

CHURCH AND SOCIETY. THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS JOURNALS IN THE DIFUSION OF THE BIBLICAL ELEMENT WITHIN THE HISTORICAL BANAT AREA. 1867-1918



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ABSTRACT

The church press published important documents regarding the religious life of Romanians from Transylvania and Banat. This publication also included details regarding the religious life of the school from Banat. The *Biserica și Școala* magazine was published in the western historical Banat, in Arad. This was possible due to the fact that Timisoara, the most important city in Banat, had a Romanian Orthodox Deanery that was dependent on the Diocese of Arad, before the establishment of the Diocese of Timisoara in 1939. The Caransebes Diocese' magazine *Foaia Diecezană (The Diocesan Sheet)* provided the clergy and the faithful with information on Christian spirituality. Along the aforementioned magazines, there were a few newspapers which have enriched this field's literature. Based on those covered by the study, we find that the media made an overwhelming contribution to the dissemination of the biblical information during that particular period of time.

Keywords: Banat, Timisoara, Bible, New Testament, *Biserica si Scoala, Foaia Diecezana*.

INTRODUCTION

The historical Banat is a province that extends between the Danube, Mureș, Tisa and the Carpathian Mountains (Munteanu, 2006, p. 46). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the territory of the historical Banat spanned across 28.526 km². After the Second World War, the 28.526 km² were divided as follows (Ciurușchin, 2010, p. 141): 18.966 km² - to Romania, 9.276 km² - to Yugoslavia and a north-western corner, situated at the junction of Mureș with Tisa, became part of Hungary (meaning 284 km²). The Banat region was a bridge of contact between the Central and South-Eastern Europe and it developed, along the centuries, its own particularity with distinct ethical, cultural, and spiritual characteristics.

In terms of the population from the historical Banat, at the beginning of the 20th century, the census in 1919 showed a number of 1.366.218 inhabitants (Munteanu, 2006, p. 283). Out of 16 nationalities, the Romanians were a majority - 41,7%, followed by the Germans with 22,5%, the Serbians with 17%, and the Hungarians with

13,3% (Munteanu, 2006, p. 389). The Romanians and the Serbians were Christians, predominating in percentage, and a significant number of Romanised Germans and Hungarians, with a lower percentage, were recorded in the protestant, Greek-Catholic or mosaic confessions (Scridon, 2010, pp. 98-113).

Starting with the mid-16th century and up to the beginning of the 18th century the historical Banat was under Turkish rule. This way it was established the *Pashalik* of Timișoara. During the Austro-Turkish War, between 1716 and 1718, the region of Banat was under Austrian rule, but at the same time recognized as an imperial province by the Peace Treaty of Passarowitz (1718).

The historical Banat was integrated into the Habsburg Empire and it owned a particular position in the area situated at the European periphery (the newly acquired part to the continent) in conjunction with the classical Europe. This region was between the Eastern-Balkan and the Western-Central European area, gravitating towards the Southern area, in the continuous oscillation between Northern and Southern part of Europe (Bocșan, 1986, p. 7).

On the 18th of April 1768 the Habsburg Monarchy strengthened the eastern border of Banat by establishing a military border in this area. This included the territories between Orșova and Caransebeș, with the headquarters in Mehadia. In 1775 to the military border were added new territories such as Țara Almăjului and the area of Clisura Dunării, up to the lower course of Nera river (Bocșan, 1986, p. 102). The military border included 1/4 of the Romanian Banat territory and 1/5 of its population.

In the same century the Habsburg Monarchy, in striving to consolidate the Austrian rule and efficiently explore the natural resources, colonized the inhabitants from the southern Germany and Austria. Referring to this aspect, the famous Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga wrote: "in 1718 the imperialists have widened the borders of their possessions in this Orient where they were claiming the entire heritage of the royal Hungary, wanting to turn mere demands into an effective domination. Eugeniu de Savoia gave them the domination over Banat of Timișoara, which he had exemplarily organized, by colonizing it with occidental elements, French and Spanish people together with Serbian immigrants, some from an earlier age, and Romanian people..." (Iorga, 1985, p. 22).

The settlers had significantly contributed to the economic development of the area, but the local population has always been confronted with numerous difficulties related to the politics of excessive centralisation. This new historical context will lead to promotion and development of national emancipation movement.

