

## THE GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE LUDUȘ DEANERY FROM ORIGINS TO THE COMMUNISM PERIOD

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*Abstract: The Greek-Catholic Church was set up between the years 1697 and 1701 when part of the Orthodox clergy and Orthodox believers in Transylvania switched to the Catholic faith. The Romanians here agreed to the union because catholicism in those times was the solution in order to avoid the condition of tolerated. The union with the Roman Church had a significant influence on the inhabitants of the Luduș area. Alongside with other Romanian in Transylvania, most of Luduș natives accessed a western spiritual community without renouncing their orthodox tradition which was expressed through the Greek rituals. One of the first documents which confirms the existence of the Greek-Catholic in Luduș and Gheja was the conscription of the bishop Inochentie Micu Klein, in the year 1733. This conscription stated that The Greek-Catholic Church in Luduș belonged to the Turda district and included 350 followers, whereas the one in Gheja belonged to the same district and included 300 followers for a population of 700-900 people. Over time, the community of the Greek-Catholic believers attended important historical events such as the Uprising of Sofronie from Cioara, the 1848-1849 Revolution, the First World War and the Great Union of 1 December 1918. The Greek-Catholic Church was involved in the setting up of schools in the Luduș area from the 1700s until the 1900s. In the 20th century The Greek-Catholic Church in the Luduș Deanery had an important role in the keeping of the national identity, promoted cultural acts, supported the Romanian army as well as the families of those encamped. The year 1948 brought along the prohibition of the Greek-Catholic rite by the Communist regime. The years 1948-1989 were a period of persecutions for both the Greek-Catholic clergy and followers who chose not to abandon their faith against all the hardships.*

*Keywords: Transylvania, Luduș, Catholicism, persecutions, Communism*

### **Background of Unification with the Church of Rome**

The situation of the Romanians in Transylvania during the 17th and 18th centuries was a very difficult one. According to the Act of 1437<sup>1</sup> and the various laws elaborated after this year, the Romanians did not form a “*nation*” in the legal sense of the due rights, having no representatives in the diet nor in the government. Under these circumstances, the role of the church was extremely important for the Transylvanian Romanians.

The action of converting Romanians to Catholicism did not take place only for religious reasons. The important reason was one related to political calculation.<sup>2</sup> Imperial policy in the Transylvanian Principality aimed the centralisation of the institutions, blurring local autonomies. The birth of the Greek Catholic Church took place between 1697 and 1701 through the passing of a part of Orthodox priests and believers from Transylvania to Catholic religion. The Romanians responded to the offer of union because Catholicism was at that time an exit solution from the „tolerated” state. An important role coming from the Romanians have had the metropolitans Teofil (in 1697) and Atanasie Anghel (1697-1699). On February 16, 1699, Emperor Leopold issued the first Leopoldin Diploma of the Union, considered by M. Bernath “the decree of the establishment of the United Romanian Church.”<sup>3</sup> The imperial diploma grants equal rights to the other accepted religions in Transylvania. Some Romanians have remained Orthodox.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fraterna Unio*, meaning Fraternal Union was known as the Unio Trium Nationum and was a mutual pact of political and mutual alliance concluded during the Bobâlna Revolt in 1437 between the great Transylvanian Magyar nobility, the Catholic clergy, the Saxons inhabitants of the city and the Szeklers; the agreement was signed at Căpâlna.

<sup>2</sup> Constantin Giurescu, *Istoria românilor, vol. III*, Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1944, p.368

<sup>3</sup> Ioan Aurel Pop et. alii, *Istoria Transilvaniei, vol. III*, Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, Deva, 2016, p.97

### **Evolution of the Greek Catholic Church in the Deanery of Luduș until 1918. Participations in Important Historical Events of the Greek Catholic Believers of Luduș**

The union with the Church of Rome also had an important influence on the inhabitants of Luduș, a village located in the southern Transylvanian Plain, at the confluence of the River Plain with Mureș. Along with the other Romanians of Transylvania, they have entered in a Western spiritual community without abandoning the Orthodox tradition expressed by keeping the Greek rite. The union and its creators offered the incipient phase of the program of political emancipation, included in the acts of the Union and in the Second diploma. But these desiderata violated the Constitutional Diploma of 1691, which led to its failure to apply on the essential points that harmed the interests of the political nations.<sup>4</sup>

