

# Transylvanian Echoes of a European Phenomenon The Vatican and the National-Christian Movements in the Mid-1920s

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Unirea (Blaj, 1926)

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**T**HE WINTER of 1926 seems to have been a perfectly ordinary one for the Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania. Historical texts make no reference whatsoever to any remarkable or outstanding events for the period in question. Upon closer investigation, however, certain previously overlooked facts begin to emerge. Albeit unknown and ignored to far, these facts may not actually be that surprising. This Church with a dual orientation (Western and Eastern), located since its establishment in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century at the point of contact between the major trends in European thinking (political, religious, etc.) and the realities of the Romanian space, could not deviate from this pattern even after the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What were the most important issues for the Greek Catholic elite and what potentially new elements appear on its public agenda? What did actually happen in the autumn of that year? A survey of the representative press of that time comes to provide a number of relevant clues.

Hierarchs of the Church, professors at the theological academies, priests and (more rarely) laypersons made their voices known in the publications of the eparchies, in official acts, in catechistic texts, or in opinion pieces.<sup>1</sup> The life of the Greek Catholic community was reflected in the pages of the *Unirea* (Union), an “ecclesiastical political paper” published weekly in Blaj, the town that hosted the administrative and spiritual center of this denomination: the Metropolitan See. At that time, the periodical in question, whose suggestive subtitle alluded to its mission as a communication channel between Church and society, had as its director Dr. Alexandru Rusu (the future bishop) and, as its editor-in-chief, Dr. Augustin Popa. Both of them were also teaching at the local theological Academy. The periodical reflected a diversity of opinions, polemical exchanges were also quite common, but we are nearly always told what the editorial board believed about the various matter under discussion.

In what the content is concerned, a first category that emerges is that of texts providing guidance to those tended to by the Church, believers and priests. We read about the restless work of the bishops, about their visits in the territory and the measures taken to remedy one situation or another,<sup>2</sup> about what it meant to be a good shepherd to one’s flock, about the education provided to youths and adults alike, about the need for a proper moral and spiritual training of the priests, about the scarcity of catechistic literature, etc.<sup>3</sup> We are dealing here with a whole range of general and permanent concerns, most likely common to all Churches, but also with a number of distinctive features.

Then come the reports on various events of that time. These were, of course, selected on the basis of their relevance to Church matters. We also find pieces of news coming from Rome or Romania. Some are profoundly spiritual, such as the reports on the celebrations marking 700 years (on 4 October 1926) since the death of St. Francis of Assisi, accompanied by a survey of his life and teachings.<sup>4</sup> We also find gloomier news, such as that about the illness of Metropolitan Bishop Vasile Suci, or about the poor health of King Ferdinand I.<sup>5</sup>

However, if we were to identify the major topic of interest and concern for the editorial board of *Unirea*, this would undoubtedly be that of the relations with the Orthodox faith. Practically every debate is connected to this tense relationship. Often highlighted and sometimes bemoaned, the disputes between the two Churches dominate the public agenda. “Our Uniatic Church and the Orthodox Church are like a small rock faced with a much larger one. Unavoidably, these two rocks grind against one another,”<sup>6</sup> as one of the contributors suggestively summed up the existing state of affairs.

The two Churches shared a troubled history. The union with Rome of a significant part of the Transylvanian Romanian clergy, in 1700, was always seen

as a betrayal by the Orthodox Church. No matter how hard the new denomination (Greek Catholic) tried to justify the ecclesiastical union—mainly with arguments regarding the improved status of the Romanian nation in Transylvania (higher social standing, education, culture, Latin identity, the Transylvanian School, etc.)<sup>7</sup>—the Orthodox remained decidedly unmoved. The religious union had split the Romanian community in two, and the “other side,” with its hierarchy and priests, had sided with the “foreigners” (the House of Habsburg or the Pope in Rome). In certain situations the recriminations became even more bitter, to the point where the Uniate were labelled false Romanians or even un-Romanian.<sup>8</sup> In fact, much of this religious conflict was fought with national (ethnic) “weapons.”

