

Silvia GROSSU
PhD, Associate Professor,
Moldova State University
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Luminatorul: The Identity, confessional and national Message

Abstract: In this study, paying homage to the clerical magazine *Luminatorul (The Enlightener)* 110 years after its first issue, we propose a segment of the national awakening movement of the Bessarabians, focused on the hard work of identity legitimization on two essential levels – confessional and national.

Keywords: clerical magazine *Luminatorul*, confessional situation, mother tongue, identity legitimization, national emancipation

Résumé: Dans cette étude consacrée à la revue cléricale *Luminatorul*, à l'occasion de 110 ans depuis la parution du premier numéro, nous proposons aux lecteurs un segment de l'activité d'éveil national des Bessarabiens, axé sur le travail assidu de légitimation identitaire sur deux plans essentiels – confessionnel et national. Pour élucider les valeurs identitaires de la première revue en langue roumaine, il serait approprié de commencer par la présentation d'un tableau panoramique de l'état dans lequel se trouvait l'Église orthodoxe de Bessarabie aux confins des XIX^e et XX^e siècles, la veille des événements de l'année 1917 et dans la période d'entre les deux guerres.

En 1912, immédiatement après l'annexion de la Bessarabie par l'Empire russe, l'Archevêché de Chisinau nouvellement fondé passa sous la juridiction du Patriarcat russe, contribuant ainsi à un processus de dénationalisation de longue durée. Il faut prendre en compte l'activité salvatrice pour la tradition du lieu du Métropolitain Banulescu-Bodoni, fondateur de la Métropole de la Bessarabie, qui incluait le territoire dénommé par la nouvelle administration

«La Bessarabie», mais également les localités jusqu'au Bug et la mer Noire, y compris Odessa. Les premiers livres ont également été promus à travers les saintes demeures. C'est le cas de rappeler que l'imprimerie épiscopale était le lieu d'impression non seulement des livres ecclésiastiques mais aussi des livres laïcs, parmi ces derniers se trouvaient abécédaires, grammaires roumaines, livres de lecture, calendriers, sollicités par les Roumains cultivés. Pourtant, sous la pression croissante des mesures administratives restrictives, la vie culturelle en Bessarabie se dégrade, si bien que ce programme minimum pour l'émancipation nationale – l'édition des livres roumains – pour une période considérable de temps, de 1871 à 1906, ne restera qu'un *désidérata*. La situation confessionnelle empire de manière évidente: la variante roumaine du bulletin épiscopal *Monitorul Eparhiei Chişinău* (le *Moniteur de la Diocèse de Chişinău*), l'unique publication de Bessarabie avec une variante dans la langue des autochtones, est suspendue, les livres saints en langue roumaine sont retirés du circuit ecclésiastique, nombre de prêtres autochtones sont substitués par des prêtres russes, sous motif que les premiers n'avaient pas la formation nécessaire et qu'ils ne maîtrisaient pas la langue russe. Dans l'Église fut imposé le vieux slave ecclésiastique comme unique langue de culte, tandis qu'environ 340 églises furent fermées. De cette manière commença le processus d'éloignement de la population de l'Église.

La parution, en 1908, de la première revue en langue maternelle – *Luminatorul* – a donné des espérances aux Roumains de Bessarabie. *Luminatorul*, solidement documenté et bien structuré, a paru mensuellement à Chişinău de janvier 1908 à mars 1944, par l'effort conjugué de l'archimandrite Gurie Grosu et du professeur du Séminaire Théologique Constantin Popovici.

Mots-clés: revue cléricale *Luminatorul*, situation confessionnelle, langue maternelle, légitimation identitaire, émancipation nationale

