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FATHER ARSENIE BOCA

**PROMOTING A MISSIONARY SERVICE OF DIALOGUE
AND A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL**

PhD Thesis

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Argument

I have chosen this subject because of the particular interest shown lately to the charismatic personality and work of Father Arsenie Boca, manifested in the emergence of a number of PhD theses and countless articles and studies. This fact determined a fairly detailed analysis of Father Arsenie's writings – headed by The Kingdom's Way – or of those attributed to the great confessor, often called Transylvania's saint, as workers in the Secret Service used to record even during his stay at Prislop Monastery.

In this current task I intend to analyse, along the pastoral renewal he proposed – through frequent practice of Confession and receipt of Holy Eucharist – and the promotion of the inter-Christian dialogue – especially the Orthodox –Greek Catholic one, which unfortunately has been stalled after the sacrament of the former Bishop Nicolae of Banat with some ministers connected with Rome – as a kind of statement of unity between the right-serving Christians from Transylvania.

Not least have I attempted to pay attention to the pastoral and missionary work undertaken by the great confessor in former Greek Catholic parishes – some of which belonging today to the Church united with Rome, meaning those turned Greek Catholic – but also his contribution to the rebirth of some Orthodox monasteries – Sambata de Sus and Prislop – after a period of attempts to turn them into centres of Greek Catholic propaganda and, unfortunately, of abandonment, when this plan failed.

Let us not forget that Father Arsenie Boca comes from a mixed family: his father was Greek Catholic, and his mother was Orthodox. His words or deeds have to be regarded as coming from inside a reality very inaccessible to those outside the Transylvanian area, as says Seckler Nagy Attila, quoting his Professor Szilagy N. Sandor: Some religious messages - like some cultural, spiritual or social ones – “beyond the Carpathians these can be understood completely differently to how we intended them¹.

Of course, taking all this into account, I have to declare that I have faced many difficulties in the research of this theme; because of this I had to use archived testimonies, some of these kept in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Arad, Ienopole and Hălmagiu, some in the Archives of the former Secret Service, but also in the memory of those who knew him.

An important role played the contributions of Father Florin Duțu, published under the care of Floare de Colț Publishing House in Bucharest, to which I give the adequate acknowledgements. Some of his suggestions have materialised in those presented in the pages of this PhD thesis project, written with the intention of acquiring a PhD in Theology.

¹ According to *A Seckler's meditations*, in „Certitudinea”, nr. 12/2018, p. 2.

Introduction

The year 2017 marked the anniversary of 320 years since the start of the Austro-Hungarian Empire pressing for the union of the Romanian Orthodox population in Transylvania with the Church in Rome. In fact, these pressures started with the election of Atanasie Anghel as Archbishop of Transylvania; this start being recorded by – thanks to the Jesuit Ladislau Baranyi – a letter from him to the emperor in Vienna, immediately after his return to Transylvania, in which he declares himself “united to the holy Roman Catholic Church”.

It is not our intention to analyse the accuracy of this fact – which is more a political one, although with pretty serious consequences for the spiritual unity of Romanian people in Transylvania – but especially the relationships between the two Churches – united and non-united- in the support of the national aspirations of all Romanians, who did not enjoy the same rights as the other Transylvanian inhabitants; not just because they were Orthodox, since few privileges were given even to those united to the Roman Church.

At the turn of the 18th century, especially after the Austrian victory over the Turks – declared on 16 February 1699 – Transylvania was acquired by the Austro-Hungarians, after political pressures part of the Romanian Church will have united with Rome, provided that - as was recorded in an union document – “we and our remains from the rites of our Eastern Church should not be changed, but all ceremonies, feasts, fasts, as until now, and from now on should be free to observe them, following the old calendar.”

So, under Metropolitan Atanasie Anghel, ordained – as customary – by Climent of Adrianopole, Auxentie of Sofia and Neofit of Sevastia, after signing that he will guard “all affairs that Hungary’s throne has, unchanged”, meaning all “canons and decisions of the holy synods and of the Holy Fathers” will pass this law that will break the Romanian Church in two. The union document marked the start of a new Church, in fact of an archdiocese subject to Rome as one of the “limbs of this holy Church.”

The afore mentioned document was sealed by the signatures of the deans of Hațeg, Inidoare, Sas-Sebeș, Blaj, Călata, Cața, Nimigea, Bistrița, Hoporta, Orăștie, Gimal, Lăpuș, Armeniu, Chioar, Colun, Mohul, Racovița, Săliște, the two deans of Făgăraș, those from Ilia, from Vinț, from Uifalău, from Gurghiu, from Țighendial, from Belghiș, from Leapindea, from Șieuț, from Simihaiu, from Silvaș, from Ohaba, From Cugir, from Călin, from Kora, Săcal, Keza and one more; “most of the deans, without a boundary to their power, village priests, who – for money – were carrying a title bigger than that of usual priests.”²

² N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church and of the religious life of Romanians*, volume 2, edited by I. Oprisan, Saeculum Publishing House, Bucharest, 2016, pp. 21-22.

Even if in the union document nothing was shown to be changed, a copy written in Latin which was taken to the Court in Vienna showed that the union was made unconditionally; the Orthodox people accepting all the Roman Catholic teachings. This trick will be revealed at the same time as the document “uncovered only in 1879, Budapest University Library. To the emperor they only forwarded the Latin translation of the document, which was forged.”³

As Atanasie himself showed, the union implied the retention of “all our law, the Church’s service, mass and fasts should halt”; to which was added that bishop Atanasie should be left “in peace”, meaning displeased. This proves that firstly a material interest was being followed, while the mistrust towards those whose “hand is reaching for union and an even greater love for old customs, of which they cannot separate themselves under any circumstance” is apparent; this means the old customs of the Orthodox Church “in which generations upon generations had lived, fighting – through force or cunning – for their keeping, as one of the most secure way to God and the *forgiveness of souls*.”⁴

Unfortunately, this union with Rome was to divide Romanian Orthodoxy in Transylvania in two; it will be discussed as *the two pews of Romanians’ Church*. And when the promises of the Church of Rome were not kept, many tendencies to break this tendency appeared. Additionally, we must not forget that the fact that “the news of the union filled the Calvinist nobles of Transylvania with anger”, who were losing “a great number of serfs, who – in clerical robes – fulfilled the same tasks and performed the same hard work as the rest of the peasants.”⁵ For this reason, some of these uprisings might have had their concealed support; this does not diminish the fact that the majority of those who accepted the union – expecting an improvement in their financial circumstances – were unhappy.

