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# **P**rotopresbyter Ioan Oprea of Timișoara and His Contribution to the Romanian National Movement from Banat

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## **Abstract**

Being always with the Romanian communities, the Orthodox clergy from Banat represented the most active force of the national movement. In the Romanian villages, the tumult of the national movement was stronger, and in the urban localities, where there were fewer Romanians, the priests were those who, through pastoral activity, supported the feeling of ethnic and cultural unity. During the tumultuous years of the First World War and the establishment of the Romanian-Serbian border, the protopresbyter of Timișoara was Ioan Oprea, a little known church personality. He was a delegate at Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, but his role was more noticeable at the events occasioned by the establishment of the Romanian administration in Banat and the entry of the Romanian Army in Timișoara (August 3, 1919).

## **Keywords:**

Banat, Ioan Oprea, Protopresbyter, National Movement, Romanian Administration

In the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania and Banat was the national pillar of the Romanian faith and culture. The

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involvement of hierarchs, protopresbyters, priests, theology professors, and confessional teachers in the national affirmation was also regarded as a duty of faith. In its organization, Orthodoxy used the ethnic principle, but also it had a natural and moral attitude in the front of history. According to these postulates, the clergy acted for the coagulation of a national feeling among the Romanian population, but also for the cultural elevation of the people they were leading.

Priests were the closest to the needs of the people since they knew well the reality of the times, but also their spiritual desires. There are countless images of priests who assumed an existence oriented towards the ideals that animated the Romanians from Transylvania and Banat for years. Ioan Oprea, the protopresbyter of Timisoara was among the leading priests of Banat, who were shepherds during the Great War years and in the time of disturbance for establishing the borders of Romania.

Although a prominent local personality in the economy of the Great Union and with great role in the establishment of the Romanian administration in Banat, protopresbyter Ioan Oprea does not have a comprehensive historiographical image. On the contrary, the few historical data that exist about him are incomplete and antagonistic.

Some historiographical sources state that protopresbyter Ioan Oprea was born in 1844 in Ezeriș and died in 1934 in Doman, and he was a supporter of the Romanian National Party in Timișoara and director of the Timișana Bank<sup>1</sup>. Others claim that he was born in Mures County, without providing end-of-life data<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, there was a priest Ioan Oprea, born in Ezeris in 1844 and who died on July 12, 1934 in Doman<sup>3</sup>, but he served as a priest for 62 years only in the village of Doman, near Reșița, from 1868 to 1930 when he retired<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ioan MUNTEANU, Vasile Mircea ZABERCA, Mariana SÂRBU, *Banatul și Marea Unire*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, 1992, pp. 243-244.

<sup>2</sup> Ioan MUNTEANU, Dumitru TOMONI, Vasile Mircea ZABERCA, *Banatul și Marea Unire. Bănățeni la Alba Iulia*, Editura Partoș, Timișoara 2018, p. 264. This is a revised and added edition of the book published in 1992, with many corrections and developments made by professor Dumitru Tomoni.

<sup>3</sup> County Service of the National Archives Caraș-Severin, *Registrul decedaților din Parohia Doman*, f. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel ALIC, *Protopopiatele și parohiile Episcopiei Caransebeșului*, *Micromonografii*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2017, p. 186.

## I. Early life and career

The protopresbyter of Timișoara Ioan Oprea was born in Bandul de Campie, Mureș County, and the route of his life was very different from that of the old priest Ioan Oprea from Doman. The Church archives and the most recent historiographical sources have largely completed the life of the “protopresbyter of the Great Union from Timisoara”.

In 1908, Ioan Oprea from Bandul de Campie graduated the Theological-Pedagogical Institute in Sibiu, Theology Section, and class of 1905-1908<sup>5</sup>. The graduation gave candidates the right to register for the vacant parishes within the Metropolis of Transylvania. During that time, many candidates registered for such competitions outside the diocese where they were born. The future protopresbyter Ioan Oprea was in the same situation. Immediately after graduation, he registered for a contest for the occupation of a parish in Banat of Timisoara.

