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MANAGEMENT OF 1977 SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS EVENTS IN ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Abstract

The study analyses the social and religious events in the Romanian society of 1977, and the way in which the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) succeeded in managing them. The 70s in the Romanian society were characterised by authoritarianism, which was felt in all social spheres. And the Romanian Orthodox Church was not exempted from this. In 1977 there were several events that marked the Romanian society and the Romanian Orthodox Church. After the death of Patriarch Justinian Marina, the new Patriarch was enthroned - Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church Iustin Moisescu. Alongside these two important events for the Romanian Orthodox Church, another event in 1977 was the celebration of a century of Romania's independence, since 1877. In addition to all of these events, we should also recall the earthquake of the evening of 4 March 1977, which left deep traces in the souls of the Romanians, event in which the BOR was also involved.

Keywords: church; patriarch; Justinian Marina; Iustin Moisescu; social crisis;

1. INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the social and religious events of 1977 in the Romanian society, as well as the way in which the Romanian Orthodox Church succeeded in dealing with them.

The 1970s in the Romanian society were characterized by an authoritarian state policy that was felt at all societal levels, and the Romanian Orthodox Church was not exempted from this either. It was a sensitive period of time, and the social analyses are usually biased, subjective and sliding into two directions. The former is the denial of that society, the institutions of the time being accused of having submitted to the communist political regime, while the latter is eulogistic, emphasising the positive actions taken by the political system for building a better society.

Several events that marked both the Romanian society in its entirety and the Romanian Orthodox Church took place in 1977. Patriarch Justinian Marina died, and a new Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church was appointed – Iustin Moisescu. Another important event of 1977 was the celebration of 100 years of Romania's independence. Also worth mentioning is the earthquake on the evening of



March 4, 1977, which left deep scars in the souls of the Romanians, an event in whose aftermath the Romanian Orthodox Church was also involved.

These events are presented and analysed with a view to highlighting the ability of the Romanian Orthodox Church in dealing with them with responsibility, balance and faith, in a society that was hardly free and democratic. This topic has been chosen because 2019 is the Year of Celebrating the Romanian Village, as well as the anniversary of the Patriarchs Nicodim Munteanu and Justin Moisescu and that of the translators of ecclesiastic books at the Romanian Patriarchy.

2. THE PASSING OF PATRIARCH JUSTINIAN MARINA

The first article of the Official Bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchy, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, in April 1977, breaks the news of Patriarch Justinian Marina's death. The article is entitled 'Justinian, părintele nostru' [Justinian, our father] and was signed by Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania, at that time, archimandrite and Director of the Biblical Institute and Orthodox Mission Press of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The opening lines are:

"Great grief is made of stone. It petrifies us for a moment, then simmers in silence for a long time. And its tears are made of stone too, as those of the large caves. We cry in the dark throughout a lifetime and we suddenly find ourselves between columns, in the temple of our own grief, face to face with the ones we have mourned and alongside them, unto the same walling, knowing that we haven't wasted ourselves in vain. A candlelight gathered from the dew, as from the tombstone of the Holy Sepulchre, is our only miracle: a light that unveils from within, in the absence of the coloured stained glass" (Anania, 1977).

In the same article, Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania outlines several aspects that marked this event: "A handful of older and closer collaborators had gathered at the Patriarchal Palace on that evening of March 26 to greet the homecoming of His Beatitude after almost two months of hospitalisation... A phone call from the hospital fell like a heavy bell from a spire broken by the wind: the Patriarch had passed away. He had passed away 45 minutes earlier, in the car heading home, with his head on the shoulder of the doctor that was accompanying him. His heart, large as a heavy bell, had fallen from a spire broken by the wind" (Anania, 1977).

It is then presented the carefulness of the Patriarchal Father in choosing his place of eternal rest: "Extremely thoughtful, the Patriarch Father built his resting place of stone in Radu Vodă Church, on the Bucharest banks of Dâmbovița River, which he had re-established with passion and ardour.

-Why not in the Cathedral, next to the other two? Someone had asked him about three years before.

-The Cathedral is so small now, he had replied, stroking his beard. Put one more tomb or two in there and all church-goers will be sent out. Where would they fit into that space?" (Anania, 1977).

It ends with this farewell of forgiveness and prayer: "We have accompanied him to the place of eternal rest, we bade him farewell, we prayed for him and did not pray for us, we all forgave him and no one asked for his forgiveness. We are praying and asking for forgiveness now, when the white flame of death consumes impurities and leaves room for transparencies only" (Anania, 1977).