What is completely unacceptable is that the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania became – through union – suffragan diocese of the Hungarian Roman Catholic archdiocese of Esztergom; meaning that the right-serving Church of Transylvania was turned into a rite of the Church of Rome, and the loss of autonomy was accompanied by an obvious denationalization of the Romanian people. As an evident mark of this double humiliation is the fact that Atanasie was re-ordained priest and bishop under the Roman Catholic rite, and in a document – signed on 7 April 1701 – he was forced to break “any ties with the Archbishop and the ruler of Wallachia.”⁶

³ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, The Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 322.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁶ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, p. 323.

On 5 July 1701 Constantin Brâncoveanu will send a letter to the people of Brașov in which he encouraged to remain in orthodoxy: “I have learned that even the Fathers from Făgăraș and other Orthodox Christians , again did not lose themselves with such nothingness, that they have kept the honour of His word, of which we were very pleased, at least that they felt right to do, since we raised that holy church and we supported it in the hope that we are dedicating it to the Holy Oecumenical of the Eastern Church and that it will exist among few priests and Christian inhabitants, that orthodoxy should not lack and we say again, in what we will be in our power to look for them and to protect them we will not let down. This now and forever God help you.”⁷

From here we understand that Brașov and Tara Bârsei – indeed even Tara Făgărașului – rejected the union, remaining “under the pastoral protection of the metropolitans of Wallachia.”⁸ The first uprising – after some unease – was that of 1711, when a certain Vasile and his brother Petru “managed to gather together for a formal declaration in favour of the old law”, which Atanasie himself signed. In the synod held in July 1711, the archpriests “declared openly that they have been deceived. That is why, they signed a document – together with Atanasie – in which they renounced the union.”⁹ Only when Cardinal Kolonici, the Government and Gabriel Hevenessi intervened, will he go over “this signature”, before his death in 1712.¹⁰

And his successor, Ioan Giughiu Patachi – “a noble from the region of Dobâcea, Jesuit scholar from Cluj, Vienna and Rome, doctor in Theology, Roman Catholic missionary” – will seal this unwanted and contested union of Orthodox Romanians with Rome. Although elected in January 1715, he was confirmed by the Pope only in 1721; meaning after – in 1714 – “all the buildings of the former Romanian Archdiocese in Alba Iulia were raised to the ground.”¹¹

The Orthodox Archdiocese in Alba Iulia – built by Mihai Viteazul – was demolished, so that the new fortress could be built. A new united Romanian diocese was created in Făgăraș; its seat having been elected to be in “the Brâncovenesc church of St. Nicolae, where it settles in August 1723”; meaning only to counteract Romanians’ opposition to the union in this part of the country. In their turn, the people of Maramureș “did not however want to accept him, beholding another Orthodox, Dosoftei, as successor to Iosif Stoica¹² and Serafim of Petrova.”¹³ The state of affairs was not very calm in other regions in Transylvania or Banat either.

⁷ Dr. Sterie Stinghie, *Documents regarding the past of Romanians from Șchei (1700-1783)*, volume 1, Brașov, 1901, p.16.

⁸ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, p. 324.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church and of the religious life of Romanians*, volume 2, p. 41.

¹¹ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, p. 337.

¹² This hierarch was based at “St. Michael” Monastery in Perii Maramureșului, on the river Tisa.

¹³ N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church and of the religious life of Romanians*, volume 2, pp.43-44.

Unfortunately – after 1729 – only “the Brâncovenesc churches from Ocna Sibiului, from Poiana Mărului and Sâmbata de Sus, on the estates of Brâncoveanu”, as well as “that from Porțești, belonging to Matei Basarab, could serve for the refuge of Orthodoxy. The number of priests in the whole of Transylvania – “four hundred priests against the union or suspected of Orthodoxy belief” – who did not come to take *homily* from Făgăraș, will be the ones who will support the faith of the people.¹⁴ In fact, it has to be said that “the great majority of the people did not learn anything about any change of the *law*.¹⁵

It was about this unmovable faith that vermegea of Sătmăr was writing in *Antologhion* or *Mineiul ales pe scurt* (1702-1715), translated into Romanian by Priest Chirilă of Aciua: “We, Romanians, who are in these regions mixed among other tongues, we are like the trumpet, even if it played flat we could not pick it up; so do the saints’ deeds we hear them in a different language... and we have no use, whereas other languages have so they know the whole Scripture in their own tongue, like the Serbs, Russians, Greeks, such – after, our own people lamenting to understand Slavonic – they changed a lot from the Slavonic book into our own Romanian language, with the will of God the merciful, and now we still have hope to multiply our Scripture in our tongue.”

He reminds that – when he was engaged in the Romanian translation – *the Jesuits, the papists* “were striving” to break “the Eastern Sion”, for “whose permanence the writer prays”.¹⁶ From this can be easily seen that the adversity towards union is a fact that had grounds to trouble the ecclesiastical and political authorities, because – with every passing year – this was becoming apparent in the treacherous way that was carried out by the Catholic propaganda through the Jesuits.

