

ASPECTS FROM THE LIFE AND ACTIVITY OF ARCHPRIEST ZAHARIA MANU

Emanuil Ineoan⁹⁹

ABSTRACT

The biography of archpriest Zaharia Manu marks the portrait of a Church servant, dedicated to his ministry, but also to certain large-scale construction works, his deeds, as well as his opinion maker personality, through the important influence he had among his parishers recommend him as an elite element of the Romanian Orthodox clergy, a reference and model of dedication and abnegation. His ability to confess his creed and to defend, without compromises, the believers living that time of great adversity under the two totalitarian regimes make the archpriest Manu an undesirable target for both the Horthy regime and the communist one.

Keywords: Zaharia Manu, Dej, Romania, Horthy, Hungary.

With the arbitration in Wien, a large part of the Transylvanian region belonging to Romania was occupied by Hungary. In the surrendered land, a number of 2,603,589 persons were living, of whom, 1,304,898 were Romanians and 968,371 were Hungarians, together with other nationalities¹⁰⁰. Under the omophorion of the only Orthodox hierarch in the occupied Transylvania, Nicolae Colan, 436 parishes remained, with 300 subsidiaries and 339,448 souls¹⁰¹. The Hungarian part presented only 228,800 Orthodox Romanians in the 1941-statistics, approximately 8.9% of the entire population of the occupied area¹⁰².

⁹⁹ PhD in History, postdoctoral researcher at the Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; E-mail contact: iemanuil@yahoo.com. This paper received financial support through the project "Doctoral Research and postdoctoral fellowship, innovative and relevant to the labor market": POCU /380/6/13/124146, project co-financed from the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Program 2014–2020.

¹⁰⁰ Central National Historical Archives (hereinafter A.N.I.C.), *Fund Preşedinţia Consiliului de Miniştri [Council of Ministers Presidency Fund]*, File 37/1940, f. 4.

¹⁰¹ Alexandru Moraru, *La răscruce de vremi o viaţă de om: Nicolae Colan, Episcopul Vadului Feleacului şi Clujului: 1936–1957: după documente, corespondenţă, însemnări, relatări, impresii, Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxă Română a Vadului, Feleacului şi Clujului [A man's life at the crossroads: Nicolae Colan, Bishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj: 1936–1957: after documents, correspondence, notes, accounts, impressions, Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj]*, Cluj-Napoca, 1989, p. 309.

¹⁰² Balázs Ablonczy, *Transilvania reîntoarsă: 1940–1944 [Returned Transylvania: 1940–1944]*, Iaşi, European Institute Publishing House, 2014, p. 171.

Before 1940, these parishes belonged to the three Orthodox bishoprics: Maramureș 87 parishes and a subsidiary, Oradea 110 parishes and 46 subsidiaries and Cluj with 184 parishes and 42 subsidiaries, together with the 55 parishes that had belonged to the Archbishopric of Sibiu¹⁰³. In 1942, there were only 186 priests left there, while 277 priests had taken refuge¹⁰⁴.

According to the official Hungarian statistics of 1941, within the county and municipal administration, only 6.6% of the employees were Romanians, most of them holding small positions, as clerks or support staff¹⁰⁵.

It should be noted that the canonic territory of the bishoprics did not overlap exactly over the occupied territory. Therefore, from the Eparchy of Cluj, in Romania, 201 parishes and 35 subsidiaries remained, accounting for 172,805 souls; from the Eparchy of Oradea, 210 parishes remained, amounting 175,171 souls. Besides the three eparchies of Cluj, Oradea, Maramureș, on the occupied territory, another 55 parishes and 211 subsidiaries were found, accounting for 29,692 souls, which belonged to the Archbishopric of Sibiu. The data has been taken from General Report of the Eparchy Council's meeting, of May 15, 1941¹⁰⁶.

The relentless persecution against the Romanian Church was systematically and concentrically unleashed by all the organized and chaotic forces – army, gendarmerie, police, paramilitary organizations or unorganized bands and individuals from among the Hungarian population – as well as by the state authority in Budapest, by the media etc.

The Hencke-Rogeri Commission noted, in its report dated February 8, 1943, that of the 442 Orthodox parishes functioning in the occupied Transylvania before August 30, 1940, “not even half can be found today there”¹⁰⁷.

The moment August 30, 1940 meant, for the Orthodox clergymen in the Transylvanian areas found under Hungarian occupation, a high-pressure situation, in which, they had to choose either to stay in their parish with their own parishioners and being, thus, as Orthodox priests, subject to very many risks from the new administration, or to leave for the free Romania, and rebuilding, practically, their life from scratch.

