

ROMANIAN CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY. CASE STUDY ON THE GREEK-CATHOLIC DEANERY OF OAȘ COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT: *THE UNITED AND ORTHODOX CHURCH REMAINED IMPORTANT STRONGHOLDS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND WAS THE ONLY NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR ROMANIANS, ACORDING TO THE LAWS ENACTED DURING THE DUALISM. AFTER THE 1848 REVOLUTION, BOTH IN OAȘ COUNTRY AND IN OTHER AREAS OF TRANSYLVANIA, CULTURAL LIFE ENJOYED SISTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT EVEN WITH IMPEDIMENTS OF HUNGARIAN OFFICIALS. IN THE CONSCIENCE OF MORE ELIGHTENED ROMANIANS, THE TEACHER WAS SEEN AS TE LEVER THAT COULD ELEVATE ROMANIANS AS NATION, AND THE MORALS AND RELIGIOSITY OF CONFESSIONAL TEACHERS WAS UNDER THE STRICT SCRUTINITY OF CHURCH AUTORITES.*

KEY-WORDS: CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION, TEACHER, ELEMENTAERY SCHOOL, CHURCH AND STATE.

In this period, the main desideratum of Transylvanian Romanians was to obtain political autonomy. This wish was expressed even during the Revolution of 1848, hoping for all Romanians in the Monarchy to be united in a “Romanian duchy” headed by the emperor in Vienna as “grand duke”.

With the defeat of the revolution, the desire and idea of autonomy remained the connecting element in Transylvanian political circles. Initially, the Viennese court aimed to counter the “centrifugal tendencies” of the Hungarians and to “experiment constitutional forms” with the help of Romanians and Slavs. Following negotiations with the Hungarians, the dual Austro-Hungarian state was formed, shattering Romanian hopes for autonomy, the latter becoming a minority people as a result of the union between Transylvania and Hungary.²

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² Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947 / România 1866-1947* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 223-224.

Both the United and Orthodox Church remained important strongholds of the national movement, being the only national institutions for Romanians according to not only the 1868 Nationalities Law, but also to other laws enacted during the dualism. These two institutions “kept their administrative autonomy and their control on Romanian education, through elementary and secondary confessional schools.”³

The evolution of the Greek-Catholic Church in Hungary was different from that of Austria, as at the beginning of the dualism, Austria severed the connection between State and Church, the latter becoming a marginalized spiritual institution, reduced to the status of a confession the same as others in the monarchy. In 1855 the Concordat between Austria and the Holy See is signed, specifying that the Greek-Catholic Church regains its role of “temporary power” in the monarchy. After only a few years, the Concordat is no longer recognized, from 1867 in Hungary and from 1870 in Austria.⁴ The influence of the Greek-Catholic Church in Hungarian public life will be gradually reduced, and not suddenly, as in the Austrian case. Among the main reasons that drove the specificity of ecclesiastical legislation there were also those of ethnic and confessional character.⁵ Towards the end of the eighth decade, the Hungarian government came to see in the two Churches an impediment to the transformation of multiethnic Hungary into a national Hungarian state. Gradually, the state began to intervene in the internal affairs of the Church, thus undermining its autonomy and diminishing its “ability of cultivating a distinct Romanian identity.”⁶

The problems that arose between the united Church and the state came to influence their relationship, causing differences of opinion regarding the naming of bishops. In this situation, according to the Leopoldine Diploma, the emperor had the right to appoint the bishop from among the candidates nominated by the Electoral Synod. With the instatement of the dual regime the situation changes, and thus the recommendation of the candidates for the position of bishop comes to be made by the Budapest Ministry of Cults and Instruction and not by the Electoral Synod. This state of affairs becomes more and more tense when the bishop seat remains vacant, and the candidates are not to the liking of Hungarian officials owing to the positions they occupy or to their publications.⁷ The candidate that was to hold the office had to fulfil certain criteria, and especially to be apolitical and subservient to Hungarian authorities. The reason for which the Hungarian government did not accept the propositions of the Electoral Synod were due to its “archivistic, linguistic and administrative merits”.⁸ As the politics of the Hungarian government towards the Romanian Churches change, becoming more and more aggressive, beginning with 1883 a new system of administration in the case of state aid for priests is introduced. The Ministry of Religion and Education came to distribute these sums directly to priests with financial troubles and not through mediators. The Minister Ágoston Trefort arrived at the conclusion that with the old systems abuses were made and priests did not know that the aid came from the state and not from the Church. Considering the fact that their salary was not entirely in currency, this supplementary income was beneficial for supporting their families.⁹ Therefore, the subsidies came to be another cause of tension between the Romanian clergy and the laymen, but also

³ *Ibidem*, 243.