The moment of grace that had seen the embrace between the bishops of the two Churches, Iuliu Hossu and Miron Cristea (the future patriarch of the Orthodox Church), at Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918, at the great assembly that decided the union between Transylvania and Romania, now seemed to be a thing of the past. There, where the former (Iuliu Hossu) had read out the proclamation of the union, the two Churches came closest to one another. With the fulfilment of the national ideal (the union of the Romanians into a single country), the chapter on cooperation seemed closed. But new disputes emerged: what would be the status of each Church in the new state?

The Constitution of 1923 had come with a solution to the issue, by granting both denominations—Orthodox and Greek Catholic—the title of “Romanian Church,” but it had also favored the former: “as this is the religion of most Romanians, it shall be the dominant Church in the Romanian state; the Greek Catholic Church shall take precedence over the other denominations.”<sup>9</sup> The argument concerning the overwhelming majority and the constitutional tradition of the Kingdom of Romania led things in this direction. However, the Greek Catholic Church itself was given precedence over the other denominations. Now, in late 1926, a major event was about to take place, this time at international level: the Concordat between Romania and the Vatican. If before 1918 Romania had had little reason to sign such an agreement, given the small number of Catholics on its territory, after 1918 the situation had changed.<sup>10</sup> Transylvania contributed a large number of Catholics to the population of Greater Romania, and most of these Catholics were Romanians of the Greek rite. They were accompanied by a significant Catholic community of the Latin rite, largely Hungarians, but also some Germans. Not all the Hungarians in Transylvania—and, for that matter, not all of the local Germans—were Catholic.<sup>11</sup>

After having presented, over the years, the successive phases in the negotiations regarding the Concordat,<sup>12</sup> in the autumn of 1926 *Unirea* was covering yet another failure. The Romanian prime minister’s September visit to Rome had

ended without the document being signed.<sup>13</sup> The Blaj periodical focused on the Orthodox offensive on the matter of the “Jesuit monster spawned by the Vatican,” opposed by that “Orthodox pope,” State Secretary Vasile Goldiș.<sup>14</sup> Even if eventually Goldiș himself would sign the document on behalf of the Romanian state (in the spring of the following year),<sup>15</sup> in 1926 *Unirea* was clearly not one of his greatest admirers.<sup>16</sup> The same antipathy once again becomes manifest in November of the same year, when he issued decision no. 49838 of the Ministry of Religious Denominations, which regulated the creation of state-supported parishes. Essentially, in future, for any parish to be recognized it had to have 400 families, if in the urban environment, or 200 families in the rural areas. A “census” of parishes was to be carried out.

The proposal was met with fierce opposition by the Greek Catholic hierarchy<sup>17</sup> (and also enjoyed a lukewarm reception among the other denominations, including the Orthodox one, for obvious reasons). The Greek Catholics feared the loss of parishes kept in operation “during the hard times experienced by our nation.” There were areas of Transylvania where such numbers were difficult to achieve, and the dissolution of parishes seemed to threaten the preservation of the Romanian identity itself. This initiative led to broad polemical exchanges regarding the possible consequences, some even hosted by the Romanian Senate,<sup>18</sup> and brought to the fore another thorny issue affecting the bilateral relation between the two denominations: the competition over followers and over the presence in the territory.

Two questions, chiefly rhetorical, addressed to the priests come to confirm this observation: “1. What Orthodox parishes were approved for Transylvania—purely as a thorn in our side—with fewer than 300 believers, the minimum number required for such approval; 2. In which villages, deprived of a parish and maybe even of believers . . . was land granted following the agrarian reform, in order to benefit the Orthodox parishes that were to be set up here in the future.”<sup>19</sup> Also present is the fear that the many Romanian civil servants (mostly Orthodox) who had come to Transylvania after the Union would also somewhat alter the denominational balance in the region.<sup>20</sup> This because, even if the Orthodox were numerically dominant in the province as a whole, there were areas where the situation was quite the reverse, and the Greek Catholics were the majority population (especially in the northern and central areas).<sup>21</sup>

Amid all these disputes regarding status, pastoral work, influence, history, ecclesiastical jurisdictions, etc., a new reason for dissension emerged. It was a matter of considerable consequence, coming from the political realm. The article signed—with remarkable courage!—by “An Orthodox priest” highlights a profound reason for worry: “Most Orthodox priests have embraced a political orientation that is the very opposite of Orthodoxy and Christianity. Consider

the many priests who ran on the lists of the National Christian Defense League (NCDL). After *Unirea* and *Cuvântul* reviewed Mr. Cuza's brochure—and, to my knowledge, no Orthodox publication has ever criticized it—Mr. Cuza reviewed the Christian faith for the benefit of his League. Did the priests who ran on the lists of Cuza's League take any measure to ensure that their priestly mission would not be affected? Or did Their Holinesses make any declaration to that effect? They did not. Because there are no regulatory mechanisms within the Orthodox Church.<sup>22</sup>

This was not the first time that *Unirea* was dealing with A. C. Cuza or his League. But it was the first time that it accused the Orthodox priests for their involvement in the organization, and their Church for failing to react to that.