The actuality of the topic

For an adequate and justly approach to the numerous problems which the society and church from the Republic of Moldova nowadays face, it is important to study the genesis and the evolution of the Romanian press from Bessarabia in the interwar period in general and, within it, of the

ecclesiastical press. After the fall of the totalitarian occupation regime, after the Republic of Moldova had gained state independence, the return of the society to the values of parliamentary democracy emphasized also a series of confessional problems. These are related to the legalization of the Metropolis of Bessarabia by the state authorities of the Republic of Moldova; to the relationships between the Metropolis of Bessarabia and the Metropolis of Moldova, canonically subject to the Russian Patriarchy; to the activity of other churches that are separated from the Orthodox one, and also two the inter-confessional dissensions among laymen, especially among youngsters. Mass media plays an important role within this context: the subjects it treats, the degree of persuasion of the papers it publishes, its topics, what readers ask (laypersons or clergy) is of interest not only for scholars, but also for the Church and state authorities from the Republic of Moldova. This is the reason why the deep knowledge of the clergy press, from its beginning and during the interwar timespan, its accomplishments and shortcomings, the problems it tackles, the ways of solving critical situations similar to the nowadays ones (the problem of the new style, the expansion of sects, the gender approach etc.) will be really useful for the persons that are interested in this subject. At first sight, it seems that the problems of the Romanian press from the interwar period have already been studied (Grossu, *Valențele presei clericale din Basarabia (1918-1940)*). However, we point out that there is no monographic study dedicated to aspects of the press having a religious profile from Bessarabia. Our intention to offer a clear and exact image of the Bessarabian journalistic profile from a timespan of greatest importance for the existence of the Romanians from Bessarabia could materialize by distinguishing the place and the role of each periodical edition from the period between the two world wars. By means of the clergy press, we will be able to restore the real dimensions of the role of the Orthodox Church in the confessional and national of the role of the Orthodox Church in the confessional and national consolidation of the Romanians from Bessarabia. Thus, in order to know more thoroughly the history of the national press, would be useful a study about the most long-lived religious publication from the Bessarabian area – the journal *Luminatorul* which celebrates this year its 110th anniversary. Our study will fulfil this missing chapter, it will complete the already existing researches and will offer other perspectives in order to esteem the dimensions and restore the true coordinates of the identity discourse of the national press.

The Orthodox Church from Bessarabia in the first half of the 20th century

A distinct chapter in our investigation consists in an overview of the state of the Orthodox Church from Bessarabia on the eve of the 1917 events and during the interwar timespan. We cannot miss also the decline of faith within the Orthodox Church before that. Thus, shortly after the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian empire in 1812, the Archdiocese of Chisinau passed under the jurisdiction of the Russian Patriarchy. Drastic measures were undertaken after the arrival of the Russian archbishop Pavel Lebedev, in 1871, in Chisinau. He suspended the Romanian variant of the eparchial bulletin „Monitorul Eparhiei Chişinău” (The Monitor of the Chisinau Eparchy), the single publication in Romanian from Bessarabia. He withdrew from the ecclesiastical usage a lot of books in Romanian. He also substituted many native priests with Russian ones, motivating that they had not the necessary education and did not know the Russian language. The cult language in the Church was changed from Romanian to Slavonic, about 340 churches were closed. In this way started the process of alienation of the population from the Church (Grossu, *Presă din Basarabia în contextul sociocultural al anilor 1906-1944* 115-116). The confessional situation aggravated as the “inochentist” heresy increased. This heresy originated in the Balta Monastery and appeared around the Priestmonk Inochentie, famous for his sermons in Romanian. The sectarian proselytism gains ground due to the fact that it spreads in Romanian and because sectarians help people in their troubles. Beginning with the years 1906-1908, the Orthodox Church from Bessarabia starts to recover after the forced russification, but it remained strongly affected by it. On the 6th of May 1925, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church had formally created the Metropolis of Bessarabia that acquired its proper statute three years later. “Due to the creation of the Metropolis of Bessarabia, the clergy and the Orthodox people from this part of the country were put on an equal foot with the entire clergy and the Orthodox believers from other provinces, while Gurie Grosu entered into history as holder of the title of first Romanian metropolitan of the Bessarabian Church” (*Ibid.* 120).