The ceremony and burial service of Patriarch Justinian highlight the thoughtfulness and wisdom of the Orthodox Church's mediation of this event of religious and social significance at the international level. Thus, on March 27, 1977, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church announced the sad event with a note in the Register of the Patriarchal Palace, also notifying, on the same day, the other Orthodox Churches, the Romanian Orthodox communities abroad, and Christian organisations worldwide.

The burial ceremony started with a solemn assembly in the Synod Hall of the Romanian Patriarchal Palace, on Thursday, March 31, 1977. The following took part in this ceremony:

- Members of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church;
- Representatives of the Department of Cults;
- Delegates of other Orthodox Churches;
- Heads and representatives of non-Orthodox Churches and other ecumenical bodies;
- Heads of other cults in the country (David, 1977).

After the conclusion of this commemoration service, the burial rites were performed in the Metropolitan Church by a synod of high hierarchs. In the Metropolitan Church, there were present delegates of the State authority, delegates of the Church and of non-Christian cults, as well as representatives of international Christian organisations. More ambassadors, consuls, cultural attachés and other political and diplomatic figures also attended.

On Sunday, April 4, 1977, in the Romanian Orthodox churches in the country and abroad, as well as in other Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches and in temples and headquarters of other Christian or non-Christian cults and denominations, memorial services were held (dirges, requiems, Trisagion, memorials) (David, 1977).

In addition, condolence telegrams and letters were received by His Eminence, Iustin, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, acting Patriarch after the death of Patriarch Justinian, from:

- Heads of Orthodox Churches (His All Holiness Dimitrios I, Patriarch of Constantinople);
- High hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Church (His Holiness Pope Paul VI);
- Telegrams from the Old Catholic Church (Archbishop Marinus Kok, President of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht);
- Telegrams from the Eastern Churches (His Holiness Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope and Patriarch of the Coptic Church of Egypt);
- Church of England and the Anglican community (Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury – Primate of All England);
- Telegram from the United Bible Societies;
- The Evangelical Church (Olof Sundby, Archbishop and Primate of Sweden);
- Telegram from the Lutheran World Federation;
- Telegram from the Management of the Conference of European Churches;
- Telegrams from various political and diplomatic personalities who could not attend the funeral – the telegram from His Excellency Haim Zadok, Ministry of Religious Affairs of Israel (David, 1977).

All these underline the European and international opening of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The following are mentioned in the condolence telegram sent by the Management of the Conference of European Churches: “We remember that His Beatitude was one of the greatest religious leaders of Europe after World War II, and we praise God for his sincerity and honesty (André Appel-President)” (David, 1977).

3. THE ELECTION, INVESTITURE AND ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS BEATITUDE IUSTIN MOISESCU, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

According to the Status for the Organisation and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, after the death of Patriarch Justinian, His Eminence Iustin Moiescu, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, became the acting Patriarch.

On June 12, 1977, the Church Electoral College was summoned, electing His Eminence Iustin Moiescu, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava as Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Ungro-Vlachia and Patriarch of All Romania, in accordance with the canonical and statutory provisions (Gagiu, David, 1977).

The Church Electoral College consisted of members of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, rightful delegates of the national authorities, clergy and lay members of the National Church Assembly and the Eparchial Assembly of the Archdiocese of Bucharest, the Rectors of the two Theological Institutes, and the headmasters of the seven Theological Seminaries of the Romanian Patriarchate. 94 out of the 105 members of the Church Electoral College were present, thus the requirement of the legal quorum being met.

In his opening address of the assembly of the Church Electoral College, Metropolitan Iustin Moiescu requested and obtained a half-an-hour delay for the members of the College to confer with

regard to the person that they consider worthy of the dignity and responsibility of the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Gagiu, David, 1977).

The 94 ballot papers were given to the members of the College. After the counting, it was established that His Eminence Iustin Moisescu, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, had obtained 92 votes, and His Eminence Nicolae, Metropolitan of Banat, 2 votes (Gagiu, David, 1977).

In his address, the elected Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church emphasised the unity of the Romanian people: "As peoples are different from one another in various ways, it goes without saying that the national or local Churches also acquire specific traits. In this context, one can speak of Romanian Orthodoxy, built according to the origins, life and aspirations of our people. Thus, the unity of the Romanian people, so dear to our nation, has manifested in the religious sphere as church unity. On the one hand, the Church has taken advantage of this national aspiration to guard its unity. On the other hand, the unity of the Church has fed our people's sense of community. Similar considerations can also be given in regard to the autocephaly and autonomy of the Church, and to the great historical event of national independence" (Gagiu, David, 1977).

