

**THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: HISTORY, ORGANIZATION,
AND INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ROMANIA**

Marius Hriscu

Abstract: Romania, like Bulgaria, is predominantly an Orthodox country. This article presents the history and organization of the institution of the majority religion in Romania. It also considers the type of relationship that the Romanian Orthodox Church has with the state. Last but not least, the paper analyzes the completion of the project to build the People's Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest, as well as the opinions of analysts and the general public about this event.

Keywords: Romanian Orthodox Church; history; organization; relationship; Romania.

The word *church* comes from the Latin *basilica* and, as a proper name, means the religious society founded on the basis of the teachings of Jesus Christ¹. Mihai Eminescu, the national poet, considered the Church “the spiritual mother of the Romanian nation, the one that gave birth to the unity of the language and the ethnic unity and which was the asylum of national salvation in countries where the Romanian has no State.”²

The Great Union also determined the need for administrative unification of the Romanian Church. This has been an initiative of Patriarch Miron Cristea since 1919 when he was Bishop of Caransebeș.

The first preliminary project that envisioned the organization of the Autocephalous Romanian Orthodox Church was drawn up in 1920 by the Church Constitution (Church representatives from all Romanian provinces). This Constitution drew up a draft law at the end of 1921 with the help of Octavian Goga who held the position of Minister of Cults. Later, based on the provisions of the new Constitution from 1923, a new draft law was drawn up with the support of Constantin Banu, Minister of Religious Affairs and the Arts. In the same year, the Church drafted its own law and official status, which, in 1924, were revised by Alexandru Lapedatu, the Minister of Cults, and presented to the legislative bodies (Mati-chescu 2005, 201). The project was voted, but the Law and the Statute concerning the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church would only become effective on 4 May 1935. Thus, the Church became dominant over the other cults and autocephalous over the other Orthodox churches. From an organizational point of view, it included four metropolitan areas, each of which with a number of dioceses as follows:

1. The Metropolitanate of Hungarian-Wallachia, with the following dioceses: Archdiocese of Bucharest; Bishopric of Râmnic; Bishopric of Buzău; Bishopric of Argeș; Bishopric of Constanța.

¹ <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romano-catholicism>

² <https://luceafarul.net/mihai-eminescu-si-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului>

2. The Metropolitanate of Moldavia and Suceava, with the following dioceses: Archdiocese of Iași; Roman Bishopric; Bishopric of Hus; Bishopric of the Lower Danube.

3. The Metropolitanate of Transylvania, Banat, Crisana and Maramureș, with the following dioceses: Archbishopric of Alba Iulia and Sibiu; Bishopric of Arad, Ienopole and Halmagi; Diocese of Caransebeș; Bishopric of Oradea; Bishopric of Vad, Feleac and Cluj.

4. The Metropolitanate of Bucovina, with the following dioceses: Archbishopric of Chernivtsi; Bishopric of Cetății Albe-Ismailului (Maticescu 2005, 201–202).

Based on a law promulgated on 23 February 1925, the Archbishopric and Metropolitan See of Hungarian-Wallachia as the primate of Romania was raised to the rank of patriarchal see, and its holder, Miron Cristea, was awarded the title of Patriarch, having the same tasks and the same jurisdiction he had while being Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Hungarian-Wallachia, and Primate of Romania. In 1922, an Episcopate of the Army and Military Clergy was also established.

Since 1935, the unity in the management of the Romanian Orthodox Church has been ensured by the central management bodies, which were as follows:

- The Holy Synod which dealt with spiritual and canonical matters, and which was formed by all the metropolitans, bishops, hierarchs and vicars in office and was under the presidency of the Patriarch;

- The National Ecclesiastical Congress that considered religious, cultural, foundational and epitropical issues; it was made up of six representatives (two clerics and four laymen) from each diocese and of all the members of the Holy Synod. The executive body of the Holy Synod and the National Church Congress was the Central Church Council, made up of three representatives of each metropolitanate (one cleric and two laymen).

The constituent parts of the Church, according to the law, were:

- the parish;
- the protopapas;
- the diocese.

They had the following representative bodies:

- Parish Assembly;
- Protopapas Assembly;
- Diocesan Assembly.

The executive bodies were as follows:

- Parish Council;
- Archbishop Council;
- Diocesan Council (Maticescu 2005, 203).

The monasteries had their own canonical organization, but according to the law, they were considered constitutive parts of the Church.

By virtue of the law, the representative bodies of the Church were composed as follows:

- the Parish Assembly was formed by all the major believers who had to fulfill their moral and material obligations towards the Church;

- the Protopapas Assembly and the Eparchial Assembly formed by representatives of the clergy and the laity in a ratio of 1/3 clerics and 2/3 laymen. They were elected by vote by all members of the Parish Assembly grouped by electoral constituencies (laymen) and fellow priests (clerics).