Since the early summer of that year, Augustin Popa (*Unirea's* editor-in-chief) had been aware of the “revised Christianity” of Mr. A. C. Cuza and of his “revolutionary” brochure. On behalf of a generic “we,” the Blaj professor expressed his reticence towards the League: “From the very outset, we were appalled by the loud and bellicose Christianity of this group.” In his opinion, violence was utterly un-Christian, and their doctrinarian grounds were also unacceptable, reducing Christianity to anti-Judaism. “Mr. Cuza is not a Christian. He is a sectarian nationalist, or indeed a mere politician.” As to its League, it was but “an anti-Christian sect, or indeed an anti-Semitic political party, no matter how much they challenge the label.” Finally, he complained about the hijacking of Christianity for the purposes of electoral demagoguery: “Mr. Cuza has the dubious merit of having dragged the pure flag of the Gospel through the mud of the political disputes, for entirely un-Christian purposes.” If he wants to make “a fuss about the Semitic issue,” he would be well advised to do it on his own behalf instead of wrapping his bizarre rants in the Christian flag.<sup>23</sup>

By early autumn, the ideological struggle against Cuza's League had unexpectedly received “foreign assistance,” or maybe the domestic reactions had themselves been inspired by the European developments. “In the much-troubled France there is a powerful movement supporting a national-Christian revival: the Action Française. Its heart and soul is Charles Maurras, one of the leading personalities of our time.” Yet, the exultant introduction was followed by a striking “however, Maurras is not a believer!” “His approach to Catholicism is a purely social-moral one.”<sup>24</sup> This introductory text dated 18 September summed up a much longer story. The movement established in France at the end of the previous century had been long supported by the Catholic Church. Presently, in the mid-1920s, things had changed. The development of the movement, the ideas of the new pope (Pius XI, elected in 1922), and the spirit of the times had combined to drive the two radically apart.<sup>25</sup> The statements made by Cardinal

Andrieux in Bordeaux—in response to the questions asked by “a group of young Catholics”—were followed by a papal letter which strongly condemned the “manifestations of a new religious, moral, and social system” in which religion and morals were subordinated to politics, and which expressed grave concerns regarding its potential effects on the youth. “In essence, these manifestations display the features of a revived paganism, combined with naturalism,” concluded the Pope.<sup>26</sup> The anonymous author of the piece published in *Unirea* provided his own pedagogical conclusion: “I have written this letter especially because we are dealing with a case similar to that of the Action Française: the NCDL. . . . The Pope’s words should therefore be a memento for those who have joined the League, and especially for the priests who have joined its ranks.”<sup>27</sup> The warning was clear, but in the aforementioned article of October 1926 (“O confesiune: Criza ortodoxismului românesc”/A confession: The crisis of Romanian Orthodoxy) only the Orthodox priests were rebuked for having joined Cuza’s League. But they owed no allegiance to the Pope!

Before identifying any other category of League supporters, *Unirea* turned to a new dispute involving the Holy See. An article dated 25 September talked about a “conflict between the Vatican and the fascists,” indicating that “a major gymnastics competition involving Catholic youths from all countries,” for which 7,000 participants were scheduled to meet in Rome, had just been canceled. The reason was the “hostile attitude of the fascist militias” towards “all organizations of the Catholic youth.” Sifting through the numerous such instances, the periodical mentioned the events occurred in August of that year in Mantua and Macerata, which had ended in violence and led to the suppression of the Catholic youth association, the only one deemed responsible for what had happened (!). A sense of revolt, despair, and confusion is obvious in the final paragraph of the report: “It is almost impossible to explain such a situation, for as long as Mussolini’s policy determinately seeks to strengthen both religion and the Church. But what happened was not the government’s fault. The fascist organizations, which the government is seemingly unable to control, wish to monopolize all youth organizations.”<sup>28</sup> We also see here the tense relations between the Vatican and two of the great Catholic nations of Europe. The preparations for the signing of documents of reconciliation (concordats) were hampered by such events. The attitude of the Holy See towards these new ideological trends, some calling themselves “national-Christian,” but which universally sought to control the youth, was one of concern and it influenced the making of decisions.<sup>29</sup>