Hereinafter, we will address the life and activity of an Orthodox clergyman, Zaharia Manu, an archpriest. The events that took place in 1940 are captured in his reports to his hierarch, in a relevant manner for the degree of drama that this elite priest and archpriest had to overcome. His pastoral dignity and the spirit of sacrifice proven by this clergyman together with his administrative and missionary achievements, round out for us today a complex portrait of a man of the cloth, fully

¹⁰³ Archive of the Cluj Archbishopric, Report from 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Schematics of the Cluj Bishopric for year 1942.

¹⁰⁵ Balázs Ablonczy, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ Alexandru Moraru, *op. cit.*, pp. 309–310.

¹⁰⁷ Vasile Pușcaș, *Dictatul de la Viena, Transilvania și relațiile româno-ungare (1940–1944)* [*The Vienna Dictatorship, Transylvania and Romanian-Hungarian relations (1940–1944)*], Cluj-Napoca, Ardelean School Publishing House, 2020, p. 280.

dedicated to the Orthodox mission, which has nothing to do with the typology of a clerical clerk who pursues, many times maybe, his own selfish interest.

A FEW BIOGRAPHICAL FACTS

He was born in 1882 in Boiereni, Maramureș. He graduated the Andreian Theological Institute of Sibiu in 1905. On December 21st, 1906, he was consecrated in Sibiu by the metropolitan Ioan Meșianu, and on January 1st, 1907, he was appointed priest in the parish of Bobâlna, Cluj County. Between 1911 and 1912, the priest Zaharia Manu built in Bobâlna, with the support of the parishoners and of the Romanian community from Cleveland – Ohio, the church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, a project carried out by architect Ioan Berindean, and which reenacted, to a scale of 1/3, the metropolitan cathedral in Sibiu. The sanctification of the church took place on September 2nd, 1926, being performed by Ioan Stroia, the bishop of the Army. In April 1921, the priest Zaharia Manu was appointed archpriest of the Tg. Lăpuș Deanery, where he would carry out his mission until 1929. In April 1929, the priest Zaharia Manu was transferred to Parish I of Dej, being appointed also archpriest of Dej, a position he held until 1949¹⁰⁸.

DURING THE HORTHYST OCCUPATION OF NORTH-WEST TRANSYLVANIA

Along with the Horthyst occupation that occurred after August 30, 1940, the entire Orthodox Deanery of Dej fell under the annexed area, which meant, for the archpriest Manu, but also for the other Orthodox clergymen, the beginning of a difficult period, when many of the altar servants were subject to various pressures. All these heinous acts manifested by the new Hungarian authorities restricted the religious freedom of the Orthodox Romanians, their priests being considered dangerous for the new regime. Implicitly, the person of archpriest Zaharia Manu was considered *persona non grata* by the officials. About the events that occurred after August 30, 1940, in the area of Dej, a letter belonging to archpriest Zaharia Manu bears witness, addressed to the metropolitan of Ardeal, Nicolae Bălan from Sibiu, the message being written on November 1st, 1940:

“I was arrested by the Hungarian authorities on October 21st, this current year, together with other 10 Orthodox priests and 12 greco-catholic priests from the county and we were admitted to the correction institute of Gherla.

Getting acutely ill under the harsh regime inside the prison, I was released. At my insistence of being sent to the hospital or to be subject to house arrest, I was informed

¹⁰⁸ Augustin Pădurean and Teofil Herineanu, *Protopopiatul Ortodox, Român Dej-Monografie, [Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Dej-Monography]*, Cluj-Napoca, Renaissance Publishing House, 2010, p. 22.

that if I choose the Romanian citizenship, I would be set free, after I refused to make that choice and seeing that my illness only got worse to such an extent that I was succumbing without a medical treatment, they set me free. [...] Those who were released were informed that they had 15 days to leave. My children are all in Romania, five in all, of whom, 2 boys are not done yet with their university studies. I was determined not to leave, I was trying to convince and to encourage my priests who wanted to leave not to leave their places, which I managed to succeed, in part.

Now, after my arrest, many young and old priests are preparing to leave because they are horrified by the camp and advise me to leave as well. Of the 34 priests I have in my deanery, 18 are still with their parishes, of whom, according to the information I have, 6 are preparing to leave and therefore only 12, approximately, remain and they must cover the 40 parishes I have.

The Hungarian doctor attending me advises me to leave, because the atmosphere and the current against me are as such, since I have established 12 new parishes through the returning of the people to the Orthodox belief from among the congregation, starting with 1929 and in this parishes, I built beautiful churches. In Beclean, I expropriated a piece of land for the construction of a church in the heart of count Bethlen's park, in Tg. Lăpuș, where I was an archpriest for 8 years, I bought and expropriated a big house with fir trees planted on its land [...] from Eszterhazy, and in Dej, in spite of the great difficulties I had to overcome, put in my way by the congregation and the Hungarians, I won in the heart of the city a big territory for the cathedral. So, I don't have to leave.

