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LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF THE PASTORAL SERVICE OF ORTHODOX MISSIONARIES IN TRANSNISTRIA (1941-1944)

-Abstract-

The article deals with the pastoral activity of the Orthodox missionaries, who served the Romanian Orthodox Mission in Transnistria, during the Second World War.

Keywords: Orthodox clergy, Transnistria, missionary work, Romanian Orthodox Mission.

LUMINI ȘI UMBRE ÎN ACTIVITATEA PASTORALĂ A MISIONARILOR ORTODOCȘI ÎN TRANSNISTRIA (1941-1944)

-Rezumat-

Articolul se referă a activitatea pastorală a misionarilor ortodocși, care au lucrat în legătură cu Misiunea Ortodoxă Română în Transnistria în anii celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial.

Cuvinte cheie: cler ortodox, Transnistria, activitate misionară, Misiunea Ortodoxă Română

We have repeatedly given scientific attention to the features of the Romanian Orthodox Mission (hereinafter – the Mission) which operated during the Second World War in the territory between the Dniester and Southern Bug

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(“Transnistria”)¹. Activation of church and state processes in independent Ukraine, historiographic gaps and historical ignorance of the contemporaries identified another problem of our historical novel – to show processes of “re-Christianization” of the occupied territories, through the “preparation” of everyday life of the missionaries as newcomers from Romania, and local religious collaborators, to show their pastoral activity and behaviour, sometimes controversial positioning regarding religious people, etc.

Religion policy and its implementation was in complete dependence on views on the missionary nature of Christianization of the leaders of the Mission – Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban, Metropolitan Visarion Puiu, Archimandrite Antim Nica, and several other predominantly objective circumstances that were caused by military actions and time. However, there were some improvements for two and a half years in the church and religious revival of Christianity (so-called “re-Christianization”) in that region. Population and missionaries rebuilt dozens of Orthodox churches and houses of worship, revived the tradition of Christian baptism, wedding, etc., which were not kept to for generations because of godless policies of the Bolsheviks in the 20-30’s pre-war years. Christian morality, education of children and youth received a new push, though they were carried out by Romanization methods and had propaganda focus. This is confirmed by dozens of stories of respondents – villagers of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Odessa Regions, who were in this area during the occupation. Memories of the interviewees, direct witnesses of the events, help to approach to the reconstruction of past events. The story by M.M. Matviychuk shows historical comparison of Soviet policy and Romanian missionaries’ policy, public reflection on the religious policy of Romanians: “The Church of St. Pokrova” (Pokrovska) in the village Hnylyakove (now – Dachnoe Village near Odessa) has existed for 254 years. The church was dilapidated after the October Revolution. All that was in the church was destroyed, and the house was turned into a club, then into a warehouse, in 1936, the church bell was thrown off... In 1942, when there were Romanians, the church was restored by local craftsmen. All men worked on rebuilding the church. Local artists have restored the iconostasis, painted icons... In 1942 the church was open. Worship took place in it, a local priest Mykhayil served in the temple. Romanians and villagers were preparing for religious holidays (were cleaning the yard,

¹ Михайлуца М.І. Організація релігійного життя в губернаторстві Транснїстрія (1941-1944 рр.) // Український історичний журнал. – 2011. – №2 (497). – С. 80-90; idem. Румунська окупація і релігійна політика в «Транснїстрії» (1941-1942 рр.) // Історія релігій в Україні: науковий щорічник / упоряд. О.Киричук, М.Омельчук, І.Орлевич. – Львів: Інститут релігієзнавства – філія Львівського музею історії релігії; вид-во «Логос», 2012. – С. 609-616 etc.

washing houses)... Church helped poor people and orphans with bread. Romanians' relation to learning was very strict. All children, who were overgrown, and those who had school age sat at desks, learned to read and write. The lesson began with "Our Father" in Romanian...². Baptism of the population in the occupied territories by Romanian missionaries is described in the story by O.V. Panchenko, who, along with the statement that "the perception of the revival of the Orthodox faith among the population was different, and often hostile", yet admits that during the war, the church of Alexander Nevsky, which operates to this day, was rebuilt in their village, and "the priest that came with troops from Romania brought little children and baptized them in the early days"³.

