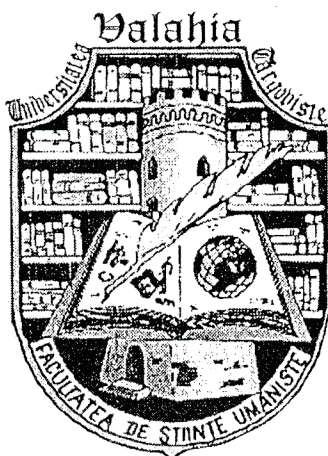


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THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE YIELDING OF BASARABIA AND BUCOVINA

*Vasile Adrian Costin**

The number 7/1940 of the magazine "The Romanian Orthodox Church" contains a 4 pages article, framed in black border, titled "The Mourning Church". With deep sorrow it was announced "3rd of July 1940 – a mourning and heart-breaking sadness day for the Romanian people and its ancient Church... again they are tearing away from us, with the most ruthless violation of justice, bloody strips of body and soul: northern princely Bucovina and the entire Basarabia with its millions peaceful believers and local Moldavians... Close to the pain of the country is the greater pain of the Church... Remained shield and hope for the Moldavians, since the ancient invasion in 1812, it (the Church) is today the first and greater victim... The houses... will first fall... together with their servants... the Romanian Church... is forced not only to defeat its dreams, but also to count its dead, martyrs for faith... But with all its pain... the Church didn't lose hope... We will retreat, but we will come back... So our brothers won't be hopeless" (Savin 1940 : 521-524).

Thus it was announced the tragedy from summer 1940 when, after the Soviet ultimatum based on the Ribbentrop - Molotov agreement from 23rd August 1939, the Romanian territory between Prut and Nistru passed under Russian domination and northern Bucovina was taken as "compensation" for the 22 years of "Romanian domination" in Basarabia.

Basarabia is a Romanian territory, an integral part of Moldavia from the very formation of the Romanian people. This fact is contested only by the Russians and the most eloquent proof is the language spoken by the Bessarabians.

In 1401 (August – September) when the ecumenical patriarch Matei gave the Tomos for the recognition of the Moldavian Metropolitan seat, it stretched all the way to Nistru, where later Ștefan cel Mare will build his fortresses. The first metropolitan bishop in Moldavia between Carpathians and Nistru was Iosif I Mușat who, in 1403, will found a bishopric at Rădăuți. In this jurisdiction also enters Hotin from Basarabia.

The territory between Nistru and Prut was named Basarabia by the Russians only in 1812, to distinguish it from the rest of Moldavia. The name derives from the southern counties of this territory, inhabited by the Wallachian Basarabi. In 1596, Aron Vodă founded a bishopric at Huși, including the lands Lăpușna, Orhei, Soroca and Tighina from Basarabia which remained under its mastership until 1812 when the Turks ceased Basarabia to the Russians. Meanwhile, after the Crimeean War (1864), Cahul, returned to Moldavia, passed under the jurisdiction of the Huși bishopric. The Berlin Treaty from 1878 gave again Cahul to the Russians.

When at Brăila was founded the Proilavia Metropolitan seat (1546), it had under its jurisdiction Cetatea Albă (taken from the Tartars in 1408 by Alexandru cel Bun), Buceag, Ismail, Căusani, Țighina, Hotin, Dubăsari from Transylvania, Lăpușna and Orhei, all territories east of Prut, although the metropolitan seat was in Brăila (Constantinescu 1906: 35). After the Adrianopole Treaty (1829) the Proilavian Metropolitan seat vanishes.

In 1767 at Hotin bishop was the famous scholar the Constantinopolitan Patriarch. After the Russian occupation of Basarabia, from 1813 the territory of this bishopric was annexed to the Metropolitan seat of Chișinău, and the bishopric was abolished.

If all the Moldavian hospodars mastered the land between Prut and Nistru, this fact is also stressed by the churchly organization of the Moldavian Metropolitan seat, because its bishoprics has jurisdiction also over this territory.

The problems begin with the Russian invasions in the Romanian Countries. After they occupied the Romanian Principalities in 1787 – 1792, ignoring the order given by the Constantinopolitan Patriarch regarding the election of a new metropolitan bishop, the Russians named an exarch of Moldo – Wallachia, Ambrozie Serebrenikov, bishop of Ecaterinoslav (Berechet 1923: 956-960).

In 1791, Ecaterina the IInd named Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni as dean bishop at Tighina and Cetatea Albă (Bender and Akkerman). Both Ambrozie and Bodoni "were political bishops rather than canonical ones, being sent by the power of the occupant and not chosen after the laws of the country."