On November 30, 1908, following the transfer of priest Vasile Terebenț, the parish committee in Izvin decided to organize a contest for parish priest of the village. *Biserica și Școala*, the newspaper of the Diocese of Arad, published the vacancy of the parish and the legal and ecclesiastical norms to be fulfilled by those who wished to register for the contest<sup>6</sup>. Five candidates registered: Petru Fleșieriu - graduate of Theology from Căpâlnaș, Ioan Enuică - graduate of Theology from Făget, Nicolae Furnică - graduate of Theology from Brașov, Ioan Oprea - graduate of Theology from Sibiu and Virgil Popovici, parish priest from Săvârșin<sup>7</sup>. The contest was organized on February 22 / March 7 under the chairmanship of protopresbyter Traian Putici. The members of the parish council attributed most of the votes to candidate Ioan Oprea<sup>8</sup>.

After winning the contest, theologian Ioan Oprea was ordained a priest by bishop Ioan Papp of Arad. On July 11/24 the same year, protopresbyter of Timișoara Traian Putici announced the Consistory in Arad that on June 7/20, “after learning more about the rituals, new parish priest Ioan Oprea”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Eusebiu ROȘCA, *Monografia Institutului Pedagogico-Teologic „Andreianu” al Arhidiecezei Ortodoxe din Transilvania*, Tipografia Arhidiecezană, Sibiu, 1911, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> *Biserica și Școala*, Arad, XXXIII (from January 25 / February 7 1909) 4, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Arhiva Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, *Fond Bisericesc* III, Dosar 248/1909, no number.

<sup>8</sup> Arhiva Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, *Fond Bisericesc* III, Dosar 248/1909, no number.

<sup>9</sup> Archive of the Diocese of Arad, *Fond Bisericesc* III, Dosar 299/1908, nr. înreg. 4107 din 1909.

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was placed in the parish office in Izvin, on which occasion priest Oprea took over the parish inventory.

The marriage certificate of the theologian Ioan Oprea shows that on May 10/23, 1909, he married Măriuța Rusu, the priest's daughter from Ida Mare<sup>10</sup> (today Viile Tecii, village of Teaca, south of Bistrița-Năsăud County). Ioan Oprea's wife was Miron Cristea's sister niece, the future patriarch of Romania. At that time, Miron Cristea was a counsellor at the Metropolis of Sibiu, and his second sister, Maria, married Ioan Rusu, a parish priest in Ida Mare<sup>11</sup>. Măriuța was the third offspring of priest Ioan Rusu's family, who had six children<sup>12</sup>. From the declaration signed by Ioan Oprea at the ordination, it appears that the canons and the ordinances of the Orthodox Church regarding the Holy Sacraments of Marriage and Ordination were fully respected, on May 27 / June 9 being ordained in Arad<sup>13</sup>.

## II. Protopresbyter of Timișoara

During his activity at the parish office in Izvin, priest Oprea succeeded to strengthen the believers spiritually and to make a good management of the parish's assets. It results from the administrative correspondence carried out with the Protopresbyteriate of Timisoara and with the Eparchial Centre of Arad<sup>14</sup>. These qualities and, probably, the influence of Miron Cristea who became bishop of Caransebeș in 1910, recommended that in 1912, after the death of protopresbyter Traian Putici, Ioan Oprea be appointed parochial administrator at Timisoara Fabric Parish and administrator of the Protopresbyteriate of Timisoara. These positions were first recorded in the parish acts on September 5/18, 1912<sup>15</sup>. Although he was only 27

<sup>10</sup> Archive of the Diocese of Arad, *Fond Bisericesc* III, Dosar 299/1908, nr. înreg. 2487 din 1909.

<sup>11</sup> Ilie ȘANDRU, *Patriarhul Miron Cristea*, Editura Grai Românesc a Episcopiei Ortodoxe a Covasnei și Harghitei, Miercurea Ciuc, 2008, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ioan RUSU ABRUDEANU, *Patriarhul României Dr. Miron Cristea, Înalt Regent*, ediție nouă, Editura Napoca Star, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Archive of the Diocese of Arad, *Fond Bisericesc* III, Dosar 248/1909, no number.

<sup>14</sup> Archive of the Diocese of Arad, *Fond Epitropesc* V, Dosar 357/1909, nr. înreg 4128/1909.

