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**Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat și
Marea Unire**

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DOCTORAL THESIS

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN BANAT AND THE GREAT UNION

SUMMARY

Keywords: Romanian Orthodox Church, Banat, Great Union, clergy, national activity

Talking today about the Church and the nation, about their common historical path, especially among the Romanians of Transylvania and Banat, seems an old-fashioned and, most of the time, obsolete action. This is due to the progressive ideas of the moment, drawn from globalist principles that call not only for an economic market without border restrictions, but also for an uprooted world without ethnic principles that in any way individualize human communities. The polemics of leading exponents of Romanian society on this subject are recurrent in the philosophical and economic discourse of the times, and unfortunately also in the historical and cultural discourse, and are readily received especially by young people. Such an approach can also be found in Romanian historiography, with conceptual history and metahistory gaining more and more ground to the detriment of objective analysis of events unfolding over time.

The Romanian Orthodox Church has been, par excellence, a supporter of the nation because both its doctrine and the principles by which it is organized are aimed at the nations. The Church, by her universal embrace, addresses all peoples, and peoples or nations are eternal in God, the One who shows in each a nuance of His spirituality.

Therefore, a balanced and objective discourse on Church and nation in the context of Romanian history, in this case the history of the Romanians in Banat at the beginning of the 20th century, only outlines an essential sequence in the past of a territory with a distinct history and many cultural individualities.

Following the Orthodox tradition of shaping themselves on ethnic principles and territorial organization, the Episcopates of Arad and Caransebeș, historical ecclesiastical institutions of the Romanians of Banat, have always been promoters of nationality. The period 1864-1918 was the most emblematic in terms of the national support of the communities and was primarily due to the hierarchs who shepherded them. The bishops of Arad were Bishop Procopie Ivașcovici (1853-18730), Bishop Miron Romanul (1873-1874), Bishop Ioan Mețianu (1874-1889), Bishop Iosif Goldiș (1899-1902) and Bishop Ioan Ignatie Papp (1903-1925), and at Caransebeș Bishop Ioan

Popasu (1865-1889), Bishop Nicolae Popea (1889-1908) and Bishop Miron Cristea (1910-1919), the future metropolitan primate (1920-1925) and patriarch (1925-1939) of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Historical Banat is a well-defined political, geographical, administrative and cultural entity in the modern history of Romania. Its location in the west of Romania has always placed it, ideologically and culturally speaking, at the confluence of East and West, at the crossroads of Central and Southeast European civilisation. In a broader sense, we can say that it was the link between East and West, historians considering it the topos where Byzantium and Central Europe meet.

The geographical extent of Banat lies between the Mures river in the north, the Tisa river in the west and the Danube river in the south. In the east it is bounded by the Poiana Ruscai Mountains, the Țarcu Massif and the Cernei Mountains, on a conventional line that descends to the east of Orșova, in the Vodiței Valley.

From an ethnic point of view, the population of Banat was mostly Romanian, even if, during the Habsburg period (1718-1860), Vienna had a political and economic vision that led to the colonization of many of the Sabians in the meagre area of Banat. After the incorporation to Hungary, a new territorial organization of the territory was made, which was divided into three counties: Caraș, Timiș and Torontal, with the exception of the territory of the military border in the south of Banat, which remained under military administration. The new organisation, adopted after the Imperial Decree of 31 January 1870, decided to demilitarise the military confinement with its headquarters in Caransebeș, leaving four administrative circles or plăși in its place: Caransebeș, Teregova, Bozovici and Orșova. The counties were divided into "plăși", besides those in the military area, there were 11 rural and one urban "plăși" in Caraș County, 11 rural and 4 urban in Timiș and 12 rural and 3 urban in Torontal. Later, after 1880, when the process of organizing the administrative territory of Banat was completed, the plateaus of the former military Confiniu were included in the Caraș County, which changed its name to Caraș-Severin. This structure remained more or less the same until the dissolution of the monarchy.

