

The Bishopric of Arad in the interwar period. Church history files

(Summary)

One of the oldest documented bishoprics within the Romanian Patriarchate is the Bishopric of Arad, elevated to the rank of Archbishopric based on the decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church with no. 3.621 of June 19, 2009. Its precursors were the diocesan centers of Ineu and Lipova, localities where, since the first half of the 16th century, hierarchs are mentioned.

Since its establishment, the Arad Bishopric has had a major role in the spiritual and cultural advancement of the Orthodox Romanians from Hungary and Transylvania, being the only institution that - in a certain historical period - had something to say in the House of Magnatils from Budapest, with bishops present as ex officio members of the Hungarian Parliament. The continuity of Romanian Orthodoxy in the western part of our country is due to the bishops, diocesan councilors, deacons, priests, and believers from these places. A particularly important role was played by the Bishopric of Arad, through its representatives, in the creation of the Romanian national unitary state. In addition to the status of the political capital of the Great Union, acquired due to the fact that the great luminaries were active here and elaborated the program and documents of the Union, Arad would fully deserve the name of the ecclesiastical capital of the Great Union, and this because the bishop of Arad was the deputy of the Metropolitan of Transylvania, with an overwhelming role in achieving this desire. A major contribution to the realization of church unification in 1925, as well as to the creation of the Romanian Patriarchate, from the establishment of which will soon be 100 years, was made by the Bishopric of Arad through his hierarch Ioan Ignatie Papp and his collaborators, who signaled the need of a unitary clerical organization for all Orthodox Romanians. The problem of the Concordat signed with the Vatican in 1927 concerned both the hierarchs, the archpriests and the faithful of the Arad diocese, being known the taken positions against this decision with serious consequences in the actuality of the time. The theological education in Arad, with ancient roots in the history of the Diocese, still occupies a place of honor among the Faculties of Theology in the country. It is well known the contribution of the teaching staff at the Theological Institute in

Arad, which has militated for the unitary reorganization of theological education in the Romanian Patriarchate and for the elevation of this educational institution to the rank of a Theological Academy, is known. The support of culture was the essential concern of those who held the reins of the Bishopric of Arad, being aware that only through the promotion of culture it will be possible to reach to the national and spiritual emancipation of a people. Missionary activity was also a priority, because of the policy carried out by the government from Budapest aimed at the denationalization of Romanians, forced Hungarianization, but also the visible intention to determine the abandonment of the Orthodox faith; on the same line, in the interwar period the Hungarian revisionist tendencies threatened the territorial integrity of the Romanian state. The social-philanthropic activity, the lay apostolate, the establishment of various societies and associations were ways by which the Bishopric of Arad managed to involve the laity in the pastoral-missionary work of the Church. In the interwar period, The Bishopric of Arad was the center that coagulated the main elements of local society, keeping alive the national consciousness, so important in preserving the identity of race, language, culture and faith.

Chronologically, the present work captures the interwar period, marked by the end of the First World War and the achievement of the Great Union from December 1, 1918 until the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, respectively 1941, the year when Romania entered the war; as an extension, in some extents, I considered appropriate to continue the historical study of the period up to 1948, the year of the establishment of a new political order in Romania.

The motivation for choosing the topic that I want to present as a doctoral thesis, namely *the Bishopric of Arad in the interwar period. Church history file*, it is related to my belonging to this Diocese since my childhood, my professional training, as well as my service, as priest, for over 20 years. The present thesis fits in the historical field of the History of the Romanian Orthodox Church, contributing to a certain extent to the bringing to light of some original inedited documents, found in the Archives and the Library of the Archdiocese of Arad, at the Arad County Service of the National Archives, such as and in other places. In fact, my intention was to collect original documents, which can highlight facts, events and personalities between the two World Wars. In the current conditions, when the Church is in a delicate situation, due to frequent attacks from a certain segment of civil society, I considered it will be appropriate to highlight the place and the role that the Bishopric of Arad had in supporting the national identity and ancestral faith. The consulted documents, which bear witness to some facts that brought to

light the specificity of this people, which led until to sacrifice to fulfill an ideal, could constitute an impetus and a model for today's young generation.

