

**The religious life of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary and
the historical Banat between the Pasoptist Revolution and
the Second World War**

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Habilitation Thesis

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The habilitation thesis entitled „The religious life of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary and the historical Banat between the Pasoptist Revolution and the Second World War”, presents the balance of achievements, but also the perspectives of the research directions I aim at. This is either to continue and develop the concerns so far or to move towards other horizons of knowledge, by addressing new topics – to a small extent different from what has been the scientific endeavour so far.

The present paper is a true mirror of the career path, of the scientific results reflected in the studies and specialized books and last but not least of the research activity whose purpose we can discover both in the list of publications, but also in the courses / the seminars I teach at the West University of Timișoara, as a tenured teacher for a decade and a half.

From a historical perspective, I have undertaken systematic research in the archives of Hungary, Serbia and Romania. The excerpt documents were the foundation of the scientific approach. The critical analysis of the documentary sources and their reporting at the research level represented, in fact, the essence of my concerns. In the same direction, through the constant research of the archives, I understood very well the existence of a volume of original material, which we must bring in *the visual range* of the historical analysis.

I highlighted the main exploited axes after completing the doctoral studies. After the experience gained in the first doctoral thesis (in history), through the research *New Testament School from historical Banat, 1867-1918* (doctoral thesis in theology, published in 2017 at Jate Press Publishing House in Szeged / Hungary), I wanted to give back to the scientific circuit new, historical elements, discovered in archives related to the scientific concerns of teachers in Banat. *The case study* was the scientific preoccupations of the professors from the discipline of the Study of the New Testament within the Theological Institute from Caransebeș, but also the presentation of the scientific *endeavours* of the different clerics who disseminated in the press of the time New

Testament studies. The perspective of the work is historical. The historical element clearly outlines the whole body of the material, although the exploitation of the biblical *angle* would have been auspicious. However, based on historical doctoral experiences, which required rather good archival, journalistic, bibliographic documentation, *the balance* of interdisciplinarity leans towards the historical dimension.

The structure of the habilitation thesis, follows naturally, the regulatory coordinates, namely to present briefly and document, on the one hand, *the scientific and academic achievements*, and on the other hand *the perspectives of evolution and development of the scientific and academic career*.

As for my area of research, it has expanded to the following colour: „The religious life of Romanians in Hungary (1850-1950)”; „The scientific activity of the professors from the Theological Institute from Caransebeş (end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century)” and „The Christian Church and the Banat society (1867-1918)”.

The central stake of the volumes „A History of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary (1921-1944)”, vol. I (Scridon, 2021) and vol. II (Scridon, 2022), but also of the studies published in the European space 2020), Serbia (Scridon, 2020), Poland (Scridon, 2020)] is the materialization of the aspirations of each historian to contribute – as much as possible – to the development/completion of an exposed topic and the opening of new research directions.

The scientific concerns of the authors - Teodor Misaroş (Misaroş, 1982), Maria Berényi (Berényi, 1990-2018), Elena Rodica Colta (Colta, 1998-2018), Elena Csobai (Csobai, 1993-2017), Emilia Martin (Martin, 2009-2016), Cornel Sigmirean (Sigmirean, 1999-2016), – and several dozen other authors, have made obvious contributions to the informational enrichment of the religious life of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary.

Apart from Teodor Misaroş, all the other authors tangentially touched the subject, but not without sprinkling elements of originality.

The hard work of the forerunner Misaroş is obvious. The pioneering work of his holiness has a rather *native* component, as the narrative laid down by Father Misaroş „betrays” the knowledge of BOR from Hungary and the Hungarian *family* society. It was a huge job, especially because, only later, the BOR archive in Hungary was systematized, and the archival citations from the work of Father Misaroş were limited. This can be seen from several perspectives: the

sufficiency of the archival documents discovered to embody the final thesis; methodology and level of depth in approaching a topic, etc.

Without Misaroş, knowing the BOR activity in Hungary was much more difficult. All researchers-in question- refers to the thesis of his holiness. However, many topics, once opened by Misaroş, began to be exploited.

The (re)opening of the topics, in the light of the new documents, takes the research to another level. The causes and effects of the narrative can be perceived differently.

For example, the reopening of the „Ghenadie Bogoevich” chapter was necessary. The Romanian researchers from Hungary, presented above, highlighted his unfortunate actions. Cornel Sigmirean, only in 2016 brings new elements in question, and I (Scridon, 2020) through archival documents I think I managed to complete the portfolio. This, as long as the *decryption* of the Bogoevich case - as far as possible - provides us with one of the keys to understanding the process of disintegration of the BOR in Hungary.

The apparent erased clerical figures – Ioan Borza, Gheorghe Buha, Petru Mândruţău – are historiographically anonymous. The explanation is simple: they did nothing. Naturally, in this context, the researchers paid attention to other faces that tried to do something. As for me, *driven* by the numerous archival documents discovered, I managed to bury/analyze the activity of these clerics, and the results, we believe, were extraordinary. The problems of the Borza, Buha or Mândruţău clergy fit perfectly into the BOR *puzzle* in Hungary, and their separate approach gives us a clear picture of the (multiple) causes of the disorganization of the BOR in Hungary. Processes that, at least now, 100 years later, we need to understand.