The Bishop’s seat in Făgăraș – which replaced a short-lived seat of a Calvinist bishop – intended that all those who did not accept the union, because “Țara Făgărașului did not accept the union either, which was now revealed with all its consequences of hypocrisy and humiliation”, meaning the people who had kept their Orthodox faith should be attracted towards this union. Despite the fact that Brâncoveanu himself “had built a while ago a beautiful church, finished in 1698, and endowed with privileges by its founder.”¹⁷

Bishop Ioan-Inochentie Micu himself – ordained as united Bishop of Făgăraș, on 25 October 1730 – fights “for the rights of his whole Romanian kin, which he proclaims *the oldest* in the realm, since the time of Trajan still master of these lands”, a fact which will eventually bring his suspension; but not before having received – since 1735 – “in place of Făgăraș and that

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

¹⁵ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, p. 324.

¹⁶ N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church and of the religious life of Romanians*, volume 2, pp. 46-47.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

of Gherla, the town of Blaj – an old estate of Tansylvanian princes, with the promise of building a school and a printing house.”¹⁸

Unhappy that the promises made were not kept, he will declare to a Hungarian committee: “My people and I truly are and will remain united, if only we too were given those benefits and immunities that are enjoyed by the whole Roman Catholic clergy”, because “We have joined with the condition that we receive those benefits and avails.”¹⁹ On the 6 July 1744 he summons a synod at Blaj, in which he will ask the Roman Church and the Imperial Court an accusing question: “If all that was promised to Romanians could not be upheld, do they still wish to observe the union or do they renounce it?”

The conclusion of the items discussed in that synod was that “the united [Romanians] notice that life was better when they were Orthodox, than now, because they always found protection in the Romanian rulers... And with their support they were noticed still, not only at the Royal Court, but also in the Principality [of Transylvania], or they were helped in any other ways.”²⁰ After travelling to Vienna, where he finds he is not listened to, but is threatened to be tried by a commission, to answer no less than 82 charges, he leaves for Rome; there “he was forced to renounce the Bishop’s seat in 1751.”²¹

A movement for the defence of Orthodoxy – as the righteous faith was inherited from the forefathers – was impossible to be stopped; “Transylvania was burning with revolt.” Bishop Inochentie was to pass away in Rome, in 1768 – after having been elected as bishop in 1764 in Blaj with 72 votes – saying: “I cannot serve God, Who is Truth, and please the world, which is lie.”²² His martyrdom proved that “neither the Jesuits nor the Catholic nobles did not pursue through the union the service of the Romanian people, but only their own interests. That is why, the numbers of those who had accepted the union were ever increasing, the vast majority of the Transylvanian believers remaining steadfast in the ancestral belief.”²³

Here is how Samuil Micu presents the glowing figure of this great fighter for Romanians rights: He wanted to take the Catholic theologian out of the united diocese, for which he was denunciated “as having said that the empire only delights Romanians with ornate words and as having said that if the Romans will not fulfil what they had promised to the Romanians, when they united, then Romanians either should not follow their belief, like they had said in the synod: either you will change your Law, or you will find another way, like allowing books printed by non-united [Christians] to be read in churches, or by accepting priests ordained by the non-united; and those from this country are pushed behind, for not opposing a hermit,”²⁴ who in the

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 123-125.

¹⁹ Apud Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, p. 324.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 340.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church and of the religious life of Romanians*, volume 2, pp. 126-127.

²³ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, p. 341.

²⁴ Meaning Visarion Sarai, born in Bosnia (apparently in a Romanian family).

year 1743 came in from Banat and spoke a great deal about the union and the unionists, putting the people down and influencing them against the union with the Church of Rome.”²⁵

The leader of this movement was monk Visarion Sarai, who travels with letters from the Serbian Patriarch Arsenie. He “wandered like this through places in the Mureş Valley, around Lipova, Deva, Oraştie, Alba Iulia, up to Sălişte (near Sibiu), managing to convince several villages against the union. Between Sălişte and Sibiu he was arrested and taken to Sibiu”; he will finally end up in the prison in Kufstein, Austria, where it is believed he died for having fought for the defence of Orthodoxy.²⁶

In turn, the peasants themselves will go to Vienna to complain about their hardship; it is about Nicolae Oprea (Miclăuş) from Sălişte, who in 1748 decides to go to Vienna. Then Ioan Oancea from Făgăraş, accompanied by four other believers, goes “again to Vienna.”

Before Easter in 1752, Nicolae Oprea and Priest Moise Măcinic from Sibiel leave for Vienna, carrying “a statement from Transylvanian believers”; they will be arrested, sentenced to life in prison. In 1752, one of them escapes (it appears to have been Oprea), and the other one dies in Kufstein prison.²⁷

They are joined by: Priest Cosma from Deal, next to Sebeş, who – around the year 1755 – who travelled around 42 villages; Priest Ioan from Galeş, near Sibiu, who rebelled against the union “in the lands of Sibiu, Sebeş, Orăştie and Hunedoara”; he will end up in Kufstein prison. Archpriest Ioan Piuariu from Sadu was arrested and shaved, whence the nickname *Clipped Priest* (Rom. *Popa Tunsu*); he will be released only after promising he will not return to Transylvania, settling down in Sâncolaul Mare, in Banat.

But the climax of these movements will be reached when Sofronie from Cioara – where he had built himself “a kind of hermitage in the middle of the woods” – began to call on churchgoers “to oust united priests and to declare that they wish to be *under the injunction of the Church in Jerusalem*. During Christmas 1759, he was arrested and detained in the village of Bobâlna, next to Orăştie.” After being set free by around 600 peasants, led by Priest Ioan from Sălişte, he left “for Apuseni Mountains, encouraging all the people to “return to Orthodoxy.” In 1760 he summoned a *synod* in Zlatna to draw up “memoranda to the empress Maria Theresa and to the Government of Transylvania”; he called together similar *synods* in Blaj and Alba Iulia. So it is that “tens – even hundreds – of villages left the union.”²⁸

Although the Government will take action – executing him “in front of those who believed that through him could cleanse their souls of the heavy guilt gained from listening to

²⁵ Apud Ioan Lupaş, *Cronicari şi istorici români din Transilvania*, volumul I, Craiova, 1933, p. 104.

