

For the Rest of Their Life The Retirement of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Clergy*

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“IT IS known to all, how difficult a man whose capabilities are fading away can fulfil his duties as a priest. The one who has seen a priest hardly trudging his feet, barely walking over the threshold, jumping streams and climbing hills between groans and pains, that one can imagine what it means to serve at such old age. Then it is also known how much drama the service of a spiritually worn out and lacking healthy feelings priest can make,”¹ a voice of the clergy in the official paper of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș lamented anonymously in 1909 on the topic of the creation of a Pension Fund for clergy. The 1909 debate was generated by the mandatory review and update of the statutes of the Fund created by Metropolitan Ioan Vancea in 1889, which occurred every ten years, as prescribed by the founder.

The topic of the present study is the pension of the clergy of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Archdiocese in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an expression of the professionalization of the clergy. We intend to analyse the opinion favourable to the creation of a genuine Pension Fund for the Romanian clergy, and also the steps taken by the Church governance in order to adapt the purpose of the Fund to the realities of the 20th century. In order to support our research we used a series of unpublished documents and other ecclesiastical sources, such as the Protocol of the incapacitated priests from the Archdiocese, the decrees of the provincial synod of 1872, those of a series of Archdiocesan synods, decisions of the deaneries synods, and the *Schematismi* of the Archdiocesan clergy covering a period of time between 1865 and 1921. We divided our study into two major parts, one dedicated to an elaborate analysis of the ecclesiastical regulations regarding the pensions for the cler-

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gy, and a second one, where we tried to emphasize their enforcement and the effects they had over the priests.

The laws

THE DECREES of the 1872 Synod of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Metropolitan Province of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș, approved in 1882 by the Holy See,² stated that the ecclesiastical benefit was set for life, and that its beneficiary—the priest—cannot be deprived of it without a formal sentence following an ecclesiastical process, “even if they become unable to accomplish their office.”³ They could, however, ask for the help of another clergyman, ordained as chaplain or coadjutor, who would take over some of his functions,⁴ and would share the benefit. In 1872 there were no other provisions made for the clergy, considering their burdened old age.

Nevertheless, during the 19th century, the ecclesiastical administration acknowledged the possibility of occurring health problems in the case of the Romanian Greek-Catholic clergy. In 1838 was created a Pension Fund for incapacitated priests, their widows and minor orphan children of priests. It was decided that all clergymen were to make money contributions to support the Fund, but the contribution was not a fixed one. In 1865, the Fund was divided between the Archdiocese and the two newly-created eparchies of Lugoj and Gherla, and Alexandru Șuluțiu, the Metropolitan at that time, established the amount of the contribution.⁵ A further step was made in 1889, when Metropolitan Ioan Vancea decided to separate the pensions for priests from the ones for priests’ families, setting two distinct Funds. The existing amounts, belonging to the Pensions Fund until 1889, were dedicated to the separate Fund for the widows and minor orphan, while the Metropolitan donated 100 bank shares of “Economul” in Cluj to the Fund of incapacitated clergy. The institution was called “Vancea Fund for the incapacitated priests of the Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș.”⁶ The new setting occurred during a session of the Archdiocesan Synod of 1889, which was also convened for adapting the pension system to the ever-changing realities of the modern Hungarian society at the end of the 19th century.⁷

The next step towards a modern pension system was made a decade later, under the initiative of the ecclesiastical government of Metropolitan Victor Mihályi of Apșa. The statutes adopted in 1899,⁸ during an eparchial synod, established the contributions for the next decade: 2 % of the salary after the regulation of the congrua, assessing an annual system of contribution based on three levels, namely 16, 12, 8 crowns paid by priests. A modern element was considered to be the fact that the Fund was opened to any clergyman from the Archdiocese area that paid the prescribed fee for at least 10 years, and was declared incapacitated, therefore losing

his benefice. Validation of disability occurred either on request, or *ex officio*. For this purpose the applications were restricted to the priests who had served 45 years, or to those incapacitated who lacked the coadjutor; before approving the pension for the last ones, the Consistory could request an official evaluation of two medical doctors.⁹ Similarly, pensions were determined taking into account the three levels of contributions, with maximum rates specified: the annual rate could not exceed 400 florins for the first category of contributors, 300 florins for the second, and 200 florins was the maximum for the third level of contribution. If an incapacitated clergyman got help from other sources, the regulation of 1899 also stated that his pension would be reduced so that the total amount should not exceed the ratio ensured by his level of salary.¹⁰