Beside the mentioned explanations of the partial failure of the Russian policy aiming denationalisation, we should emphasize the basic dimension of the analysed phenomenon – the essential contribution of the Orthodox Church in maintaining the “self-consciousness” of the Romanians from everywhere. The first educated poet of the Romanians

was Metropolitan Dosoftei with his outstanding “Psalter in verses”. The first schools and printing houses were also funded by cultic institutions. Architecture, painting, iconography, all of them, through their genesis and evolutionary dynamics, were inextricably tied to the Orthodox Church. Firstly, everything that pertained to values, in fact pertained to the national Church. In this respect, the merit of the clergy from Bessarabia was justly esteemed by several scholars, one of them being Paul Mihail. He highly appreciated the activities of Church servants: “Priests accomplished not only the Holy Mass in the language of the people, but also the entire Church correspondence, documents, registers, inventories, the certificates of marital status were written only in Romanian, and as such they were submitted also to the head office of the Church from Chisinau” (*Mărturii de spiritualitate românească din Basarabia* 148). The first books were promoted also by means of cult institutions. It is the proper place to mention that within the eparchial printing house were printed books for the Church cult, but also lay editions. The latter ones were represented by “bucoavne” (ABC books), Romanian grammar books, reading books and calendars that were requested by Bessarabian scholars. But due to the increasing pressure of the restrictive administrative measures, the cultural life in Bessarabia decays. As a result, this minimal program of national emancipation – the publishing of Romanian literature – during a considerable timespan, from 1871 until 1906, remained only a desideratum. The reopening of the eparchial printing house, in October 1906, at the initiative and strenuous insistence of Archimandrite Gurie gains in this context an additional value.

Hence, because of several characteristic features of the Romanians from Bessarabia – the conservatism and traditionalism, deeply rooted in the common consciousness of the population, especially of the rural one, – the language (it rested almost unchanged for a long period) becomes the main inner feature that supports the national spirituality, i.e. the most important landmark of the identity legitimation. It is no wonder that, after the prohibition of the Holy Mass in the mother’s tongue, churches became empty. The language of the Holy Mass, absolutely understood by natives, kept people in a wearisome numbness. Because it became strange and inaccessible, most of the parishioners abandoned the Church. Hence evolved a particularly harmful phenomenon for Orthodoxy – the confessional indifference. It nurtured later several attempts to erode Orthodoxy, among them being the atheism insistently promoted by the Social-Democrats. This difficult situation for Orthodoxy was skilfully used by the sectarian proselytism that had expanded its area of influence. The

events acquired a dramatic turn for the Church from Bessarabia when the Priestmonk Inochentie started his activity at the Balta Monastery. His charming sermons, expressed in the beautiful mother's tongue, attracted thousands of believers to the monastery. Shortly, the movement from Balta acquired frightful dimensions. The high Church offices assessed the danger coming from the "inochentism", atheism and sectarianism. They undertook consequently actions to re-establish the critical situation. Although it was late, such an acknowledgement of the danger was followed by a series of activities of confessional revisions. First, in 1890, beside the Chisinau Eparchy was founded a Missionary Section, *Christ's Nativity Brotherhood*. Its members were concerned with the translation and editing in Romanian of prayer books, Sunday leaflets and explanatory booklets about lives of saints, Church rules etc. Hence, the "heavy blows" for the Bessarabian believers were: the withdrawal of the civil state which considerably diminished the priest's statute; the abolishment of the primary confessional schools, called "parochial" ones, supported by the Church. These schools represented "a powerful means of religious and moral education for youngsters". Then followed the expropriation of Church lands and fortunes, the calendar reform, which caused discords between not only parishioners and clergy, but also misunderstandings among Church servants, leading to the split of clergy. The insistent immixture of politics in Church affairs, once more, worsened the confessional situation. Thus, all these features nurtured the sectarian proselytism, atheism and the confessional indifference.

Establishing and maintaining the magazine *Luminătorul*

The Religious magazine *Luminătorul* was edited under the aegis of the Priesthood Congress and of the Society *Christ's Nativity Brotherhood*, at the initiative and effort of hieromonk Gurie. „The idea of a Moldovan magazine in Bessarabia after 1905 was put in public circulation and warmly supported, by giving it its current name, by the holy hieromonk Gurie, missionary of the Orthodox Church here, another soul who understood and felt the need to bring the Christian teachings and all moral guidance to his people, so they could understand them” (*Luminătorul* 1933, n°1, p. 2). After long steps and actions, the authorities of the Russian Empire allowed the editing of the *Luminătorul* – the first „church journal” in the Romanian language of Bessarabia. „...Against the publication of the magazine, we were also told the reason that we do not have a developed language, that our Moldovan