Banat as a geographical and cultural space has a troubled history, different from the other Romanian territories and has experienced over several centuries various rulers, from feudal Hungary to the Ottoman Empire and then the Habsburg Empire. Nevertheless, the Romanians of Banat have defended their Orthodox faith, language, traditions and customs with determination.

The period of Austro-Hungarian dualism (1867-1918) represented for the Romanians of Transylvania and Banat a new stage in their struggle for national progress. The integration of the Romanians from the interior of the Carpathian arc into Hungary reopened an almost forgotten

mentality and created conditions unsuitable for natural national development. Against this background was superimposed the ideology of emancipation and freedom of the peoples, an ideology that has been strongly present in the Romanian area since the Ardelean School. In the course of time, the forms of national expression have taken different forms, depending on the challenges of history. From the more timid expressions of the beginning of the 19th century, to the Pasoptista effervescence and, finally, to a linear and ascending phenomenon that grew with the times and reacted in the hottest periods that challenged it to manifest itself.

While in the second half of the 19th century the most elaborate national action was the memorandist movement, fervently supported by the Orthodox Church and its representatives, at the beginning of the 20th century large-scale national actions were concentrated around ecclesiastical centres. The Romanians' political representatives were in close contact with the Church's representatives, the latter's clerical authority often being the binding force behind an articulated national vision. In these circumstances, bishops, protopopes and priests were a bridge of connection and cohesion between Romanian political forces. By the nature of their priestly mission, the ministers of the Church were closest to the needs of the faithful and, therefore, almost without exception, supported the national emancipation of the Romanians.

The Orthodox Church in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the matrix in which Romanians developed spiritually, culturally and nationally. Thanks to the Holy Metropolitan Andrei Saguna and the Statute he conceived, the eparchial centres supported the establishment of confessional schools, which transformed the Transylvanian Romanian primary education into a mass education. In its cultural approach, the Church had to face a school legislation that did not take into account the realities of the Romanian countryside at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the following century, the specific confessional nature and the possibilities of manifestation of the communities. With the desire to modernise the school process, numerous prohibitive laws were imposed, which aimed, as a subsidiary objective, to reduce Romanian education at all levels.

The Romanian Orthodox Church also owes a great deal to the achievement of national objectives, which were most clearly expressed in the Great Union of 1 December 1918. However, the event of Alba Iulia was not easily achieved. It was preceded by a war that sharpened the national problem from the lowest level, in family communities, to the international expression of communities, of nations. This whole journey was accompanied by the Church. It was the priests in the parishes who came into contact with the reality "on the ground", with the frustrations and disappointments of those who could not express themselves freely in their own way. In terms of declared national activity by action and deed, clergy had a special status. They took the message

from the hearts of the people and expressed it publicly. The hierarchs and protopopes, each in his place, assumed the role of enlighteners of the people, and enlightenment came through faith, education and a sense of community, that is, through common identity. This is why priests were not only religious leaders but also leaders of the nation. History records their sacrifices for the Church and the nation.

With all these casualties and with the desire for national unity expressed in Alba Iulia, for the Romanians of Banat the Great Union was not the end of the national struggles. Throughout 1919, and even later, there was unrest over the division of the territory between the Danube, Tisa and Mures between Romania and the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom. The abuses of the Serbian army occupying Banat were many and hard to imagine, and the humiliations of the Romanians were more pronounced but shorter-lived than before. The Church, its clergy and ministers were again in the midst of trouble. The motto was struggle for justice and sacrifice for truth. The national freedom of the Romanians in Banat came only after the Romanian army entered Banat in mid-1919. For the Romanians who remained in the foreign part of Banat, national oppression was harsh and continued throughout the interwar period. Their support was again the Church.

A research on the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat and the way in which the principles of Orthodoxy generated cultural and national attitudes in response to the historical challenges of the first two decades of the 20th century was both a laborious and painstaking undertaking. Laborious because historiography has so far not recorded synthetic works promoting only the national activity of the Church's ministers, and painstaking because of the wealth of information contained in various edited works and archival documents. The consultation of historical sources and their collation has highlighted how the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat was involved in the national life of the faithful during the most vocal period of their identity affirmation.