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After the peace signed at Iași (11th of February 1792), Ambrozie, helped by the Russian general Cehovski, installed Bodoni as Moldavian metropolitan bishop (Frățiman, 1920, p. 20) and withdrew at Golia, despite the protest of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch who unfrocked him and asked voivode Alexandru Constantin Moruzi to proceed to the canonical election of the metropolitan bishop.

The voivode ordered the election and in 1792, Jacob Stamati, the bishop of Huși was elected Metropolitan bishop of Moldavia. In a circular letter send to the priests Jacob Stamati announced that Bodoni wasn't a canonical Metropolitan bishop, being "against the law and without the election and the community reception of the patriots... the anathema was sent against him" (Iorga 1928-1930, II: 187).

Gavriil Bănulescu, send by voivode Moruzi at Constantinopol, returned to Russia where, after occupying three bishopric seats and being decorated by Ecaterina the IInd, became Metropolitan bishop of Kiev (1799). Moruzi's gesture had as a result his moving in Wallachia, although the Russians had asked the Sublime Porte for his deposition.

Although installed by the Russians, Bodoni, a Romanian from the Bistrița-Năsăud area, never forgot that he was a Romanian and as much as he could he helped the Romanians, promoted the Romanian language and writing and even founded a Theological Seminary. Canonically speaking he played the game of the Russians who named in Basarabia, after him, only Russian bishops who persecuted the Romanians.

After the Russian – Turkish war (1806) and the Treaty of Slobozia (1807) the Romanian Countries were annexed to Russia. From 1803 the Metropolitan bishop of Moldavia was Veniamin Costachi (in 1806 he also replaced the voivode). Forced by the Russians, Veniamin retired and in his place was brought again Bodoni, named exarch of Moldavia, Wallachia and Basarabia. He had orders to ignore the Constantinopolitan Synod and instead to listen to the Synod of the Russian Church. The Metropolitan bishop from București was supposed to obey to Bodoni only and to ask for his opinion in everything (Arbure 1898: 741).

On the 16th of May 1812 was signed the Treaty of București between the Russians and the Turks. The Russians withdrew from the Romanian Principalities in change for half of Moldavia (the part between Prut and Nistru) which they named Basarabia. In Moldavia voivode was the Phanariot Scarlat Alexandru Callimachi. The bishop Bodoni had raised out in the open against the Greeks, dismissing the very Metropolitan bishop of Wallachia, Dositei. He had to leave Basarabia and his place was taken by Veniamin Costachi, who was received with great joy by the Moldavians. "The soul of the great patriot was sad – said Erbiceanu about Veniamin Costachi – the wound of his soul couldn't heal because, looking towards the Prut he remembered that half of our ancestors country was lost because of the rapt of Basarabia." (Erbiceanu 1888: 20-21).

The Moldavian divan sent a protest to Constantinople against giving up Basarabia to the Russians. Veniamin wanted to sent a protest to Viena too, but the divan, fearing the Russians, didn't agree to that. Leaving the divan, Veniamin would have said: "For Bucovina Voivode Ghica gave his life and for Basarabia we are not even sending a protest" (Nistor 1991: 175).

The Russians founded a Metropolitan seat in Basarabia, ignoring the canonical authority, the jurisdiction of Constantinople and the canonical rights of Veniamin Costachi. Metropolitan bishop of Basarabia was named the same Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni. Bodoni remained a good Romanian although he was named bishop by the Russian occupant who, in this way used the Holy Synod to strenghten the mastership over the invaded territory. For Basarabia the Metropolitan bishop Gavriil Bodoni proved to be providential. Born Romanian, raised and educated in Transylvania, with Romanian mind and heart, he organized the Church, the religious and cultural life in the new Russian province, Basarabia, on the historical, political, cultural and religious track of the Romanian Moldavia. He encouraged the people and the priests to use the Romanian language in church, he published Romanian books and magazines, he raised an imposing Metropolitan residence with a church inside, surrounded with gardens of flowers, orchards and vineyards. All of them passed over centuries and came to be "the largest and loftiest Metropolitan residence in Romania. On one side is the chapel, large like a cathedral; on the other side is the dwelling. Down stairs there are the official and episcopal rooms, and up stairs there are the guests rooms. The bishop's is crowned with belfry, and on the west the walls and porches open towards a lovely garden with flowers, orchards and vineyards." His death on the 30th of March 1821 was a mourning day for all Bessarabians. Buried in the vault of Cipriana Monastery, on the tomb stone are written the words: "His name will live among the nations, the people will recognize his wisdom and the Church will confess his praise." (Galaction 1926: 1)

All the successors of Bodoni at the head of the Bessarabean Church were genuine Russians (none of them a Romanian) actively involved in the plans and the russification pressures of the administrative, political, cultural and churchly authorities, by all means, against Bessarabians. Some of them were extremely zealous, like Pavel Lebedev (1870 – 1882) nicknamed the Romanian-eater and Serafim Ciceagov (1908 – 1914), who deported many patriot priests, among which was archimandrite Gurie, the future Metropolitan bishop. In over 100 years of Russian domination and administration the russification of Basarabia didn't succeed. The Romanian resistance force was the people, the churches, the priests, Romanian language and books.

