

Tense Relationships between Justin, the Patriarch, and the Department of Cults

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Abstract

After Patriarch Justinian's death in 1977, The Metropolitan of Moldavia, His Eminence Justin was elected as Patriarch. The Romanian Orthodox Church's position towards the communist state did not change. Patriarch Justin tried to maintain his predecessor's policy. On one hand, the state wanted to put pressure upon the Church in order to be sure that the Orthodox people were obedient and they didn't try to fight against the regime. On the other hand, the Church was interested in finding a way to stop state's interference in the religious life.

The Cults in Romania were officially under the surveillance of the Department of Cults. Meanwhile, the Secret Service (Securitatea) was very interested in observing the activity of priests and hierarchs. A top secret report from 1980 revealed that there were some misunderstandings between Patriarch Justin and the Department of Cults. The Department tried to change the Metropolitan of Transylvania, Nicolae Mladin because they realized he was very ill and he could not administrate his diocese any more. The Patriarch disagreed with this measure and suggested that the metropolitan should have an assistant bishop in order to help him.

The Patriarch was also against the Department of Cults initiative to reduce the number of theologians from the theological schools and he refused to take into consideration such a measure.

Key words: Romanian Orthodox Church, Department of Cults, Patriarch Justin, Nicolae Mladin, Ion Roşianu.

The death of Patriarch Justinian- in March 1977- was the end of a long period of dramatic fights and obsolescence between the Church and the communist authorities. His Beatitude tried his best to encumber certain measures taken by the State against the clergy and its believers (as, for instance, Decree 410/1959; he made all attempts to impede it). The attributions of His successor to the throne of the First Hierarchy of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church were very delicate and difficult as reported to the then given conditions. Beginning with 1977, Justin Moisescu, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, was chosen to lead the destinies of the Romanian Orthodoxy. His personal relationship with the leaders of those times proved to be even more difficult to be established than that of his predecessor. Appointed in the above mentioned position at the age of 67, the ex-professor was to be confronted with an even harsher internal and external reality.

That situation was predictable since July 1971, a moment that anticipated the blowing-up of the so-called “mini cultural revolution” - that is Romania’s closer approach to the Chinese and Northern-Korean pattern, an approach carrying on the specific rigorous consequences in as far as the cult of personality was concerned, reaching mythological accents in the 1980s. Actually, as Academician Florin Constantiniu noticed, “the mini cultural revolution ideologically influenced all the important spheres of the social life offering the party nomenclature an even greater power: from the secretary of the lowest party organization to the counties first secretaries supervised and led by the Political Executive Committee it was created a sound hierarchy reminding of the feudal-vassal-like structures; the difference was that the personal fidelity that linked the sovereign to his vassal was replaced by careerism and opportunism” (Constantiniu, 2008: 507).

Year 1977 faced Romania’s life with many events and changes to the worse: the devastating earthquake of March 4 and the Valea Jiului miners’ strike of August (a strike appeared at the request of

Nicolae Ceaușescu) - in the interior - and the installation of the White House Administration and the evaluation of the forms of government according to the way man's rights were observed or not started to weigh heavily on the shoulders of the Romanian communism, in the exterior. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment stipulated that the clause of the most favoured nation would be granted to those countries which allowed their citizens to emigrate; yet, many difficulties were created by the political regimes of those countries that hindered the emigration of those who wanted to leave their own countries.

This was the context in which Justin Moisescu became a patriarch. The years that followed have confronted the Romanians with even more absurd decisions taken by the "state and party leadership": entire districts and many churches were demolished, as well as strict restrictions were imposed in food and utilities departments. The relations between the leader and the people were getting worse and worse every day.

The religious aspect was, undoubtedly, included in this general atmosphere. When Ion Roșianu was appointed in 1977 the President of the Cults Departments, this appointment was to greatly influence the State-Church relationship. He was considered to be close to Patriarch Justin, who was in good relations with Mihail Roșianu, his father, since both of them lived in Vâlcea.

It is possible that out of his desire to manifest his personality and to impose his opinions, Roșianu's unfriendly attitude against Justin, the Patriarch, was so evidently proven. Consequently, a State Security Department informative note of July 3, 1980 mentioned that data have been gathered showing that between the leadership of the Cults Department and His Beatitude there existed misunderstandings leading to a negative influence connected with the negative solutions obtained at both the internal and the external level; one of those misunderstandings referred to the one-year-longer-period delay in electing and appointing a bishop for the Paris Orthodox Diocese, a reason that could have enabled Vasile Boldeanu to exercise his mission freely and unhindered (Note, 1973-1988, f. 131).

Another important aggressive act of the regime was that of dismissing Nicolae Mladin, the Metropolitan of Transylvania, from his leading position, under the pretext of an illness. The informative note of the Security mentioned that Patriarch Justin announced the Cults Department that he would not replace the hierarchy; consequently, he suggested the solution by which a vicar bishop should be elected as to solve the current problems of the eparchy (Note, 1973-1988, f. 131).

