

ALONE, AMONG ITS OWN: THE GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH IN TRANSYLVANIA BETWEEN 1918-1940

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Abstract: This study presents the historical evolution of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church between the two World Wars. After World War I, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church was forced to adapt to the new political, ideological and cultural context specific to Greater Romania. This study shows how the Greek-Catholic Church anchored itself in the legislation of the Romanian Kingdom after 1918. It analyses the need for an institutional restructuring of the Church and its new configuration as of 1930, outlining the educational challenges and the solutions the Church came up with, and making reference to ways of enhancing the spiritual life of the clergy and of the laity, the revitalisation of monastic life, the encouragement of religious and moralising publications, the building of places of worship and the idea of the ecclesiastical unity of the Romanian people.

Keywords: reorganisation, interconfessional competition, denominational schools, monastic orders, publications

Rezumat: Studiul de față prezintă evoluția istorică a Bisericii greco-catolice românești în intervalul cuprins între cele două războaie mondiale. După Primul Război Mondial, Biserica română unită a fost nevoită să se adapteze noului context politic, ideologic și cultural specific României Mari. Studiul prezintă modul în care s-a ancorat Biserica greco-catolică în legislația Regatului român după 1918. S-a analizat necesitatea restructurării instituționale a Bisericii și noua configurație în care ea a funcționat începând din 1930; s-au prezentat provocările de natură educațională și soluțiile pe care Biserica le-a identificat, nelipsind nici aspectele legate de dinamizarea vieții spirituale a preoților și credincioșilor, revitalizarea vieții monahale, impulsivarea publicațiilor cu caracter religios și moralizator, programul de edificare de lăcașuri de cult sau ideea unirii ecleziastice a românilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: reorganizare, concurență interconfesională, școli confesionale, ordine monahale, publicații

The Union of Transylvania with Romania opened new horizons for the Greek-Catholic Church. Part of the rich cultural-religious dowry that the last of the provinces which declared their union with the Romanian Kingdom in 1918 brought inside the new state, the Greek-Catholic Church optimistically approached the prospect of cohabitation with the „blood brothers.”² Its more distant or closer past justified it to adopt such an enthusiastic attitude. It was an institution which, since the 18th century, had championed the implementation of the rights promised to the Romanians at the time when the religious union with the Church of Rome had been accomplished. Moreover, the access of the

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² Turcu 2016, 102–117.

Greek-Catholic clergy to the most prestigious institutions of learning and culture in Europe at that time allowed for the emergence of an elite that made a significant contribution not only to the shaping of their own denominational group, but also to safeguarding the Romanian identity. Throughout the 19th century, representatives of the clergy and prominent figures of the Greek-Catholic laity became the mouthpiece of the fight for the national rights and freedoms of the Romanian community in the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Empire.³ In the last few months of World War I, through its extensive network of parishes and daughter churches, the Greek-Catholic Church contributed decisively to the institutionalisation of the Romanian structures of authority in Transylvania, by encouraging and directly involving its teachers and priests in setting up national councils and guards, which ensured the transfer of power from the old to the new administration that was gaining shape in those days.⁴ The Church's power of shaping public opinion showed its positive fruits also in terms of the success of the Assembly in Alba Iulia, which formalised the Transylvanian Romanians' desire for political union with the Romanian Kingdom.⁵ For all these reasons, the Greek-Catholic Church considered itself entitled to receive recognition for its efforts of strengthening Romanian national identity and ideals. The reality was going to disprove, one by one, these ambitious aspirations, and the causes of these unexpected disappointments for the Greek-Catholic Church must be sought in the political, cultural-ideological and religious context of the state that adopted it within its framework after December 1, 1918.

A notable difference from the previous period was related to the much lower motivation of the policymakers in Bucharest to act in order to protect the rights of the Catholic Church and promote its interests. Although he assumed the same religious (Catholic) identity as the former sovereigns of Vienna, the King of Romania, Ferdinand I, had not expressed a similar attitude toward the various Churches that recognised the authority of the sovereign pontiff and functioned on the territory of the new Romanian state, the Greek-Catholic Church being just one of those churches. Accepting the article of the constitution that required that the royal descendants should be baptised and educated in the confession of the vast majority of the Romanians, the sovereigns of the European dynasty of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen who reigned on the throne of Romania associated, at least at the level of the public image, the Reigning House with the Orthodox Church. This attachment imposed by the provisions of the fundamental law did not remain without negative consequences for the crowned heads of Romania. While, in the case of Carol I, the attitude of the Holy See did not radicalise (given that the royal family had lost, in early infancy, the only offspring to whom they had administered the sacrament of baptism in the Orthodox rite),⁶ things were different in the case of his successor to the Romanian throne. Respecting, for all of six children, the provisions of Article 82 of the constitution, Ferdinand I experienced the personal drama of excommunication from the Catholic Church for nearly two decades.⁷ Therefore, the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania had translated the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church from inside a state ruled by

³ Turcu 2019, 58–63.

⁴ Turcu 2017 a, 36–37.

⁵ Moga 2014, 144–145.