Later on, at the end of the 18th century, the Banat region was incorporated into the Habsburg Kingdom of Hungary (1778 -1780). It happened at the insistence of the Hungarian nobility to the Imperial Court, which amounted claims on this territory. The consequence was the reorganization of Banat. Its former territory was divided into three counties: Timiș, Torontal, and Caraș. The three counties were subordinated to the Hungarian Council, and through it, to the Hungarian government of Pest. From the annexation to Hungary, in Banat will apply only the legislation approved by the Hungarian political council, where the three counties send their representatives. The Banat Military Border was an administrative and military structure created with the purpose of defending against Ottoman threat

(Feneşan, 1997, p. 36) - the southern, the south-eastern and the south-western part of Banat, remained further under the administration of the Empire. The Military Border was headed by the General Military Command of Banat, based in Timișoara and subordinated directly to the Aulic Council of Vienna (Feneşan, 1997, p. 36). From a religious aspect, following the appearance of Greek Catholicism in Transylvania, therefore from 1698 to 1864, the Orthodox Romanians in the Banat were directed by Serbian hierarchs. After the re-establishment of the Metropolitan church of Ardeal, in 1864, with two suffragan dioceses in Arad and Caransebeș, Andrei Șaguna convened in Sibiu *The Romanian Orthodox National Church Congress* of the whole metropolitan church, in the fall of 1868. During this congress has been approved the *Organic Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania*, ratified by the authorities in May 1869. This is the historic act after which the Transylvanian Church was led, until 1925 (Păcurariu, 2000, pp. 365-366).

Between 1867 and 1918 it was a difficult period for the Romanian clergy (bishops and priests) due to organizational efforts of the metropolitan church in Sibiu, and the two bishoprics of Arad and Caransebeș, which were barely at their beginning. Moreover, the hierarchical separation and the heritage issue caused tensions between the two ethnic groups that lived peacefully in the historical Banat. However, there were many cases when due to a better "financial" delimitation the representatives of the two Churches had appealed for justice. Certainly, the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century are distinguished through a sustained effort in building churches. From this point on, all the church services were held in Romanian language only. All these aspects, divided in parishes, were very well depicted by the scholars from Timișoara, such as: Nicolae Ilieșiu (Ilieșiu, 1943) and Virgil Popovici (Popovici, 1933). They produced two major papers devoted to the historical past of Timișoara, with rich unique content, through which they proved the amplitude of the spiritual and cultural life in the municipality.

In the aforementioned ethnic and confessional context, the biblical message could be disseminated by the official press of the two Orthodox Christian Churches in Banat from Caransebeș and Arad. I mentioned the town of Arad, which is structural in Transylvania, whereas half of the historical Banat was under canon bishopric of Arad. The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Arad had the *Biserica si Scoala* magazine and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Caransebeș owned *Foaia Diecezana* magazine.

a) The Diocesan Sheet (*Foaia Diecezana*)

Foaia Diecezana has been printed for the first time in January 5/17 1886, being the work of the bishop Ioan Popasu. It was registered among the Romanian gazettes of Banat with the longest existence and it played a leading role in the dissemination of articles, studies, calls and news of interest for Romanian people's cultural progress (*Foaia Diecezană*, 1900-1918). It was issued once a week (on Sunday) and it had a format on two columns and eight pages.

Numerous articles were devoted to the scientific theological study, therefore biblical, but also kept a significant space for the history and Romanian language and literature issues.

The analysed biblical studies were signed by a number of priests and theologians from Banat (Scridon, 2014, pp. 702-712). Among the priests that contributed to this paper are: Aureliu Iana from Brădişorul de Jos (Iana, 1898, pp. 3-5; 1910, pp. 2-3); B. Biro from Herendeşti (Biro, 1898, pp. 1-2; 1901, pp. 1-3); Petru Barbu (Barbu, 1901, pp. 2-4); Didon Chircescu-Nazarie (Didon, 1901, p. 4) etc. Several of the biblical studies included in the magazine from Caransebeş were published during the fasting period, especially before the Resurrection of Jesus Christ Celebration (Easter). Dramatic events that occurred in the last week before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ were commemorated by the special church services within the Orthodox worship (vigils), but also through these studies that reminded the reader of the suffering of Jesus.