However hidden in the document, it was a fact that a decision taken against the Metropolitan from the part of His Beatitude might have appeared non-canonical and that the political interference could have become evident. The panic of the authorities derived from the echoes of such a measure among the Transylvanian orthodox rather than from its reference to Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin or to the Patriarch.

An interesting version of this problem is told by Priest Ion Peană, ex-driver and deacon of Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin who, in an interview, said that in 1979, he was invited to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party and said that the hierarchy refused to sign a laudatory text at the address of Nicolae Ceaușescu (Manoliu, 2013).

In 1980 Father Peană told the hierarchy that rumours appeared in connection with his mental disease. The Metropolitan went to Cluj for a general medical investigation: Dr. Aurelia Sârbu - Neuropsychiatry, Dr. Emil Câmpeanu - Neurology and Dr. Cuatu. The result of the investigations sounded like this: the patient has no health problem (Manoliu, 2013).

The tense relationship between Roșianu and the Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church was even clearer within the sessions of the Holy Synod when - according to a note given by the Securitate - the president of the Cults Department reproached the Patriarch his lack of involvement in certain external activities of the State.

On April 16, 1979 the document mentioned that the president of the Department did not use to participate in the opening session; Roșianu entered the session hall of the Synod an hour and a half later,

a thing had never happened since 1948. As a matter of fact it was nothing else but the Patriarch and the other hierarchs' defiance at his address. Besides, the explanation given by the communist leader that the number of places offered to the theological training for 1979/1980 was to be diminished, determined the Patriarch to decline such a hypothesis. Facing such evident intimidating the hierarchy attempts, His Beatitude Justin had an immediate reaction: He went directly to the headquarters of the Cults Department and announced that such measures were meant to ruin and destruct the Romanian Orthodox Church; He also added that in the following educational year - 1980/1981 there would be even less places in the theological institutions (Note, 1973-1988, f. 131).

The attitude of the hierarch is - at this stage of the research - the first tense moment that appeared within His relationship with the authorities. Although docile and quite old for an open confrontation with the leaders of the time, the Patriarch decided for such an approach. He could not offer many options for the moment: he had to either accept those decisions which might lead to even more drastic effects in future, or choose a more convenient form of protest: that of pleading of His cause in private, within the Cults Department. Yet, His Beatitude realized that there would appear various consequences as the result of His actions; and the results appeared soon after.

Within a note regarding Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin and Bishops Emilian Birdaş and Visarion Aştileanu issued on April 10, 1981, it was written that "starting from several personal dissatisfactions yet pleading for Metropolitan Mladin's the health and lack of mental integrity - whom Patriarch Justin Moiescu refused to remove from his position at the request of the Cults Department - comrade Roşianu Ioan suggested to some clerics from Sibiu to denounce the Metropolitan to the Superior Party and State leadership about his being under a disability" (Note regarding Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin and Bishops Birdaş Emilian and Aştilean Vasile, 1973-1988, f. 195).

In the document, it was mentioned that "during the investigations it resulted that COSTEA MARIA (the Metropolitan's

housekeeper) performed many negative influences over the Metropolitan at the suggestion of various persons from Sibiu and especially from clerics; consequently, comrade ROȘIANU IOAN reached the conclusion that the housekeeper was the informer of the security organs who had trained her in such a way as to create problems and difficulties against the positive activities of the Metropolitan Church. We report that the situation corresponds to reality." (Note regarding Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin and Bishops Birdaș Emilian and Aștilean Vasile, 1973-1988, f. 195).

In order to administrate such a situation, a special commission of the Synod analyzed the claims and decided to offer the Metropolitan of Transylvania a medical leave meant to help him regain his health. Besides, the same commission analyzed the claims against Bishops Emilian Birdaș from Alba-Iulia and Visarion Aștileanu of Transylvania: some of the claims were anonymous. The interesting thing is that the report issued by the Security Agents explains the way the Cults Department administrated the situation: they invited to the hearing only those who denounced the two hierarchs, without offering them the opportunity of speaking up their own points of view. It was evident that the two hierarchs had to be discredited, the credibility of the Church had to be spoiled and the personality of Patriarch Justin compromised. It goes without saying that such an approach could no longer be overlooked; it generated discontents among several persons and, consequently, the fact was analyzed by the Synod.

The conclusion at the end of the report issued by the Securitate mentioned that the Agency was not involved in the case in any way.

The present documents clearly demonstrate the relationship between the State and the Church, in general, not only in the time of His Beatitude Justin. The relationship between the State and the Church depends on a lot of conditions but among the most important one are the persons who manages it. The animosity between Ion Roșianu and Patriarch Justin led to objections and malicious attitudes from the part of the Cults Department. Certainly that during the

1980s - when Nicolae Ceaușescu's attitude versus the population became very tough - the Church means of protest were very few. Besides, no change concerning any decision taken by the state and party leadership, as a consequence of the protest of no matter what institution or person - in problems considered of high importance - were taken into account (systematization, for instance). Afraid not to generate major repressions and greater destructions, Patriarch Justin chose to write his dissatisfactions to the authorities of the country, accepting at least, the recovery of a part of the church and cultural patrimony kept in the Nuns' Convent (it was the case when the Nuns' Convent workshop was demolished in 1982).

