

The Interest of the Convert: Marius Theodorian-Carada and the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church in the First Decades of the 20th Century

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Abstract: The present study aims to present the situation of the Greek-Catholic community in Bucharest in the first decades of the 20th Century, starting from the reports that Marius Theodorian-Carada sent to the Holy See at that time. As a convert to Greek Catholicism in 1908, Theodorian-Carada showed an increased interest in the situation of the Greek Catholic believers in Bucharest during the interwar period, more precisely after the parish of Saint Basil the Great had been placed under the authority of the Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Blaj. The present paper covers the intellectual profile of the convert, his continuous activism for the cause of the union of the Orthodox Church in Romania with the Catholic Church and, above all, the solutions that Theodorian-Carada proposed in response to the most urgent problems that the Romanian Greek Catholic Church was facing at that time. Last but not least, our study sheds light, based on archival documents, on the perspective that the Nunciature from Bucharest and the Greek-Catholic hierarchy had on the issues raised.

Keywords: Greek-Catholic Parish of Saint Basil in Bucharest, union of Churches, liturgical language, religious press, Greek-Catholics in the Old Romanian Kingdom

Rezumat: Studiul de față are în vedere prezentarea situației comunității greco-catolice din București în primele decenii ale secolului al XX-lea pornind de la rapoartele pe care Marius Theodorian-Carada le-a trimis în acele vremuri Sfântului Scaun. În calitate de convertit la greco-catolicism în 1908, Theodorian-Carada a manifestat un interes sporit față de situația credincioșilor greco-

catolici din București în perioada interbelică, mai exact după ce parohia Sfântul Vasile cel Mare de acolo a fost pusă sub autoritatea arhiepiscopiei greco-catolice de Blaj. S-a avut în vedere profilul intelectual al convertitului, activismul său susținut pentru cauza unirii Bisericii ortodoxe din România cu Biserica catolică și, mai ales, soluțiile pe care Theodorian-Carada le-a formulat la cele mai stringente probleme cu care se confrunta în acele timpuri Biserica greco-catolică românească. Nu în ultimul rând, studiul nostru pune în lumină, pe baza documentelor de arhivă, perspectiva pe care Nunțiatul de la București și ierarhia greco-catolică au avut-o asupra problemelor reclamate.

Cuvinte-cheie: Parohia greco-catolică Sfântul Vasile din București, unirea Bisericilor, limba liturgică, presă religioasă, greco-catolici în Vechiul Regat român

1909 was the year that symbolically marked the presence of other Romanians in the capital of the Romanian Kingdom, namely the Greek-Catholic Romanians. Although their existence in Bucharest and in other places of Romania at that time was not something particularly new, the older plans related to the construction of a place of worship for them materialized only at the end of the first decade of the last century. However, the lack of united churches did not mean the total absence of the spiritual assistance needed by the increasingly numerous Greek-Catholic Romanians beyond the mountains.¹ As their numbers increased, the Transylvanian hierarchy dispatched priests to attend to the spiritual needs of these faithful emigrants. The units in the capital city have had their own shepherd of souls since 1817, when their number was estimated to be no more than 1000.² Until 1886, the community did not have a stable priest, but from that year onward, an uninterrupted series of priests who appear to have sequentially attended to the spiritual needs of the religious group in question.

However, the presence of priests in the extra-Carpathian communities was not the only focus of the leadership of the United Church in Transylvania. It made efforts to acquire land in order to build them proper places of worship. In the city, on the banks of the Dâmbovița

¹ Octavian Bârlea, "Biserica română unită între cele două războaie mondiale" [The Romanian Church united between the two world wars], in *Biserica Română Unită - două sute cincizeci de ani de istorie* [The United Romanian Church - two hundred and fifty years of history] (Cluj-Napoca: Casa de editură "Viața creștină", 1998), 91.

² Archivio della Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali [Archive of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches] (hereinafter A.C.C.O.), *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 52.

River, one such a property was purchased at the time when Demetriu Radu was in charge of shepherding the Greek-Catholic believers in Bucharest. Despite having access to the highest political decision-making circles of the time (King Carol I, Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu, etc.), the priest originally from Tâmpăhaza failed to carry out the construction plan for a Greek-Catholic place of worship for the community.³ The one who will succeed in this endeavour was Archbishop Raymund Netzhammer, although his predecessor at the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Romania also showed interest in the aforementioned project.⁴ He submitted the necessary documentation in order to obtain the construction authorization from the City Hall of the capital (headed at that time by Vintilă Brătianu). Moreover, he personally dealt with the employment of the architect (Nicolae Ghika-Budești). He provided financial support and often inspected the construction works, the decoration and the appropriate equipment of the church. Thus, the high hierarch turned out to be, in fact, a vehement opponent of the idea that the Greek-Catholic Romanians had to attend Orthodox places of worship outside of Transylvania, an idea that had, at that time, been rather widespread. The consecration of the new religious establishment by the same Swiss prelate, on the day of the commemoration of Saint Nicholas in 1909, marked the drawing of a symbolic border intended to contribute to the preservation of the Greek-Catholic confessional identity in an Orthodox-dominated space. Moreover, the founder of the elegant church in the Polonă Street did not stop there. In 1913, Raymund Netzhammer managed to purchase a plot of land on Aquila/Sirenelor Street,⁵ on which he intended to build the second sacred place, a project that was postponed by the start of the First World War.⁶

³ Ciprian Robotin, *O viață în slujba Bisericii și a națiunii: episcopul Demetriu Radu* [A life in the service of the Church and the nation: Bishop Demetriu Radu] (Timișoara: Artpress, 2020), 34.