The two topics (the Action Française and the “fascist youth groups”) were once again mentioned by the Pope in his consistorial address of 20 December.<sup>30</sup> On that occasion, he denounced the French movement, in a statement aimed

at the entire Catholic world: “Catholics shall not actively embrace those ideologies that place party interests before religion, and subordinate the latter to the former.”<sup>31</sup>

Echoes of the papal statement eventually reached the Greek Catholic community in Romania, as not only Orthodox priests had embraced the local version of national-Christianism represented at that time by the NCDL. Among its members we also find a significant group of Transylvanian Romanian intellectuals who, in June 1923, had set up in Cluj an organization called the Romanian Action (with direct reference to the original model). Now incorporated into Cuza’s League, which operated at the level of the whole country, the Transylvanian organization also had Greek Catholic members, foremost among them being the priest and professor Titus Mălăiu, who at the time was also a member of the NCDL leadership.<sup>32</sup> He was also the one who responded vehemently to all these statements regarding the national-Christian movements.

The Christmas issue of *Unirea* featured not only pastorals and messages concerning the peaceful and joyous celebration of the birth of Christ, but also a lengthy article by this professor at the Greek Catholic theological Academy of Gherla, bearing the title “Precizări într-o chestiune de importanță” (Clarifications on an important matter).

Titus Mălăiu was no novice when it came to journalistic discourse. Throughout the previous year (1925), as well as in 1926, he had contributed pieces to the publication of the Romanian Action (and then to that of the NCDL), in its successive iterations (*România Întregită*/Reunited Romania, *Înfrățirea Românească*/Romanian brotherhood). As opposed to the style chosen for this publication, the purpose of which was to flatter or persuade the reader to join the promoted cause, the piece he contributed to *Unirea* seems an uncontrolled outburst of anger. We find here an apology of the NCDL, portrayed as a besieged fortress. According to the author, the organization was facing an unjustified “hail of bullets” coming from all directions, from the “unchristian hydra,” from “a certain part of the press,” from the “Hungarian Christian brethren,” and—to his utter disappointment—even from the Greek Catholics. All because he had dared initiate “a radical and unforgiving struggle under the Christian banner.”<sup>33</sup> Only one name was significantly absent from this updated list of the enemies of the national-Christian cause: the Pope himself.

The paragraphs detailing his beliefs are formulated in the same vehement manner: “Philo-Semitism is a blemish upon any Christian,” while “anti-Semitism is an obligation.” “To open fire on the Mosaic-Semitic front is the fundamental and honorable duty of any soldier in the service of the Christian creed.” Equally bellicose metaphors are employed when he lists the “ways to fight the spread of the Mosaic faith,” of which some are deemed to be “exaggerated”

(such as the detection of “racial sins by way of blood” or the elimination of the Old Testament and of all allusions to it from the biblical exegesis). These, alongside things such as statistical works, the ancient Roman ghetto, insults, beatings, and pogroms are listed in order to highlight a contrast. As compared to such practices, the street rallies (challenged by the critics) “can be a practical and appealing way of carrying out anti-Semitic propaganda, especially for the vigorous and expansive Christian youths.”<sup>34</sup> After all, even “the Church has been employing such means in its Christian apostolic work (see, for instance, the Eucharistic congresses and their impressive processions).”<sup>35</sup>