²⁶ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, pp. 345-346.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 346.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 346-349.

united priests and attending their service” – the movement “could not stop so easily.” Seventeen archpriests joined monk Leontie Moscuna, followed by a lot of people, asking to reinstate bishop Inochentie, saying: “Nobody believes what they hear, even if an angel from the Heavens were to speak, if his holiness does not come back; but then, whatever they would be told, they will all listen... and not fire, not iron will separate them from the heart and the love of their lawful shepherd.”²⁹

And in 1756 the so-called Seven Year War started, and from the union with Rome “now left Brașov and all of Țara Bârsei, most of the Szeckler villages, who sourced their altar covers from the bishops in Roman, Sibiu – with the surrounding villages, headed by Siliștea and Rășinari, the Saxon lands of Sebeș, the lands of Solnoc and Dobâcea, some parts of Hațeg, where the priests followed the Bishop-Father Superior from Silvaș, whose old monastery was one of the centres of the religious revolution, certain villages around Bălgad, influenced – obviously – by the monks from Râmeți; the whole boundary and – along it – most of the towns.”³⁰

Although two bishop’s seats were established in Oradea – Meletie, bishop *in partibus* of Tegeia (1750) – and Sibiu, whose bishop will be named Dionisie Novacovici; he was not named Bishop of Transylvania, but Bishop *in Transylvania*, things do not appear to settle down. Visarion’s place is taken by Priest Ioan Molnar; and the united bishop was chased from Sibiu to Blaj. Because things were not settling down, in 1761, the Court in Vienna sent General Nicolaus Adolf Buccow to bring peace; Maria Theresa herself will send him “with military units, with the mission to strengthen the union and to suppress any movement against it.”

What was the result of this oppression, which ended with the demolition of over one hundred Orthodox churches? It was that “tens of Orthodox villages were forced into union and over five hundred Orthodox churches were given to the unionists, even in the villages where there were only a few united families.” Despite this, the census – “which was commissioned at his order – showed the Orthodox population outnumbered greatly the united churchgoers. It was then that the monasteries at Sâmbata de Sus and Prislop were destroyed.³¹

What followed is described - “with pain and anger” – by those at Râmeți Monastery, which “was first painted ... in the days of Matiaș Crai, in the year 6879 (1486/1487)” that in the time of Buccow “the heathens broke the monastery at Râmeți and that at Geoagiu, in the year 1762, in August 23, on a Saturday, to their perdition.” And at Prislop, at Silvaș, monastery that Petru Pavel Aaron “helped and supported until 1759; even – when the cells are demolished, chasing the monks, who run to Sibiu – one of them laments the end of the community, that had

²⁹ N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church and of the religious life of Romanians*, volume 2, pp. 130-132.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

³¹ Priest Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, pp. 348-349.

given Transylvania its first Metropolitan and stigmatises his truly damaging part in the act of the union.”³²

From now onwards we face two dioceses for the Romanians *in the two pews*: for the Orthodox ones at Sibiu, in fact at Răsinarii Sibiului, and for the united ones at Blaj. If until 1770 the bishops and the canons at Blaj were “disdainful of the old Orthodoxy humble and poor and of those who – even in Transylvania, or beyond the mountains – lived in the same dogmatic darkness and in the same lack of culture and rights”, following Petru Pavel Aaron and his successors, especially in the time of Samoil Micu “had begun to find hard to accept the deification of the union act, in as little historical research as could have reduced it to its true value.” What was the consequence of this? Even the nephew of Bishop Inochentie “was prepared to cut off the ties with Catholicism.”³³

Researching the history of the Romanian people and its Church, they became a lot more critical about the Church of Rome, who did not support any interest of this down-trodden nation; this explains why the Roman Catholics were able to forge documents, to trick the Romanians, giving “a bit to the *priests*, but leaving the *nobles sulking* and completely forgetting about the *poor ignorant* - the serfs.”³⁴ The same path was followed by Gheorghe Șincai – who had no “respect for the *union* that leaves the nation *faithless*”; and Petru Maior who held no high regard for *Italians, the Pope’s monarchy, his infallibility, his inheritance, for the right to call and head synods, the fastidiousness of universal authority, the temporal domain* and others. Because of these beliefs he wrote in 1783: “O, if only God had protected humankind from this type of learned and theologian people, who only with the attention, the beard and the fame they have in the robes and in His house, wish to defeat everybody; if they say anything from Rome, be quiet, be still, be listening, mouth wide open.

If you point from the Holy Fathers, from the synods and from the Church’s old history about their opinions, at once you are schismatic; and worse than the heretics... Rome’s horns had begun to appear a long time ago!”³⁵ Archpriest Petru Maior of Reghinul Săsesc – intrigued by Ioan Bob’s attempt to snatch the archpriests’ few rights left, wrote *Protopopadichia, Injustice made to the Protopopes*, showing that “his heart no longer resided in the Church in Blaj.”³⁶ The fact that in 1784 Samoil Micu stood next to the Orthodox Patriarch of Carlovit confirmed “that he had left the union completely.”

This was the situation at the start of Horia, Cloșca and Crișan’s Rebellion, which caused the emergence of a Letter in Vienna, which showed “the righteous mirror of peace, love and the

³² *Ibidem*, p. 139.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 205.

³⁵ Apud *Procanonul*, edited by Constantin Erbiceanu; published in Bucharest, in 1894 – excerpt from „The Romanian Orthodox Church”, p. 47.