In 1909, Nicolae Iorga observed that in the annexed Basarabia, Romanian sounded the bells into the church, Romanian spoke the people, Romanian were the songs and prayers in the church, Romanian was spoken the word of God, Romanian were performed the Great Mystery (Christening, Wedding, Confession), Romanian was the sermon in the homily. (Iorga 1909: 2194-2196). All these happened while a Metropolitan bishop like Pavel Lebedev victimized all priests who served in Romanian language, gathered all the Romanian books from the churches and for seven years he heated his residence by throwing them in fire, he closed 340 churches where the priests served in Romanian language and the priests were expelled. Luckily in 1882 he was transferred as exarch of Georgia. His successors were a little more lenient, but not with much. (Nistor 1991: 233-245).

Such actions, together with the russification of education and literature, the interdiction of the Romanian literary or political publications to enter in Basarabia, the promotion in the main posts only on russophile basis, tended to darken the Romanian spirit. They wanted to stop the access to culture from which it might have appear the ideas of liberty, national and social justice, awakening and revolt against a foreign domination.

But then came the year 1918 when, on the 27th of March the Country Council decided the unification of Basarabia with Romania, the mother - land. Years of regaining knowledge followed, together with the trust in future. Only now the Metropolitan seat of Basarabia was canonically founded (on the 25th of June 1918). The Huși bishop, Nicodim Munteanu (the future patriarch) was named by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church deputy of the metropolitan seat. In 1921 the dean bishop of Iași, Gurie Grosu was chosen archbishop of Chișinău and in 1928 was raised at the level of metropolitan bishop. Bessarabean from Stolniceni, monk and afterwards bishop, he cared very much at the national dignity. "It is a very humiliating and shameful thing when a man abjures his nation and hides his dependency towards the fruitful people who gave him birth. Moldavian, teach us how to respect you if you want others to treasure and consider you. Do the clerks who obey Moscova believe that those from Moscova respect them? They can be sure that they despise them more than the Romanian does. And when they go there everybody knows that they don't take the bow as Christian meekness, but as unworthy begging... The Christian meekness do not ask to sacrifice out dignity, to show slave degradation... but to give each nation the proper respect." (Ghibu 1926, I: 53-61).

In the govern of the independent Moldavia before 1918, Gurie Grosu was deputy of the Cult Ministry. Gathering an Assembly of the Bessarabean Orthodox Church, he insisted on the fact that "the Church should be a spring of national culture... The priest should be the best defender of the nationality." (Ghibu, 1926, I: 159-160). In gathering this Assembly and during all the struggle for unity, Gurie Grosu was seconded by another great patriot, Dionisie Erhan, former abbot at Suruceni Monastery, future dean at Chișinău and then bishop at Ismail, Honoris Causa doctor with only 4 primary classes, but a very good self-educated man. When it was discussed the gathering of the Clerks Churchly Assembly of the independent Basarabia (on the 15th of March 1918), in which to discuss the relations with the Russian Synod and the Moldavians over the Nistru, it was also mentioned the problem of sanctioning a churchly forum for this Assembly. In the Church all are done with blessing. Dionisie Erhan did not approve to ask blessing from Moscova, because Basarabia was part of the Metropolitan seat of Moldavia and its territory was annexed against the canonical stipulations to the Russian Synod, who didn't had any jurisdictional right over this territory. Regarding the transnistrian Romanians, using the 34 apostolic canon, Dionisie said that "the bishops of each nation must know the first of them and to consider him as the superior and to do no other useless thing... the Romanian people, no matter where it might be, should be ruled by the Metropolitan bishop of Moldavia, no matter the boundaries which politically separates us". He showed that while the Russian Bessarabeans had Russian bishops, for the Russians in Japonia or America they send Russian bishops, not accepting Japanese or American bishops. Where is the justice in that? (cf. Plămădeală 1993)

Despite the Russian persecution on cultural, educational and religious plan, the Bessarabean priests kept the Romanian conscience even after 100 years of forced domination and systematical russification. They had an important role in achieving unity on the 27th of March 1918 and continued this role after the Unity. If the Seminary in Chișinău gave all these unity makers in 1918, the same seminary, like those from Ismail, Bălți, Edinet and the Theological Faculty from Chișinău gave between the two world wars culture men, scientists, good priests and good Romanians.

