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HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY FACULTY**

DOCTORATE THESIS

**THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF ROMANIANS
FROM MARAMUREȘ OVER TISA
DURING THE 20th CENTURY**

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2013

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KEY WORDS

Maramureş over Tisa, Transcarpatia, Ujgorod, Muncaci, Middle Apşa, Lower Apşa, White Church, Slatina, Topcino, Strâmtura, Greek-Catholic Church, romanian priests, communism, atheism, gulag, religious feeling, religious practice, devotion, worship.

REZUME

Until the Revolution from December 1989, a systematic approach of the religious life of romanians over Tisa was impossible to fulfill because of the political and institutional obstacles.

Two decades have already passed and a thoroughgoing study of the religious feeling was necessary in this contemporary european contest of opening and capitalization of the religious and cultural past. This is a condition for every nation which calls itself „european”. A profound knowledge of a religious and cultural past becomes a source of a universal cultural past thoroughgoing study, an intrinsic understanding of the history in both historic and geographic context. This is a great cultural and ethnic variety in Ukraine, romanians being one of the ethnies which a considerable number of inhabitants spread all over its territory, from Odessa to Carpathians. Left on the lands of this state, close to Romanian borders, the historical Maramureş is named in this work „**The Maramureş over Tisa**”, being kept in this way the cultural, spiritual and ethnic connection with all those separated by Tisa`s banks.

After the Red Army occupied the lands and the communism was established there, the soviet space became impenetrable, tight closed with „barbed wire and missiles”¹, as one of the inhabitants said, making impossible any approach or scientific individual analysis of the religious life in the Romanian villages. In case of ex-communist countries, the use of the official history in this religious and spiritual respect (mainly in case of catholic confession of both rites) is a perverted one, filled with a

¹ Interview made with Moiş Gheorghe, ex- serviceman, in Middle Apşa

materialistic ideology and orthodox confessional ideas set under the party's orders at the time. The treatises, school text books, magazines or any other publication, they were all directed to the same purpose targeted by the Party Members, both local and central. Lately, the oral history gained a lot space becoming a fashionable research domain, the researchers pick information, publish articles or present unique works through which they value the historical, cultural or religious past of a geographical or ethno-cultural space such as the Romanian villages located over Tisa.

In the present works the oral testimony was used for a better understanding, knowledge and study of the 20th century religious phenomenon, especially the one from the communist period. The communism establishment in Europe was a huge stroke for all cults because it was the suppression for collective religious pilgrimages, procession, charitable and cultural activities.

The religious politics promoted by Kremlin meant the limitation of Church access on the public space, the ban for the party members to participate at the religious celebrations, the youngsters access limitation to church areas. Relating stories or events which were witnessed is like having an oral personal diary; the people live again certain situation, a tendency but in the same time an alignment of subjectivity to objectivity. There is now the possibility of discovery the truths hidden by the official history. This kind remembered and related experiences offer us an assembly and living image of some Romanians religious past; we know very little in this case, but a picture of a period that nobody wrote about might be taken, a „face-to-face” confrontation, a shared history.

In the present works the oral testimony is combined with the written one, and where the bibliographical source is missing what is left is only the experience and its relating. For these places, the redeeming of individual or collective memory is to emerge from obscurity, to value the experienced truth (many times in contradiction with the official history), to recover the „real history”. It was proved that the official history was corrupted (perverted) as in the whole Eastern Europe; through memory the confrontation gives birth to a resistance against the ideology and the religious or social oppression. The space where the research activity took place is restrained to the six Romanian locations placed in Maramureş, on the right side of Tisa. When we refer to „Maramureş over Tisa”, we talk about only the Romanian locations from there. The territory of the Historical Maramureş which was left beyond Tisa, once the river traced the borders, is much larger and contains two thirds of what was in the past. Now, in this

space, only six romanian villages are left; the others were carpato-russian or made hungarian along history. While the research was being completed, the interviewed persons were those implied in the Church`s suppression events, especially those who came from the priests families. Being witnesses they give the most authentic testimony about their social and religious experience in the middle of a more and more atheistic and anticlerical stream. The perspective from which the events are told depends on the witnesses social surroundings. As main characteristics we can name the involvement or passivity. For example, the family of a priest who was arrested can see persecution or the religious oppression from a different perspective. The common person, on the other hand, sees those things differently. For him the place of worship is the bench-mark of his spiritual life, no matter who is at the altar. Sometimes, for common people the real persecution didn`t mean only the priest`s arrest who could have signed the adhesion to orthodoxy, but the looking up of the worship place. He can have no more this kind of meeting with God. The same gravity and irresponsibility were shown by transforming the churches in common buildings, a disloyalty made against God and people. Through this, an example of retentivity was given against all those considered enemies.