⁶ Sima 2016, 189–201.

⁷ Turcu 2015, 363–376.

a Catholic dynasty into one where the sovereign had to pay dearly for acts of infidelity to the faith professed by the Holy See.

The second factor that fundamentally changed the role and place of the Greek-Catholic Church compared to the previous period was the quantitative one. Formed and developed in an Empire marked by strong ethnic, confessional, linguistic, cultural, etc. divisions, but in which the majority of the population was subject to the sovereign pontiff, the Greek-Catholic Church was faced with unprecedented challenges upon the union of Transylvania with Romania.⁸ One of these concerned the Romanian character of the state in which it now functioned. More than two centuries after its birth, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church became part of a state entity that assumed the same ethnic identity as that of the believers it was shepherding.⁹ This happy coincidence generously fuelled the already mentioned optimistic projections of the Church about its future within the frames of the new Romanian state. The other primordial novelty was related precisely to the confessional profile of the state that had adopted it. More specifically, out of the total population of approximately 18,000,000 inhabitants, the vast majority of the citizens of New Romania (13–14,000,000) belonged to the Orthodox Church from a confessional point of view. In these circumstances, the Greek-Catholic Church was forced to function, for the first time since its creation, in a country that was vastly Orthodox, and to assume the status of „little sister“ (about 1,400,000–1,500,000 people) in the constellation of Romanian denominations within the young Romanian state.¹⁰

In close connection with this new reality was another, much more important one. Namely, the existing imbalance between the confession that was dominant numerically speaking and the one that came second, also in numerical terms (as seen above, this was Greek-Catholicism) was reflected in the interconfessional relations between the two denominations.¹¹ This was especially visible in the Transylvanian area, where the relative numerical balance between the two Romanian denominations before the province's union with Romania was doubled by relations that were if not benign, then at least neutral. That explains why, from the end of the 18th century to the late 19th century, the high prelates of the two Romanian Churches, together with several representatives of the clergy in their suborder, assumed the role of representing and demanding the fulfilment of the Romanians' national aspirations.¹² In other words, during the most important moments of the movement for the emancipation of the Transylvanian Romanians, the presence and contribution of the Romanian Church, with its two Transylvanian strands: Orthodox and Greek-Catholic, were of vital importance. It certainly mattered, in the manifestation of such collaborative and solidarity stances, that these efforts were made inside a state whose leadership was ethnically different from the mass of believers in each church; equally, each of them considered itself the constant target of premeditated policies directed against them by the Hungarian rulers, but also the keeper and defender of the Romanian identity

⁸ Botond 2002, 273.

⁹ Leslie 2004, 16.

¹⁰ In the 1930s, there were 13,108,227 registered Orthodox out of the total number of 18,057,028 inhabitants in Romania (accounting for 72.6%), while the Greek-Catholics had 1,427,391 members (accounting for 7.9% of the total population of Romania), see Manuilă 1938, XXIV.

¹¹ Turcu 2012 a, 283–292.

¹² See Gyémánt 1986.

heritage. A fundamental change of the ethnic and religious coordinates of the state in which they came to operate influenced the relationship between the two Romanian Churches in Transylvania, by increasing the competitiveness between them.¹³

Finally, relations within the family of Catholic denominations in the new Romanian state were not among the most positive. If we are to refer only to the Latin and Greek rites, we must say that the high prelates of the Greek-Catholic Church tended to distance themselves from the Roman Catholic bishops, particularly from the Transylvanian hierarchs. This is largely understandable, given that the latter had declared in public their discontent with the new national boundaries of the Kingdom of Romania, refusing, in the first phase, to submit the oath of fidelity to the sovereign of their new country, and the juxtaposition of the bishops of the Greek-Catholic with their dissenting peers could have caused serious damage to the Greek-Catholic Church, affecting the image of its national loyalty.¹⁴

Even under these circumstances, which were not exactly favourable, the Greek-Catholic Church was forced to find its place and, more significantly, to configure its role within the new state, primarily as regards the legislative projects on the agenda of the politicians in Bucharest after the end of the war.¹⁵ In particular, these projects included the Constitution, the law for the general regime of religious denominations, as well as the Concordat.

The need to develop a new fundamental law was based on the spectacular changes that the Romanian state had experienced as a result of the territorial unions proclaimed throughout 1918 and enshrined *grosso modo* through the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–1920.¹⁶ The propagation of the law in force at the level of the provinces that had declared their union with the Kingdom of Romania even after that moment was just a provisional situation, which had to be put an end to by developing a new regulatory framework, envisaged to contribute to the welding of the various territories that made up the young Romanian state and to homogenise and standardise administrative structures, making possible a tighter control over the new national territory from the political centre in Bucharest. Although the principles which were to form the basis of a new constitution were subjected to public debate immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, its adoption occurred after the first months of liberal governance, in March of 1923 to be precise. Among those who took a stand in those days on the values that should guide the new Constitution were the clergy of the two Romanian Churches, heavily seconded by representatives of the laity. As rightful members of the Senate, the bishops of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches actively participated in the intense debates that emerged in the country's Parliament, each „choir“ being aware of the fact that the prerequisites for the future development of the new Romanian state would depend on the content of the constitutional articles referring to the confessions. For that reason, the representatives of the Orthodox Church pleaded for perpetuating the status conferred to the confession of the great majority of Romanians under the Constitution of 1866, all the more so as the number of its members had grown in the above-mentioned proportions. By contrast, the Greek-Catholic Church believed that the principle included in the resolution of Union

¹³ Hitchins 1995, 135–136; Ghişa 2012, 54–82.

