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Bagiu, Lucian

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Uniate Clergy: Between the Obtaining of Social Advantages and the Affirmation of Social Conscience

*Prep. univ. drd. Lucian BĂGIU
Universitatea "1 Decembrie 1918", Alba Iulia*

Frustrating and paradoxical, the Romanian Transylvanian apriorism seems to have denied itself until the 18th century by not getting constituted according to the norms of the canon. The Romanian ethnical medium can be explained only as an organic entity always in a predestinate, fatal and fundamental regression from the objective, casual history, up to the direct boycotting of the historical existence, sometimes voluntarily but most often unconsciously.¹ The organic life could be considered an ontological evolutionary and local phenomenon that, nevertheless, benefited from a latent dynamic, which determined the conscience of national identity in the end. Most often the instrument was the ignoring of the aspects imposed by the course, of history, and when the interaction proved inherent, people restored to the selections done according to an ineffable interior logic and to rare assimilations.

The halt to the objective course of historic time took place rather late and rather suddenly as there were especially two processes that determined the affirmation of the Romanian Transylvanian nation: the Unification with the church of Rome between 1697-1701, and the unsteady, but always novel reforms of the Court in Vienna. However, even now comes a disarming observation in point of quantity: the immense majority of the ethnic Romanian medium remained outside the borders of the phenomenon of connection to the objective reality, and this is due to the fact that a very thin stratum, though an elite, had the intuition of a unique chance that seemed meant to offer a normal victory over destiny: its admittance as a fourth nation with legal rights within the borders of its country. This position between the privileges of a noble, religious and social class and the assuming of the responsibility for an entire people did not always lack temptations and hesitations.

Nevertheless, the merits of the success go first to the national elites, which formed initially a national conscience engaged later in the political fight. A short look upon the social basis offers the picture of the peasantry, of which the dependent part represents 80 % of the ethnic element, and the free part being on Royal Land: the frontier guards, generally an emancipated stratum of the Uniate peasantry: the citizens with real contributions and social structure only in Braşov; the new nobility whose virtual action was repressed from the beginning due to its affiliation to a tolerated confession, so it was insignificant; the intellectuality- the only social entity capable of actions that could create an echo among the authorities.

The Romanian intellectuality in Transylvania was far from representing a quantitative or qualitative threat for the nations. In this sense a statistic offers the

¹ Lucian Blaga, *Evoluție și involuție*, vol. Spațiul mioritic, apud vol. Lucian Blaga, *Opere*, 9, Trilogia culturii, editor Dorli Blaga, Introductory Study by Alexandru Tănase, Minerva Publishing House, Bucureşti, 1985, pp.298-307

culminating point to which this category evolved before the revolutionary events. (see Table no.1).

TABLE NOI ²

Social category	Period	Historical Transylvania	Western parts	Total	Percentage
Orthodox clergy	1839-1843	1048	988	2036	38.1%
Uniate clergy	1842-1843	1513	220	1733	32.4 %
Orthodox schoolmasters	1843-1844	282	578	860	16.1 %
Uniate schoolmasters	1840	409	5	414	7.7 %
Clerks	1813-1848	86	9	95	1.8 %
Lawyers	1849	88		88	1.6 %
Chancellors	1845-1848	30		30	0.6 %
Officers	1846	31		31	0.6 %
Teachers	1848	30		30	0.6 %
Doctors	1830-1848	26		26	0.5 %
Total	1813-1848	3543	1800	5343	100 %

If we take into account the fact that the Romanian ethnic element in Transylvania and in the Western parts was made up of 2, 2 million individuals in 1839, then the 5343 of existent intellectuals at the time of the revolution represented 0.2 % of the mass. It is useless to mention that this 0.2% of the Romanians involved in totally different manners in the cultural, political and national emancipation according to their own cultural horizon, conscience, and material interest. At a short notice upon the ciphers we shall see that the small number of the Romanian intellectuality was made up of about 94 % clerics and schoolmasters and if we were to identify a social category that by its quantity and quality was relevant in the social and political context of the 18th and 19th centuries, this would be the clergy, as the Church was the only traditional institution and with national valences in Transylvania along the silent Romanian Middle Age.

And it is exactly this apparent endangering of the Romanian Transylvanian tradition that seems to have caused the crystallization, the stimulation and the affirmation of the national specificity. The paradox is most of the times a conjunctional historical product.

² apud Ladislau Gyemant, **Mișcarea națională a românilor din Transilvania 1790-1848**, București, The Scientific and Pedagogical House, 1986, pp.358-359

The Uniate Clergy or the Changes of a National Conscience

It is useless to insist upon the unalterable condition that the Orthodox Church in Transylvania had to accept in the period of the Principality in order to survive. Nevertheless, there is one remarkable fact i.e. in spite of its being totally obedient to the Calvinist superintendent of the Transylvanian Prince, despite its having formally accepted several times the conditions regarding its administrative, social and cultural activity imposed by the superintendent, the Transylvanian Orthodoxy did not become Calvinist in point of confession. It stayed organic and instinctive, though at a subconscious level. Thus, the more confusing seems the recovery the Orthodox Church experiments between 1697-1701, when, at a speed totally different from its previous somnolence, speculates at all levels: political, social and confessional and becomes in its totality United with the Church of Rome through the act signed by Athanasie Anghel in Vienna in April, 1701 and through the emperor Leopold I's Diploma in March, 1701. For sixty years the Orthodoxy in Transylvania will disappear as an institution until the recovery in 1759. What should have been the reason that drove all the Orthodox priests and bishops to accept the proposal of Vienna in mass? As it shall be shown, the confessional was but superficially and formally affected and the great ignorant mass of people would remain outside this process. We encounter, thus, a perfect example of organic selection and of preferred assimilation of history by the Romanian Transylvanian apriorism.