⁴ Ana Sima Victoria, *The Relationships of the Holy See with the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church in the Second Half of the 19th century / Relațiile Sfântului Scaun cu Biserica Greco-catolică românească în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* (Cluj-Napoca, 2009), 87-89, doctoral thesis.

⁵ *Eadem*, 100-102.

⁶ Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania / Afirmarea națiunii: mișcarea națională românească din Transilvania, 1860-1914* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2000), 174-175.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 175-176.

⁸ Ana Victoria Sima, *The Relationships...*, 106-107.

⁹ Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Affirmed...*, 176-177.

between the clergy and the government, and the competition between the State and the Church gradually grew noticeable. The education system also became a source of disagreement. Transylvanian confessional education was the most widespread and under the rule of the Church, but with the instatement of the dualism the situation changes to the worse.¹⁰

The Hungarian government tried to “spiritually uproot the Romanians and deprive them of the possibility of national life”, rejecting their wish for political, economical and religious rights, which the Hungarians, Transylvanian Saxons and Székelys had. The annexation of Transylvania was not enough for the Hungarian nation, that wished to assimilate the Romanian population in the area. So that this purpose might be attained, justice and education were administratively organized. Attention was focused on education, which was seen as the most efficient means of magyarization, since all Romanian schools were built on equity or confessional funds.¹¹

Oaş Country was localized in the north-west of Transylvania, in the County of Sătmar and was attested in documents since the 10th century by the notary Anonymus in “Gesta Hungarorum” or in the paper of the Romanian historian Atonisie Tăutu, “The Seniority of Romanians in Oaş Country”.

Education in this country has seniority, a fact confirmed by the “people of Oaş, Sătmar, Maramureş and Chioar” who first benefited from the knowledge of writing in Romanian, in Cyrillic script. The systematic education of Oaş, and also of other parts of Transylvania, has its origins in the law issued by the Empress Maria Theresa in 1777, known under the name of *ratio educationis*. According to this law school became a state institution and the Romanian people came to benefit from a well-organized educational system, in their own language and under the wing of the State and the Church.

During the first half of the 19th century the schools had very low activity. The dean of Negreşti-Oaş, Ioan Pop, had to ask the Sătmar County authorities to permit the establishment of schools in all Oaş villages. Due to poverty the children could not be sent to school, because they lacked clothes or the schools were too far away. After the 1848 Revolution, both in Oaş Country and in other areas of Transylvania, cultural life enjoyed systematic development even with impediments from Hungarian officials. The establishment of the Gherla Diocese in 1853 was an event of great importance for political and socio-cultural advancement, a moment in which the Romanians of the Muncaci Diocese pass under the protection of the Gherla Diocese.

Also following the events of 1848, education in these parts was reorganized. In 1862, Pamfiliu Văleanu, the professor-teacher of Oaş, accused some priests of inappropriate behaviour and lack of interest towards the activities of the school. It is also Pamfiliu Văleanu who suggests the establishment of a “principal school” in the cells of the Bixad Monastery, accusing the monks at this hermitage of “not working on anything, and these rooms should be used with practical purposes.” In what the school textbooks are concerned, until the 19th century books printed in Vienna, Blaj or Buda were used, and beginning with the second half of the century textbooks printed in Blaj, Vienna, Gherla or Sibiu were identified.¹²

¹⁰ Ioan Câmpean, Victor I. Moldovan, Mircea D. Câmpean, *Contributions to the History of Confessional Education in the Gherla-Cluj Area (The Second Half of the 19th Century and the Beginning of the 20th Century)* / *Contribuții la istoria învățământului confesional din zona Gherla-Cluj (a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea-începutul secolului al XX-lea)* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2008), 44.

¹¹ Dorin Giurgiu, “School Politics of Hungarian Governments 1867-1918” / “Politica școlară a guvernelor maghiare în perioada 1867-1918” *Apulum* (2004): 529-530.

¹² Ion M. Bota, “Romanian Education in Oaş Country” / “Învățământul românesc din Țara Oășului”, *Pedagogy Magazine / Revista de pedagogie*, 5 (1978): 52-53.

The reunion of Greek-Catholic teachers of Satu Mare and Ugocea was instituted late. The initiative was found in the appeal of the “Mariana” reunion of September 1881, which regarded the establishment of teacher reunions in the whole Diocese. Alessandru Erdös, the Dean of Oaş Country, was the leader of this initiative. The first advance in this sense, of forming teacher reunions, was recorded in the period 1882-1883, ending with the ministry refusal to approve the statutes in 1887. Subsequent to this decision the Consistory decided to give up the initiative, at least for the moment. The project was resumed in 1889 by the Administrative Committee of Ugocea County. Also in this period, around the year 1891, the Committee of teacher reunions in Gherla took measures for the instatement of the Sătmar teacher reunion. The Consistory asked Dean Alessandru Erdös to draw up the statutes, and the latter sent those previously composed, which had been rejected at first. In April 1892, after fifteen years, the statutes were approved.¹³ Alessandru Erdös, the Dean of Oaş Country, was firstly a chaplain at Negreşti and during the year 1869 he was vicar at Raça. In documents he is known under the name “Alessandru Erdös”, then “Alessandru Silvestru” and finally “Alessandru Erdösiu”.¹⁴