It should be noted that among the organizational foundations of church communities, unity and collaboration are defining. Liturgically speaking, these are fulfilled in the Eucharistic act, and historically they are distinguished by the religious, social, cultural and ethnic bond of the members of the communities. These have been the ideological motivations for the actions of religious leaders in the national consolidation of the faithful they have shepherded.

The beginning of the last century was marked by doctrines that stood against the affirmation of the identity of Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With a serious legacy from the 19th century, the policy of the Budapest governments at the dawn of the 20th century hardened in its desire to standardise the "patriotic nations" through Hungarianisation. In this

context, the bishoprics, dioceses and parishes of Banat were the only institutions that could ensure the viable development of national characters.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, the Orthodox Romanians of Banat were organized ecclesiastically in two bishoprics, that of Arad and that of Caransebeș, both dependent on the Metropolitanate of Sibiu. The jurisdiction of the Diocese of Caransebeș was the largest in Banat. Approximately two thirds of the southern part of the province was represented by the Diocese of Caransebeș, and the other third, which included the northern area up to the Mureș River, was in the Arad ecclesiastical area. Of the 15 Banat protopochies, 11 were under the coordination of the ecclesiastical centre of Caransebeș (Biserica Albă - 32 parishes, Bocșa - 30 parishes, Buziaș - 30 parishes, Caransebeș - 57 parishes, Ciacova - 18 parishes, Făget - 48 parishes, Lugoj - 31 parishes, Mehadia - 47 parishes, Oravița - 24 parishes, Panciova - 16 parishes and Vârșeț - 27 parishes), and 4 depended canonically on Arad (Banat-Comloș - 17 parishes, Belinț - 46 parishes, Lipova - 36 and Timișoara - 40 parishes). The Diocese of Arad had a much larger extension, besides the protoparishes of Banat, it also had 7 other protopopeal offices in the north of Mures (Arad, Chișineu-Criș, Buteni, Ineu, Șiria, Vărădia de Mureș, Hălmagiu) and those dependent on the Consistory of Oradea.

The work of the hierarchs, protopopes and priests in these units involved not only solving problems of an ecclesiastical nature, but also other concerns for the cultural and social stability of the faithful. The most eloquent instances of this were during the First World War, when priests oversaw the stability of parish communities and in economic and social matters, sensitive issues caused by the support of the war effort.

A cultural approach articulated in support of the Romanian communities in Banat and for their national affirmation was supported by religious associations and societies supported by the Church. Choral meetings and women's societies organized a good part of the Romanian events in the towns and villages of the diocese. Members of similar societies were invited to these events, which led to a cultural emulation beneficial to pre-war Romanian society. Added to this were the interventions of *Astra* and the *Society for a Romanian Theatre Fund*, which led to a qualitative progress of the cultural act. The Romanian language and culture were also promoted through the activity of the Orthodox Church, with the same aim of affirming common values.

The Church's most comprehensive and articulate national activity proved to be its support of denominational schools in the early 20th century. In the general context created by the school laws promoted by Count Albert Apponyi Romanian education was threatened. Church schools meant Romanian culture and language, spirit and sacrifice and therefore their social expression had to be limited. Bishops Ioan Papp of Arad and Miron Cristea of Caransebeș took remarkable public