The common declaration in October 7, 1698 of the Orthodox archbishops that signed the Unification act seems essential: *"We so unite and confess to be the organs of the holy Catholic church as it shall not change us and the remains of the customs of our Eastern Church and all our previous ceremonies, holidays and fasts that have been so far will be so that we shall be free to respect them according to our ancient calendar and no one will have the power to take the position of our holy Athanasie until the day of his death. And if this day should come, it will be synod's decision who will be the ruler and whom the holy Pope and the Emperor will approve of, and the Patriarch with his power to ordain him according to our customs, and no one else will have nothing to do with that. And all shall be as it has been so far; and if they do not allow our customs and us remain settled as before, our seals and signatures will have no value and power and this is supported by the seal of our Metropolitan Church and by our testimony.*

*And so will those mentioned above unite that our laws, service church, liturgy, fasts and our gifts shall remain unchanged. And if these should be altered, so will our seal have no power upon us, and our Athanasie will be our ruler and no one will change this."*³

Many more things could be discussed upon this declaration. Obviously, a major preoccupation of the virtually Uniate Clergy is to perpetuate its Byzantine Orthodox ritual with no important exception. Consequently, the confessional substance was saved without suffering dogmatic turbulences and especially without the outside believers to notice any material change related to confession, the four dogmatic points i.e. the essence of the Uniting process, are not mentioned but generally forgotten (the four points are: the

³ cf Lucian Blaga, *Opere, Gândirea românească din Transilvania în secolul al VIII-lea* editor Dorli Blaga, București, Minerva Publishing House, 1995, p.16

Papal sovereignty, the existence of the purgatory, the unleavened bread in the mass, and the famous “filioque” i.e. the Holy Spirit that comes over not only from the Father but also from the Son). In this sense, the words of Gheorghe Șincai, a Uniate, are memorable: “*who speaks about filioque, speaks dust in the wind*”.⁴

Moreover, the protection and the insurance of Athanasie’s function after the accomplishment of the edification act are rather ostentations.

Athanasie Anghel was not a common Transylvanian Orthodox Cleric; he came from a family of Orthodox nobles. There were a lot of other Orthodox priests in his situation, detaining a noble title but unable to benefit from a corresponding social status, as they were representatives of a tolerated nation and confession with no social privileges. Here are some examples of ennoblements previous to the religious Unification: the family of Ignatie Darabont in 1666, the family of Petru Maior in 1656, that of Ioan Patachi in 1607, that of Gheorghe Șincai in 1592, that of Silvestru Caliani in 1417, that of Athanasie Rednic in 1349. The great merit of Athanasie Anghel is that of having had the sense to negotiate as laic conditions as possible, an exchange to the confessional compromise with the Court in Vienna in cold blood. He wanted the sociable promotion of the Orthodox Clergy that became Uniate, the corresponding material status and the free access to the superior occidental education of the Transylvanian priests, which had been totally inexistent aspects until then. One of the first measures of the freshly Uniate Archbishop Athanasie Anghel was that of extending nobility upon the other member of his family. On the other hand, the desire of acknowledging a deserved social and confessional status can be seen even from the requests formulated by the Orthodox priests within the Synod in 1697 under the ruling of Teofil, he himself coming from an ennobled family in 1692:

1. *The priests and the of the Greek rite Church should enjoy all those privileges and the rights that not only the Roman-Catholic priests enjoy but also the Arians (Unitarians), the Lutherans and the Calvinists.*
2. *Every village that has a priest should also have a church and a vicarage*
3. *The priests should depend on and dispose of the archbishop and not of the laics as before (as it was under the Calvinist domination)⁵*

It is useless to insist more on the worldly economic, social and administrative clerical hierarchy, reasons that urged many of the Orthodox spiritual leaders to take into consideration the maximum profit they would gain out of a more political compromise with the new Habsburgical domination in Transylvania. Knowing the state of harsh intolerance from the part the Transylvanian nations, we can find enough reasons to exculpate them, at least partially. However, the posterity seems not to have forgiven them at all. Let us see some considerations upon this matter.