One of the first documents confirming the existence of the Greek-Catholic believers in Luduș and Gheja was the Inochentie Micu Klein bishop's conscription from 1733. This conscription mentioned that the Greek-Catholic Church in Luduș belonged to the Turda district including 350 believers and that of Gheja belonged to the same district and consisted of 300 believers. At that time, the total population was about 700-900.<sup>5</sup> The 1960 "*Șemantism*" records showed that the Greek-Catholic parish served in Gheja since 1731. The synodic acts and the "*Șemantism*" of 1900 recorded the establishment of the Greek-Catholic deanery in Luduș in 1833.<sup>6</sup>

#### *The Rebellion of Sofronie from Cioara*

Due to the non-observance of the promises by the authorities, regarding the rights of the Romanians following their passage to Greek Catholicism, both in Transylvania and in the Luduș area have been also attempts to return to Orthodoxy, such as those led by Visarion Sarai<sup>7</sup> (1744-1746) and Sofronie from Cioara (1759-1761)<sup>8</sup>. Sofronie from Cioara's rebellion also included Luduș and neighboring localities: Bogata, Chețani, Hădăreni, Chimitelnic, Sânger, Tăureni, Zau, and Valea Largă. In August 1760, revolt actions occurred in the area. The rebellion was ruled by Sofronie or his emissaries<sup>9</sup>. The extent of the rebellion endangered the Habsburg ruling in Transylvania. For this reason, reprisals followed that ended with the defeat and oppression of the rebels.<sup>10</sup> After the rebellion, according to statistics of those times, out of the 98 families of Romanians in Luduș, 93 declared themselves Orthodox and 5 declared themselves Greek Catholics.<sup>11</sup> We can talk about a first revolutionary movement of the Romanians in the Luduș area, a struggle for social justice and national freedom. We cannot speak of an interconfessional struggle in itself, but about a fight for the rights of the Romanians, for a better life for the serfs.

#### *The Revolution of 1848-1849*

The social troubles became more and more profound among the Transylvanian Romanians in 1848. The spirit of rebellion was also reported in Luduș during this period, especially by the students. The Greek Catholic Church was involved through the person of the united priest Nicolae Vlăduțiu, the representative of the Romanians from the Plain area, participants in the revolution.<sup>12</sup> Jakab Elek mentions that there have been rebellions in the parts of Luduș, which would have been swept away by the army.<sup>13</sup> The journey of clergy and students through the villages of the Transylvanian Plain served to inform the population about the Blaj Assembly and the revolutionary

<sup>4</sup>Mihai Bărbulescu et. alii, *Istoria României*, Ed. Corint, București, 2003, p.236

<sup>5</sup> Sorin Valer Russu, *Monografia Parohiei Greco-Catolice Luduș "Sf. Apostol Petru"*, Casa de editură „Mureș”, Tîrgu-Mureș, 2010, p.51

<sup>6</sup> Iosif Andreica, et alii, *Monografia orașului Luduș*, Ed. Nico, Tîrgu-Mureș, 2008, p.218

<sup>7</sup>Visarion Sarai was a monk with Serbian descent who roamed the Transylvanian villages preaching a return to the Orthodox faith. Sofronie from Cioara was a Romanian monk who led the way of the second anti-Catholic rebellion of Transylvania in the 18th century.

<sup>8</sup> Iosif Andreica, *op. cit.*, p.99

<sup>9</sup> Mircea Gheborean, *Ludușenii-participanți la răscoala condusă de Sofronie în Luduș-600*, Foaie volantă editată de Consiliul Popular orașenesc Luduș, septembrie 1977, p.2

<sup>10</sup> Mircea Gheborean, *op.cit.*, p.2

<sup>11</sup> Virgil Ciobanu, *Statistica românilor din Ardeal*, Cluj, 1926, pp.23-26

<sup>12</sup> Sorin Valer Russu, *op.cit.*, p.54

<sup>13</sup> Ioan Olteanu, *Revoluția de la 1848 în Câmpia Transilvaniei*, Ed. Arhipelag XXI, Tîrgu-Mureș, 2014, p.110

movement. The peasant excitement of 1848 included the peasants of Luduș and Gheja. In the Luduș area, the rebellion took place between the April 30th gathering and May of the same year. It was defeated only by the armed force.<sup>14</sup>

In the autumn of 1848, after the third meeting in Blaj, on the occasion of the administrative and military organization of the Romanians, Luduș was assigned to the prefecture of Plain, whose prefect was Alexandru Bătrâneau from Balda. Nicolae Vlăduțiu represented one of the most important figures alongside Avram Iancu, becoming a hero of the defense of the mountains. He has made an important contribution to the victories of revolutionaries in the battles of the Apuseni Mountains against the attacks of the army led by Emerich Hatvani and Baron Kemeny Farkas. Nicolae Vlăduțiu returned in 1848 to his village Bogata, where he lived until the end of his life (1872).