positions in defence of the schools, but to no avail. The Apponyi Laws, although they were in tune with the modernisation of education, through the demands they made regarding teachers' salaries and the patrimonial infrastructure, were formidable opponents of the Romanian confessional school. Failure to fulfil the law's wishes meant the loss of the confessional school, implicitly the loss of the place where the Church maintained a Romanian spirit with reverberations on the whole community. The bishops initiated and maintained a broad campaign to bring the schools in the region within the terms of the law. Loans and financial aid were offered, parish communities were mobilised and urged to get involved, in places without possibilities, applications were made for state aid, and the relevant legislation was explained and communicated in time to be complied with. In this way, about 100 schools in the region were saved from extinction. It is also worth mentioning the support given by Vasile Stroiescu, a Basarabian nobleman, known as a great patron of church institutions in Transylvania and Banat. The financial aid he provided throughout the Mitropolis helped hundreds of schools to fall within the boundaries of the law and fulfil their cultural and national mission. That is why Vasile Stroiescu rightly occupies a special place in the existence of Romanian confessional schools.

The First World War left a deep mark on denominational schools. The mobilisation of teachers on the war fronts created a tragic situation. Forty-two percent of all teachers were recruited from the Diocese of Caransebeș, and 37% from Arad. The hotbed of Romanian culture and spirituality had to be protected, and the diocesan centres took care to ensure children's education by employing retired teachers or priests in the teaching process. The effort to keep the school within the Church was a labor that spanned many years. Towards the end of the war, the school, by its very existence, came to be regarded by the authorities as a means of national resistance and they wanted to suppress it. The experiment to reduce the school phenomenon was called the *cultural frontier*. It proposed the statification of schools near the borders with Romania, which meant education in the Hungarian language. Everything was designed to prevent Romanian feelings from being amplified after Romania's entry into the war. In Banat, a good part of the Diocese of Caransebeș was in the *cultural area*. The church reactions were commensurate. Diocesan consistories drafted memorials, hierarchs made public speeches in the Hungarian Parliament and even obtained high-level audiences. Forecasts of the fate of the war slowed down this project, which never got off the ground. The Pedagogical Institutes were also included in the same policy of statification, which fortunately did not come to fruition.

A discussion of the Church's involvement in Romanian national activity is a sensitive issue that requires a broad overview and a careful look at all the sources the documents provide. Living under Hungarian rule, the Romanians of Transylvania and Banat were under constant threat of

denationalization, a process that intensified in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Because the parishes and many of the denominational schools received financial support from the state, the Church could not officially, publicly and resolutely express an anti-Hungarian stance.

In Banat at the beginning of the 20th century, the national support action was marked by two distinct periods. The first is the pre-war period, when the public discourse of churchmen was moderate but firm in defending church autonomy and other rights of the Romanian nation. Here one can speak of the Church's influence in the resumption of an active policy in the Romanian National Party (through the protopope George Popovici), of the support of nationalist candidates in the pre-war Hungarian parliamentary elections, of the interventions for the introduction of universal suffrage and of the steps taken to remove all political and cultural restrictions imposed on the Romanian people. The second period covers the years of the Great War and is characterised by an expansion of Romanian national sentiment on the one hand and increasingly punitive measures imposed on the people by the state authorities on the other. Here again we can identify two stages. The first corresponds to the period of Romania's neutrality, when repression was more moderate, and the second, which begins after Romania's entry into the war. This is certainly the most difficult stage in the modern historical development of the people of Banat and Transylvania.

The outbreak of war led to a radicalisation of communities in their national outwardness. Concentrations and enlistments at the front, the payment of war aid, the lack of labour, the endangering of schools by transferring the educational premises to the needs of the army, the requisitioning of food and other socially restrictive measures caused discontent and revolt. The Romanians of Banat felt drawn into a confrontation in which they had no stake, a war that was not theirs. The desire for self-determination and freedom grew. The priests and teachers who remained at home had a difficult task. They listened to people's pain and sought to soothe their souls. The hierarchs had to exhort their faithful to submit to their masters and to behave diplomatically. A great tragedy for communities was also the requisitioning of church bells, a decision carried out between 1915 and 1917.

