

# THE RUMANIANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM

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In 1790 the independent Transylvanian Principality came to an end, a fact which set a term also to the conversion of the Rumanians to the *Protestant* faith.<sup>1</sup> The *Hungarian Princes* were replaced by the *Austrian Habsburgs*, the independent Principality gave place to a *Großfürstentum*, or *Grand Duchy*, and the efforts to spread the doctrines of *Calvinism* were superseded by Roman Catholic proselytism. The former represented a purely religious and cultural movement, while the *Roman Catholic* campaign had a strongly political flavour. The *Orthodox Church* and the Rumanians beyond the Transylvanian border fiercely opposed both the Protestant and the *Catholic* movements, and were so far successful as a very few years sufficed to obliterate every vestige of Protestantism from the life of the Transylvanian Rumanians; Greek Catholicism, on the other hand, survived in an altered and superficial form and has remained an important factor to this day.

The change of domination brought a great change in the political and religious life of *Transylvania*. The independent Principality had been Hungarian and *Protestant*; *Habsburg* rule was German and Roman Catholic. The entire political stratum of the country had to be altered to suit the new rule and to render it effective. A *pro-Austrian* bias had to be superimposed on the strongly independent spirit of the *Magyars*, while submission to the Pope had to replace Protestant radicalism.

It was by no means an easy matter to bring this about. The *Roman Catholic Magyars* could be gained by a Catholic and the *Lutheran Saxons* by a *German Power*; but the *Calvinist Magyars* were obdurate, and they were in a

<sup>1</sup> See previous article entitled: "*The Rumanians and Protestantism*" in our September issue, Vol. IX, No. 4.

majority. Therefore the first endeavour of the new rulers had to be to reduce this hostile majority.

The ordinary methods of the counter-reformation did not promise an adequate result, for they could not be pursued with sufficient vigour. In the *Diploma* in which the Emperor had promised to uphold the Constitution he had pledged himself "to make no alteration in the matter of the accepted religions". But there was another means to raise the number of the *pro-Habsburg* and *anti-Protestant* inhabitants: the conversion of the Rumanians to *Roman Catholicism*. In the constitutional fabric of the country they represented the neutral element; they did not belong to the "union" of the three nations, and their *Orthodox creed* was not an accepted religion: the pledge of the *Diploma* did not refer to them, consequently they offered a fair field for proselytism.

The last *Transylvanian Prince*, *Michael Apafy*, was still alive when the infiltration of the Jesuits into the country began. One of them, *P. L. Baranyi*, arrived under a disguise, but revealed himself as a priest later on and became a friend of the *Orthodox Bishop Theophilus in Gyulafehérvár*. It was he who, with the help of other Jesuits, undertook the conversion of the *Transylvanian Rumanians* to *Roman Catholicism*, as a parallel action to the re-Catholicization of the *Magyars*. The *Jesuits* even asked the Pope's permission to turn Orthodox themselves, in order to obtain more easily the confidence of the Rumanian people, but this the Pope refused.

In 1692 the *Emperor Leopold* issued, on the instigation of the Jesuits, a general ordinance promising substantial privileges to those Orthodox priests, *Ruthenians* and *Rumanians* alike, who consented to join the *Roman Catholic Church*. They were to be allowed to retain the *Orthodox* rites, they were to be liberated from servitude together with their families, and they were to have the same political and social position as the *Roman Catholic* priests.

Upon strong pressure on the part of the *Jesuits*, the *Rumanian Bishop Theophilus* convoked in 1697 a *Synod to Gyulafehérvár* at which *Baranyi* was also present. At this *Synod* the *Bishop* made a powerful speech accusing the Protestants of meddling with the liturgy of the *Rumanian*

*Church* and extolling the union with Rome, which would make them equal with the *Roman Catholics*.

The *Synod* stipulated first of all that in case the union was accepted no change was to be made in the liturgy and in the administration of the *Church*, that the *Julian calendar* should be retained and that the *Uniate* creed should henceforth be counted not among the tolerated but among the accepted creeds. After which it subscribed to the following points of dogma:

1. *The Pope is the head of the universal Church;*
2. *the Holy Eucharist is administered in the form of unleavened bread alone;*
3. *Purgatory exists; and*
4. *the Holy Ghost emanates both from the Father and the Son (filioque).*

A further stipulation was that *Uniate* ecclesiastics should enjoy the same rights and privileges as the *Roman Catholics*; and that it should be the *Bishop* who appointed the priests.

These stipulations being accepted, the union was decided, and the Act of Union signed by the *Bishop* and twelve deans.

