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PHD THESIS

**ECCLESIOLOGICAL PECULIARITY IN GREEK CATHOLIC
EPARCHY OF ORADEA IN ITS FIRST CENTURY OF
EXISTENCE**

- Summary -

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This paper is a modest contribution to the deepening of issues regarding the organization and activity of the Greek Catholic Diocese in its first century of existence, focusing in particular on the life and activity of the bishops who led it in its first century. The content of the work is structured in four chapters. In the first one, entitled „Transylvania - a space of religious confluences: catholicism and orthodoxy” we tried to synthesize the process of Christianization of Romanians with particularities, emphasizing the fact that this is the only nation from the family of Latin people to practice the Christian religion of Byzantine rite. The chapter is a short presentation of the history of Romanians, beginning from their Christianization and until the unification with the Church of Rome (1697-1701).

In the second chapter we spoke about the Council or the Ferrara-Florence Synod (1438-1439), as a unifying foundation of part of Romanians from Transylvania with the Church of Rome, showing that it represented the most important attempt for unifying the two traditions of Christianity: oriental and western.

The subject of the council was: the adjunction of „Filioque”, the purgatory, the unleavened bread and the papal primacy, these problems discussed and kept in historiography under the name of „the Florentine decrees”. It represented the unique attempt in the Middle Ages to rebuild the church’s unity between west and east through treaties. Although it was accomplished, later, by the unification with the Church of Rome of the Ukrainians from the Polish kingdom, at Brest (Bierastsie), in Belarus (1596), by of Ruthenians from Superior Hungary (1646-1692), as by the attempt of unification of the Serbs from Hungary (1688). These experiences of unity represented for the Romanians from Transylvania a pattern for the Unification that will be accomplished between the years 1697-1701.

The four decrees which separated the two Churches, catholic and orthodox, discussed at Ferrara-Florence Council were accepted by the Romanians from Transylvania, as basis for their accession among the oriental catholic Churches. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to make known the history of the Ferarra-Florence Council, without which we cannot understand correctly the forming and the activity of the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek Catholic. The purpose of this brief presentation is to elucidate the preparation of the unification of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church with Rome, described in the third chapter. In this, it is analyzed the birth of Romanian Church United with Rome, the historical, theological and ecclesiological

reasons for which a part of the Romanians from Transylvania, led by bishop Teofil Seremi (1692-1697), were separated by the Orthodox Church and united to the Rome, Greek-Catholic Church. This chapter also discusses on the protestant reform, describing its influence on Romanians. It was born as a satisfaction of spiritual thirst, succeeding in comparison with other heretic movements, to state and to impose in many countries in Europe, thanks to political and economic support of the German princes, who adopted it as a state religion. This led, essentially, to a massive spiritual awakening, which marked the faith and life of western Christianity although it had also social political and economic repercussions on European life. It was triggered in a period marked by rich cultural and political changes (Renaissance thinking, the geographical discoveries, the birth of national monarchies) and led to crushing the monolithic structure of the Roman Catholic Church, appearing as a great disintegrative force of medieval Catholicism. Contrary, to widespread opinion the Protestant Reformation was a European phenomenon and not national one, i.e. German and then exported to various European countries, it simultaneously manifested in various forms, in many European countries. Luther's initiative was the detonator of a massive process, which had a lot of protagonists, and implied, with different results, the whole Christianity from Western Europe, including England and also Central Europe.

This chapter also presents the unification with the catholic church of Romanian churches from north-east of Hungary, especially from the region of Satmar. Here, it is described also, those who acted for the Unification, especially, cardinal Leopold Kollonich. He was the leader of commission in 1688, and he succeeded to prepare the notorious document entitled: *Einrichtungswerk des Königreich Ungarn* ("The reorganization of the Kingdom of Hungary"), in which he supported the establishment of an ample movement for unifying of orthodox nations with the Church of Rome, supporting in the same time, measures of social and political nature in favor of the future catholic clergy. The unifying pattern of Ruthenians from Hungary had a major importance for the Romanians from Transylvania, on one hand because the territory inhabited by Ruthenians bordered with that region of the Empire, and on the other hand, in the villages from north Transylvania, proselytizing in favor of the Romanians' unification was initiated before its accomplishment, through the efforts made by the Greek Catholic bishop of Munkács, Iosif de Camillis. A major role in preparing the unification of orthodox churches from Transylvania with the catholic church were played by Jesuit missionaries, led by Father Ladislaus Bárány. These