An element of novelty was the fact that the documents of the 1899 Archdiocesan Synod also kept reports by deanery synods, convened in the autumn of the same year, as a prior consultation of the clergy. Most clergymen agreed that the Pension Fund for the incapacitated priests was a good idea, and that the initiative had to be extended for another decade, keeping the contributions at the same levels. Nevertheless, few original recommendations were made, i.e. the clergy from Sibiu Deanery suggested that fees should be proportionally increased to wages, and that the clergy should be able to ask for pension after 40 years of active service.¹¹ Similarly, Morlaca Deanery proposed that all priests reaching 40 years of service, at their own request, should be declared incapacitated and therefore entitled to receive pensions.¹² The clergy of Blaj lowered the active service to 30 years, making the remark that retirement after 50 years of service was very rare, and only few would enjoy pension. Moreover, they even suggested that the mere contribution to the fund for as long as 30 years to be sufficient to grant pensions for the applicants.¹³ Almaş Deanery proposed a differential pension system: 3/5 of the salary to be paid to those who have served 50 years, while 4/5 of the salary to be the pension of those who became incapacitated after serving at least 25 years.¹⁴ Many clergymen suggested taking into consideration co-financing the pension system by taxation of church properties, and by contributions of the parochial community, and even laymen institutions, such as Romanian banks.¹⁵ Many suggestions presented above had a real basis, as we intend to present in the second part of our study, when analysing the actual cases of retired priests.

A decade passed, and the clergy was again convoked in Blaj, in 1909. This time, the ecclesiastical officials were ready to acknowledge the fact that clergymen needed to retire just as much as any other professional category. An internal report made for the synod by Provost Ioan Micu Moldovan and the secretary of the Consistory, Iacob Popa, recognised that there were no precedents in this regard, but estimated that the Fund, if wisely administered, could cover about 75 % of the previous salary of a priest who spent 45 years in active service. However, the contribution was to be increased from 2 % up to 5 % of the monthly salary of any priest, since the

pension system was extended. Comparing the situation of clergymen to one of the other categories of professionals, they concluded that priests did not feel encouraged to retire, their status following the retirement being similar to a demotion. This draft also took into account the possibility that the Fund might not fully cover the amounts provided as pensions, if the priests would require retirement in large groups. If such situation occurred, the amounts were to be reduced proportionally to the contributions.¹⁶

The 1909 Statutes of the Pension Fund for the incapacitated Priests stipulated that in order to be pronounced unable of active service, a priest must request this himself; as a mandatory condition, a prior 45 years of active service or the physical or psychological inability to hold the office was stated, certified by two medical doctors.¹⁷ Another binding provision referred to the moral conduct of such retired priests: the ones declared incapacitated had to keep a decent conduct, consistent with the priestly dignity, being otherwise liable to have their pension suspended. Deans were in charge with drawing up an annual report on the behaviour of retired priests residing in their jurisdiction.¹⁸ As for the pension, a fixed-ratio of it was stated, so that priests would receive 25 % of the monthly salary for 10 years of service, for each year of service added the pension increasing proportionally by 1.5 % of the salary, reaching a maximum of 77.5 % after 45 years of active service in the community of believers.¹⁹