At the teacher reunion of the 26th of October in Negreşti and of May 1894 at Certeze, Călineşti, Moineşti, Târşolţ and Cămârzana teachers took turns giving lessons. All the teachers, cantors, and local population that took part in the lessons offered in Negreşti were present at the Negreşti assembly presided by Dean Ioan Romanul.¹⁵

In the conscience of more enlightened Romanians, the teacher was seen as the lever that could elevate Romanians as a nation, with the aim of advocating their identity and position. To attain this purpose a program was initiated to attract children to school, persuading parents through words or threats, so that their offspring could attend a form of education.¹⁶

The morals and religiosity of confessional teachers were under the strict scrutiny of Church authorities. The teacher was obligated to have exemplary moral behaviour, especially in family life. Drunkenness and scandal were considered human weaknesses, tolerable up to a point.¹⁷

An instruction from the contents of “The Protocol of Order, Instructions, Correspondence, Situations and Tables Regarding the Greek-Catholic Elementary School of Negreşti” presents the attitude that the instructor must have towards the pupils, but also towards the community. As contractual inspector, Alessandru Erdös issued a document in 16 points, updated in 1885.

The first point of the act presents the ideal image of the teacher, who must be tolerant towards his students and must draw them to his side in order to carry out pleasant teaching activities. He “must win the love of his pupils,... if he hath won this gift, then his labour shall be crowned with desired success.” A certain paragraph refers to the state of mind of the teacher, in case he “shows himself sombre, wroth, he would strike them with his palm, with the ruler, would pull their hair, set them on their knees and arms and strike their heads

¹³ Daniel Sularea, *School and Society. Confessional Elementary Education in the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Gherla (1867-1918) / Şcoală şi societate. Învăţământul elementar confesional în episcopia greco-catolică de Gherla (1867-1918)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008), 349-351.

¹⁴ Câmpean Viorel, *People and Places of Sătmar / Oameni şi locuri din Sătmar* (Satu Mare: Citadela, 2008), 129-130.

¹⁵ Ion M. Bota, *Romanian Education...*, 54.

¹⁶ Călin Sabou, Mihaela Sabou, “The Involvement of the Greek-Catholic Church in Supporting Confessional Education in the Diocese of Gherla During the 19th Century” / “Implicarea bisericii greco-catolice în susţinerea învăţământului confesional din dieceza Gherlei în secolul al XIX-lea”, *Acta Musei Porolissensis* XXV (2003): 363.

¹⁷ Daniel Sularea, *School and Society...*, 252.

‘against walls and chairs’¹⁸, asking him not to use violence, verbal or physical, to punish disobedient students.

If the students “should master not their lesson, commit immoralities, even yet commit theft” they could be punished with “deposition on chairs”. The instructor could detain them at school after class and their name would be “marked on the board”. Another alternative in this case was the teacher consulting the vicar and the parents of the culprit, to chose punishment “by gravity of the sin”, but it is mentioned and insisted upon that violence should not be used to correct children’s behaviour. It was very important that the teacher not be gossiped about in the village, and it was mandatory that his lectures to the students begin with the prayers Our Father and Mother of God.

During holidays, on Saturdays and Sundays, the teacher would bring his pupils to sing at the church. He would hold lectures of one to three hours to the “youth of the school”, even during vacations. In the event of the teacher’s relocation, he must leave the classroom as he had received it. It was mandatory for him to have a protocol that would include “all affairs and correspondence”, more precisely, the stipulations from superior authorities, and, once the lectures began, he would make notes of his students’ activity.

According to regulation, the dean was obliged to make school inspections at least twice a year, and in any case, the school was visited once a year with the occasion of the exams which took place at the end of the year. At this time, the teacher had to present their activities to the inspector, “the babes’ letters, examination records on the babes’ diligence, records on instruments of instruction, after the ordination of the ordinariate and likewise on truancy; moreover on oranges and inventory, so that all shall be on the table.” When the end of the year exam was held, grade reports were finalized, and the dean had the last word.¹⁹ The vicar had a difficult job, as he was part of the directing office of confessional schools. As principal of the school, he drew up the lists of children who were obliged to attend school and made propositions for possible postponements or exemptions. He was the president of the school senate, which represented the parish and was supposed to help him with these problems. He was also responsible for the regress or progress of the school, and it was only him that could persuade the parishioners to pay contributions so that their children may benefit from an education in their mother tongue and not a foreign one.²⁰