From 1902 the priests gathered in a "Brotherhood of the Birth of Christ", which had as purpose the printing of churchly literature in Romanian, for the people, distributed for free in all the villages.

The year 1918 found the Bessarabeans in a cultural and national troublesome, caused by the 100 years of Russian domination. The Metropolitan bishop Gurie decided to begin a life and death struggle to reduce, spread and eradicate darkness by lightening minds, spreading knowledge, schools and cultural institutions. Not finding the necessary forces in Basarabia, he asked for the help of the Romanians in Ardeal who had temperaments, instruction and fighters education, steeled by the attempts of life. They had an Assembly for the culture and literature of the Romanian people – ASTRA – which held annual conferences and a monthly press

organization – the magazine Transilvania from Sibiu. At the Congresses and Conferences organized by ASTRA participated King Ferdinand (honor president of ASTRA), the first minister, state magistrates, members of Parliament, academicians, bishops, culture men. Because Bishop Gurie liked the activity and plans of ASTRA, he wanted to extend it to Basarabia. He used to participate at the Congresses and in July 1924, in the presence of numerous personalities, Gurie dared to ask the first minister, through King Ferdinand, “less politic and more culture.” (Revista Transilvania 1924: 42-43).

In October 1924 he participated at the anniversary of 100 years from the birth of Avram Iancu. At the pilgrimage made in Apuseni Mountains took part Gurie Grosu followed by two co-workers, the counsellor Burcovski – Bujoreanu and priest professor Leon Trofin. At Cămpeni took place the Congress of ASTRA where, in his speech, Gurie reminded the King the need of culture in Basarabia.

At the annual Congress of ASTRA in 1925, Gurie participated with a delegation of 70 Bessarabians which impressed with their ardent desire. Then it was decided that ASTRA from Transilvania to found a branch in Basarabia, under the name of ASTRA of Basarabia. (Cunescu 1993)

On local, churchly plan, Gurie managed to found two bishoprics: 1. The bishopric of Hotin with residence at Bălți, founded on the 10th of March 1923, first bishop being Visarion Puiu, former Argeș bishop and future metropolitan bishop of Bucovina, followed by Tit Simedrea, him too future metropolitan bishop of Bucovina, both “passionate” in Romanian problems, one antigerman, the other antisovietic, passion that will cost them rejection from their functions and then retreat at the monastery; 2. The bishopric of Cetatea Albă – Ismail, with the residence at Ismail, also founded on the 10th of March 1923, with patriot bishops like Nectarie Corlarciuc, Iustinian Teculescu, Dionisie Erhan.

After 22 years their joy was to be suppressed. The Soviet-German approaching, sealed in the well known pact Ribbentrop – Molotov on the 23rd of August 1939, responded to the expansionist goals of each camp. The pact canceled the Anglo – French – Soviet negotiations started after the conquest of Cehoslovakia in March 1939, which contained a mutual non-aggression rider (which would soon fall), mutual contacts and information on each side. The pact delimited two zones of German and Soviet influence and, concerning Romania, in the 3rd article there was an exact explanation: “Regarding south-east Europe, from the Soviet part is underlined the interest for Basarabia. The German part declares a total political lack of interest for these regions.”

The signing of the Pact, the attack against Polonia (the 1st of September 1939), the mutual assistance treaties imposed by U.R.S.S. to Estonia (the 28th of September 1939), Letonia (the 5th of October 1939), Lituania (the 11th of October 1939), the Soviet attempt to conquer Finland (30 November 1939 – 12 March 1940), the attitude of France and England (only a war declaration against Germany on the 17th of September 1940) determined the neutral attitude of Romania and the attempt to avoid the military confrontations by organizing the Neutral Balcanic Block, the Balcanic Accord from 1934 and by the attempt to sign a non-aggression pact with the Soviets with the help of Turkey. These forces, but concomitant with the recommendations of the cominternist Boris Stefano to follow the example of the Baltic Countries, to “sign immediately a treaty of mutual help with U.R.S.S.” and to discuss a “unsolved disputed question, that of Basarabia”, as Molotov used to say, gathered troupes (between 35 and 46 divisions) at the Romanian-Soviet border.