Caught between official state policy and the realities on the ground, many priests and teachers have suffered. After the outbreak of war, the attention of the authorities turned to the settlements near Romania. In some localities, priests, teachers and other village leaders were accused of resistance and imprisoned. The hierarchs of Arad and Caransebeş often made efforts to free the prisoners and justified their release with the need to continue their activities in parishes and schools. This was possible until Romania's entry into the war on the side of the Entente in 1916, after which the requests for release signed by the bishops were automatically rejected. Supervision of priests and teachers became very strict and any normal gesture or behaviour was considered

hostile. Priests were arrested and imprisoned for simply greeting in Romanian or for urging their faithful to pray for the prosperity of their nation. The punishments were harsh and ranged from house arrest to imprisonment and deportation to camps in western Hungary.

A statistic compiled from archival documents and other bibliographical works dealing with the sacrifices of the priesthood during the war years shows that the number of priests from Banat who had forced residence between 1914 and 1918 amounts to 50. Another 29 priests were imprisoned for various periods of time, and 43 priests were deported to camps in conditions that are hard to imagine. As a result of these persecutions, Protopope George Dragomir of the White Church and the priest Alexandru Atnagea of Vrani passed away. Suffering and persecution were also endured by the priests of Banat who, threatened with death for their national attitude, took refuge in Romania. Confessional teachers are another sacrifice of the Church. In 1916, 235 teachers from Banat were away at war, and those who remained at home were persecuted and persecuted. Of the teachers from Banat, 13 had their residence forced, 10 were imprisoned and 16 others were deported. We mention only Ion Vidu, the teacher of the denominational school in Lugoj, who suffered imprisonment for the national ideals he described in musical notes.

Even under these conditions, for the proper functioning of church institutions, hierarchs had to have a public discourse in line with the politics of the time. This explains the pastorals of the hierarchs at the beginning of the war, which demanded obedience and sacrifice to the Habsburg tone. The 1916 pastorals, issued after Romania's entry into the war, are today considered outrageous and incriminating for the national position of the hierarchy, which was forced to praise a war against the Romanians across the Carpathians. Not in the era in which they were read. The people knew that hierarchs could not openly depart from the political line of the times, and they also knew that their real work was in the service of the people. In the alternative, these statements were considered merely "acts of diplomacy" for the unaltered preservation of the Church in Banat.

We can say that in the public discourse of the hierarchs of Banat there is an interesting evolution, from maximum caution - shown at the beginning of the war and later on, when Romania entered the battlefield - to the direct expression of national feelings, towards the end of 1917 and in 1918. Bishop Miron Cristea was more resolute in this respect. Ioan Papp was more oriented towards the moral life of the faithful, while the Bishop of Caransebeş was more active on the national front. From Christmas 1917, when he firmly expressed his desire for national freedom in his Christmas pastoral, and throughout 1918, Miron Cristea was politically persecuted and threatened with dismissal.

After the establishment of the Central Romanian National Council in Arad, the same Miron Cristea, without prior agreement with Bishop Ioan Papp (Metropolitan Vasile Mangra had died),

challenged the authority of the Emperor and demanded that the self-proclaimed national mastery of the Romanians be mentioned at church services. All these national actions found their fulfilment in the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918, when the unity of all Romanians was achieved and where the bishops of Banat were those who religiously proclaimed the union of the Romanian nation. In their efforts to promote national unity and Romanian unity, the bishops were assisted by priests, protopopes and confessional teachers. Among them, an important place is occupied by the protopopes George Dragomir, Andrei Ghidiu, Gherasim Sârb, Sebastian Olariu, Traian Oprea, Augustin Ghilezan, Ioan Oprea, Ioan Sârbu, Mihail Gaşpar and Fabriţiu Mănuilă.

