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The Adventist Confession in Romania between 1919-1945

Doctoral THESIS ABSTRACT

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Key words: Adventist Confession, Adventist, Baptist, Orthodox, non-Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, Ministry of Cults, police, Gendarmerie, church, Romanian Orthodox Church, pastor, priest, worship, believers, freedom, ministry, ministerial decision, army, Union, Conference, mission, Division, General Conference, General Conference, colportage, arrest, baptism, place of worship, Ministry of Interior, complaints, proselytizing, preacher, publications.

The study of the Adventist denomination in Romania between 1919-1945 aimed at analyzing the evolution, development and integration into Romanian society of a relatively small religious community as well as its internal evolution between 1919-1945. The importance of the theme is given by the fact that this denomination had an accelerated development and dynamics during the period under study, which is also reflected in the attention given to it at the time. From 2,540 believers on December 31, 1919, this denomination managed to increase tenfold in 20 years alone, with 20,050 believers at the beginning of 1940.

For the sake of the argumentation of the analyzed historical cut, we specify that 1919 was chosen as the starting year due to the fact that we have an unprecedented situation by uniting all the Romanian provinces and bringing them under a single administration, a situation followed by a new Constitution (1923) and a new Law of Religious Cults (1928) as well as the issuance of other laws and ministerial decisions that regulated the interwar religious life. The beginning of 1945 has been chosen as the end date of our research both because of the changes occurring at the political level with the dismissal of Marshal Antonescu and his arrest by King Mihai and because of the changes occurring within the Adventist denomination.

Given the particularity of the subject and its complexity, we considered it necessary that the research does not remain within the chronological limits mentioned, there are situations in which the analysis goes down to the arrival of the first Adventists in Romania and how the first Adventist centers developed, then to the period before the First World War or goes up to the recognition of the Adventist denomination as an official cult by royal decree in 1946, all this out of the desire to follow the historical processuality.

A determinant role in the choice of the theme was played by the limited interest shown by researchers in the history of the Adventist denomination in Romania, especially for the period

1919-1945. In addition to this reason, the fact that minorities of any kind are of particular interest to society, often being referred to in political discourse and debates in the Romanian media.

On the other hand, there is a danger that about 100,000 believers, which is the current Adventist denomination, will construct a history based on romanticized descriptions by some Adventist believers, authors who are tempted to approach the history of the denomination in a one-sided, subjective way. The analysis of the Adventist denomination during the period 1919-1945 is unprecedented in Romanian historiography, as there is no scholarly work that deals with these aspects in a bivalent way for the period in question.

Another reason is the desire to observe the integration of the Adventist religious phenomenon in a broader scheme, answering questions such as: why in Romania? What was the religious situation in Romania at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century? How did Romanian society react to the emergence of this denomination? Who were the first people to accept this new faith? How does this denomination find its place in Romanian society?

On the other hand, the relations between temporal and spiritual power, between the State and the Church, have always been, and still are, of particular interest to researchers and the general public. Last, but not least, another reason for researching the history of this denomination is the timeliness of the moment, namely, the access of researchers to archival documents that have long been inaccessible for research.

For the study of Adventist history very few scholars have turned their attention to this field, much less to the history of the Adventist denomination during the period 1919-1945. Attempts to write the history of this denomination have either not been scientifically documented, writing only pages of history without any biographical reference, or it has been a general approach that has summarily dealt with the whole period, including the communist period. Thus, there were some general concerns about the history of the Adventist denomination in Romania, but the period 1919-1945, with its particularities regarding the Adventist church, as well as the framing of this denomination in the local religious landscape have not been realized. That is why we considered that the realization of a scientific study on the Adventist Confession in Romania between 1919-1945 is opportune and welcome.

For the historical research we used different sources, as well as general and special works. The unpublished historical sources were represented mainly by archival documents kept

at: the Archives of the National Council for the Study of Security Archives in Bucharest, the National Central Historical Archives, the National County Archives, the Archives of the Adventist Union of Romania. We also researched a large volume of press and several thousand articles from the period under study were identified, articles that brought new perspectives to the history of the Adventist denomination. The documentation in libraries and archives was supplemented by the use of oral history interviews and by reading the testimonies of those who were contemporaries of the events.

Within the first chapter, a first stage of the research was to trace the emergence and course of the Adventist denomination in America, the place where the denomination had its genesis and developed. The next step was to identify how it spread to Europe and then Romania. Within this stage, an important objective was to establish the causes that led to the emergence of the Adventist denomination both in the United States and in Romania, as well as to form a picture of the Romanian religious context before the Adventist denomination appeared in Romania.

The second chapter aimed to capture the way in which the Adventist denomination behaved in the face of the new historical realities, coagulating and organizing itself. It also aimed to capture the efforts through which this denomination was recognized by the Romanian State and how religious life was regulated during this period by the State. The activities carried out by missionaries and church organizations, activities that led to the spread and increase in the number of believers, as well as their evolution in data and statistics, are captured. The institutional development was also documented, capturing the moments of the establishment of the Adventist printing house and the theological seminary in Focșani. It also studied the dissidence that was formed in the Adventist denomination, namely those who would be called Reformed Adventists. The Romanian press of the period under study and the way in which the Adventist denomination was reflected in it was closely followed. The research in this chapter stops in 1926, a year of internal crisis in the leadership of the Adventist denomination that led to the resignation of the Adventist Union president six months earlier than the statutory terms and the election of a new president with new plans and new visions.