The end of First World War changed the map of Europe; Transylvania was united to Romania, and its laws, traditions, and administration were subjects of integration and homogenization into the new state. The Romanian Greek-Catholic church was also forced to adapt to the new situation, as well as its first Archdiocesan Synod convened in 1921, in dealing mainly with financial issues of a church deeply affected by war. The decrees of 1921 also referred to the pension system, stating the parity of the new currency, the Romanian lei, with the old crowns, and that the contribution to be paid for the Pension Fund, starting from 1922.²⁰ A sign of modernity was the establishment at Blaj of a nursing home for incapacitated priests of the Archdiocese jurisdiction, along with a hospice, also identifying the funding resources for such an initiative.²¹

The Pension Fund for the Incapacitated Priests underwent through a series of alterations along its existence, evolving on paper from a fund for the incapacitated priests to one of a general retirement system. The re-evaluation of its statutes every ten years made it possible, since the reconfirmation tried to keep up with the evolutions of society. However, we must take our analysis to the next level, in order to outline its effects on the clergy.

The people

IN SEARCH of the people subjected to the regulation of the Pension Fund for the Incapacitated Clergy we started from the data published in the *Schematismi* of Clergy from the Greek-Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș, namely the ones covering the period of time between 1865 and 1929.

The eleven *Schematismi* registered the number of both secular priests and incapacitated ones, thus offering us the data in Table 1. The percent of retired priests was low for the entire period of time under scrutiny, with an increase in the first decade of the 20th century. The 1865 data reflect the reality of a split Pension Fund, three incapacitated priests being the ones residing in the Archdiocesan jurisdiction after the division of the three eparchies (Făgăraș, Lugoj, and Gherla). The number of incapacitated priests fluctuated until the end of the 19th century when it decreased again, so that in 1890 there were only four names recorded. The decrease can be mirrored both by natural death of some pensioners, and changes made in 1889 to the statutes of the Pension Fund (see Table 1). This supposition is supported by the fact that in 1890 there were four incapacitated priests, and seven new requests for pensions were approved, and four of them received pensions since March.²²

At this point we introduce our main source of information, covering a period of time between 1890 and 1936: the protocol of the retired priests of the Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș. The summary recorded data connected to priests' retirements, i.e. their names, the parish in which they served until retirement, the resolution regarding their pensions and the date of their official enforcement, the pensioner's year of death, and finally other observations concerning the retirement.²³ We put together some data in Table 2, the upper temporal limit being established in 1921, when "there was no request for disability,"²⁴ because it was then the last Archdiocesan synod, of the ones we took into consideration in the first part of our study, convened.

What does the summary tells us? First, that in a period of thirty-two years, 167 priests were declared retired, as resulting from Table 2. Then, that sanctioned retirements were unequally assigned over the years, so that in 1894 we recorded only the retirement of Nicolae Deac of Vurpăr's²⁵ On the other hand, we have the period between 1912 and 1914, when a total of 34 clergymen retired, almost 20% of the overall number of pensions. What could have been the explanation behind this numbers? In order to find the answer, we had to analyze every single case that received the approval of the Consistory, and we put together the data in Table 3. Considering the fact that between 1912 and 1914, 70 % of the pensions were granted to priests who were in active service for a longer period of time then 40 years, we can say that the statutes were enforced pretty accurately. The two cases that were pensioned early were probably diagnosed with poor health conditions, a reasonable motive for their retirement. The others served in their parishes for a long period of time, if only we consider the case of Teodor Borza retired after 59 years in active service, at the age

of 82. For a short period of time he was recalled into active service, but he was sent back to pension again, and died in 1917.²⁶

Why were so many retirements between 1912 and 1914? Our hypothesis is that we are registering the peak of the cohort change, because 23 of the retired priests were over 70 years old and were ordained during Metropolitan Alexandru Șuluțiu leadership and the first decade of Metropolitan Ioan Vancea, namely between 1850 and 1870. The old priests served during three Metropolitans and they were fortunate enough to live a long life, so they could retire by request.