For the people of Banat, Alba Iulia did not mean freedom and Romanian unity. From 13 November 1918 the Banat was occupied by Serbian armies, who came as peacekeepers. With their avowed desire to annex Banat to Serbia, the Serbs' behaviour was not different from their previous rule. Offensive acts against the confessional school followed, priests and teachers humiliated and imprisoned, requisitions of machinery and industrial tools. Following the memorials sent by the people of Banat to the Great Powers, the eastern part of Banat was taken over by the French armies. The Paris Peace Conference had on its agenda the question of Banat, a territory claimed by Romanians and Serbs. Church representatives organised protest rallies against the division of Banat and sent numerous memoranda to the political leaders of Europe, strongly demanding a Romanian administration and full union of the whole of Banat with Romania. The will of history was otherwise and on 13 June 1919, Romania was informed that one third of the lands between the Danube, Tisa and Mures had been assigned to the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom.

The Church of Banat was involved in the establishment of the Romanian administration in Banat and was present at the entry of Romanian soldiers in the towns of the province. The day of 3 August 1919 was a truly liberating moment for the Romanians who had been under foreign domination for centuries. The Dean Ioan Oprea of Timișoara, together with the Prefect Aurel Cosma, received in the city the Romanian soldiers who had come to consecrate and defend the unity of Banat with the Kingdom of Romania. Tens of thousands of people from the villages of Timișoara celebrated the entry of the army into the main city of Banat, the last Romanian land liberated after the Great War.

The overwhelming role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat in the achievement of national unity cannot be disputed. On the contrary, historical objectivity obliges us to note the extent and seriousness with which hierarchs, protopopes, priests, theology professors and confessional teachers have participated over time in establishing a sense of unity among all Romanians.

The aim of the present research is to present synthetically and systematically how the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat was involved in supporting the national activities of its

believers, from the beginning of the 20th century until the province was taken over by the Romanian state. The main points of debate were:

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the topic

Research objectives

Historiography

Research methodology

I

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN BANAT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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1.2. The organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat at the beginning of the 20th century

1.3. Church life in the historical, political and cultural context of Banat

II.

CONFESSONAL SCHOOL FROM BANAT - PROMOTER OF IDEAS OF NATIONAL UNITY

2.1. The school network of the Church of Banat at the beginning of the 20th century

2.2. Confessional education under the impact of school laws from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Denationalization attempts and the reaction of the Church of Banat

2.3. Concrete actions against the Banat confessional school as a factor in the spread of Romanian culture

2.4. The challenges of religious education in Banat during the First World War

2.5. A tendentious project. The "cultural border" of Banat

2.6. The Theological and Pedagogical Institutes of Banat in the fight for national unity

III.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHURCH FROM BANAT IN THE NATIONAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT

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3.2. The Church and the support of the candidates of the Romanian National Party in the parliamentary elections

3.3. The Episcopate of Banat and the involvement in the affairs of the nation in the years before the First World War

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BETWEEN STATE POLICY AND NATIONAL SENTIMENT. THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN BANAT DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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4.3.3. Confessional teachers and their sacrifice for the national ideal during the Great War

4.4. The evolution of the official discourse of the Orthodox Church in Banat. From serving the monarchy to serving the people

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THE ORTHODOX CHURCH FROM BANAT AND THE GREAT UNION

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5.3. The Orthodox Church as the main institution in the national organization of Romanians

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VI.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TO THE INTEGRATION OF BANAT IN THE UNITARY ROMANIAN NATIONAL STATE (1918-1919)

6.1. The church in Banat during the foreign military occupation (1918-1919)

6.2. The church and the Romanian communities in support of the unity of the Banat

6.3. The administrative integration of the Banat into the Kingdom of Romania. The contribution of the Orthodox Church

ADDENDUM

Archdeacon Ioan Oprea of Timișoara - a little-known personality of the Great Union

REFERENCE

I. Archival funds

II. Edited documents

III. Periodicals

IV. General works

V. Special works

ANNEXES

The need for this work is also due to the fact that Banat was the only Romanian territory that was not integrated into the Romanian national state in 1918, being claimed by the Serbs. National struggles were fought here and, in some cases, the Serbian persecution was harsher than previous foreign rule. Since the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in this historical episode has been little known, an investigation of how the clergy handled the problems that arose is both a historiographical and ecclesiastical achievement.

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