I cannot go on hiding without knowing where I might be placed, because the hardship of such an exile I cannot bear and if I succumb during the retreat, I would only provide the new rulers with a counter-argument. [...]

I kindly ask you though not to be considered a duty deserter or a hireling, who leaves his flock, but a person who suspends his activity here, in order to resume it from where I leave it, when the time comes and with the help of our good Lord"¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁹ „Am fost arestat de stăpânirea ungurească în ziua de 21 octombrie a.c. dimpreună cu 10 preoți ortodocși și 12 uniți din județ și am fost internați în institutul corector din Gherla.

Îmbolnăvindu-mă acut în urma regimului aspru din închisoare am fost eliberat. La insistențele mele de a fi trimis în spital ori să mi se fixeze un domiciliu forțat mi s-a pus în vedere că dacă optez pentru cetățenia română atunci mă eliberează, după ce eu n-am vrut să optez și văzând că boala mi se agravează în măsură de a succomba fără tratament medical m-au pus pe picior liber. [...] Celor puși în libertate li se pune în vedere ca în termen de 15 zile să plece. Copiii mei toți sunt în România, cinci la număr, dintre cari 2 băieți încă nu sunt terminați cu studiile universitare. Eram hotărât să nu plec, pe preoții mei cari voiau să plece încercam să-i conving și îmbărbătez să nu-și părăsească locul, ceea ce în parte mi-a succes.

Acum după arestarea mea mulți preoți tineri și bătrâni se pregătesc să plece de groaza lagărului și mă sfătuiesc să plec și eu. Din 34 preoți câți am în protopopiat sunt la parohii 18 dintre cari după informațiile ce le am se pregătesc 6 să plece, deci mai rămân vreo 12 dacă rămân și aceștia pentru 40 parohii câte am.

Doctorul ungar care mă tratează mă sfătuiește să plec, căci așa e atmosfera și curentul față de mine, care am înființat 12 parohii noi prin reveniri la ortodoxie de la uniți începând din anul 1929 în cari parohii am ridicat biserici frumoase. În Beclean am expropriat teren pentru construcție de biserică în inima parcului contelui Bethlen, în Tg. Lăpuș, unde încă am fost protopop 8 ani am cumpărat și expropriat o casă mare cu teren plantat cu brazi [...] de la Eszterhazy, iar în Dej cu mari dificultăți ce

As we can see from the above testimony, but also from his missionary-administrative achievements, Zaharia Manu was one of the elite priests of the Orthodox clergy, his voice was listened to, he was a respected figure, his moral authority before the community he was shepherding was a special one. All these qualities were sketching the strong profile of a priest with an impact among his parishioners. The above-mentioned qualities and the popularity of archpriest Manu were already disturbing when the regime changed in 1940, his mere presence in Dej becoming undesirable to the new Horthyst authorities, which were animated by the plan of purging the Romanians' community leaders. As it happened in other similar typology cases, the Hungarian officials pressured him to take the decision to emigrate to Romania. His leaving for Romania was not an easy act, resulting from a selfish calculation, on the contrary, he was concerned that his gesture of leaving could be considered a defeatist one, as he himself states:

"I kindly ask you though not to be considered a duty deserter or a hireling, who leaves his flock, but a person who suspends his activity here, in order to resume it from where I leave it, when the time comes and with the help of our good Lord"¹¹⁰.

Archpriest Manu was aware that his failure in Romania, including his death, considering his health condition, could have been speculated by the Hungarian authorities and used as a means of propaganda against the Romanians still under occupation, who were hoping for a liberating act from Bucharest.

Even the documents of the Hencke-Rogeri Commission stated the following: "The decision to leave, implying the loss of any wealth, that native land on which they lived for generations, must have certainly been rather serious for most of the Romanian emigrants and might have been made only when they thought they had no other escape possibility"¹¹¹.

DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME

After the Horthyst occupation was over and after North-West Transylvania's liberation, the archpriest Zaharia Manu returns to Dej from his refuge in Sibiu, where he resumes his activity as head of the Orthodox deanery and shepherd of his

mi le-au pus în cale uniții și cu ungerii am câștigat în inima orașului un teritor mare pentru catedrală. Deci eu trebuie să plec.

Eu nu pot pleca în pribegie fără să știu unde voi putea fi plasat, căci greutățile pribegiei eu nu le pot suporta și dacă aș sucomba în refugiu aș pune la îndemâna noii stăpâniri un contra argument. [...]