¹⁴ Maner 2007, 177–186.

¹⁵ Niga 2001, 226–227.

¹⁶ Bucur 2003, 16.

adopted in Alba Iulia, which decreed „equal justification and full, autonomous confessional freedom for all the religious denominations in the state“ had to underlie the new Romanian Constitution.¹⁷ The final formula included in the fundamental law adopted then was the result of a compromise. The position of the Orthodox Church was strengthened by its recognition as „dominant in the Romanian state,“ as long as the Greek-Catholic Church was assigned the prerogative of having „precedence over the other denominations.“ The sole quality recognised to both Churches in the same constitutional provision was that of being Romanian, which amounted to equalising their status from the point of view of the political decision-makers' right to intrude in the management and organisation of each of the two Romanian Churches.

The second legislative act that underpinned the functioning of religious entities, including the Greek-Catholic Church, was the law for the general regime of religious denominations. Such a regulation proved necessary given that the confessional landscape had diversified so much after the creation of Greater Romania. In the new confessional context after 1918, adaptation was necessary in a twofold sense: firstly, the Romanian state needed to adjust to the pluri-confessional realities within its territory, closely related not only to the old religious horizon in which they had operated for decades or centuries, but also to the traditions and laws that had regulated their activity throughout time; secondly, the religious denominations needed to adapt to the new political, cultural and religious context of the Romanian state, in which the Orthodox by far outnumbered the members of the other denominations and had been accustomed to a certain privileged treatment from the state.¹⁸ Although the first version of the draft law had been submitted to the consideration of the representatives of the religious denominations at the end of 1922, the government gave priority at that time, as we have seen, to the adoption of a new Constitution, and to regulating the functioning of the majority Church under the 1925 „Law and Statute for the Organisation of the Romanian Orthodox Church,“ a normative act that underlay not only the drafting of the law of minority religious denominations, but also their organisation and operation by respecting the rights conferred upon „the dominant Church in the Romanian state.“ Even if the leaders of the Catholic Church took firm positions on the different drafts of the law that had been submitted to their attention prior to its adoption in the spring of 1928, their well-founded views were neglected by the legislators.¹⁹ What made a difference in this situation was the fact that, at the level of the Ministry of Religious Denominations, the sole constant and well-informed representative of the Catholic Church was the priest-professor Zenovie Păclișanu. The Greek-Catholic Church was not well represented even at the level of the special commission created at the level of the Senate for discussing the draft of the law proposed by the Ministry. Except for I. Pecurariu, the Greek-Catholic Church had no other delegate in that body whose leadership had been conferred on the highest-ranking Orthodox prelate, Patriarch Miron Cristea. The development, by the officials and ministerial experts belonging to the Orthodox Church, of successive draft laws for the regulation of the regime of religious denominations and the verification of the contents of the law articles by representatives of the clergy of this

¹⁷ Biró 2004, 472.

¹⁸ Gillet 1995, 348–350; Turcu 2013, 367–406.

¹⁹ For an extensive approach, see Turcu 2017 a, 82–151.

Church was a further cause of disregarding the wishes of the Greek-Catholic Church about the manner of drafting the new legislation. Nor did the pressure exerted by the Holy See's diplomatic envoys to Romania on the leaders in Bucharest have the expected effect. The desirable option for the high Pontifical circles was that the law for the general regime of religious denominations should be adopted after the conclusion of the Concordat or that the Catholic Church in Romania should be exempted from that law. Given that none of these variants were agreed on by the Romanian side, and the secrecy surrounding the drafting of the last draft law generated suspicions and fears about the possible abuses that this draft might contain against the Greek-Catholic Church, its secular and clerical elite reacted promptly, urging the mass of believers to solidarity in order to protect the fundamental rights of the Church. The most important result of the call for the peaceful mobilisation of the Greek-Catholic priests and believers was the birth within the Greek-Catholic Church of a powerful body whose role in the revitalisation of the intellectual and cultural life of the Church and in the expression of the Greek-Catholic confessional identity was fundamental. This was the General Association of Greek-Catholic Romanians (hereafter abbreviated as A.G.R.U.). Only by way of an exemplary mobilisation of the laity and the major confrontation in the legislative body of the country, was it possible to remove it from the final text of the law the articles that could have endangered the smooth operation of the Greek-Catholic Church, for instance, articles on the right of ownership of ecclesiastical assets or on the fate of those properties in the case the believers converted from one denomination to another. The denouement of the process of adopting the law for the general regime of religious denominations was seen as a victory of the pro-Catholic movement in Romania. Taking into account the composition of Parliament (the vast majority of whose members were Orthodox), the fact that the Senators and MPs of the National Peasants' Party (a party considered, at the time, at least by some of its leaders, to be of Greek-Catholic orientation) withdrew from discussions, and considering that, throughout the debates, the government was under counselled by the Orthodox prelates (well anchored in the power structures by virtue of the patriarch's position within the Regency), the passing of the law for the general regime of religious denominations, by amending or eliminating the articles deemed dangerous for the Greek-Catholic Church was the result of a tenacious persuasion effort on the part of its elite (clerical and secular alike), of unconditional support from the Holy See, but also of the public pressure coming from the Greek-Catholic believers and not only.²⁰