Fundraisers, which were conducted by the Romanian and local clergy, their charity among the population as a "distribution of charity to the church and from mourning to the poor and orphans"⁴, certainly gave people hope to survive in appalling conditions of war.

Against the re-Christianization according to the Romanian sample, the problem of priestly training, their pastoral service, human, moral and Christian qualities is separated. The desire to return to church service (of priest or deacon) is fully justified not only in theological terms. Obviously, in terms of hardship and poverty, hundreds of clerics tried to survive by revival in holy order that would give hope for a better life. Archimandrite Antim Nica noted in 1942 for a reason that most of the 285 clergy registered in "Transnistria"... were found and selected with great care here...⁵(Romanian), i.e. they were local. The underclass clergy wanted to return to pastoral work: village priests and cantors. The former cantor of Mostovsky District, G. Kovalenko, asked Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban for assigning for the "new place of feeding" in a letter dated September 9, 1942⁶. We can see not only religious, but also economic reasons in the request sent to Odessa on May 25, 1943 by the former gubernial secretary and cantor, Ivan Yarovuy. "Now I am a parish school teacher with no means of support, wrote a 68-year-old man, I ask you to give me a place of cantor in Katerynivka Village of Holtsky

² Interview of M.M. Matviychuck (born in 1927, dwelling in the village Dachne of Bilyayivskiy district in Odessa region) was recorded on March, 17th, 2006 and is kept in the author's personal archives.

³ Interview of O.V. Panchenko (born in 1921, dwelling in the village Yasky of Bilyayivskiy district in Odessa region) was recorded on April, 7th, 2006 and is kept in the author's personal archives.

⁴ Interview of V.M. Romanyuk (born in 1923, dwelling in the town of Bilyayivka in Odessa region) was recorded on April, 12th, 2006 and is kept in the author's personal archives.

⁵ Transnistria Creștină [Revista Misiunii Ortodoxe Române în Transnistria.– (București)]. – An. I (1942). – № 1 (ianuarie–martie). – P.30.

⁶ State Archive of Mykolaiv Region (SAMR). – F. 2704. – Reg. 1. – Act 4. – P. 17.

County”⁷. The desire to “serve the Church and God” in any parish of the county was expressed in the letter to Metropolitan Visarion by the former cantor and mechanic and driver as in Soviet times, Bayda Anatoliiy⁸. Judging by the resolutions of the chief of the Mission, Metropolitan Visarion, the same day the fate of these people was solved positively. In January 1943 among 461 participating mission priests – 196 were local, and only 16 from 253 cantors came from Romania⁹.

The heads of the Mission regularly monitored the moral character of subordinate priests. Any clergyman, missionary or local should meet the requirements that have been outlined by Romanian hierarchs: “Serving for a Romanian church, which was among the first to contribute to the promotion of religious salvation of local people will support not only local Orthodox, but also the whole East”¹⁰.

Indecent behaviour of clergy was punished and criticized by the heads of the Mission. The latter opposed to the views of religious communities, recommendations of the diocesan archpriests, characteristics of prefectural officials and primaries in the hinterland of the province. Romanian priests assigned to “Transnistria”, who apparently considered themselves beyond the control of any religious bodies due to difficult war conditions, often “were famous for” unworthy behaviour. These would-be missionaries behaved impudently, rude and irresponsible which generated conflicts in their relations with the local population. Here is a demonstration document – memorandum of pretor of Kryve Ozero District sent to the prefecture of Holtsky County No.195 dated February 3, 1942¹¹. The official informs the prefect of the county of systematic complaints of the rural population about the Romanian priest-missionary, Fr. Petru Șchiopu. It turns out that the “pastor” without any authority committed a crime against the community, having taken an oven, pot and other kitchen tools from the villagers of Romanivka. In addition, the complaints of the primary of Kryve Ozero and other villagers and the report of the “Agrokultura” community elder, I. Chaschuka, on behalf of its members, told about the concern that “the priest does not respect the holy temple of God turning the house of God into a barn for chickens, which are brought to him as

⁷ State Archive of Mykolaiv Region (SAMR). – F. 2270. – Reg. 1. – Act 4. – P. 56-57.