³⁶ N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church...*, volume 2, p. 207.

heart, through which with the right trials the united believers redeem themselves of the insults that are thrown upon them, while the non-united, are neither heretic, nor schismatic, especially not being able to be called Romanian, to the use and consolation of the Romanian nation.”³⁷ These three – Clain, Șincai and Maior – make up what we call *The Transylvanian School*. And Ioan Molnar will support the foundation of *The Philosophical Society of the Romanian Nation in the Great Principality of Transylvania* in Sibiu since 1793; this will publish an *Appeal* in which a Romanian Library programme was brought forward, that will remain only a project, but that has the merit to be published in *Holy Liturgy* (1798, third edition in 1801) – “the first mass book for the non-united from Transylvania.”³⁸

In 1848, Orthodox Romanians will demand a bishop from their own nation; that is how, in Blaj, Timotei Cipariu proves to be “the leading personality”, who will support the publication of religious literature. But we must not forget the movement that he – along with Simion Bărnuțiu – cultivated among the young through “Bariț’s papers” and the influence of the Hungarian nationalist movement which led to the “rebirth of the Romanian spirit in both Churches and their definitive structure.”³⁹ That is why the emphasis in Simion Bărnuțiu’s words is not unusual: All the political and religious *unions* “were foreign bait to break the Romanians, who only need to unite between themselves.” This way we understand why he ends his speech saying: “Yes, let us unite; let it be no more united and non-united between Romanians.”⁴⁰

And in the *inter-faith decision*, signed by newly-ordained bishop Andrei Șaguna and united bishop Ioan Lemny – after in “that great day of 3 May 1848” had officiated together ”at the great festival at Târnave, where the peasants called by Bărnuț show, through their number and attitude, that the Romanians from Transylvania and Hungary want to be a separate nation” – in which is shown that: “The Romanian nation demands that the *Romanian Church with no difference* to be and to remain of *free denomination, independent from any other Church*, equal in rights and uses with the other Transylvanian Churches.

She demands the re-establishment of the Metropolitan Church and of the current general Synod in the old rite, in which synod there should be ecclesiastical and secular representatives. At the same time the Romanian bishops should be elected freely, through majority of votes, without candidate. At the remembrance of Romanians’ old right to have a Metropolitan Church and an annual general Synod, the Romanian Transylvanian Metropolitan Church was proclaimed by the people with unanimous applause.”⁴¹ But Rome’s harsh intervention will stall the two Churches reunion dream, meaning the return to the old Romanian Metropolitan Church,

³⁷ N. Iorga, *Studies and documents*, volume 13, p. 16, footnote 27, apud N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church...*, volume II, p. 211.

³⁸ N. Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Church....*, volume 2, p. 219.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 287.

⁴⁰ Ioan Lupaș, *Studies*, Sibiu, pp. 428-429

⁴¹ Apud Nicolae Popea, *Metropolitan Șaguna’s Memorial*, volume 1, Sibiu, p. 56.

whose seat was in Alba Iulia. It was even supported by the Hungarians, who did not approve the reaffirming of spiritual unity among Romanians.

Providence will help Saint Andrei Șaguna, who will make possible definitive fulfilments in the history of the Romanian Orthodoxy. Nicolae Popa – who had been Șaguna's secretary and later would become Bishop of Caransebeș – wrote a history titled *The Old Metropolitan Church of Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary* (1860), meant “to show that the seat in Sibiu is the only true historical metropolitan church.”⁴²

It is in this atmosphere of collaboration between the leaders of the two Romanian Churches that the support for the Romanians' demands will be stated after the affirmation of the Austro-Hungarian dualism – through which “authority over the eastern half of the empire, that was a disaster for the minorities in the Hungarian zone”⁴³ was given to Hungarians - from the second half of the 19th century. If in the year 1791 Orthodox Bishop Gherasim Adamovici of Sibiu and united Bishop Ioan Bob from Blaj compiled that *Supplex Libellus Valahorum*, and in 1848 bishops Vasile Moga from Sibiu and Ioan Lemeni presented the Government in Cluj “the petition for the recognition of the political and religious rights of Romanians”, ASTRA will be established, under the powerful influence of the Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, which will strengthen the solidarity between all Romanians; this was set up in 1861.⁴⁴

Talking about the semi-centenary celebration of this association, Bishop Roman Ciorogariu showed: ASTRA - “in order to symbolise national solidarity of the two Churches in 1848 – celebrated its semi-centenary in 1911 at Liberty Field in Blaj. All the Orthodox and united bishops were present. When the two Romanian metropolitans – Ioan Mețianu of Sibiu and Victor Mihali of Blaj accompanied by the five Orthodox and united bishops - passed from the metropolitan residence towards the united cathedral, the tens of thousands of Romanians were deliriously cheering this great moment of national solidarity between the two Churches.”

To be even more convincing about the enthusiasm experienced by all present, the aforementioned bishop quotes some of those in the crowd: “*Even God must enjoy this twining* – sighed a peasant next to me in the church. Another one said: *This is like in 1848*, and a different one *it must always be like this forever*; and they all felt the shivers of the grand day of the two Churches' twining.”⁴⁵ It is easily observed from these fragments that Romanians – from the Church's two pews, as they saw themselves – wished that the wound of the separation to be healed, once and for all.

I believe the idea that the same wish united the servicemen of the two Churches at the start of last century is equally important. Here is how it is portrayed in the afore-mentioned

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 300.

⁴³ Neagu Djuvara, *A short illustrated history of the Romanian people*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, p. 255.