#### *The Union of 1 December 1918*

Vasile Suci, the capitulatory vicar, invited him by writing a letter to the dean of Luduș to attend the Assembly of 1 December 1918, which was to be held in Alba Iulia, starting at 10 a.m. alongside “one emissary of all Romanian confessional scholarly meetings”.<sup>15</sup> Among the Electoral Circle members the Greek-Catholic dean Enea Pop Bota and Greek-Catholic priest Ioan Modrigan from Gheja were part of it. These priests attended a delegation of 50 people at the Great Assembly in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918.<sup>16</sup> The Greek-Catholic priest Enea Pop Bota<sup>17</sup> was part of the 1228 delegates present at Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918.<sup>18</sup>

#### *The Greek-Catholic Church of the Luduș Deanery during the Interwar Period*

In 1930, 56.7% of the Luduș land (plasă) was Greek Catholic (22.8% reformed and 11.9% Orthodox)<sup>19</sup>. At the level of Luduș locality, the highest percentage was occupied by Greek Catholics (2685 persons). The other religious denominations were represented as follows: 2387 Reformed, 880 Roman Catholics, 580 Orthodox, 15 Evangelical, 64 Unitarian, 601 Israeli, and 80 Adventists.<sup>20</sup>

#### *The Libraries of Greek Catholic Parishes*

At a time when books were the main source of information and culture in the Luduș area, parish libraries played an important role. The parish library in the village of Cecălaca had 70 books in 1940.<sup>21</sup> In the Greco-Catholic Deanery of Luduș there were subscriptions to various Christian magazines. An example is given by the magazine “Viața Culturală” (Cultural Life), a magazine that was issued in Blaj, with good graphics, with many collaborators, interesting articles on various topics.<sup>22</sup>

#### *The Tragic Year of 1940. The Taking of the Oath of the Priests in September*

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<sup>14</sup> apud Mircea Fanea, *Monografia satului Gheja*, Birotic Center, Luduș, 2006 / V. Cheresteșiu – *Adunarea Națională de la Blaj*, Editura Politică, București, 1966, p.372

<sup>15</sup> The letter, written in Blaj on 23 November 1918, addressed to the Greek-Catholic dean in Luduș, Enea Pop Bota, was accompanied by a credential that would be presented „Verification commission of delegates' credentials at the assembly”. Romanian National Archives – Mureș County Directorate, *Fund of the Greek-Catholic Deanery of Luduș*, File 146/1918, ff.1-2

<sup>16</sup> Sorin Valer Russu, *op.cit.*, p.77

<sup>17</sup> Enea Pop Bota was born on March 22, 1875 in Năsăud locality, Bistrița-Năsăud County. It came from a well-known family that in 1666 received the noble title. On April 14, 1922, priest Enea Pop Bota was promoted as a dean of Luduș District, a position he held until retirement in 1945. Following the parliamentary elections in 1919 he was elected Senator of Turda. He was the president of the local PNȚ (National Peasants Party) organization, member of the Turda County Council (1926-1930), president of the Luduș Dividing of ASTRA, president of the Turda County Council (1931-1934). For his entire activity, he was awarded the 1st class "Cross of Merit" and the "Reward of Labor for the Church" medal class II. He published poems, sketches, short stories and articles in "Illustrated Magazine". He died in 1954.