⁴ Raymund Netzhammer, *Episcop în România. Într-o epocă a conflictelor naționale și religioase* [Bishop in Romania. In an era of national and religious conflicts], vol. I, edited by Nikolaus Netzhammer and Krista Zach (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2005), 81-82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 453. The land had been purchased on 30 June 1913, for the sum of 41,000 francs and covered an area of approximately 1,900 m². "We bought that place for a second united Romanian church [...] The position is excellent, given that the land is located on the plateau and, because of this, it is also vigorous", notes Netzhammer.

⁶ It seems that this was not the only reason for postponing the construction of the second place of worship for the Greek-Catholic believers in the capital. From a letter written by Archbishop Alexandru Cisar and addressed to Cardinal Giovanni Tacci, we find out that the main reason for his predecessor's rejection of the idea of building the second united church in Bucharest was the poor participation of the faithful there in the liturgical offices.

After the union of Transylvania with the Old Kingdom, the hierarchy of the Greek-Catholic Church was even more interested in overcoming the image of a regional Church. The task was not easy, considering that, for over two hundred years, the organizational nucleus of the United Church had been in the Transylvanian province, the place where its institutional ramifications also emerged and developed over time. Therefore, this was, in fact, a test with multiple stakes. It implied an expansion beyond the consecrated territory. Thus, the challenge resided in the institutional flexibility of the United Church, its ability to take root in the extra-Carpathian area and its ability to adapt to a context that was politically, culturally and confession-wise very different, compared to the previous period.⁷ However, the expansion strategies of the Greek-Catholic Church were hindered by the Orthodox Church's claims of confessional supremacy over the Romanians from the extra-Carpathian area. In Transylvania, the competition between the two Romanian confessions intensified after the war, as evidenced by the attempts of the Orthodox hierarchy (some of them successful) to penetrate predominantly Greek-Catholic "fronts", such as the central and northern part of the Transylvanian province.⁸

As a first step, an administrative measure was required. This pertained to the necessity of transferring the unions from the capital city under the spiritual authority of the Roman Catholic Church to that of the united hierarchy. Initiated shortly after the union of Transylvania with Romania, the action was justified by the need to secure greater involvement from the state, commensurate with the needs of the respective community. After the war, there was also the intention (one that was implied, rather than explicit) of the Greek-Catholic hierarchy to distance itself from the choir of Latin rite bishops, an association that it considered to be harmful to its image. Once the agreement of Archbishop Netzhammer was obtained (with whom the Greek-Catholic Metropolitan

As such, the Roman Catholic hierarchy considered changing the destination of the purchased land and the amount collected for the construction of a Latin rite church or a diocesan hospital: A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, III, 1-17, doc. 17.

⁷ Keith Hitchins, "Orthodoxism: Polemics over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania," in *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, edited by Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), 135-136.

⁸ Lucian Turcu, "Ortodoxie majoritară - greco-catolicism provincial. Despre biconfesionalismul românilor ardeleni în primul deceniu interbelic" [Majority Orthodoxy - provincial Greek Catholicism. About the biconfesionalism of Transylvanian Romanians in the first interwar decade], in *Caiete de antropologie istorică* [Notebooks of historical anthropology], year X, no. 1 (18) (2011): 107-110.

at that time, Vasile Suciu, had discussed the subject twice, during the spring of 1920, managing to agree on the conditions for the transfer of authority, on a provisional basis, over the parish of Saint Vasile) to shepherd the Greek-Catholics from Bucharest, the united hierarchy's aspirations grew even further. Shortly afterwards, it expressed the desire to bring all Greek-Catholic believers scattered across the territory of ancient Romania under its authority. This project is based not only on the idea of providing the necessary spiritual assistance to geographically scattered communities, by connecting parishes and making priests available to them for administering the sacraments, but also on the ideal of expanding the Greek-Catholic confession among the Romanians of the Old Kingdom. If the latter desire turned out to be an unrealistic, the initial phase of the first objective was achieved at the beginning of 1924, and received the final approval with the Concordat of 1927.⁹