⁸ Idem – P. 55-55.

⁹ Solovei R. Activitatea Guvernamentului Transnistriei on domeniul social-economic și cultural: 19 auğ. 1941-29 ian. 1944 / R.Solovei.– Iași, 2004.–P. 119.

¹⁰ Petcu A. N. 1942-1943: Activitatea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în Transnistria // Studii și materiale de istorie contemporană / [Inst. de istorie “Nicolae Iorga”; Serie nouă]. – Vol. 1. – 2002. – P. 303.

¹¹ SAMR. – F. 2704. – Reg. 1. – Act 1. – P. 31.

a gift by religious people”¹² (Ukrainian). Moreover, the Romanian missionary committed a quarrel with the church deacon in front of the religious people, not dividing with him cakes (prospora) collected in Mazurovka Village, which caused people both laugh and shame for these missionaries.

Pretor asked to react to misbehaviour because “it follows from all this that such spiritual activities of the Holy Father is contrary to the rules of moral and Christian perceptions and the great purpose for which he was sent here”¹³.

There are many cases of clergy misconduct, which caused concern in higher bishops. Those priests, who violated the rules of the pastoral life, Christian ethics and morals, and did not meet the requirements of missionary work, were deprived of the right to engage in religious work. In 1943 the Chief of Mission, Visarion, selected its central (cathedral), city (22 Odessa churches) and external personnel, and having found non-compliance with missionary purposes, sent several priests back to Romania¹⁴.

Considering the daily life of a simple village parish priest, we note that pastoral work was very hard and stressful because of the sacrificial offering of it for the benefit of the Church and the religious people. First, fulfilling his obligations, any priest began his work aimed at cooperation with the church committee, search of material and financial resources for the restoration of the Church or the chapel. At the same time, he was bound to implement guidelines and directives of higher church authorities: office of the Mission, vicariate and secretariat of the Metropolitan. Conduct of daily morning and evening worship in the temple needed much effort for preparation and deliverance of sermons and appeals to the parishioners. “Each service, – the magazine “Transnistria creștină” emphasized, – was decorated with a sermon. Due to the variety of services the priests advise and teach people seeking ways to direct them to the path of Christian life. The priests use every occasion to show the greatness of faith compared to disbelief”¹⁵. Analyzing monthly memoranda of priests, correspondence, etc., we can see almost monthly the work performed by the priests in their parishes. For example, a priest of Domanyovka, Archpriest I. Sulkovsky in July 1943 held 6 instructive gospel topics, religious conversations, reading of akathist, etc., and in August – 7 sermons, hymns with the choir, conversations and appeals to flock on different church topics: about John the Precursor, Alexander Nevsky and other saints of the Orthodox Church¹⁶.

¹² *Ibidem* – P. 34-34.

¹³ *Ibidem* – P. 31.

¹⁴ Petcu A. N. 1942-1943: Activitatea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române... P. 293.

¹⁵ Transnistria Creștină – 1942. – № 1. – P. 52.