<sup>18</sup> Iosif Andreica, et alii, *op. cit.*, p.110

<sup>19</sup> According to the census data of 1930

<sup>20</sup> Adrian Mihai Olaru, *Luduș, o istorie neterminată*, Ed. Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae, Brăila, 2016, p.410

<sup>21</sup> Information sent to the Luduș Dean's Office by Florentin Pop, parish adm., December 6, 1940, ANR-DJM, *Fondul Protopopiatul Greco-Catolic Luduș*, File 289/1939, f.2

<sup>22</sup> ANR-DJM, *Greek Catholic Daenery Luduș Fund*, Dosar 289/1940, f.3

The year 1940 meant major territorial losses for the Romanian state. Romania was forced to give up to the Soviet Union: Northern Bucovina, Herzegovina and Bessarabia; Hungary was given the northern part of Transylvania and to Bulgaria, South Dobrogea. On September 6, Carol II abandoned the throne in favor of his 19-year-old son, Michael I. Under these conditions, the Greek-Catholic priests had to take an oath<sup>23</sup> before the representatives of the local authorities: „*I swear the faith to the Nation, the King and the Romanian State; I swear faith and submission to the Head of State; I swear to keep the order and the secret that was entrusted to me; I swear to execute orders without hesitation; I swear to be honest.*”<sup>24</sup> The legionary rebellion of January 21-23 marked the end of the legionary national state that had been founded on September 14, 1940.<sup>25</sup> Under these circumstances, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Arts requested the Greek Catholic dean from Luduș through the United Romanian Metropolitan Church from Blaj, data regarding the involvement of priests from the Greek-Catholic deanery district of Luduș on the legionary rebellion.<sup>26</sup> According to archive documents, no priest took part in the Legionary rebellion.

*Participation of Greek-Catholic Believers in the “Loan of Reunification”*

The Loan of Reunification<sup>27</sup> (bonds worth 5,000 lei) aimed at being a solidarity act among the Romanians. The General Ion Antonescu together with Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu appealed to the population to contribute through this loan to the reconstruction of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina<sup>28</sup> because “... *Our dear Bessarabia and a good part of the sweet Bucovina were defrauded by the Bolshevikheathens...*” The Greek Catholic believers and priests of the Luduș Deanery have mobilized to support the reconstruction of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and contributed significant sums to this loan. Greek Catholic priests had an important role in raising money. Along with the Greek-Catholic believers the parishes also supported the initiative with money.

According to the data available in the studied documents, the total amount of the subscription was 1,772,000 lei in the Luduș Deanery. It should be mentioned that there was no data for the parish in Luduș regarding the subscribed amount.

**Persecution of the Greco-Catholic Priests in Luduș after 1948**

In 1948 the Communist authorities banned the Greek Catholic Church, proclaiming on 1 December 1948, the union of the Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church. This imposed “union” was, in fact, the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church. The bishops refused to sign any document on the transition to the Orthodox cult and were sent in prisons by the authorities. In Luduș it is known the case of the priests Ioan Olteanu, dean of Luduș and Octavian Russu, vicar of Gheja, who did not leave the Greek-Catholic cult, preferring humiliation, imprisonment and poverty. In Luduș, many non-practicing believers have gone to Orthodox worship. There were also inhabitants who remained loyal to the Church of Rome. They were incorporated into the Roman

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<sup>23</sup> This oath was taken on the basis of the Decree-Law No. 3052 / 6.09.1940 (text published in the Official Gazette no.48 / 27.02.1938, which abolished the Constitution promulgated on 27.02.1938) and on the basis of Decree-Law no. 3072 / 7.09.1940 regarding the investiture of the President of the Council of Ministers and Royal Privileges (Text published in the Official Gazette of Romania, September 8, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Excerpt from the report signed when the Greek Catholic priests from Luduș Deanery have taken their oath. ANR-DJM, *Greek Catholic Daenery Luduș Fund*, File 284/1940, f.3.

<sup>25</sup> The German leader preferred to give Antonescu support in his confrontation with former Allies, the legionnaires, grouped in the Iron Guard. Thus, the first stage of the alliance between the Legionnaires and Nazi Germany was concluded. In Romania, the military dictatorship of General Ion Antonescu was established.

<sup>26</sup> Letter no. 1897/1941, ANR-DJM, *Greek Catholic Daenery Luduș Fund*, File 286/1941, f.19.

<sup>27</sup> It represented a financial contribution of the Romanian citizens to the country's public debt, to support the military campaign on the Eastern front and to reconstruct the places of worship and the destroyed infrastructure in Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina. Loan securities were issued under Decree Law 2200/1941, published in the Official Gazette No. 187 / 09.08.1941.

<sup>28</sup> In the documentary film “*The Loan of Reunification*” produced by the National Cinematography Office, Bucharest, 1941, directed by Amedee Morin. The leaders' appeals were presented, and images of the Eastern front were presented in the background.