If the objective of placing the believers dispersed throughout the territory of the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia under the management of the Metropolitan of Blaj was achieved without much difficulty, the same cannot be said about the process of organizing those communities into parishes or about the construction of places of worship or the building of parish houses. It took time, resources and perseverance for the good intentions of the united hierarchy to take shape. At the beginning of the fourth decade of the last century, the unions established outside Transylvania were barely organized in 10 parishes.¹⁰ At that time, not all benefited from legal recognition and material support from the state authorities. The only community that had a place of worship suitable for sacred functions continued to be the one in Bucharest. But even there, the small church built a quarter of a century prior was completely inadequate for the growing number of Greek Catholic believers settled in the country's capital city. After Bucharest, the largest Greek-Catholic community was in Ploiești, a city that, at that time, had approximately 70,000 inhabitants. The Greek-Catholic parish in that locality was a recent one, having been established in 1931, the number of believers affiliated to it being estimated at 2000. Only two years after its foundation, the parish received a priest, who, incidentally, was compelled to officiate the sacred functions in improvised spaces, as there was no proper church available.

⁹ *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice, vol. I, 1920-1950* [Romania-Vatican. Diplomatic relations, vol. I, 1920-1950], authors: Ioan-Marius Bucur, Cristina Păiușan, Ioan Popescu, Dumitru Preda; contributors: Alexandru Ghișa, Costin Ionescu, Nicolae-Alexandru Nicolescu (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 33.

¹⁰ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 52.

Other cities where the Greek-Catholic presence was notable, but the communities were still not organized into parishes, were Constanta, Brăila and Galați. In each of these settlements, efforts were made to rent or buy locations that were then meant to function as chapels, or to obtain (by donation or by purchase) some land intended for the construction of places of worship. Other cities targeted by the attempts to organize Greek-Catholic groups from beyond the Carpathians were Craiova, Câmpina, Focșani, Iasi.

The expansion of the Greek-Catholic Church beyond its natural borders was not done exclusively by the movement of the Transylvanian population towards and east of the Carpathians. In several instances, it was actually due to voluntary conversions from Orthodoxy to Greek Catholicism. Without carrying out an actual proselytizing action, the United Church had a series of adhesions to the faith it professed. Before the war, such cases had been rather isolated. However, after the creation of Greater Romania, the hope that as many Romanians as possible would embrace this confession within the leadership of the Greek-Catholic Church, as previously mentioned. The ambitious expectation was not solely fueled by the Latin branch of the ethnic ancestry of the Romanians. It was also ignited by the considerable prestige that the Catholic Church possessed (both organizationally, and in terms of the instruments for the propagation of the teachings of the faith and social involvement). This prestige was known even within the Orthodox world.¹¹ But these ideals and theoretical projections were shattered by the initiatives and practical measures taken by the authorities, shortly after the war, at the expense of the Orthodox Church. Given its numerical superiority and, above all, the privileged treatment it received from the state, post-war Orthodoxy consolidated its status, taking advantage of an ideology that equated national identity and the religious (Orthodox) identity of Romanians.¹² The same conception that asserts the unity of destiny between the Romanian state and the Orthodox Church perceives the existence of the second Romanian Church, the Greek-Catholic one, as a threat and even a weakness for the Romanian community. Despite the fact that its merits had initially been acknowledged, with respect to the roles it had played in the cultural and social history of the Romanians, which led to the

¹¹ George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere în România contemporană. Studii și eseuri* [Orthodoxy and power in contemporary Romania. Studies and essays] (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2005), 459.

¹² Olivier Gillet, "Orthodoxie, nation et ethnicité en Roumanie au XXe siècle: un problème ecclésiologique et politique," in *Ethnicity and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Maria Crăciun, Ovidiu Ghitta (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 1995), 348.

fulfilment of the national unity ideal, its purpose was considered finished.¹³ Threatened by the virulence of such force-discourse, which often led to concrete unfriendly political actions taken towards it,¹⁴ the Greek-Catholic Church attempted to preserve its spiritual and human heritage, understanding that its future largely depended on the loud voices of those who could build a wall of defence around it. One of these voices was undoubtedly that of Marius Theodorian-Carada.

Born 155 years ago in Craiova, Marius Theodorian-Carada is part of the gallery of intellectuals deeply involved in the life of the Church in the years before the First World War and in those that followed. Of the two halves of his name, the second obviously had the greatest resonance for the efforts to modernize the Romanian society from a political, economic and cultural perspective. It links him to his illustrious ancestor,¹⁵ Eugeniu Carada, to whom he dedicated an opus, acknowledging the facts and honouring the merits.¹⁶ A lawyer by training, Marius Theodorian-Carada, like other intellectuals, became involved in the Romanian political life, promoting the values upheld, not only from the rostrum of the Parliament, but also through press articles, as a tireless contributor to the most important periodicals of the time.¹⁷ As a prolific author, he was strongly involved in the debates around the political and cultural ideas of the time, repeatedly proving his qualities as a talented polemicist.¹⁸ Theodorian-Carada was also a careful observer

¹³ Nicolae Gudea, "Reflecții privind relația Stat-Biserică - o abordare teologică greco-catolică" [Reflections on the State-Church relationship - a Greek-Catholic theological approach], in Babeș-Bolyai University / Pazmany Peter Catholic University, *Theological Doctrines on the Ideal Church-State Relation / Relația ideală dintre Biserică și stat* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000), 54.

