially her mother, influenced Zoe's life and interfered even with her spiritual perception of God. She was still under her mother's influence, in her job, in the church, in her relationships with men. Kragiopoulos (2005) used different language to refer to parents' influence on children, underlining what Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991), Sullivan (1953), Klein (1932), Andersen et al. (1998) have written about extensively. For children, relationships with parents (carers) may define their adult life, or it could at least influence

it. To be confident adults, children need to receive much love from their parents, especially from their mothers. A mother should be gentle, loving, forgiving, understanding, and proactive in the relationship with her children (Kragiopoulos, 2005). Nevertheless, mothers (and fathers) are the result of their parents or carers, and therefore, there is no such thing as ideal parents (or primary carers), who will only influence their children positively.

Zoe's childhood was not a joyful time. She experienced pain and suffering from the lack of love from her mother. Zoe did not talk about her parents much during the first interview. She only mentioned how unloved she felt by her mother, whom she describes as very authoritative and very rigid. Her mother's rigid attitude, where feelings were not shown, is strikingly similar to the communist philosophy, where thoughts and feelings were not "only considered secondary to matter but also unimportant" (Falls 2011, p. 36).

At the same time, Zoe felt that her mother influenced her views on men in general, and her father and half-brother, with whom she regrets not having a good relationship:

> I have never had a close relationship with him (i.e. her stepbrother), and I have seen him through the eyes of my mother ... she rejected him very much ... it is a tradition in our family ... for boys to be rejected and men to be dishonoured... ... it is a struggle I have... I mean ...mmm ... I often find myself despising men…

I felt much regret and sorrow in Zoe's voice for her attitude and behaviour towards her father and stepbrother (who was her mother's son).

> For many years I perceived my father and my brother through my mother's eyes; I don't know who my brother is. A little while ago, I decided to give him a chance, even though we have not had a relationship. He is far away, in Italy. My brother's life story is sad, and he repeated his father's and our mother's mistakes. I mean…there is much pain inside him; and I think it could be inside me too because he did not behave like a proper brother to me, because he did not show me any emotion because he is wrapped up in his own story so much, and into the heavy things he carries in his soul, that he is unable to show me any kind feeling.

Although my relationship with my family was not as complicated as hers, I still empathise with Zoe, as I feel that the relationship I had with my parents, and with my mother in particular, did me a lot of emotional damage. I felt that I shared something with Zoe, namely the relationship with our parents and professional challenges. During her stories,

I experienced a variety of feelings: anger, compassion, gratitude, revolt, and in the end, confusion. Zoe explicitly said how affected she was by the relationship with her mother, as was I as well, although I only saw it relatively recently.

Metaphorically speaking, I heard a voice reaching out from inside Zoe, taking her back to her childhood years. Her mother's voice criticised Zoe's for all of her mistakes, and did not allow her to make any mistakes of her own. This inner subtle but firm voice influenced Zoe in all her adult relationships, her intimate relationship with her husband, her professional relationships, and the spiritual relationship with God and her spiritual father.

For me, the most surprising fact was the influence of her mother on her perception of God and how this perception influenced her spiritual life.

> I changed my perspective on God only a few years ago; before, He was a strict paternal figure, dictatorial, who hunts you; who punishes you; who will show you that you are always wrong; who does not forgive; who does not forget and who asks you things that you cannot do. He was the image of my mother.

She created an image of God in her head that resembled her mother, holding the same communist authority. Her words made me reflect more about the nature of the relationship between parents (carers) and children, and how much parents can influence children, even in adult life, where they will battle with their parents' views on the world and their influences. The voice of Zoe's mother is everywhere in the relationships she has had with men. She declared she inherited this negative perspective from her mother and now tries to heal it, both through psychotherapy and through engaging in spiritual life.

Moreover, her spiritual life was affected by her mother's ideas about men. Talking about her relationship with her spiritual father, Zoe said that she does not consider her spiritual father to have a unique role in her life, outside of confession. She even tries to avoid developing a special   relationship outside of confession with him, because she is afraid of being disappointed by him or by other spiritual people in her life (particularly monks, who I will come back to later). It looks like Zoe avoids being involved in relationships with men. She said:

> Here I still have a lot to heal because I'm still trapped in the past. My spiritual father does not have a role in my life, outside of confession; he is not yet a safe place in my life, and I try not to develop a relationship outside of confession,

first, because I am afraid I will be disappointed …and to see in him things that would make him less worthy in my eyes. There were moments when I thought that people like my spiritual father or the sister (a nun) have not done what they said they would and what I thought they should do. Therefore, I avoid a close relationship, on the one hand, because of what I said previously, and on the other hand, because the relationship with my father has not completely healed. However, in confession it is all right because it is something different; it seems that even my spiritual father is different or maybe he is himself.

Sullivan's (1953) claim about the importance of significant others and interpersonal relationships finds its echo in Zoe's story. She acknowledges her mother's influence on her perception of people, in general, and on men, in particular. Although she understood how her mother had influenced her perception, the present did not change; Zoe still fights with the inability to forgive her father for his addiction. This perception of men recurs in Zoe's mind, regardless of their profession or spiritual state. Although she knows the thoughts that cross her mind are not real, Zoe said she continues to be dismissive of men.

Because Zoe mentioned her spiritual father a few times, I wanted to go deeper and see if there was anything more behind this relationship. When Zoe began to talk about her relationship with her spiritual father, I wrongly assumed that she would tell me only positive things. Zoe made a distinction between her spiritual father in confession and outside of confession. She does not trust him outside of confession; maybe because she perceives him as a man with all the qualities she mentioned before. However, as part of her spiritual life, when it comes to confession, this attitude shifts and she trusts her spiritual father. The main reason is her belief that confession is a meeting with God (likewise prayer) and that in confession, through her spiritual father, God Himself speaks.

> In confession, I am sure that what my spiritual father says is what God wants to tell me. I do not understand what I would ask him for advice outside of confession? Any person from the church could advise me. However, I know I need to change this attitude.

In the light of religious literature about confession, Zoe makes a mistake that many of the Orthodox Christians often make regarding their relationship with their spiritual father. As Ware (1974) said, people expect a *Deus ex machina*. In other words, they expect their spiritual father to be without mistake, to act virtuously, in any circumstance, inside and outside of confession. On the one hand, they are right, as a spiritual father should be

gentle, loving, supportive, optimistic, full of faith. On the other hand, these expectations are not realistic, as a spiritual father is a human being likely to get it wrong sometimes. Therefore, a spiritual father should not be idealised (because he is not God himself), nor should he be blamed or judged when he makes a mistake. Zoe's attitude towards her spiritual father made me question myself: why do people expect perfection from others? In this sense, these Christians teachers, who perceive their spiritual father as a *deus ex machina*, expect that their spiritual father will provide them with a guideline which will benefit their personal and their professional life, without making any personal effort. Therefore, their spiritual father should tell them what to do in the classroom and in the school environment so that their problems can be solved quickly.

Her spiritual father plays an essential role in Zoe's life, and the relationship they have built in confession has enabled Zoe to begin the journey of overcoming past experiences with her parents that still have echoes in her present life, both on a personal and on a professional level. Although essential in her life, he did not seem to me to become significant. But he directed Zoe to meet other people, nuns from a monastery, who have become significant for Zoe's healing process through their therapeutic and spiritual practice. These nuns provide psychological and spiritual support for various addictions, from drug, alcohol, to psychological addictions. Although Zoe never said these nuns were significant for her, she mentioned them often, just as she often mentioned her mother.

More concretely, the nuns she spoke about are two nuns who helped Zoe overcome and cope with her spiritual, personal, and even professional challenges. On a spiritual and personal level, they helped her through prayer and psychotherapy. Zoe followed some psychotherapeutic sessions for psychological and spiritual healing through forgiveness and prayer. There are psychotherapeutic meetings where people reflect upon painful experiences of their lives, and identify the people involved in order to find and give forgiveness at the end of the sessions. The nuns supported Zoe to acknowledge and overcome some of her inner wounds and to understand why she manifests negative attitudes towards men. Zoe said that she still has a lot to work with inside her and many more wounds to heal:

> What I worked through with Sister R. helped me the most and fulfilled me, that kind of therapy and spiritual work, because it was a work with God, it was an attempt to put all our lives in front of God.

Zoe said that the sisters also taught her how to put herself in front of God and how beneficial it was and still is:

> I learned the techniques with the sisters, Sister S. and Sister R., but of course, it is a continuous process. Lately, I have gained much courage, in the sense that it is easier not to hide anymore. Before I was ashamed to say the petty things, or when I did something, my conscience would say it is not ok. I tended to escape, to hide myself. However, now, I have gained courage, and there is an inner voice inside me which encourages me to show all those bad things to God. I have understood what giving your whole life to God means with my whole being, not only rationally. Putting myself in front of God, everything I go through, especially what is harder to say, is a relief. If you see God as a code of conduct it is hard, but if you see him as someone you have to come down to, because He waits for you there in the mud, it is so easy, and I feel so loved by Him.

The sisters (nuns) helped Zoe learn how to address God and understand her spiritual life in the context of her story and professional challenges. They stood and continue to stand by her in her struggle to overcome the inner wounds from her childhood. However, Zoe does not idealise the sisters, and she is still afraid that they might disappoint her at some point. I quote her again: There were moments when I thought that people like my spiritual father or the sister (Sister S.) did not do what they said they would or what I thought they should do.

Again, I sense her mother's influence here, who expects people to be perfect and fulfil her needs and desires. Is this not what children think about their significant others? If I analyse Zoe's attitude from a spiritual point of view, I could say that she is also confronted with pride and egocentrism, as she does not expect anything to make her feel uncomfortable and wants to demonstrate (to her, to others) how perfect she can be. Once again, her mother's voice is evident, which tells Zoe that she is her daughter and that she must be perfect to deserve her love.

Zoe's speech was often infused with religious words, and she often showed a religious understanding of the events in her life. It appears that, for Zoe, the teaching profession (or any other kind of profession) intersects with her religious beliefs, and it seemed to me that she feels motivated by her faith in doing her work. Even though she was disappointed from a professional perspective, working for God makes her continue and find courage in any other profession she might decide to pursue in the future. In the next section, I will

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analyse Zoe's religious discourse to see if the words she uses in her speech bring more insight into her story.

7.5. The Role of Confession and Prayer in Zoe's professional life

As I mentioned in the Methodology chapter, discourse analysis is a sophisticated methodology used in the social sciences (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). It comprises data collection methods and analysis, but it also integrates them with a set of assumptions concerning the constructive effect of language and social practice (Milliken, 1999; Wood and Kroger, 2000). Thus, discourse analysis is a complex methodology. In this section, my discourse analysis approach applies only to one part of Zoe's speech, namely her religious discourse. The reason for choosing only the religious discourse to analyse her story is justified by the aim of this interview, which is to understand the role of significant others, of which the spiritual father is of high importance in the lives of Orthodox Christians (Barbu, 2013) in the process of personal and teaching professional development.

While I planned my approach to this section, many questions arose: how does an Orthodox Christian teacher speak, or how should they speak? Is there any specific type of language he or she should use? Why do Orthodox Christians use a specific vocabulary when they speak about their relationship with divinity? What does the way they speak about their religious and spiritual experiences say about them?

In my analysis of Zoe's religious discourse, I aim to answer the questions: what? how? and when? regarding the role of confession and prayer in her life. However, I would add a fourth question to these three: What does the use of this type of language signify in my research about the influence of parents and spiritual father on the personal and professional development of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development?

I will start by answering the third question, which is about when Zoe has used religious discourse. She used religious discourse at various moments during the interviews. The most frequent use was when we spoke about the role of prayer, of confession and spiritual father in her life, though not exclusively. Speaking about her profession, she often

mentioned words such as God, prayer for students, nun, spiritual father, Sister R., Sister S. (the names of the nuns with whom she had the psychotherapeutic sessions), putting my sorrow in front of God, and many others.

If the use of religious words is justified when speaking about religious or spiritual matters, it may also be justified by how that person sees the world around, by how they perceive the world around them when they speak about their profession or even personal affairs. When I asked her how she sees herself as a teaching professional, she answered:

> I do care about every child beyond what they do in the class. As I told you, I don't believe teaching French is valuable in itself. This comes second. For that reason, I pray for them and empathise with them. I do this with all my heart, and I dedicate time to this action, but I am aware that I still have much work to do on the spiritual side. Sometimes I am tired of showing myself to God and at some point, I give up, I forget about it, it overwhelms me and wants a break. Then, unfortunately, I take myself on a spiritual vacation, but God still works for me, although I am superficial when I pray and say "my Lord bless me. My Lord, look at how I live now.

Zoe spoke about her professional identity and recurrent challenges in her profession, and the quote used above is one of many where Zoe used religious words, furnishing her experience with a spiritual and religious understanding of her professional identity. Because of the multitude of these kinds of quotes and the limited space in this section, I will not present them all here. However, the quote I gave above is representative.

After illustrating the context in which Zoe used religious discourse, namely across the whole interview, even in the sections where she spoke about her profession, I moved onto the analysis of what was said. Zoe often used religious language composed of words that I have already mentioned in the previous section (God, prayer for students, nun, spiritual father, sister R., sister S., putting my sorrow in front of God):

> I feel I can do anything, but the most important thing is to do as I did until now…to be aware that I am there with God's willing and that, in front of me, is a human being who surely needs God. And God wants me to be available to work with Him and to say: My Lord, here I am. (speaking about her teaching profession)

More important than praying is to be in a state of mindfulness and awareness that God exists and that he knows everything that happens in my life. Rationally speaking, I knew that I should put every single bit of my soul in front of God, but I understood it recently, at a service in the last week of the Great Lent when I heard the priest say "all our life to Christ our Lord to give" and the choir answering "to Thee oh Lord". I understood that I have to serve. (talking about prayer)

I tended to run away, but lately, I have become braver. I feel inside me a voice who encourages me to open myself in front of God with my whole being, mind, and heart. If you understand God as a set of norms and rules, as a moral thing that you have to reach, everything becomes difficult. However, if you refer to Him as to one to whom you must descend because he waits for you down there in the mud of your life, everything becomes easier for you. It is how I understand spiritual life: make myself transparent to God, and this process makes me feel at peace. (talking about her relationship with God)

I do not understand how people live without confession. It's the only thing in my life without which I would not be able to live, because many tiny things come together and burden my soul and consequently, I become agitated and irritable, I cannot pray anymore, I cannot do my job, and I need confession. I give up on anything but not on confession.

The quotes I used above are only a few examples of Zoe's speech. She extensively spoke about the importance of prayer, as a state of awareness and mindfulness which, in her view, should be present in every aspect of her life. She spoke about her teaching profession and about the vocation of serving God beyond a specific profession, about how she perceives her relationship with God, about the importance of confession and consequently, of her relationship with her spiritual father. Apart from what she said, it is even more essential to analyse how she said it. In the next section I will analyse what intonation she used when she spoke about her spiritual life and the relationship with significant others in her spiritual life.

Zoe's tone of voice during the interviews fluctuated from sadness to happiness. When she talked about the importance of significant others in her life in the context of her spiritual life, Zoe sometimes had sadness in her voice. She felt sad for not have had a good relationship with her mother, which further influenced her whole life and the relationships

she had with male figures. In this category, Zoe included God as well, who was her mother's projection for a long time. However, her spiritual life changed once she had met the nuns and her spiritual father. Even her professional behaviour changed since then, as she understood that she needed to approach her students differently. Towards the end of our interviews, I felt Zoe was much more at peace with herself, her choices, and her personal and professional life.

Zoe's way of talking and including spirituality in her stories brought me closer to understanding her personal and professional identities and how her parents and spiritual father influenced her. I saw Zoe as a woman, a middle-class professional, challenged in many ways, and an Orthodox Christian who seeks to understand her life in the light of her faith. As I mentioned before, she used a religious discourse even when she talked about her work. This suggests that she is a person for whom faith/religion/spirituality plays an essential role in her life. Her engagement in spiritual growth is essential for finding solutions to her difficulties, repairing broken relationships, and changing her perspective on men, which was distorted by her mother's views, as well as for learning how to become a Christian and showing understanding of her and others' lives and actions.

7.6. Paradoxes in Zoe's life

Zoe's life is imbued with various paradoxes, which I consider to exist in anybody's life to some extent at least. However, her paradoxes are linked to spiritual life and significant others, such as her mother and her spiritual father. One paradox I identified in her story was her Orthodox Christian identity and her behaviour as a teacher. Until I heard her story, my conception of how an Orthodox Christian teacher should behave was determined by my subjective understanding of the world. In my view, an Orthodox Christian should be humble, silent, loving, be conscientious, amongst other things. In Zoe, I saw a struggle of trying to be an Orthodox Christian while fighting to be a teacher who is respected and listened to by her students by any method, even ones that could be considered unkind or 'non-Orthodox':

> At the beginning [of my career as a teacher] this thing [students' misbehaviour] used to agitate me a lot, and made me to ask myself: what am I doing in this

class? I am a good teacher, and my teaching is clear and understandable. These fools are not listening, are not interested and make noise. It was tough for me to tolerate their behaviour; it made me frustrated, so many times, I gave them bad marks to punish them. But now…glory be to God; things changed a lot in my life. Through my spiritual life things changed in the sense that I do not put myself at the core of my teaching activities, it is not only about me and my professional satisfaction, but it is about us, my students and me. In this process, I have received much help through prayer.

Although she was affected by the relationship she had with her mother, and this relationship influenced her professional life, Zoe started to overcome the setbacks of childhood and teenage years through engaging with her spiritual life and the relationship with her spiritual father, in confession, and through the spiritual- psychotherapeutic sessions with the nuns. This paradox was the second I have identified in her life. She was not in her best psychological condition, yet she started to act as if she were in her professional relationships, and once Zoe began to be deeply involved in her spiritual life, she began to attend the psychotherapeutic sessions with the nuns. This kind of paradox could be identified in other professionals' lives as well, but in Zoe's case, the paradox involves the spirituality which brings benefits for her personal and professional life:

> Through prayer, I understand I am sitting before God and letting myself seen by God. I often use this phrase: See me, my Lord! Moreover, when I say that, it's the very moment when I open myself with my whole being and with every pore to God. Then, I let God's grace in to abide in me and to heal my heart.

A third paradox identified in Zoe's life is her relationship with her spiritual father, which was a surprise for me, because of my own presumptions about Orthodox Christians refer to their spiritual father. Why would I consider this to be paradoxical? Zoe believes in the mystery of confession and believes that the relationship with her spiritual father is beneficial for her personal and spiritual development:

> Regarding the relationship with my spiritual father, who is a man, I am still dependent on the past. I mean, my spiritual father does not play any role in my personal life, he does not represent a secure base for me outside of confession, and I try not to develop any relationship with him outside the mystery [of confession]. First of all, it is because I am afraid of not being disappointed, observing him doing things that would bring him down from the pedestal. There were such moments where I thought I saw him not doing what he teaches us or

what I thought he should do. On the other hand, I avoid a personal relationship with him because of the unhealed relationship with my father. I had many setbacks because of this [relationship with her father]. However, in confession it is different, and my spiritual father is different, or maybe it's himself…I don't know exactly. I trust him in confession, because I believe Christ himself speaks to me through my spiritual father, but not outside of confession. Furthermore, besides this reason, I don't know why I should ask him for advice outside of confession. I could ask anyone else. Nevertheless, I know I must heal this.

