

***THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GREEK-CATHOLIC DISCOURSE OF IDENTITY
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY***

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Abstract: The Greek-Catholic Church in Romania has been forced to face a set of major challenges in the last 25 years: the institutional and administrative reorganization after its return to a legal existence; the relation to the Romanian state and the Romanian Orthodox Church; but also the relation to its own community of believers confronted with the evolutions specific to the post-modern world. The Romanian Uniate Church was, and in a sense still is, also faced with the need to find a satisfactory answer to the question: how much should it go back in time in order to tie again the line of its discourse of identity?; how much should it go back in time in order to be able to find those links that would define in a natural way the characteristics of its own confessional identity? Back to 1948? To 1848? Back to the roots from 1700? This dilemma, correlated to the aspects of the confessional, social and political context of the last decades, has determined the way in which the discourse of identity of the Greek-Catholic Church has been built, its constitutive elements, but also its relation to the historical process of construction of a specific own Tradition, clearly individualized in the Romanian spiritual environment.

This paper aims to analyze this process of constitution of a Uniate confessional discourse of identity, its themes and symbols, as well as the position of the Greek-Catholic Church towards: the other Romanian churches; the Roman-Catholic Church; the Romanian society facing the influences of specific phenomenon like globalization and secularization. But also towards its own Tradition.

Key-words: discourse of identity; confessional identity; otherness; Tradition; Greek-Catholicism

The confessional identity is one of the fundamental aspects of the life of any religious community. Its components (doctrine, rite, Tradition, traditions, history, institutional specificity, confessional otherness, the link with the national movement) are transmitted towards the clergy and the believers through a specific discourse of identity elaborated by the hierarchy and the intellectual elite of the church. In the case of the Greek-Catholic Church in Transylvania, the beginning of this process can be found in the time of the rule of bishop Inochentie Micu Klein, and it had its first literary form in a book entitled *The Flower of the Truth*, published in Blaj, in 1750, being a first official presentation of the constitutive elements of the confessional identity of the Uniate Romanians¹. Until 1948, the confessional identity of the Romanian Uniate Church evolved from the famous statement of bishop Inochentie: "we accepted the four points in Florence and nothing more", to the acceptance of the fact that, over the time, many elements of Latin origin entered in the practice, doctrine²,

¹*Floarea adevărului pentru pacea și dragostea de obște*, edited by Meda-Diana Hotea, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Argonaut, 2004.

² The dogmatic and sacramental elements of Latin origin entered in the practice of the Greek-Catholic Church are: the four points in Florence (including their usage in the liturgical practice – the pope was first mentioned in

ritual³, structures⁴ and legislation⁵ of the church. These elements gave the Uniate Church in Transylvania (in Romania after 1918) a certain individuality, differentiating it from the Romanian Orthodox Church, which proved to be very important especially in the context of a relationship of otherness often marked by numerous moments of tension and conflict.

In 1948, when the Greek-Catholic Church was suppressed by the Communist regime, this church had a very clear confessional identity consisting in a combination of Eastern / Greek as well as Latin elements. In the 18th century, the Orthodox polemicists blamed this mixture, describing the Union as “a third way”, using an accusatory and ironic tone⁶. Nevertheless, the Uniate Church succeeded to define an individualized profile, based on the promotion of the Catholic faith / doctrine, and developing and adapting a Tradition of its own starting from the Greek rite and the Eastern traditions.

In the recent historiography, the historian Nicolae Gudea made a short synthesis of these evolutions, insisting on the fact that the formation of the confessional identity of the Greek-Catholic Church was a process in evolution who reached its highest point in the inter-war period, “when the Eastern traditions as well as the Latin innovations were consolidated”. The final “test” was given during the Communist persecution. In his opinion, the elements

the *Liturgikon* from 1905; whereas Filioque was not introduced in the text of the Creed until 1948 – there are two exceptions: the Creed published in a book called *Bucoavna*, published in 1744, in Cluj, by the Jesuits, during the pastoral rule of bishop Inochentie Micu; and the Creed published in a prayer book, entitled *Flacăra credinței*, printed in 1931, in Oradea); epiclesis; indissolubility of matrimony; infallibility of the pope; Immaculate Conception.