Aside from national unity and Romanian Orthodoxy, Patriarch Iustin also mentioned the care for the Romanian Orthodox communities abroad and the connections to be strengthened with other Churches and religious cults: "Our thoughts will not stop at the borders. We have Romanian Orthodox communities abroad that we are going to support as per their needs.

Similarly, we will help and support the strengthening of the links and the cooperation of our Church with other Churches or religious cults, both bilaterally and generally, within the framework of the Conference of European Churches, the Christian Conference for Peace, and the Ecumenical Council of Churches, having the belief that the work of strengthening and defending peace among peoples is one of the most beautiful sides of the Church's activity in the world of our times.

Not only does it explain the emergence and persistence of the positive connection between the State and the Church in our country, but also emphasises the necessity of their strengthening" (Gagiu, David, 1977).

On June 13, 1977, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church assembled for an ordinary session for the canonical examination of the election.

The report of the Canonical, Juridical and Disciplinary Commission appointed by the Holy Synod stated that the election of Metropolitan Iustin as Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church had been pursued with consideration for the canonical and stator provisions. The Holy Synod made the following decisions:

- It was recorded that the election of Metropolitan Iustin as Patriarch had been pursued in accordance with the canonical and statutory provisions;

- It decided that the Department of Cults would be notified to issue the Presidential Ordinance of Acknowledgement of His Eminence Metropolitan Iustin Moisescu as Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Ungro-Vlachia and Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Gagiu, David, 1977).

On Saturday, June 18, 1977, the Presidential Ordinance was issued and handed at the Palace of the Great National Assembly, in the presence of representatives of the State, the Vice-President of the State Council, the Mayor of Bucharest, the President of the Council for Culture and Education and the President of the Department of Cults. Patriarch Iustin was accompanied by the members of the Holy Synod.

From the address uttered by Patriarch Iustin upon receiving the Presidential Ordinance, it is worth mentioning the advice on the steadiness, history and Christian faith of our people, which can be construed today as a catechization of the representatives of the State authority present at the event: "As it is well-known, since the age when our Romanian being was coming into existence in the land of our Dacian-Roman ancestors, the thread of the Church history has interwoven with that of the country's history. Identifying its mission with serving the people, the Church has ceaselessly pursued to keep the righteous faith and serve the aspirations and hopes of the entire Romanian nation, and to improve man's day-by-day life... The Church has carried out charitable activities of illumination of the people, of creating an artistic oeuvre that is nowadays a national treasure, part and parcel of the Romanian heritage, that is reconditioned, preserved and maintained by the provisions of the Law of the National Cultural Heritage" (Gagiu, David, 1977).

On Sunday, June 19, 1977, the ceremony of enthronement of His Beatitude Iustin as Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The festivities were attended by an international audience, among whom one could mention:

- the members of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church;
- representatives of the State authority;
- high clerks of the Department of Cults;
- heads and representatives of other Orthodox Churches;
- representatives of the Old Eastern Church;
- representatives of inter-Christian organisations (the Conference of European Churches, the Ecumenical Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Council of Sweden, the Christian Conference for Peace);
- heads of the religious cults in the country;
- radio and television reporters, etc. (Gagiu, David, 1977).

The festivities started on June 17, when the foreign delegations arrived, and ended on June 21, when they left the country. These festivities had been carefully prepared and scheduled. The delegations were welcomed at the Patriarchal Palace by Patriarch Iustin on June 17 and 18.

The Patriarch thanked the delegates for the expression of their feelings and gave them assurance that the Romanian Orthodox Church would pursue the collaboration between all Churches and Christian organisations, both for the reunification of the Christian Church and for the peaceful understanding among peoples. He also informed the foreign delegates that they were welcome to visit the religious settlements and monasteries near Bucharest or from the Romanian Patriarchate.

All guests enjoyed a warm welcome both at the airport or train station and at the hotels they were lodged in. A protocol service provided the best conditions for them, and they were at all times accompanied by hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church and, whenever needed, by interpreters of the Foreign Relations Service of the Church.

The festivities set out on June 19, 1977, with the Holy Liturgy held in the Metropolitan Church, followed by the service of the Doxology of seating on the Patriarchal Throne and canonical investiture. Then, the Synod statement signed by all members of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church was read, followed by the enthronement service and speeches.