As she said, she judges her spiritual father through her mother's eyes and her mother's ideas about men. Although her spiritual father is her connection with God, outside of confession, she perceives him as any other man. So, different from other Orthodox Christians I met, and different from my perspective on spiritual fatherhood, she distinguishes between her spiritual father during confession and outside of confession. Through her belief in what the mystery of confession means to her, she managed to self or peer-regulate the destructive emotions she experienced with men. However, that happened only through confession's mystery, as she still fights with her mother's conceptions about men. It was healing for Zoe to acknowledge her mother's influence in her professional life and overcome those professional challenges that came from the relationship with her students. She began to understand that the image she had about her misbehaved students, especially male students, was the perception she had on men.

The final paradox I have identified in her story relates to her teaching profession and self-efficacy within her profession. I have carefully listened to her story because it was similar to my own story regarding my mother and my professional challenges. For this reason, I was interested in hearing what she did to overcome her past and change the professional present. I was interested in understanding more about her life and profession to give meanings to my own life and profession.

Zoe's mother had a pronounced influence on her conceptions about how life should be lived. She mentions it herself, and the reason for this influence became more transparent. My observations about how she approached her professional challenges and the outcomes of her struggles to become a respected and a 'perfect' teacher, made me believe that she managed to be not perfect, but a good enough teacher, although she was emotionally and spiritually very exhausted. She said she often got angry with her students. She regularly spent her family time preparing lessons (which is maybe what many teachers would do),

and she sacrificed the relationship with her husband to achieve her professional goals. Consequently, she managed to build a good relationship with her students, especially since she began to be more involved in her spiritual life, giving increased importance to confession and prayer:

> I was desperate. I began again to scream at children, to threaten them, but nothing happened. The worst thing is that I had four hours every week with them. I preferred to go to any other class and teach no matter how many hours but not to go anymore to these foolish students. However, Sister S. helped to apply a method, which supposed students' involvement in managing the behaviour of misbehaving children. Beside that method, I also prayed a lot for them, as they were my children. And it worked. They began to be active in managing misbehaviour, to be better behaved themselves, to listen to my teaching and to build a better and a close relationship with each other. Now they are my favourite class, and I am the best teacher in the world for them.

Despite all these improvements in her life, despite her proven self-efficacy and her gained ability to self-regulate negative emotions, I felt that she still did not wholly overcome her past, and as she said, she still has much to heal from the relationship with her primary significant other, namely her mother.

Zoe's story was full of sorrow and redemption at the same time. As she said during our last interview, our meetings enabled her to better understand her personal, spiritual and professional struggles. She said that the narrative interviews were not as she expected them to be and that she felt comfortable and safe to speak about her mother.

Not only Zoe benefited from the interviews, but it was also me, Cristina, the person, the Orthodox Christian and the Religious Education teacher who has sought understanding since she became a teacher. Meetings I had with Zoe revealed a different way of approaching my own life and profession, seeking to find the answers and the solutions to my professional challenges not outside but inside me, where I can still hear Cristina's significant others.

7.7.   Summary of the Chapter

Zoe's story enabled me to understand the relationship and the type of attachment I have had with my parents for a long period of time. The unhealthy and unfulfilled relationship

I have built with my mother affected and it affects how I behave and act as an adult. I do not blame my mother for her desire to control me, but I understand now the lack of confidence in making my decisions and in expressing me opinion. I understand now the fear I feel when tensions arise between people, especially when I am involved in such situations. On the other hand, I understood more about my relationship with my spiritual father, whose influence I felt in my personal and professional life. He managed to show me the motherly love I needed. However, I understood and felt that it was God's love which it is manifested towards any person. The relationship I built with my spiritual father determined me to perceive my parents, and especially my mother with greater empathy, and to understand that her behaviour was a consequence of how she was educated. On the other hand, Zoe's story helped me to acknowledge that the relationship I built with my spiritual father was a real support in my professional struggles.

Apart from Zoe's story, Melanie's and father Agapios' stories have also enabled me to gained understandings about my personal, spiritual and professional experiences. In the next chapter, I present and analyse Melanie's story.

Chapter eight: Melanie's Story

8.1. Introduction

Melanie is the second female teacher who took part in my research. She was one of my best friends during our university studies. Later, after we finished university, we went our separate ways, so we could not spend as much time together as we did during our time at university. She rented an apartment with other friends she had, whereas I rented a room in an old lady's apartment. She decided to apply for a master's degree in speech therapy to continue her second degree in Psychology. I chose to proceed with a master's degree in Religious Studies, and then another one in Teaching Strategies studies.

My decision to involve Melanie in this study was based on a few reasons. Firstly, because of her job as a teacher. Secondly, because of her nationality. She is Romanian and teaches Religious Education in a mainstream secondary school in Romania. Finally, it was because of her faith. Regarding the importance of spirituality in Melanie's daily life, I only assumed, before the interviews started, that she would have many things to share from her story, which will enable me to understand her experiences better (personal, spiritual, and professional) and to give meaning to my own.

I met Melanie three times, each time lasting one hour and a half each. We met two times in a restaurant close to her home, and our last meeting was in a pub near the railway station. It was she who chose the locations where she felt comfortable. At the time of our interviews, she recently had given birth to her first child. At the time of our first interview her daughter was nearly four months old. At that time, Melanie and her husband lived in her parents-in-law's house, which caused considerable distress for Melanie, who suffered from postnatal depression. I wished I could have seen her daughter and have our interviews in her home, as I did with the other two participants, but later I understood the circumstances were not favourable for such a meeting (I will discuss this more later).

As I have mentioned, Melanie has been a Religious Education teacher in Bucharest, Romania's capital city, for nearly ten years. She has taught in two different high schools, both considered to be top schools in Bucharest. In terms of her personal life, Melanie is married to a priest and

now the mother of two children, a boy, aged four months, and a girl, who is four years old (at the time of writing).

I understood better Melanie, in her new role, and the challenges that arrived in her life after becoming a mother, only after I became myself a mother (Barclay and Beverly, 1996). I wonder how a male researcher would have perceived Melanie's story of becoming a mother, being a priest's wife, and living in the same house with a mother-in-law who does not appreciate her enough. At the same time, I wonder how Melanie would have responded or opened in front of a male researcher. Would she have opened; would she have shown him the depth of her feelings?

As with all participants, we did not follow a specific structure. We went back and forth, as I let Melanie express herself as she felt worked best for her. She extensively spoke about her professional life, the relationship with her spiritual father, not too much about the relationship with her parents, and quite a lot about her current personal life.

8.2. Early life – a time of peace

Melanie was born in South Romania, in a region called Oltenia, different in many aspects (which I will analyse in Discussions chapter) to Moldavia (where Zoe's origins lie) and South- Moldavia (where Father Agapios is from). She was raised and educated in her hometown until the age of 18 when she moved to Bucharest to study Theology. Unlike Zoe and father Agapios, whose parents were ordinary people, workers, Melanie's parents were better educated: her mother was an accountant and her father was a schoolteacher.

At home, in the beautiful mountainous landscape of Oltenia, she lived with her parents, her older sister, her grandmother, and her great-grandmother. She seemed to have lived in a stable, loving family, with professional parents and gentle grandmothers who took care of her and her sister. Unfortunately, at the age of six, her father died while he was shopping in a supermarket. Wishing to protect Melanie from feeling distressed, I did not insist on asking her more questions about what she experienced when her father passed away. Melanie added that although her biological father died when she was very young, she found another male figure who played the role of a father in her life. She has seen

him as her father for more than 20 years. This man was the priest from her village, who later also became her spiritual father.

> I saw my spiritual father as a biological father. My father and my spiritual father were of the same age. In a way, I saw my spiritual father like my natural father, and I tried to follow his advice. He filled the gap that my father left after he passed away. I am grateful to him for all the support he gave me during all those years. If he had not been with me, I would not be what I am today.

Her spiritual father was the only male figure in Melanie's life, as her family was composed only of women: her sister, her mother, her grandmother and her great-grandmother. She attended primary school and gymnasium (years 5 to 8th) in her village. Later, to go to secondary school (years 9 to 12th), she commuted to the closest town to her village. Melanie had been attracted to the spiritual life since her childhood. The principal persons who influenced her in this regard were first her great-grandmother and then her grandmother who, after her son's death, found peace in prayer, church services, and pilgrimages. It was the beginning of Melanie's spiritual journey in the early years of her life:

> My great-grandmother and my grandmother were very religious. My great-grandmother raised me with love, and she was an example for my personal and my spiritual life. Then, her daughter, my grandmother, after the death of my father, started to seek peace through faith. She moved to another stage in her life. She got closer to God and tried to comfort herself and us after the loss of her son, through prayers for his soul. So, being the youngest of the family, I grew attached to my grandmother, and often followed her on her pilgrimages, where she went to pray for my father's soul. Through her, I began to build a personal relationship with God, with the saints and with the Mother of God.

The sudden death of her father was the only event which darkened Melanie's childhood. As sad as it was, the consequences of his death in Melanie's life were not as harmful as they could have been, because the women who raised her knew how to address and how to deal with this loss, and secondly because a new man took her father's place, namely her spiritual father.

8.3. Becoming a teaching professional – "My true vocation."

The school was another beautiful period of Melanie's life. After she finished secondary school, she went to university. Her initial dream was to study Theology and History and to become a History teacher. However, for practical reasons (her sister was studying Chemistry in Bucharest) she could not study Theology and History at her dream University in Sibiu, West Romania. She had to choose a different University to be closer to her sister. This way, her mother was reassured about Melanie's safety, and it was more practical in terms of visiting them:

> I had always wished to study Theology and History, but it was not possible. My older sister was a student in Bucharest, so I had to give up on my dream and to come to Bucharest where the university did not provide that specialisation, only Theology and French. However, it was good, and I feel it was the will of God to be in the teaching field.

Melanie's dream to become a History teacher was inspired by her History teacher whose professionalism she greatly admired:

> In secondary school, I had an excellent History teacher who was a role model for me, and I've always wished to be the teaching professional he was. I remember how he used to make us think about the historical facts and to find answers to historical questions. I admit that I try to copy him in my practice many times.

Her passion for teaching came to fruition in 2008 when, finishing her final exams, she became a Religious Education teacher in a secondary school in Bucharest. She talked very passionately about the years she spent teaching before going on maternity leave. The way she talked about her profession and her students confirmed my initial assumptions about teaching as a vocation. At the same time, it confronted me again with my frustrations about not perceiving teaching as a vocation, as I wished to.

> Somehow, the teaching 'profession' and I have made a great team together. I do not know if I chose it or if the profession chose me, but I know that we made a perfect team together.

In Melanie's perception, teaching is not a profession, in the sense of a job, or a career, but it is more a calling, a destiny to which people are called to fulfil a special mission. In this

mission, students play an essential role, being unique in Melanie's eyes. Children were the main reason why she chose to become a Religious Education teacher:

> I love children very much, this is why I chose this profession, and it seems that this profession helps me to reinvent myself every day, to be the best version of myself I can be.

Hearing these words, I asked myself why I did not feel the same as Melanie after six years of teaching. Although I started with a similar perception of teaching, my enthusiasm decreased considerably over time, when I met significant challenges in my career. Was it because both Melanie and I perceived ourselves as unique people, called by God to a special mission, and who will change, and even convert, students to a better spiritual life? For me, the answer was probably yes. I imagined that a vocation does not imply dealing with challenges but with a mastery given from the above to master any kind of challenge without much effort.

Melanie admired her students for their intelligence, and she was very pleased with their behaviour. Thus, she tried not to pressure them with learning, but motivated them to participate in class discussions rather than memorising religious information. Knowing the pressure her students experience at that secondary school, where teachers have high expectations from them, she tried to make the lessons as relaxed as possible, to make them feel comfortable and secure to talk about their religious views and perspectives. Melanie received positive feedback from her students for her approach to teaching Religious Education.

> I think children feel relaxed because I feel excellent near them too. First, I tried to build a personal and professional relationship with my students. The fact that I gave them good grades made them feel secure and, further, they opened themselves up. I tried to make them understand that our meeting in the Religious Education class is not for learning some religious concepts solely, but it is also to learn some things useful for life, so that when we will go through challenging moments in life to find resilience through our faith in God. Moreover, the more we surpass the difficulties of our lives, the stronger we become, with God's help, the source of power and wisdom in our lives. If we rely on ourselves solely, will we succeed?

Melanie seemed to show her students much respect and appreciation. Would that not make a well-educated student respond positively to her? Or was Melanie solely an

exceptional teacher who was determined her students should behave and be responsive to her teaching? In my opinion, children who are taught by their parents to show respect, especially when it is shown to them, will respond positively to a teacher such as Melanie. Again, I meditated on my own years as a teacher, when I had a similar vision about my students, never pressured them with learning, and trying to create a relaxed learning atmosphere. However, I did not receive the kind of feedback from all of my students that I would have liked. So, I asked myself, what did I do wrong? The answer came from Zoe's story, who understood that behind her students' behaviour is their own story, the challenges they go through, the relationships they have with their parents. Thus, my students had difficulties in their personal lives and, comparing my students' background to that of Melanie's students, I could start to gain a better understanding of their experiences and how that influenced my experiences with them.

Being a Religious Education teacher is at times almost like a sort of evangelism for Melanie:

> Being a religious education teacher is not only about teaching children some things you learned during your Theology degree, but you must identify yourself, you have to live what you teach; otherwise, you turn into an information spreader. You do not experience your teachings, and children will feel that. Therefore, students should perceive our message as a living one in our way of conduct.

Such a statement would create problems to Melanie in a more multireligious or a more secular environment, but not in Romania, where parents themselves (or at least most of them) expect such conduct from Religious Education teachers (Chapter 2) provides more detail on this.

Therefore, Melanie would not be considered a good teacher because of her notions in a different environment, because many schools discourage evangelism. However, her evangelistic attitude would not be accepted if she was any other subject teacher. Only her professional status, as a Religious Education teacher, allows her to speak openly and to bear witness to her spiritual and religious experiences in front of her students. Melanie acknowledges how she would be perceived if she taught another subject or if she had a different profession:

> I am also a trained French teacher and speech therapist. However, I feel more useful and more comfortable teaching Religious Education because I can speak

freely about God. Teaching Religious Education allows me to present myself as I am, using other knowledge I gained to reinforce children's faith. For this reason, I must say I came home happy many times.

Again, Melanie emphasised how important teaching Religious Education is for her personal and professional fulfilment. Teaching Religious Education in Romania is an advantage for Melanie, as a person with strong faith who believes herself to have been called to Religious Education by God. However, things have changed lately in Romanian society, and there is an increasing tendency towards a more secular approach in Religious Education. Nevertheless, Melanie's opinion about how Religious Education must be taught in Romania is evident:

> We must not forget that we are Religious Education teachers, and our subject cannot be taught in any other way. I have always kept that idea in mind. I am a Religious Education teacher, and, therefore, my behaviour should be appropriate, as I teach about God. I am aware that I will never be able to teach about Him properly. He is not a concept but a Person who can be felt as being present in our daily lives.

As a teacher, Melanie perceives her profession as a vocation, and she does not perceive any boundary between the personal and the professional when it comes to expressing her faith and her religious convictions and experiences. During interviews I had with Melanie I discovered how passionate she was about teaching Religious Education. Her story enabled me to give meaning to my own professional experiences, just as Zoe's story had done.

In the next section, I will analyse the relationship Melanie developed with her mother, her grandmothers, and her spiritual fathers, and how these relationships influenced how she developed as a person, as a Christian, and as a teacher.

8.4. Significant Others – Mother, grandmother, spiritual fathers

In Melanie's case, it was not straightforward to identify how her family influenced her personal development. The women, her grandmother and great grandmother, seemed to have made an important contribution to Melanie's spiritual formation. Her father, who passed away in her early years, did not seem to have had any influence, except when it

comes to Melanie's memory about him being a teacher. However, spiritual father seemed to have significantly influenced Melanie in childhood and throughout her adult life. In Melanie's case, when I say spiritual father, I refer to all spiritual fathers she had, as it seemed to me that she referred to them as to her biological father.

> In childhood, my spiritual father was the priest who married my parents, and to whom I confessed until I left home to go to university. I perceived him as a father. My biological father died when I was six years old. My father and my spiritual father had the same age. I saw my spiritual father as my natural father, and I tried to follow his advice. He filled the gap that my father left after his death. I am grateful to him for all the support he gave me all those years. If he had not been by my side, I would not be what I am today.

According to Bowlby and Ainsworth's (1995) attachment theory we could describe Melanie's perception and relationship with her spiritual fathers as one of security and safety. Melanie's image of her father seems to be very weak, which makes me wonder if he influenced Melanie in any way, whereas her spiritual father played an essential role, inspiring her to build her faith in God and to perceive the world through the lens of the Orthodox Christian faith.

When she moved to Bucharest she found another spiritual father, but she kept the same parental perception of spiritual fatherhood that she had when she was at home. She saw her spiritual father as a guide, even in professional matters:

> Talking about the teaching mission I have had for eight years; I want to tell you about an example from my profession. I was a principal teacher for a group of students who were sometimes naughty, which made me go through many anxious moments. Sometimes, they had small conflicts which could escalate, which further could have led to tensions with their parents. In such situations, I used to seek advice from my spiritual father. I wanted to find Christian ways of bringing peace between children and their parents. He gave me some useful and practical advice, which helped me to reconcile students and parents.

As I said previously, women dominated after the death of Melanie's father. No other man, apart from her father and spiritual father, was mentioned. She grew up with grandmothers, but she did not mention anything about her grandfathers. Therefore, I assumed they passed away when she was very young or before her birth.

I would have expected to hear Melanie speak more about her mother and how she influenced her. The only time she mentioned her mother was when she referred to her father's death, after which her mother did not marry anymore. I did not ask Melanie more about her mother, leaving her to say as much as she was comfortable with. Instead, she spoke more about her grandmother and her great-grandmother's influence on her, who inspired Melanie to believe in God. The first who influenced Melanie was her great-grandmother, who taught her how to pray and took her to the church during Orthodox Christianity's great feasts. After her father's death, her grandmother became more religious and took Melanie with her to church on Sundays and on pilgrimages, where she hoped to find peace after her son's death:

> My great-grandmother and my grandmother had a strong religious feeling. The first was my great-grandmother who raised me with love, and who was an example of the women in my life. Then, her daughter, my grandmother, after the death of her son, my father, wanted to find peace through faith in God. She moved on another stage of her life. She got closer to God and tried to comfort herself and us after the loss of her son, through prayers for his soul. So, being the youngest of the family, I became very attached to my grandmother, and often I used to follow her on pilgrimages, where she went to pray for my father's soul. It is how I began to build my relationship with God, with the saints and with the Mother of God.

Melanie developed a religious feeling that has dominated her life ever since. The influence was so significant that she decided that studying Theology would suit her best. Her profession's choice was also influenced by her history teacher, who I mentioned in the previous section.

Melanie's story about the influence of significant others in her life was not as vocal as Zoe's (in the previous chapter) or as Father Agapios' (in the next chapter) stories about their significant people. She was very much focused on the present, as mother and as a teaching professional. However, the influence of her spiritual father in regulating her emotions and coping with new challenges was clear. Thus, in Melanie's case, I could argue that her spiritual father (who was a different person at different times of her life) influenced her personal and spiritual path, which further influenced her professional behaviour, worldview and language.

8.5. The role of Confession and Prayer "we must be light for our students"

Like Zoe, Melanie extensively used a religious discourse during the interviews, showing the importance and significance of faith and Orthodox Christian spirituality in her life. She often used words such as God, faith, love, church, confession, and spiritual father, which highlighted the importance of spirituality in her life.

