

Summary of the PhD thesis entitled
The Organizing Structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the
Inter-war Period (1918-1940) and its Canonical Background
defended by PhD candidate Cristian-Vasile PETCU

Our thesis which is to be defended in order to obtain the title of PhD in the field of Theology, attempts at describing those defining elements in the canonical and legal perspectives that led to several important transformations in the life of the Church during the interwar period. At the same time, it emphasizes their value for the present-day Romanian Orthodox Church.

However, the presentation is not entirely self-sufficient for the theme, yet it is detailed enough to provide a view of the canonical and legal life and problems of the Romanian Orthodox Church during this period. We think it is absolutely necessary to adopt this structure of presenting new perspectives and multiple aspects for the specialized research domains. Moreover, these aspects could not be restricted to the domain of canonical law.

Firstly, the objectives proposed and developed in this thesis point to the historical (national and political), legal and canonical contexts in which the Romanian Orthodox Church manifested itself as a national, hierarchical and autocephal Church for the newly unified Romanian State. This is why the legal aspects that are part of the canonical law and Church legislation domain are presented in detail, both from a historical and a contextual point of view. Therefore, the objectives of this thesis do not only include the internal realities of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its organizing structure, but also the relationship between the Church and the State, between the Romanian Orthodox Church and other Sister Churches at a national and international (interfaith) level.

In order to thoroughly present its objectives, the thesis is structured both chronologically and thematically, in seven chapters, in over 200 pages.

The first chapter entitled *The Fundamental Canonical Principles of the Organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Canonical Bases of a Local*

Orthodox Church, with three subchapters, is a contextually-based introduction to the fundamental canonical principles that formed the background for the organisation of the sister Orthodox Churches in the newly unified historical provinces, now part of Romania. The historical-legal context is also important for the state of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its component parts. Thus, in the first subchapter *The Romanian Orthodox Church at the end of the First World War in the new national and political context* we need to take into account in our approach the newly established national and political status, because the organizing structure and the canonical-legal background of the Church was highly influenced by this.

The second subchapter entitled *The Avatars of the Church Unification; the election of Miron Cristea as the First Metropolitan Bishop of Romania* represents the second part of this approach. The purpose is to chronologically present the most important moments in the life of the Romanian Orthodox Church after 1918, among its objectives being the edification of the Church unity and the consolidation of the central synodal authority by the election of a first metropolitan bishop.

The last subchapter of the first chapter, entitled *The Organizing Structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church until the Election of its First Patriarch Miron Cristea* synthesizes the fundamental canonical principles that are to be found at the basis of the organizing structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the interwar period – principles that are still valid nowadays in the administrative and canonical structure of our Church.

The thematic of the second chapter is related to an extremely important moment in the life of the Romanian Orthodox Church – *The Foundation of the Romanian Patriarchy and the election of the first Patriarch Miron Cristea*. The consequences for the Romanian Orthodox Church, both on the local level and on the international one, are included in a presentation that starts from the preoccupations, efforts and propositions to establish the Romanian Patriarchy up to its establishment in 1925.

The third chapter – *State laws regarding the Romanian Orthodox Church* – follows the same lines of approach in a chronological presentation of the theme, trying to reach the essential points of the Churchly politics of the Romanian State,

preoccupied to strengthen its newly obtained unity. Nevertheless, the main objective of this chapter is to emphasise the contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as a dominant majority church in the State.

The Constitution of 1923 shall establish the main principles of the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church as an autocephaly Church, with central synodal authority, unitarily organized at the national level, with the purpose to provide an active participation of all its component parts, clergy and laymen, to its functioning and administration.

The Concordat of 1927 (1929) and the Cultic Law of 1928 reveal difficult moments that influenced the Churchly politics of the Romanian State that, at least until the promulgation of these laws, showed coherence in its political attitude towards the Church. The Romanian Orthodox Church found itself in an inferior position. Thus, the parity and the equal rights principles of all the Cults, stipulated in the Constitution of 1923, became inapplicable.

The problematic aspect of the Constitution of 1938 – the last subchapter of the second chapter – is approached from the perspective of the novelty of the legal text in the domain of Church politics. Among these, we mention the constitutional stipulations regarding the implication of the priests in the political life. The relationship between the Church and the State undergoes transformations in the newly established national and political context of the authoritarian regime of King Charles II.