Father Mălăiu’s statements come not only to generally defend the NCDL against the criticism levied against it, even in the pages of *Unirea*, but are also meant to protect him should his own position be seen as coinciding with that condemned by the Pope. This emerges quite clearly in the lines he devotes to the “political program” of the organization in whose executive committee he himself sat. The first clarification in this regard seems a bit strange: “no matter how anti-Semitic the members of the NCDL, the word ‘anti-Semitism’ cannot be found anywhere in their program!” (He had just told readers that anti-Semitism was an honorable duty. . . Were the NCDL members exempt from it?) When he lists the foreign models that inspired the program of the League, he mentions the social-Christian movements in Belgium, Italy, Austria, etc., but not the ones in France. The preferred model seems to be the program of the Viennese social-Christian party which, Mălăiu writes, “was approved by the entire elite of the Roman Catholic Church in Austria.” How could the Romanian elite of a Catholic Church reject a similar program, Mălăiu seems to wonder, also indicating that *Unirea* itself had welcomed the preparations for the establishment of the Romanian Action. Finally, a strong argument in support of the NCDL program raised before the unnamed “jury” of the Greek Catholic Church is that in the program in question “the two Romanian Christian Churches are placed on an equal footing.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, by following a precept of the League one could achieve “brotherly harmony between the national Churches, utterly ruling out inter-denominational conflicts.”<sup>37</sup> (In other words: rather than fight with our Christian brethren, we should join forces in the struggle against the non-Christians, thus achieving the much-desired national harmony. Maybe under the flag of the NCDL!)

The end of the article once again turns into a plea: “We believe that what has been said here so far is quite enough to persuade any reasonable person of the fact that the NCDL is not about frivolous sectarianism or shallow ‘revisionism,’ and that it does not ‘compromise a slogan.’”

Did Mălăiu manage to persuade the jury, and who was actually in that jury? The response coming from the contributor who had previously highlighted the



“problems” associated with Cuza’s League did not diverge from the initial position: the NCDL is neither Christian, nor anti-Christian; it is an anti-Semitic party. It was no more Christian than “other bourgeois parties in the country.” But the latter were willing to “leave Christianity in the hands of the Church, rather than revise it in support of their political agenda.” The allusion to the recent European events relevant for this matter is quite transparent: “at least some League members should consider the case of the Action Française.” For the case of Romania, an interesting solution is proposed, and the decision should be taken as follows: “Now that the readers have seen the clarifications offered by Mr. Mălaiu, they can decide what the Church should do.”<sup>38</sup> We see that Augustin Popa does not turn directly to the local hierarchy in search of a clear and transparent solution, but rather asks the public to mediate in the dispute. Indeed, the public soon reacted. The relations between some representatives of the Greek Catholic Church and some of the political trends (parties) of that time would become the object of polemical exchanges at the beginning of the following year, within a debate fostered by the consistorial speech of the Pope, made on 20 December 1926.

**T**O SUM up, these were the novel and significant elements in the debate involving the Greek Catholic intellectual circles during the autumn and winter of 1926. Individuals like Father Mălaiu (but not only he) were experiencing first-hand the perverse effects of joining some Western trends of that time. We see that the West offered not just ideas likely to inspire or justify one’s own beliefs, but also limitations of the latter and models of behavior deemed inadequate or even unacceptable. The Greek Catholic Church as a whole was called upon to meet these new challenges. □

(Translated by BOGDAN ALDEA)

## Notes

1. *Curierul Creștin* (The Christian courier), published in Gherla, which hosted the Greek Catholic bishopric of northern Transylvania, made a clear distinction between the two categories of texts, which were structured into the “official part” and the “unofficial part.”
2. See the article “Munca apostolică,” *Unirea* (Blaj) 40 (2 October 1926), on the activity of Bishop Iuliu Hossu during the seven years passed since the Union.
3. Petru Herb, “Probleme de pastorație,” *Unirea* 47 (20 November 1926): 2; “Ce ne trebuie,” *Unirea* 47 (20 November 1926): 2 (not the only examples of this kind).
4. Several reports and articles regard the commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi. The most representative one is Giovanni Papini, “Un sfânt catolic: Sf. Francisc din Assisi,” *Unirea* 41 (9 October 1926): 2.