In these conditions the King Carol the IInd, seconded by Gh. Tătărăscu and Gr. Gafencu, tried to fortify the relations with Germany. Molotov, the German ministry at Moscova, decided that “resolving the problem of Basarabia does not allow any more delays” and Germany “accepts the decisions from Moscova. Regarding Bucovina (the Soviet part claims that it was inhabited by “Ukrainian population”), the Soviet claims are a novelty for the Germans.” (*Istoria Românilor* 1996: 319-321). On the 26 of June U.R.S.S. receives the acceptance of Germany and limits its demands only over the northern part of Bucovina, wanted as a compensation for the Romanian domination in Basarabia. The Romanian govern, advised by Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy, Germany to satisfy the Soviet demands so to save peace, after the two ultimatums from the Soviet part (26 and 27 to 28 June 1940), to avoid the grave consequences that might have open hostilities on this side of Europe, was forced to accept the evacuation conditions specified in the Soviet answer.”

After this decision in the competence of U.R.S.S. entered 50 762 square kilometers and 3 915 000 inhabitants, lost by Romania.

The political and military factors from București, the national public opinion, a great part of the army billeted on the yielded territories and the rest of the country didn't share the point of view according to which the acceptance of the Soviet conditions was the only way. Among these were Nicolae Iorga, Ștefan Ciobanu, Iuliu Maniu, Constantin I. C. Brătianu, Virgil Madgearu, Constantin Angelescu, Stelian Popescu, Ion Antonescu and others.

Their protests were in vain, like the analysis of the solidity of the data exposed in the Crown Council on the 27th of June 1940 by the persons who choose the acceptance of the ultimatum.

Forcing the terms of the ultimatum, the Soviets occupied Basarabia, Bucovina and the land Herța, which meant a real tragedy and the departure point of what followed (the Dictate of Viena when the north-west of Ardeal was lost and the Treaty of Craiova when the Cadrilater was yielded). The tragedy of Romania also meant the tragedy of the Romanian Orthodox Church which saw its believers abandoned into a foreign domination which was to victimize them. Thus it didn't agree but it had to accept the reality. In this situation it started to help refugees (many in number) from Basarabia and Bucovina. On the 1st of July 1940, the Patriarch Nicodim send a pastoral to all parishes urging the priests and believers to pray "for the protection of the Country, for the victory of the King and of our Nation, for enlightening all the leaders of the Romanian people and for fortifying the army." (Patriarhul Nicodim 1940).

He didn't despair. "We will retreat, but we will come back. We will shake, but we are not going to brake... The high Romanian and Christian spirituality which over two centuries spread from the desks of the Theology Faculties in Chișinău and Cernăuți will not have been in vain. Hidden in our souls, it will maintain alive the flame of hope for the better days that are to come... even if all our friends would leave us we won't be alone because God and justice are with us. It is the soothing and encouraging word that we are sending to our priests and believers brothers in Basarabia and Bucovina, uprooted from the body of the country and from the protection of the Romanian Church at the compulsory act begun on the 28th of June and ended on the 3rd of July 1940." (Savin, 1940: 523-524)

He urged the people to help the refugees, giving actual examples from the Bible: "No one should take care only after himself, but he should care about the others, too" (I. Corinteni 10,24), "each man should give as much as he wants, but not with sorrow, because God loves the one who gives with open heart (II Corinteni 9,7).

In such times are checked the Christian virtues. Personally, I have taken all the measures so that the Seminaries, the priestly Homes and the monasteries to host and help as many as possible. I gave all I could to the Comity, from the Archiepiscopate and Patriarchat. This cannot caress all the pains... confess about Christ through your deeds... the entire clergy should stand upon times... helping, encouraging and working together..." (Patriarhul Nicodim 1940: 520).

There were made collections of money, clothes, toilet objects and food. The refugee friars and nuns were distributed in the monasteries from the country. It was made "a distribution of the refugee priests to the other dioceses in the country in proportion of about 10% at the existing number of parishes from each actual parish." Thus there were distributed 368 priests in the parishes of 15 bishoprics.

Parallel with this charitable activity, priests and believers were prepared for the war that the Church recommended to bring back the lost territories of the country. Physically and military the war preparations were developing. Call-ups and mobilizations were made. In a harmonious working together with the government, the Church took part at all these actions to defend the country boundaries. After the dispositions of the state organs it replaced the called-up professors (Arhiva, I: 78-79). It also participated at the propaganda for the law of agricultural mobilization and correct declaration of the agricultural production (Arhiva, I: 80-81), for the measures against epidemics (Arhiva, I: 221) and others. Not neglecting the spiritual side, the Church tried to awaken the peoples conscience to participate at the national reuniting war.