As regards the conclusion of the Concordat between the Romanian state and the Holy See, the agreement had become useful and even necessary for both parties in terms of the changes that had occurred at the end of the war, both in terms of the number of subjects of the sovereign pontiff who lived within the borders of Romania, on the one hand, and the reconfigured strategies of papal diplomacy during the post-war period, on the other hand.²¹ Specifically, the number of citizens in the new Romanian state who recognised the authority of the sovereign pontiff had risen to almost 3 million. From the point of view of the ecclesiastical infrastructure, after the end of the war there were no fewer than 10 dioceses (6 of Latin rite and 4 of Greek rite, without taking into account the extensions of

²⁰ See Ardeleanu 1928.

²¹ Bucur 2017, 33–47.

the various hierarchical authorities from abroad on the new Romanian national territory). Although (more or less serious) attempts to establish a diplomatic convention between Romania and the Holy See had also existed in the pre-war period, concrete steps to perfect such an agreement were made in the final months of the war and in the following decade.

Since this was an international agreement, the task of negotiating and concluding it went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, given the nature of the treaty, rallied the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Arts in that endeavour. Taking into account the fact that during the 1920s there were persons of Orthodox confession at the helm of these institutions and, especially, that the governments that ruled the country were aware of the unpopularity of such a convention, its signing was postponed until 10 May 1927. Although it was deeply interested in the content of the future Concordat, the Greek-Catholic Church had to assume rather the role of a spectator of the official steps that were taken. This did not prevent it from expressing its views on the Concordat draft laws made either by the Romanians or by the Holy See, and from proposing its own versions of the texts that would underlie the diplomatic negotiations (as it happened through Vasile Lucaciu, Demetriu Radu and Alexandru Nicolescu, or on the occasion of the bishops' conference held in Bucharest on 28 February 1920). The common denominator of all the projects emanating from within the Greek-Catholic Church was the diversification and expansion of its network of dioceses, the preservation of its rights concerning religious education in schools, the reinforcement of its right to administer its movable and immovable property and to multiply it, even with the support of the state. The extensive debate and public impassioned media campaigns (fuelled, unsurprisingly, by the Orthodox Church), which questioned the desirability of Romania's reaching an agreement with the Holy See, trapped in their web the Greek-Catholic Church, the latter being accused of being part of an international organisation that altered the „Romanian soul,” or supported the „enemies of Romania.”²² It was only after the adoption of the said law which regulated the regime of religious denominations in Romania that the country's legislative body considered ratifying the Concordat, although it had been signed, as we have seen, in the spring of 1927. Held in an atmosphere of social tension and only after the Romanian government obtained from the State Secretariat of the Holy See a series of explanations of some articles in the text of the agreement, the heated parliamentary debates resulted in the adoption of the Concordat. For the Greek-Catholic Church, this meant clarifying its relations with the Romanian state, but also a new institutional-organisational configuration, adapted if not to all of its needs, at least to its stringent ones.

Regarding the new administrative-jurisdictional structure, it should be noted that the Union of Transylvania with Romania imposed on the Greek-Catholic Church the need to adapt its hierarchical and organisational infrastructure to the new state in which it came to function.²³ It was necessary, first of all, to reduce the existing imbalance of jurisdictional territories of the existing administrative structures (the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraş and the suffragan Dioceses of Oradea, Gherla and Lugoj) and the number of faithful belonging to each. The more extensive dioceses were those whose cities of residence were located inside the historical province of Transylvania (the Archdiocese and, respectively,

²² See Ghişa 2010.

²³ Georgescu 1929, 796.