⁴⁴ Bishop Roman Ciorogariu, *Lived days*, Oradea, 1926, p. 50.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

work: “Aside all the controversies about *united* and *non-united* [feeling], generally the Orthodox and united priests covered one another at functions, when one or another was missing from the village and officiated together on certain occasions. These friendly relations from the united Church’s side were characteristic of especially to the clergy of the Archdiocese of Blaj, where the old traditions of national solidarity were upheld. The last representative of those traditions was canon Ioan Moldovan – *Moldovănuț* (*Little Moldovan*), beloved by everyone – who used to be alive in 1911, like a symbol of historic Blaj.”⁴⁶

From these few excerpts we can understand more easily the brotherhood evident in the relationships between the ministers and the churchgoers of the two Churches, at the end of the 19th century and the start of the last century. Unfortunately, the First World War and the inter-war period will bring some changes, which – although the interest of the Church of Rome becomes more and more obvious, until that *Concordat* between Romania and the Papal state in 1927, through the contribution of King Ferdinand – will reveal the same unity dream, missed because of certain reasons when the Great Union happened in 1918.

Conclusions

Romanians in Transylvania, throughout history, were faced with many attempts at denationalisation and uprooting from the heart of the mother Church. Their national and confessional identity was submitted to assimilation pressures from foreign authorities. Strong in their faith, they overcame the waves of Calvinist propaganda, they systematically refused Catholicisation, but a number of Orthodox Transylvanians accepted the union with the Church of Rome, because it did not imply changes in worship but promised an improvement in living conditions and in Romanians’ political and legal status in the territory annexed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But all these political and confessional events as well as the break in the Transylvanian monastic tradition – in the 18th century by the order of the Austrian monarchy – will lead to pastoral deficiencies, endured through generations and identified by the Transylvanian hierarchs and clerics.

The sublime moment of the Great Union, when one single Romanian heart could beat again on both sides of the Carpathians reignited the hope of reunion of brothers in the same faith. But again history diverted its waves over Romania and the First World War delayed the start of the process of those Romanians united with Rome to return to Orthodoxy. But the inter-war period brought a welcome respite, used fully by the Metropolitan of Transylvania, Nicolae Bălan, to begin to form a very necessary spiritual elite that would put into practice the grand project of resurrecting the authentic Orthodox feeling in Transylvania.

The organisation of the ecclesiastical life, in the vision of Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, was meant to start from the training of the clerical personnel, for which he will allocate funds – for bursaries, which will be benefitted by not only Father Arsenie Boca, but also Father Professor

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

Dumitru Stăniloae, Father Professor Liviu Stan, Father Professor Teodor Bodogae and Professor Nicolae Mladin; the latter one will be will be the successor of this great hierarch in the metropolitan seat at Sibiu. Obviously, I have only mentioned the most important ones, to demonstrate that the great hierarch's preoccupation was beneficial to the whole of the Romanian Orthodoxy. Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan aimed to train some missionaries, who through word and image would more easily facilitate the understanding of the ancestral belief. If in the former kingdom a new generation of secular missionaries asserted itself – headed by Nichifor Crainic and Nae Ionescu – in Transylvania, because of the competition between the Orthodox and the united, the training of sanctioned missionaries was imposed.

Impoverished and widowed by the richness and the intensity of the Orthodox religion, the Transylvanian people needed examples for living and symbols of the ancestral faith in those lands, that is why Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan will choose to restore Brâncoveanu Monastery at Sâmbăta de Sus – connected by the name of its martyr founder and by the manifestation of hatred of the Austrian authorities – which, noticing its determining role in maintaining Orthodoxy, will attack it with cannons, until they will demolish everything, except for the Church's enduring walls, evidence not only of the injustice suffered but also of the feeling of responsibility built in out of the reverence of the Romanian prince.

In this study I have highlighted Father Arsenie Boca's role in the pastoral rejuvenation of Transylvanian Orthodoxy and more, based on frequent practice of Confession and receipt of Holy Eucharist along with the promotion of inter-Christian dialogue – especially the Orthodox-Greek-Catholic one, which unfortunately was interrupted after the sacrament of the former Bishop Nicolae of Banat with some ministers united with Rome – as a kind of statement of unity between the right-serving Christians from Transylvania.

Equally I have emphasised the pastoral and missionary work undertaken by the great confessor in former Greek Catholic parishes – some of which belonging today to the Church united with Rome, meaning those turned Greek Catholic – but also his contribution to the rebirth of some Orthodox monasteries – Sambata de Sus and Prislop – after a period of attempts to turn them into centres of Greek Catholic propaganda and, unfortunately, of abandonment, when this plan failed.

Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan's vision concerning Orthodoxy's pastoral renewal at Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery had found the perfect man through which it could materialise. Father Arsenie Boca had a great spirit of sacrifice, cared about the monastery's material needs, managing, at the same time, to gather in church God-thirsty souls, from the simplest ones to the most learned ones. As Father Arsenie Boca made no effort for the prosperity of the Monastery and the spiritual support of those that crossed the threshold of the edifice of the martyr prince thirsty for the deepening of the Orthodox faith, so the people who came to the monastery did not

pay attention to the poverty, the distance, the weather and the adverse times, heading for the Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery as towards a fountain of youth.⁴⁷

Father Arsenie Boca's austere life, the authentic feeling of the prayer and of the liturgical gestures when officiating the Holy Liturgy, the responsibility and the seriousness with which he conducted the Sacraments, especially Holy Confession, Holy Eucharist and Holy Unction, and last but not least the talent with which he revealed the sins' roots to people and the crucial importance of a firm decision not to sin again, rendered the path to the Sâmbăta de sus Monastery to become one of the most well-trodden routes taken by God-thirsty believers. During the Holy Liturgy service, Father Arsenie Boca was fully involved, the chanting of the hymns and prayers was powerful, "precise, like a confession of our faith in the Holy Trinity and an admission of His Kingdom that we bless and magnify."⁴⁸