¹⁴ Lucian Turcu, *Între idealuri și realitate. Arhidieceza greco-catolică de Alba Iulia și Făgăraș în timpul păstoririi mitropolitului Vasile Suciu (1920-1935)* [Between ideals and reality. The Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș during the pastorate of Metropolitan Vasile Suciu (1920-1935)] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2017), 60-230.

¹⁵ Dinică Ciobotea, Aurelia Florescu, "Contribuții genealogice la o biografie a lui Eugeniu Carada" [Genealogical contributions to a biography of Eugeniu Carada], *Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria Istorie*, year XVI, No. 1(19) (2011): 119-122.

¹⁶ Mariu[s] Theodorian-Carada, *Eugeniu Carada* (Bucharest: Tipografia Gutenberg, 1922).

¹⁷ Id., *Efimeridele. Însemnări și amintiri, 1908-1928* [Notes and memories, 1908-1928] (Săbăoani: Tipografia „Serafica”, 1937), 124-125; Dinu Bălan, „A piece of Mariu(s) Theodorian Carada’s journalism. His collaboration with *Decalogue* magazine”, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A. D. Xenopol”*, tom LVII (2020): 369-372. The attachment to the Catholic cause in Romania also materialized in Theodorian-Carada's involvement, between 1921-1924, in the publicist project "Albina", promoted by the Nunciature.

¹⁸ Dinu Bălan, "Chemarea străbunilor: Mariu(s) Theodorian-Carada și activitatea lui istoriografică" [Calling the ancestors: Mariu(s) Theodorian-Carada and his historiographic

and commentator of religious life in Romania. He vehemently criticized the spiritual immobility of antebellum Orthodoxy, condemning the selfish interests behind the promotions within the high clergy. He argued that the Romanian hierarchs were unable to convey any aspirations towards higher values to the faithful. His conviction was that a Church in servitude to politics (as was the case of the Orthodox Church in Romania, in his view), could not offer its pastors the means for cultural and spiritual elevation.¹⁹ Instead, he admired the discipline upheld within the Catholic Church, the rigorous intellectual training undertaken by the clergy and the strategies used in the mobilisation of hundreds of millions of believers. Theodorian-Carada was influenced by the vitality of Catholicism, prompting him to embrace, at the end of the first decade of the last century, the doctrinal teachings of the universal Church, but in their Greek-Catholic iteration. After the end of the war, he campaigned for the idea of uniting the Orthodox Church in Romania with the Church led by the pope, but, from a practical viewpoint, his plans in this regard were rather unclear and unconvincing.²⁰ He frequented the Paschoptist leitmotif of a single Romanian Church, “which must be neither orthodox nor united, but simply a Romanian church,” and which, the author of such a project hoped, “will one day unite with Rome.”²¹ Theodorian-

activity], in *Perspectivile și problemele integrării în spațiul european al cercetării și educației* [Perspectives and problems of integration in the European area of research and education], vol. VII, partea 2 (Cahul: Editura Universității din Cahul, 2020), 326-328; Miltiade Adamescu, *Bibliografia tuturor scrierilor domnului Mariu Theodorian-Carada* [The bibliography of all the writings of Mr. Mariu Theodorian-Carada] (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice, 1923): *passim*. Mia Frollo, *Un scriitor original: Mariu Theodorian Carada* [An original writer: Mariu Theodorian Carada] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Dorneanu”, 1940).

¹⁹ Mariu[s] Theodorian-Carada, *Decăderea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române și cauzele ei* [The downfall of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its causes] (Bucharest: Tipografia Gutenberg, 1897): *passim*.

²⁰ Theodorian-Carada's perspective on the binomial nation-confession (with a plea for the union of the Orthodox Church with the Church led by the pope), in his work *Biserica română din punct de vedere național* [The Romanian Church from the national point of view] (Bucharest: Tipografia Profesională Dimitrie C. Ionescu, 1913). See also Dinu Bălan, “Națiune și religie în România modernă: cazul lui Mariu(s) Theodorian-Carada” [Nation and religion in modern Romania: the case of Mariu(s) Theodorian-Carada], in *Perspectivile și problemele integrării în spațiul european al cercetării și educației* [Perspectives and problems of integration in the European research and education], vol. VIII, part 2 (Cahul: Editura Universității din Cahul, 2021), 182-188.