the Diocese of Gherla, which was composed of over 500 parishes and more than 560,000 souls), while those placed outside the perimeter had a smaller area, becoming, after the creation of Greater Romania, border eparchies (the Dioceses of Oradea and Lugoj). The second major objective was the intention to multiply the episcopal power centres. This objective proved to be of the utmost importance because it served both the need to make the church administration more efficient and flexible (thus attempting to bring the shepherds closer to the mass of believers) and the need to counter the extension of the network of Orthodox dioceses in areas with a higher concentration of Greek-Catholic believers, such as Maramureş, the north-west of the country or the centre of Transylvania, where such church structures had been established or planned to be created. The avalanche of projects that the Greek-Catholic Church representatives launched in those times included the foundation of several dioceses and even the transfer of the residence of the Greek-Catholic Metropolitan Bishop from Blaj to Cluj.²⁴ Since the latter proposal was not accepted entirely even within the episcopate at the time, the only notable changes enshrined in the text of the Concordat (the agreement upon which depended the whole reorganisation of the Roman Catholic Church in Romanian, hence, also that of the Greek-Catholic Church) were those related to the transfer of the episcopal see from Gherla to Cluj and the creation of a new diocese in the northern part of the country, one whose residence was eventually set up in Baia Mare.²⁵ Finally, the third goal of the Greek-Catholic Church after the Union was the creation of new parishes in the extra-Carpathian space, where the number of Greek-Catholic believers had risen, as they looked for jobs in towns such as Craiova, Ploieşti, Galaţi, Brăila and, of course, Bucharest. In the capital of the country there was the largest community of Greek-Catholic believers (estimated, immediately after World War I, at 15,000–20,000, with a growing trend throughout the interwar period), for the benefit of whom the first place of Greek-Catholic worship outside Transylvania had been built and consecrated in 1909: the Church of „St. Basil the Great“ on Polonă St. All the attempts of the Metropolitan See of Blaj, under whose ecclesiastical authority the Holy See had placed the Greek-Catholics in all the provinces outside Transylvania, to organise them in parishes so as to preserve their own religious identity were impeded by material hardships and by the opposition of the Orthodox Church, which could not accept the expansion and consolidation of the Greek-Catholic Church, in an area in which it did not have ancient roots. This is how any initiative to establish a hierarchical centre in the capital of the country was doomed to failure. Only in 1940 was a vicar bishop introduced for Bucharest and the Old Kingdom, with the residence in the city on the banks of the Dâmboviţa. The first to occupy this ecclesiastical position was Vasile Aftenie.

From an institutional-administrative point of view, the Greek-Catholic Church was reorganised in this period under the provisions of the bull *Sollemni Conventione* of 5 June 1930 in a *unicam provinciam ecclesiasticam* directly subjected to the authority of the Holy See. The Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraş was led, during this period, by the archbishops and metropolitans Vasile Suci (1920–1935) and Alexandru Nicolescu (1936–1941); the Diocese of Oradea was led by Demetriu Radu (1903–1920) and Valeriu Traian Frenţiu (1922–1952); the Diocese of Gherla, which in 1930 became the Diocese of

²⁴ Turcu 2012 b, 111–124.

²⁵ Turcu 2012 c, 83–108.

Cluj-Napoca, was shepherded by Iuliu Hossu (1917–1970); the Diocese of Lugoj was led by Traian Frențiu (1913–1922), Alexandru Nicolescu (1922–1926) and Ioan Bălan (1936–1959), and the newly created eparchy of Maramureș, by Alexandru Rusu (1931–1963).²⁶

One of the thorniest problems for the Greek-Catholic Church in the period between the two World Wars was that of education. First of all, the Church was forced to relinquish its vast network of denominational schools,²⁷ which had assumed in time a fundamental role not only in disseminating elementary education among peasant families, whose children attended them, but also in preserving the benchmarks of confessional and national identity. The advance of such phenomena as secularisation or religious indifference in the Romanian society led the Church to face the problem of fewer classes of religion in secondary schools belonging to the state. In these circumstances, the entire effort of the Church had to be focused on strengthening its own network of educational institutions and on building new ones. Between the two world wars there were normal (pedagogical) schools in Blaj, Oradea and Gherla, and high schools in localities such as Blaj and Beiuș. In order to increase the quality of the theological training of future priests, efforts were made to establish a central seminary in Blaj, where the highest quality education was to be provided to those who would become shepherds of souls. But the priesthood has also become less attractive as time passed. The reasons behind this unfortunate reality were related to the ever growing need out for personnel in the expansive network of state schools or in the dense bureaucratic apparatus, and this made young people's interest in the priesthood decline significantly, while the number of people abandoning this vocation grew alarmingly at the time.²⁸ The prospect of a transfer to urban areas and, of course, a higher level of pay in educational institutions and in the administration were sufficient reasons for so many priests to abandon their post, while the priesthood was no longer a springboard for social ascent and prestige, as it had used to be. In these circumstances, the Church had to think of a series of strategies to overcome the crisis. The plan to join the diocesan seminaries in a central one was unsuccessful. On the contrary, in Lugoj, the seminary opened there in the autumn of 1913 by Valeriu Traian Frențiu had to close its doors after World War I because of the low number of young people enrolled. Nor were the plan to establish a Faculty of Catholic Theology and a dormitory for the future students either at the University of Bucharest or at the University of Cluj more successful. The opposition of the Orthodox hierarchy was decisive each and every time, both when the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Instruction, Ion Borcea, a member of the first cabinet headed by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, made such a proposal, and when the great historian Nicolae Iorga resumed it in 1932, in the draft law on higher education he created as chairman of the Council of Ministers and as Minister of Public Instruction and Religious Denominations. This is why the Greek-Catholic Church was forced to limit the training of its future priests to the theological seminars (academies) in Blaj, Oradea, and Cluj. An important success in the field of the education of the future priests was the foundation of the *Pio Romeno* College on 12 May 1930 and its official opening on 9 May 1937. Although it served only as a hostel in which the Romanian students in the capital of

²⁶ For the biography and activity of these hierarchs, see Știrban, Știrban 2005.