Catholic missionaries tried to persuade the Romanian church leaders that only through unification with the Roman church the Orthodox faith could be saved by the danger of Calvinist conversion. This idea found, therefore, consensus among some members of Orthodox clergy. The following part describes the three synods of the Romanian unification with the Church of Rome, as well as the history of the Leopoldine Diplomas, and finishes with some historiographical consideration on its accomplishments.

In the last chapter, the longest of the thesis, we tried to bring to light the establishment of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea. In this part I discussed the necessity of its establishment, emphasizing the difficulties arisen and its evolution under the leadership of the first bishops Meletie Kovács (1748-1775), suffragan bishop, and Moise Dragoş (1775-1787), followed, as I said before by Ignatie Darabant (1788-1805), Samuil Vulcan (1806-1839), Vasile Erdélyi (1843-1862) and Iosif Papp-Szilágyi (1863-1873). In this chapter, also, I spoke about the big ideologies of that time as: *josefinism*, Enlightenment or the Catholic *Aufklärung*, spread in Transylvania and in Bihor county, at the end of the 18th century, treating also about echoes of the French Revolution, which, in a way or other influenced the development of the diocese. I dedicated a considerable part of the chapter to the policy of tolerance by Joseph the 2nd, where I proposed to analyze and describe the reforms started by Maria Theresa, to reach as follows, to the reformism of her son, even from the years when the latter was co-regent and to the most profound ecclesiological reforms, which had its climax with the 1781 Edict of Tolerance and its further applications. In the Habsburgic Empire, the intent of “Imperial Majesties,” Maria Theresa and Joseph the 2nd, based on enlightenment ideas of “leveling up” the standards of civilization of the people from their empire, everything in the spirit of rational, pragmatism and constructive enlightenment, meant to make people better, more responsible, as “citizens” subject to state but in the same time protected by its institutions. No wonder, that in this situation, that many of them were seduced by the idea of unconditioned benignity of the emperor, the policy of Maria Theresa, but especially of her son Josef the 2nd. The first, has intensified her efforts to make life easier for the peasant serfdom, from the countries of “the crown” through those famous regulations of land records tasks (1767-1772), and the second one stepped further, as it’s known, freeing them, in 1785, of “servitude”. They were also interested by their religious life, drawing them to the “true and better” of them all, Catholicism, not necessarily through “brute force” as

the Romanian historians used to say before 1989, but through that of persuasion as otherwise it cannot be explained, as a local specificity of course, why there were those “queries” or inquiries made over the years the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea, through special committees constituted for this purpose, of several Romanian parishioners reported as Catholics to see if they remain determined and particularly if they know the differences between catholic and orthodox faith. These weren’t even known by all the priests, let alone the followers, even if, since the early years after the unification they were made by the catholic priests to utter those “commitments”, mentioned above. And it proves, if not their superficial Christianity, at least it remains only at the level of instincts. In any case we can conclude that the unification laid the light of culture on Romanians and thus it prepared reception of great desideratum of their nation. This assertion can be easily proved by the study of the lives and works of the bishops from the first century of existence of the Church mentioned, Meletie Kovács, suffragan bishop, Moise Dragoș, Ignatius Darabant, Samuil Vulcan, Vasile Erdélyi and Joseph Papp-Szilágyi, on which we focused along this modest work.