The present work was set up in four main chapters, each one being graduated in subchapters, where a religious analysis of Romanian villages placed on the right side of Tisa river, along the 20th century, was pursued. The first chapter surprised a brief history of Maramureş, of those villages which remained romanian until today. For three centuries, in Maramureş, almost all the villages were setteled by Carpatio - Russian citizens. At the beginning of the twentieth century only four remained.

After the end of the Second World War we can talk abot five villages and from 1989, about six of them. Every single location was briefly analysed in the historical and religious process, the most important moments being labelled. The Church of Maramureş is analysed here, in this chapter, both from clerical and historical perspective. The subchapters take into account the diocese (curacy, vicariate), parishes and the monasteries from there; they are presented as part of Maramureş church organisation.

An analysis of the church`s structure shows the personal way of organising, the clerical evolution beginning with 1391, once the monastery from Peri was taken as "stavropighie" (monastery that is directly dependent on the patriarchate). In the second chapter, the first subchapter shows the Historical Maramureş dismemberment. This is not one of the main subjects of this work but it helps to define what Maramureş over

Tisa means and also where it is placed. Another reason would be the lack of interest and analysis on this subject, the circumstances which eventually led to the loss of this territory. During the communist period, such a subject was avoided; the territory belonged to the Sovietic Union and the romanian politic system was servile to Moscow. After Sovietic Union was dismembered such an analysis was relieved; lots of documents which were avoided and locked in archives are now brought to life.

The chapter continues with the research of the religious life before the communism was installed in Maramureş over Tisa. The targeted item was the village of Maramureş on the 20th century and its specific religious denotions and practices. In this period, especially beginning with its third decade, the latin denotional paradigm was implemented in the Greek -Catholic church. It had consistent influences on the greek -catholic religiousness of that time. Their intensity or frequency is different from village to village, but the adaptability to oriental tradition peculiarities is clear: the practice of ektenis for priest`s and believers` spiritual elevation (string of prayers in the Eastern Orthodox Church). The news brought here by priests magnetized the parishes, relieved a spiritual breath which associated the devotion prescriptions with its practicability. The confession and the frequent reception of the eucharist were demanded by the devotion`s practice in honour oh The Heart of Jesus, the godliness and obedience to Virgin Mary combined with the prayer of Rosary.

This chapter contains both the oral testimonies and the publications of the time, especially those which appeared in the monastery of Bixad. It became a place of pilgrimage for greek-catholic christians, a kind of "flagship" for the monks` establishments under the Command of Saint Basil the Great , from Romania². The monastery had its own printing press, in this way being able to spread through publications the christian teaching (knowledge). The subscriptions were paid by the clergy but also by the peasants from those villages. In the third chapter, besides the data about the communism establishment, the study targets the greek-catholic religious practice after the Church was eliminated. The main source of information was the testimony made by those who had chosen to be faithful to greek – catholic religion and the one made by the priests family members. After they refused to defect (to sign the agreement for the other confession, orthodoxy), those three greek – catholic romanian priests acquainted the persecution and the communist "gulag" and their sucesors were

² Romul Pop, *Bixad Lights*, Scriptorium Printing Press, Baia Mare, 2009, p. 35

soon labelled "sons of the nation's enemy", as the daughter of the priest Pop Simion Daniel pronounced herself. It is of great relevance also that testimony of a priest's wife, Mrs. Pop Maria Magdalena now aged 92, regarding the priest's arrest, the hard period she confronted with, the authorities hunt that she felt and their permanent search for seven years time. Generally, such a testimony is accompanied by many tears; Mrs. Pop tried to hide saying that "It does not matter anymore", it is more important to know the truth than to be marked by such sensitiveness.

The religious practice in the communist period was examined from the point of view of greek – catholic faith experience during hard times, the result being the observation of some faith survival strategies. The faith was split up once the priests were arrested: everyone chose his own way – more or less connected to catholicism or faith. The closing of worship places was seen as persecution on all the levels, and the appearance of orthodox priests as a constraint. The faith experiences are strange from places, traditions, local devotions. After two decades of orthodoxy people change and the presence of romanian priests is seen as compulsory (there is a lack of priests in that area). At Middle Apşa, the priest Dabija Serafim was the initiator of a church choir, gathering somehow the believers spread in the Sovietic Union.