5. In the autumn of 1926, Metropolitan Bishop Vasile Suciuc, who led the Greek Catholic Church between 1920 and 1935, experienced severe complications of his chronic disease, resulting in the amputation of a part of his left leg. The illness kept him away from his residence for a few months, but he returned there on 28 November. “Metropolitan Bishop Vasile Suciuc did not return from the clinics of Cluj. He came back from the borders of eternity,” said the first page article titled “Întru mulți ani stăpâne!” *Unirea* 49 (4 December 1926): 1. See also Lucian Turcu, *Între idealuri și realitate: Arhidiocesa greco-catolică de Alba-Iulia și Făgăraș în timpul păstoririi mitropolitului Vasile Suciuc (1920–1935)* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2017), 306–308. The disease of King Ferdinand I was even more serious and led to his death, in July of the following year. His health was periodically mentioned in *Unirea*, in the form of medical bulletins and accompanying comments.
6. Priest Ioan Borza, “Câteva reflexii,” *Unirea* 44 (30 October 1926): 3.
7. “Școala Ardeleană” (the Transylvanian School), the most important manifestation of the Enlightenment among the Romanians, active in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, generated not only a significant body of historical, philosophical, philological texts or works of fiction, but also some of the seminal ideas of Romanian nationalism. In this regard, see Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Școala Ardeleană și națiunea română din Transilvania în Secolul Luminilor,” and Marta Petreu, “Școala Ardeleană,” *România literară* (Bucharest), 51–52 (2015).
8. For the combination of religion and nationalism in the case of this dispute (between the Uniate and the Orthodox), see also Ioan-Marius Bucur, *Din istoria bisericii greco-catolice române 1918–1953* (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2003), the chapter “Religie și naționalism: Biserica Unită în perioada interbelică,” 29–42; Ciprian Ghișa, “The Greek Catholic Discourse of Identity in the Inter-War Period: The Relation between the Nation and People’s Religious Confession,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia* (Cluj-Napoca) 57, 2 (2012): 54–82.
9. Apud Bucur, 63.
10. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the 5,912,520 inhabitants of the Kingdom of Romania, only 144,000 were Catholic (of the Latin rite). In 1930, in Greater Romania, of the 13,108,227 inhabitants, 1,427,391 were Greek Catholic and 1,234,151 were Roman Catholic. Apud Ciprian Ghișa, “Întărind vechi alterități, ridicând noi frontiere: Concordatul dintre România și Vatican—1929,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Theologia Catholica* 55, 4 (2010): 45–46.
11. The Hungarian census of 1910 indicates that Transylvania’s population was 53.66% Romanian, 31.65% Hungarian, and 10.74% German (according to the mother tongue). By denomination, it was 34.28% Orthodox, 23.72% Greek Catholic, 18.91% Roman Catholic, 13.22% Calvinist, 4.99% Evangelical, 3.5% Mosaic. *Recensământul din 1910 în Transilvania*, eds. Traian Rotaru, Maria Semeniuc, and Elemér Mezei, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Staff, 1999), 8.
12. For the various stages, drafts, authors (Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic), the issues disputed by the Romanian state, the representatives of the Catholic denominations, the Holy See, see Bucur, 49–59, and especially Turcu, 151–230.
13. “Dl general Averescu și Concordatul,” *Unirea* 41 (9 October 1926): 1.