As with Zoe, I will analyse Melanie's religious discourse, based on three questions: when did she used religious language? What religious words did she use? How did she use the religious language? And what does the religious discourse say about Melanie's personality?

Melanie's religious discourse was used across all interviews, emphasising how much her world views are influenced by her spiritual understanding of the world. When we talked about her profession, she wanted to highlight the importance of her spiritual life in being a religious role model for her students.

> Therefore, religious education teachers must take care of their spiritual life. We must take care of our spiritual life so that are able to communicate the faith to our students.

Melanie thinks that Religious Education teachers need to take care of their spiritual life in order to be able to communicate the Christian faith to their students. Again, I identify here with how she perceives her profession through the eyes of her faith. With the first sentence here she emphasises the role of spirituality in the lives of teaching professionals. She uses the modal verb 'must', which implies the certainty or even the duty of being engaged in spiritual life. Melanie emphasises the idea of being role models and examples of good conduct in students' lives. Further, she details how an outstanding Religious Education teacher takes care of her spiritual life:

> Confession plays a critical role, and students look to their teacher, and they identify the subject with the teacher. Therefore, the teacher needs to be a role model, although it does not work every time, at least not for me.

Confession is one way in which a Religious Education teacher takes care of others as well as their own spiritual life. Melanie suggests that, through confession, teachers transform and become role models for students. When both spiritual father and spiritual children are

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involved in a relationship, frequent confession implies a deeper relationship between the two of them. As the religious literature suggested (Barbu, 2015), for an Orthodox Christian, the spiritual father becomes of high importance or, in the terms of developmental psychology, he becomes a significant other. In Melanie's perception, religious education teachers' behaviour will influence the perception students have about the subject; therefore, teachers "must" take care of their spiritual lives.

Melanie's discourse was infused by religious words for most of our interviews. Next, I will provide a few quotes from different interviews, and I will analyse them. First of all:

> Prayer was so well fitted to my needs, a confession in front of God. There were moments when I felt I tangibly met God. We should experience this kind of moment more often. Unfortunately, such a prayer does not happen to me very often. However, I try to have my moments with God during the day, and His presence is overwhelming. (about prayer in her daily life)

Prayer is for Melanie an encounter with God. She says she perceives prayer as an unmediated confession, where she reveals herself in front of God. Although she does not experience God's presence every time, when it does she finds it "overwhelming", and she is happy with these moments. Melanie speaks about prayer and reveals a profound understanding of what prayer is within Orthodox Christian spirituality, namely an encounter with God (Bloom, 1970).

> Prayer helps us in each moment of our life, and its consequences can be seen in the state we have if we pray: we have patience with our students, we pray for them if they challenge us, and we become a light for them. (prayer for her students)

Melanie's perception of prayer has a secondary outcome: professional development. In prayer, she sees a tool through which a teacher may regulate the anger and frustration generated by children's challenging behaviour. Moreover, she believes that prayer can enable teachers to survive and overcome challenging situations and become more self-effective. Prayer differs from 'regular' professional reflection in various ways. In professional reflection, people reflect on what and how things have been done. In contrast, prayer implies a similar action of thinking about what has been done. However, a relationship with God is involved here, the God who is all-knowing and who, through the

power given in this relationship, enables teachers to change their feelings, their attitudes, and their behaviour towards challenging students or situations.

This way, teachers become once again role models for their students. Her statement once more that, for Melanie, spirituality is necessary for her professional life, and whether she prays or not makes the difference between being an outstanding Religious Education teacher or not.

Further, she spoke about confession in a similar way:

> Confession is the opportunity to recognise your weaknesses, and you try to undress from the older man and to become new every time you meet your spiritual father. Confession is a cure. It is a place from where you leave more reliable than you came.

Melanie sees confession as a chance to confront her weaknesses in a safe and secure space, where people do not feel judged, but rather feel cured. She perceives it as a continuous transformation and development of personality when she says, "undress the older man and become new every time". I think her perception of confession reveals the close relationship Melanie has with her spiritual father. Otherwise, she would not affirm that confession is a cure or a place from where you leave stronger than you arrived. In other words, Melanie's confession is transformative and contributes extensively to her personal and professional development: You leave stronger, of course, if you want, because your spiritual father gives you advice and God sends you answers you would never have expected through your spiritual father. There is something that interferes here. What? Your freedom, to listen or not, to put the advice into practice or not.

Melanie says that confession may influence teachers' profession only if they allow it to. Therefore, the influence is not likely to occur unless a teacher chooses to be influenced. She brings the argument of freedom into her decision to listen to her spiritual father's advice, which is, according to Melanie, always beneficial for the believer.

At this point, I was more interested in how confession influenced her profession or which role her spiritual father played in her profession.

> I could talk about the mission I had, which I mentioned last time. I was a principal teacher for a group of students who were sometimes naughty, and I went through many anxious moments. Sometimes, they had small conflicts which could escalate, meaning that their parents could end living in a state of tension because

of their children. So, in such situations, I used to seek my spiritual father's advice to know how to bring peace between children, and between their parents. He gave me some useful and practical advice, which helped me to reconcile my students and their parents.

The relationship Melanie has with her spiritual father is manifested even at the professional level. She involves him in her professional problems and asks for advice that could bring peace at school. In Melanie's case, I identify what Bandura (2012) called relying on 'divine proxy agency' in sorting out issues in people's lives. In other words, Bandura explains that believers tend to rely on God to solve their difficulties. God is considered an agency who stands close to His faithful and intervenes whenever they ask for help. For Melanie, confession seems to be where she finds answers from her spiritual father for any issue or challenge in her personal or professional life. It seemed to me that Melanie's view of a spiritual father is different from Zoe's. Zoe only trusted her spiritual father in confession, whereas Melanie does not distinguish between her spiritual father in confession and outside of confession. Apart from what Melanie said, it is essential to analyse what tone of voice she used when she spoke about the importance of spirituality in her life, which is what I will analyse in the next section.

Melanie was going through a difficult time in her life when we had the interviews for my research. Although I knew her as a strong, ambitious, and intelligent woman, I now saw a different Melanie. I met a facet of her that I never knew before. I did not understand much at that time, and I was trying to find answers to her emotional state, but now, after I became a mother, while being a student, I understood more of the emotional state she experienced at the time of our interviews. Her emotional state influenced Melanie's tone of voice. Her voice was weak, lacking willpower, apparently disappointed with her life. Melanie's weak voice and her sad face expressed the sadness she was going through in that time of her life. She talked about God, but with sadness, as she was not living the words, she was merely speaking them. She remembered how she used to believe, how she used to think and feel before giving birth to her first child. At that time, I remember that I could not understand how a happy event, such as childbirth, can bring so many challenges, and how giving birth to a child could be life changing. When things had changed in my life, after I had given birth to my son and I experienced many difficulties in my personal and professional life, I began to empathise entirely with Melanie. If I had been interviewed at that moment in my life, I would have the same tone of voice Melanie

had when she spoke about her life and experiences. I felt that my inner voice was weak. I tried to recover or to reconstruct myself after going through many challenges in my personal life after giving birth to my son: inner conflicts, misunderstandings, and lack of parental support, deterioration of the relationship with my husband, trying to be a good and supportive mother for my son but at the same time, trying to understand when to create boundaries, raising a hypersensitive boy, trying to focus again on my doctoral thesis, and this is just to name a few of the challenges I have been through after becoming a mother.

However, when Melanie began to remember and talked about her profession, her tone of voice changed. She smiled, her voice sounded confident again, and I found the Melanie in front of me I have known since our university years. Perhaps teaching, as a space, provides Melanie with a secure base, as she goes back to this after the sadness of the earlier narrative.

The more we got into our discussion about the role of spiritual father and faith in her personal and professional life, the more she sounded as if she was recovering from the sad emotional state she had been experiencing. It was like she had had amnesia, and she was slowly beginning to remember those missing pieces, which made her recover her past. The engaging and deep way she talked about her spiritual life made me think of the importance of this in her personal and professional life to overcome challenges, become resilient, self-regulate negative emotions, and gain and develop her self-efficacy.

Understanding Melanie's religious discourse made me think that religion and spiritual life are essential for her personal and professional development. Her discourse leads me to several ideas regarding her story and her approach to spiritual life. Melanie places great importance on faith in her life and her profession. I might assume that she understands her role, namely being an Orthodox Christian, a Religious Education teacher, and a priest's wife. In the Christian journey towards spiritual fulfilment, one goes through various stages of understanding life and spiritual growth (Sakharov, 1977). Every human life is unique, and, therefore, every experience will be unique. Every story is worth being valued and understood as much as possible.

Admittedly, for Melanie, faith is essential, and it is her way of facing life's challenges and becoming more assertive. However, as Aimilianos (2014) noted, spiritual life aims to allow Christ to descend into people's hearts and work inside us. In other words, there

is a mystical, spiritual connection between humans and God, who has the power and ability to descend into the inner being of humans and to support them and to give them life-changing knowledge. In Ainsworth and Bowlby's terms, a secure base and a safe attachment can be built between God and humans. Humans can allow God to guide them and to raise them.

Melanie is an Orthodox Christian teacher who relies on the divine proxy agency (Bandura, 2003) to overcome the challenges encountered in her personal and professional life. Prayer for students, teaching about religion and spirituality, a close relationship with her spiritual fathers, all these are transparent in Melanie's religious discourse. The several mentions she made during our interviews about the importance of her spiritual father in her life, indicates the influence he has on her personal, spiritual, and professional development.

8.6. Summary of the Chapter

Melanie's story had its particularity and significance in gaining understandings about my own story and experience. Her struggles after becoming a mother echoed in my heart and mind only after I passed through the motherhood experience. I felt as Melanie sometimes down because of my new role, but also because of unresolved past relationships with my parents, which have affected my present. Again, I felt how the relationship I built with spiritual father (and through him with God) enabled me to overcome or better said, to cope with new challenges. Moreover, Melanie's story put me in the situation of confronting myself with my teaching experience and with my struggles of managing the misbehaviour of some of my students. As I mentioned early in this chapter, at some point I experience a sort of envy for not having had the chance to have better behaved students. I understood that it was not the real reason for my struggles and the tensions I lived inside me, but the low self-confidence I felt every time tense situations arose.

If Melanie's and Zoe's stories enabled me to understand more about the relationship I built with my parents and my spiritual father, the last participant in my research, father Agapios aided me to relate differently to my relationship with my profession and my spiritual life. His story is presented and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter nine: Father Agapios' story

9.1. Introduction

Father Agapios, who was my teacher and my spiritual father for approximately four years, is the third teacher whose story I present and analyse in this study. I met father Agapios 16 years ago, when I started my degree in Theology, in Bucharest. There, he taught Orthodox Christian dogma and spirituality. Before becoming a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology, he had taught the New Testament for 13 years at an Orthodox Christian seminary. Then, he became a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology.

A genuine question could be asked about why I chose Father Agapios' to be part of my research. Several reasons led me to ask him to be part of my study. Reflecting on appropriate people for my research, farther Agapios was the first who came to mind. He is an experienced teacher and he is a priest. Therefore, he is an Orthodox Christian engaged in his spiritual life, and additionally he is Romanian. I knew a little about his life from internet sources, and I was interested to understand his life as a teacher in the context of his faith. I was also hoping to give meaning to my experiences through his own teaching experiences. I also wanted to know if his parents and his spiritual father influenced his personal development and if this influence could be felt in his career as a teacher.

As I noted, father Agapios has been a theology teacher for more than 30 years. He is also a priest and a spiritual father for many of his current or former students, including me. He is married, the father of three, and a grandfather of two.

I met father Agapios twice, for two hours each time, in the old-fashioned living room in his home. I liked his living room a lot for the beautiful and rare icons hanging on the walls, and the old piano which was positioned at the entrance to the living room. He was kind and gentle every time I visited him for the interviews, offering me fruit. He hugged me and made me feel like I was his daughter. It was a nice feeling I experienced which reminded me of his habit of hugging his spiritual children. Father Agapios' story enabled me to understand more of my own story and my teaching experiences. He was open to any question I would have and ready to speak about his experiences. In his case, I did not feel I had a position of authority because of his age, and because he was my spiritual

father and my teacher. Despite all these, I managed to listen to his story detached from the image I had about him. However, I have still perceived him as a man, although he did not impose over me with a masculine attitude. I have still experienced a sort of shyness in front of him, like the shyness a girl feels in front of a grownup. However, in the analysis of his interviews I tried not to be influenced by the shyness I experienced in front of him, but to immerse myself into his life and into his experiences and, therefore to give them understandings.

9.2. Early life and adolescence– longing for God

Father Agapios was born in a small village in South Moldavia, Romania. He was the youngest son of his family, which consisted of him, his mother, brother, and father. He described himself as a shy child, and was later mocked frequently by his father for not being a strong and tough young man. As his father used to work a lot in other villages to support the family, he was absent from home much of the time. Therefore, he spent more time with his mother, about whom he spoke very positively:

> My father was away from home because he was working as a seasonal worker, but our mother showed us much love, kindness, gentleness, and tenderness.

His parents were the first people who directed father Agapios and his brother towards the Christian faith. His father often read the Bible to them, and their mother used to sing religious songs.

> My childhood was inspired by my parents' religiosity. Our father used to read us from the children's Bible. And my mother used to sing us religious chants.

Although his parents were both believers who attended church every Sunday, they were opposites in character. The difference between his parents influenced how he built a relationship with each one of them:

> Despite this fact [his father's religiosity], my father, who never missed going to church on Sundays, was an impulsive character, in contrast to my mother, who had a very kind personality…I could even say that she was a martyr. She carried all of the household on her shoulders…

Father Agapios was a very sensible and sensitive boy, who obeyed his parents and had an excellent relationship with his mother, who influenced his personality (more about their relationship in the section about significant others).

He did not talk much about his childhood. He mentioned what I said above, and he recounted to me an episode from adolescence when he wanted to apply for a place in a theological vocational secondary school. Unexpectedly, he had an ulcer crisis one day before admission examination. He was in terrible pain, bleeding, and psychologically he felt devastated because he thought that his dream to study at that school had vanished:

> I got sick from an ulcer. I remember having pains in my stomach, even bleedings. It was midnight, the day before my exam, and it was pouring. I told myself: everything is lost! Everything is compromised! And then, I asked God: My Lord, what are you doing with me? After that prayer, I felt a strong inner feeling of confidence which suggested to me: you will pass, and you will be the first. I didn`t necessarily wish to be the first to be admitted, but God put things in such a way that I was the first.

I could imagine Father Agapios as a young man, aged 14, imagining his life at that secondary school. An ideal life for a young man whose desire is to serve God, as he said in another interview, and he wanted to become a monk. Life in a vocational secondary school would be composed of theological school subjects to study, reading Scripture, participation in church services every day, a daily prayer routine, fewer temptations, and an ideal spiritual life where the students were taught how to feel in a continuous state of communion with God. He was admitted to that secondary school, and he was first, with the highest grade. I can imagine how happy he must have felt when he saw the results. And I ask myself: how did his relationship with God change after that event? I could assume that his faith became greater because he felt his prayers had been answered unexpectedly:

> That event was an extraordinary confirmation of God's presence in my life. Nobody can take that away from me. I was suffering. I had severe pain. My face turned yellow, and I was losing blood, I felt physically, psychologically, and spiritually destroyed. So, despite this sufferance, God supported me, and I was admitted first.

However, not everything was as he had imagined at that secondary school. On the one hand, students had a daily common prayer, they had to participate in daily church services,

and they studied many theological subjects. On the other hand, father Agapios was disappointed with how students' lives around Orthodox Christian spirituality were approached. He found that it was too formal, it was too militarist, and students lacked freedom and a loving approach from teachers. Like Zoe's and my story about our mothers and our relationship with them, father Agapios experienced the legacy of the communist ideology in his life (Falls, 2011) differently. It was not through his personal relationships but his professional relationships. Although probably most of them priests who were serving Sunday services or who were probably confessors for other Christians, teachers in his school were influenced by the communist ideology about authority and obedience, without any freedom to personal expression (Klicperova-Baker, 1999).

Listening to father Agapios desire to study Theology, I found connections between his story and my story. When I was 19 years old, after finishing the final examination (A-level equivalent), I wanted to study Theology. I prepared much for that a year in advance. In order to have the examinations, I had to commute from my town to the capital city. As I had never been there by myself, my brother and my father accompanied me. I travelled to Bucharest by train, and I had to wake up at 3 a.m. after I had gone to sleep at midnight. Because of unexpected reasons, I was scheduled to be examined at 5 p.m. in the afternoon. I passed the first examination in Dogmatics. I finished my exam at around 8 p.m., and we had to travel back to our hometown that night, as we did not have anybody to receive us, or my dad did not dare to ask the few relatives we had there. There were no seats and no trains left. So, we had to hitchhike. Fortunately, some security guards from my village worked at a hypermarket in Bucharest, and the company offered them private transport to commute. We travelled in their coach without seats, standing on our feet. We got home around 10.30 p.m.

The next day, I had a French examination. So, again I woke up at 3 p.m., got the train, and at 8 a.m. I was taking my French test. I passed, and I was admitted first. Being the first, the university offered me a scholarship, which I managed to maintain until the end of my university degree. Like father Agapios, I prayed God to allow me to enter my dream university, which now, after 12 years, I consider a blessing. Although the conditions were not friendly for a young woman to feel confident, I never remember complaining about being tired, for not having anywhere to sleep that night. I took everything as it came.

Given the similarities between father Agapios's story and my own, I empathised with him, and in a way. He ascended from hell to heaven, or from agony to ecstasy. And afterwards, this strengthened his faith in God.

He lived when Romania was under the communist regime and, as a young man, he felt the regime's constraints many times. He longed for freedom, but he could not escape. Therefore, he found a way to escape to his inner world through reading, which became one of his biggest passions during childhood and adolescence:

Although there was a lot of pressure from the communist regime in society, inside me, I felt a higher effervescence. I had a strong determination to find a way towards freedom. And my way was through my faith, and through reading, which opened an inner space which could not be invaded by anybody.

Again, I felt a similarity with father Agapios at this point. Although I did not experience the communist regime with its constraints, I still experienced a state of constraint in my life during my adolescence. I was troubled about my physical appearance and because of that I did not feel comfortable in friendships that young people are typically involved in. It was one of those moments when I did not receive emotional support of my parents. They were very preoccupied with offering us food and clothing and could not listen to us and support our emotional needs. Therefore, I found a space where I felt accepted and loved, and it was a different world from a 'normal' teenager's world. It was within the faith and the reading which was liberating.

Father Agapios' adolescence was also influenced by the pilgrimages he was going on every summer holiday to Moldavian monasteries, together with one of his best friends. There, he developed a special relationship with the monks within the monastery. These people became significant for him and, together with his mother, influenced his personal and further teaching professional identity and development.

9.3. Significant others – mother and spiritual fathers

In father Agapios' life, there were two prominent significant others, his mother and his spiritual fathers. I will first analyse the relationship he had with his mother, and then I will analyse the relationship with his spiritual fathers.

As I mentioned in the section dedicated to his early years, father Agapios' mother played an essential role in his personal development. Her personality helped him to develop his sensitivity. He did not speak as extensively about her as Zoe did about her mother, but I felt her influence on his personality. He also emphasised the influence his mother had on him. From the description he gave, I could say that she falls into the category of traditional Romanian women who were loving, sacrificed much for their children, and endured a harsh life with their husbands, who were sometimes aggressive. Father Agapios said that his mother was gentle, helpful, loving, whereas his father was strict and cold.

Father Agapios considered his mother to be a martyr of his father's behaviour, as she suffered from his toughness and from the hard work she had to do at home:

> I could even say that she has been a martyr. She carried all of the household on her shoulders.