³ The ritual elements of Latin origins entered in the practice of the Greek-Catholic Church are: the reduction of the number of holy days from over 50 in the mid 18th century to 21-22 in the first half of the 19th century; the removal from the *Synaxarium* of the saints who were not linked directly to the church of the first millennium, such as St. Paraschieva, or St. Ioan cel Nou from Suceava; baptism through affusion, instead of immersion – already mentioned in the beginning of the 19th century; usage in the spiritual practice of Latin prayers such as the Rosary – second half of the 19th century, or *Via Dolorosa* – as early as the first half of the 19th century; introduction of specific Latin words in the services translating the Slavic ones – some of these words have become true marks of identity for the Greek-Catholics, such as: îndurare (instead of “milă” – mercy), spirit (instead of “Duh” – Ghost); the usage of the Latin vestment of the bishops – since the 19th century; usage of the altar servers during the liturgical services – mentioned before 1850.

⁴ Many of the ecclesiastical institutions of the Greek-Catholic Church in Transylvania have a Latin origin: the vicar general (already mentioned in 1701); the vicars forane (1786, 1809); the consistory - the institutions of the so called “little synod” from the first half of the 18th century, as well as the activity of the fathers from the Holy Trinity monastery from Blaj can be assimilated with the specific activity of a Roman-Catholic consistory; *capitulum* – 1807.

⁵ Elements of Latin canon law were introduced in the practice of the Uniate Church as early as the 18th century, supporting and adding to the prescriptions of the Eastern *Pravila* (canon law) – the Latin canon law was taught in the Blaj seminar since the beginning of the 19th century.

⁶ See, Ciprian Ghișa, *Biserica Greco-Catolică din Transilvania (1700-1850). Elaborarea discursului identitar*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006, passim.

This accusation or negative remark is a constant element in the Orthodox anti-Uniate discourse. In 1935, the orthodox priest Manea Popescu published an article entitled “Biserica Unită”, in which the Uniate Church was presented as a compromise made by the Roman Catholic Church in order to extend its influence, through which the Uniates moved further from the true Eastern Tradition, but without joining completely the Latin Tradition. Manea Popescu, *Biserica Unită!*, in *Glăsurile Monahilor*, București, 1935, year XIII, nr. 439, p. 2-3. The Union is presented as a “hybrid” in another article from 1934, published in *Viața Ilustrată* from Sibiu. *Ortodoxie și românism*, in *Viața Ilustrată*, Sibiu, 1934, nr. 2, p. 3-8.

And, in 2015, an article entitled “Greco-catolicismul” defines the Uniate Church as “an improvised situation ... the Greek-Catholics are not Orthodox, nor Catholics” but something “in between”. *Greco-Catolicismul*, in www.crestinortodox.ro/carti-ortodoxe/veniti-luati-bucurie/greco-catolicismul-82882.html - in Nov. 2015.

specific to the Greek-Catholicism are: the Romanian law (hierarchical organization, canonic dependency, the Slavonic liturgy, specific fasting and holy days) and “institutions, ideas and influences imposed or taken over from the Catholics”. Amongst the elements which consolidated the “endemic call towards the West, towards Rome”, he mentioned: the schools, education, the national trend known as The Transylvanian School, the Latinist trend, the Latin influences in administration, institutions, discipline, pastoral and dogmatic activity; the effervescence of the Latin Catholic piety after the Vatican I Council – Marian devotions, the Rosary, *Via Dolorosa*, devotion to the Latin saints, pilgrimages⁷.

From a different perspective, the identity of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania was presented shortly in the apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II, from 2000, on the occasion of the celebration of 300 years since the Union. The Pope started his analysis from the principles of the unity of the faith and of the unity in diversity, and praised the unaltered maintenance of the rite and traditions specific to the Uniate Church. He mentioned that the Union was based on the decisions of the Councils in Florence as well as in Trent, and reasserted the spiritual need of the Romanians to be in communion with Rome. The Romanians fought for the reunification of the Church of Christ, thus being a model for all. The pontifical letter mentioned bishops Atanasie Anghel, Inochentie Micu and Petru Pavel Aron, and the provincial synods from 1872, 1882 and 1900, as pillars for the historical evolution of this Eastern rite church. The Pope closed with a reference to the specific calling of the Eastern Churches to be in communion with Rome⁸. His text can also be interpreted as an encouragement for the Romanian Uniate Church to deepen its understanding of its own specific patrimony of identity developed over the last three centuries.