During the communist period, the collective religious pilgrimages were stopped; they continued only as individual practices. The same happened with the religious processions organized before certain celebrations. They were replaced by popular (folkloric) demonstrations, especially for Easter, avoiding in this way Church frequentation and exposing another proposal: communist activities. The testimonies are taken from the priests sons, daughters or sons – in – law, the successors of those who once were witnesses. The only exception is Mrs. Pop Maria Magdalena, a priest's wife, witness of dreadful events which were accurately memorized. The believers gave information regarding the religious practice during forty years of communism. The information came from their own example, from their memories which included the greek – catholic, and orthodox priests but also the other parish clerks.

The last chapter examines from the religious point of view the period which comes after the fall of communism: the greek – catholic cultural revival, religious life aspects inside the romanian parishes or inside the Muncaci Eparchy. Researching of the period immediately after the fall of the communism brought to light that the Greek – Catholic Church from Transcarpatia began its public activity with at least two years before the Sovietic Union dismemberment. The politic aspects in Russia changed

dramatically after Mihail Gorbaciov was elected. The new reconstruction (Perestroika) proposed by the Moscow's politician gave birth to pluripartitism and to the possibility of free expression. The loss of politic inertia was seen as a phenomenon, and the process, once opened, had as a result the dissolution of Soviet and communist parties and the national assertion of some states. A politic, social and religious "relief" caused the loosen of a too tight chain. After forty years of interdictions and according to the law, under the Gorbaciov's command since 1985, the "united" were thought as disappeared. Ignoring all the threads which came from the local authorities, a religious movement began. At Slatina, the greek – catholic priest began to celebrate the Holy Mass with public in his own house on Naberejnaia Street, no.2. This step came because of a milder political and social environment. The believers from White Church asked the priest Vereş Tiberiu, the last vicar before the communism came, to open the parish after almost forty years. After all those present in the church consented, the greek – catholic parish from White Church was reestablished in 1989. This step was the spark which launched the egress to light of the Greek – Catholic Church from the romanian villages. After the parishes from Slatina and White Church opened again their gates, other two followed immediately: Middle Apşa and Lower Apşa. The religious holidays gained a fresh Spiritual breath after the communism fell.

Their practice is allowed, according to the traditional calendar and stays as a boundary stone in confessing the greek – catholic faith while facing the neoprotstant current permanently expanding. The religious pilgrimages to romanian greek – catholic monasteries are reprised, but those from Bixad and Moisei weren't up – to – date ness for the romanians who lived in Maramureş over Tisa, firstly because of the border, then because they weren't given back to the rightful owners. The ukrainian monasteries Boroneavo and Mukacevo are visited because they are closer to the romanian villages and also the traditional orthodox ones from Poceaiv and Pecersk.

At the beginning of the third millenium, the eparchy passes a spiritual and hierarchical reconstruction period, the most important events being shown. The new bishop leads a cultural religious program which profoundly involves the communion. The priests' coming or departure affect the people, leave a sadness feeling but also bring a trace of hope for romanian communions. The people feel neglected mostly by the priests who came from the left side of Tisa. Soon, all those inconveniences are left behind. There is hope in the new "shepherds".

In order to acquire the necessary information regarding the way in which the religious life was set in Maramureș over Tisa, witnesses of communist period events or their successors were attended. The research was made in all the Romanian villages over Tisa, mainly where there were Greek – Catholics before communism. Most of the interviews were made in Middle Apșa, Lower Apșa, Slatina and , White Church, where the Greek – Catholic communions appeared before 1949. Regarding the social, cultural and administrative aspects, sources of information were found in Strâmtura and Topcino. Fifty – one persons from all six Romanian villages were interviewed (questioned). The interviews were accomplished working on four interlocutor categories: priests families, intellectuals, public authorities, believers. 28 hours of interviews were collected, 26,6 being audio interviews and 3,4 video interviews. Some of the persons were interviewed for two or three times at months or years distance, which is specified on footnote. The transcription, the make – up and bring – out were accomplished by the author. In the interviews, the authors` utterances were kept, the explanations, having the abbreviation ”our note” (nn), being inserted in brackets. The interviews gathering and settlement, the documents and the photographs which were made are to be found in Iusco Vasile Personal Archives (APIV), which can be consulted regarding the present work.

In order to express terms connected to liturgical practice or the vocabulary used by the Greek – Catholic believers, the Greek – Catholic Church`s terminology was used. In case of quotations, the original text was submitted. In other contexts, phrases as Holy Spirit, Lord have mercy, Isus Hristos (Greek – Catholic term) were used and not Iisus Hristos (the Orthodox Church`s term) or Isus Cristos (the Roman Catholic Church`s term). The use of these terms was chosen because it was closer both by the subjects` and author`s feelings and existence.