After the Easter celebration, which is in the center of Orthodox Christian spirituality, the period before the Nativity was marked by the presence of an increasing number of Bible studies.

The studies show a preoccupation of the Clergy from Banat to deepen the information contained in the Holy Scriptures. The dissemination of the New Testament information through *Foaia Diecezană* had a *pastoral impact* among the faithful from the area where has been published the aforementioned paper.

b) The Church and The School (*Biserica si Scoala*)

By 1865 the Bishopric Church of Arad depended canonically by Metropolitan Church of Carlovit and the bishops from Arad, such as Precopie Ivaşcovici, urged the pastored clergy to study the church press from Braşov and Sibiu. Therefore, the Banat clerical press situation changed radically with the reinstatement of Metropolitan Church of Sibiu through the Holly Baron Andrei de Şaguna.

Among other church newspapers published under the blessing of the Bishop of Arad, *Biserica si Scoala* was the most read magazine by the priests and faithful in the jurisdictional territory studied by us: the historical Banat (Vesa, 2006, pp. 356-364).

The first number, of the aforementioned paper, was issued in January the 30th/February the 11th 1877, and it was also called „*church, scholastic, literary, and economic sheet*”. Its main objective was, as the title says, the church and scholarly issues. Vicenţiu Mangra was the responsible editor, which in our opinion, inserted across the sheet he was leading, the most elevated studies of the entire New-Testament around the Banat church's press.

At the beginning, the magazine has been printed in the typography from Arad, owned by Ştefan Gyulai. Then, on January 1st, 1879 the publication is printed at the Diocesan Typography of Arad, and from 1883 the magazine's text was edited with the new orthography proposed by the Romanian Academy in Bucharest.

Biserica si Scoala has been also coordinated by Augustin Hamsea (the 1st of January 1879 up to 31st of January 1882; 1884-1899); Roman Ciorogaru (1900-1917) and Teodor Botiş (1917-1921) (Vesa, 2006, pp. 356-364). This publication piece could not fulfill its proposed mission without the support of its contributors. Many of them were true church and cultural landmarks of those ages, such as: Vicenţiu Babeş, Silvestriu Morariu, Simion Mehedintî, Teodor Ceontea, Constantin Gurban, Ioan Damsaet and so on.

In its pages can be found various church and laic studies, as well as items related to ecclesiastical history, systematic and practical theology, bibliographies of church personalities, and so on. Our scientific approach attests that the New Testament biblical research, that has been found in the pages of the magazine, was not obstructed. However, we must not forget that the articles published, in general, has been addressed to the priests and teachers. *Biserica si Scoala* published, in each of its issues, vacancy lists for priests and teachers. It was certainly a magazine that had a theological and cultural enrichment for both the priest and the confessional educator.

In early 1916, *Biserica si Scoala* had 314 subscribers within the 18 deaneries that were canonically dependent to the Diocese of Arad. In the 18 deaneries, there were 588 parishes and 600 schools (Vesa, 2006, p. 362). Within the historical Banat were functioning deaneries from Becicherecul Mare, Cenad, Cichindia, Hașiașul, Lipova (Vesa, 2006, pp. 197-198), Timișoara, and Vinga (Vesa, 2006, pp. 200, 562).

CONCLUSION

Following the analysis of biblical studies for the discussed period (1867-1918), we estimate that the articles published in the magazine of Arad were superior to those of Caransebes. The upper level touched by language and information has been raised due to a group of young people, well prepared, which later were elected at the head of the Church's hierarchy as bishops. We could mention here the theologian-scientist Vasile Mangra, which at that time was the editor in charge at *Biserica si Scoala*. Besides the studies carried by Vasile Mangra (Mangra, 1878, Nr. 2, pp. 1-2; 1878, Nr. 14, pp. 107-108), have contributed Silevstru Morariu (Andrievici, 1883, pp. 131-132) – Metropolitan bishop of Bucovina and Roman Ciorogariu (Ciorogariu, 1911, pp. 1-2) – future bishop of Oradea, etc.

Therefore, the historical Banat' church magazines had been noticed by the elevated studies inserted in its pages. They were much read not only of priests but also by numerous faithful, who have valued the activity of the Church on the publicist land as well.

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