He inherited from his mother the habit of embracing his spiritual children, showing them support in this way and, I would say, providing them with what I would argue to be an example of a secure base (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991):

> People from the church tell me: Father, I like it when you hug people in the church, especially your spiritual children. I answer them: yes, it is nice, but I do it naturally, as I learned it from my mother.

Father Agapios recognises in himself his mother's attitudes towards him, and maybe towards other people. As in Zoe's case, father Agapios' mother influenced how he perceives people and the world around him. The relationship he had with his mother was very close. So close that he remembered one time when his mother was near death because of a miscarriage. She was eight months pregnant, and the child died in her womb without anybody knowing:

> I remember an episode from childhood when my mother was in danger of death because her baby died in her womb because of the hard work on the farm. She was eight months pregnant. The doctor came and said there was no chance she'd survive. I remember I went somewhere, next to a river, I knelt on the sand, and I cried and prayed from the bottom of my heart to God: "My Lord, please save my mother". It was awful to see my mother close to death." Then, God heard my prayer and saved my mother. The doctor took the baby out of the womb

through a caesarean section. After that episode, she could not have any more children.

Hearing father Agapios, I imagined a boy, aged around eight years old, came into my mind. Standing outside his mother's room, people and the doctor around his mother, who was probably lying unconscious on the bed, his father in the room, his brother, and hearing the doctor and others saying she would die. It must have been terrible for him to understand that the person who showed him love and support would pass away. He knew his father would continue to be harsh and insensitive to his needs. Who was going to hug him, kiss him, and love him? His mother, his secure base, was dying. So, he asks God to intervene and to save his mother, the source of all good for him. Miraculously, his mother lived, and she lived for many years after that event. The love for his mother made me understand more about his professional world, as a world where love and empathy for the "other" come before transmitting knowledge. Apart from his mother, father Agapios' personality was influenced by five spiritual fathers he met during school holidays when he spent the holidays at monasteries in North Moldavia. It was how he started the interview when I asked him to tell me something about himself:

> The presence of great spiritual fathers in my life taught me that beyond everything, the presence of a spiritual person is definitely more significant than the spiritual books he or she wrote.

He called the trip to monasteries a spiritual journey because it influenced him for a lifetime:

> It is how one of the most essential and beautiful periods of my life began; a period that I would value as a destiny.

The five spiritual fathers influenced, each in his own way, the development of father Agapios' personality. He said that these spiritual fathers enabled him to access a deeper spiritual understanding of people and the world around him. He used this new spiritual understanding in his personal life and the relationships he built with others, and later when he became a schoolteacher (more on this in the section about becoming a teaching professional). Each one of them influenced father Agapios with their particular personality. These five spiritual fathers passed away a long time ago, and they were known by other people as well for how they lived their lives and how they inspired people.

The first one was father Cleopa, who had a unique way of talking about saints, as if they were alive and present at the moment of speaking. His attitude made Father Agapios see the relationship between faith and the saints of the Orthodox Christian faith differently than before:

> Father Cleopa had the gift of speech. Many Christians used to visit him during the communist regime, and he always had something to tell. He used to choose a topic from Paterikon, but also other subjects related to Christian life, like fasting, prayer, fight against the passions. The feeling I had when listening to father Cleopa was that he was living a spiritual reality like it was a real, deep life. Therefore, for him, there was no gap between the seen and the unseen world. When he was talking about the fathers of the Christian church, I had the impression that he was living what he recalled. Thus, it was the gift of speaking that convinced us about the realities perceived by me at that age, like legends, myths, or fantasies.

It was surprising for father Agapios to meet and listen to a man with such sincere Christian spiritual aspirations and experiences. As a young man, he was preoccupied with knowledge and with understanding life, as he mentioned at some point. He could not perceive his faith and his spiritual life as a reality. He was amazed when he heard father Cleopa's speech, as it made him feel the saints' presence in his own life. Father Agapios spent nine summer holidays next to this monk listening and following his advice. I can now recognise the same enthusiasm to speak to his students about saints' presence in Christians' lives in his teaching style. During his lectures, he always talked to us about the spiritual and mystical journey of the saints' lives and experiences. His approach made me feel the presence of the saints and of God close to me and ready to support me whenever I needed it.

Not far from father Cleopa's monastery lived another monk who influenced father Agapios' worldviews. His name was Paisie, or elder Paisie, as people used to call him. He had a different character. He did not have the same speaking gift, but he had a unique way of approaching people:

> Father Paisie was the spiritual father of the monks from the monastery of Sihla, and had the gift of mindfulness when he received somebody. He had a weak body; he always seemed to be powerless; he had a warm voice, sometimes weakened but always kind and warm. The blessings he used to give us were

giving him energy. He used to say: May God give blessings to you, save you, and give you a place in heaven.

For father Agapios, seeing this weak but kind old man, gave him an insight into how priests in the church should receive people and how teachers should approach their students. The influence I see here is not in the knowledge the old monk would have given him, but more in his presence. Although he was physically weak, he gave people the impression of a strong man. Maybe this is why father Agapios receives his students with kindness and helps them to solve problems of any kind.

The third monk who influenced father Agapios's youth was father Elefterie. His physical appearance was similar to that of the fathers of the desert. He was very welcoming, and every time father Agapios and his friends visited him, he showed them a great honour:

> What impressed me in father Elefterie was the fact that every time we went to visit him, he invited us to eat together with him and gave us much attention, spending his time with us, 2–3 hours each time we met. Moreover, the fact that he invited us to have lunch together, the fact that he used to give us advice about how a priest should prepare himself for liturgy, how a priest's relationship with his wife should be, what the family should look like and how to have a balance between all these things. For us, in those times, it was impressive because no one would have done the same. He used to see us as future priests and used to show us great honour. All this time spent with us meant so much to us. Moreover, every time before we left he used to give us a blessing, as we called it, which was a considerable amount of money for those communist times. So, every single time.

It was impressive for me to listen again to the recording of this part of the interview. It made sense now why father Agapios gave each of his students and spiritual children individual attention. I remember him staying until 2–3 a.m. listening to people's confessions and being supportive, even though at 7 a.m. the next day he had to be back in church for the morning service. Father Elefterie gave father Agapios much attention for an extended period of time, or as much as he needed. This attention given to a shy young man, who probably was carrying the burden of not being as 'other young men', as his father expected from him, enabled father Agapios to find peace with him and overcome his father's expectations.

These three spiritual fathers (father Cleopa, father Paisie, father Elefterie), who he met during his adolescence and youth, seemed to have developed father Agapios' personality

in such a way that it would later influence his life as a teacher, as well as his view on the profession and his opinion on what the relationship with his students should look like.

After graduation, he met another spiritual father and theologian, Father Dumitru Staniloae. He was retired when father Agapios began his studies, but he met him before his doctoral studies. Father Agapios used a different tone of voice when he spoke about father Staniloae, emphasising how special their relationship was and how attached he felt to him. Their first interaction was during father Agapios' doctoral studies and they continued their relationship until father Staniloae passed away. Meeting father Staniloae was one of the most beautiful periods of his life, which he again refers to as 'destiny':

> So, this is how another beautiful period of my life began, a period which felt like destiny for me.

When he said destiny, I wondered what he meant as, within Orthodox Christianity, destiny contradicts the teaching about humans' freedom. Then, after listening to the interview again, I understood that he gave the word destiny a different meaning. My suggestion about what he meant by 'destiny' is that he referred to the influence that father Staniloae had on his life, personal, spiritual, and professional. What followed in father Agapios' professional and personal life was the consequence of their first meeting:

> In that first meeting with Father Staniloae, I felt a spiritual union with him. He loved me as much as he loved anybody who came to visit him, and I felt as if I were his biological son. He loved everybody in an honest way. Although I have met many spiritual fathers, I had never felt that love; they had their limits. However, Father Staniloae loved me as his child or nephew. He was interested in my studies, and although he was not at the faculty anymore, I used to visit him at his home. For me, it was overwhelming to be given such significant importance.

Therefore, he felt cherished, valued, and supported, as he felt when he was at his mother's home. This story reminded me again of father Agapios' attitude towards other students, including myself. He gave us a feeling of importance and attention. I wonder if his teaching attitude towards us was influenced by how father Staniloae behaved with him. It seems that father Agapios was involved in relationships with spiritual fathers whose main feature was kindness, his mother's foremost quality.

Another person with whom father Agapios built a trusting relationship was his confessor priest, his spiritual father. During the interviews, father Agapios spoke about this spiritual

father, referring to his gentleness. As a priest and spiritual father of many young people, father Agapios thinks that a spiritual father comes in our life as a gift from God, for whom we need to pray: We first need to put ourselves in the gift of God with much prayer, and then God will give us a spiritual father. We receive our life as a gift from God and through our parents; likewise, we receive the spiritual father as a gift from God.

It is his conviction that through a spiritual father a believer connects to God, and not only because he is a priest. He also added that there must be compatibility between a spiritual father and his spiritual children for that to happen:

> There has to be compatibility between the spiritual structure of a spiritual father and his spiritual children. The connection between them has to be rhythmic so that he knows his spiritual children very well.

He found this compatibility between him and his spiritual father. As he said in one of the interviews, being very sensitive he could not confess to a firm priest, he needed more understanding and love from his spiritual father:

> My spiritual father has never given much advice; he was a gentle presence. His gentleness attracted me to the monastery where he was a monk. Also, I used to confess to him; he was listening to me all the time without rushing me, giving me advice. However, beyond everything, when every time he touched my head giving forgiveness for my sins, I felt his love and his kindness, healing my sadness and all my wounds.

Hearing my spiritual father talking about his own spiritual father enabled me to understand much of his behaviour towards me: his kindness, his gentleness, his love, his goodness. The description he gave of his own spiritual father is similar to the description I would give of him if anybody were to ask.

Each one of the spiritual fathers he met, as well as his mother, influenced father Agapios' personality, which he further expressed in his relationships with people and his professional relationships with students. In the next section, I will write about how significant others influenced father Agapios' professional behaviour and conceptions about the teaching profession.

9. 4. Becoming a teacher

Father Agapios became a teacher at the vocational secondary school where he had studied years before. It was another enjoyable but challenging period of his life for him. He was very passionate about teaching and capturing his students' attention, and interesting them for the subject he taught. He has taught Dogmatics and the New Testament for 13 years. As a student, he disliked the military atmosphere and the unkind attitude of most of his teachers. Instead, he liked how the students' timetable was organised around church services and prayer. Once he became a teacher in his secondary school, he aimed to change the atmosphere at school and make students enjoy their lives there:

> During that period, I was teaching Dogmatics, and my first act of freedom was to change the military discipline existing in that secondary school into a freer education, with a deeper spiritual perspective.

Becoming a teacher enabled father Agapios to practice everything he learned during childhood, adolescence, and his time at university. He sought to break free from the authoritarian communist regime (Falls, 2011), and maybe from his father's authority ever since his childhood. He found freedom in reading and in visiting spiritual fathers. Over time, he has developed a personality that allowed him to be free to act according to who he is, and this is essential to his personality. Therefore, he initiated the change of the teaching model at his secondary school. He had no fear, although he was still a sensitive person who still had much of his childhood shyness. He took this initiative together with two other young colleagues at the school:

> As a teacher, I was put in the situation to change the teaching paradigm into an education based on freedom, on vocation, on openness towards spiritual perspectives. God helped me, and I managed to change the students' perspective together with two other friends of mine. All three of us provided a new perspective on teaching at that school.

As he said, it was not easy to change the teaching paradigm during the communist regime, where even theological - vocational secondary schools had to conform to communist ideology, expressed through rigidity, no freedom of expression, keeping personal beliefs hidden. Listening to him, I thought about my own teaching experience, when I wanted to change the paradigm regarding the relationship with students. Father Agapios aimed to

change the classic authoritarian teacher-student relationship to one based on mutual respect and confidence and everybody's right to express personal opinions without judging or being judged by others. However, not everybody in the school was happy with his initiative. He was harshly criticised and ridiculed by other teachers in school:

> I was fearless and enthusiastic in trying to change the paradigm, but often older teachers mocked me. For example, during springtime, when the weather was beautiful, I used to take my students outside, in the school's park and teach them Dogmatics. Something very unusual. We were sitting on two benches we could all fit on, talking about the sacraments of the Church. But the old teachers used to make fun of me and even criticised me saying: 'You and your migratory teaching.

Although he was mocked for his views on teaching, he persisted in the decision to change the paradigm. I wonder what was behind his determination to change and give his students a new perspective on learning about Dogmatics and the New Testament. I think it was everything that had happened in his life so far: his mother's kindness, his spiritual fathers' ways of approaching him with love and consideration, his dream to be able to express himself freely. His students were open and responsive to his new approach to teaching:

> I must say that I had great satisfaction when the generations I prepared for their admission to the faculty of Theology achieved excellent results. The Professor responsible for students' admissions asked where all those students were coming from, because their style was similar. It was a good exercise because I managed to motivate them to like and to study Theology.

He influenced his students to such an extent that they decided to follow his path, and now they are lecturers at the same faculty as he is. I wanted to understand more about how he managed to captivate his students' attention and motivation to learn the subject he taught. I assume that most of the teachers would like that to happen in their profession. I asked him what else he did to capture their attention:

> As teachers, the most important thing we can do is take care of our inner (spiritual and psychological) state, which we show in front of our students. It should be a state of deep peace. This state attracts children and makes them feel secure. Without the Holy Communion, without confession, without a strong relationship with their spiritual father and, through all these, with God, one cannot have this

inner peace. Teachers do not only teach a subject, but they also teach about who they are inside. The teaching style reflects a teacher's personality.

Father Agapios' perspective on teaching has been deeply influenced by his faith in God and how his personality was formed from childhood until his teenage years. All those years of searching inside for something more profound, for something meaningful, resulted in him having a different view on teaching and the professional relationship with students. I noticed that, in his life, there was a theme that arose time and again: freedom. He wanted to break free from the oppressive communist regime and his father's authoritarian character and, later, as a teacher, he wanted to educate his students to be free as well. Maybe, unconsciously, father Agapios felt how the communist legacy about obedience and authority was transmitted to other generations through formal education in school. He was a young man who felt that freedom to be who you are inside of you is a precious gift that God made to people. Therefore, freedom is a natural characteristic of human beings that they need to manifest without fearing punishment and of supreme authority (Klicperova-Baker, 1999).

> Teachers should enable their students to feel free to express who they are, and they should help students to learn how to 'fly'. Teachers should teach students the art of learning by themselves how to do this; so, as teachers, we should educate them in this sense. However, not all teachers can do it, as teaching is a vocation, just as the priesthood.

Father Agapios revealed to me a different feature of teachers, one that I had not thought about until hearing him, namely teachers who understand their students' uniqueness. His understanding questioned my views of those teachers from my school whose students were very obedient because they knew how to make them obedient. Furthermore, they gained respect for their aggressive approach.

Father Agapios made me reconsider my teaching practice and how I communicated my inner state to my students. Although I used to confess to my spiritual father, I received Holy Communion and prayed for the challenging situations I was going through. I now think that I did not believe enough in these practices to gain a state of peace. Father Agapios said:

> Prayer, Confession, and Holy Communion set you up in a state of harmony and peace that can be communicated to your students; without this, I do not know how an Orthodox Christian teacher could help his students to develop.

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The interviews I had with father Agapios were revealing for me as I discovered more about how my view on my spiritual life influenced my teaching practice. However, now, I realise that I was not fully engaged in my faith, or not as much as I thought I was. Also, I think more about the importance of teachers' professional and personal development for understanding themselves and their profession.

9.5. Religious discourse

Father Agapios' discourse was full of religious words, such as 'prayer', 'Jesus prayer', 'confession', 'spiritual father', 'Holy Communion', 'forgiveness', 'humility', 'God'.

Father Agapios used religious discourse almost all of the time during the interviews. Even when he spoke about his childhood, he remembered his father's religiosity and his mother's beautiful voice singing religious chants. Spiritual fathers influenced his adolescence. His teaching career was about teaching students' religious subjects, and he had priesthood and, later, his career as a university lecturer. Apart from these, he also mentioned God's help and the divine presence in his relationship with his wife. His wife is also his first ever girlfriend:

> Before I got married, my father was making fun of me saying: you have no experience with women. One will grab you, and she will twist your mind. Later, in my life, I realise the miracle God had done for me giving my wife. She has been the greatest joy of my life, and through her came all other joys of my life. All the beautiful things in my life came through my wife. I thank God that we are still in love with each other.

As this quote shows, father Agapios relied on God's proxy agency to find a woman who will stand by him during the sorrows and the joys of his life. If in the other situations of his life, his adolescence spent in a theological secondary school, then his teaching career in the same secondary school, his priesthood could be considered as standard for the use of religious discourse, in the case of entering a relationship with women, his approach is quite rare. When he spoke about his relationship with his wife, he highlighted the importance of God's grace and help in enabling him to find somebody to love him. He spoke about his marriage and how he understands the world around him, and his

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relationship with the people around him. Therefore, the religious discourse in his relationships with women reflects his thinking about the importance of faith in one's life.

Father Agapios often mentioned his relationship with God. I will give examples for each of the situations he spoke about, many of which I have already discussed above:

> My childhood was inspired by my parents' religiosity. Our father used to read to us from the children's Bible. My mother used to sing religious chants to us. (on childhood)

> In that first meeting with Father Staniloae, I felt a spiritual union with him. He loved me as much as he loved anybody who came to visit him, and I felt as if I were his biological son. He loved everybody in an honest way. I had never felt that love before, although I met many spiritual fathers, they had their limits. However, Father Staniloae loved me as his child or nephew. He was interested in my studies, and although he was not at the faculty anymore, I used to visit him at his home. For me, it was overwhelming to be given such significant importance. (about one of his spiritual fathers).

> First, because I think it is vital to have a 'place' to come back to. Secondly, because there is somebody able to carry all the evil which is in us. Thirdly, because through confession I came back together with the other members of the church because we are not going to go alone to the Kingdom of God. Then, because in this sacrament it is essential to forgive and to humble ourselves, the connection between the spiritual father and his spiritual child must be rhythmic and the spiritual father has to know his spiritual children very well. (about confession and the relationship with spiritual father).

> As teachers, the most important thing we can do is take care of our inner (spiritual and psychological) state, which we show in front of our students. It should be a state of deep peace. This state attracts children and makes them feel secure. Without the Holy Communion, without confession, without a strong relationship with their spiritual father and, through all these, with God, one cannot have this inner peace. Teachers do not only teach a subject, but they also teach about who they are inside. The teaching style reflects a teacher's personality. (about teaching professionals' inner state)

> People from the church tell me: Father, I like it when you hug people in the church, especially your spiritual children. And I tell them: yes, but I do it naturally, as I learned it from my mother. (father Agapios as a priest).

As can be seen in the quotes above, father Agapios speaks mainly about the importance of spirituality from his childhood to his present life. As a child, he was educated in the faith by his parents. In adolescence, he chose to dedicate his free time to prayer, pilgrimages to monasteries, religious readings, confession, and building relationships with spiritual fathers. As a teacher, he aimed to change the old teaching paradigm of his theological secondary school into one that enabled students to have a personal encounter with God, and experience this encounter that he hoped for them would not be reduced to some external spiritual rituals only. He wanted his students to freely want to practice the faith and experience it uniquely. As a priest, Father Agapios cultivated further the kindness and the gentleness received from his mother. As a priest, he conceives the relationships built in confession with his spiritual children as essential to be constant This knowledge will make confession more effective for both, and especially for the spiritual children.