By 4 pastoral war letters written by archimandrite Iuliu Scriban at the demand of the Romanian Patriarchy, explanations were given regarding the participation of people and army at a war fought "not only with guns, but with the soul also", because the "war isn't just a clash of arms, but also a throb of the souls. If the souls are alive and warm, then the guns will be better handled." Thus the duty of the priests is to undertake the entire tension of the nation and to guide the believers to become "one with the army", supporting it with the thought and heart. Because the battle is not fought only on the battlefield, but on the entire country, the priest must "feed the spirit of those remained home with the idea of justice. This idea guides the nation and makes it remain steadfast in the faith in justice and in the determination to support with all its heart the sons from the battlefield." (I. Scriban, I, 1940: 383-386).

Thus to "fulfill the justice wanted by the nation" armed action is not enough. It was mentioned the example of the Russian people who's leaders "left the unworthy and bad thinking to sneak onto his breast and this bitten all around until it undertook vast sections of the people". And all this because "their priests didn't learn and were only content to make the Holy Sermon". (I. Scriban, II, 1940: 387-392)

Together with the teaches that were supposed to unite the spirit of the people, the priests had to caress the families who's children remained on the battlefield, to support the children and be spiritual fathers for them, to gather help for those in need, to seek the ill and the prisoners if in their parish were hospitals or prisoners camps. The prisoners, although "enemy fighters", were still grieved humans without "personal guilt for the state they were in. The priests must show them Christian care, fulfilling the Bible words "love your enemies, bless those who curse you and do good to those who hate and victimize you" (Matei 5,44). In this way they could leave a "special mark in the heart of a foreign man" and "lead far away the good name of the country". (Scriban 1940: 392-396)

If soldiers passed through the parish, the priest should meet them, to prey with them and talk to them about sacrifice for the good of the nation, to "advise them against the temptations that could come to the desiring man". (Scriban 1940: 396-400).

The priests were urged to take all these measures before the beginning of war, during the problems caused by yielding Basarabia, Bucovina, north-west Ardeal and Cadrilater, out of preoccupation for the refugees.

On the 6th of September 1941, Patriarch Nicodim send Marshal Ion Antonescu, after "one year of fruitful governing", a telegram in which he says that "it is a year since you promised to the country the completion of the boundaries, order and just pride. God helped you to keep your work. The entire nation owes you gratitude. I pray Good Lord to give you many happy years and among Your beautiful desires: power, luck and complete spiritual contempt." (BOR, 9-10/1941: 599)

The army was followed by military priests who encouraged it and fulfill the religious needs. They obeyed the Army Episcopacy founded in 1921 at the initiative of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church and recognized by the political power. This episcopacy was lead in the period 10 October 1937 – August 1948 by the bishop Partenie Ciopron.

The high authorities of the Church, the Holy Synod and the Patriarchy supported Marshal Antonescu in preparing the army and the spirit of the people for the war to free Bucovina and Basarabia. Ion Antonescu appreciated this help and in the answer to Patriarch Nicodim telegram thanked for it: "I am happy to see that, in this year which ended with the victory of the deep Romanian justice, my efforts received the understanding and the support of Your Highness, the Clergy and the Church. The victory will be whole if we will remain united in work, sacrifice and beliefs." (BOR, 9-10/1941: 600)

On the 9th of November 1941 the Romanians were called to pronounce in a plebiscitary public assembly over the Marshal Antonescu governing acts, after a year of leadership. In the speech on the Radio, on the 6th of November 1941, Patriarch Nicodim said that "Marshal Antonescu is the providential man... who removed the catastrophes rushed upon our nation because of some huge political mistakes... and offered the possibility to undone some errors which smashed the body of our country". In a war that took less than a month Basarabia and Bucovina were reunited with Romania. The Patriarch, aware of the fact that "the war didn't end" (there were still north-western Ardeal and Cadrilater to take back), in the name of the Romanian Orthodox Church "unbinding to Marshal Antonescu" and "for the necessary reforms mend to ensure and to fortify the existence of the Romanian State, its geographic and spiritual unity, between the boundaries that God gave we are giving our patriarchal blessing." (BOR, 9-10/1941: 602-603)

The speech of the Patriarch valued a lot of the Marshal received the approval vote to continue the actions for improve the situation of the country.