language has no more than 200 words, used by people in the countryside, that we have neither wise nor well-trained writers. We were also told: the Moldovan language is an anachronism. In vain you try to revive it ..." (*Ibid.* 14). Language becomes an anachronism if it is not used, thus its demand in various fields, including the ecclesiastical one, could ensure its viability. This was very well understood by the most educated part of the clergy of Bessarabia, to which belonged the merit of publishing the first clerical publications of Romanian expression. Established „in order to enlighten those who lay in the darkness of ignorance and speak Romanian" (*Ibid.* 2), the periodical was „the only torch of Romanianism that burned unceasingly until the Unification" (*Viața Basarabiei*, 1933, n°109). Hieromonk Gurie Grosu and the archpriest Constantin Popovici were its first editors and proofreaders. The content of the magazine was traditionally structured in the *official part*, dedicated to the clergy, and the *informal part*, intended primarily for the faithful. In the official part of the magazine was published information for internal use for the clergy of the Diocese of Chisinau. It was usually reduced to a few pages because the Church in Bessarabia had its official press office since 1867 – „Kishiniovskie eparhialnye vedomosti" (The Monitor of the Chisinau Eparchy), which had the mission to reflect on its pages all the ordinances, circulars and other official documents necessary for the clergy of the eparchy (it should be remembered that the „Monitor..." had in the timespan from 1867 until 1971 also a Romanian version).

The unofficial part of the article contained popularizing and cultural materials: articles on church organization, sermons, saints' lives, moral-religious parables, stories, articles of apologetic and dogmatic character, in various headings and compartments: „Religion", „Church History", „Church Feasts. Habits", „Sermons", „Education. Advice" etc. All the materials (in most cases translated from Russian) were sources of knowledge for the laity, inspiration for priestly sermons and support for „live communication with people".

During 10 years of Russian rule, the magazine has been maintained thanks to some priests, not scholars, but rather temeraries, people with high tendencies to national culture, who have watched faithfully at its „head". Few Bessarabian priests were well acquainted with Romanian, for which reason the editing of a magazine was not easy for the editors, but the good knowledge of the Romanian language of hieromonk Gurie „saved" the situation: „Hieromonk Gurie, wrote priest Popovici, (...) who, as eparchial missionary, used to hold conferences for Moldovans in the Moldovan language, had a stronger connection with the lower people, and

knew better than me the pure Moldovan language, the book language” (Ciachir, *Basarabia sub stăpînire țaristă (1812-1917)* 67). Beside hieromonk Gurie and Constantin Popovici, with the journal collaborated also the poet-priest Alexie Mateevici, the priest Iulian Friptu, the archimandrite Scriban, the stavrofor priests Serghie Bejan, Pavel Grosu and many others. Until the Unification of 1918, but also in the first decade after the Unification, *Luminătorul* continued to be the only periodical publication, where penmanship leaders in Romanian could exercise in writing. It is not to be overlooked that the majority of collaborators of religious publications in the interwar period were priests or intellectuals with studies in Russia, which they partially perfected only through the Romanian press, through contact with literature and intellectuals across the Prut. That was not enough and „often the language of the periodicals’ materials was blatantly inaccurate” (Buzilă, *Din istoria vieții bisericești din Basarabia* 207). *Luminătorul* was also a true school for the poet Alexei Mateevici. Starting with 1910, Alexei Mateevici became a constant collaborator of the magazine until 1917, the year of his sudden death. Beside translations from Russian prose, novels, teachings, moral writings, condemning the shortcomings and vices of everyday life, A. Mateevici, then a student of the Spiritual Academy in Kiev, published a number of articles of scientific character. Between 1911-1913, Mateevici was of amazing creativity – there are magazine numbers, where more than half of the space of the unofficial part is covered by his studies. For example, in the first issue of 1911, Alexei Mateevici published three articles: „New Year”, „Towards Heaven”, „The Stones”. The most significant was the study „When and how the Moldovans became Christians”, in which the author analyzes several hypotheses regarding the Christianization of the Romanians. After an insight into the history of the faith of the ancient Dacians, the author concludes that the Christian religion was spread to us in the second century by settlers brought from different parts of the Roman Empire (*Cum s-au încreștinat moldovenii*). In 1912 Mateevici published two other articles of scientific character: „Our Church Press” and „Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni”. Mateevici also publishes an impressive number of poems translated from Russian writers (A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, K. Batyushkov, A. Koltsov, K. Briusov, F. Tyutchev), but also original – all, however, inspired by the Christian moral and general human spirit.

