

“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY  
“ISIDOR TODORAN” DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

**The Relations between the Romanian Orthodox  
Church and the Royal House of Romania  
between 1918-1947  
-PhD Thesis Summary-**

Scientific Coordinator:

Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Alexandru MORARU

PhD Candidate:

Paul-Ersilian ROȘCA

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*Nihil sine Deo* (Nothing without God), the motto of the Royal House of Romania, represented for 81 years the principle which the four Kings who ruled in Romania tried to make the core of their kingship. Nowadays, in a world with a growing tendency to completely remove the religious element from the public space, especially from the political-administrative areas of the society, the idea of substantiating and legitimizing the exercise of power starting with the Christian values has become inconceivable. However, things were different within a monarchy, the Sovereign power derived from his quality of being anointed by God, and invested with a power that did not rely only on the legitimacy offered by a series of laws and secular principles. This undeniably meant also establishing special relations and connections with the Church, and hence, the two fundamental institutions of the State were linked in an inextricable symbiosis, operating at the level of institutional and personal relations among their members. The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House of Romania made no exception, proving to be the two most important milestones of the Romanian nation during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first five decades of the twentieth century.

Oftentimes working together and doubtlessly sharing the same national ideals, the Church and the Monarchy made their decisive contribution to the formation and development of Modern Romania, as several referential moments have brought the two institutions to the fore. We would like to highlight a fact that might otherwise go unnoticed. Starting with the Organic Regulations, continuing with the legislation under the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and ending with the three Constitutions adopted in 1866, 1923 and 1938 (the latter showing a few exceptions), the princely/royal institution was no longer equivalent to the State as a decisional authority. Following the tradition in the Romanian Principalities, the princely institution held all the legislative, administrative, judicial and military powers, exercised through a series of designated persons or institutions representing the ruler.

The principle of separation of the powers was a product of the nineteenth century. and the princely/royal institution became only a part of the whole and not the whole itself. This is the reason why, discussing the relations between the State and the Church as institutions is not equal to discussing the relations between the Church and the Monarchy; even if they overlap to a large extent, no subordination relation takes place. This needs to be highlighted to understand why, somewhat surprisingly, much of the historical research has focused on the relations between the State and the Church, without paying special attention to the relations between the Church and the Monarchy as an independent research topic.

One of the first decisions we had to make at the beginning of our research was the chronological delimitation of the period we intended to analyze, but the choice of the interval between 1918 and 1947 came naturally, as these two milestones represent two important reference points in the Romanian national history, the former being related to the completion of the Union and the establishment of Greater Romania, while the latter marks the end of the history of the Romanian Kingdom, soon to be replaced with a Socialist Republic. The arguments given to justify the chosen option relied on another important aspect: the Union of 1918 provided the favourable framework for the unification of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which means the relation of the Royal House with the Church could be analyzed within the entire Romanian space, not only the space associated to the Old Kingdom. Thus, our research aims to capture and analyze the evolution and expression of the relation between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House of Romania during the three decades we plan to analyze.

The proposed thesis consists of four main chapters, preceded by an introductory chapter, which presents the arguments, the current research stage and the methodology we used, and it is followed by the bibliography and a rich corpus of appendices containing images and representative documents for our topic.

Chapter II is entitled *Coronation as the Peak Moment in the Relation between Monarchy and the Church. Meanings and Perspectives of the Byzantine and Romanian traditions. Carol I and his Relations with the Romanian Orthodox Church* and offers a general outline of the relations between the Monarchy and the Church over history, both in the Byzantine and Romanian traditions, focusing mainly on coronation as a symbolic moment of interaction between the two institutions.

The sacred and the profane are two elements of one of the first distinctions made, in man's historical existence, between natures. However, the two dimensions were not separated in a way to exclude communion and communication among themselves, as bridges were built to make the coexistence of divine and human natures possible in one place and at the same time. The priesthood and the monarchy are the most familiar expressions; while the former has the role to mediate between the divine realm and the human community, the latter claims to be empowered with the authority to rule by divine right. Consequently, a unique connection was created between the two dignities, a symbiotic relation, in which the two natures often arrived to overlap in the form of the king-priest and priest-king institutions.