Although his relationship with his father was cold, and he might have suffered in childhood because of that reason, the way he spoke about those past relationships in his childhood sound detached. I could not feel as detached as he sounded in my own relationship with my mother. However, I assume that the reasons for his detachment were threefold. The first is his age. Father Agapios is now in his late fifties. A long time has passed since his childhood. Another reason could be the excellent relationship he had with his mother in childhood and adult life. Lastly, I might assume that he built a trusting relationship with spiritual fathers, who played the 'male figure'' roles in his personal development.

As I said, he sounded knowledgeable, meaning that I sensed a spiritual maturity in his voice. He sounded like, for example, a teaching professional who knows his or her profession well, he or she knows how to deal with challenges and how to approach people involved in teaching. Similarly, his tone of voice contained an expression of spiritual experience and maturity. He spoke with much joy and love about his mother and his wife. Similarly, he sounded very thankful for the blessings he has received in his life through his spiritual fathers, his mother, and his wife.

9.6. Understanding father Agapios' life through the paradox lenses

I have identified the central paradox in Father Agapios's story. He said about himself that he was a timid boy and young man. In his mind, he had the image of manhood that his father presented him and to which he compared himself.

One paradox lies in how he felt during his exam for being accepted at the vocational secondary school and his results:

> I got sick from an ulcer. I remember having pains in my stomach. I was even bleeding. It was midnight the day before my exam, and it was pouring. I told myself: everything is lost! Everything is compromised! And then I asked God: My Lord, what are you doing with me? After that prayer, I felt a strong inner feeling of confidence which suggested to me: you will pass, and you will be the first. I didn't necessarily wish to be the first to be admitted, but God decided matters in such a way that I was the first.

His health could have impeded his secondary school entry exams. He suffered from these significant pains only a few hours before the exams began, and they should have taken him to the hospital instead of school. At some point, he was in despair, seeing his dreams fall apart. Therefore, the tension within him increased and made him enter a state of despair. And then he prayed; he prayed from the bottom of his heart, showing his pain to God and asking him about God's plan for him. And being in that state of despair he found hope. He found the confidence that he would succeed. Being successful with such a health condition and also in such a state of disappointment would not be possible. In Bandura's terms, Father Agapios relied on the divine proxy agency (Bandura, 2003) asking God to intervene. Otherwise, he would not be able to write anything. He received answers to his prayer to God. Not only was he able to pass his exams, but he was the first. Father Agapios remembered this paradox of his health condition and the final results for the rest of his life as a miracle.

Another paradox is his shyness and courage to confront the old teachers' mentality and change the teaching paradigm in his secondary school. The tension comes from how I understood father Agapios' identity and his courage to change a pre-established order during the oppressive communist regime. Although a religious setting, the secondary

school was still under the influence of the communist mentality where everybody had to obey without any right to express a different opinion:

> As a teacher, I was put in the situation to change the teaching paradigm into an education based on freedom, on vocation, on openness towards spiritual perspectives. God helped me and I managed to change the students' perspective together with two other friends of mine. All three of us provided a new perspective on teaching at that school.

In this quote, he emphasised the fact that he "was put in the situation". In other words, father Agapios considered the way in which the seminary teachers were educating children inappropriate for a student to become an adult prepared for life's challenges. In this sense, he considered that students needed more freedom to find and develop their skills, the freedom to live their relationship with God in a personal way, the freedom to study at that secondary school as a consequence of a personal choice and not without the opportunity to change their educational path. However, father Agapios suffered from his peers' disregard.

Father Agapios' story enabled me to gain new understanding of my own life and profession. For me, life in the church was an escape from my parents' life, which I never agreed with. Being poor during childhood, my parents suffered their whole life from not having enough money to buy things that they imagined would make their lives happier. They constructed their lives around working hard to build a house, to pay debts, to have money to buy food and to pay utilities. As a young person, I tried to change their mindset and to show them that happiness is not given only by material things and that a spiritual richness is inside us which can make us happy in the middle of life's worries and sorrows. I had the aspiration towards the same spiritual freedom which I tasted during my whole life and, like father Agapios, I understood that behind my life, unseen but felt, was the protection of God, who intervened in the most important events of my life. I understood that, for me, as an Orthodox Christian, the inner sense of freedom is given by the faith in God. Another thing that I understood through father Agapios' story was my relationship with my students. I have not acted as a teacher dedicated to his or her students. Instead, I was much more preoccupied with controlling students' behaviour in order to demonstrate that I was a good teacher, although I had the right not to be, as I was only at the beginning of my career, with no previous teaching experience. I found it interesting how he

approached his students and his aim to teach his students how to find their own way of being and doing.

Father Agapios' story, together with Melanie's and Zoe's stories, helped me dig into my past, into my relationship with my parents and with my spiritual father, and understand the impact they had on my personality and my professional identity and development.

9.7. Summary of the Chapter

Father Agapios' story enabled me to understand in a different way my profession and my relationship with my spiritual father. He has perceived his teaching profession differently than his peers. For him, connection with his students was essential or more important than the subject he taught. His aim was to make his students to enjoy his subject not to force them to memorise different information. As he said, he wanted to teach his students the 'art of flying by themselves'. It was a new perspective he gave me on my teaching which was not like his until I heard him. I struggled to cope with children's behaviour without trying to empathise with them, which was useless because I was not the kind of teacher who imposes herself with authority. Another thing from father Agapios' story was his relationship with his spiritual father, which was one built on trust, on love and on kindness. He made me understand more about the relationship with my spiritual father and to acknowledge his contribution in my personal and my professional development.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the research questions are explored in the light of the material presented in the stories of my participants.

Chapter ten: Discussion

10.1. Introduction

The concepts I used to understand my participants' personal, spiritual and professional experiences will never exhaust the fullness of their lives. As Zizioulas (1985, 2006) stated, personhood is a mystery between humans and God, making this relationship deep and difficult to penetrate with research instruments. According to the same author, both God and man are persons, which makes the relationship unique in the human being's different hypostasis. In other words, each relationship between a human and God is different and unique. Moreover, it is affected by God's unknowability. Beyond each story of my participants, there is a whole universe of profoundly personal experience relating to them and their significant others, who manifested their influence in their personal, spiritual, and professional lives. Therefore, trying to understand and to explain it using research tools of any kind becomes difficult, if not impossible.

My auto/biographical research on the influence of significant others in the personal and professional development of Orthodox Christian teachers from Romania involved several emotional challenges, from interrogating the literature to carrying out the interviews, but also to performing data analysis. When it comes to my participants' stories, it felt as if I was there in their stories with them. We were together in our stories, trying to give meaning to our experiences, and acknowledging significant others' influence in our personal and professional development, while I relived my own story, happiness, frustrations, and disappointments.

Using the auto/biographical method, while it seemed to provide me with freedom, confronted me with other people's real experiences, which made me feel that I was not as free as I thought in the beginning. Therefore, in this study, I aimed to honour their personal, spiritual, and professional experiences, or in brief to honour their lives. I felt a deep connection to my participants; our stories had commonalities but were also unique. Beyond our stories, it was the interviewing process which allowed us to develop a personal and close relationship. This close relationship made me realise more fully how important and valuable each human experience is, and as such I was inspired to honour their lives and their experiences.

As mentioned in Chapter five, I was very cautious in using words such as 'data' and 'analysis' to understand my participants' lives, because I felt it would be disrespectful to their stories and the contexts behind them. Interpreting Zoe's unfulfilled relationship with her mother, Melanie's emotional condition after becoming a mother, and father Agapios' inner search for spiritual understandings of life as 'findings' felt cold and functional, given my desire to honour these teachers' lives and professional experiences. Also, cutting and dissecting their experiences into small pieces to see only some fragments would prevent me from seeing their Gestalt (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 68). For this reason, I was fearful of describing their lives under 'themes' (Patak, 2018).

Nevertheless, certain similarities between my participants were evident, for instance parts of their shared stories and their spiritual and personal experiences of Orthodox Christian teachers from Romania.

This study has reinforced existing research on the influence of significant others, but it has also discovered new ways in which significant others may exert their influence. On the one hand, it reinforces the seminal authors' studies on personality development and how significant others may influence even professional adult life (i.e. Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Klein,1932; Sullivan, 1953; Honneth, 1995; Andersen, 2000). On the other hand, my research has been the first to provide some insight into the importance of the spiritual father as a significant other in the lives of Romanian teachers. It was not only my wish to understand professional challenges, but it was also helpful in enabling my participants to give meaning to their personal, spiritual, and professional experiences. In this thesis, my participants' stories revealed an interconnectedness between the personal, spiritual, and professional lives of Orthodox Christian teachers from Romania. The personal, spiritual, and professional connections connect and influence each other, as in the Venn diagram below.

They connect to a common point, which is where the spiritual, the personal, and the professional meet.

My research revealed that the spiritual father can be regarded as a significant other in the professional lives of those Orthodox Christians who perceive him as an intercessor between them and God and in whom they invest emotionally (Anderson et al., 2002). A spiritual father may influence Orthodox Christian teachers' perspectives on life and profession. However, the perception one has of a spiritual father may be influenced in turn by the carers as significant others. In other words, carers (especially mothers) may influence the future perspective adults may have on people, on reality, on relationships of any nature, and on their profession. For example, the role of the mothers can be seen in Zoe's narrative, where her mother's ideas about men influenced Zoe's perception of male figures, even God Himself. All these influences are interconnected, and they function differently from one person to another. The importance of the SF has been primarily studied in Theology, especially in Orthodox Christian spirituality, where his presence in Christians' lives is essential for their spiritual and professional growth (Barbu, 2013).

Keeping the aim of this thesis in mind, in the next sections I will return to the research questions to consider how my participants' stories could enrich academic research on teachers' personal and professional development and if there may be any implications or recommendations for educational policy and practice.

Before exploring the research questions of this thesis, I will list them again, after which I will start with the first research question.

1.   In which ways do significant others influence the Orthodox Christian teachers' personal identity and development?

2.   How does the relationship with significant others influence the spiritual understandings of the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers?

3.   How does the Orthodox Christian spiritual life influence the relationship with significant others?

4.   What is the impact of significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality on Romanian teachers' professional development?

10.2. Question 1: In which ways do significant others influence the Orthodox Christian teachers' personal identity and development? Question 2: How does the relationship with significant others influence the spiritual understandings of the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers?

Significant others' influence on peoples' personal identity and development was not a new area of research. As shown in the Literature Review (Chapter 3), this area has been researched extensively in the last 50 years (Sullivan, 1953; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Andersen et al. 2002). These significant others can be any persons in whom one invests emotionally for an extended time. In the case of my participants, the parents and the spiritual fathers were profoundly influential in shaping their identity and development. However, this influence was not as evident for all participants. In Zoe's case, her mother manifested an evident influence on her personal identity. Across all interviews, I had the impression that her whole life was built around her mother's view of the world around, especially on the relationship with men. As for Melanie, her parents were not very present in her story. Instead, her great-grandmother and her grandmother influenced Melanie at a young age. Father Agapios' mother influenced him in an obvious way: he recognised in himself his mother's positive influence on how he perceives the world and the people around him.

The influence of spiritual fathers in Orthodox Christian lives is a new area of research and until now had not been given attention. There are many studies on spiritual fatherhood

on the one hand (Barbu, 2013; Zizioulas, 1985; Ware, 1974), and about the influence of significant others (Sullivan, 1953; Klein, 1932; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Andersen et al. 2012) on the other hand. However, there are no studies linking spiritual fatherhood, significant others, and teaching professional development. My participants' stories emphasised the importance and influence exerted by spiritual fathers in the formation and development of their personal and professional identity. All three participants spoke about their spiritual father as a person they trust and in whom they have invested emotionally. Although all three manifested their trust in their spiritual father, Zoe showed a particularity in this relationship. At the time of our interviews, she emphasised that she trusts her spiritual father only in confession and that she does not feel the need to ask his advice outside of confession. Her mistrust outside the secure place of confession is due to her image of men, which was influenced by her mother's view. This will be detailed in section 7.4.

In my participants' stories, there were a few commonalities which enabled me to understand how significant others (carers and spiritual father) influence Orthodox Christians' personal identity and development. There are three aspects of this influence which will be analysed in the next three subsections. The first refers to how self-perception and reality perception relate; the second concerns how they perceive other people; and the third concerns how they perceive the events in their lives.

10.2.1. Self-perception

Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991) emphasised the importance of significant others in shaping a person's self-concept. The self-image is built concerning significant others. Accordingly, this image is likely to be expressed in adult life. A loving interpersonal relationship with the primary carer supports children to develop a sense of confidence and self-worth (Sullivan, 1953). In my research, this was explicit especially in Zoe's and father Agapios' lives. Zoe's self-image was distorted because she sought for perfection all of her life, whether personal, professional, or spiritual. I assumed that her quest for perfection was due to her desire to gain her mother's love and attention. She was deprived

of maternal love, and being 'perfect' would have forced her mother to love her and show that through actions, as she told me:

> I was a teenager so full of pain. Mom was very authoritative and very rigid.

A feminine presence who contrasted to her mother was her French teacher who was kind, loving, and who impressed Zoe, who did not have such an example in her family. for me, this delicate and feminine presence .... mmm...I do not know; I do not know ... how to describe her warm, for me it was… WOW.

Therefore, she loved her French teacher, for her kindness and gentleness and the motherly atmosphere that she created around her. Zoe felt loved and cared for. Further in her life, Zoe sought to be perfect in her teaching, and never accepted her students' disruptions. I think that her students' misbehaviour made her feel insecure or that she lost control over them and herself. For this reason, at the beginning of her career, she was very strict with her students.

At the opposite end was father Agapios, whose mother inspired him to gain self-trust, although he was a shy young man, intimidated by his father's authoritative attitude towards him. His mother was the opposite of his father:

> my mother, who had a very kind personality…

His mother's gentleness made him feel loved, therefore secure in taking actions, such as going far from home when he was 15, at a time when no mobile phones existed, to fulfil his desire to understand more about spiritual life and God. Over the years, his 'secure base' moved inside. When he became a teacher in a vocational setting, although still a shy young man, he fought to change the teaching paradigm and to make his students to like his classes and not be fearful of the consequences of not learning. His different approach was, first of all, an expression of his relationship with his mother. Father Agapios gave me the impression that he felt free in their relationship and, later, he developed a similar relationship with the spiritual fathers he met. This freedom he encountered in his first significant relationship determined how he perceived future relationships, even with his students:

> Teachers should enable their students to feel free to express who they are, and they should help students to learn how to 'fly'. Teachers should teach students the art of learning by themselves how to do this; so, as teachers, we should

educate them in this sense. However, not all teachers can do it, as teaching is a vocation, just as the priesthood.

Melanie was in the middle of father Agapios and Zoe. She could be categorised as having had a good enough relationship with her mother, which was neither dysfunctional as for Zoe, nor as positive as it was for father Agapios. Melanie seemed more connected to her grandmother and her great grandmother than to her mother. They influenced Melanie to perceive reality through the eyes of the Orthodox Christian faith.

> My great-grandmother and my grandmother were very religious. My great-grandmother raised me with love, and she was an example for my personal and my spiritual life. Then, her daughter, my grandmother, after the death of my father, started to seek peace through faith. She moved to another stage in her life. She got closer to God and tried to comfort herself and us after the loss of her son, through prayers for his soul. So, being the youngest of the family, I grew attached to my grandmother, and often followed her on her pilgrimages, where she went to pray for my father's soul. Through her, I began to build a personal relationship with God, with the saints and with the Mother of God.

As she said herself, her grandmother and great-grandmother directed Melanie towards a spiritual life, which years later influenced her to become a Religious Education teacher, who perceived reality through the eyes of faith and Orthodox Christian spirituality.

For all three participants, mothers and grandmothers were influential, as well as their spiritual fathers, who contributed to forming their personal identity and the ideas they had about this formed identity. For Zoe, her spiritual father managed difficult situations, and she went through her personal and professional life but only trusted him in confession. She did not allow herself to develop a relationship with him outside the mystery of confession for fear of being disappointed. However, father Agapios and Melanie showed a deep trust in their spiritual fathers, seeking their advice outside and inside confession. The relationship with their spiritual fathers enabled Zoe, father Agapios, and Melanie to perceive themselves in a different light, although they were still very connected to their first significant relationships. Zoe began to gain more trust in herself and God, not seeing him as an authoritative figure anymore, but developing a spiritual relationship based on love and feeling accepted without having to be perfect. Father Agapios explicitly said that meeting his spiritual fathers was a life-changing for him, strengthening his faith and

further enabling him to perceive the world as a safe space where a person can express themselves freely.

Therefore, the role of significant others would suggest that, for my participants, parents and spiritual fathers influenced their personal identity formation, but also their spiritual understanding and, further, contributed to their professional identity formation and development.

10.2.2. The perception of other people

Zoe struggled with the same image of any male figure for many years, until she understood why negative thoughts and words of contempt towards men were coming into her mind. Conversely, father Agapios' mother has influenced his perception of people. Valuing people, showing them love and respect, were essential features to behave in relationships with others. He learned to love people and to give them the freedom to discover God through their relationship. Father Agapios learned from his mother to embrace people giving them, this way, the sense of being valued and respected.

He did not speak about his mother or her influence as much as Zoe, but he gave me some vital clues, as in the quote above, to which I added memories I had of him recounting to people in church the beautiful relationship between him and his mother. Melanie's relationship with her mother does not add much, as she did not talk about it. There was silence in their relationship, although the connection between them was not dysfunctional. As Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991) stated, the mother, or the baby or child's main carergiver, constitutes the secure base for his or her personal development. Zoe's and father Agapios' mothers repeatedly appeared in their stories. For Zoe, people in her life were harmful, especially men. Zoe's mother taught her that people, especially men, are not safe and, as a female, you must fight to gain your independence and do everything by yourself. This affected her even in her professional relationship with her male students. She expressed her identity in the classroom, and she felt frustrated when she encountered misbehaviour similar to the image she had about men.

On the other hand, father Agapios also expressed his identity in the classroom, approaching his students positively and encouraging them. He learned how to see people through his mother's loving eyes, respect others as they are, and teach them to find

themselves. However, in Melanie's case, I could not understand her mother's influence on her perception of people, because she never mentioned her or anything about their relationship. However, there was an evident influence of her great-grandmother and grandmother on her religious life (about which I will say more in section 8.4).

Melanie, Zoe, and father Agapios' relationships with significant others made me reflect on the relationship I have with my mother, and how it has been frustrating, and in fact still is. As I said, my mother is a fearful woman who showed her fears to her children. She did not know how to manage her fears and distinguish between her life and her children's lives. Due to her fears I became very shy and unable to build relationships with people or to feel an emotional connection in developing relationships. Furthermore, my attitude created difficulties for me in voicing my thoughts and opinions at the workplace. I still find it difficult to express what I think in various circumstances, whether personal or professional.

It is essential to understand how the intimate interpersonal relationship with the primary carer (the mother, in most cases) influences the perception of people that my participants developed over time. As Anderson et al. (2013) noted, significant others are brought into the present through an unconscious transference process. This way, Zoe and father Agapios transferred the traits of their carers to new people in their lives. In Zoe's case, her mother's attitude influenced Zoe to perceive any male figure negatively. Instead, father Agapios' mother educated him in a loving environment, which determined him to approach people, especially his spiritual children, with the same loving attitude.

Apart from carers, who were the first to influence my participants' identity and development, the spiritual father plays an essential role in their lives. The spiritual father's influence comes as a consequence of the importance my participants give to their spiritual lives. As Orthodox Christians, confession, through which one interacts with priests, is vital. As Zoe said, she could not "live without confession" (section 7.4). For father Agapios, a spiritual father is a safe place where one can always return and be received with love.