The magazine *Luminătorul*, through its very publication and long-lasting preservation, has performed a major mission of confessional and cultural-national consolidation in Bessarabia. „The publication of the church

magazine *Luminătorul* in the times of Russian rule over Bessarabia presents one of the most important phenomena in the life of the Romanian people in Bessarabia. The exactness with which this magazine appears is to be admired, also the persistence facing times and circumstances” (*Luminătorul*, 1912, n° 8-11). The magazine’s collaborators were aware from the beginning of the importance of the Romanian publication not only for the church ministers, but for all the faithful in Bessarabia.

There is a living connection between the village clergy and the magazine. Not only the clergy leaders collaborate to this magazine. Along with archimandrite Gurie, the priests Constantin Popovici, Mitrofan Ignatiev, Alexei Mateevici, Alexandru Baltaga, Grigore Constantinescu, Justin Ignatovici, the Superior abbot Dionysius, the singer Ioan Ravca, there are still dozens of names of humble priests, deacons and singers from villages. Peasants, teachers and ministers also wrote to the magazine. (*Cu prilejul jubileului de 25 de ani al Luminătorului*)

Thematic diversity in the pages of *Luminătorul*

The relative relaxation of the Czarist surveillance and censorship regime in 1916, with Romania’s entry into war on the side of the Entente, also allowed the revision of the magazine’s view of the events. Issues of vital importance to Bessarabians – participation in the war, the situation on the front, fraternization of the Moldovan soldiers on the Russian-Romanian joint front, the supply of the army, the export of grain, etc., are more boldly approached. Although initially in 1908, the magazine was accepted by the higher courts as a docile instrument of propagation of religion and education of the Bessarabian parishioners in the style of Russian church publications over time, thanks to the concerted efforts of the most educated representatives of the cult, such as the priests Constantin Popovici, Mihail Ceachir, archimandrite Gurie, the priest and professor Grigore Constantinescu, its content has changed, it became to the years 1916-1917 a militant clerical publication, a publication with a pronounced enlightening-cultural character, also dealing with major issues related to the events of the First World War, the autonomy of the Church in Bessarabia, the return to education in Romanian language and so on. For the representatives of the clergy, another common goal was the autonomy of the Bessarabian Church, for which they had opted even at the first meetings of 1917. In 1933, in the number dedicated to the 25th anniversary of issuing the magazine, Pantelimon Halippa wrote: „I would especially like to emphasize the

significance of *Luminătorul* for awakening the national conscience to our Moldovans in Bessarabia. 25 years ago, after the sudden disappearance of the first Romanian newspapers: *Bessarabia*, *Viața Basarabiei* (Life of Bessarabia) and *Moldovanul* (The Moldovan), the *Moldovan* citizen of Bessarabia was served only with some sporadic publications, such as „Parabels and Stories”, Constantin Popescu’s calendars, a few brochures and a reading book and small sheets that the Brotherhood took out in the name of Christ” (*Ibid.*). *Luminătorul* has made a real difference to the national culture and the Orthodox Church, „conducting a sustained propaganda with the powers our Orthodox people have placed upon those eternal truths that make up the Christian religion, over those issues that concern the church settlement and the whole of the spiritual life of our Bessarabian Moldova” (*Ardealul*, 1918). Educated clergy, who only had studies in Russian schools, tried to offer samples of Romanian literary language to the Bessarabian readers. Alexie Mateevici is at the head of this string of names, because he was the only one who came to be known to his contemporaries and to subsequent generations.

The first church publication in the Romanian language of Bessarabia – *Luminătorul* continues to appear in 1917, so until then, only the themes become more audacious, more varied, more dynamic. *Luminătorul* fundamentally alters the platform through a radical reorientation of the message, becoming the tribune of the social and national activism of the Bessarabian clergy. Claiming national rights has become the leitmotif of the publication. The unit of interests of the various social classes at that time gave the hope of re-establishing the mother tongue, the key issue of all previous steps of the national publications. Therefore, we must keep in mind that for now the spiritual interests of Moldovans can only be met in Moldovan language and that spiritual food they need must be left to that language. Also in Moldovan, the pure language of the country, the demands and desires of Moldovan Christians must be revealed” (*Luminătorul* 1917, n° 5). The head of the Bessarabian priesthood publications, *Luminătorul*, in almost every number, projects in the foreground several aspects of this period of turning in the life of Bessarabia, advocating autonomy, learning in the mother tongue, publishing resolutions of congresses of soldiers, teachers, of course, offering vast space to congresses of clergy, informing readers about the establishment of the Moldovan National Party, supporting the idea of creating the „Country Counsel” („Sfatul Țării”) etc. In so doing, engaging in solving various political, social, cultural problems, clergy became one of