Concrete actions were needed. Almost a year of Bolshevik domination in Bucovina and Basarabia destroyed many material and spiritual goods. In an organized economical robbery, over Nistru were taken large quantities of alimentary, agriculture and industrial products. A terror regime was installed and members of the Romanian population were victimized and massacred. Many families from Ukraine were removed instead of the German population shifted to Germany. Many churches were closed and profaned, the Romanian manuals in schools were replaced with Russian ones, in administration were imposed persons brought from over Nistru. Retreating in front of the liberating Romanian army, in the period 22 – 26 June 1941, the soviets made massive destructions. While the Romanian villages and towns were still smoking after the soviet communist fires, a group of Transylvanian bishops and priests leaded by the Metropolitan bishop Nicolae Bălan, decided to caress the brothers escaped from slavery. They were the hierarchs of Sibiu, Arad, Caransebeș, Oradea (evacuated by force and installed at Beiuș) and Timișoara, followed by 56 priests. They were to perform a missionary action in Basarabia and Transilvania, divided in five groups. Each priest was to preach every day in one village at a time, to regain the spirit of the rich people and to achieve a real unity of Romanian thinking and feeling. A wagon of religious books printed by the Ardeal Metropolitan seat was send and the missionary groups had the task to found in each village a library in the places indicated by the association ASTRA. The connections of Metropolitan bishop Gurie with ASTRA begun to flourish. The mission was planned for 20 days, while 1000 Holy Masses were to be performed in the spirit of the faith and love for the nation. As many libraries were to be found to enlighten the people.

The group left București in the presence of Patriarch Nicodim, the vicepresident of the Minister Council Mihai Antonescu, the national Culture and Cults minister General R. Rosetti and the general secretary for Cults, Colonel D. Chirichescu.

In this moment Patriarch Nicodim said that it was about to begun only a small part of the great missionary battle which the Romanian Orthodox Church begun and lead in the ruined, trampled parts by those without a God. Mihai Antonescu showed the value of faith and of Church not only for the personal restoration of a man, but for the restoration of a nation and of the whole world.

This was the continuation of an action begun by the Patriarchy ever since the entrance of the Romanian army in Basarabia and Bucovina. Bishops were sent and settled at bishoprics, priests and ritual books also etc. (BOR, 7-8/1941: 470)

This mission begun on the 3rd of September 1941 when, stepping on the freed land, metropolitan bishop Bălan said to the Bessarabians "we are coming to pray with you for the defeat of the enemy, ... we are not asking anything, but we are bringing all our Christian and Romanian love."

All the five missionary groups headed to the established places. Returning from the mission, the metropolitan bishop Bălan sent a pastoral letter to the Transylvanian priests and believers where he showed the suffering endured by the Bessarabians and Transylvanian brothers and the joy lived by them after the Transylvanian Christian mission. (BOR, 7-8/1941: 605-613)

In order to rebuild the schools, churches and public buildings destroyed by the Soviets in Basarabia, the government had to make a huge internal loan. Understanding the needs of the time, Patriarch Nicodim subscribed to this action 500 000 lei and addressed the priests and believers a call in which he showed that "every Romanian is in debt to subscribe as many and as soon as possible to the necessary loan to prove the world that the Romanian country is united around its leader... The Romanian Orthodox Church, whose life mingles harmoniously with the very being of the Romanian State, consequent to the glorious past and wanting to see the Romanian State in all its glamour, subscribes from the Archiepiscopate of București and the Romanian Patriarchy – the Central Churchly Council – the sum of 9.000.000 lei. The clergy from the Archiepiscopate of Bucharest subscribes one month salary in ten rates and we are taking care that the country has immediately the sum.

The faithful people are urged to follow the example of the Church and of clergy. Him who follows the Church and the clergy follows the demands of God." (BOR, 7-8/1941: 471-472)

In Basarabia, at Cernăuți, archbishop was Efreim Enăchescu who, in July 1941 returned in the seat from which a year before he had been banished by the Soviets. In Bucovina the bishopric seat remained vacant in May 1940 after the retreat of the metropolitan bishop Visarion Puiu. On the 13th of June 1940 the Churchly Electoral College votes Tit Simedrea, former bishop at Hotin, in the vacant seat from Cernăuți. After two weeks begun the chaos for Bucovina and Basarabia. In these conditions the investiture from the Royal Palace couldn't take place until the 13th of March 1941 and the bishopric seat and residence could not be occupied until August 1941. The situation of the Metropolitan seat was difficult. Destroyed churches, dispossessed of art and cult objects, many believers just returned from exile, priests also. After several pastoral visits when he observed the pain and disaster, he sent a pastoral letter to the priests from the Metropolitan seat, urging them to retake their seats and with all their powers and love to serve the believers. They were to make a quick list of the destroyed or alienated art and cult objects, to perform for free all the delayed mass acts (Christening, Wedding, funeral services), to help rebuild particular administrations and public institutions, to act according to the Evangelic spirit.