14. “Frica de năluci,” *Unirea* 36 (4 September 1926): 1.
15. The Concordat was signed in Rome on 10 May 1927, a potential factor being the desire of King Ferdinand I to see it completed before his death. It was ratified by the Romanian Parliament only in 1929. See Ghișa, “Întărind vechi alterități,” 43–56; Turcu, 151–230.
16. Goldiș was not just an “Orthodox pope,” but also a politician who had defected from the traditional party of the Transylvanians (the Romanian National Party, led by Iuliu Maniu) in order to join, alongside other leading Transylvanians (most of them Orthodox), the People’s Party led by General Averescu.
17. See Dr. Alexandru Rusu, “Ministerul cultelor a alarmat opinia publică a țării,” *Unirea* 49 (4 December 1929): 2.
18. During the dispute in question, some clergymen were surprised to be dubbed “Hungarians” by the Bucharest press, years after the unification of the country. See “Discursul Prea Sfinției Sale Iuliu rostit în ședința Senatului dela 18 Decembrie 1926,” *Curierul Creștin* 3–4 (1927): 23–31.
19. “O rugămintе,” *Unirea* 45 (6 November 1926): 2. Allusions or reports about disputes between the two Churches over assets or believers do occur, but relatively seldom. See, for instance, Ioan Turdeanu, “Din eparhia Orăzii,” *Unirea* 51 (18 December 1926), a report on the “proselytizing actions carried out by the Orthodox against our Church in Arad County.”
20. One such hint can be found in the text entitled “Munca apostolică,” *Unirea* 40 (1926): 1 (“many Romanian public officials, lured by the mirage of Orthodoxy, instead of doing their jobs, lent a hand to the subversive propaganda”), in which we read about the situation in Maramureș.
21. The example of the city of Cluj is quite relevant in this respect. In 1910 it was home to 2,318 Orthodox and 9,136 Greek Catholics (*Recensământul din 1910*, 241). In 1930, we have 13,745 Orthodox and 23,290 Greek Catholics: *Recensământul din 1930: Transilvania*, eds. Traian Rotaru, Maria Semeniuc, and Elemér Mezei (Cluj-Napoca: PUC, 2011), 251. For the region as a whole, the percentages for the year 1930 were largely similar to those of 1910: 34.8% Orthodox and 25% Greek Catholics, indicating that the balance had not shifted in the meantime (*ibid.*, 12).
22. “O confesiune: Criza ortodoxismului românesc,” *Unirea* 42 (16 October 1926): 2–3. The brochure alluded to in the quote had been published in 1925 under the title *Învățătura lui Isus, judaismul și teologia creștină*.
23. Augustin Popa, “O sectă nouă,” *Unirea* 23 (5 June 1926): 1.
24. “Papa și Maurranismul,” *Unirea* 38 (18 September 1926): 3.
25. For the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Action Française, see Jacques Prévotat, *L’Action française* (Paris: PUF, 2004), 25–28, 58–67.
26. “Papa și Maurranismul,” 3.
27. *Ibid.*, 4.
28. “Conflict între Vatican și fasciști,” *Unirea* 39 (25 September 1926): 3.
29. For the complicated relationship between Pius XI and Mussolini see, more recently, David J. Ketzler, *Il patto col diavolo: Mussolini e papa Pio XI. Le relazioni segrete fra il Vaticano e l’Italia fascista*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Milan: Rizzoli, 2015).

30. "Alocuțiunea consistorială a Sf. Părinte," *Unirea* 1 (1927): 2.
31. Apud Ernst Nolte, *Fascismul în epoca sa: Action française, Fascismul italian, Național-socialismul*, trans. (Bucharest: Vivaldi, 2009), 221. Or, as *Unirea* put it, "the Catholics shall not join a program or a pseudo-school that places politics above religion and makes the latter serve the former": "Un cuvânt al Papei," *Unirea* 3 (15 January 1927): 2.
32. See Maria Ghitta, "A Priest in the 'Romanian Action': Dr. Titus Mălăiu," *Transylvanian Review* 24, 3 (Autumn 2015): 26–39.
33. Titus Mălăiu, "Precizări într-o chestie de importanță," *Unirea* 52 (25 December 1926): 6.
34. Ibid.
35. The person providing the response feels compelled to indicate that a comparison between the street rallies of Cuza's supporters and the Eucharistic congresses "is so farfetched that I shall not even qualify it in any way, so as not to betray the spirit of Christmas!" Augustin Popa, "Partid antisemit," *Unirea* 52 (1926): 8.
36. His statements are corroborated by chapter VI, "Problemele bisericești." See "Programul Ligei Apărării Național Creștine," *Înfrățirea Românească* 1, 11 (1 October 1925): 7.
37. Mălăiu, 8.
38. Popa, "Partid antisemit," 8.

## Abstract

Transylvanian Echoes of a European Phenomenon:  
The Vatican and the National-Christian Movements in the Mid-1920s

The article examines the manner in which the public agenda of the Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania came to include an issue of European interest: the difficult relationship between the Holy See and certain political trends, during the mid-1920s. The disavowal by Pius XI of the Action Française and his condemnation of the actions taken by the fascist militias against the Catholic youth, both occurred in the second half of 1926, also had an impact upon the Greek Catholic circles in Romania. A number of priests belonging to this denomination had joined the local manifestation of the national-Christian trend (the National Christian Defense League), and the question was whether the papal ban on Catholics joining the movements that placed religion in the service of their own political interests was also relevant for the Romanian space.

## Keywords

Greek Catholic Church in Romania, Pope Pius XI, Action Française, Liga Apărării Național-Creștine (National Christian Defense League), Titus Mălăiu