

# A TYPOLOGY OF GODKINSHIP PRACTICES IN ROMANIA

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The paper draws a typology of various forms of godparenthood across Romania, punctuated with case studies from different field sites. It shows that spiritual kinship is vivid and diverse in this part of the world, as opposed to its shrinking in Western Europe. Furthermore, godkinship proves to be a useful social and economic tool, through networking, but also a practice surrounded by numerous religious and superstitious beliefs. The types of godparenthood treated in the paper are, as defined by the author: (1) descent group type, (2) dyadic type, (3) bilateral type, (4) vertical alliance type, and (5) multiple godparents type. Based on extensive fieldwork and secondary sources, the argument put forward is descriptive and synthetic in nature and the aim of the paper is mainly to fill a gap in the knowledge of godparenthood practices in Eastern Europe.

**Key words:** godparenthood, ritual kinship, beliefs, anthropology of Christianity.

## INTRODUCTION

For Western Catholic Europe, historians predict the imminent disappearance of godparenthood, based on the fact that statistics from Italy and France show how godparents are currently chosen primarily among blood relatives, especially aunts and uncles, which are soon to appear with the sharp fertility decline (Alfani *et al.*, 2011). Central European countries, such as Hungary, are also shown to have reverted in the last 30 years to choosing godparents among kin (Vidacs 2011). In Romania, godparenthood practices are very vivid. Romanians name godparents for weddings and baptisms in proportions of almost 100%, but they do not prefer blood relatives. Young urbanites prefer to choose among close friends. In some areas, godparents are multiple, going up to 50 pairs of godparents for a single wedding or baptism; in other areas, godparents are inherited in the paternal line; in yet another areas, a few persons concentrate the positions of godparents for entire villages.

The paper attempts to put order to a certain extent in this variation of godparenthood in Romania by drawing a typology based on different practices, beliefs, and motivations of actors. The types treated in the paper are: the descent group type; the dyadic type; the bilateral type; the vertical alliance type; and the

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