Without representing a norm, these exceptional cases offered a pattern that certain kings or emperors tried to apply, as the perspective of cumulating the two dimensions of power was very tempting. Even when such a structure was impossible to put into practice, the struggle to subordinate the religious element to the lay power came when the latter tried to assume sacred qualities and attributes. It was not a one-directional perspective, though, as situations where the clergy tried to assume the special attributes of the monarchy were also frequent; the most prominent example is related to the Popes, who are simultaneously head of the Church and head of the State.

In the Christian tradition, considering Jesus Christ's words: Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (Matthew 22:20–21), a delimitation and a regulation concerning the Church interaction with the State were applied. For more than one millennium and a half, both symbolically and at a representative level, this type of interaction was associated with the monarchic institution, whether we speak of kings, emperors or princes. One of the most representative forms of relationship between the two institutions was the Byzantine pattern. The relation between the Church and the Emperor has become the expression of a full communion, which would later be known as the Byzantine symphony. Thus, the relation between the Sovereign and the Church began during the coronation ceremony, which was one of the most significant rituals for the two institutions.

Ascending to the throne was not possible without receiving the blessing and acceptance from the Church, which was equivalent to placing the crown on the head and the act of anointing. The patriarch's action of placing the crown on the emperor's head was not only a symbolic gesture, lacking any effective power, as starting with this moment, the man who until

recently had been a regular person received the dignity that allowed him to lead the people and assume attributes that were almost sacramental. Thus, the confusion regarding the nature of imperial dignity persisted for centuries, as it was often associated to bishops, and it became visible in the emperor's relation to the Church as he considered it was his duty to be involved in church matters. As an example, the emperor would issue the decree to convoke the Synods and, by his seal, he would also adopt the canons as law.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the two institutions were definitively separated, the emperor's institution was lost, and his attributes were symbolically taken over by the Patriarch, who continued to watch over and defend the Orthodox community which was now under Ottoman rule. But the Byzantine type relation was taken over and adapted by the Eastern space, such as existed in Russia, the Romanian United Principalities, the Serbian and Bulgarian Empires, which continued the legacy they received from Constantinople.

In the Romanian space, the relations between Church and State started already since the concept of statehood began to exist. An interdependence could be noticed from the start, the Metropolitan bishoprics of Hungaro-Wallachia and of Moldavia were founded under the rule of princes, but the Church also played a fundamental role in the recognition of their existence by the international community. In a context of mutual support, the relation between the prince and the hierarchs has developed constantly, and they were often participating together when celebrating the important moments for their Country, Church and Throne.

For centuries, the voivode was responsible with the appointment of metropolitans, who were the voivodes' closest collaborators. After the nineteenth century, the situation changed, the relations between the institutions started to be governed by the legislation through laws and regulations and the principle of the separation of powers emerged. The Organic Regulations, a series of laws enacted during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the Romanian Constitution of 1866 established a new order, the institutions having different attributes going further. The Church was included in the public space, the church organization, its properties and income were all regulated by a specific legislative framework.

The separation of powers led to a change in the relations between the princely institution (starting with 1881, we speak of monarchy) and the Church. After the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, a distance between the throne and the Church was visible, the role of the Church as a validating factor of the reign completely disappeared. Being a prince or a king no



longer depended on being anointed and crowned, but on constitutional laws. The institutional relations between the Throne and the Church followed a similar path, the Sovereign's role in the life and activity of the Church was clearly stated by the legislation. He was entitled to appoint bishops and metropolitans (during Alexandru Ioan Cuza's reign, he could also name them), he had the authority to convoke the Holy Synod through decrees, to validate the hierarchs' election, to confirm the laws regarding the Church life.