The twelfth point clearly mentioned that “the schoolteacher’s bearing without the school need be the example of righteousness and decorum”, an affirmation that represented the requirements parents had of their children’s teacher, that he would first and foremost be religious and moral. As a result, he had to avoid “bad society, taverns, gambling, and to forgo walking about the paths with his pipe.”²¹ An example in this case was the situation of the teacher in Cămârzana who was dismissed in March 1906 because he drank, agitated people against the state and accepted bribery for not filing complaints against parents who did not send their children to school.²² Also included in the category of immoral behaviour was concubinage, considered a felony by the Church. The School Consistory was the institution that dealt with sanctioning teachers by discharge, or forgiveness when and only if he married his concubine. This would be a happy case, but in the case of adultery the situation was different. In 1891 the Dean of Oaş Country asked the teacher of Prilog to

¹⁸ Satu Mare County Service of National Archives, *Collection of Documents of Ecclesiastical Institutions / Colecția de documente ale instituțiilor ecleziastice*, file no. 338, f. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 3-4.

²⁰ Daniel Sularea, *School and Society...*, pp.197-198.

²¹ S.M.C.S.N.A., *Collection of...*, f.4.

²² Daniel Sularea, *School and Society...*, p. 323.

“dismiss” his concubine. The latter requested approval to marry her from the School Committee, a request that was approved.²³

The schoolteacher had to have “sound and peaceful bearing, not falling into quarrel”, it being emphasized that he should not go from house to house demanding his fees. His salary was collected by the vicar or the dean and if the teacher did not receive it, he had to greet all villagers with “gentleness and good-nature”. In any case, the teacher’s financial situation was difficult, especially since he received his pay on a semestrial basis, not only in currency but also in goods. Furthermore, he still had to be good-natured and peaceful towards the students’ parents when he had to inform them of their children’s “ignorance”.

The last paragraph of the instruction mentions the way in which the teacher should behave towards his superiors, having to always address them with respect, even when he is only mentioning them.²⁴

At 25 years of age Ștefan Cintiariu was a schoolteacher in Negrești, during the school year 1884-1885, being in the parish since 1881. He underwent a training period of six weeks following which he obtained a decree of “cantorship” in 1880. For the community, the teacher’s knowledge of church rites was important. The docent’s morals were catalogued as exemplary only if he regularly attended church, but also if his demands of the students were not exigent.²⁵

The teacher was named for life but his keeping the post depended on the community. If he was tolerant, collecting his salary with patience and ignoring certain irregularities in school, he was kept in his position. If he did not honor the people or the priest, asked for his salary on time or complained to superior authorities, then he did not have good chances to stay a teacher in that parish for a long time. The parishioners came to address the Consistory for an exchange, complaining on the grounds that the schoolteacher was not to their liking. The Consistory asked the people to argue the reason for which the teacher was unwanted, so that it could initiate a disciplinary inquiry.²⁶ It was preferable that the teaching position be occupied by the priest and not by a qualified teacher. The education law permitted priests to teach in elementary schools only until the post was taken by someone qualified.²⁷

In what the situation of the schools in Oaș Country is concerned, it was illustrated in “the report of the school inspector read at the County Committee meeting”, which took place at Carei and which showed that out of 20 schools, only 9 were of good quality, 3 were mediocre and 8 were weak, and that the precarious situation of schools was caused by poverty and not the teachers.²⁸

The overview presented by parishes was much more serious than in the report presented to the Consistories. The inspectors of counties Solonc-Dăbâca, Sălaj, Bistrița-Năsăud, Sătmar and Maramureș told only of the derelict state of school buildings, of the very numerous absences, of the analysis of instructional content or efficient school results. It was also related that most of the schools did not teach all of the eleven subjects mentioned in the Law of 1869, but only the most important, like writing, reading or calculus.²⁹

Teachers were seen as models in rural society, both socially and morally. Their training was brought to light by the obtained qualification certificates or through the exams

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 252.

²⁴ S.M.C.S.N.A., *Collection of...*, f.4.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 12.

²⁶ Daniel Sularea, *School and Society...*, pp. 284-285.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 305.

²⁸ Ion M. Bota, *Romanian Education...*, p. 55.

²⁹ Simion Retegan, *In the Shadow of the Belfry. Confessional Greek-Catholic Schools in the Gherla Diocese Between 1875-1885 – Documentary Testimonials / În umbra clopotnițelor. Școlile confesionale greco-catolice din dieceza Gherlei între 1875-1885 – mărturii documentare* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2008), XXXI.

held in order to occupy teaching posts, but also by their decision making abilities when solving various problems. Exams were not left to chance, being previously arranged and presided by a committee. The subjects studied by the children, such as history, orthographic spelling, calligraphy, arithmetics or agriculture had great importance, fact which proves that the children were taught about matters that they could use in life, in order to be good citizens.

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