²⁷ Bucur 2006, 133–138.

²⁸ Bârlea 1998, 92–93.

the Catholic world were accommodated, it played an essential role in facilitating access to the highest quality education by providing scholarships to the most industrious students.

One of the most important achievements of the period was the reactivation of monastic life in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church.²⁹ It was a necessary undertaking, given the already mentioned crisis of priestly vocations, but also the major challenges to traditional religious identities brought by the diversification and intensification of the activity of religious sects. Although this goal was expressed on the occasion of the three provincial councils organised in the second half of the 19th century (in 1872, 1882 and 1900), the revival of monastic life within the Greek-Catholic Church occurred only in the interwar period. A significant contribution in this respect was made by Vasile Suci, the first Greek-Catholic Metropolitan of Greater Romania, who obtained, in the audience he had with Pope Benedict XV in April 1921, the approval for the founding of monastic orders of the Romanian rite. The sovereign pontiff even allowed him to gather in congregations all those who were already active in similar organisations of the Catholic Church. The first monastic order created in the era was a feminine one: the Congregation of the Sisters of the Mother of God. The nucleus around which the new Congregation emerged was by mother Febronia Mureşan, the daughter of a clergyman, who had made her novitiate in the Congregation of the Poor Franciscans and who carried out charitable actions in Târgu-Mureş after the war. The first mission entrusted to the brave women who joined the organisation as soon as it was set up (among them being the daughter of Minister Dimitrie Greceanu) was to provide protection and education to children who benefited from shelter and food in the modest, but so necessary orphanage founded in Blaj in autumn 1918. After the transfer of that social settlement to Obreja, the Congregation established its residence there. A part of its members ensured the primary training of the hundreds of poor children, whom they protected, enabling them to discover in workshops the secrets of some trades that might help them earn their daily living as adults. In the following years, the Congregation acquired more and more adherents, diversifying its spheres of activity. The number of its territorial branches grew. The main places where the members of this Congregation performed educational, charitable, medical and cultural activities were Blaj, Cluj, Geoagiu de Jos, Aiud, Craiova, Brăila, Bucharest etc. During the period between the two world wars, the Basilian Order gained „roots“ in the Greek-Catholic metropolitan province. Up to that point, the few monks who had been active had followed the spiritual rules prescribed by St. Basil the Great, but had not belonged to that monastic organisation.³⁰ Even before World War I, in the Diocese of Lugoj, there had been an attempt to restore the Basilian Order in the convent of Prislop, the mastermind behind this project being Fr. Leon Manu. After the end of the war, the project in question received an impetus from the entire episcopate, headed by the bishop, Metropolitan Vasile Suci, who was also trying to establish other monastic centres where aspirants of that monastic organisation could carry out their novitiate and then import the prescribed cohabitation rules, laying the foundation of such communities in Romania. The solution chosen in the end was for Augustin Pop, along with three other debutants (including his brother, Iuliu, Atanasie Maxim and Gheorghe Alic), to undertake their novitiate in the Basilian monastery of Krikov, in Poland. After a year and a half, the

²⁹ Turcu 2017 a, 329–333.

³⁰ Furtună 2016, 85–104.

first generation of Romanian monks belonging to the Basilian Order was repatriated, Fr. Augustin, Fr. Lucian and brother Vasile settling at Prislop Monastery. Fr. Augustin became the abbot of that monastic settlement, on August 1, 1924, and Atanasie Maxim became abbot of the monastery of Bixad, in 1925. As abbot of the monastery in the Land of Oaş, Maxim was able to attract to Bixad the group of monks residing at Prislop (a place where monks might have felt limited as regards the development of their monastic community). This led to the emergence of a new reformed Basilian community in the bosom of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church. It was very active and played an important role in the expansion of the Order of St. Basil the Great in Romania. Gradually, the principles of Basilian monastic life spread to other monastic centres (Moisei, Nicula, etc.), penetrating with greater difficulty the territory of the archdiocese, which eventually happened in 1938, when several monks settled in Obreja. The ratification of the Concordat between Romania and the Holy See³¹ made it possible to launch the procedure for the establishment of the Romanian province of the Order, in 1937, when the province of the „Holy Apostles Peter and Paul“ was founded, as part of the Basilian Order of St. Iosafat, whose superior general resided in Rome in 1932.³² The first elected provincial superior was Fr. Atanasie Maxim. Other monastic orders that were active among the Greek-Catholic Romanians (and not only) were: the Assumptionists, the Jesuits, the Franciscans, etc.