<sup>15</sup> Pr. dr. Cosmin PANȚURU, *Parohia Ortodoxă Română Timișoara-Fabric, studiu istoric, canonic și administrativ-bisericesc*, Editura Astra Museum/Partoș, Sibiu/Timișoara, 2013, p. 226.

years old, Ioan Oprea managed to skilfully avoid the financial problems that the Timisoara Fabric parish was involved in, a parish with a church under construction and many administrative difficulties. Protopresbyter Putici contracted bank loans and made payment promises to Ioan Zaicu, the painter of the new church in Fabric and to the Bosioc family, who made the iconostasis and the furniture of the church. At his death, which occurred on August 28 / September 10, 1912, the parish had large debts to Păstorul Bank (whose director was Traian Putici) and to the artists who embellished the church<sup>16</sup>.

The new parish administrator Ioan Oprea tried to organize a collection throughout the metropolis, but his request was not possible. Because the payments for the works had to be paid and there was a risk of a trial, they asked Bishop of Arad to bless the urgency of the works reception. This was done in February 1913 (on February 17, the reception for painting and sculpture was made, and on February 19 for construction work)<sup>17</sup>. The Diocese of Arad also decided to convene a meeting with the most important intellectuals of Timișoara and the decision-makers from the city, under the presidency of protopresbyter Ioan Oprea. This meeting was held on August 2, 1919 for establishing a commission that was to draw up a report to the Church Centre of Arad for a loan without guarantees from the Diocese. The following were part of the aforementioned commission: Ioan Oprea as protopresbyter, Pavel Rotariu, Dr. Aurel Cosma, Dr. Gheorghe Adam and Nicolae Jian<sup>18</sup>.

The request could not be honoured, as there was no legal framework, but Bishop Ioan Papp blessed the church to be entrusted to the public divine worship through a consecration service officiated by protopresbyter Ioan Oprea on September 22 / October 5, 1913 (thus the patrimonial claims on the building being removed). The church was to be anointed by the archbishop on July 20 / August 2, 1914, at the celebration of the first patron feast<sup>19</sup>. Unfortunately, the anointing could no longer be organized on the date set because of the Great War outbreak.

In October 1917, after 5 years of administrating the Protopresbyteriate of Timisoara and the Fabric Parish (the central parish of the city of

<sup>16</sup> Pr. Virgil POPOVICI, *Ortodoxismul și Biserica națională românească din Timișoara*, Timișoara, 1935, p. 94-95.

<sup>17</sup> Virgil POPOVICI, *Ortodoxismul...*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>18</sup> Virgil POPOVICI, *Ortodoxismul...*, p. 97.

<sup>19</sup> Pr. dr. Cosmin PANȚURU, *Parohia Ortodoxă Română Timișoara-Fabric...*, p. 66.

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Timișoara at that time), Ioan Oprea was permanently reinforced in the position of parish-protopresbyter, on December 2, the same year, being officially invested in this office<sup>20</sup>.

### III. Involvement in the national movement

#### III.1. The political and administrative situation in Banat prior to the Great Union

As the main cleric of the city on Bega, Ioan Oprea participated actively in the national movement, his involvement being more evident in the events at the end of the war. Then, the political context gave the nations from the Austro-Hungarian Empire the right to decide their own fate. The executive committee of the Romanian National Party met under the leadership of Teodor Mihali, in Oradea. They drafted and voted the final version of a declaration by which the Romanians from Transylvania and Banat demanded their right of self-determination, according to the Wilson principles accepted by the European leaders and they no longer accepted to be represented as a nation by the Hungarian Government<sup>21</sup>. A Subcommittee of action was established with headquarters in Arad, consisting of: Vasile Goldiș, Iuliu Maniu, Ștefan Cicio Pop, Ioan Suci, Alexandru Vaida Voevod and Aurel Vlad, together with representatives of the Romanian social-democrats<sup>22</sup>. Alexandru Vaida-Voievod read the declaration in the Hungarian parliament on October 18, 1918 and it caused a real shock to the audience<sup>23</sup>. The act read by Vaida Voevod was completed by the speech of Vasile Goldis, who stated on October 25, 1918 that only a national assembly could pronounce on the destiny of the Romanians.

Although in Timisoara on October 31, Dr. Otto Roth (member of the Social Democratic Party in Hungary) proclaimed the Republic of Banat and declared that he would remain attached to the new Hungarian government.

<sup>20</sup> Virgil POPOVICI, *Ortodoxismul ...*, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Victor LĂZĂRESCU, "Protopopul dr. George Popovici (1862-1927)", in: *Mitropolia Banatului*, XXVIII (octombrie-decembrie, 1978) 10-12, p. 693.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Aurel COSMA jr., "Amintiri și mărturii de la Unirea din Alba Iulia", in: *Mitropolia Banatului*, XXVIII (octombrie-decembrie, 1978) 10-12, p. 643.