Each of them wanted to “their spiritual sons”, to remain unshakeable in the Unification, thus “Catholics”, but also, as their compatriots, keepers of the liturgical rite practiced by them, and thus belonging to their own “nation”. The unification, therefore, meant not a “betrayal”, as it was described by some of the Romanian historians, but strangely, for those who adopted it, a return to the spirit and conscience of Latinity, here were they lived, in the vicinity of ugro-finics, in west, and in the sea of Slav peoples who surrounded them. Another specificity of the ecclesiastical institution of which we spoke, would be that it, Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea, in its first century of existence, was favored, more like other dioceses from the Empire, by the generosity of the emperor, materialized by the wealth they had access, by possessing in 1781, “for eternal ownership” of the Domain of Beiuș, in whose exploitation were gained, despite of the unfertile soil, considerable income. The Habsburgic Court had set up even the way of spending these revenues, which proved beneficial for the parishioners of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea. The Church was, thus, indebted to the emperor, so to the “state”, “listening” both to him and to the Holy Pope from Rome, even when the former wanted to dictate the affairs of its administration, trying to bring order to the policy of the foundation of monasteries, and in the operating of religious orders, considered once too many, and useless in the Joseph the 2nd

opinion. He would have liked to see, in his kingdom, a “State Church” or for the state, involved in the process of civilizing the people from it. He was understood by all the hierarchs who acted according to his commandments, when, they did not contradict, in essence, their belonging to the “descendant” of Saint Peter. It is enough to follow, in the Greek-Catholic diocese of Oradea, the activity of the first two hierarchs, Moise Dragoş and Ignatie Darabant, fighting for the “widening”, for their compatriots, of the unification, and in the same time, for their “enlightening” through school. For the shepherd, both the Oradea hierarchs and the Greek Catholic Church, in general, were, so to say, a *totum factum*, from the point of view of carrying everything that meant the adaptation to life, for the improvement of everyday life, their moral posture. In front of Meletius Kovács, Moise Dragoş, Ignatius Darabant and Samuil Vulcan, and their consistories had, for example, in court, the “ponoslar”¹ partners of couples, or those dissatisfied with the behavior of husbands or wives, on the verge of separation or divorce.

The Bihor County National Archives, Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea fund, stores a lot of these complaints, with resolutions given by the bishops mentioned above, the most involved in such actions was Samuil Vulcan. Commitments or covenants of peace, taken before the bishop of the spouses, in writing and under oath, had the gift, most often, to bring the best thoughts, and reconciliation. And also the bishops were in charge not only for the Greek Catholic parishioners but for their children because they offered them scholarships “hurry-scurry”, to those deserving, of course, no matter of religious rite. It is enough mentioned here that in the list of school results from the gymnasium of Beiuş, on the years 1842/43, there are a lot of young man from orthodox villages, of which we can assume that many lived and “ate” in the school. Through them, i.e. bishops, officials did implement hygienic measures or medical treatment, but also smallpox vaccination or “cow shed”, made early on diocesan territory, shortly after it was discovered. And the concern for welfare and improvement of inhabitants daily living did not eluded the bishops from Oradea. To the peasants were “leased” for care, sheep’s and cattle, on the huge pastures of the Domains of Apuseni mountains, at moderate prices, of course, and there were “approved” cutting for firewood and construction on its secular forests. They taught the inhabitants how “to save” their buildings, in many villages barns and grain stores, with specific regulations, operating as a cooperative model, which saved from destruction, in time of disaster, many of the Romanian

¹ The term originates from the Hungarian “panaszló” which means defendant.

peasant families. They were recommended by bishops, deans and priests, of course, to grow silkworms, or to plant strawberries for food, as from the sale of cocoons there were obtained important completitive revenues.

The ecclesiastical institution was, thus, careful not only for the souls of the believers, but also for their bodies, believing that starvation means destroying their “earthly bodies” made of the “image and likeness of God”, a true suicide *in nucce*, and thus a mortal sin. It didn’t always succeed in this project, but succeeded in others, linked, as I said before, at the emancipation through culture of their parishioners, so it is hard to imagine what would have happened with the Romanians from Transylvania without the unification of a considerable part to the Church of Rome.

Key words: council, synod, diploma, ecclesiology, church, pope, patriarch, metropolitan, bishop, diocese, parish, deanery, priest, vicar, dean, parishioner, union, Christianization, Christianity, Reform, Counter-Reformation, Protestant, Byzantine, Latin, confession, religion, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Orthodox, prince, emperor, empire, decree, edict, court, nation, petition, culture, school, education, seminar, Transylvania, Oradea, Beiuș, *Partium*, Bihor, Munkács, Satu Mare, Vienna, Rome.

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