Prince Carol's accession to the throne in 1866 represented a new page in the history of Church-State relations, His Majesty being a Catholic. However, he tried to keep religion within the private space, so that it should not interfere with the public duties he had as Romania's sovereign. Showing his deference towards the Church institution, the King managed to complete all the projects that concerned it. Moreover, he accepted the Constitutional laws regarding the religion of his successors, who had to be brought up in the Orthodox religion. When his only child, Maria, was born in 1870, Carol I considered the little princess had to be baptized in the Orthodox Church and share the same religion with the people his father ruled. Some of the most important moments that reflect the relation between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House of Romania are: gaining the autocephaly of the Church in 1885, and a comprehensive Church legislation (1872, 1893), which, although having elements that showed the Church had a subordinate status to the state, represented an important stage in the development of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Chapter III, *The Relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House of Romania during the Reign of King Ferdinand I* starts with two subchapters which present a detailed analysis of king Ferdinand I's biography and highlights the manner in which the first decades of the future sovereign influenced his relations to the Romanian Orthodox Church.

On the 10th of October 1914, Ferdinand I ascended to the Romanian throne. He was born at Sigmaringen on 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1865, and, he was a Catholic like his uncle, but a fervent one. In 1881, he participated at Carol I's coronation in Bucharest, a moment that would anticipate the fact that he would be chosen as heir to the throne. When he arrived in Romania, the constitutional laws regarding the faith of the future sovereigns did not apply, so he could keep his faith. A series of problems appeared when the marriage between Ferdinand and Marie took place, the dispensation granted by the Pope was conditioned on bringing up their children in the

Roman Catholic faith, and this led to a constitutional conflict. Running the risk of being excommunicated in case of disrespectful behavior towards the dispensation provisions (a fact to take place later), the marriage was completed, and the event was extremely important for the whole country.

The accession to the throne corresponded the beginning of World War I, for two years, the social pressure and the intervention of the main political figures were stronger than the voice of his heart, and Romania joined the Entente side in World War I. Although the war was disfavoured, several territories being lost, its end brought an achievement the Romanian people had been expecting for centuries: the Great Union. Accomplished in 1918, it opened new perspectives: Romania was larger and stronger. The unification process involved, besides other aspects, the religious dimension. A first step was represented by the unanimous election of Bishop Miron Cristea of Caransebes in the seat of Metropolitan-Primate of Bucharest. With the King's support and the contribution of other decisional factors, he managed to unify the Romanian Orthodox Church under one hierarchy, raising the Romanian Church to the status of Patriarchate. Another important event, which was intended to be of crucial significance, was the coronation at Alba Iulia on 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1922. Confronted with the Patriarch's ambitious plans to crown the King following the Orthodox tradition, an attempt which was doomed to failure, King Ferdinand's stern rejection led to a ceremony where the civil character of marriage prevailed.

An important role was played by Queen Marie with her unique personality in the Romanian history. A romantic nature, she had a passion for everything that was related to art, her own interaction with Orthodoxy taking place through a relation with a strong esthetic characteristic that failed to fully understand the genuine spirit of Orthodoxy.

The fourth chapter, *Autonomy or Commitment? The Dynamics of Relations between Monarchy and the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Reign of King Carol II of Romania* analyses and develops the new relationship between the Crown and the Church. During the reign of Carol II, this relation has developed under multiple forms of expression, overcoming episodes such as the coronation or the legitimation of royal rule. The sovereign had the advantage of having known the details of the relations between the two institutions since his childhood, witnessing the way in which Carol I and Ferdinand, as Catholic kings in an overwhelmingly

Orthodox country, implemented the attributions and royal prerogatives associated to this important dimension of the Romanian society.

While the interaction of the two antecessors with the institution of the Church and Eastern spirituality followed a strictly institutional relationship pattern, well-regulated in the legal framework (participating in the appointment of hierarchs, the baptism of children in the Orthodox Church – a constitutional obligation, issuing legislative royal decrees regarding the Church organization etc.) and the customary framework (attending the Orthodox Church services at ceremonies and during holidays such as Easter, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Epiphany, the consecration of churches and monasteries – several restored at the King's expense, offering the patronage to the social projects of the Church), during the reign of Carol II, things looked considerably different. Sharing the same faith with his subjects, and aware of the meaning of monarchic dignity in the Orthodox tradition and the role played by the princely institution in the history of the Romanian people, the King wished to inaugurate a new stage in the relation between the Crown and the Church, the Sovereign's role becoming more active in the life of the Church. On the other hand, the Church was going to rediscover the tradition of loyalty towards the Throne, materialized for hundreds of years through an indestructible symbiosis of the two institutions.