Catholic Church of Luduș.<sup>29</sup> It is to be appreciated the gesture of the Roman Catholic priest from Luduș, Ghere Bella, who understood the moment when the Greek Catholic Church passed and also celebrated the Holy Liturgy in Romanian, for the Greek-Catholic believers.<sup>30</sup>

*Clandestine Activity of the Priests in the Luduș area*

The prohibition of the Greek-Catholic cult, together with collectivization and nationalization, represented the party's objectives for 1948, objectives that gave the green light to the full establishment of communism in our country.

*Greek-Catholic priest Ioan Oltean* was the dean of Luduș in 1948. He was constantly harassed in the hope of being convinced to follow the Orthodox cult. His determined refusal cost him years of shortcomings, being subjected, he and his family, to humiliations. Authorities also put pressure on the wife in order to convince him. He stayed in Luduș and for years he failed to find a job, although his training would have allowed him to find a job, because at that time the number of people with secondary and higher education was quite reduced in the locality. After a while, he managed to engage in a construction site in Dej, but after the authorities discovered that he was a non-transitioned Greek-Catholic priest, he was fired. He returned to Luduș where he got employed as a worker at the wood warehouse near the train station. He was fired from this warehouse also and then was hired as an accountant at the Carpathian Restaurant where he worked until retirement. He died in 1978, in Luduș.

*Priest Russu Octavian*, the vicar of Gheja, had a similar destiny to that of the dean Ioan Oltean. Shortly after December 1, 1948, he was evacuated, along with his family from the vicarage, but he did not leave the village because of his believers. He was searched nights in a row to be arrested, but he was helped by the people. For eight years, the priest's family was sheltered by various village believers. All the personal belongings (clothes, equipment, different goods, furniture, animals, and food were kept in different families.) As in the case of the dean priest Olteanu, finding a job was a huge problem. In 1956, the priest and his family moved to Tîrgu-Mureș, where he was pursued by the Securitate (Security), and for years he was forced to appear every Sunday at the Militia headquarters. Loved by worshipers while he was in Gheja, Octavian Russu was visited in his small studio in Târgu-Mureș that became the "*new headquarters of the Greek-Catholic parish Gheja in the catacombs.*"<sup>31</sup> Some worshipers came to celebrate the Mass, others to strengthen in the faith and others to be confessed. He kept in touch with Bishop Iuliu Hossu<sup>32</sup> who was at that time at the Căldărușani Monastery. In this regard, there is in the possession of the priest Valer Russu from Luduș, a letter dated March 19, 1970, written by Bishop Hossu and addressed to priest Russu Octavian.<sup>33</sup> After a while he managed to get employment as an accountant, but soon he was arrested and sentenced, being imprisoned at the Poarta Albă penitentiary. After his release, he retired with his wife Ludovica in their studio, living a modest life. He died in August 1985.

Along with these priests was the clandestinely dean Ioan Crăciun, originally from Gheja. He tried to organize the clandestine deanery of Luduș along with Bishop Alexandru Todea. His actions were stopped by the Securitate, being arrested and sentenced to years of detention.

**Conclusions**

The Greek Catholic Church in Luduș and throughout Transylvania appeared due to the desire of the Romanians to enjoy equal rights with the other nations of Transylvania. Over the years, it has been involved in promoting education, preserving the language, customs, and ancestral traditions, but the most important aspect was the cultivation of national consciousness, belonging to

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<sup>29</sup>Iosif Andreica et. alii, *Monografia orașului Luduș*, Ed. Nico, Tîrgu-Mureș, 2008, p.218

<sup>30</sup>Sorin Valer Russu, *op.cit.*, p.85

<sup>31</sup>Iosif Andreica et. alii, *op.cit.*, p.219

<sup>32</sup>The bishop Iuliu Hossu was proposed the chair of Moldavia metropolitan in exchange for giving up his Catholic faith. He refused to follow the Orthodox faith and he was transferred with a required domicile in Căldărușani starting from 1956 until his death in 1970. During 1950-1955, he was detained in the Sighet Prison.

<sup>33</sup> Sorin Valer Russu, *op.cit.*, p.84

the Romanian nation. It played an important role in the accomplishment of the December 1, 1918 Union, was then banned during the war, but could not be abolished. The religious life of the Church continued uninterruptedly, albeit on a much smaller scale, clandestinely. It can be said that the ban on the Greek Catholic Church was a test for believers, an examination of conscience, consistency and faith. Not everyone passed the exam, but there were many who resisted with dignity until the end of their lives.

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