the five driving forces of the national emancipation movement (Moraru, *Istoria românilor. Basarabia și Transnistria* 145).

The plenary involvement of the publication in the turbulence of the events of 1917 determined the orientation not only of the magazine, but also of the Bessarabian clergy, towards the horizons of the national life. *Luminătorul* „... embraces all national issues for a while. It is rejoicing one's heart to see how this sheet, which only used to write about religious issues, dedicates pages to the history of the nation, awakening in priests a new breath and the desire to work for the enlightenment of villages through Romanian culture” (Michail, *op. cit.* 153). The Appeal „To the clergy of Bessarabia”, published in May, warns church ministers of the long-awaited changes by the people: „... we all must receive (sic) part in the building of church life again” (*Luminătorul*, 1917, n° 5, p. 6-7). Since the priestly layer was double-linked to the „crowd” – first, by virtue of spiritual mission and grace, secondly through the genealogical roots (the priests, most of them, stemmed from peasants or middlemen), the plenary involvement in the turmoil of events was imminent. This involvement was understood by the magazine as an act of summing up and fortifying the entire creative potential of the servants of the Orthodox Church as a broad widening of the horizon in promoting national goals. „We all need to clarify and work out how to make up our ecclesiastical things again according to the Moldovan interests (s.n.), so that our Church and the awakening of the Moldovans can reach out to a beautiful and thriving state ...” (*Ibid.*). The unity of interests of various social layers at that time gave the hope of re-establishing the mother tongue, the key issue of all previous steps of national publications.

The new stage in the evolution of the clerical press in the social-political conditions after Unification

In the initial phase, *Luminătorul* was a magazine for the popularization of Christian teachings with a pronounced cultural character, maintained until June 1918, the month when its appearance has been interrupted. After a half-year break, dictated by cardinal political changes, on January 15, 1919, the magazine reappears with the same name in the same graphic formula, but with substantial changes in content and structure. It appears with another subtitle, which specifies the status of *official journal* of the Diocese of Chisinau and Hotin. The publication was to take through the enlarged official part (printed in Latin characters), the place of the eparchial

bulletin *Golos Bessarabskoi Tzerkvi* (Voice of the Bessarabian Church), which, by the decision of the Superior Council of Eparchies, had ceased to appear. The official part had a higher frequency than the unofficial, with a separate monthly appearance. But the unofficial part was printed entirely in Cyrillic characters until 1921, and for three years, until 1924, the text has been mixed, that is, they appeared side by side: some with Latin characters, others with Cyrillic. In 1921-1922 the magazine began to regain its traditional appearance of theological magazine, the official compartment being increasingly smaller. For example, the edition of July 1921 kept the traditional structure: the official part and the unofficial part. On the front page is indicated the status of „Orthodox Church Magazine in Bessarabia”. At the beginning of the official part are inserted „Official documents regarding the installation of Most Holy Gurie as Archbishop, holder of the Diocese Chisinau and Hotin” and two materials written and signed by Gurie Grosu: „From the spiritual commissioner”, „About the exams of the monks who are proposed to the ordination”. Another informative material „Announcement from the Chisinau School of Church Singers”, signed by archpriest Mihail Berezovschi, director of the Singing School, and the rectification of an error in a report, published in the May issue of the magazine. Thus, the official part becomes more sober, concrete and concise. The multitude of issues that the *Luminator* treats, we see through the rich summaries of each number.