The two representative bodies of the Church listed above had, in turn, the Protopapas and Diocesan Councils as their executive bodies.

The following disciplinary and judicial courts existed for judging the disciplinary offences of clerics:

- The Archpriest Court, which was next to each archpriest;
- The diocesan spiritual consistory existing next to each diocese;
- The central consistory next to the Holy Synod.

The Diocesan Assembly and the National Church Congress, convened ad hoc, elected the bishops, archbishops and metropolitans (Maticescu 2005).

As at present, Romania subsidizes the clergy of its Orthodox Church. A general church fund was also created with the aim of reducing the state's fiscal burdens, and in order for the Church to fulfil its religious, cultural and philanthropic mission under the best conditions. This fund was administered by the Ephoria as the executive body of the Central Council.

The Romanian Orthodox Church had and still has connections with other Orthodox churches and Christian denominations. In the past, it was dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. With the political independence of the Romanian state, the independence (autocephaly) of the Romanian Orthodox Church was also achieved.

The Church also extends its jurisdiction over the Romanian Orthodox communities in other states. As for the communities in America, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate was established in 1935 (Mati-chescu 2005, 203–204).

The communist constitutions of 1948, 1952 and 1965 stated that Romania guarantees all citizens freedom of conscience and religion. Religious cults can organize and function freely, the Romanian Orthodox Church is autocephalous and unitary in its organization, and the school is separate from the Church.

In real life, there has always been a very deep mutual involvement between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian state. It follows the tradition of the Romanian Orthodox Church to be loyal to the state.

According to the 1991 Constitution, the Church is separated from the state. Freedom of conscience is guaranteed, freedom of religious beliefs cannot be restricted in any way, and religious cults are free to be organized according to their own statutes, autonomous from the state but still able to enjoy its support.

In Law No. 489 of 28 December 2006 on Religious Freedom and the General Regime of Cults, particularly in Chapter II: Cults, Section I: Relations between the State and Cults, Art. 7 states that “the Romanian State recognizes the important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the other recognized churches and cults in the national history of Romania and in the life of Romanian society.”. Art. 9 states that “in Romania there is no state religion; the state is neutral towards any religious belief or atheistic ideology.”³

If we look at the example of the Russian Orthodox Church, we notice that it unconditionally supports the actions of the Kremlin in Ukraine.

Analyst Cristian Pîrvulescu speaks for a real separation of church and state and for equality between churches: “Religion should become, in the Western sense of the word, a private matter, and not a public matter.”⁴

We believe that Romania's accession to European values implies, in fact, granting equal rights to the recognized cults and emphasizing the dialogue and the idea of acceptance towards the other.

Eminescu also had the idea of building the People's Salvation Cathedral to commemorate those who fell during the War of Independence and to serve as a place of prayer for Romanians⁵.

In the most important polls regarding the establishment of the Cathedral, more than 15,000 people responded to the survey, asking readers whether this act was necessary. The vote was overwhelming: 66.46% of the respondents, representing almost 11,000 people, said that such a construction was not necessary. The remaining 5,400 readers answered that Romania and Bucharest needed such a building⁶.

The People's Salvation Cathedral was inaugurated and consecrated on 25 November 2018 by His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and His Beatitude Father Patriarch Daniel. On 31 May 2019, the Cathedral was also visited by Pope Francis⁷. It is one of Romania's emblematic buildings and a place of worship where thousands of believers pray daily.

The conclusion belongs to Dorel Dimitru Chirițescu, Professor of Economics from the Constantin Brâncuși University in Tîrgu Jiu. He made the following statement in the article “Catedrala Mîntuirii

³ <http://timotheus.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Anexa-A10-Legea-Cultelor-Nr-489-din-2006.pdf>

⁴ <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/1961074.html>

⁵ <https://luceafarul.net/mihai-eminescu-si-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului>

⁶ https://www.stiridiaspora.ro/sondaj-catedrala-neamului_7812.html,

⁷ <https://catedrala-nationala.ro/istoric>

Neamului – sau pragul civilizațional dincolo de care trebuie să pășim” (The People’s Salvation Cathedral: Or the Civilizational Threshold Beyond Which We Must Step): “It is a threshold of becoming mandatory towards a new legitimacy. It is a kind of necessary salvation, a detachment from a past in which, for various reasons, we could not leave such traces on earth. That’s what it’s about, a step beyond a threshold. A decisive step in relation to assuming what Romanianism will be in the future.”

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