Zoe, father Agapios, and Melanie have had a secure attachment with their spiritual fathers, yet each of them in a particular way. All participants' perceptions of the people around the were influenced by their spiritual fathers, each to a different extent. The most influenced was father Agapios, who was attached to several spiritual fathers. Each one of

them influenced father Agapios in their own unique way, but all of them complemented his mother's loving attitude. As he said in section 9.3., meeting these spiritual fathers was "destiny" for him, meaning that it changed his life:

> It is how it began one of the most essential and beautiful periods of my life; a period that I would give it a destiny value.

In other words, for father Agapios the presence of spiritual fathers in his life was essential and life-changing, as each one of them brought his contribution to his personal, spiritual, and professional development. Melanie perceived her spiritual father like her father, as her natural father died when she was six years old.

> I perceived my spiritual father like my own father. My father and my spiritual father were of the same age. In a way, I perceived my spiritual father like my natural father, and I tried to follow his advice. He filled the gap that my father left after he passed away. I am grateful to him for all the support he gave me all those years. If he had not been next to me, I would not be what I am today.

She acknowledged the influence her spiritual father had on her personal development, giving her the sense of protection that the presence of a man offers to a young woman and which she needs for developing self-confidence. Melanie perceives people, peers, and students positively, although there might be issues or misunderstandings in her relationship with them.

Therefore, female carers, on the one hand, and spiritual father, on the other hand, manifested their influence on my participants' relationship with people. The influence was interconnected, meaning that the female carers' influence could have been noticed in how participants, like Zoe and father Agapios, perceived their spiritual fathers. Similarly, how the relationship with a spiritual father develops influences the relationship with other significant others and other people. Apart from these influences, the relationship with significant others influences also the perception of spiritual understandings.

10.3. Question 3: How does the relationship with significant others influence the spiritual understandings of the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers?

In line with previous studies on the importance of significant others in shaping a person's personality and his or her worldview (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991; Andersen et al. 2002), my research revealed that primary significant others might shape not only the perception of reality, self, and others, but they can also shape a personal spiritual understanding. Shaping the perception of reality, the self, and the other through one's spiritual understanding is also possible when a spiritual father becomes significant in an Orthodox Christian's life.

The results in this research support Anderson et al.'s IF-THEN theory (2009), which explained how people react when they encounter similarities between significant others and new people who resemble them. People tend to accept or reject new people if they resemble significant others. Their theory supports why Zoe had a distorted perception of her spiritual father and God. The image of Zoe's mother has been influential all of her life, even in the most intimate situations. As she said in section 7.4., she doubted and mistrusted her spiritual father, only because of his gender. Further, she attributed to God her mother's features: toughness, strictness, lack of love. In Christianity, God is considered the loving Father of all beings, humans included, but for Zoe, the paternal figure was strict, punishing, lacking love, and always looking for a child's faults. In Zoe's mind, a connection was made between her mother's character and the paternal figure of God, resulting in the image of God as one who aims to show humans that they are always wrong, never capable of doing 'impossible' things He asks them to do, and always ready to punish people.

In line with the seminal (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1991) and current research on significant others (Andersen et al. 2013), this study showed, through Zoe, Melanie and Father Agapios stories, the importance of significant others, such as primary carers (especially mothers) in shaping how one will perceive reality. My study showed that spirituality can be included. These findings are the novel contribution of my research. Significant others may shape even how one will develop the intimate spiritual relationship with God and how they will perceive the relationship within the faith which, in the case of my research, is the relationship between Orthodox Christian teachers with their

spiritual father. Further, Orthodox Christians may develop a similar attitude towards their spiritual father as towards their significant others. For example, Zoe manifested an attitude of distrust in her spiritual father outside confession, although he was the same person, because of her mother's influence regarding men.

However, another aspect needs to be considered in analysing how the relationship with significant others may shape the spiritual understandings of life, how much they spent in the relationship with primary carers before entering a relationship with their spiritual fathers. The older people are before engaging in a spiritual relationship with a spiritual father, the greater the influence they bring to the new relationship. This insight came after analysing the lives of my participants and my own story at the same time. Melanie, Father Agapios and I entered in a relationship with spiritual fathers at an early age. Melanie was around seven years old, I was 12 years old, and father Agapios was 14 years old, whereas Zoe was around 30 years old. Therefore, apart from the influence the relationship with significant others had on my participants' spiritual relationships and understanding, I noticed an influence of the spiritual father on the relationship of my participants with their parents.

Like Barbu's (2013, p.257) approach to spiritual fatherhood, my participants' stories highlighted the importance and significance a spiritual father may have in the lives and professions of Orthodox Christians (see next section). His main job is to give his importance to Orthodox Christians' lives:

> The 'job' of the spiritual Father is to transmit this fatherly love of God to the people, to make it real and tangible in the life of each Christian seeking spiritual guidance and nourishment.

This was the case for all of my participants. They found love, acceptance, and understanding with their spiritual fathers. However, it was surprising to hear Zoe's mistrust in her spiritual father outside of confession, and I expected to hear positive stories about Melanie and father Agapios relationship with spiritual fathers and how these relationships nourished them in their personal and professional lives. Nevertheless, Zoe's understanding of spiritual fatherhood was not wrong, from an Orthodox Christian point of view, although her reactions were due to her ideas about men. Zoe feared discovering that her spiritual father, as a human, could be wrong and this way he would not be perfect anymore. Despite her fear, which prevented her from developing a relationship with her

spiritual father outside of confession, she benefited from the relationship within confession. Similarly, Melanie, father Agapios, and I developed a personal relationship with our spiritual fathers, which enabled us to change our perspective on other people and our lives (Ware,1974, p. 309):

> What the spiritual father gives to his disciples is not a code of written or oral regulations, not a set of techniques for meditation, but a personal relationship.

This personal relationship enables Orthodox Christians to consider their spiritual father as a significant other, trusting him and investing emotionally in their relationship (Anderson et al., 2015). This is in line with Ware (1974, p. 308), who said

> The task of a spiritual father is to assist man (sic) to see the truth for himself not to suppress a man's personality but to discover himself, to grow to full maturity and to become what he really is.

Melanie's, father Agapios', Zoe's and my experience with our spiritual fathers enabled us to discover ourselves, our past, our faults, and our virtues and start learning who we "really are", in Winnicott's (1960) terms. For example, Zoe began to change her perspective on God, from a punishing one to a forgiving and a loving one. She acknowledged her tendencies of judging men with preconceptions and sought help so that she could heal. At the time of our interview, she said that she was still tied to the past, but that she had managed to heal many of her spiritual and psychological wounds since she began therapy with the sisters (section 7.4.) and since she came to understand more about the relationship with her spiritual father, in the mystery of confession:

> I have gained much daring, in the sense that it is easier not to hide anymore. Before I was ashamed to say the petty things, or when I did something, my conscience would say it is not ok. I tended to escape, to hide from myself. However, now, I have gained daring, and there is an inner voice inside me which encourages me to show all those bad things to God. I understood what giving your whole life to God means with my whole being, not only rationally. Putting in front of God, everything I go through, especially what is harder to say is relieving. If you see God as a code of conduct, it is hard but if you refer to him as to one to whom you have to come down to, because He waits for you there in the mud it is so easy, and myself I feel so loved by Him.

The relationship with her spiritual father in confession and the therapy with the nuns were life- changing for Zoe. Through therapy, confession, and prayer she gained a different understanding of her past, which further enabled her to reconstruct her present.

For Melanie, the relationship with her spiritual father was not only a spiritual one, but even became something like a biological connection, as it came after her father's death at a young age. This relationship shaped Melanie's personality to the extent that she became interested in studying Theology degree at University and learned that she could ask for God's help through prayer in the difficult moments of her life. Except for her spiritual and personal development, her spiritual father guided Melanie even in her professional life as a teacher.

As stated previously, the relationship with significant others impacted not only on my participants' personal and spiritual lives, but also on their professional life. The next section will answer the third and the fourth research questions of my thesis: how does the Orthodox Christian spiritual life influence the relationship with significant others? and What is the impact of significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality on Romanian teachers' professional development?

10.4. Question 4: What is the impact of significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality on Romanian teachers' professional development?

My study showed that significant others influenced my participants' personal and spiritual identities. However, I also considered their professional identity and development. People develop behavioural patterns which are further manifested in their professional lives. The stories of Zoe, father Agapios, and Melanie confirm the theory about the influence of significant others. Their stories gave me new insights into my own professional experiences. They enabled me to understand the fears I had in the classroom, the frustrations I felt when I could not manage children's misbehaviour, the lack of self- confidence I have often felt in my personal and professional life, how my spiritual father influenced me to understand the relationship with people around me better. At the same

time, my participants' stories showed me how Orthodox Christians can develop as teachers.

The influence of significant others (parents) on my participants' professional development was negative, in Zoe's case, and positive, in the case of father Agapios and Melanie. However, Zoe's relationship with her spiritual father and her spiritual life helped her be aware of what was negative in her life and profession and seek healing.

I will first look at the impact parents (primary carers) have had on my participants' teaching professional lives. The professional impact on them was not clear for all of them. In Zoe's case, however, the influence was evident; she declared that the relationship with her mother even influenced the way she perceived her profession and her relationships with students, especially with misbehaved students. The male students were only seen as men, especially the misbehaved boys. They reminded Zoe about her brother who, in his youth, could do no wrong and did whatever he wanted to do, whereas Zoe had to show her mother good behaviour, without making mistakes. I deduced that because her mother was very demanding regarding Zoe's behaviour and learning, she developed an urge to be perfect in every aspect of her life. In the chapter dedicated to her story, I noted that Zoe was a perfectionist because she hoped that through perfection she would gain the love of her mother. Unconsciously, she became a perfectionist teacher whose aim was to "save" children, meaning that she wanted to be that "perfect" teacher who changes lives, who is always listened to by her students, and who delivers perfect lessons. Due to this she dedicated much time during her early career to her teaching profession, harming the relationship with her husband. Moreover, a sense of low self-esteem arises when children grow up without parents' affection and love, or not enough love and attention. I interpreted Zoe's tensions in teaching as a sign of low self-esteem, demonstrating her professionalism to herself, students, and students' parents and school staff. However, as Bandura suggested, her low self-esteem did not affect her self-efficacy, because she developed another relationship from where she started to build a sense of worth (Stosny, 2014) and self- esteem (Khan et al. 2015). According to Kragiopoulos (2008), low self-esteem is not the same as humility, as many Orthodox Christians would tend to think. It is the opposite of humility. When children grow up without parents' affection and love, they turn towards themselves, becoming selfish and looking to satisfy the lack of love and attention they feel deep inside them in whatever way.

Melanie showed a passion for teaching, and I'm not sure where it came from. She was eager to deliver outstanding lessons, but I never felt that she was tense in her profession, which she spoke about in in idealistic terms. I interpret her professional behaviour as a consequence of her secure base, given by women in her life and by her spiritual father (more about this later). Father Agapios kept his idea about being loved for who he was, which was transmitted to his students when he became a teacher.

Apart from the role of mothers in my participants' professional lives, spiritual fathers and Orthodox Christian spirituality played a significant part in bringing harmony to their professional lives, and in understanding more about themselves as professionals through the lens of Orthodox Christian spirituality. I mentioned the spiritual fathers in Zoe's, Melanie's and father Agapios' personal lives in the previous sections of this chapter. Here, I will discuss their influence on the participants' professional lives. The interviews I had with my participants reveal the spiritual fathers' direct and indirect influences on their teaching. However, these influences were different for all of the participants. Melanie was very open about the fact that she sought advice from her spiritual father, even about professional matters because, fortunately, her spiritual father was also a trained teacher:

> Talking about the teaching mission I have had for eight years; I want to tell you about an example from my profession. I was a principal teacher for a group of students who were sometimes naughty, which made me go through many anxious moments. Sometimes, they had small conflicts which could escalate, which further could have led to tensions with their parents. In such situations, I used to seek advice from my spiritual father. I wanted to find Christian ways of bringing peace between children and their parents. He gave me some useful and practical advice, which helped me to reconcile students and parents.

Therefore, in Melanie's case, her spiritual father has impacted how she dealt with professional challenges, contributing to her professional identity and development. I say professional identity because, as she said in the quote above, she wanted to find "Christian ways to bring peace between children and between parents". Melanie's attitude was not surprising, because I thought an Orthodox Christian teacher might deal with challenging situations in the profession this way. However, Zoe's story about her spiritual father's direct influence came as a surprise. She said explicitly that she never seeks advice from her spiritual father outside of confession, but did ask his help once when she went through

a situation where she did not know what to do. Nonetheless, her spiritual father's influence was indirect in shaping her professional identity and development through the relationship they built in confession, which enabled Zoe to change the perspective she had about herself and other people. The influence of spiritual fathers was direct, but in most cases it was indirect, as it worked through the engagement of both spiritual father and spiritual children in a relationship mediated by confession and prayer. All participants acknowledged the importance of confession and prayer in their professional lives, as practices which involve a deep engagement.

The impact of these practices in their teaching profession was seen in the process of self-regulation (Bandura and Simon, 1977) and self-efficacy (1997) in the classroom. Zoe's story was more explicit in the context of this research. For her, confession and prayer are the practices through which she manages to regulate her professional frustrations and disappointments. About confession, she said:

> I do not understand how people live without confession. It's the only thing in my life without which I would not be able to live, because many tiny things come together and burden my soul and consequently, I become agitated and irritable, I cannot pray anymore, I cannot do my job, and I need confession. I give up on anything but not on confession.

Zoe's struggle to solve professional difficulties found an answer in confession where she placed her soul in front of God, and all her sorrows which kept her from thriving in her profession. Simultaneously, she said that prayer for her students helped her see them in a more empathetic way and made her understand their behaviour better:

> Through prayer, I understand sitting before God and letting myself seen by God. I often use this phrase: See me, my Lord! Moreover, when I say that, it's the very moment when I open myself with my whole being and with every pore to God. Then, I let God's grace to abide in me and to heal my heart.

Similarly, Melanie's story emphasised the same importance she gives to confession and prayer, as two regular practices in her professional life. They are two practices which demonstrate to students that their Religious Education teacher is faithful to his or her subject and shows the honesty of the teacher in front of his or her students:

> Confession plays a critical role, and students look to their teacher, and they identify the subject with the teacher. Therefore, the teacher needs to be a role model, although it does not work every time, at least not for me.

For Melanie, confession is essential in becoming able to have the right spiritual and psychological state in front of her students:

> Prayer was so well fitted to my needs, a confession in front of God. There were moments when I felt I tangibly met God. We should experience this kind of moment more often. Unfortunately, such a prayer does not happen to me very often. However, I try to have my moments with God during the day, and His presence is overwhelming.

In line with Bandura's (2003) notion of the divine proxy agency, my participants often relied on God's help and intervention in the most challenging moments of their professional lives. However, in contradiction to Bandura's (2003) assumption about losing a sense of self-agency when relying on the divine proxy agency, my study showed that my participants were still acknowledging the importance of their choices in making decisions and taking action in certain situations. As my participants' stories showed, the process of self-regulation becomes peer- regulation in confession and prayer, meaning that the teacher collaborates with God and with their spiritual father trying to understand the new challenges and to find new ways to cope with them. The practice of peer-regulation in confession enables teachers to find meaning and equilibrium. As father Agapios emphasised many times during the interviews, this underscores the essential role of a compatible relationship between spiritual father and his spiritual children: There has to be compatibility between the spiritual structure of a spiritual father and his spiritual children. The connection between them has to be rhythmic so that he knows very well his spiritual children.

His words about the nature of the relationship between spiritual father and spiritual children and my participants' stories revealed that such a relationship between them and their spiritual father who, directly through advice and support, and indirectly through confession and prayer, impacted on their professional identity and development. In the next section, I will discuss the role religious discourse has in shaping Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers personal and professional identity.

10.5. The role of the Orthodox Christian discourse in shaping Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers personal and professional identity

During the interviews, all three participants referred to their spiritual experiences several times. As mentioned in the methodology Chapter in this thesis, I also sought to understand the role of Orthodox discourse in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives. I did not have the intention to analyse their whole discourse in this study, but only the Orthodox one to see how it links to the influence of the spiritual father and Orthodox Christian spirituality's impact on their professional development.

Apart from the religious words my participants mentioned across the interviews (God, confession, forgiveness, prayer), the context in which they used the discourse was also important, as well as the extent to which what they said felt significant to them. Although they talked about their professions, they still used a religious discourse, enabling me to understand the role of faith and spiritual experiences in their lives. Each one of them used Orthodox Christian discourse in a personal way. This made me think that they were at different levels of a spiritual understanding of their lives.

Zoe, who was the most affected by the relationship with significant others, spoke with pain, and communicated to me the need to overcome the past through spirituality, to heal the inability to accept men as worthy persons. I felt much pain in her voice, and Orthodox life came as an escape from the chains of the past. For father Agapios, the Orthodox Christian life and the discourse came more naturally, as a continuation of the life lived in his youth. Apart from this aspect, father Agapios is a priest, and religious discourse is of course present in his life every day. In his case, religious discourse has shaped his personality since his childhood. Melanie gave me the impression of being at the beginning of her spiritual path, and that she has not yet gained a deep understanding of spirituality's role in her life.

My participants' religious discourse was shaped by the social contexts where they live, perceiving personal and professional relationships through their faith, which further influenced their professional development as well.

They all recounted challenging events they went through in their personal and professional life. They said how much help they felt God had given them. The connection

between linguistics and cognitive perception and understandings were emphasised in my participants' stories. The Orthodox Christian perspective of life presented to my participants by their spiritual fathers changed how they perceived reality and altered their discourse further. For example, Zoe, who in the first part of her life was influenced by a negative mentality about men, began changing after engaging in a spiritual relationship with her spiritual father. Both in her struggle against her mother's influence and in her professional challenges, Zoe brought a spiritual discourse into her daily practice. Not by speaking about her faith, unless her students required her to do so, but through thinking about situations she went through in the classroom and by bringing them in front of God and her spiritual father through confession. In father Agapios' case, spiritual discourse was present since his childhood, as his parents were believers. Further, the spiritual fathers he met, through their spiritual discourse, shaped his mentality. When he became a priest and a teacher, he manifested his influence on his students and on his spiritual children. The influence was manifested also on himself, as Boroditsky (2012) stated, what we speak shapes what we think, and vice versa. Melanie's grandmothers' faith allowed her to build a spiritual perspective on the world around her since childhood. Her attitude was present in how Melanie understands her life and her profession.

Another important aspect of my participants' Orthodox Christian religious discourse was how they used it. During the interviews, referring to their personal and professional experiences, they recurrently used their spiritual understandings and experiences in giving meaning to their experiences. They regularly used religious justifications for their actions and decisions made in their professional life. Melanie and father Agapios, for example, recurrently referred to their function as role models for their students. Both highlighted the importance of being examples of good behaviour, communication, acting, and making decisions in front of their students and other colleagues. Zoe was more directed towards herself, towards moving from changing others to changing herself. I explain her attitude by her need to overcome her past and to feel in peace with herself as an inevitably imperfect person. Thus, each one of them showed a particular involvement in their spiritual life, and particular importance is given to spiritual life in their profession, depending on their spiritual level. Indeed, it is important to note that their spiritual involvement cannot be measured, and each person has his or her particular relationship with divinity (Sakharov, 1977). In my study, I did not intend to scale their religiosity's influence on their personal and professional identities and development, but rather to

demonstrate how each individual religious experience is unique, and has a unique influence on their discourse.