Thus, for example, in the official part, in addition to circulars, ordinances, official appeals, detailed information about entrance examinations in seminars and the Faculty of Theology (since 1926, the year of its foundation), editing and confirmation of religious textbooks for the primary and secondary classes, the composition of the teaching staff from different educational institutions, the teaching of religion in school, the provision of teaching material (for example, we find out that only 52 textbook titles were published in 1929) and many more. The informal part summed up ample materials in several headings: „Philosophy. Sociology”, „Social Issues. Economics”, „Law Issues”, „Science. Culture. Art”, „History. Geography. Personalities”, „Literature. Criticism and History of Literature”, „Advertising. Press. Bibliography”, „Letters to Parishioners”, „Christian Words”, „Magazine of the Magazines”. The biblical researcher Ion Şpac, having accounted in over 8,000 sheets only the titles of this immeasurable heritage that *Luminătorul* offers, claims that being edited, this file „would make it easier to find the necessary materials necessary at historical level,

contributing to enhancing the informative level of researchers, of all those willing to approach the past of this worthwhile Christian publication” (Șpac, *Pagini de istorie a preseii periodice basarabene* 17). Another thematic area focused on the charity initiatives of the Church in Bessarabia, welcome for the impoverished layers of the population, for the orphans, the sick ones, etc. All of them found coverage in the pages of the publication.

When the two Eparchies were established in Bessarabia – Hotin, residing in Balti, and Cetatea Alba, with the episcopal seat at Ismail, were initiated and see the light of the printing, starting with 1923, the official diocese bulletins – the bulletin of the Diocese Hotin and of the Diocese Cetatea Alba-Ismail, both with monthly appearance. Their content was traditionally divided into the official part, which included, of course, the circulars and administrative ordinances, and the informal part, which respected the structural rigors of the *Luminătorul*, adapting to the realities of each eparchy. It is specified that for a short period of time there appeared a common yearbook for the Diocese of Chisinau and the Diocese of Hotin – „The Yearbook of the Diocese of Chisinau and Hotin”, and from 1926 only – „The Yearbook of the Diocese Hotin”. Through its unofficial part, *Luminătorul* maintained its common publication for all the dioceses of Bessarabia, printing articles from all the dioceses, while the official part, beginning with 1923, fulfilled only the demands of the Diocese of Chisinau. In the 4th decade, the clergy of the Metropolis of Bessarabia had at their disposal 4-5 religious journals, namely: *The Romanian Orthodox Church* – the magazine of the Holy Synod, edited in Bucharest, *Luminătorul*, the old magazine of the clergy of all Bessarabia, *The Missionary*, the magazine of the Romanian Orthodox Mission under the paternity of the Chișinău Cultural Section, *The Magazine of the Historical-Archeological Society*, and for some parishes also the magazine *Archives of Bessarabia*, as well as the eparchial papers edited in the dioceses of Hotin and Cetatea Alba-Ismail.

Rich in articles of religious and cultural character, as the program had been announced from the beginning, one can conclude that the magazine even excelled on this segment. There are many documents that have direct reference to the Church, Orthodoxy, holy places, ordinances, and ceremonies (about 500 documents, and if we also consider those related to the theme, only indirectly (pastoral proclamations, customs, celebrations, etc.), the number of these materials would increase up to two thousand and more) (Șpac, *op. cit.* 16). Of course, they are very extensive as thematic levels – various official acts on the work of the Eparchial House, the Eparchial

Printing House, the clergy bookstore, the training process at the Theological Seminar or the School of Singers, orphanages; reports on the material state and the activity of the Historical-Archeological Society of Bessarabia; the minutes of the clergy meetings in Bessarabia, the description of trips and visits of Metropolitan Gurie in parishes and monasteries, countless calls for the construction of churches; documents on different churches, monasteries, eparchial schools, etc. Consistent articles were inserted: „The Role of the Church in the Past of the Romanian Nation” (V. Bjola), about „Decoration of Moldovan Churches” (P. Constantinescu-Iași) about the history of candle making (by Vl. Ciuda), about the main monasteries of Bessarabia (by G. M. Rașcu, archimandrite E. Laiu); „Aspects from the Life of a Parish” (1928) and „Remarks from the Past of the Alcedar Parish, Orhei County” (1936), both by Mihail Vasilache, „History of the Eminence of Our Salvation” by T. Petrovici (1929, n° 5, 9, 10, 12, 13) etc. The most extensive and complex ones are the monographic studies: „A Page in the History of the Basarabian Orthodox Church”, published by Serghei Bejan during the years 1920-1923, „From the History of the Church of the Romanian People”, signed by professor Constantin N. Tomescu (pseudonym *Tomas*) in the years 1920-1921, and „Historical Sketch on the Divine Liturgy of our Orthodox Church” (1928, n° 17-19), signed by Constantin Popovici, chairman of the editorial board.