A more dynamic spiritual life and strengthening confessional identity were other features of the period under consideration.³³ These were goals shared by the Greek-Catholic clergy and believers alike. Among the means used for the improvement of the intellectual and moral horizon of the priests were spiritual exercises, introduced in the Greek-Catholic Church by Valeriu Traian Frențiu, during his episcopacy in Lugoj, and generalised in all the dioceses in the inter-war period. Such practices involved the clergy spending a time (usually three days) in prayer, meditation and reflection. Also, in order to expand the cultural and moral training of priests (who continued to represent, at least in rural areas, a model of social conduct and „guardians“ of Christian values), and to increase solidarity between them, priestly associations were encouraged. These organisations were: the „Association of Worshipping Priests“ (Valeriu Traian Frențiu introduced it in the Diocese of Lugoj and in that of Oradea, with the purpose of pursuing the cult of the Eucharist and celebrating Holy Mass on a daily basis); the „Association of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana“ (it was meant for celibate priests and promoted intense prayer and meditation); the „Association of the Holy Apostle Peter“ (it was founded in 1936 in the archdiocese, expanding subsequently to the Diocese of Cluj-Gherla and, after World War II, at the level of the whole Greek-Catholic Church; it was intended for the married and widowed priests, promoting canonical hours, the study of theology works, the sacrament of confession, and the frequent celebration of the Holy Mass). Among the believers, there also emerged a strong associationist-religious spirit.³⁴ This fact was perceived as a necessity, given that in those years an important topic of conversation in certain circles of the Greek-Catholic intelligentsia concerned the

³¹ For a relevant analysis on the consequences of the conclusion of the Concordat between Romania and the Holy See, see Nóda 2010, 281–301.

³² Rotche 2011, 101.

³³ Bârlea 1998, 94–95.

³⁴ For an extensive approach, see Rotche 2011.

possibility of the laity becoming involved in the decision-making structures of the Church, according to the model of the Orthodox Church. The vehement opposition of the pontifical authorities to such a project meant that the energies of the Greek-Catholic laity were to be devoted to a large number of Marian organisations, associations and congregations, Societies of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Rosary Associations, the „St. Helen“ Society of female believers and its masculine counterpart, the „St. Paul“ Society (the last two appearing in the early 1920s in the parish of St. Basil the Great in Bucharest), etc. Taken individually or together, these societies answered the need to keep the piety of the faithful awake and to strengthen their confessional identity. Of course, the most active and well organised was the above-mentioned A.G.R.U.,³⁵ whose branches went from the diocesan level to the parochial one. The annual congresses of the Association, held in different localities of Transylvania, were attended by hierarchs, intellectuals and very many believers, becoming a space for the debate of the most pressing issues affecting the life of the Church. The need to include young people within the Church's own organisation determined the creation in 1931 of the Association of Greek-Catholic Romanian Students (A.S.T.R.U.). With its headquarters in Cluj, it organised conferences, gatherings, charitable actions etc. to stimulate the piety of the faithful, a decisive contribution belonged to the popular missions, introduced before World War I and continued over the following period. What turned out to be much more important in the era, in terms of their popularity, were religious pilgrimages.³⁶ This practice was stimulated by the appearance of several monastic pilgrimage centres on the confessional map of Greek-Catholicism. These attracted thousands and even tens of thousands of believers year after year. This was the case, for example, of Lupşa Monastery in the Apuseni Mountains, Prislop Monastery, Strâmba Monastery, or Moiseiu Monastery. But the greatest pilgrimages, which took place at the Feast of the Assumption and which gathered believers from all corners of Transylvania (and not only), were those from Bixad Monastery (belonging, after 1930, to the newly established Diocese of Maramureş) and from Nicula Monastery in the Diocese of Cluj-Gherla. Both religious settlements were used by the members of the Basilian Order (there was also a printing office and, after World War I, an orphanage at the monastery from the Land of Oaş). But the practice of pilgrimages also spread across the country's borders, the most sought-after destination for Greek-Catholic believers being, of course, Rome. During the inter-war period a number of pilgrimages were organised to the Eternal City, for instance, in 1925 (on the occasion of the Holy Year, when the 1600th anniversary of the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea was celebrated), and in 1933, 1936, or 1937, on the occasion of the inauguration of the *Pio Romeno* College on Gianicolo Hill. Canonical visitations contributed massively to supervising the parishioners' mores and ensured the proximity of the „herd“ to its spiritual shepherds. All of the bishops were interested to know the dioceses they led and to alleviate, as far as possible, the sorrows of their believers, but none of them surpassed Bishop Iuliu Hossu (nicknamed, for this reason, the „bishop of canonical visitations“), who was at the helm of the most numerous diocese of the Greek-Catholic Church. Not once, such „apostolic pilgrimages“ of the bishops through the dioceses they led were occasioned by the sanctification of new places of worship. The interwar period is also significant for the construction of new churches

³⁵ See Tăutu 1931; Rus 2009.

³⁶ For an excellent analysis of the phenomenon of pilgrimage in the Romanian society, see Bănică 2014.