About the Ioan Ola (Martin, 2009), István Németh (Misaroş, 2002) or Iosif Sigescu (Câmpeanu, 2003) clergymen, even if it was written more extensively, we believe that we offer new elements in the restoration process. For example, the Cluj elite – Remus Câmpeanu presents Iosif Siegescu anchored in the Budapest realities: the Romanian language department at the University of Budapest, political activity, writings related to the union, etc. From there, we – based on archival documents – analyzed Siegescu's activity, exclusively while he was in the *chair of the Commissioner for Romanian Affairs in Hungary*. The trends turned out to be similar. Remus Câmpeanu's descriptions in the evoked issues also materialized in the BOR trenches in Hungary, during Siegescu's mandate. Even though the specialists in the field pointed out that Siegescu did

nothing good for BOR from Hungary, (and) we came up with evidence, which represents the foundation of the historical speech.

Even the so-called exhausted subject „Ioan Ola” can offer – in our analyzes – reallocations of ideas, repositioning on the historiographical scene.

We discover a positive light by focusing on Vasile Beleş, Gheorghe Botău, Simion Cornea, Petru Mişcuția, Dimitrie Sabău, Toma Ungureanu, Petru Biberia, Nicolae Rocsin, Ştefan Cordoş, Gheorghe Negru priests etc. Their activity, as it is discovered in the archival documents, proves that they have acquired the good clerical qualities. The involvement of some (Simion Cornea) was sublime.

Along the same lines, we have highlighted, through the new archival discoveries, the modest level of research in the Georgije Zubković *file* – the Serbian Bishop of Buda. If initially, the historiography disputes it, clearly shows that the Serbian bishop did nothing for the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary (Misaroş), from the archival documents that explicitly concern Zubković's correspondence, but also all the other documents published from the BOR archive in Hungary or MAE, we extract the surprising conclusion: Zubković was involved – in the matter – in a concrete way, by signing the various addresses which - to our delight - are kept in the archives.

An exploited lane (not yet sufficient) and which I have dealt with is the involvement of the laity in saving the religious life of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary. Gheorghe Alexici, Virgil Emandity, Ilie Barcoți, Gheorghe Gros, Aurel Maghiar, Ioan Moldovan and Axentie Roşu are largely anonymous historiographers. The only thing that was written about was the personality of Professor Gheorghe Alexici. Otherwise, the researchers did not have to approach the other faces, because they stood out exclusively in Church.

Of the eight *icons* of Romanian spirituality in interwar Hungary, only Gheorghe Alexici and Virgil Emandity stood out, in their time, as true elites in the Hungarian society. For example, this social *visibility* that Gheorghe Alexici enjoyed was a blessing for the Romanian Orthodox Parish in Budapest. Prestigious university professor, with a quarter of a century of experience in the academic environment of Budapest, Alexici did not limit himself to being a simple participant in the Sunday services, but discovered, naturally, that the Church is composed of clergy and laity.

On the other hand, the other elite – Virgil Emandity, initially wanted to become a priest and ended up becoming a good lawyer, but serving God in a different kind of robe.

Ilie Barcoți, Gavril Gabor, Gheorghe Gros, Aurel Maghiar, Ioan Moldovan or Axentie Roșu did not have *worldly* functions, but they managed to gain another world and, obviously, through this, a place in our scientific preoccupations.

Through the second line of research – „The scientific activity of the professors from the Theological Institute of Caransebeș (late nineteenth century and early twentieth century)” – I exploited the topics analyzed through doctoral studies in Theology.

A legitimate explanation of the Caransebes scientific phenomenon has been highlighted in various studies. This is because, concretely, the group of young people *educated* in Habsburg Chernivtsi did not return empty-handed. The goals pursued by the hierarchs Șaguna and Popasu in the second half of the 19th century reached their objectives. The phrase *invests in people*, so used today (2020) in the European context, was a *holy grail* in the mentality of nineteenth-century dioceses.

The *spearhead* of these young people was Iosif Iuliu Olariu. His scientific interests – from the years after his studies in Chernivtsi – can be found in the study which I published in 2014. The material briefly analyzes the 10 most important works published by Father Olariu at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

In two other materials, which I published in 2015, I highlighted a broad picture of the impact of Professor Olariu's contributions in the Banat society from the interwar period. The simple fact that the entire pleiad of Caransebeș elites (and not only) wanted to publish *a thought* about the priest, professor and researcher Olariu, after his death, attests to the role he played in coagulating spiritual values.

Through various studies, I also presented the organizational side of Professor Olariu. In parallel with the study, Father Olariu was involved in administrative matters, as director of the Theological Institute of Caransebeș. In the school year 1917-1918, we will find him as head of the Theological Institute in Arad, and then, in the autumn of 1918, he will return to Caransebeș. The motivation of the ring can be discerned in the studies I have published.