After the anti-Communist Revolution, the question of “what does it mean to be a Greek-Catholic at the end of the second millennium?” has a lot of significance considering the context of the revival of this church, whose future is directly linked to the way in which its new community of believers, drastically reduced as numbers, understands and assumes the characteristics of a confessional identity which is very much changed as compared to the one from the inter-war period, because of the post 1948 events. The decades of persecution influenced decisively the people’s perception of the classic dual combination between the Catholic faith and the Greek rite.

In the recent years, the Greek-Catholic hierarchy has presented with various occasions its own vision on the identity of the church. In a speech from the 13th of October 2010, in Rome, during the fifth general assembly of the Synod of the Bishops from the Middle East, the bishop of Oradea, Virgil Bercea, mentioned the fact that his church is a minority church in Romania, being “the expression of that happy and providential synthesis between the complete communion with the See of St. Peter and the richness of the treasure of the Byzantine spiritual, liturgical and disciplinary tradition”. Then, he referred to the martyrdom

⁷Nicolae Gudea, *Biserica Română Unită (Greco-Catolică) între chemarea endemică spre Occident și dificultățile orientale actuale*, in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Theologia Catholica*, year XLVII, 2003, no. 1, p. 109-120.

⁸*Scrisoare Apostolică a Sfântului Părinte Ioan Paul al II-lea la al treilea centenar al Unirii Bisericii Greco-Catolice din România cu Biserica Romei*, in *Unirea*, 2000, no. 7, supplement, p. I-VIII.

of the Greek-Catholic bishops, dead in the Communist prisons⁹. Therefore, these are the main elements of the Uniate identity: the communion in faith with Rome; the Byzantine rite and tradition; the Communist persecution; the current situation as a minority church.

The new element is obviously the martyrdom, the persecution, the suffering from the decades of illegality. The bishop of Cluj-Gherla, Florentin Crihălmean, showed in his Easter pastoral letter from 2009: “in our Greek-Catholic Church, the testimony of faith made during the Communist regime constitutes a determined element of our identity, a precious treasure inherited from our ancestors, bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laymen”¹⁰. And in the sermon during the ceremony of his installation as bishop of Maramureș, P.S. Vasile Bizău spoke about the life of the church in “the anonymity of the clandestinity and in the horrid awareness of being a slave in your own country”¹¹.

Another new idea will be the one of a continuous persecution in the decades after 1989, when the Greek-Catholic Church, in minority in a state with an Orthodox majority, suffered injustice from the part of the state¹² as well as from the Romanian Orthodox Church. In his Easter pastoral letter from 2009, the bishop of Oradea, Virgil Bercea, said: “today, we, Greek-Catholic Christians, live as those from the first centuries, we are often considered deceivers, although we are lovers of the truth ... we are considered to be traitors although we have been creators of this country and loyal servants of our altars, of culture and of the Truth. Indeed, over the centuries, we, Romanian Uniates, Greek-Catholics, have been servants of God, in spite of troubles, needs, problems, beatings, prison ... even if we had been pushed to the margins of our society, we have never despaired”¹³. The redemption of the Greek-Catholic Church has been built on the “humiliation of Atanasie and of Inochentie Micu, on the tenacity of Petru Pavel Aron and Samuil Vulcan, on the sacrifice of Gheorghe Șincai and of bishop Ioan Suci, on the martyrdom, devotion and sacrifice of hundreds and thousands of Romanian scholars”¹⁴.

The idea of a continuous persecution is often linked to the issue of the church properties which was a constant source of conflict between the Greek-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The Uniate hierarchy asked for “*restitutio in integrum*” of all the properties confiscated by the Communist state in 1948, many of them remaining in the possession of the Orthodox Church after 1989. The tension has been felt at the level of the

⁹P.S. Virgil Bercea, in *Vestitorul*, Oradea, series I, year XIX, no. 4 (204), 2010, p. 7.