Chapter IV – *The Legislation and the Organizing Status of the Romanian Orthodox Church* – interrupts the chronological presentation, changing the approach into a thematic one. In the first three subchapters, we structurally bring forward in detail the legal provisions that formed the basis of the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the interwar period. Each theme - 4.1. *The Church - State Relationship*; 4.2. *The Holy Synod and the organization of the ruling body of the Romanian Orthodox Church* 4.3. *The constitutive parts of the Church: the parish, the protopopiate (archpriestship), the monastery, the bishopric* – covers all the major aspects of the organizing structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church, stipulated in the Law and Organising Status of 1925. The last subchapter - 4.4. *The Role of the Laymen*

in the life of the Church – goes beyond the punctual presentation of the statutory provisions of the Romanian Church and adopts a synthetic perspective on the problems raised by the legislative inclusion of the Sagunian principles in the new law which allowed the participation of the laymen in the Church executive body.

The fifth chapter addresses the problems of the *Territorial and administrative organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Interwar period*, starting from the state of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the end of the first world war until the enact of its territorial and administrative structure in the Law and Organizing Status of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1925. The establishment of new parishes, as well as the strengthening and harmonization of the administrative unity at the national level are chronologically presented until the end of the interwar period. The historical and canonical impact of these moments in the life of the Romanian Church is relevant until present days, mainly because in order to renew and consolidate the present we have to recapture and bring forward the past.

The second subchapter – *The Theological Education System – administrative and legal aspects* – highlights the practical aspects that correspond to the needs of the Church in educating and schooling its own followers and servants, and the relationship between the Church and the State at an administrative-legal level. These facts are still valid nowadays. Furthermore, it is surprising that many of the aspects regarding the organization of the theological education system, the material basis, the financial support, the vocational specificity of the interwar period are still included in the present-day structure because, in fact, the premises are identical.

The last subchapter – *The Organizing Structure of the Monastic Life and the Publishing Activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church during Patriarchs Miron and Nicodim* - focuses on completing the image of a Church that finds itself in a transformation process in order to assert its unity and its structure at all organizational levels and most of all in its worldly mission.

The themes of the sixth chapter of this thesis, entitled *The Relationship of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the other Sister Churches during the Interwar Period*– refers to the relationship with the other Orthodox Sister Churches, materialized in the closely established bound with the Ecumenical Patriarchy, in the

participation at Pan-orthodox congresses or at conferences of the Orthodox theological faculties or its implication in solving the Bulgarian Schism. All these reveal an internationally active Romanian Orthodox in promoting and defending the Orthodoxy.

The same spirit lies at the basis of the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the other Sister Churches. Our Church had been present and preoccupied with the reconstruction of the Christian unity. The dialogue with the Old Catholics or with the Anglican Church, the participation at different meetings of the international ecumenical committees reveal a Church that exceeded its territorial boundaries, asserting itself on the international level. Under these circumstances, the most important aspects are related to the relationship of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the Anglican Church, whose dialogue regarding the reconstruction of the Christian unity had significant results, relevant for that period, in the acceptance of the validity of the Anglican priesthood.

The seventh chapter entitled *The Canonical Structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Interwar Period* falls outside the chronological and thematic purpose of this thesis and approaches the canonical perspective in a synthetic way. The fundamental canonical principles are presented as representing the background of the Romanian Orthodox Church structural organization and of its canonicity in accordance with the norms and specific stipulations of an Autocephalic Church of the Eastern Orthodoxy.

The theme of this thesis presupposes a comprehensive bibliography, both in the theological and historical field, in order to approach the problems in a contextual way. In other words, all the bibliography consulted and many representative authors in the domain of canonical law adopt the same line of approach in their works regarding the canonical and legal bases of the organizing structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Bibliography is divided in *Documents and legal acts, Anniversary volumes, Volumes, studies and articles* and includes older and newer scientific works debating on the theme of our thesis.

Moreover, we included in our thesis in annexes *The Law and Organizing Status of the Romanian Orthodox Church of 1925*, and *The Cult Law of 1928*, as fundamental legal landmarks in the interwar period.

In conclusion, we can state that the interwar period – in its problematic complexity – represents for the Romanian Orthodox Church an important period in asserting its canonicity at the territorial, administrative and legal levels, both nationally and internationally, as well as its ecumenical, canonical and hierarchical character at the European interfaith level.

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