Carol II wanted to have the full support of the Church in all of his projects, even when their main purpose was political and to set up a personal, authoritarian regime. By assuming the image of an old Romanian prince and a part of the Byzantine emperors' doctrine (symbolically placed at the head of the Church), the king was constantly interested in all aspects concerning Church life, from the most unimportant details to the major issues concerning the existence of the Church institution. On the king's agenda, elements such as: naming or revoking hierarchs, establishing new dioceses, managing the wealth of the church and the legislation regarding the religious component of the society, promoting the Orthodox values all over the country were to be found.

All of the above-mentioned elements formed the basis of a very tight relation, and the fourth decade of the twentieth century was marked by a visible presence of the Church within the society, the prestige it enjoyed had never been met before in the modern Romanian history. Having patriarch Miron Cristea as head of the Orthodox Church, with good knowledge of the mechanisms of society and of the political space, the Church understood how to maximize the

benefits of the privileged position offered by Carol II, and knew to assume and manage the Sovereign's intrusion in administrative matters that concerned it. The support the Church offered Carol II when he decided to make a major change of the Romanian political space, by constantly highlighting and promoting the Orthodox values must be regarded in a similar manner.

The last chapter, *King Michael I and the Romanian Orthodox Church* focuses on king Michael's reign and the new directions that characterized it. King Michael's reign was enframed within different coordinates. His first accession to the throne occurred following king Ferdinand's death and because prince Carol was excluded from the succession. Still a minor, a Regency was appointed that included also patriarch Miron Cristea who was intended to balance the situation. However, the Great Depression at the end of the third decade of the twentieth century brought Carol II to the throne of Romania. Michael's second accession to the throne took place in a dramatic context where a large part of the Romanian territory was lost. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1940, King Carol abdicated and Marshal Ion Antonescu was appointed as Head of the State in Romania. After four years of isolation, the King managed to depose Antonescu, considering there was a chance to a new beginning for Romania. It was a new start indeed, but not the expected one, as a ruthless, more perfidious regime was going to control the country in the next two years: the communist regime. In this suffocating, oppressive atmosphere, king Michael found an allied in patriarch Nicodim Munteanu, and the two stayed shoulder to shoulder until the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1937, when His Majesty was forced to abdicate and a page of history that had lasted for more than six hundred years was thenceforth closed.

Our approach aims to highlight from the beginning the multiple aspects and particularities that were documented concerning the relations between the two institutions, reflecting the diversity of elements particular to sovereigns or hierarchs. Several times, these personal notes help to outline and recreate the general picture regarding the relations between the Church and the Royal House. Any type of official act or action is only the visible result of factors that involved a private sphere as well (negotiations, personal attitudes, conflicts between the parties, religious beliefs etc.). A historiographical approach is both actual and necessary, given the fact that the interwar period and the World War II years represent a period of many historical events and phenomena, many of which directly involved the two institutions (prominent examples are the coronation on 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1922, the Regency, the Government under Miron Cristea).

Presenting, analysing and interpreting these events brings a better understanding of the general context and helps us identify specific factors that contributed to certain events or representative actions. In the absence of works specifically dedicated to the relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House of Romania, our thesis aims to fill an important historiographic gap, by bringing a considerable quantity of information and by using significant archival and bibliographical data.

There are several elements worth mentioning when studying the hermeneutics of relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Royal House of Romania, and our research opens only a few directions to explore. The Romanian society as an heir of the old Byzantine-Slavic traditions has experienced a privileged relation between the State and the Church throughout its history. The new realities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought major, dramatic changes. The two institutions started to build their own path, being separated from each other both in terms of values and perspectives. King Ferdinand's and King Carol's reign offered different approaches regarding the relation with the Romanian Orthodox Church. There is one element that remained unchanged: the Church to be an autonomous body, to find its own way and to accomplish its mission. The Byzantine symphony has changed over the century and has become the Romanian symphony.