¹⁰P.S. Florentin Crihălmean, *Pastorala de Paști*, 2009, in <http://www.bru.ro/documente/pastorala-de-pasti-a-ps-florentincrihalmean-2009/>.

¹¹*Predica P.S. Vasile cu ocazia înscăunării ca Episcop de Maramureș, in 27 iulie 2011*, in www.bru.ro/documente/predica-ps-vasile-cu-ocazia-inscaunarii-ca-episcop-de-maramures/.

¹² See, for example, the letter of P.F. Cardinal Lucian Mureșan addressed to the prime-minister Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, no. 382/24.04.2012, on the issue of the project of the law regarding the restitution of properties, in which the high hierarch spoke about unjust and discriminatory measures which practically continue the policy of the former Communist state. See: www.bru.ro/documente/scrisoarea-pf-cardinal-lucian-despre-proiectul-de-lege-privind-restituirea-proprietatilor/.

The Uniate Church supported the principle of restitution *in integrum* of its former properties, as a principle of universal law acknowledged also by the Romanian state – see also the open letter of the cardinal Lucian Mureșan from 14.06.2002, addressed to the president Ion Iliescu – in www.magisteriu.ro/scrisoare-deschisa-a-ierarhilor-greco-catolici-catre-presedintele-tarii-2002/.

¹³ In *Vestitorul*, Oradea, series I, year XVII, no. 10 (190), 2009, p. 2.

¹⁴*Ibidem*, p. 3.

local communities, as well as of the communication between the bishops and with the state authorities. One relevant example is given by an open-letter of bishop Virgil Bercea addressed to the Orthodox patriarch Daniel, on the 10th of April 2012, in which the Uniate hierarch blamed the “acts of aggression against the Greek-Catholics conducted or instigated by the representatives of the Orthodox Church”, who do not respect the law and refuse the solution of alternative celebration of liturgies in the local churches¹⁵.

It is obvious that the initial formula of the 18th century – *Unio in fide*, and not *in ritu*, sustained so firmly by the writings of bishop Petru Pavel Aron, for instance, with a strong focus on the complete preservation of the Greek rite, was very much changed until 1948, as so many elements of Latin origin were introduced in the practice of the Greek-Catholic Church. On the other hand, the period of Communist persecution made the ritual matters to become very less important, considering the fact that the services were celebrated in totally improvised conditions. The years after 1989 brought little change as many liturgies were celebrated by the Uniates in parks, school buildings or private houses. Therefore, the issue of the rite, although essential for the defining of the Greek-Catholic identity, remained a fluctuant element, in permanent change and under constant external influences. The Uniate hierarchs tried to establish a series of regulations aiming to set the framework for the spread of the Latin origin elements in the ritual practice of the Romanian Uniates. The main objective was to create a uniform liturgical discipline of the church. Various official documents speak about the necessity to maintain the old practice of the Byzantine tradition and spirituality. A decree from 2009 referring to the liturgical vestments forbid any “innovation” and recommended “the return to the specific tradition of our Church”. “Our Rite” is another expression used in the same document¹⁶.

These aspects rise an interesting question: what is this old tradition? What is the so-called “our Rite”? Is it referring to the practice of the Uniate Church from the beginning of its existence? How much should one go back in time to find this point of reference? Back to 1700? Back to 1850? Or to 1900, to the years of the three provincial synods? Or to 1948, the beginning of the martyrdom? These questions lead to another observation: the attempt to “return” to an unclearly defined Byzantine tradition seems to ignore the entire evolution of the Uniate Church since 1700 up to today!

All the aspects presented so far describe a Greek-Catholic confessional identity described in the official discourse of the church around these elements: the Catholic faith and a strong spiritual link with Rome; a declared loyalty to the Byzantine rite; the experience of

¹⁵ *Scrisoare către Patriarhul Daniel*, 10.04.2012, in www.greco-catolica.org/a511-comunicat-episcopul-virgil-bercea-ii-cere-patriarhului-daniel-sacondamne-public-actele-de-agresiune-ale-reprezentantilor-bor-contra-greco-catolicilor-din-vasad-jud-bihor.aspx.