The decision made a great stir both among the *Magyars* and *Saxons* of *Transylvania* and among the *Rumanians* of the *Principalities*, but by this time *Transylvania* was governed from *Vienna* and the *Estates* were helpless in the matter.

That same year *Bishop Theophilus* died, if rumour spoke truth, of poison; and the appointment of a successor proved no easy matter. Eventually one of two candidates, both of whom had received a Protestant education, was elected in the person of *Anghel Popa*, son of the *Rumanian* village priest of *Bábolna*. He took the name of *Athanasius*, and after spending two months in a monastery in *Bucharest* and undergoing a searching examination in regard to his *Orthodox* beliefs by the *Patriarch* of *Jerusalem*, was consecrated as *Orthodox Bishop* of *Transylvania*.

The suspicious *Patriarch* was not satisfied by *Athanasius'* episcopal oath; he forced upon him a long list of instructions designed to regulate his future conduct, in which he was ordered, among other things, to employ either *Slovene* or *Greek* as the language of the liturgy, using *Rumanian* only for *Sunday* and *holyday* sermons.

When *Athanasius* returned to *Transylvania* he found there a royal *Diploma* addressed to the *Gubernium*, — the governing body of the country, — in which it was decreed that *Orthodox* priests who joined the *Roman Catholic Church* and recognised the *Pope* as *Christ's Vicar* should enjoy the same privileges as the *Roman Catholic* priests, and those who united with any of the other accepted Churches should partake of the liberties of those Churches, while those who clung to the *Orthodox* creed should continue to bear the burdens and disabilities hitherto imposed upon their Church.

But it was only on paper that the choice was thus left open. Cardinal Kollonits, *Primate* of *Hungary*, in a secret missive to General Rabutin, military commander of *Transylvania*, declared that the *Orthodox* priests must be made to join the *Roman Catholic Church* on pain of punishment. And *Kollonits's* order prevailed.

*Athanasius* had been consecrated in *Bucharest*, but he could not officiate in *Transylvania* until his election had been confirmed by the King, which in this case meant that he must identify himself with the unionist movement. This, accordingly, he did.

He summoned a Synod which met on October 7, 1698 and after a prolonged debate lasting eighteen days issued a declaration signed by the bishop and thirty-eight of his deans.

"*We the undersigned*", this declaration ran, "*of our own free will and inspired by the Holy Ghost alone, join the Roman Catholic Church and declare ourselves members of said Church, accepting, believing and confessing all the tenets which that Church accepts, believes and confesses . . . Consequently we demand that we be granted the possession and use of all the rights and privileges which appertain to the priests of that Church in accordance with the Holy Canons and the injunctions of the ancient Kings of Hungary.*"

A few months later, in February 1699, the king issued a *Diploma* confirming the union of the *Orthodox Rumanians* with the *Roman Catholic Church* and threatening with condign punishment all who dared openly or secretly to work against the new Church and her members.

This *Royal Decree* was made public at the *General*

*Synod of May 24, 1699*, when humble thanks were returned for the royal favour.

The Magyar and Saxon Estates were staggered.

The *Protestant Magyars* saw their efforts to gain the *Orthodox Rumanians* for their Church brought to nought; but the Roman Catholics also began to realise that the union was aimed, not only against the Protestants, but also against the *Magyars* in general and against the constitutional structure of the country.

The *Gubernium* protested in a remarkable rescript addressed to the Viennese Government.

"*The union*", it ran "*signifies no benefit whether to the Rumanians who have been forced into or to the Roman Catholic Church, seeing that these people have no religion at all but are barbarians full of superstitions and disposed to every sort of malice. Its only result will be to destroy the Transylvanian Laws and to throw the burdens of the liberated priests on to the shoulders of the other tax-payers, at the same time provoking the resentment of the neighbouring hospodars, who are Orthodox. The Rumanians have not become genuine Catholics through the union, they have not really joined the Catholic Church; they are neither friends of, nor believers in, Catholicism, they only wish to be freed from the obligations of the peasants and are now ready to fight their landlords. Such innovations and experiments can be useful neither to the Throne nor to the country at large, where religious fervour has always been tempered and conditioned by the higher interests of the State and by the mutual understanding of the various nations and denominations. It is only thanks to this moderation that this country, surrounded as it is by so many enemies and holding so many religions, languages and races, has been able to preserve its existence and independence in the stormy times through which it has passed.*"

The *Viennese Government* refused to be moved by the arguments of the *Gubernium*. In August 1699 it once more confirmed the union and the privileges granted in the February Diploma, ordering their publication and execution.

A Diet was convened for the 8th of September. The Estates could not evade the publication of the *Diploma*, but

they embodied their objections to the union under seven points and ordered an investigation of the whole matter, which however led nowhere.