10.6. Summary of the chapter

This chapter has discussed the findings of the four research questions that guided this study. In line with the research paradigm, this has been done by interpreting teachers' stories, experiences and thorough analysis of their religious discourse, which emphasises the engagement each participant showed in their spiritual life and how this engagement influenced their personal and professional lives.

The discussion of teachers' stories and experiences here has pointed to an evident influence of parents' and the spiritual father, as significant others, in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives. It emerged that parents unconsciously influence the perception teachers have about themselves, about students, peers and their profession. In some cases, it has also been explicit that, like in Zoe's case, parents, as significant others, contribute to the future image adult have on spirituality. Through unconscious processes, which have been explained in detail in the Literature review, future adults think and conceive the world around through their parents' eyes. A spiritual father's contribution appears when he becomes a significant other. In this case, showing a loving and supporting attitude enables the adult to discover and manifest freely, through the confession and prayer, which become restorative and transformational.

The next chapter offers a reflective conclusion to the study. It explains its strengths and limitations, its usefulness, and gives directions for further studies. In this last chapter, I will also reflect on how this research has changed me as a person, as an Orthodox Christian, and as a teacher. The new insights I have gained through this research have implications for my professional and academic life in future, and so I will reflect on those as well.

Chapter eleven: Conclusions

11.1 Introduction

People's lives are unfinished stories, being continuously open to change. The stories of Orthodox Christians about their connection with divinity are also unfolding and cannot be written off on account of our psychological wounds: our stories are far from being over. It felt unfair and dishonourable to close this book and to place it onto the undusted shelf of academic research. That would be a dishonouring of my participants' sacred spiritual experiences and connections with their significant others, one of those a spiritual father, the one that connects them with divinity. It is not only the connection of my participants with their spiritual father that seemed to be sacred to me and valuable for them, but also their connection with other significant people in their lives, like parents in the case of this study. People's relationships have something sacred within them. Maybe this is the reason why, when the relationships are not functional, they hurt so much and affect peoples' lives negatively. For these reasons, after completing my thesis, I intend to keep in touch with my participants and to trace how their feelings have or have not changed and written about this; I will use my conclusions and apply them in various situations of personal and professional life, and I will continue exploring the connections between spiritual life and the teaching profession.

My study involved three Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers and my autobiography. To generalise about all Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers on this basis might sound irrational or farcical. Auto/biographical research does not seek to generalise or to seek proof in terms of empirical research but to give voice to those voices that are silenced. In various ways, our voices were silenced, either by the communist regime or by our significant others, like parents in this study. On the other hand, we found our inner voice, our freedom to find ourselves in relationships with new significant others, such as a spiritual father in this research. Although an auto/biographical research cannot and does not aim to be generalised, many Romanian Orthodox teachers will be able to recognise themselves in my participants' stories, which will echo their personal and professional lives.

To be more explicit, in this thesis, I set out to answer these research questions: In which ways do significant others influence the Orthodox Christian teachers' personal identity and development? How does the relationship with significant others influence the spiritual understandings of the Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers? How does the Orthodox Christian spiritual life influence the relationship with significant others? What is the impact of significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality on Romanian teachers' professional development? The aim was to understand how significant others influence the personal identity and development of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers. Further, I wanted to understand how this relationship altered their spiritual understanding and, vice versa, how their spiritual life changed the relationship with significant others. Finally, I wanted to identify the impact of significant others and Orthodox Christian spirituality on Romanian teachers' professional development. My justification was that this would allow me to better understand how Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers develop. It is vital to first understand how relationships with essential people affect their lives, and this was only possible by letting them talk about their lives. Chapters seven, eight and nine have provided answers to these questions.

The most important finding of this study is that the relationship with parents and spiritual fathers influences my participants' personal and spiritual lives as well as their professional lives. Yet the influence is not the same for all of them, and it depends on how deep the relationship is. The influence on their professional practice can be seen in teachers' sense of self-efficacy, in the way they manage to self/peer regulate their emotions, and how they express their agency in both their private and professional lives. This study regards Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' relationships with parents and spiritual father as significant others as an essential source that can give meaning to personal and professional experiences, in order for teachers to   develop personally and professionally.

Considering that this study was the first of its kind in Romania and gives voice to Romanian Orthodox Christians' life stories and professional experiences, the study contributes to the literature. It is also a good starting point for other researchers interested in exploring the lives of Orthodox Christian professionals for whom a spiritual father is a significant other, and who are interested in how this relationship transforms and improves their lives and their profession. Such studies can contribute to building a more significant body of literature in the Orthodox Christian context, which could complement the

literature about significant others and counterbalance the western literature about professional development.

This final chapter offers a reflective explanation of the usefulness, strengths, and limitations of this research. It also explains how the narrative interviews I conducted and my interaction with participants became an opportunity for my teaching fellows to better understand their own relationships with significant others and their stories. Finally, I elucidate how and what I understood about my story from the interaction with my participants and the directions for further studies.

11.2 Usefulness of the study

I have argued previously that this study's usefulness lies in its auto/biographical approach to understanding Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' life stories. As argued several times before, auto/biographical research enables a better understanding of what is probably difficult to understand: human lived experience. People's stories are complex, unique, and impossible to label clearly. From this uniqueness comes the richness for academic research. People learn one from another, they model one another, they look at others' examples and, most of the time, they follow others' examples.

The usefulness of this study also lies in three other aspects and contexts. Firstly, this study is valuable for Romanian academic research as it illuminates how Romanian teachers, for many of whom faith is essential in their lives, develop personally and professionally. It has been argued and shown through participants' stories how a good connection with significant others, such as parents (in the first years of life), or a spiritual father (more in the mature phase of life) enables teachers to better understand themselves. It also enables them to develop a better sense of self-efficacy, learn how to regulate negative emotions and experiences, and gain a better sense that the agents of their life and this agency are well expressed through Orthodox Christian faith. For this category of Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers, this study is useful as it suggests a way to cope with the various challenges of the professional life of a teacher. This assumes a better connection with their spiritual father, and this relationship in itself could be restorative under the conditions developed in the literature review chapter. Furthermore, this study also enriches previous research from developmental psychology about significant others and

teaching professional development for Western academic research. It shows that for those who manifest faith in divinity (God), this could be their way to develop their profession and cope with life's challenges. Lastly, this study highlights an area of research which is not straightforward to study. As a Romanian Orthodox Christian teacher myself, I could understand better how my fellow teachers think. Of course, nobody can access others' thinking, but being "one of them" facilitated my understanding. Therefore, the usefulness consists of entering a world that would not otherwise have been easy to access.

Another important use of my thesis is understanding how faith and teachers' narratives might shape their practice and professional identity. As seen in the thesis and my participants' narratives, their faith and narratives have shaped their professional identity and practice. For example, father Agapios relationship with his mother and his spiritual fathers has been reflected in how he understood a teacher should behave professionally. He learnt that, as a teacher who has faith in God, he needs to perceive his students according to his faith. More concretely, he saw his students as humans created on the image of God; therefore, unique people whose freedom to choose what they want to become should be respected and even more, should be valued and developed, as he said, "We, as teachers, should teach our students the art of flying". On the other hand, the influence of Zoe's relationship with her mother has been acknowledged and observed by herself in her teaching practice, when she realized that she was annoyed with those misbehaved male students who resembled her brother, for whom she has not had good feelings for a long period. In Melanie's case, faith could have been seen in her professional practice, as she recounted how she and her students used to pray in the classroom when some of her students passed through critical periods in their lives and how she understood her teaching career as a call from God to teach her students how to construct a spiritual and personal relationship with Him.

Having outlined the usefulness of understanding the impact of significant others on three Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' personal and professional development, I will move to the next section, where I concentrate on the strengths and limitations that resulted from this.

11.3. Reflections on the Strengths and Limitations of the Study

11.3.1. The Research Design

In general, the qualitative approach and auto/biographical research are often criticised for their dependence on a small number of participants, who do not represent the whole population that is studied, as mentioned in Chapter five. Thus, findings from such research are not generalised. The teachers involved in this research represented neither all Romanian teachers nor all Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers. However, my study provides a glimpse into the life of Romanian teachers, specifically a teacher for whom spiritual life and connection with a spiritual father are essential and significant. Thus, in a similar context, I expect that teachers, as those involved in the study, can relate to the findings to some extent. During my own time as a Religious Education teacher I interacted with many other teachers of the same subject, who showed a deep connection with their spiritual father. At that time, I was not aware of the psychological process that happens in peoples' minds when they are in such a relationship. Likewise, this study may help other teachers gain insight into that process, even if they do not share exactly the same experiences.

This uniqueness of human experience, and the even more unique facets of peoples' spirituality, could be considered limitations. However, auto/biographical research's focus is to celebrate the uniqueness of humans' lives and experiences. Such studies' strengths are that they bring more richness to academic research, especially to the kind of research interested in human experiences. Moreover, spiritual experiences that people live are part of their stories and the uniqueness of human life.

On the other hand, narrative interviews could be risky for gathering information, as people could easily hide valuable information from the researcher. However, such a strategy could prove enormously profitable and valuable when the researcher offers their participants a safe environment where they can open up without feeling in danger of being 'discovered'. As mentioned in Chapters seven, eight and nine, my presence helped my participants to open up and feel free and safe talking about sad or happy events in their lives.

11.3.2. Researching in a Familiar Setting

The experience of conducting auto/biographical research on how significant others have influenced Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' lives, being one of them myself, underscored once again the usefulness of being 'one of them' when conducting biographical research. Being familiar with the Romanian context (in all its aspects) and knowing my participants beforehand allowed me to create a sense of familiarity between us a lot quicker. I knew the country, and I knew the Orthodox Christian context. Therefore, I could have access to sensitive and confidential information much more easily, because they knew me and trusted me. However, although familiarity could be a strength in conducting narrative research, it could at the same time be a limitation, as people can hide valuable information from people they know, for fear of being judged or for fear that I would change my opinion about them as people I knew before.

Bias was another limitation of researching in a familiar setting. One could easily be biased by their experience in a particular context and space, judging situations according to that personal knowledge and experiences. Nevertheless, I was aware of this possibility, so I tried to be mindful that the other, although perhaps similar in some ways, was a different person. Therefore, I should not interpret their experiences through my own, despite the similarities. However, I could provide meaning and analysis to their and my experiences in a mutual exchange of experiences and stories. Therefore, researching in a familiar setting with familiar participants came with strengths and limitations, which were overcome through mindfulness and consciousness about my role in their lives and their roles in my life. I was there as their fellow teacher, their Orthodox Christian friend, and the person influenced by her parents and supported by her spiritual father. At the same time, I was the narrative researcher who sought to give her life story meaning through her participants' stories.

11.4. Inspiring my participants

Although this study was designed to give meaning to my participants' personal and professional experiences, I did not expect my presence to inspire them to reflect better or differently on their identity and experiences. Although this is what narrative research

does, I did not expect that I could enable participants give meaning to their experiences. I was seeking meaning and inspired them to take action and try to understand more about who they were, about their experiences, and about their relationships with significant others.

After the first interview with Melanie, she told me that she felt good about remembering her professional teaching period and understood how to refer to her current situation. I felt useful when I heard her acknowledge that my presence during the interviews was an opportunity for her to recall those events of her life, which helped her overcome what she was going through during our interviews. Similarly, Zoe told me after the first interview that it was not as she had expected it to be. She had a more formal interview in mind, with questions and answers. She felt a little insecure initially, but the more we talked, the more comfortable she felt speaking about herself and her experiences. At our last interview, Zoe was even more comfortable and in peace with herself. As she said, the interviews we had allowed her to learn more about herself, her experiences with significant others, and continue her path towards healing and development. For father Agapios the interviews we had were beneficial as he remembered about his mother and his spiritual fathers who influenced his personal, spiritual and professional life.

Thus, although I realised that the role of a narrative researcher is to enable participants to give meanings to their experiences, whether personal or professional, I was surprised that my presence, in the context of a narrative interview, could inspire teachers to seek a better relationship with their significant others and to understand past experiences. I felt that perhaps I realised that, in a way, I was responsible for the effects my non-verbal messages (such as body language, tone of voice, etc.) would have on my participants."

11.5. Reflections on Lessons Learnt in the study

Coming to the end of my PhD thesis, I have reflected on my journey, trying to understand what I learnt from this study, how it has changed me, and how it has challenged my personal, spiritual, and professional assumptions about myself and others.

I learnt more than I could ever imagine during my PhD studies. In the beginning, everything felt odd and different. I was an Eastern European moving to the United Kingdom, to read and write in a different language, in a different setting, in a country

with a different mentality. It was not that obvious initially, but only when I began writing my thesis, there was a lot of criticism. As I was used to being a good student it was, in a way, shocking for me to be frequently criticised. I felt that my self-confidence decreased more and more. I began to understand that I should learn how to deal with criticism and how to approach criticism positively in order to pass this PhD. It was not easy to understand and accept criticism. I am still struggling to accept the idea that being criticised is not the same as being judged, but it is a way to highlight what deserves and what needs improvement. The very points for which one is criticised could be the most valuable part of the study. For example, I was criticised for the use of paradox in understanding my participants' stories and as a way of situating my research within the philosophical ways of understanding human experience. It was difficult in the beginning but improving that particular area of my research turned out to be a novelty which my thesis brought into academic research.

Another lesson I learnt is to never make assumptions about what people's lives are like, because you do not know their past and the wounds they have inside. I made many assumptions, for example about Zoe, who was well known in the church, and I assumed she had a very close relationship with her spiritual father both in and outside of confession. She indeed had a nice and "normal" life and relationships with significant others. I assumed that Melanie was happy for having a new-born child, being a priest's wife, and living in a house with her family, which would have been a real moral and practical support in raising her child. And I assumed that Father Agapios had undoubtedly been a self-confident young man, successful and appreciated by others. I also made assumptions about myself, thinking that I was better engaged with my spiritual life than I actually was. Thus, through this research, I learnt that I should never make assumptions about other people's lives and thinking.

I have also learnt much about my personal experiences with significant others, both through the literature and through my participants' stories. I understood more about my past and my present, such as that the relationship with my mother (mostly) modelled how I referred to my personal, spiritual, and professional life. I know now that a better and securely attached relationship with my mother could have offered me more self-confidence in expressing myself at the workplace and in personal and professional relationships. For example, I could have felt more secure in expressing my personal opinions on different matters without the fear that I would be excluded from the group,

or that I would be appreciated and accepted less for having a different opinion than the group.

Another valuable lesson is that offered by the auto/biographical research itself. I went through many ups and downs during my studies, but learning how to be a researcher enabled me to grow personally and professionally and understand that narrative research is a journey towards one's inner self. I do not claim that I fully know myself now, but I began a journey of self-knowledge, professional knowledge, and even spiritual knowledge of my relationship with God.

11.6. Direction for Further Studies

In this section, I would like to make recommendations for further studies based on my research. I will explain in which ways further research can build my findings. The further studies that promise to delve deeper into the relationship between Orthodox Christian spirituality and the teaching profession can only be qualitative, as the use of surveys or questionnaires, as instruments for data collection, could never capture individual teachers' spiritual and personal experiences. It was only through giving my participants the time, space, and safety to talk freely about themselves that they revealed the details about their lives presented in this thesis.

This study only explored the relationship teachers had with significant others, parents and spiritual father, and how they could heal and develop within these relationships. Developing how spiritual life (in many of its aspects) only impacts Orthodox Christian personal and professional lives could also help to understand how they may develop professionally. Research on the relationship between the Church and the teaching profession in Romania would also be valuable for understanding a cultural and social context of an Eastern European country that found itself under a communist regime for many years.

Exploring the spirituality of Romanian children would also be an exciting and challenging study, which would bring a better view of Romanian society and education. It would be interesting to know how spiritual practices, such as prayer, confession, and holy communion, impact children's psychological, spiritual and educational development.

Additionally, after conducting these studies, future research could look at the impact children and teachers' spirituality may have on educational policymakers and how (if there is indeed an impact) this could influence the curriculum.

Furthermore, it would also be useful and interesting, at the same time, to understand how faith and teachers of other Christian denominations (such as Catholic or Protestant) narratives impact their professional identity and practice. Alternatively, I wonder how teachers' belonging to other religions and their narratives would influence and impact their professional identity and practice.

As mentioned throughout the thesis, gender identity influenced the relationships built with my participants. It also influenced how I understood their stories and reflected on my own experience as a mother, as a woman, as a female teacher and as a female novice researcher. This reflection on the gender influences makes me think of how this research would look if a man would conduct it? It would be interesting to understand the impact that a male researcher, having his narrative, would have on research about the role of significant others (parents and spiritual father) on the personal and professional development of Christian (or not Christian) teachers.

Lastly, it would also be useful to understand the impact on teachers' professional identity and practice in different religious communities in supporting the engagement of trainee and experienced teachers with reflective practice. The outcomes of such research could be positive, showing that different religious communities are a source of support for their believers. Or, by contrary, the outcomes could show that other communities could be a source of constraints that may limit teachers' personal and professional development.

In this final chapter, I have explained the study's strengths and weaknesses, reflected on how the narrative interviews inspired my participants to seek more meaning for their private and professional lives, the lessons learnt in doing this research and directions for further research.

11.7. Final word

To conclude, my three participants' stories and my own story show one more time the importance of significant others in people's personal, professional and spiritual identity

and development. The novelty of this thesis dwells in exploring the influence of significant others in Romanian Orthodox Christian teachers' development. If I were to summarize the whole thesis to a single word, this would be 'relationship', especially the relationship with those who are significant for us. I understood through this thesis that, for my participants and me, 'relationship' was the keyword that explains the influences we felt or not in our personal, spiritual and professional lives. At the beginning of our lives, the relationship we built with our parents, then our spiritual father, began to have a special place in our lives. Therefore, he became significant. At the same time with building a relationship with our spiritual fathers, it became more evident that we were engaging in a spiritual, mystical relationship with God through Confession and prayer, which further influenced how we perceived other people, our personal and spiritual lives, our professional identity, our sense of self-efficacy but also enabled us to cope and overcome personal and professional challenges that arose in our lives through peer and self-regulation. It was a journey I undertook with my teaching fellows, a journey towards ourselves, towards our past, towards our inner world. It was a journey that enabled us to understand our experiences, our relationships with significant others, and a journey that made us better understand our present beyond the challenges that may arise in our personal, spiritual or professional lives.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL COMPLIANCE LETTER

Canterbury Christ Church University

6 June 2016   Ref: 16/EDU/CL98

Ms Cristina Radu
17 Cranfield Drive
London
NW9 5WH

Dear Cristina

Confirmation of ethics compliance for your study *"Reflection and reflexivity for teachers' personal and professional development viewed from an Orthodox Christian faith perspective: an auto/biographical study."*

I have received your Ethics Review Checklist and appropriate supporting documentation for proportionate review of the above project. Your application complies fully with the requirements for proportionate ethical review as set out in this University's Research Ethics and Governance Procedures.

In confirming compliance for your study, I must remind you that it is your responsibility to follow, as appropriate, the policies and procedures set out in the *Research Governance Handbook* (http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/centres/red/ethics-governance/governance-and-ethics.asp) and any relevant academic or professional guidelines. This includes providing, if appropriate, information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course should be notified to the **Research Office**, and may require a new application for ethics approval. It is a condition of compliance that you **must** inform me once your research has been completed.

Wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Roger Bone

Roger Bone
Research Governance Manager
Tel: +44 (0)1227 782940 ext 3272 (enter at prompt)
Email: roger.bone@canterbury.ac.uk

cc: Dr Alan Bainbridge

Research Office
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Professor Rama Thirunamachandran, Vice Chancellor and Principal

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APPENDIX 2: ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

For Research Office Use
Checklist No:
Date Received:

PROPORTIONATE ETHICAL REVIEW

ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST

Sections A and B of this checklist must be completed for every research or knowledge transfer project that involves human or animal[1] participants. These sections serve as a toolkit that will identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.

If the toolkit shows that there is **no need for a full ethical review**, Sections D, E and F should be completed and the checklist forwarded to the Research Governance Manager as described in Section C.

If the toolkit shows that **a full application is required**, this checklist should be set aside and an *Application for Faculty Research Ethics Committee Approval Form* – or an appropriate external application form – should be completed and submitted. **There is no need to complete both documents.**

Before completing this checklist, please refer to *Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants* in the University Research Governance Handbook.

The principal researcher/project leader (or, where the principal researcher/project leader is a student, their supervisor) is responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgement in this review.

N.B. This checklist must be completed – and any resulting follow-up action taken – before potential participants are approached to take part in any study.

Type of Project – please mark (x) as appropriate			
Research	X	Knowledge Exchange	

Section A: Applicant Details

A1. Name of applicant:	CRISTINA RADU
A2. Status (please underline):	Undergraduate Student[2] / Postgraduate Student / Staff Member
A3. Email address:	c.radu374@canterbury.ac.uk

Ethics Rev Checklist ver7_may14

A4. Contact address:	17 CRANFIELD DRIVE, LONDON, NW9 5WH
A5. Telephone number	07476924880

1 Sentient animals, generally all vertebrates and certain invertebrates such as cephalopods and crustaceans

2 Checklists for Undergraduates should be retained within the academic department concerned

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Section B: Ethics Checklist

Please answer each question by marking (X) in the appropriate box:

		Yes	No
1.	Does the study involve participants who are particularly <u>vulnerable</u> or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities), or in unequal relationships (e.g. people in prison, your own staff or students)?		X
2.	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to any <u>vulnerable</u> groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. students at school, members of self-help groups, residents of nursing home)?		X
3.	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without usual informed consent procedures having been implemented in advance (e.g. covert observation, certain ethnographic studies)?		X
4.	Will the study use deliberate deception (this does *not* include randomly assigning participants to groups in an experimental design)?		X
5.	Will the study involve discussion of, or collection of information on, topics of a sensitive nature (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) <u>personal to the participants</u>?		X
6.	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to human or animal participants?		X
7.	Does the study involve invasive or intrusive procedures such as blood taking or muscle biopsy from human or animal participants?		X
8.	Is physiological stress, pain, or more than mild discomfort to humans or animals likely to result from the study?		X
9.	Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences in humans (including the researcher) or animals beyond the risks encountered in normal life?		X
10.	Will the study involve **interaction** with animals? (If you are simply observing them – e.g. in a zoo or in their natural habitat – without having any contact at all, you can answer "No")		X
11.	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?		X
12.	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X
13.	Is the study a survey that involves University-wide recruitment of students from Canterbury Christ Church University?		X
14.	Will the study involve recruitment of adult participants (aged 16 and over)		X

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	who are unable to make decisions for themselves, i.e. lack capacity, and come under the jurisdiction of the Mental Capacity Act (2005)?		
15.	Will the study involve recruitment of participants (<u>excluding</u> staff) through the **NHS**?		X
16.	Will the study involve recruitment of participants through the **Department of Social Services** of a Local Authority (e.g. Kent County Council)?		X

Now please assess outcomes and actions by referring to Section C ⮑

	who are unable to make decisions for themselves, i.e. lack capacity, and come under the jurisdiction of the Mental Capacity Act (2005)?		
15.	Will the study involve recruitment of participants (<u>excluding</u> staff) through the **NHS**?		X
16.	Will the study involve recruitment of participants through the **Department of Social Services** of a Local Authority (e.g. Kent County Council)?		X

Now please assess outcomes and actions by referring to Section C ⤷

Section C: How to Proceed

C1. If you have answered 'NO' to *all* the questions in Section B, you should complete Sections D–F as appropriate and send the completed and signed Checklist to the Research Governance Manager in the Research and Enterprise Development Centre for the record. That is all you need to do. You will receive a letter confirming compliance with University Research Governance procedures.

[*Master's students should retain copies of the form and letter; the letter should be bound into their research report or dissertation. Work that is submitted without this document will be returned un-assessed.*]

C2. If you have answered 'YES' to *any* of the questions in Section B, you will need to describe more fully how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your project. This does not mean that you cannot do the study, only that your proposal will need to be approved by a Research Ethics Committee. Depending upon which questions you answered 'YES' to, you should proceed as follows

(a) If you answered 'YES' to any of *questions 1 – 12 ONLY* (i.e. not questions 13,14, 15 or 16), you will have to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) using your Faculty's version of the *Application for Faculty Research Ethics Committee Approval Form*. This should be submitted as directed on the form. The *Application for Faculty Research Ethics Committee Approval Form* can be obtained from the Governance and Ethics pages of the Research and Enterprise Development Centre on the University web site.

(b) If you answered 'YES' to *question 13* you have two options:

(i) If you answered 'YES' to *question 13 ONLY* you must send copies of this checklist to the Student Survey Unit. Subject to their approval you may then proceed as at C1 above.

(ii) If you answered 'YES' to *question 13 PLUS any other of questions 1 – 12*, you must proceed as at C2(b)(i) above and then submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) as at C2(a).

(c) If you answered 'YES' to *question 14* you do not need to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee. *INSTEAD*, you must submit an application to the appropriate external NHS or Social Care Research Ethics Committee [see C2(d) below].

(d) If you answered 'YES' to *question 15* you do not need to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee. *INSTEAD*, you must submit an application to the appropriate external NHS or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (REC), *after* your proposal has received a satisfactory Peer Review (see *Research Governance Handbook*). Applications to an NHS or Social Care REC must be signed by the appropriate Faculty Director of Research or other authorised Faculty signatory before they are submitted.

(e) If you answered 'YES' to *question 16* you do <u>not</u> need to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee. *INSTEAD*, you must submit an application to the appropriate external Local Authority REC, *after* your proposal has received a satisfactory Peer Review (see *Research Governance Handbook*). Applications to a Local Authority REC <u>must</u> be signed by the appropriate Faculty Director of Research or other authorised Faculty signatory before they are submitted.

IMPORTANT

Please note that it is your responsibility in the conduct of your study to follow the policies and procedures set out in the University's Research Governance Handbook, and any relevant academic or professional guidelines. This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the study should be notified to the **Faculty and/or other Research Ethics Committee** that received your original proposal. Depending on the nature of the changes, a new application for ethics approval may be required.

Ethics Rev Checklist ver7_may14

Section D: Project Details

D1. Project title:	Reflection and reflexivity for teachers` personal and professional development viewed from an Orthodox Christian faith perspective. An auto/biographical study.
D2. Start date	01.09.2016
D3. End date	31.03.2017
D4. Lay summary (max 300 words which **must** include a brief description of the methodology to be used for gathering your data)	The aim of the research I intend to conduct is to find out in which ways a teacher`s spiritual life could influence the personal and professional, through reflection and reflexivity. The rationale of this research is the interest I have in finding links and boundaries between Christian orthodox spirituality and education, especially reflection and reflexivity viewed from an orthodox perspective in a teacher life.
	The paradigm I am working in is the interpretative and because my aim is to conduct the research in my subjects` natural settings, attempting to interpret the Christian faith perspective on reflection and reflexivity, I chose qualitative methodology.
	In terms of method, auto/biography is the method I considered to be the most appropriate for my research. First, because my intention of exploring the link between spiritual, personal and professional in teachers` lives supposes a deep analyse of my participants' life histories and in the same time my own experience. In addition to life histories interviews, I will use other empirical sources (i.e. videos, photos and a reflective journal for myself). Another reason is the possible trustworthy relationship that may occur between me, the researcher, and the participants, which may lead to interesting outcomes of my research.
	On the other hand, I am aware that this method may not lead to what I expect to, but my experience taught me that a good relationship with the interviewees is the key to finding the best answer to researcher`s questions.
	The research questions are:
	In what ways can reflective practice and reflexivity support Orthodox Christian teachers to reconcile their personal and professional development?
	In what ways can Orthodox Christian teachers` spiritual identity influence their personal and professional development?
	How can theories generated through research enable researchers to understand the ways in which Orthodox Christian teachers development may occur?

Section E1: For Students Only

E1. Module name and number or course and Department:	Faculty of Education
E2. Name of Supervisor or module leader	Alan Bainbridge
E3. Email address of Supervisor or Module leader	alan.bainbridge@canterbury.ac.uk
E4. Contact address:	Canterbury Christ Church University North Holmes Road Canterbury Kent, CT1 1QU UK

Section E2: For Supervisors

Please tick the appropriate boxes. The study should not begin until all boxes are ticked:

The student has read the relevant sections of the University's Research Governance Handbook, available on the University web pages at: http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/centres/red/ethics-governance/governance-and-	☐
The topic merits further investigation	☐
The student has the skills to carry out the study	☐
The participant information sheet or leaflet is appropriate	☐
The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate	☐
If a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check is required, this has been carried out	☐

Comments from supervisor:

Section F: Signatures

- I certify that the information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.

- I certify that a risk assessment for this study has been carried out in compliance with the University's Health and Safety policy.

- I certify that any required Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check has been carried out.

- I undertake to carry out this project under the terms specified in the Canterbury Christ Church University Research Governance Handbook.

- I undertake to inform the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee of any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over the course of the study. I understand that such changes may require a new application for ethics approval.

- I undertake to inform the Research Governance Manager in the Research and Enterprise Development Centre when the proposed study has been completed.

- I am aware of my responsibility to comply with the requirements of the law and appropriate University guidelines relating to the security and confidentiality of participant or other personal data.

- I understand that project records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future and that project records should be kept securely for five years or other specified period.

- I understand that the personal data about me contained in this application will be held by the Research and Enterprise Development Centre and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.

As the Principal Investigator for this study, I confirm that this application has been shared with all other members of the study team	(please tick)

Principal Investigator	Supervisor or module leader (as appropriate)
Name:	Name:
Date:	Date:

Section G: Submission

This form should be returned, as an attachment to a covering email, to the Research Governance Manager at roger.bone@canterbury.ac.uk

N.B. YOU MUST include copies of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form that you will be using in your study (Model versions on which to base these are appended below for your convenience). Also copies of any data gathering tools such as questionnaires, and a COMPLETED RISK ASSESSMENT FORM.

Providing the covering email is from a verifiable address, there is no longer a need to submit a signed hard copy version.

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Reflection and reflexivity for teachers` personal and professional development viewed from an Orthodox Christian faith perspective. An auto/biographical study.

Name of Researcher: Cristina Radu

Contact details:

Address:

17 Cranfield Drive NW9 5WH LONDON UK

Tel: 07476924880

Email: c.radu@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. — X

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. — X

3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential — X

4. I agree to take part in the above study. — X

____M▓▓▓▓▓▓U____   __12/05/2016____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature
(if different from researcher)

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__CRISTINA RADU_____   _12/05/2016____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

Copies: 1 for participant
            1 for researcher

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM SIGNED

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Reflection and reflexivity for teachers` personal and professional development viewed from an Orthodox Christian faith perspective. An auto/biographical study.

Name of Researcher: Cristina Radu

Contact details:

Address:
17 Cranfield Drive
NW9 5WH
LONDON
UK

Tel: 07476924880

Email: c.radu@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | X |

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. | X |

3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential | X |

4. I agree to take part in the above study. | X |

____M▓▓▓▓U____   __12/05/2016____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature
(if different from researcher)

APPENDIX 4: PRESENTATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

Amaximoaie, C (2018) Personal Commitment in the Religious Education Classroom, paper presented at AULRE conference, London.

Amaximoaie, C. (2017) Teachers' personal and professional development in the post-communist Romania, paper accepted at ATINER conference, Athens, Greece.

Amaximoaie, C. (2017) Spiritual discourse as an alternative for personal and professional development of teachers from an Orthodox Christian perspective. Paper accepted at ESREA conference, Norway.

APPENDIX 5: PHOTOS

Priests confessing in the Orthodox Christian Church

People queuing for food during the communist regime

Communist prison

APPENDIX 6: INITIAL NOTES ON PROFORMA

Proforma from Merrill and West (2009). The notes refer to an interview with Zoe.

Pen Portrait – who was interviewed

Zoe is the first participant in my research. She has worked as a French teacher for more than 10 years. I knew some things about her, professionally especially, from the church, where I used to go when I was in Romania. However, we haven't spoke before.

Themes –what patterns were identified in the conversation

During our conversation, I have identified some patterns which repeated constantly. Zoe began to talk about her family, especially about her mother. Then, she approached the difficult relationship she has built with her father and with her mother. A theme was identified in here, the role of significant others in personal identity formation and development. Zoe's way of talking about her mother revealed to me the sufferance she went through during childhood and latter, as an adult. Another recurrent pattern in our first interview was the teaching profession, about which she talked when she presented herself to me as being a French teacher for more than 10 years. She wanted to point that she didn't believe that her profession was her vocation.

In this first interview, another theme which arose was the spiritual life, which was of a highly importance to her. However, she mentioned something very intriguing for me which was that her lack of trust in her spiritual father, outside of Confession.

Mother, significant others, father, family, significant others, sufferance, poor relationship with her mother, profession, spiritual life, mentioned something about her spiritual father which intrigued me-need to find more about it.

*It is a reference point in our **family**. **Boys** to be rejected **by women** and men to be marginalised very much. It is a fight I have with myself; I mean, I have noticed many times a tendency in myself to despise men for being weak, whiny, not being real men, not coping with life; anyway…all kinds of thoughts. From the female point of view, this attitude is compelling; I mean, negative phrases and devaluing thoughts about my husband come into my mind; especially, **my mother's words.***

*__Dad__ drank a lot, and for many years, I judged him for this. He died in 2008 in a car accident, drunk, but …so still through **my mother's** eyes, seeing him through her frustrations because she used to bring all these difficulties from their relationship to me.*

*I have never had a close **relationship with him** (i.e. her stepbrother), and I have seen himthrough the eyes of **my mother** … she rejected him very much ... it is a tradition in **our family** … for **boys** to **be rejected** and **men** to be **dishonoured**.. ... it is a struggle I have...I mean ...mmm … I often find myself despising men…*

*For many years I perceived **my father** and **my brother** through **my mother's eyes**; I don'tknow who **my brother** is. A little while ago, I decided to give him a chance, even thoughwe have not had a relationship. He is far away, in Italy. My brother's life story is sad, and he repeated his father's and **our mother's mistakes**. I mean…there is much pain inside him; and I think it could be inside me too because he did not behave like **a properbrother** to me, because he did not show*

me any emotion because he is wrapped up in hisown story so much, and into the heavy things he carries in his soul, that he is unable toshow me any kind feeling.

*I changed my perspective **on God** only a few years ago; before, He was **a strict paternalfigure, dictatorial,** who hunts you; who punishes you; who will show you that you are always wrong; who does not forgive; who does not forget and who asks you things thatyou cannot do. **He was the image of my mother.***

*Here I still have a lot to heal because I'm still trapped in the past. My spiritual father does not have a role in my life, outside **of confession**; he is not yet a safe place in my life, and I try not to develop a relationship outside of confession, first, because I am afraid I will be disappointed ...and to see in him things that would make him less worthyin my eyes. There were moments when I thought that people like **my spiritual father** orthe sister (a nun) have not done what they said they would and what I thought they should do. Therefore, I avoid **a close relationship**, on the one hand, because of what I said previously, and on the other hand, because the relationship with my father has not completely healed. However, in confession it is all right because it is something different; it seems that even **my spiritual father** is different or maybe he is himself.*

Process – power balances and unintentional motivations or reservations. The reflexive thoughts of the researcher.

When I first entered her house, she invited me into her living room, with an elegant old-fashioned furniture. Because of the image I had about Zoe, I felt a little bit nervous. She seemed to be an important person into how she related with people from the church. However, I was always shy, not being able to build relationships with many people. Offering me tea and chocolate, smiling to me made me feel more relaxed.

Nevertheless, when we began our interview, after I lauded two recorders on the sofa, next to me, my notebook and me holding the pen, made Zoe feel a little bit insecure. As we went deeper into the interview, she began to feel more and more relaxed and open more and more. At the end of our first interview, she said that it was different than she expected. She seemed relaxed and looking forward for our next meeting.

Her old-fashioned living room. Lots of books (medicine, French, spiritual), herbal tea and chocolate. She felt to be reserved at the beginning.as we went deeper into the interview she became more open, relaxed and confident.

Ethnography – place and context of the interview. What happened before and after. What this might have meant to the meaning of the conversation.

The interview took place in Zoe's living room, at her home. We decided for that place before I asked her where she would like to meet me. I agreed because I wanted to make Zoe feel safe and comfortable in order to open as much as possible. It was a period when I was travelling between United Kingdom and Romania for my research. She knew I was coming from the UK and especially for collecting data for my research. She seemed to be a little bit nervous, but welcoming. I assumed that she felt nervous because she was giving an interview to a person she did not know before, that person was a researcher, although a person from the same church. On the other hand, I was also nervous, because I was in a house I haven't known before, looking forward to understanding the life of another person. However, she was very welcoming, offering me tea and chocolate. This made me feel comfortable.

After we finished the interview, her emotional state was changed. She was more relaxed and seemed to be happy with how the interview has gone. I have also felt happy to have heard a story different from what I expected.

I think that in the beginning, my positionality, of a researcher, although Romanian, coming from another country, was a problem of positionality and determine Zoe to perceive me as being "superior". Also, the fact that she did not know what to expect determined her to be nervous.

Towards the end of our interview, she began to have trust me and we began to build a relationship, which made Zoe to trust me and to relax.

Gestalt – the wholeness of the encounter. Meaning/Broader narrative.

In the first interview the personal and profession recounts of her life were mixed. After my question "Can you please tell me something about you?", she began with her professional identity and then she moved into personal accounts. She did not consider the teaching profession as a vocation. This made me ask myself why? Her confession felt very contradictory to my own suppositions about her professional perception. Although nervous, she was open from the beginning, and then, as we went deeper into her story, she became even more open. As I went deeper into her story, I began to question myself about the importance parents (especially mothers) have in children's personal identity formation and development. The poor relationship she had with her mother determined me to decide to search and read more literature about the importance of close people (especially parents) and their influence in children's lives. Another important point here was my own reflections about the relationship I have had with my parents, especially with my mother. I always have felt uncomfortable in relationship with my mother, but I never knew why. When Zoe recalled about her relationship with her mother many questions came into my mind.

I began with a few assumptions about how Zoe's life must have been, but the interview took me in a different direction. It looked like her family had a great influence on her personal development. Many questions came into my mind: How deep were the influences? Have those relationships affected her professional identity as well? Was the teaching profession still important to her, although she did not consider it as a vocation?

In addition, she has also mentioned about therapeutic meetings she had with some nuns, which helped her, together with Confession and the Holy Communion to start healing and to overcome the sad relationship she had with her family, especially with her mother. Here, new questions raised into my mind: how about her spiritual father? Does he have a role in the process of healing? If so, which was or is his role? She has also mentioned that she Confess often but she does not trust her spiritual father outside Confession. This has also been very intriguing for me.

From this first interview, I understood that I need to explore more the spiritual side of her life and to understand the possible impact on her personal and professional lives.