Of course, the Orthodox positions express an exactly opposite perspective, but using a similar vocabulary and accusations. Referring to the abovementioned letter of bishop Virgil to patriarch Daniel, the Orthodox father Eftimie Mitra described it as being “slick”, and accused the Uniates of anti-Orthodox attitudes which lead to tensions and chaos, dishonesty and proselytism, lack of respect for the law and lack of will to celebrate the liturgies alternatively with the Orthodox in the communities where there is only one church building. Interview from 28 april 2012, in *Apologeticum*, www.apologeticum.ro/2012/04/cultul-greco-catolic-are-rolul-clar-de-a-tulbura-linistea-si-buna-vietuire-interconfesionala-din-romania/

¹⁶ See the decrees 20/21.05.2009 and 21/21.05.2009. In *Vestitorul*, Oradea, series I, year XVII, no. 12 (192), 2009, p. 5, 6-8.

the persecution and martyrdom; the crucial role played by the Greek-Catholic Church in the historical and cultural evolution of the Romanian nation. But, the real question is: how much does the nowadays community of believers assimilate, understand and assume this identity? In 2007, on a Greek-Catholic web-site (www.forum-catolic.cnet.ro) the readers were asked to answer the following question: “does a Greek-Catholic identity exist?” Out of the total number of people, 53% answered “yes”, 16% said “no” and 32% answered “I do not know”¹⁷. The main idea of the discussion was centered naturally round the binomial relation between the Catholic faith and the Byzantine liturgical tradition, but many of the respondents approached also the idea that the Uniate Church was passing through a period of identity crisis.

We would like to focus more on this question: what does it mean to be a Greek-Catholic in 2000, three centuries later since the realization of the Union with the Church of Rome? Which parts from the official discourse of the hierarchy have succeeded to reach to level of the faithful? In order to do that, we conducted a study of oral history, helped by the students from the Faculty of Greek-Catholic Theology – Blaj Department. The surveys were applied in various Greek-Catholic communities from the dioceses of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș, Lugoj and Cluj-Gherla. The believers were asked to answer several questions like: why are you a Greek-Catholic?; which are the differences between the Greek-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church?; which prayers do you recite regularly?; who are your favorite saints?; could you mention three historical personalities from the history of the Greek-Catholic Church?; why was the Union with Rome signed in 1700?; have you ever assisted to a Roman-Catholic mass?¹⁸

Starting with the dogmatic aspects, we will focus first on the question referring to the differences between the Greek-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, as it can reveal the degree of awareness of the believers regarding the Union’s specific elements of faith. 67,94% of the respondents (106 persons) referred to the Florentine points, with a special focus on the papal primacy, Filioque¹⁹ and the purgatory. Seven persons mentioned *Immaculata Conceptione* as well, and other seven persons indicated also the indissolubility of the matrimony. Thus, the majority of the believers perceive these elements of doctrine as the individualizing essence of their faith. There were also persons who observed only formal differences between the two churches: 17 persons said that the difference between the Catholics and the Orthodox is resumed to the fact that “we say *spirit* and they say *duh*”; 6 cases referred to the words “îndură-te” and “miluește”; 2 persons said that the Catholic liturgy

¹⁷See: www.forum-catolic.cnet.ro/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=378

¹⁸ Our study is based on a set of 187 questionnaires, filled in by a group of diverse persons – residence, age, gender, level of education. It is a balanced group, representative for the Greek-Catholic contemporary community. A number of 66 respondents (35,3%) come from the urban areas, from cities like Blaj, Lugoj, Cluj-Napoca, Teiuș, Mediaș, Sibiu; respectively, 121 persons (64,7%) come from the rural areas. 66 persons were women and 121 were men. 56 persons (29,95%) were 14 to 35 years old; 67 persons (35,83%) were 36 to 60 years old; and 64 persons (34,22%) were over 60 years old. From the level of education point of view, the respondents come from different categories as well (149 persons declared the level of their formal education): 3 pupils – 2,01%; 21 students – 14,10%; 50 persons with a graduated high-school – 33,55%; 58 persons with university education – 38,93%; 17 unqualified persons – 11,41%.

¹⁹ It is important to mention that after 1989, Filioque is recited in the Creed by the Greek-Catholics in Romania, as another sign of belonging to the Catholic spiritual environment.

was shorter than the Orthodox one. For all these respondents, the word “Catholic” overlaps with the formula “Greek-Catholic”. On the other hand, 10 persons said that there was no difference between Catholics and Orthodox. One person, of 39 years old, living in the urban areas, asked: “Is there any difference?”