Department of State Security

Top secret

Direction I

No. 65129 of July 3, 1980

Note

We possess information proving that between the Cults Department and Patriarch JUSTIN MOISESCU there exist misunderstandings that negatively influence the possibility of solving some problems referring to internal and external activities of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Consequently, due to these approximately one-year misunderstandings, no bishop was appointed in the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Paris; this thing permitting BOLDEANU VASILE - a legionary commander - the parish priest of the Orthodox Church from the same town to act according to his own way.

The change of MLADIN NICOLAE, the Metropolitan of Transylvania is also controversial, although the already checked information led to the conclusion that the person in discussion can no longer fulfil the duties appointed to him, because of an advanced sclerosis.

Patriarch JUSTIN MOISESCU announced the Cults Department that He would not replace MLADIN NICOLAE and that,

for the re-establishment of the whole situation, He suggested that a Metropolitan vicar should be chosen and appointed so as to replace the position and continue the above-mentioned Metropolitan's activity.

Certain misunderstandings between the Patriarch and the president of the Cults Department have also been expressed especially during some sessions of the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. So, for example, in August 1979, the president of the Cults Department reproached the Patriarch that there were not taken the best measures for developing specific activities within the communities and Orthodox churches abroad.

On April 16, 1979, the president of the Cults Department entered the session hall after a delay of about one hour and a half since the opening of the session, and Patriarch JUSTIN MOISESCU was shocked and said that during the 25 year of activity, it was for the first time that the president of the Cults Department did not take part in the opening of the session of the Synod, contrary to the cults law of 1948. This happening was interpreted by some hierarchs as an underestimation of both the Patriarch and of the Synod, if not a possible change in the Romanian Cults policy. Similarly, the speech made by the president of the Cults Department at the same Synod, was interpreted in connection with the number of places destined for the 1979/ 1980 religious educational institutions the Patriarch had refused to accept.

Recently, Patriarch JUSTIN MOISESCU when going to the headquarters of the Cults Department, reproached the president that, if for the school year 1980/1981 the number of placed would be diminished, the decision might appear to mark a change in the policy of the Cults of the Socialist Republic of Romania, as the destruction of the Romanian Orthodox Church - which is "national and patriotic" had been practically envisaged.

Chief of Direction
Major-General
BORDEA ARON

ACNSAS, Documentary Fond, dossier 148, vol. 8/1973-1988, f. 131.

Top secret

Annex no. 6 at D.S. no. 0046623 of April 10, 1981

Note regarding Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin and Bishops Birdaş Emilian and Aştilean Vasile

Starting from the personal discontents, yet claiming the health condition and the lack of mental capacity of Metropolitan MLADIN NICOLAE, the one whom the Patriarch refused to replace at the demand of the Cults Department, comrade ROŞIANU IOAN suggested to some clerics from Sibiu should denounce the Metropolitan to the superior state and party leadership as being disabled.

On the basis of such claims, in the summer of 1980 an inquest commission of the Synod was gathered to investigate the things on the place. According to the conclusions that resulted after the investigation, it was decided the NICOLAE MLADIN should be given a year-long recovery medical leave. After the decision was taken, the Patriarch asked comrade ROŞIANU IOAN "What shall we do about MLADIN?" The answer was: "I do not know, this is your problem." The Patriarch asked again: "But it is you who started the inquest, so it is our problem, as we agreed how to proceed."

Although these discussions took place, no decision was taken concerning the Metropolitan's future: whether he would regain his position and activity or not.

Since because during the investigations it resulted that COSTEA MARIA (the Metropolitan's housekeeper) had a negative influence concerning the Metropolitan, at the initiative of certain persons from Sibiu and from among the clergy, comrade ROŞIANU IOAN declared that she was the informer of the Security organs who had trained her as to create difficulties in the activity of the Metropolitan Church. We report that the situation does not reflect reality.

The same Synod commission - at short and regular intervals of time - investigated the situation of BIRDAȘ EMILIAN from Alba-Iulia and AȘTILEAN VASILE from Arad, as they happened to have the same authenticated denouncements among. The fact that in both cases - before and after the investigations - the leadership of the Cults Department was hearing and listened to the claimants only, without attaching any attention to the named hierarchs, has generated a state of dissatisfaction among large circles of people.

All these dissatisfactions augmented in the case of the hierarchs the moment they were analyzed in front of the Synod.

We report that referring to the above mentioned problems our organs had no participation at all.

A.C.N.S.A.S., Documentary Fond, dossier 148, vol. 8/1973-1988, f. 195.

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