Vă rog însă să nu fiu considerat dezertor de la datorie și nici un năimit, care-și lasă turma ci ca unul care îmi întrerup aici activitatea pentru ca la vremea sa cu ajutorul bunului Dumnezeu să o reîncep de unde am lăsat-o." in *Archive of the Sibiu Archbishopric*, 12437, III 553 940.

¹¹⁰ „Vă rog însă să nu fiu considerat dezertor de la datorie și nici un năimit, care-și lasă turma ci ca unul care îmi întrerup aici activitatea pentru ca la vremea sa cu ajutorul bunului Dumnezeu să o reîncep de unde am lăsat-o." in *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Vasile Pușcaș, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

parish in the center of the town of Dej. Following a short period of apparent freedom, along with the full establishment of the communist regime in 1948, priest Zaharia Manu moves into a new period of persecutions. The archpriest of Dej quickly becomes a goal of the Communist Securitate because his critical positions against the new regime become inconvenient to the totalitarian system that wanted the rapid annihilation of any opposition. In an informative note of August 1948, a sermon with „hostile content” was reported, which was uttered on the eve of the feast Dormition of the Mother of God:

“At the end of the Liturgy, he uttered a sermon through which he said to those present, under no circumstance, to depart from the church and not to listen to those who try to destroy the church, because those who don’t believe in God, will not succeed at destroying the Church and instead the Church will destroy them”¹¹².

Priest Zaharia Manu had a similar position in March 1949, on the occasion of a meeting of the Orthodox and the reformed priests from Dej. From the informative note, we find out that the main topic of discussion was the surrender of the parish lands to the state, because of the taxes that were impossible to pay. The attitude of father Manu was trenchant, advocating for keeping the land heritage of the Church, not believing that they should just give it away “voluntarily”:

“You don’t realize the times we are living and you don’t see that the priests are no longer paid by the state and you want to turn over the land to the state instead of having the state come over and take it, and until then we could live from the income provided by such land”¹¹³.

These critical positions against the communist regime, along with his membership of the National Liberal Party during the interwar period turned priest Zaharia Manu into an “enemy of the people”, being arrested on August 15, 1952, pursuant to order 490 of the Ministry of the Interior, which targeted all those holding leading position within the historical parties. The information on his two-month detention is very little. In an informative note of 1957, the agent, who was imprisoned together with father Manu, mentioned that he “spoke against the Romanian Popular Republic while in custody”¹¹⁴.

¹¹² „La sfârșitul Liturghiei a ținut o predică prin care spunea celor prezenți ca nu cumva să se îndepărteze de biserică și să nu asculte celor ce caută să distrugă biserica, pentru că cei ce nu au Dumnezeu, nu vor reuși să distrugă Biserica, ci Biserica îi va distruge pe ei.” in Ierom. Grigorie Benea (coordonator), Andreea Dăncilă Ineoan, Emanuil Ineoan, Andreea Opreș, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, Dorin Sas, Dragoș Ursu, *Preoți din Arhiepiscopia Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului în temnițele comuniste, [Priests from the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj in communist prisons]*, Cluj-Napoca, Renaissance Publishing House, 2017, p. 211, apud National Council for the Study of Security Archives (Archives hereinafter CNSAS), Information Fund, File 376031.

¹¹³ „Nu vă dați seama în ce timpuri trăim și nu vedeți că preoții nu mai sunt plătiți de stat și vreți să predați pământul statului în loc să vină statul să-l ia, iar până atunci să putem trăi din veniturile pământului.” in Ierom. Grigorie Benea (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 212, apud National Council for the Study of Security Archives (CNSAS), Information Fund, File 376032.

¹¹⁴ Ierom. Grigorie Benea, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

After being released from prison, father Zaharia Manu returns to his parish Dej I, where he served until his retirement in 1962. In March 1957, the Securitate filed, pursuant to order 70 of the Ministry of the Interior, a new surveillance proceeding on the father's name, in order to verify if he carries on with his „hostile” activity¹¹⁵. Father Zaharia Manu passed away on September 3rd, 1972. He also had an intense publishing activity in the pages of the magazines “Telegraful Român” – The End of the World according to the Holy Scripture, The Redemption through Christ, The Biblical Solar System, the Days of the Creation, the Day our Lord was Born, A Night in Nisan, and “Revista Teologică” – The Deluge in Tradition and the Holy Scripture, The Organization of the Presbiterial Conferences, The Moral of the Man under the Influence of the War, Christmas Evening Thoughts. Likewise, he was awarded the medal The Reward for the Work conducted for the Church, 2nd class, on May 12, 1922, and the order Coroana României (Romania's Crown), as Knight, on December 30, 1922¹¹⁶.

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¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Augustin Pădurean and Herineanu Teofil, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

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