The aspects regarding the rite can be analyzed starting from several of the questions of the survey. Looking at the one referring to the daily prayers²⁰, it is obvious that the basic ones (Our Father, Ave Maria) are the most common ones. But, we will emphasize the fact that 35,7% of the respondents said that they recite the Rosary on daily basis (or at least a part of it), which is a prayer of Latin origin with a long tradition in the practice of the Uniate Church. We shall also notice the very high percentage of the believers who recite the Creed on daily basis – 44,3%. The profession of faith recited regularly contributes to the consolidation of a strong confessional identity.

Related to the preference of the Greek-Catholic believers for certain saints, the survey shows that 29,8% of the respondents declared their special devotion to the Virgin Mary, whereas 11,92% mentioned St. Joseph, earthly father of Jesus Christ and the patron saint of the family. On the other hand, 41,05% said that their favorite saint was St. Antony of Padua, 13,24% mentioned St. Rita, 7,28% mentioned St. Augustine. St. Nicholas was mentioned by 16,55%, St. John the Baptist by 15,9% and St. George by 9,27%.

We need to emphasize the very high percentage of the people who have a special devotion for St. Antony of Padua. Practically, St. Antony has become in time the most popular saint for the Greek-Catholic believers, his popularity succeeding to exceed even the one of Virgin Mary, who has naturally enjoyed a constant adoration in the Romanian Uniate Church. One can also notice the fact that the diversity of the Latin saints venerated by the Uniate believers is not very high. Alongside St. Antony and St. Rita, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Francis of Assisi were also mentioned. The quite high percentage of the people with a special devotion to St. Augustine is somehow surprising. An explanation can be found in the constant reference to him and to his conversion in the sermons of the priests. On the other hand, one can notice the maintenance of the common diversity of the Eastern saints in the popular devotion, but this is explained mostly by the fact that many of the believers were baptized with the names of these saints (Nicholas, John, George, Peter, Paul).

Analyzing these data, it is obvious that a consistent Latin influence can be traced in the ritual and spiritual practices of the believers. The veneration of the Latin saints is proven also through the fact that a series of churches and chapels built after 1990 were dedicated to them. A few examples: in Oradea, one of the chapels from the parish Oradea Velența I is dedicated to the Pope John XXIII; the new church from Săliște, Maramureș county, is dedicated to St. Padre Pio; St. Antony of Padua is the patron saint of parish churches in Baia Mare, Carei, Dej or Valea lui Mihai (Bihor county); St. Virgin of Fatima and St. John Paul II are patron saints of a parish in Reșița, Caraș-Severin county.

²⁰88,7% of the respondents declared that they recite daily „Our Father”; 73,5% - Ave Maria; Creed – 44,3%; Rosary – 35,7%; *Împărate cerească* (prayer dedicated to the Holy Ghost)- 33,7%; *Via dolorosa* – 10,6%; *Paraclis* (dedicated to Virgin Mary) – 9,9%.

The Latin influence is visible over the rite in the fact that numerous Greek-Catholic churches did not have (or still do not have) an iconostasis, or that musical instruments are used during the mass (e.g. the Holy Cross church in Baia Mare). These realities should not be too surprising. Many of these practices were in the usage of the church already before 1948. Later, during the Communist regime, when the liturgies were celebrated in completely inappropriate conditions, when many believers assisted frequently to Roman-Catholic services, the issue of the unaltered preservation of the rite became completely irrelevant to the faithful. The participation to the Latin services was an option for the believers to remain in contact with the Catholic spiritual environment. One effect is visible in a very flexible attitude of these persons towards the rite. On the other hand, the contact of the Uniate believers with the Roman-Catholic liturgy remained constant also after 1989. 77,78% of the respondents to our survey declared that they had participated to Roman-Catholic masses over the time.