The above-mentioned case of Teodor Borza opens another interesting aspect, the one of priests' "reactivation": some of the priests retired after 1911 were called back in active service starting 1914, probably for covering the vacancies produced by war into the parishes from the Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș. That was the case of Vasile Rusu, serving in Șulia de Câmpie, who first retired in January 1914, got reactivated as honorary vice-dean in Pogăceaua, and then retired a second time in December 1925.²⁷ In 1923, two other priests received an official confirmation of their second retirement, permanent this time.²⁸ The war efforts mobilized the retired clergymen, who returned for a few more years to pastor their flock through tough times.

The sanction of retirement given by the Consistory was the final act of a priest's active service in the parish where he served. However, we must ask ourselves how many years did the clergymen enjoyed of their pensions? Searching through the protocol, we noticed that as we advanced into the 20th century, the period of time got longer, since the life expectancy grew and the regulations allowed an "early" retirement, after 40 years of service. For example in 1890, out of 7 retired priests only one received his pension for as long as 12 years: Nicolau Fărcașiu from Birghișiu retired in May 1890 and died in February 1902, age 92. The others were not so lucky or healthy, as five of them died within a year after their retirement.²⁹ A decade later, 8 priests received an official confirmation of their retirement. One lived 10 more years, witnessing the beginning of First World War, and the others lived at least one year.³⁰ On the other hand, the priests that retired in 1913 had a longer life expectancy, even though they were already old when they received the approval for their pensions. Two of them got reactivated during the war, while seven of them lived to see the war ended and Transylvania reunited with other Romanian territories.

When it comes to how long a priest received his pension, two cases draw our attention, because of their shortness. The retirement of the priest of Coluni, Ioan Giurca, was sanctioned in 1905, May 13, the resolution stating that the pension would be paid starting with the 1st of July.³¹ However, the priest died in May 13, because of a complication of one of his health conditions: tuberculosis, gout and, finally, a stroke, at only 56 years.³² Not only did he not enjoy his pension, but he did not survive long enough to find out that he was officially retired. Similarly, Alexandru Albini died of pneumonia in March 10, 1910, only ten days after he retired of active service.³³

As for the numbers of priests receiving a pension, we take a close look to Table 1 that gives us the numbers registered by the *Schematismi* of the Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș. The numbers were changing during a year, varying because of the deaths and of new retirements. For example, the numbers of Table 2 can be corroborated to the ones registered in the 1911 *Schematismus* that recorded 34 incapacitated priests,³⁴ and the ones from the Register of deceased priests from the Greek-Catholic Archdiocese, documenting the death of 4 incapacitated priests.³⁵ Altogether, they prove that in 1911 the clergy pension system supported approximately 40 people with pensions varying between 400 and 800 crowns.

These numbers are a proof of the fact that the Pension Fund was not ready to make an official passing to a generalized pension system for the Archdiocesan Clergy, prior to the First World War. First explanation for this is that the clergy was not capable to pay his annuity, as required by the statutes; naturally, their salaries being smaller, they were barely able to cover their everyday expenses, as the priests complained in annual Deanery synods. The priests fully supported the idea of a pension fund for them, but lacked the necessary means of its support. Therefore, the clergy was not so hurried to give up active service, since the salary was, after all, better than the pension. Second, the clergy embraced the pension system at an old age, only when they were not able anymore to serve at the altar, and got no coadjutor, in the person of a son or a son-in-law. Therefore, few of the retired priests enjoyed their pensions more than one or two years. This was the situation prior to the 20th century. However, the situation changed after the new adaptation of statutes in 1909: the ecclesiastical administration accepted the need for a pension system, and the prescription made that year set the base of it. The war changed the situation again, since it imposed the reactivation of some pensioners, who returned in active service until the end of the conflagration.

Yet another issue opens in front of us. Taking into consideration all the evolutions that were depicted above, can we consider them as part of a process of professionalization of the Romanian Greek-Catholic clergy? This is the question that motivated some sociological studies from abroad, for a long period of time. Since Richard Hall analysed in 1968 the professional model and its components,³⁶ many sociologists applied his attitude scale to various professions, in order to find out whether its characteristics still applied. When dealing with the clergy, we subscribe to the opinion of D. Hoge,³⁷ who claims that in search of a career we also have to take into consideration their vocation. Priests are professionals, but their career is a life-long one, especially when we consider the case of the Romanian Greek-Catholic clergy from the Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș.