Luminătorul of those years printed also a lot of poetry, which seems unusual for a church-based publication, signed both by well-known poets (Alexie Mateevici, Sergiu Matei Nica (Nicov), Sergiu V. Cujba, Vasil Luțcan and others) and by authors of „Luminătorul” only, who have been published here several times. In this context are worth mentioning over 50 writings of Laura Scriban, which appeared in the pages of *Luminătorul* between 1924-1930: poetry, prose, moralizing words, aphorisms and so on (*Bessarabia, Christmas, Christ, Hymn of Christ, Love, My Ideal One, Resurrection by Grace, Atonement* and others). A number of writers who collaborated to *Luminătorul* for a longer period of time succeeded in affirming themselves as poets, printing their works in other publications, and some of them in editing particular books with lyrics or prose.

Numerous authors are valuable writers on science, history, culture, art, literature, education, economics, etc.: Archbishop Gurie, Archimandrite Iulian Scriban, priests and scribes Serghie Bejan, Nicolae Caraman, Nicolae Grosu, Pavel Grosu, Serghie Păduraru, Constantin Popovici, Ștefan Berechet, Onisifor Ghibu, Pavel Mihailovici (Mihail), Pavel Ioniță, Mihail

Vasilache, Sergiu Cujbă, Natalia Buruiană, Anton Luțcan, Alexei Mateevici, Simion Mihnevici, Zaharie Rusu, Trofim Suruceanu, Alfred Tibireanu, Petre Gheorghian, Varlaam Buzilă, Vasile Țepordei and many, many others.

The dramatic year 1940 brings another syncope in the constant regularity of editing the *Luminătorul*. The events in June caused the cessation of activities, and the magazine resumed its appearance in 1941 in Chisinau. The editor of the publication is Constantin Popovici (from 1908 to 1943, the year of his passing), periodically supported by Archbishop Gurie, Professor Constantin Tomescu or an editing board. The last issue is dated June 1944.

Conclusion

Luminătorul, modestly, but well documented and well structured, appeared monthly in Chisinau from January 1908 to March 1944, thanks to the constant effort of the most daring intellectuals of Bessarabia, conjoined with the tenacity of archimandrite Gurie Grosu and the Professor at the Theological Seminary Constantin Popovici. The magazine offers to an uninitiated reader in national history issues a rich and valuable palette of documents and papers, archive materials presented and approached with competence and responsibility, numerous analytical studies on the geography of the land, cultivating respect for ancestors and identity values. The pages of the magazine hosted letters, old documents, lists written in Romanian, because the most sensitive and most pressing problem throughout the Russian rule was the problem of mother tongue, which the natives could only dream about. Thus, through the multitude of topics approached, by their consistency, *Luminătorul* becomes a very clear publication in the spiritual landscape of Bessarabia in the first decades of the 20th century. Throughout 36 years, 1908-1944, overcoming all kinds of restrictions, the first magazine in Bessarabia's mother tongue, with regularity and responsibility, made available thousands and thousands of materials to believers and church servants: studies, articles, documents, sermons and even religious poems of undeniable value. It was the publication that offered over the years the possibility of native language publishing exercise for local talents.

In the social-historical context of the inter-war period, the magazine *Luminătorul* had all the chances to maintain as a religious publication of great authority and prestige, with a special weight in the process of establishing and consolidating the national press, having the preeminence

through its status of stable publication with long-lasting appearance over more than three decades. The appearance of *Luminătorul* as a monthly magazine, broadcasting throughout the Bessarabian province even over the Nistru, was a cultural fact of great significance for identity legitimation. Among the periodicals of religious character, a representative segment of the interwar press, the magazine *Luminătorul* records new dimensions, worth mentioning, such as the continuity (1908-1944), the intransigence in the struggle with the destabilizing and destructive elements for the national Church, the perseverance of the constructive objectives, multi-faceted problems of confession, national values, traditions, etc.

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