¹⁶ SAMR – F. 2704. – Reg. 1. – Act 10. – P. 2,4

Baptism of hundreds of children, wedding of many married couples, holding memorial services at the graves, in which thousands of dead and tortured Orthodox were buried without Christian prayers at the time of Stalin's repressions – it was daily practice. Such services took place at the end of 1941 at the graves and cemeteries in almost every settlement. Where there were no priests, Christian rites were performed by assigned missionaries with representatives of local religious communities. In the spring of 1942, Orthodox Mission decided to introduce metric data recording (registration) of births, marriages and deaths in all the parishes of "Transnistria"¹⁷. Other duties of priests were complemented with monthly reports to the higher church authorities on a number of baptisms, weddings, funerals etc. The scale of ongoing daily hard work of pastors is observed in dozens of similar documents. An illustrative report was made by Fr. Georgiy Bazylevsky, who baptized 26 people, married two couples and conducted 6 burial rites in Akmechetsky parish in August 1942, and in September – baptized 17 people and married 4 couples. Overall, in six months he held 277 baptisms and 20 weddings¹⁸. Implemented measures had financial background, because the priests received remuneration in cash or products for the performed actions. Part of the benefit was given to the Mission, Red Cross, and the rest – for keeping the family of the priest. Sometimes villagers were hostile to priests, because "those collecting taxes" from them, different food, always walked with the gendarmerie"¹⁹.

Daily pastoral duties of parish priests were complemented with conducting inspections of each rural parish in terms of number of residents to determine their religion, number of clergy, ethnic nationality, married and baptized, etc. This kind of circular No.4661 was sent by the first vicar of the mission, Antim Nica in August 1942 to all the archpriests of the province without exception²⁰. By this document the priests were invited immediately to start accounting each Slavic parish, in which there were up to one thousand families and each Moldavian or mixed parish, which amounted to about 500 families. In addition, it was required to make the tables specifying information about the national composition of the parish (Russian, Romanian, mixed), surname and name of the priest, cantor (deacon) and number of the order of his appointment by September 1. It was also required to send to the Mission the table for each district, indicating the available parishes and their ethnic composition. It is symptomatic that Romanian religious officials didn't

¹⁷ Одесса. – 1942. – 12 мая.

¹⁸ SAMR – F. 2704. – Reg. 1. – Act 4. – P. 18, 20, 25.

¹⁹ From the memories of M.K. Podolak (living with. Krasnohirka, Trostyanetskogo region of Vinnytsia region.) which are stored in the author's own archive.

²⁰ SAMR. – F. 2704. – Reg. 1. – Act. 3. – P. 41.

even predict the point of Ukrainian population, which, with few exceptions, numerically dominated in most parts of the governorate.

Collection of such information by priests was quite difficult, particularly given the complete absence of vehicles in districts and counties, as already mentioned. However, due to the parish priests, who served with great responsibility, we can find very detailed materials on Lyubashivka, Kryve Ozero and Domanivka regions in archives²¹.

On the eve of holidays (Lent, Christmas, Paschal, etc.) pastors had to observe the behaviour strictly, and during Lent to serve around the clock, performing their duties in full²². And before the Easter holidays in 1943 Metropolitan Visarion gave an order that clearly defined the behaviour of priests during the holidays²³. All priests were to wear appropriate clothing: robe, coat, etc. It was strictly forbidden for clergy to wear secular attire. It was forbidden to visit theatres, cinemas, restaurants and any recreational facilities during Lent. The identified violators of this order and those who deviated from the observance of canonical rules were strictly punished after the holidays.

Thus, the pastoral service of the Orthodox clergy in “Transnistria” was defined not only by canonical prescriptions of the Church, but also subordinated to the politics of Romanian occupation administration, Romanian Patriarchy and was regulated by instructive letters and circulars of bishops. Specific is the use of local Orthodox clergy in the processes of Romanization of the occupied population through its Christianization according to Romanian model. Missionary clergy and newcomers and local people as a distinct category of occupied society, lined up their own “survival strategy” – not only to serve the Church and congregation, but also to the authority. At the same time, due to hundreds of religious people and the priests, the population of the occupied lands turned to the Orthodox Christian traditions.

²¹ SAMR. – F. 2704. – Reg. 1. – Act 12, 16.

²² Одесса. – 1942. – 24 марта.

²³ Прибугські вісті. – 1942. – 2 квітня.