The third chapter captures the period during which an American citizen was in charge of the Adventist denomination in Romania, the years 1927-1932, a unique event in the history of

this denomination, contrary to the laws of the Romanian State at that time. The American citizen D.N. Wall was brought in to take the job of president of the UAR, hoping in this way to smooth things over between the board members. Former president P. Paulini was offered to work in France and later in Switzerland, having distanced himself from Romanian Adventism and from exerting any influence over it. The transition to a modern, newly-built Theological Seminary in Stupini, Brasov, was followed. We also followed the way the press has written about the Adventist denomination and the main challenges the denomination has faced in these years.

Chapter four captures the return to the presidency of the Adventist denomination of Petre P. Paulini and the realization of the failure of the foreign presidency experiment in Adventist leadership. The period 1933-1936 was a period in which the Adventist denomination developed and strengthened. In 1934, the leadership of the Ministry of Worship sought to limit and put an end to any interpretation and any vagueness that might have resulted from the ministerial decision of 1933, proving its best intentions. We may say that it was the most friendly and sincere action of the Ministry of Worship and Arts to mediate between the denominations. Therefore, the relationship of this denomination with the Ministry of Religious Affairs was also traced through the documents issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as well as the way the press reported on this denomination.

In the fifth chapter, we have captured the changes in the leadership of the Union through the resignation of President Paulini, the tensions that arose, their resolution and the way in which the denomination operated under the leadership of Dumitru Florea, former director of the Stupini Theological Seminary. The causes that caused relations with the authorities to go adrift in 1937 are explored, and the problem is identified in a novel way. Also, through the prism of the press, the challenges faced by this confession were investigated.

Chapter six dealt with the existing political context of 1940, a context which led to a first attempt to disband this denomination in September 1940. The activities of this confession at the time when it was finally outlawed are captured. Its relations with the Orthodox Church during this time are also examined. In this chapter, the time of its return to legality was also captured, the official date being August 23, 1944, but it was not really able to enjoy the new realities until 1945.

Between 1940 and 1944, the Romanian state developed a special policy towards the neo-Protestant denominations present on Romanian territory at that time, namely the Adventist, Baptist and Christians according to the Gospel denominations. This policy became more evident during the period when Marshal Ioan Antonescu was in charge of the country, i.e. between September 6, 1940 and August 23, 1944. The state administration gradually assimilated the "Seventh-day Adventist association" with religious "sects".

From September 1940, when the national-legionary regime was established, denominational homogenization became one of the central ideas in Romanian state policy and remained so until August 1944. The state administrative and police apparatus was mobilized to implement this policy. The policy towards the three neo-Protestant denominations was fundamentally part of the Antonescu government's program of homogenization of the country, homogenization of an ethnic as well as confessional nature.

From September 1940 until August 23, 1944, the Adventist denomination and its believers were constantly under the scrutiny of the Romanian government, which sought to restrict their religious rights granted by law and, ultimately, to abolish this denomination along with the Baptist denomination and the Christians according to the Gospel. The first outlawing of the three denominations was decreed during the National-Lionist government, on September 9, 1940, by Ministry of Cults and Arts decisions nos. 42.352, 42.353, 42.355. On September 19, 1940, however, another ministerial decision, Decision 43.931, reversed these measures and, at least formally, the previous regime was restored.

The restrictions were resumed and, especially from the spring of 1941 onwards, a whole series of restrictions were introduced which made it almost impossible to practise the cult. The three religious associations were finally abolished by Decree-Law No. 927 of December 28, 1942 and then by Decree-Law No. 431 of June 28, 1943. Negative interactions between members of this denomination and Orthodox clergymen multiplied, with the Orthodox clergy during this period displaying a rich activity of restricting the work of the Adventist denomination.

Adventist publications were also censored during this period, and action was taken to prevent their dissemination, eventually leading to the banning of all Adventist "sectarian" publications. All movable and immovable property passed into state ownership as a result of the measures taken to dissolve the three neoprotestant religious associations.

With the removal from power of Marshal Ion Antonescu and Romania's return to a regime based on the 1923 Constitution, the Adventist denomination was once again recognized and free. Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists and Christians according to the Gospel were restored to the rights they had had before September 1940. Among these documents was Decree-Law No. 548 of October 28, 1944, which reinstated the provisions on religious associations in the 1928 Law on Religious Cults. The year 1945 was the year in which the Adventist denomination regained its property and the Theological Seminary of Stupini reopened its doors again for a short time. New opportunities, new challenges.

The Adventist Confession fought during this period, it was well organized and if it resisted and developed, it was also due to the fact that it was led by disciplined and organized people, such as Officer Ștefan Demetrescu, the invalid war major Petre Paunescu, officer Dumitru Florea and many others. The Adventist denomination through its believers had a positive influence on the Romanian society by the moral transformation of the believers and ennobling them with noble character traits, traits so necessary for a healthy society. The Adventist denomination has been a constant challenge to the BOR, it has led this church to mobilization and some moral reforms. Notable is the birth of the reform movement of the Lord's Prayer within the Orthodox Church with the aim of countering possible centrifugal elements within the Orthodox churches that would have migrated towards neo-Protestanism. In order to document this thesis we have used unpublished sources, which have not been researched and studied by other scholars, we have approached this theme in an objective way in order to get as close as possible to the historical reality, with good and bad, of this confession.

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