The first of the foreign delegates to take the stage was Maxim, Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, who said: "I would like to express my joy, as our Churches and peoples have always had positive mutual feelings. Our Churches are connected by the same fate, by mutuality and collaboration. We are on the eve of the one-hundred-year anniversary of the 1877-1878 war for Bulgaria's liberation. In brotherly Romania, many sons of the Bulgarian people have found hospitality during the Ottoman oppression. This is why these lands are precious for the Bulgarian people that harbour feelings of sincere gratitude for the Romanian brothers" (Gagiu, David, 1977).

Then, His Eminence Meliton of Chalcedon, representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, said: "... I have the privilege of representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which, as an older sister, is proud of the presence – an essential, edifying, universally acknowledged presence – of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian world, and also, generally speaking, in the European cultural world and, moreover, in the world of mankind. This mankind has, from this moment on, to take upon themselves the mission of reconciliation of the people of all races, religions and ideologies. ... The above stated is in close connection with Your Beatitude... you have been, since 1961, when I had the privilege of making your acquaintance and of collaborating with Your Beatitude, and until today, a great mentor of the principles and ideals expressed in my address. You have been the faithful apprentice of Saint Justin, the philosopher, martyr and apologist" (Gagiu, David, 1977)

Concluding the service, the Patriarch thanked everyone for their good thoughts: "through my voice, the Romanian Orthodox Church gives assurance of the appreciation for all your Churches and of the close cooperation in all fields comprised by our shared duty."

On the same day, at 2:00 PM, a brotherly feast took place. We present, in the following lines, the significant address of Dr G.G. Williams, on behalf of the Conference of European Churches: "A few months ago, I was here to join you in the great grief of the Romanian people for the great loss suffered by the Romanian Orthodox Church at the passing of Patriarch Justinian.

It is known that, for 13 years, you have been our distinguished collaborator and founder of our organisation, the Conference of European Churches. You have been a teacher and, at the same time, a reconciler, inspiring us and bringing peace among us. We will always remember that Your Beatitude have constantly interpreted Orthodoxy for those who are not Orthodox. You are also an example for interpreting the Church in a socialist society, showing the role of the Church in this society.

You have brought peace and resolution in all tensions and misapprehensions. ... This day is an event and a great joy for all members and believers of the Conference of European Churches” (Gagiu, David, 1977).

On the evening of June 19, 1977, a festive concert in honour of Patriarch Iustin took place at the Romanian Athenaeum, with the participation of the foreign guests and the representatives of the Department of Cults. The first part was a religious concert, while the latter featured folk music and patriotic songs. After his investiture, Patriarch Iustin sent the Heads of Churches an irenic letter, underlining the following aspects: “We would like to assure you that the Romanian Orthodox Church is determined to actively and vividly participate in all intra-Orthodox counsels – especially for the preparation of the Holy Grand Synod, in the assemblies of the Conference of European Churches, as well as in dialogues with various Churches” (Gagiu, David, 1977).

4. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS EVENTS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF PATRIARCH IUSTIN’S ARCHPASTORATE

In 1977, after his being appointed Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Iustin sent congratulatory telegrams for various life events of the Heads of the other Orthodox Churches – Dimitrios I, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Maxim, Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and also to the Head of the Catholic Church, Pope Paul VI (Editorial team, 1977b). All these telegrams were replied to, which is indicative of the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to maintain the spiritual-religious international relations at a significant level at that time.

In the address delivered at the closing festivity of the training courses for teachers specializing in theological education, held in the summer of 1977 at the Theological Seminary from Neamț Monastery, Patriarch Iustin said the following: “Our presence here shows the special importance that the Church grants to theological education. Efforts are being made for the priests to rise to the age. We need priests of today for our today society, with their eyes fixed upon the life of believers” (Editorial team, 1977c). This speech emphasises the care of the Church for church-goers. Even though the political regime of that time was hostile to the Church, attempts were being made at nearing the people to God and to the ways of the Church by all means available. The priests were prompted to maintain their relationships to the believers and to “keep their eyes on the life of the church-goers”, as it was known that Romania had just experienced, in the spring of that year, a devastating earthquake.