On administrative plan he was a good defender of the churchly fortunes. After several interventions at the Holy Synod and the Minister Council, he manages to bring the religious Fond (founded on the 29th of April 1786 under the patronage of Viena, become Romanian orthodox churchly Fond in 1925) from the state patrimony to the church patrimony, for a better administration and for the charitable and missionary activity of the church. (Ioniță 2002: 99-117).

If we add the role played by the military priests during the war, we will have a better view over the attitude of the Orthodox Church face to the territorial yielding. The active participation of the military clergy at the campaign against the "atheist and anarchical Bolshevism" shows another side of the fight to defend the boundaries of the country and the Romanian Law. When the mobilization order was given, the bishop Partenie Ciopron collaborated with the Headquarters of Marshal Antonescu. He increased the number of the priests on the front, next to the soldiers, to help them, encourage them, pray with them and even give them first aid. "If soldiers stay there, we can stay there", said the bishop when the military leaders asked them to stay away from certain sectors of the front. "Arma Cuvântului", the official magazine of the Military Episcopacy, presents a series of brave deeds of the Romanian soldiers accompanied by their priests during war. The number 1-2/1942 presents the efforts made by bishop Partenie to free the town Bălți.

Captain protosinghel Nicodim Ioniță, volunteer priest of the 38 Artillery Regiment, died at Horcow at was buried in the town of Pavlograd where the Russians build "a catalafque in the town cathedral, dressed him in surplices, put on his chest a wooden cross artistically made. So many people came to pay respect that we had to take order measures. They were all crying and kissing the surplices and dedicating in front of the coffin like in front of holy relics." (Arma Cuvântului 1942) And he was an enemy for them. It is true that he was freeing them from communism, but he was still an enemy.

After only three years things were about to change. By the armistice signed on the 23rd of August 1944 it was accepted that the country to be made Bolshevik. The decisions were already made. The Romanians were

still thinking about Basarabia. After 1990, when Basarabia became free after the disparition of U.R.S.S., the thought of the Church, awake for half a century, was again received by the Romanian bishoprics which formed the Romanian Patriarchy, the Church of Basarabia. The bishop Petru of Bălți reactivated the Metropolitan seat of Basarabia, stirring the protest of the Russian Synod who didn't wanted to recognize this reality. If it would have admitted it, it would also mend to recognize de uncanonical jurisdiction of the Russian Church over Basarabia. There were trials and at Haga the Moldavian Romanians received justice. The Metropolitan seat of Basarabia functions legally from the international point of view.

So the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church wasn't wrong to think at the believers between Prut and Nistru and even beyond Nistru. It wasn't wrong when it received, into the Patriarchy, the Metropolitan seat of Basarabia. Except for a few Russophils who are still troubling waters, spiritually speaking Basarabia reunited with the mother land. Regarding Bucovina there are still developing negotiations to found a bishopric or at least an office of locum tenens for the Romanians remained in Ukraine. But things are going very slow.

* * *

For a long time circulated the idea that Cadrilater was the exchange coin for Ardeal. If we look at the statement made by Iuliu Maniu in the Crown Council on the 30th of August 1940, that "yielding Basarabia without resistance was a big mistake and even today we are suffering the consequences", we can see that things didn't stay this way. (Istoria României 2003: 587) No matter the situation the Church was the "fire pillar who concentrated, heated and guided all the energies of the nation to achieve its ideals." Even if there were some isolated cases of Russophil priests, delays of attitude at the first two acknowledgements came from the part of metropolitan bishop Bălan regarding the Magyar Orthodox Episcopacy, or the attempts of some priests from Cadrilater to leave their parishes before the established term, the Romanian Orthodox Church remained firm defender of the interests of people to whom it served with all dedication, always having "the strong belief that there won't be long before our boundaries will stretch to their natural place, to the limits of the Romanian language and blood".

RÉSUMÉ

La connexion entre l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine et le peuple roumain n'est guère l'expression d'un équilibre institutionnel, d'après la soit-dite conception symphonique byzantine, mais plutôt la découverte d'une réalité religieusement morale, d'un moyen spirituel d'être, qui enferme la syntèse existentielle de l'esprit et de l'ethnicité et qui rend divine la vie ethnique elle-même.

C'est ainsi que le Christianisme Orthodox roumain a réalisé à l'aide de ses représentants une vraie téologie du peuple, en élevant et soutenant l'idéal national au niveau d'une dogme.

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