Moreover, in the churches that were Greek-Catholic before 1948, but became Orthodox in the Communist period, in quite numerous cases, and at least for a while, the furniture, the icons and the images specific to the Uniates were maintained, and certain devotions of Latin origin, such as the Cult of the Holy Heart of Jesus, Rosary, or *Via Dolorosa*, special prayers dedicated to St. Antony or St. Rita, continued to be practiced by the people²¹. The explanations are various: in some situations, the priest continued to be the former Uniate one, who converted to Orthodoxy after 1948; in other cases, the Orthodox priests tried to avoid the passing of the former Greek-Catholic believers to Roman-Catholicism. These elements of continuity played an important role in the return of some of these believers to Greek-Catholicism after 1989²².

Interesting answers were given to the question related to the famous personalities of the Uniate Church²³. One can notice that bishop Inochentie Micu Klein is the main and most representative figure for the Romanian Greek-Catholicism. He was the founder of the centre from Blaj, the initiator of the Romanian national movement in the mid 18th century, a constant fighter for the national and economical rights of the Romanians in Transylvania. He has also an aura of martyr as he was forced to live his last 23 years of life in exile, in Rome, paying for his political stands. On the other hand, the fact that more than a half of the respondents did not mention him proves that, in general, the historical knowledge of the Greek-Catholic believers needs serious improvement. Inochentie's remains were brought back in Blaj, in 1997, but the event had rather limited public resonance.

²¹ A situation like this was present in Maieru, a village in the Bistrița-Năsăud county. See: Maria Avram, *Rolul tradiției în revenirea la greco-catolicism după 1989 (com. Maieru, Bistrița Năsăud)*, in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală, Cluj-Napoca*, tom II, 2001, p. 183-184.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 185-187.

²³ Bishop Inochentie Micu Klein was mentioned by 47,59% of the respondents; cardinal Alexandru Todea – 43,85%; bishop Ioan Suci – 29,94%; cardinal Iuliu Hossu – 21,92%; bishop Petru Pavel Aron – 17,64%; metropolitan Vasile Suci – 17,11%; bishop Ioan Ploscaru – 5,88%; metropolitan Atansie Anghel – 5,88%; bishop Ioan Bob – 5,88%; bishop Tit Liviu Chinezu – 5,34%; bishop Valeriu Traian Frențiu – 5,34%; bishop Ioan Bălan – 4,27%; bishop Ioan Lemeni – 2,14%; archbishop George Guțiu – 2,14%; metropolitan Alexandru Rusu – 2,14%; metropolitan Alexandru Șterca-Șuluțiu – 2,14%. Very few people mentioned also: Timotei Cipariu, Petru Maior, Gheorghe Șincai, Samuil Micu, Augustin Bunea, Ștefan Manciu, Simion Bărnuțiu, Aron Pumnul, Andrei Mureșanu, Ion Budai Deleanu, Iuliu Maniu, Ioan Miclea, Ion Agârbiceanu, George Barițiu, Bernard Ștef, Iuliu Hațieganu, Axente Sever, Vladimir Ghika, Silvestru Prunduș.

It is easily noticeable that the most numerous mentions refer to the martyr bishops of the 20th century, amongst whom cardinal Alexandru Todea is the leading figure (but we should also mention the fact that he survived the Communist persecution and led the Uniate Church until 1994, thus being personally known by many of the believers) alongside bishop Ioan Suci (very famous in the inter-war period because of his pastoral activity for the young people) and cardinal Iuliu Hossu (main political voice of the Uniate Church before 1948 and the first Uniate hierarch to be appointed as cardinal – 1969, by Pope Paul VI). Furthermore, in the general list of personalities, one can see the names of all the hierarchs who suffered during the Communist persecution. Their special popularity is explainable through all the actions taken by the current hierarchy of the church in the last 20 years in order to promote their image as martyrs and saints of the Catholic Church. The persecution remained very present in the mind of the believers, as many of them lived through that period and some of them knew personally some of these bishops. Their personal example of sacrifice strengthened the confessional Greek-Catholic identity on the way to be reconfigured after 1989²⁴.