The present paperwork aims to bring to the light new aspects of a period marked by great transformations on the ecclesiastical, political, administrative, social and cultural level. Entire generations of Romanian intellectuals were formed in the tent of the Church and confessional schools, who fought for the preservation of the ancestral faith and national unity. The Church was the only institution in Transylvania and Hungary that had the ability to coagulate all the factors that contributed to the realization of the Romanian unitary national state. The obstacles that the Romanians from these places had to face were countless. Forced Hungarianization and coercion to leave their faith were the main targets of the rule in those days. The bishops of Arad, be they Serbian or Romanian, supported by their collaborators, diocesan advisers, deacons, priests and believers, tried to keep the jurisdiction of the Bishopric of Arad over the entire current county of Arad, to the Hălmeagiu and Bihor County and later over the "adjacent Banat parts" dealing with Greek Catholic proselytism.

The interwar period was a particularly complex one, with great transformations both at the ecclesiastical and state level. The ecclesiastical organization of the Arad Diocese followed its natural course unhindered until then. Thus, at the episcopal level, the same eparchial bodies functioned, the Eparchial Synod (Eparchial Assembly), the Eparchial Consistory (Eparchial Council) and the Spiritual Consistory, under the leadership of the hierarch. At the level of the Archdiocese functioned the Archdiocesan Assembly, the Archdiocesan Council and the Archdiocesan Epitropia. Within the Arad Diocese, were established 12 deaneries functioned, of which 7 were from Arad, and 5 from Banat; for missionary purposes, 3 more deaneries were established in 1926. The priests from the Arad parishes fought to preserve the national being and the Orthodox faith; many of them had participated in the Great National Assembly on December 1, 1918 from Alba Iulia. After the Unification, the Orthodox clergy from Arad became directly involved in combating some social evils, such as alcoholism, concubinage, divorces, sectarianism, etc. The three monasteries in the diocese had a decisive missionary role through the pilgrimages which were organized on the great holidays. On an overall level, the most significant achievements of the epoch were church unification, accomplished with great effort, as well as the establishment of the Romanian Patriarchate. The idea of achieving church unification started from Arad, and here too, within the Archpontifical Synods, the clergy and believers protested,

since 1920, when the first echoes appeared about the possible signing of a Concordat with the Vatican, vehemently contesting this "unpatriotic" and offensive act both to the Romanian State and to the Romanian Orthodox Church". Also in Arad, at the beginning of the 19th century, a higher theological school was established, instilling in young Romanians, along with the pedagogical school, the love of God, culture and nation. Moreover, in these parts of the country, a real resistance was manifested through culture, being established cultural societies, associations, church choirs, libraries and other similar institutions. The Great Union had also been prepared in Arad, in the entourage and with the support of the hierarch Ioan Ignatie Papp, the "Bishop of the Great Union". After the great event of December 1, 1918, enlightened people were activated in the service of the Arad bishopric, who knew with great wisdom how to manage the internal affairs of the diocese and carry out an exceptional missionary activity.

The doctoral thesis consists of six chapters. In the first chapter, are mentioned the old eparchial centers of Ienopole and Lipova, the forerunners of the current Diocese of Arad. These were the Romanian bishops, even if for a certain period of time they were under the leadership of hierarchs of another nation. Due to the strange conditions, the bishops established their residence in Lipova or in Ineu, depending on those who conquered a fortress and the conditions imposed by the occupiers. At the end of the 17th century, many Serbians were forced to refuge across the Danube. In this context, they received from the Habsburgs the so-called "Illyrian privileges", which allowed them to preserve their ecclesiastical autonomy. In 1706, Bishop Isaia Diacovici, a close relative of Patriarch Arsenie III Cernovici, bought a plot of land in Arad city, an assimilated act, from a historical point of view to the moment of the establishment of the Arad Diocese. Its territory of jurisdiction was much larger than today's, fully encompassing the current counties of Arad and Bihor, partly the counties of Satu Mare and Timiș, as well as territories beyond the Danube. The Arad Diocese was headed by Serbian bishops until 1829, when the first Romanian bishop was elected, thanks to the struggle led by Moise Nicoară, Dimitrie Țichindeal and other good Romanians. This chapter also presents the series of Serbian and Romanian bishops, who ruled this diocese from the beginnings until the Great Union.