The regulations depicted above, the examples we turned to during our analysis, all this contribute to emphasize the characteristics of an emerging category of professionals. We consider retirement to be a part of this process of professionalization. Pension indicates the end of a career, but the clergymen we depicted were not ready to fully assume what retirement meant: they retired late, remained in their parishes

with a coadjutor rather than relocate elsewhere, kept a similar pious life style as before the pension, a mandatory condition for granting the allowances. In the end, they were still far from the point where retirement meant rapture with their active service: at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, priesthood was assumed for the rest of their life.



Notes

1. *Unirea*, XIX, 16 (1909): 145.
2. Ana Victoria Sima, "The Holy See's Intervention in the Acts and Decrees of the First Provincial Synods of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church," in I.M. Bonda, C. Cârja, A.V. Sima, eds., *Transylvanian Review: Aspects of Confessional Diversity within the Romanian Space*, Supplement 3, XIX (2010): 45–61.
3. *Conciliul provincial prim al provinciei bisericești greco-catolice Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș ținut la anul 1872*, Second Edition (Blaj, 1886), 65.
4. *Ibid.*, 53.
5. *Decisiunile Sinodului Arhidiecezei Greco-Catolice de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș, ținut în Reședința arhiepiscopescă din Blaj, la 23–26 noiembrie 1909* [further on *Decisiunile Sinodului Arhidiecezan pe 1909*] (Blaj, 1909), 10–12.
6. *Ibid.*, 13.
7. Ion Cârja, *Biserică și societate în Transilvania în perioada păstoririi mitropolitului Ioan Văncea (1868–1892)* (Cluj-Napoca, 2007), 92–95.
8. National Archives, Alba County Branch, *Mitropolia Română Unită Blaj* [further on N.A.A.C.B., M.R.U.B.] – *Administrația Centrală Capitulană* Fund, file 1/1897–1901, 190–192.
9. *Ibid.*, 190–191; file 1/1911, 65.
10. *Ibid.*, file 1/1897–1901, 191.
11. *Idem*, *Registratura generală. Acte înregistrate* Fund, file 6361/1899, 552–555.
12. *Ibid.*, 443–446.
13. *Ibid.*, 203–206.
14. *Ibid.*, 138–148.
15. *Ibid.*, 219–221.
16. *Decisiunile Sinodului Arhidiecezan pe 1909*, 17.
17. *Ibid.*, 25.
18. *Ibid.*, 27.
19. *Ibid.*, 31.
20. N.A.A.C.B., M.R.U.B. – *Registratura generală. Acte înregistrate* Fund, file 2/1896–1921, 44.
21. *Ibid.*, 46.
22. *Idem*, *Arhiva Generală* fund, file 15/1890–1936, 2.
23. *Ibid.*, 2–13.
24. *Ibid.*, 13.
25. *Ibid.*, 3.
26. *Ibid.*, 11.

27. Ibid., 11, 15.
28. Ibid., 14.
29. Ibid., 2.
30. Ibid., 4.
31. Ibid., 6.
32. Idem, *Administrația Centrală Capitulară* Fund, file 8/1901–1947, 15–16.
33. Idem, *Arhiva Generală* fund, file 15/1890-1936, 9.
34. *Șematismul veneratului cler al Arhiepiscopiei mitropolitane greco-catolice române de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș pe anul 1911* (Blaj, 1911), 254.
35. N.A.A.C.B., M.R.U.B. – *Administrația Centrală Capitulară* Fund, file 8/1901-1947, 34-35.
36. Richard H. Hall, “Professionalization and Bureaucratization,” *American Sociological Review*, 33, 1, (1968): 92–104.
37. Dean R. Hoge, “Religious Leadership/Clergy,” in Helen Rose Ebaugh, ed., *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions* (Springer, 2006), 383.