²¹ See Mariu[s] Theodorian-Carada, *Unirea Bisericilor* [Union of Churches] (Galați: Tipografia “Moldova”, 1928). The author also designed a project for the unification of the Orthodox Church with the Catholic Church, edited under the pseudonym Protosinghelul A. Otmenedec, *Unificarea Bisericii. Organizație autonomă și canonică* [Unification of the Church. Autonomous and canonical organization] (Bucharest: Tipografia Gutenberg,

Carada's attachment to the cause of restoring the faith unity of the Christian world was appreciated by the papacy, which granted him private audiences (the first, shortly after his conversion, in 1910)²² and honoured him with the distinction of commander of the order of Saint Gregory the Great and with the cross pro *Ecclesia et Pontefice*.²³

As a *homo novus* in the family of the Romanian subjects of the sovereign pontiff, Marius Theodorian-Carada did not show passive loyalty. Quite the contrary. He proved to be actively involved in numerous debates, projects and initiatives that, in one way or another, affected the future of the Church he had joined. This is what happened, for example, in the fall of 1918, when Theodorian-Carada assumed the task of developing, together with Ioan Bălan, the parish priest of the Saint Vasile church in Bucharest, a concordat project, which the Romanian authorities at that time were willing to negotiate with the Holy See.²⁴ The involvement of Theodorian-Carada in the respective endeavour is rather unsurprising, since he had proven his expertise in the matter of Eastern canon law by publishing a monumental work dedicated to the respective subject.²⁵ Then, in 1926, his status as a parliamentarian allowed Theodorian-Carada to demand an account from Vasile Goldiș, the holder of the portfolio of Cultes at that time, in connection with a ministerial decision, the consequence of which could have been the deprivation of the state subsidy of numerous parish communities not meeting the newly stipulated budgetary conditions.²⁶

1920). See also Dinu Bălan, "Un mediator între confesiuni: Marius Theodorian-Carada în jurnalul arhiepiscopului Raymund Netzhammer" [A mediator between confessions: Marius Theodorian-Carada as portrayed in the diary of Archbishop Raymund Netzhammer], in *Identități etno-confesionale și reprezentări ale Celuilalt în spațiul est-european: între stereotip și voința de a cunoaște* [Ethno-confessional identities and representations of the Other in the Eastern European space: between stereotype and the will to know], edited by: Cristina Preutu, George Enache; foreword by Gheorghe Cliveti (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2018), 83-102.

²² Theodorian Carada, *Efimeridele. Însemnări și amintiri, 1908-1928*, 28-31.

²³ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 166/29, doc. 1a (p. 1-18).

²⁴ Mariu[s] Theodorian-Carada, *Acțiunea Sfântului Scaun în România de acum și de întotdeauna* [The action of the Holy See in Romania now and always] (Bucharest: Editura Autorului, 1936), 7.

²⁵ *Dreptul canonic oriental cu adnotațiuni și comentarii* de Mariu[s] Theodorian, Avocat al Creditului Fonciar Român [Eastern canon law with annotations and comments by Mariu[s] Theodorian, Romanian Land Credit Lawyer], vol. I-III (Bucharest: Tipografia "Voința Națională", 1905-1907).

²⁶ The full speech, in the "Monitorul Oficial. Partea a III-a. Senatul" [Official Gazette, Part III. The Senate], no. 13 (1926): 131-132; no. 14 (1926): 176-179.

However, the fervent convert was actually most preoccupied with in the fate of the church community of which he was a member. Shortly after the end of the war, Marius Theodorian-Carada assigned himself to the role of leading the efforts to incorporate the believers in Bucharest into organizations designed to contribute to the preservation of their confessional identity and to invigorate religious life. It started with the Society of United Women "Sfânta Elena" [Saint Helene] founded on the initiative of the same Ioan Bălan, on 14 November 1920, "as a branch of the parish of Saint Basil."²⁷ Later, it was the men's turn to be included in a similar organization. The "Saint Paul" Society was thus founded in the summer of 1921, at the initiative of the new parish priest, George Dănilă. Marius Theodorian-Carada was part of the small group of believers in charge of revising the statutes of the respective organization, and, after their approval, he became the first president of the society. He was accompanied by the representative figures of the United Church: Zevovie Pâclișanu, Ștefan Ciceo-Pop, Ion Bianu, Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Nicolae Sigmirean, Emil Pop, Octavian Tăslăuan, Aristotel Banciu, Titus Mălai, Teodor German, Laurențiu Oanea, etc.²⁸

The concern for the well-being of the community of believers in Bucharest was also manifested in the form of the reports that Theodorian-Carada submitted to the Holy See, or to its various dicasteries. However, these reports were often sprinkled with critical tones towards the leaders of the United Church and of the manner in which they fulfilled their duties. One such situation occurred in the fall of 1926, when, being in Rome, Theodorian-Carada obtained an audience with the sovereign pontiff, on which occasion he handed the leader of the Catholic Church an extensive memorandum.²⁹ The author of that document intended to personally deliver a copy to the secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, something that ultimately did not happen, because Cardinal Luigi Sincero was not in Rome at that time. The memo finally came to the attention of the secretary of the high Roman dicastery, who noticed that, in addition to other issues detailed in the document (the conclusion of the Concordat between Romania and the Holy See, the founding of a faculty of Catholic theology within the University of Bucharest, the problem of the union of the Churches, the situation of the church donated to the Romanians in Rome or that of the Latin rite places

²⁷ National Archives, Alba County Service (hereinafter A.N.S.J. Alba), *Mitropolia Blaj Fund. General registry. Registered documents*, file no. 2212 (1935): 1r.