The King sent an angry message to the Estates, in which he reiterated his pseudo-liberal allegations. "*Only those who wish to disturb the public peace*", said the message, "dare to affirm that the purpose of the Diploma was to force the Rumanians into the *Roman Catholic Church*, for our intention was to grant them full freedom to join any of the accepted religions or to remain Orthodox." On pain of his anger he ordained that no one should dare to tamper with the liberty of the *Rumanian* people.

In March 1701 *Leopold* issued a second "Diploma *Leopoldianum*" which regulated the administration of the new Church.

In 1717 an independent bishopric was founded in *Fogaras*, which in 1738 was transferred to *Balázstfalva* and elevated to an archbishopric. 1748 saw the founding of the bishopric of *Nagyvárad*, and 1750 that of the bishoprics of *Lugos* and *Szamosujvár*. After the political re-union of Transylvania with Hungary proper, the Hungarian legislation recognised and incorporated the above organisation of the *Uniate Church* in Act XXXIX. 1868.

Since that time the *Uniate Church* has flourished unimpeded.

The Rumanians regard the union and its significance in a different light.

The *Orthodox* maintain that *Roman Catholic* dogma has had no influence on their kind. They look on *Greek Catholicism* as a temporary result of Habsburg policy, bound to vanish as time goes on. There is much truth in the argument that there is no trace of Catholic feeling among the great masses, who know nothing of dogmas and have remained *Oriental* and *Orthodox* throughout. "*No truthful person can deny*", wrote Professor *Lupaş* in 1921, "that there is only one Church among the Transylvanian Rumanians, for they all believe and profess the same creed. Not one of the famous four points of 1700 has penetrated into the Rumanian soul: neither *filioque*, nor the Host, nor Purgatory,

nor the Holy See. At most, we may concede a difference in the constitution and administration of the Church."

Another reproach levelled against the union from Orthodox quarters is that it has broken up the unity of the Rumanian people. Formerly the Rumanians were indissolubly united in Orthodoxy, which embraced not only the Rumanians of Transylvania but also those of the two Principalities. This unity was destroyed by the Catholic conversion, for while the *Orthodox Church* remained attached to the Orient and the spirit of Byzantium, the *Greek Catholic* or *Uniate Church* passed under the influence of western thought and western civilisation. This is what the Orthodox resent.

The Uniates, on the other hand, regard the fact that *Catholicism* has brought the *Rumanian* people under western influences as the greatest and most valuable achievement of the union.

A modern Rumanian author, the *Uniate Canon Augustine Bunea*, has made this clear.

Never, — he writes — have the *Rumanian* people been in such danger as at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth. In the *Danubian Principalities* the Greek *Phanariot Princes* dominated; the *Rumanians* of the *Banat* were oppressed by the *Serb*, those of *Marmaros* by the Ruthenian hierarchy. The Rumanians of Transylvania were beginning to feel the yoke of the Protestant Magyars. At that moment Rome stretched out her protecting hand and rescued them through the medium of the *Habsburgs*. The *Habsburgs* could place no reliance on the Protestant Magyars as they could on the *Catholic Rumanians*. To make of them a strong bastion for Habsburg rule there was only one course open to them: to free them from the *Protestant Hungarian* domination and bring them into the *Roman Catholic* fold. The Viennese Court realised that by raising the Rumanians out of their miserable situation it would fortify its rule in the country; while the Rumanians perceived that by placing themselves under the laws which secured the existence of the Catholics they would be under the protecting wings of the *Habsburgs* and thus would escape destruction.

So far *Augustine Bunea*.

More important than these political and social results

of the union were its cultural consequences; in this respect it conferred immense benefits on the Rumanian people.

"*The Uniate Rumanians*", wrote the Orthodox *Father Ghibanescu*, "studied in Rome and became the apostles of Latinity. From Rome they received a mighty incentive to break the chains of the past. Having gained enlightenment in Rome and Vienna, they brought back with them a new spirit of cultural life to Rumania." The resemblance of the Rumanian and Latin languages was detected, which led to the invention concerning the Roman origin of the Rumanian people. *G. Sinkai* and *P. Maior*, the founders of the theory of the so-called Daco-Roman continuity, were both of them students at the Uniate schools of *Balázsfalva* and of the *propaganda fidei* in Rome. Gradually the Rumanian language was introduced in place of the Slavonic tongue in the Uniate church service; and with the advance of the nineteenth century the political consciousness of the Rumanian people took an immense stride forward. As *King Carol*, the exiled ruler of Rumania, once said: "Neither our friends nor our foes foresaw the valuable services which the founders of the Uniate Church were to render to the cause of Rumanism."

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This is the historic significance of Catholicism in the history of the Rumanian people.