Abstract

For the Rest of Their Life: The Retirement of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Clergy*

The topic of the present study is the pension of the clergy of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Archdiocese in the late 19th century and early 20th century. We focused on the creation of a genuine Pension Fund for the Romanian clergy, and also on the steps taken by the Church governance in order to adapt the purpose of the Fund to the realities of the 20th century. We intended to demonstrate that the establishment of the pension fund is part of the larger process of professionalization of the Romanian Greek-Catholic clergy, also being a feature of the setup of this particular professional category. In order to support our research we used a series of unpublished documents and other ecclesiastical sources, such as the Protocol of the incapacitated priests from the Archdiocese, synod decrees, and the *Schematismi* of the Archdiocesan clergy covering a period of time between 1865 and 1921.

Key words

Romanian Greek-Catholic Clergy, Retirement, Pensions, Archdiocese, Profession.

ANNEXES

TABLE 1.

PENSIONED PRIESTS FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ALBA-IULIA AND FĂGĂRAȘ IN SCHEMATISMI
BETWEEN 1865 AND 1929

<i>Schematismi</i>	1865	1871	1876	1880	1886	1890	1896	1900	1906	1911	1929
Secular Priests	694	728	712	706	745	760	762	689	719	735	741
Pensioned priest	3	12	12	11	7	4	15	12	19	34	16
%	0,43	1,65	1.68	1.55	0.93	0.52	1.96	1.74	2.64	4.62	2.15

SOURCES:

Șematismul veneratului cler catolic de rit oriental al Arhidiecezei mitropolitane a Albei-Iulia pe anul de la nașterea lui Christos 1865, iar de la S. Uniune cu Biserica Romei vechi al 166-lea, (Blaj, 1865), 154.

Șematismul veneratului cler al Arhidiecezei mitropolitane greco-catolice a Albei-Iulia și Făgărașului pe anul 1871, (Blaj, 1871), 271, 281.

Idem, (Blaj, 1876), 297, 308.

Idem, (Blaj, 1880), 284, 293.

Idem, (Blaj, 1886), 289, 305.

Idem, (Blaj, 1890), 269, 283-284.

Idem, (Blaj, 1896), 306-308.

Șematismul veneratului cler al Arhidiecezei mitropolitane greco-catolice de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș pe anul 1900 de la sfânta Unire 200 (Blaj, 1900), 639.

Șematismul veneratului cler al Arhidiecezei mitropolitane greco-catolice române de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș pe anul 1906 (Blaj, 1906), 307-308.

Idem, (Blaj, 1911), 254.

Idem, (Blaj, 1929), 72.

TABLE 2.
PENSIONED PRIESTS AS RESULTING FROM THE SUMMARY OF INCAPACITATED PRIESTS
FROM THE GREEK-CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ALBA-IULIA AND FĂCĂRAȘ

Year	Retired priests	Year	Retired priests	Year	Retired priests
1890	7	1900	8	1910	9
1891	5	1901	4	1911	8
1892	4	1902	3	1912	11
1893	6	1903	5	1913	12
1894	1	1904	4	1914	11
1895	5	1905	7	1915	6
1896	5	1906	3	1916	3
1897	2	1907	5	1917	3
1898	2	1908	9	1918	4
1899	2	1909	7	1919	4
				1920	2
				1921	0
TOTAL					167

SOURCE:

National Archives, Alba County Branch, *Mitropolia Română Unită Blaj – Arhiva Generală* Fund, file 15/1890-1936, 2-13.

TABLE 3.
THE AGE OF RETIREMENT FOR THE ARCHDIOCESAN CLERGY (1912-1914)

Retirements	1912	1913	1914	Total
≥ 40 years	8	9	7	24
30–40 years	3	1	2	6
20–30 years	0	1	1	2
≤ 20 years	0	1	1	2
Total	11	12	11	34

SOURCE:

National Archives, Alba County Branch, *Mitropolia Română Unită Blaj – Arhiva Generală* Fund, file 15/1890-1936, 2-13.