The second chapter, the most extensive in the thesis, contains information regarding the interwar organizational structure of the Arad Diocese, according to the Law and Organizational Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church from 1925. The constitutive parts are mentioned: the bishopric, the deanery, the parish and the monastery. The three bishops of Arad from the interwar

period, Ioan Ignatie Papp, Grigorie Comşa and Andrei Magieru, were those who kept the Orthodox faith alive, distinguishing themselves, each in part, by special qualities in the service of God and of people. The closest collaborators of the bishops of Arad were the members of the Diocesan Council, the diocesan councilors (consistorial advisors) from the three Sectors, called Ecclesiastical, Cultural and Economic, as well as the members of the Diocesan Assembly, clergy and laity, many of them mentioned in the paperwork. Along the ecclesiastical deaneries, all the priests who were active in the interwar period are mentioned, referring to their life and activity. Also are listed some of the most important priests from the Arad parishes. Monasteries occupied a special place in the Eparchy of Arad, some bishops being, for certain periods of time, their administrators; the overwhelming importance of the monasteries lay in their missionary character, especially on the occasion of holy days, when crowds of believers gathered and participated in church services. Finally, in this chapter reference was also made to the Romanian parishes remaining in Hungary and Serbia after the drawing of the new borders, as well as to the re-establishment of the Dioceses of Oradea and Timisoara.

An important moment in the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church, captured in the third chapter, was the church unification carried out in 1925, in which the Arad Diocese participated fully, through its representatives. The priestly congresses and the meetings between the hierarchs are mentioned, the proposals made for the church unification to respect the principles of the Shagunian Statute, as well as other provisions. After many negotiations, the Law and the Organizational Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church were adopted, thus establishing the Romanian Patriarchy.

The fourth chapter deals with the issue of signing the Concordat with the Vatican. The Diocesan Assembly, through its representatives, took a position against signing such a document. Very vehemently were opposed the members of the Arch-Pope Councils, who insisted that this action should not happen. And the church press from Arad was completely against it, the editorials as well as the articles taken from other publications emphasizing this fact. Despite all the opposition of the hierarchy and the faithful people, the Concordat was signed by the minister Vasile Goldiș, the secretary of the Arad Consistory, on May 10, 1927; later he would justify his decision by means of a brochure. It would have been ideal if, before the signing of the Concordat, the Law of Cults to be adopted, having the role of regulating the relationship between

the State and the cults on its territory. It was only in 1948 that the communist authorities in Romania denounced the Concordat.

In the fifth chapter, it is mirrored the cultural-ecclesiastical life, manifested at the episcopal level through the establishment of cultural houses, libraries, cultural associations, choirs and church publications, as well as through the development of the confessional, pedagogical and theological primary education from Arad. It is highlighted the involvement of the local theological school in the unitary reorganization of theological education, as well as the promotion of the Theological Institute to the rank of Theological Academy.

The sixth chapter describes the rich missionary activity manifested by the organization of congresses of missionary priests, pilgrimages to monasteries and other actions of this kind. A wish of the bishops of Arad was the co-optation of intellectuals into the Church and their involvement in its internal affairs, in the form of a lay apostolate. The associations, societies, brotherhoods and religious movements established between the wars aimed to intensify the pastoral-missionary and social-philanthropic activity in the Arad Diocese. Finally, it is also mentioned the involvement of the Church from Arad in the anti-revisionist movement of the time.

Looking back on the interwar period in The Bishopric of Arad , we can say with certainty that several major decisions were made here, both regarding the creation of the new national-unitary Romanian state, through the involvement of people from the entourage of Bishop Ioan Ignatie Papp of Arad, and regarding the ecclesiastical organization, by achieving its unification. It has rightly been said that Arad is the place where the Great Union was created and prepared. The great leaders of the Union lived and worked here, Arad being rightly called "the political capital of the Great Union"; as it can also be considered as "the ecclesiastical capital of the Great Union", since bishop Ioan Ignatie Papp held the lieutenancy of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania after the death of Vasile Mangra.

Therefore, the interwar period, a period of great transformations on all levels, brought with it great challenges for the Romanian Orthodox Church, to which it was forced to respond. The Bishopric of Arad, through those who stood at its helm, as well as through the righteous people, constituted a defense bastion of Orthodoxy of the nation. I hope that the present doctoral thesis will provide new information for an even clearer understanding of the historical context in

which the Arad Diocese operated as well as the events that took place in the period between the two great world conflagrations.

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