²⁸ A.N.S.J. Alba, *Mitropolia Blaj Fund. General registry. Registered documents*, file no.1728 (1921): 2r-5r, 6r-v, 7r-v.

²⁹ The full text, at A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 1.

of worship in Romania given to the Greek-Catholic Church etc.), one raised certain questions about the functioning of the parish in the country's capital. More precisely, Theodorian-Carada condemned "le rit hybride et la langue artificielle ridicule," which the Ordinariate of Blaj introduced within the Greek-Catholic parish in Bucharest after it had administratively taken over that parish. Those innovations did nothing but drive away the Orthodox Romanians who had regularly attended the ceremonies at that church before. The impression created among the mass of believers by the conduct of these services was considered old-fashioned. The plaintiff dared to demand that the Holy See issue an order to the Romanian hierarchs on the subject of the practice used in all the parishes that were to be established in the Old Kingdom – namely, there was to be no deviation from the language, the rite and the clothing displayed by the Orthodox priests. This strategy was intended to serve as the foundation for the Catholic Church's efforts to bring closer the Orthodox communities in Romania. All the elements of liturgical and ritual novelty likely to deepen the chasm between the two Romanian Churches and to delay the fulfilment of the ecclesiastical unification ideal were attributed by the author of the document to the acculturative influences to which the united Church was subjected during the time it functioned within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian state, a state that subversively pursued the transformation of the Church into an instrument of the Hungarianization policy. The author of the document considered that it was a crucial measure for the United Church to abandon that customary "ballast" as quickly as possible, if it wanted to contribute to bringing its Orthodox blood brothers to communion with the Catholic Church.

A year later, the same Marius Theodorian-Carada wanted to transmit, this time from Bucharest, new observations related to the Greek-Catholic community in the capital of Romania.³⁰ Through a confidential message sent to Cardinal Luigi Sincero, the Romanian dignitary reaffirmed his attachment to the idea of church union, in which he had been working for many years, evoking the personal case that led him to join the Greek-Catholic Church in 1908. He then shifts the emphasis on the transformations that the Bucharest parish had gone through since its foundation or, more precisely, from the period of its tutelage by the Latin archdiocese of Bucharest to the way it functioned under the administration of the Archdiocese of Blaj. This time, the depicted image was also that of a decline in prestige, from a parish that had managed to

³⁰ The document in its entirety, at A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 3.

coagulate not only the Greek-Catholic inhabitants of the capital of Romania, but also to attract numerous Orthodox believers, to one whose organization and functioning left much to be desired. In support of this statement, the issuer of the letter argued that the parish priest in charge of providing spiritual assistance to the Bucharest faithful was unable, due to the large influx of parishioners who requested his services, to fulfil all the duties that befell him, which is why he had been joined by two cocelebrant priests. After the transfer of the community from Bucharest under the authority of the United Church, the two assistant priests were relieved of their duties. They were not replaced, despite the fact that the needs would have required it, considering the significant influx of Transylvanian Romanian believers, many of them of the Greek-Catholic denomination, on their way to the country's capital. Even though a subsidy for a second priest on behalf of the parish of Saint Basil could, in fact, have been obtained from the state authorities, the Ordinariate of Blaj preferred to send that newly ordained priest to Bucovina. Thus, the spiritual needs of thousands of Greek-Catholic believers from Bucharest were left practically unmet. Because of this, as Theodorian-Carada argued, there were a series of transitions to the Orthodox Church, which was encouraged by the propaganda carried out by several central newspapers. The innovations that the ecclesiastical authority from Blaj introduced in the Bucharest parish also contributed to these renunciations of the Greek-Catholic confession, the most regrettable being the replacement of the liturgical language with the dialect specific to the Blaj area, which the native Bucharest inhabitant did not understand. All these changes risked antagonising the idea of church union among the Romanians, especially since some desertions from the Greek-Catholic faith had also appeared in Transylvania, according to the issuer of the letter. He also felt compelled to suggest two quick remedies for the whole situation: the first, that in all united churches in Bucharest and in the Old Kingdom, the use of the Blaj dialect should be prohibited "et qu'on doit dire et chanter *Lord have mercy, Holy Spirit, etc.*"; the second, that the priests who were mandated to attend to the spiritual needs of the believers in Bucharest or those in the Old Kingdom were compelled to reside in the localities where those communities were located.