Mircea Păcurariu, from an Orthodox point of view, believes that the act of Unification itself was done by forging public papers and blackmail, and the consequences were more a damage for the Romanian Church in Transylvania and for the people, and he ended like this: “*...the Unification was adopted by only a minor part of the clergy, for material reasons- while the rest of the Christians [...] stuck to their old Orthodox faith.*”⁶

⁴ ibidem, p.24

⁵ Ibidem, p.15

⁶ Mircea Păcurariu, **Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române**, vol. II, București, 1994, p.25

Obviously, the group of the Greek-Catholics is situated on antagonistic and irreconcilable positions, as they, being expatriated, publish *The Uniate Church: 250 Years of History* in 1952 in Madrid. Lucian Blaga is no less irreconcilable: „*Catholicism failed. (As the captivation of some Romanians meant only a slight change of name. The Unification with Rome could alter neither the religious spirit nor the cultural style.) Generally, Romanians avoided the participation to a history that was not the expression of their being by their indifference.*”⁷

Indirectly, the Hungarian baron Stefan Daniel seems to agree with him through a memorandum addressed to the Dieta in 1774: “*only the Valachian clergy profited. But he who does not see that the whole people wanders in its ancestral errors is blind.*”⁸ But the absolute historic reality cannot but be somewhere in the middle, because very soon the Uniate Clergy could see that the promised rights were not taken into account most of the times. And here comes a paradoxical national reaction facilitated especially by the way opened by the Unification with Rome. The merits of the Uniate bishops, priests and generally of the intellectuals are enormous and incontestable. The so much disputed Metropolitan Bishop Athanasie Anghel started by two shocking attitudes: he is the one to have obtained the stupefying mentioning of the second Leopold Diploma. At point 3 equal rights with the Catholics, and the laic persons and even with the serfs that were to be seen as Sons of the country are mentioned, if they accepted the Unification. Leaving aside the fact that Athanasie Anghel was also preoccupied with the fate of dependent peasantry- the greatest part of the Romanian nation in Transylvania, this document will represent a fundamental basis of the program elaborated lately by the Uniate representatives of the national emancipation movement starting, with the Episcopo Inochentie Micu Klein. (We mention that the original hidden and lost by the Jesuites was found by Kurt Wessley in Bruckental Library in Sibiu in 1938). Then Athanasie, seeing that the promised rights are not respected, he will give up the Unification, with the Clergy`s agreement in 1711. It is also useless to mention the moment 1744 and the Synod in Blaj, transformed by Inochentie Micu Klein in a national representation meeting through the participation of the Uniate and Orthodox Clergy, Romanian nobles and serfs. The memoirs-activity gains a beginning by the same Uniate prelate. Petru Pavel Aron and Grigore Maior have the merit of creating schools, the typography and the Central Seminar.

In the end, we shall insist upon the over-passing of the confessionalism in the sense of a pragmatic trans-confessional way of thinking by some Uniate and Orthodox representatives, even if in some cases the concrete action was the result of a pressure from the subalterns that had a rational Illuminist or romantic-national or even liberal vision. Thus, The Uniate Episcopo Ioan Bob, after refusing the chief position of the first Supplex, gives up and signs together with the Orthodox Episcopo Gherasim Adamovici the second Supplex, in 1792, after they had previously joined their spirits to go to Vienna to ask national rights. Ioan Lemeni takes sides with the Orthodox Vasile Moga in 1834 for a memorandum addressed to Vienna, and then, in the case of other actions through which they are asked for specific rights for the Romanians in Fundus Regius. The same episcopo Ioan Lemeni presides together with Andrei Saguna the Great National Meeting in Blaj on 15th May 1848, a fact that will cause the elimination by the Court in Vienna.

⁷ Lucian Blaga, *Evoluție și involuție*, quoted volume, p.309

⁸ apud Lucian Blaga, *Opere, Gândirea românească din Transilvania în secolul al VIII-lea*, p.25

The elimination of confessional differences seems constant in the writings of the prelates with a unitary vision. Petru Maior in the *History of the Church* appreciates the progress of the Orthodoxies in their cultural emancipation attempt and he underlines that the Uniates differ from the Orthodoxies only by their name given to those “*who want them separated as if they were two different nations*”⁹ and this is a clear reference to Vienna’s hypocrisy that believed that by Unification Vienna would master the Romanian Transylvanians according to the principle “*divide et impera*”. Ioan Budai Deleanu considers that “*if the nation is united no enemy from outside can break it up.*”¹⁰ On the part of the Orthodoxies intellectuals, Dimitrie Tichindeal launches the calling: “*do not break up, do not hate one another for the clearing of the messed laws*” but “*Let us all Romanians be one being*”.¹¹ Finally, Paul Iorgovici expresses most clearly the scope and the essence of the actions of time: “*let us not judge anyone’s confession, but respect him for his actions.*”¹² We should not forget that, starting with 1798 the actions of the unification in a National Church received the accept of the Uniates Samuil Micu, Petru Maior, Aron Budai, Ioan Para and of the Orthodoxies Radu Tempea or Ioan Popovici. Even the episcope Vasile Moga writes to the Episcopo in Blaj in 1828 that the Romanian nation should strive for Unification in order not to allow the evildoer cause any harm.¹³

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⁹ apud Ladislau Gyemant, p.459

¹⁰ ibidem

¹¹ ibidem

¹² ibidem

¹³ ibidem