The so-called "Sâmbăta movement" will play an important role in the later evolution of the Transylvanian spirituality. Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae names it so in the foreword in the second volume of *The Philokalia*: "If God will help that the whole work be published in Romanian, this deed will be linked greatly to his allpiousness' name (Father Arsenie Boca) and to the religious movement he awakened around the Sâmbăta de Sus monastery, on the most authentic bases and through the most immaculate means of priesthood, of the everlasting counsel and love of souls."⁴⁹

The Land of Făgăraș began to be covered by an authentic philokalian spirit, emanating from Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery and then extending to the entire country. Father Ioan Sofonea (one of those who personally knew Father Arsenie Boca and who grew spiritually under his guidance) clearly notices a great truth, that through personal example, through words and using Holy Confession "the Father strove for the regeneration of the Romanian people through life change. Father Arsenie's greatest miracle was the changing of our life."⁵⁰ He had the power (resulted from a strong theoretical training, doubled by an obvious inclination for asceticism and strict personal discipline in full philokalian spirit) to change the churchgoers' way of thinking and of life, but also the way they relate to God and the way they understand the Sacraments.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Especially at the monastery's fete, on the day of The Life-giving Fount of Mother of God, endless crowds crossed the newly refurbished monastery's threshold, idea backed up by Professor Nichifor Crainic's statement: "What uplifting time, when all of Avram Iancu's nation moved in pilgrimage, singing while the snow reached up to their chests, towards Sâmbata de Sus Monastery!", apud. *Father Arsenie Boca – A man above mankind*, edited by Natalia Corlean, Agaton Publishing House, Făgăraș, 2011, p.8

⁴⁸ Pr. Nicolae Streza, *op. cit.*, p.39.

⁴⁹ *Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile sfinților Părinti cari arată cum se poate omul curăța, lumina și desăvârși*, volume 2, Translated by Pr.prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Sibiu, 1947; see in George Enache and Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁰ *Father Arsenie Boca- A life dedicated to changing our life*, edited by Natalia Corlean, Agaton Publishing House, Făgăraș, 2012, p.18.

⁵¹ Priest Ioan Sofonea, *I heard a saint speaking: Father Arsenie Boca*, Accent Print Publishing House, Suceava, 2013, p.36.

When Father Arsenie Boca was Confessor of Brâncoveanu Monastery, there will be high visits there, which will later be imputed to him by the communist regime. Marshal Ion Antonescu, accompanied by Mrs. Maria Antonescu visited the monastery in 1942, on Pentecost.⁵²

Princess Ileana⁵³ had heard about the spiritual rejuvenation movement at Brâncoveanu Monastery and wished to personally meet Father Arsenie Boca. The future Mother Alexandra went to Brâncoveanu Monastery⁵⁴ in the summer of 1947 inviting Father Arsenie Boca to go to Bran Castle and Bucharest. Princess Ileana had opened a hospital at Bran Castle, in the grounds of which she would commission a church, where she wanted to rest the heart of Queen Maria. Father Arsenie was invited to the consecration service for the place of the future church and the laying of the cornerstone on the 27 June 1947.⁵⁵ There will be religious-themed discussions in the future meetings between Princess Ileana and Father Arsenie Boca.

It has to be also added that, before reaching Prislop Monastery, Father Arsenie Boca felt the harshness of the Security forces, who suspected him of having connections to the legionnaires and with those who – in the Făgăraș Mountains – formed the armed resistance against the communist regime; even from Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery he had the opportunity to declare his opposition to the idea of using guns in the support of ideas or political convictions. In the same declaration he said: "They showed themselves as Christians practicing prayer and the other church customs. They declared Christianity as the most superior doctrine in the world and in life. Their mistakes' beginning and end was the gun, the oath, the violence and the revenge. Chauvinism is not love for nation and brother. Conflict with people is also a fall from Christianity."⁵⁶

Since his arrival on 28 November 1948, enlivened by the love for the faith's sacred places, Father Arsenie Boca tried to banish poverty's devastation and to transform this old hearth of prayer and of Orthodox feeling into a beautiful ark of religion. For this he enjoyed the help of

⁵² They say about this visit that: "The esteemed guests spent a few pleasant hours around the Brâncoveanu building, admiring nature's unsurpassed beauties and the beautiful achievements of the new builder, His Holiness Metropolitan Nicolae" as was recorded in "Telegraful Român", on 31 May 1942; see also Florin Duțu, *The life of Father Arsenie Boca from Prislop: 1910-1989*, 2nd revised edition, Floare Albă de Colț Publishing house, Bucharesti, 2016, p. 41.

⁵³ King Michael and his mother, Queen Elena, and Princess Ileana, King Michael's aunt and younger sister of King Carol II, also visited Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery; see Priest Ioan Sofonea, *op.cit.*, p.109.

⁵⁴ In her book, Ileana, Princess of Romania, Archduchess of Austria, *I live again*, Humanitas Publishing House, 2010, p.381, the future Mother Alexandra also mentions Father Arsenie Boca : " There , in the little Sâmbăta monastery, hidden in the heart of the dark woods, in the small white church reflected in the clear mountain lake, I met a monk (meaning Father Arsenie Boca) who practiced the prayer of the heart. Peace and deep calm reigned in Sâmbăta of those times. Since my last visit at Sâmbăta, my steps have taken me far away, but, during all this time, Jesus' prayer lived secretly in my heart like a precious gift."

⁵⁵ Florin Duțu, *The Life of Father Arsenie Boca from Prislop: 1910-1989*, 2nd revised edition, Floare Albă de Colț Publishing House, Bucharest, 2016, p.40.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

the churchgoers, and of the nuns too – after the monastery’s transformation, in 1951, into a nuns’ monastic community – to restore the pastoral but also material beauty of this ancestral place for Orthodox prayer, which he had found “in ruins.”⁵⁷

But the most important aspect concerning Father Arsenie Boca’s activity at Prislop Monastery is the resurrection of the monastery which for the inhabitants of that area represented a true symbol of the fight for the defence of justice that gave Romanian Orthodoxy in Transylvania great fighters and declarers of the ancestral faith, starting with Saint Ioan from Prislop. In fact he also constitutes the central axis of the great confessor’s activity as a missionary and preacher of teachings, but especially of authentic feeling, of ancestral belief.