All these observations and recommendations that the Romanian dignitary made in the name of the cause of church union in Romania were treated with the utmost seriousness by the pontifical dignitaries. After receiving this last memorandum-complaint, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches appealed to the nuncio in Bucharest, asking him to verify whether or not the statements made by Marius Theodorian-Carada

were true.³¹ After gathering information from trusted sources (including the Bishop of Oradea, Valeriu Traian Frențiu), Angelo Maria Dolci managed to formulate an answer in the form of two conclusive ideas.³² Regarding the objection to the language of worship used in the Greek-Catholic church in Bucharest, it was true that it contained a series of particular expressions that significantly differed from the one heard in Orthodox places of worship. However, the differences in question would not actually be an issue for long, according to the nuncio. The Ministry of Religion had, in fact, taken, together with the Romanian Academy and representatives of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches, the initiative to standardize the liturgical language across the entire country. Thus, the elimination of the regional differences and the discouraging of various private initiatives was very likely. Regarding the spiritual assistance of the Greek-Catholic believers in Bucharest, estimated at that time at 20,000, two priests were clearly not enough to cover the pastoral needs of the respective community. A more effective solution, suggested by the Bishop of Oradea, was to entrust the Greek-Catholic Romanians living in Bucharest to a religious order, the most suitable of which was considered to be that of the order of Friars Minor from Moldova, who had shown themselves willing to be active in the *cura animarum* of the united Romanians.

In order to definitively put an end to the whole matter, the Congregation decided to address the Greek-Catholic Metropolitan of Blaj. Thus, a letter was written to Vasile Suci, on 12 May 1928, requesting him to provide a detailed explanation for the situation of the Greek-Catholic Romanians in Bucharest and the Old Kingdom and to propose improvements where inadequacies were found.³³ He was also explicitly asked for his opinion regarding the co-opting of members of a religious order to provide spiritual assistance to the groups of Greek Catholics in those areas, the direct reference being to the order of Friars Minor from Moldova, some of whose members had embraced the Romanian rite. The nuncio from Bucharest was also informed about the Congregation's initiative,³⁴ but the Romanian metropolitan did not delay sending the answer for long.³⁵

³¹ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 5.

³² A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 7.

³³ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 10.

³⁴ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 9.

³⁵ The full text, at A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 11.

The document signed by the prelate from Blaj is revealing regarding the state of the Greek-Catholic communities on the territory of the Old Kingdom. Simultaneously, it sheds light on the strategies used in recent years to organize those confessional groups and to invigorate the spiritual life within them. The first and rather surprising information transmitted is related to the fact that *“il numero di questi fedeli, dispersi per tutto l'antico regno di Romania, come anche il numero di coloro, i quali habitano a Bucarest, non si sa.”* This is why their number could only be estimated at several tens of thousands, with the largest community naturally located in the country's capital. In order to uncover the number of believers dispersed across the territory of old Romania, the Metropolis ordered an action to register them and assigned two celibate priests to this task. The activity was stopped, however, as one of the two reviewer priests (incidentally, a graduate of the Greek College in Rome) was asked to deal with a series of endangered parishes within the archdiocese. In order for the spiritual needs of the believers in the extra-Carpathian space to be managed as efficiently as possible, efforts had been made to transfer the ecclesiastical authority exercised over them by the Latin rite bishops to the Metropolitan Ordinariate, an objective achieved, as we have already seen, starting with the year 1924. Immediately after that year, the first adjustments were made regarding the administration of those confessional communities. Thus, a celibate priest had been mandated on behalf of the Boian parish and was given the responsibility of taking care of the believers in Cernăuți and the bordering area. Regarding the parish in Bucharest, it was possible to obtain a subsidy from the government for a second priest, for two cantors and for a sacristan. In 1926, the works on the parish house, located near the place of worship, were completed. An urgent situation necessitated the relocation of the second priest from the capital to another locality, essentially rendering effective pastoral care among the faithful in the country's capital unfeasible.

The overall solution to the whole problem by sending other priests to the capital was impractical, for the simple reason that the Romanian Church did not have other celibate priests in its service, and the appeal to married priests was not profitable as long as there did not have the necessary conditions to support their families. Transferring part of the responsibility to the lack of a celibate clergy in the Greek-Catholic Church and to the pontifical courts, which in recent years had not been too generous with the places assigned to students from Romania in the educational institutions they patronized, Metropolitan Suciuc considered it opportune to paint the structure of the archdiocese and the most