Last but not least, in 2014 the activity of the bishop (vicar) from Caransebeș, Filaret Musta, is outlined. About the motivation for granting the noble title of Doctor Honoris Causa by the people of Chernivtsi, but also about other aspects of the life of the Banat hierarch, we will be able to discover in a published material from 2014.

Also on the lane of the Caransebeş clerical elites, an article published in 2015 depicts the life and activity of Father Petru Barbu. The material brings to light various aspects, not only of the academic life of Banat but also of the different intrigues woven at the time.

The release or the legacy proposed to future generations has been addressed in several articles published in 2018 and 2019. I pointed out that the historic Banat, more than a century ago, was no better than other European regions in terms of the development of theological studies.

The completion of the elitist pleiad within the Theological Institute of Caransebeş was accomplished through studies published in 2020. The three treated clerics – Dimitrie Cioloca, Filip Adam and Iosif Traian Badescu - through the theological concepts promoted, but also through the role played in the diocesan administration remain representative figures in The history of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which we believe should be promoted more today.

The third line of research – „The Christian Church and the Banat Society (1867-1918)” was exploited in about 30 studies.

One of the major perspectives of the theme was the dynamics of the confessional structure. For example, in a 2010 material published in a volume under the auspices of the Romanian Institute of Culture in Vojvodina, I showed the dynamics of the Roman Catholic confessional structure in each district of Timișoara between 1867-1918: Elisabetin (Maierle Vechi), Mehala, Cetate, Iosefin and Fabric. Also, based on archival documents, we were able to restore the number of Protestants (Calvinists and Lutherans), but also Orthodox (Romanians and Serbs). These denominational divisions were structured on the table, of approximately 30,000 inhabitants – as many as Timișoara had in the second half of the 19th century.

Unpublished information about mosaic spirituality was inserted in a study published in 2011. From the archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Timișoara, we extracted information on the number of Jews in Timișoara between 1868 and 1913. With the help of documents from the state archives (Timișoara), I managed to reconstruct the involvement of the Mosaic spirituality in the social life in Timișoara. The various Jewish associations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries harmoniously intertwined philanthropic and cultural activities.

The studies published between 2011 and 2014 radiographed the same concerns (philanthropic and cultural), but from a Christian perspective (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant). Among the Christian Churches in historic Banat in the dualist period, the Roman Catholic diocese was the leader of philanthropic actions. The enumeration of the philanthropic institutions from

Timișoara, under the direct guidance of the Bonnaz Alexander, Dessewffy Sándor, Csernoch János and Glattfelder Gyula bishops, builds the extent of this Christian phenomenon.

On the other hand, the Romanian Orthodox, in this segment, made their insertion in historiography through the *Romanian National Student*, who started his self-help activity in 1868 and had as president the archpriest of Timișoara Meletie Dreghici. The actions were coordinated by the bishops of Arad. Later, bishop Ioan Mețianu (1828-1916) reactivated in 1877 the *Elena Ghiba Birta* Foundation, which at the end of 1899, had a fund of 62,722 florins, of which, starting with the year of its establishment, offered numerous scholarships annually. The same hierarch helped the poor priests, widows and orphans of priests in Timișoara through the *Greek Orthodox Priesthood Fund*.

Last but not least, based on archival documents, *resettle* the various clerical elites in the *historiographical scene* - Archpriest Gherasim Sârb (1857-1936), Archpriest Melentie Șora (1889-1956) or priest David Voniga (1867-1933). The studies published between 2012 and 2015 outline the assumptions, challenges and efforts of the Romanian priests for building the Church and the Banat Society.

All these materials presented succinctly, depict a Christian Church, a Banat society that was perfectly integrated into the values – which we call today *European*.

In the last part of the thesis (the plan for the evolution and development of the academic career. Research directions and action plan), I presented the plans regarding the development of the didactic and research activities.

Regarding the didactic activity, I will be preoccupied with continuing to find solutions that will make more efficient the teaching of the courses and seminars that I teach at the bachelor's and master's levels. The Covid-19 pandemic has become one of the most dramatic periods since the turn of the second and third millennia, which is why educational institutions are forced to propose – in the online environment – new, efficient, modern methods of exposing themes. Belonging, the acquisition of these new teaching methods, I think is *the key* to modern education – regardless of the vicissitudes of the times.

I intend to continue the research activity, starting from the scientific efforts made so far in the research projects that I have completed, such as „A History of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary (1921-1944). Analysis between historiography and diplomatic-ecclesiastical documents”, Volume 1; „A history of the Romanian Orthodox in Hungary (1921-1944).

Documents”, Volume 2, but also the works presented by the Church and the Banat Society. I mainly want to follow the religious life of the Romanian Orthodox in the diaspora, because – after consulting the various archives I found that – the issue has a lot to offer to historiography.