Although almost uninhabitable upon Father Arsenie Boca’s arrival, the following year – 1949 – Prislop Monastery will become the favourite place of two alumni of the Faculty of Theology: Leonida Plămădeală, the future Metropolitan Arsenie of Transylvania, and Stelian Manolache, the future Confessor Dometie from Râmet Monastery.

Father Arsenie Boca’s popularity began to outgrow the area or the land of Hațeg – plus the area of Făgăraș and Sibiu – spreading, despite the Secret Service’s impediments, increasingly in the whole country. This being the main reason of a progressively obvious surveillance from the communist partisans, who – through various informers – received fairly worrying data for them and for the atheist regime: Father Arsenie Boca is “considered by churchgoers [to be] a saint, which makes very many believers travel to that monastery from different regions, staying there about two-three days, sleeping in stables, huts etc., and after receiving the blessing they return home.”⁵⁸

All those who met Father Arsenie Boca changed their life, because he had great strength in his word. Not only did he see things, reducing them to their essence, but he also had an undisputable / apodictic way of speaking, more prophetic, also gained thanks to the fact that – compiling the book *The Kingdom’s way* here at Prislop Monastery, like a kind of guide to religion for those returned from Greek-Catholicism – he had to use a number of key words to help believers understand even better the depth of Christian life.

He wanted to turn Prislop Monastery into a monastic community, which would be seen as a pastoral model – in organisation and feeling – to all monasteries to be founded in Transylvania or those to be re-opened after so many years of destruction of so many Romanian monasteries and convents out of political and confessional reasons, namely to support the principles of the Roman Counter-reformation, and to replace in this way what the Church of Rome lost through the Protestant reform in the Christian West.

⁵⁷ Priest Ioan Sofonea, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁵⁸ Information file no. 2637, vol. 2, page 288 verso; see also Father Arsenie Boca, objective „Bratu”, p. 20.

Finally, we believe that this link with Prislop Monastery, which was more than a spiritual one, will cause *the saint of Transylvania* to wish that, at the end of the communist regime, to be buried in the monastery where he would have liked, but only with a blessing, to put on the monastic cloak again. Because this is where he wanted to be seeked and from where he wanted to help the disciples, the lovers of prayer places, but also all of those tested by life's hardships.

He knew – thanks to the pastoral forevision – that the pastoral desolation of the post-communist period vaguely called a transition one would not be better than the one produced by the years of communist oppression. This is where his testament to search for him when we need his help stems from.

We are not interested in the controversial or apologetic aspects, but in the bridges that Father Arsenie Boca – as a great connoisseur of the Union, his Father being Greek-Catholic – discovered and used. This study is also called for by our current situation, after the sacrament of Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat with the Greek-Catholics in 2008⁵⁹, but also by the situation created after the Synod in Crete in June 2016. It has even been suggested that even the simple dialogue with our brothers who chose to go under the obedience of the Church of Rome is a danger to Orthodoxy and its unity, which is of course an abnormal fact, since our Orthodox brothers in diaspora are welcome to officiate the Holy Liturgy and other services in Roman-Catholic or Protestant churches. Is the simple dialogue seen as the equivalent of one of the heresies that threatened the unity of the Church?

This is the question that started the research of the way that Father Arsenie Boca regarded and looked for solutions into dialogue with our Greek-Catholic brothers in Transylvania. If unity was needed in the past, as Father Arsenie Boca showed since 1943: "At the previous peace, when the union of all Romanians was created (meaning on 1 December 1918, our note) it was a mistake not to unify all the souls too as it is up to us, today, to wipe from our spiritual cloak the deceit in 1700. So, openly, return home, to the Orthodox religion; and so the nation strengthens

⁵⁹ His Holyness Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu at the consecration service of the new Greek-Catholic church in Timișoara (Doina Park), to which also took part His Excellency Francisco Javier Lozano, the apostolic nuncio in România and the Holy Bishops Martin Roos of Timișoara and Alexandru Mesian of Lugoj, received the Eucharist during Holy Liturgy. Actually Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu of Banat held a speech at the ordination of His Holiness Alexandru Mesian, on 5 May 1996, in the Greek-Catholic Cathedral in Lugoj, that caused since then many debates: "Christ has urged us to be One, not in the way the union was made, the so-called union of the Autumn of 1948 and '49. As Orthodox, without speaking on behalf of all Orthodox people, I would like to confess that I know, and those who lived those moments also know how it was done then. They know it well, they know better than us, the ones who then faced the prisons, they know how that union was. Obviously analogies can be made between what happened in 1600 and what came afterwards, but we cannot always return hundreds of years in the past, because we cannot go back in life.; life goes on."; in Cristian Vasile, *The History of the Greek-Catholic Church under the communist regime...*, p.30; see also Cezare Alzati, *In the Heart of Europe. Religious history studies of the Romanian land*, Transylvanian Studies Centre, Romanian Cultural Foundation, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p.215.

for the day that is to come. Do not wait for words from leaders, but listen to God's word.”⁶⁰ Father Arsenie Boca's premonitory visions were to come true in five years' time, namely in 1948.

⁶⁰ P. S. Daniil Stoenescu, *Father Arsenie Boca – “The man dressed in linen clothes” and “the angel with the golden censer”* (Iezechiei 9, 3; 10, 2 și 6; Apocalipse 8, 1-6), Charisma Publishing House, Sinaia, 2008, p. 148; see also Florin Duțu, *Father Arsenie Boca at Prislop Monastery, in the era of the communist executioners, 1948 – 1959*, Floare de Colț Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, pp. 49-50.