important data related to its operation. Thus, in the middle of 1928, the archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș consisted of more than 700 parishes, totalling over 500,000 believers. Stretching over a significant area of the Transylvanian province, it was ethnically and religiously diverse, the most important religious alterities within it being the Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist and Jewish. Most of the 700 parishes functioned in mixed denominational localities, most often alongside the Orthodox Romanians, there being numerous cases in which the Greek-Catholic denomination was in the minority, lacking cult buildings or those intended for the residence of priests, a situation further complicated by the fact that the government did not provide any state subsidy to religious communities that did not reach a minimum number of believers in a parish. Those communities often had to face the pressure of the Orthodox majority, and, in order to improve the material situation of the priests who served them, the archdiocesan synod of 1927 decided to collect money from the priests from the wealthier parishes.³⁶ For the construction of churches in those parishes, in addition to voluntary contributions, the "Opera Pontificia della Propagazione della Fede" was repeatedly called upon, obtaining various amounts of money over time. Regarding the capital, Vasile Suciu's plan was to reach a total of five places of worship, four of them located in peripheral areas of Bucharest, and one in the central perimeter. This plan was known at that time to the pontifical officials and to the sovereign pontiff himself, from whom permission had been requested to give the chapel located in the Apostolic Nunciature to the Greek-Catholic Church. For the immediate needs of the faithful in Bucharest and those spread all over the territory of ancient Romania, the prelate considered that it was absolutely necessary for the Greek-Catholic Church to employ priests who not only had thorough theological and moral training, acquired in the educational institutions in Rome, but also assumed celibacy. Although no less than 150 future priests were trained in the seminary in Blaj at that time, few of them chose the path of celibacy, and the need for unmarried priests was dire, the prelate emphasized, since only they could be entrusted with missions in troubled parishes. They were also the most suitable to work at the archdiocesan chancellery or in the educational institutes in Blaj. Starting from these considerations, Metropolitan Suciu asked the Congregation to accept the addition of the number of places for Romanians at the College of *Propaganda Fidae* and at the Greek College. Regarding the involvement of the members of the order of Friars Minor in the pastorate of the parish in

³⁶ See an in-depth approach to the entire issue in Turcu, *Between ideals and reality*, 495-517.

Bucharest, the Romanian prelate did not consider that very useful, since, at the level of common perception, the members of that congregation were associated with the Hungarians or with priests of the Latin rite, whom the Romanians did not regard too favourably. Calling on the services of conventual priests in the case of the Bucharest parish, instead of doing the Church good, could damage its image. If this were the case, the Orthodox circles would not hesitate to exploit it. A second great grievance expressed by the mitropolit in order to obtain the desired results in the organization of the communities of believers outside Transylvania referred to the construction of places of worship and parish houses. For this, significant sums of money were needed, which is why Vasile Suciú appealed to the generosity of the Congregation, stating that without treating that objective with utmost responsibility and involvement, there was a very real risk of losing the united believers, who were “drowning in a murky sea of orthodoxy.” Aware that the pencilled plan would encounter numerous difficulties before it became a reality, Metropolitan Suciú concluded his report by expressing his hope that, in the future, he would also benefit from the help of the Holy See, which had repeatedly demonstrated its goodwill and generosity towards the Romanian Church.

The series of observations made by Theodorian-Carada regarding the way in which the Metropolis of Blaj managed the Greek-Catholic community in Bucharest continued in the following period.³⁷ Most often they were accompanied by other problems that the tireless convert did not hesitate to point out. At the end of the third decade of the last century, in addition to the worrying situation of the community in Bucharest caused by the persistence of the same shortcomings (the lack of an appropriate number of places of worship, the insufficiency of a single priest or suspicions of his immorality etc.), the supplicant wanted to express his position on topics such as: the creation of a confessional party in Romania, the founding of a large-circulation journal to support the project of the religious union of Romanians, or the transfer of the metropolitan residence from Blaj to Cluj, etc.³⁸ This time, the statements (some of them true accusations) made by the sender of the reports were counterbalanced by the official position of the Nunciature in Bucharest, an opinion that the Congregation for the Oriental Churches requested from its representative in Romania at that time.³⁹ In addition to the

³⁷ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 770/32, doc. 14.

³⁸ The full document, at A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 166/29, doc. 1a (p. 1-18).

³⁹ A.C.C.O., *Romeni. Affari generali*, 166/29, doc. 2-3.

clarifications and nuances made to what was said by Theodorian-Carada, the nuncio wanted to make a remark regarding the predisposition of the faithful pro-issuer to shed light on the shortcomings of the Church he had joined or of its religious leaders. In the prelate-diplomat's view, the reason behind it all was the fact that the great supporter of the project of uniting all Romanians with the Catholic Church did not feel fully appreciated from a political point of view, considering that he had been the protagonist of several failed experiences in the field of politics, having initially been an adherent of the political movement led by Alexandru Marghiloman, then of the party of Alexandru Averescu, and finally working in the field of Romanian liberalism. The nuncio was convinced that Theodorian-Carada, having been born and educated in pre-war Romania, used to relate to Romanians from Transylvania with feelings of superiority. This is how the pessimistic tone and harsh judgment, in some places, must be understood, "con cui giudica Blaj e la nostra Chiesa romano-unita," Dolci concluded his clarifying message.

Even so, the plans and the ideas expressed often insistently in the letter exchanges and in the press by Marius Theodorian-Carada bring additions to the overall image of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church in general and the community of believers in Bucharest in particular, during the first half of the last century. Even if it bears the imprint of an obvious religious zeal, his assessments, frequently adorned with critical tones towards the hierarchy and its decisions, had no other purpose than to indicate the path to be followed for the betterment of the Church and the Romanian community alike.