A percentage of 9,08% of respondents could not mention even one personality of the church. We include here also the two persons who mentioned Pope John Paul II. This number is rather high and it just sustains the conclusion that the past of the Uniate Church is known by a relative small number of people. This is an element that indicates a rather weak confessional identity, considering the fact that the knowledge of the past and the spiritual and intellectual link with the ancestors is one of the decisive factors for the consolidation of any confessional identity, especially in this period influenced by the effects of phenomenon such as secularization and globalization²⁵. This is also a proof of the failure of the Greek-Catholic discourse in its attempt to educate the faithful and to strengthen their specific identity. This observation is supported also by the fact that a powerful cultural and national brand such as the Transylvanian School is so poorly linked in the mind of the believers with the Uniate Church (scholars like Petru Maior, Gheorghe Șincai and Samuil Micu were barely mentioned by a few persons), in spite of the fact that its origins and vision can be found especially in the Greek-Catholic Church and in its capital, in Blaj.

Therefore, which are the elements specific to Greek-Catholicism in the vision of the believers? This is a list extracted from the answers given by the respondents: the persecution and the image of the martyr bishops / the metaphor of the sacrifice; the link with Rome and the image of the pope as the leader of the Church; specific devotions such as the Rosary or the cult dedicated to St. Antony of Padua; the general maintenance of the elements specific to the Byzantine rite; the promotion of a specific vocabulary, different from the one used by the Orthodox Church – words like “îndură-te” and “spirit” being the most representative ones; the idea that the Latinity of the Romanian people is best manifested through the practice of the

²⁴ See the testimonies of certain persons such as pr. Vasile Silvestru Andercău, pr. hieromonk Leon Iosif Bob, analyzed in: Maria Rițiu, *Desființarea Bisericii Române Unite (1948) în memoria elitei bisericești*, in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*, Cluj-Napoca, tome VII, 2006, p. 209-222.

²⁵ For the possible reactions of a „traditional” church, such as the Greek-Catholic Church, in its confrontation with the challenges of the secularization process, see: Ciprian Ghișa, *The Greek-Catholic Church in Romania Facing the Challenges of the Post-Modern Society*, in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 13, nr. 38, 2014, p. 3-28.

Catholic faith; the idea that there is a certain type of Greek-Catholic spirituality based on modesty, seriousness, discipline, order and love for one's neighbor. Thus, numerous elements of Latin origin, combined with the respect for the martyr bishops and the image of a Church which survived a very harsh persecution. A respondent, woman, intellectual, 39 years old, from a village very close to Blaj, listed the elements that she considered to be most representative for the Romanian Greek-Catholicism: "Rosary, the Miraculous Medal, St. Antony and the veneration of Virgin Mary". Her answer is a powerful and illustrative conclusion over the way in which the Greek-Catholic spirituality evolved throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

In the end, we raise the question of how efficient has the discourse of identity of the Greek-Catholic Church been in the last decades in its attempt to shape a strong confessional identity for its believers? Analyzing the data offered by the survey, one can notice that the Uniate spirituality has moved towards a deepening of the usage of the Latin elements introduced in the practice of the church since the beginning of the 19th century, towards a greater mental and spiritual link with Rome, towards a consolidation of a specific vocabulary. And all these, in spite of the efforts conducted by the Uniate hierarchy to clarify and to promote the ritual elements closer to the Eastern Tradition.

The "strong" elements of the Greek-Catholic identity at the beginning of the 21st century are: elements of the Catholic faith – assumed and acknowledged by the believers; the ritual elements which individualize the Uniate Church in the Romanian spiritual environment; the image of the persecution; the confessional otherness.

The "weak" elements of the Greek-Catholic identity are: too much attention given to the ritual elements – the confessional identity can be diluted if the ritual practices contain too many similarities with either the Orthodox – Eastern model or the Catholic – western one; the insufficient and subjective knowledge of the past and history; an otherness based on polemics; insufficient religious education.

The confessional identity of the Greek-Catholic Church evolved constantly in the 300 years of its history creating a specific and individualizing model. This was strengthened by its Latin component which brought the Uniate community closer to the Catholic, Roman environment, without giving up on the essence of the Eastern spiritual and ritual patrimony. The Latin elements increase the degree of specificity of this church inside the Greek confessional space, whereas the Eastern elements ensure the special place occupied inside the Catholic world. This has been a permanent evolution, regardless of the political regimes or of the different perspectives and vision of the Uniate hierarchy over the time. The attempt of the hierarchs to find an uniform and unifying model will remain a very difficult challenge for the future.

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