(both in cities, where the phenomenon of Romanianizing³⁷ them was in full swing, and in villages). Some of them became genuine architectural symbols. Such new buildings, representative for the Greek-Catholic Church, were those in Braşov, Târgu Mureş, Zalău and Satu Mare. The architecture and the interior decoration of these new churches made it possible to perpetuate the canon of Byzantine art, combined with indigenous aesthetic elements and with aspects pertaining to the great Western architectural styles.

The period between the two world wars was significant in the life of the Catholic Church for the abundant and diverse publications that saw the light of print. The publishing plan included both catechetical-religious literature, such as prayer books, liturgical books, textbooks, and treatises of dogmatics (Metropolitan Vasile Suciuc distinguished himself in the field through treatises of fundamental dogmatic theology and special dogmatic theology, which were published before World War I and reprinted in the inter-war period),³⁸ and books of sermons, meditations, hagiographies, etc. There were also works of history, several specialists in the field bringing major contributions to the investigation of the past of the Greek-Catholic Church and not only. The most important were: Zenovie Păclişanu, Iacob Radu (brother of Bishop Demetriu Radu), Ioan Georgescu, Elie Dăianu, Ioan Boroş, Nicolae Brînzeu, etc. An important role in informing and broadening the cultural horizon of the readers was played by religious magazines, newspapers, and calendars. In addition to „Cultura creştină,” published since before the war, newspapers were founded in almost all the dioceses: „Vestitorul,” in Oradea; „Curierul creştin,” the official publication of the Diocese of Cluj-Gherla; „Sionul românesc,” in Lugoj. In diaristics, „Unirea” continued to be the most influential (along with „Unirea poporului”), but there were other journalistic projects as well: „Albina,” „Viaţa creştină,” etc.

One of the characteristics of the period was also the intense synodal activity.³⁹ Synods had become absolutely necessary considering the great upheavals experienced by the Church after World War I. The Church needed to adapt and find solutions to the major challenges it was facing. Deanery and diocesan synods were held in each such administrative unit of the Church, at different intervals of time. A provincial council could not be organised, although such an assembly would have been most welcome at the time. Even so, the topics of discussion in synods were of utmost topicality and importance for the Church: from the wages of priests, to the multiplication of the capital for funds and foundations (from which many scholarships continued to be granted to outstanding pupils and students between the two world wars); from measures for intensifying and diversifying catechisation, to those relating to the preservation and expansion of the Church's material heritage; from a growing efficiency of the church administration to the establishment of metropolitans in the Romanian Church Greek-Catholic, etc.⁴⁰ The latter theme concerned the clergy and, especially, their superiors, given that the old custom of acceding to the highest rung in the Greek-Catholic Church no longer pleased anyone.⁴¹ After consulting the episcopate, Metropolitan Vasile Suciuc began drafting a regulation for establishing his

³⁷ Biró 2004, 480–490.

³⁸ Turcu 2017 b, 317–336.

³⁹ Turcu 2017 a, 475–543.

⁴⁰ Rotche 2013, 411–415.

⁴¹ Turcu 2017 a, 544–583.

successors to the metropolitan see, which he submitted to the Holy See for approval. The opposition of the pontifical authorities to some provisions of the normative act and their belated resolution led to the first and only election of a metropolitan in Greater Romania (the electoral synod held in Blaj on May 7, 1935) to be held under provisional auspices.

Finally, one of the great themes that generated passionate discussions, especially within some intellectual circles, was the Union of the two Romanian Churches. A subject of such importance could only be viewed from a multiple and often contradictory perspective.⁴² The Orthodox Church believed that with the realisation of the Romanians' political and national unity after World War I, the political and cultural role of the Greek-Catholic Church had ended, and the clergy and their faithful were called to unity of faith with the vast majority of Romanians.⁴³ From this perspective, the Greek-Catholic Church was regarded as a mere stage in the history of the Romanians, and the perpetuation of its existence would be a simple reminder of the religious schisms from the end of the 17th century inside the Romanian community. In the early 20th century, this fragmentation risked rendering the political unity achieved in 1918 vulnerable.⁴⁴ The Greek-Catholic Church, however, dared to hope that once the political unity of the Romanian nation was achieved, its Latin roots had to be happily intertwined with the faith of the Roman Church so that Romanians could align themselves, as quickly as possible, the level of development and civilisation of the Latin peoples in Europe.⁴⁵ This is why the Greek-Catholic Church best corresponded to the Romanian ethos because it „poured the enlightened soul of the West into the Eastern body of our nation.”⁴⁶ How far this ideal would be from the solution found within the Greek-Catholic Church was to be demonstrated by the events that occurred after World War II, which opened a new page in its history: that of ordeal, persecutions and suffering, without which there is no true Resurrection.

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⁴² See, for instance, Theodorian-Carada 1928; Ghibu 1931.

⁴³ Gudea 2000, 54.

⁴⁴ Alzati, Evola 2016, 646–650.

⁴⁵ Biró 2004, 464.

⁴⁶ The quotation is an extract from the speech delivered by Metropolitan Vasile Suciuc after submitting the oath of allegiance to King Ferdinand I. For details, see Turcu 2017 a, 273–275.

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