The same positive and thoughtful attitude is encountered in the Pastoral to the Birth of Our Lord of 1977: “Dearly beloved, the Godly feast of today, the Birth of Our Lord, prompts me to stop amidst you to share words of righteous learning, fatherly advice and hierarchal blessing with you. Although “my body may be far”, as Saint Apostle Peter once said, “I am by your side in spirit” (Moisescu, 1977b).

5. THE CENTENNIAL OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF ROMANIA, 1877-1977

In his address delivered at the Metropolitan Church on May 8, 1977, Patriarch Iustin said: “Our people has never coveted to conquer foreign lands and has never thought of invading other peoples... Independence is the proper, free and dignified state of a people... Throughout our history, the Romanian Orthodox Church has always been present in the life of our people, not only making its presence obvious in the day-by-day life of the Christians, but also in times of great predicament... Today, at the anniversary of the centennial of the independence, looking back to our worthy forerunners, let us pay homage to them, promising to follow their example and to keep the heritage they left us” (Moisescu, 1977a).

There is a great number of articles that deal with this topic: the Romanian Orthodox Church’s support and contribution to the national independence (Octavian, 1977), the attainment of the independence, as a contribution of the past and present generations (Constantinescu, 1977), the representation of the conquering of the independence in Romanian literature (Plătică, 1977) or the Romanian visual arts and the national event of the Independence (Calciu-Dumitreasa, 1977).

6. THE EARTHQUAKE OF MARCH 4, 1977

In the morning after the earthquake, on March 5, 1977, a session was held in the chancellery of the Holy Synod, followed by a telegram sent to all eparchial centres of the Romanian Patriarchy, requesting the church staff to support the local commandments in the state of necessity decreed after the earthquake of March 4, 1977.

In the report of the Official Bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchy, one reads the following news on the earthquake of March 4:

- Thursday, March 10, 1977, from 10:00 AM to 2:30 PM - session of the permanent synod on the issue of the damage produced by the catastrophic earthquake of March 4, 1977;

- Friday, March 11, 1977, 10:00-02:30 – Follow-up to the same assembly of the Synod. Architect Cristian Moisescu, Director of the Directorate of the National Cultural Heritage, was also invited. The information on the torn down and damaged churches was examined, roughly assessing the damage.

- Sunday, March 13, 1977 – The Pastoral of the Holy Synod was read in all churches in the country. It contained advice and urge that the affected population receive support, asking for charitable contributions to the Fund for helping and reconstruction after the earthquake, known as the 1977 Humanity Fund (Editorial team, 1977a).

Although the earthquake had heavily hit the Romanian Orthodox Church's places of worship and edifices, the hierarchs, the clergy and the church-goers participated in the general mobilization for removing the immediate damaging effects by saving lives, material goods and art masterpieces, providing their entire support.

Aside from the donations made out of charity and civic spirit in the 1977 Humanity Fund, the Romanian Orthodox Church also committed to donate 21 million lei from voluntary donations. It is worth mentioning that the wage of a caretaker hired in a parish was of 1,000 lei at that time, which means that the respective amount is equivalent to approx. 4.5 million euro of today (Hurez, 1977).

In the Pastoral sent to church-goers on the occasion of the Lord's Resurrection, Patriarch Iustin prompted them to honour the victims and keep their memory alive in their hearts, while focusing on the country's reconstruction and development, helping the ones in need with financial contributions to the 1977 Humanity Fund, as a sacrifice pleasing for God (Moisescu, 1977c).

An article from May 1977, published by the journal *Glasul Bisericii* , emphasises the people's struggle for rescuing the victims of the March 4 earthquake. Soldiers, doctors, drivers, stuntmen, welders, builders had suddenly become valuable assets, turning into life-savers! Mankind struggled for their wretched peers, tearing away from the claws of death people that had been waiting under the ruins. Love triumphed once again over the blind forces that opposed man, in the name of God, who made man in His image and likeness (Rădulescu, 1977).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The management of the two events of 1977, Patriarch Justinian Marina's passing and the Enthronement of Patriarch Iustin Moisescu, highlights the European and ecumenical vocation of the Romanian Orthodox Church, through the participation of the foreign delegations and the messages received from the representatives of the Christian and non-Christian Churches and cults.

Secondly, the events of the anniversary of the centennial of the Romanian Independence of 1877 underline the affection of the Romanian Orthodox Church for the ancestral faith, national identity and for the Romanian people.

Last but not least, by mobilizing in support of the victims of the March 4 earthquake, the Church proved attachment to the people and church-goers, worthily fulfilling their mission as the Samaritan from the Scriptures.

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