<sup>23</sup> Ioan CLOPOȘEL, *Revoluția din 1918 și unirea Ardealului cu România*, Editura revistei „Societatea de Măine”, Cluj, 1926, pp. 39-47.

The Romanians did not accept this idea and organized a demonstration the same day, attended by thousands of Romanians from Timișoara and neighbouring villages. The Romanians present in the Freedom Square demanded through Aurel Cosma's voice that the "bondage chains of the Romanian nation" be broken forever<sup>24</sup>. On the same day, Aurel Cosma called a new meeting of the Romanian Military Council members in the "Kronprinz" restaurant room. He proposed the transformation of the Military Council into a Romanian National Council, which would extend its authority over civilians. In this way, civil servants were co-opted, like lawyers Pompiliu Ciobanu, Ion Doboșan and Gheorghe Adam, protopresbyter Ioan Oprea and trademan Dimitrie Blaj<sup>25</sup>. They decided to create Romanian national guards in all the villages. The Romanian National Council was established since the first days as an important political force. The interests of the Romanian inhabitants were supported through the Executive Committee and a decision was made to unite Banat with Romania. The National Council of Timișoara was naturally placed under the leadership of the Central Romanian National Council from Arad, considering it the tutelary forum of the Romanian nation and thus proving the opposition to the Hungarian idea of Banat's autonomy and the desire to unite the people of Banat with Romania. Romanians were exhorted to be calm and to defend the private or common property, especially since "the time has come for every people and every individual to be equally justified and master over his own fate"<sup>26</sup>.

The Romanians could not take possession of Banat because the Hungarian Government made peace talks with Antanta, signing an armistice in this regard. According to this armistice agreement signed on November 13, 1918 in Belgrade between Antanta and Hungary, the allied troops occupied Banat until the conclusion of the negotiations at the Peace Conference<sup>27</sup>. The first armies who arrived in Banat were the Serbs, who committed numerous abuses, not knowing their status as a

<sup>24</sup> [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unirea\\_Banatului\\_cu\\_Rom%C3%A2nia](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unirea_Banatului_cu_Rom%C3%A2nia)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/in-31-octombrie-1918-la-timisoara-este-proclamata-republica-banateana>

<sup>26</sup> Daniel ALIC, *Eparhia Caransebeșului în perioada păstoririi episcopului Miron Cristea (1910-1919). Biserică și societate*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană/Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, Cluj-Napoca/Caransebeș, 2013, pp. 344-346.

<sup>27</sup> Constantin BRĂTESCU, *Biserica strămoșească din Banatul de sud și contribuția sa la făurirea României Mari (1867-1919)*, Editura Dalami, Caransebeș, 2007, p. 25.

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force for maintaining public order<sup>28</sup>. The situation remained uncertain even in the first half of 1919, Banat being a territory still under Hungarian administration, but divided arbitrarily by the French and Serbian armies, who had different views on their surveillance mission. On November 14, 1918, the Serbs occupied Timisoara, and the Serbian command took over the military administration of Banat, dissolved the national guards, and later took over the civil administration. Initially, the Serbs held only the military administration and left the civilian administration to the Hungarians. Both forms of leadership did not like the Romanians, considering them dangerous<sup>29</sup>.

### **III. 2. Ioan Oprea's participation in The Great National Assembly from Alba Iulia and the establishment of the Romanian administration in Timișoara**

Under the new conditions, the Romanian activity was brutally stopped. The road to Alba Iulia was closed by the Serbian army, thus some delegates were not able to arrive at Campia Libertatii on December 1, 1918. Protopresbyter Ioan Oprea managed to go to Alba Iulia and represented the clergy from the Protopresbyteriate of Timisoara as a rightful delegate<sup>30</sup>. In many cases, the leaders of Banat were forced to work secretly in order to mobilize Romanians for the election meetings and hand over credentials to the delegates, that is to say powers to vote the unconditional union of Banat with Romania. After December 1, 1918, the Serbs continued and even intensified their persecutions against the Romanians and their national organizations. On December 11, 1918 Major Alexandru Dumitrescu informed the Great Romanian General Headquarters about the situation: "In Banat there is now a fierce fight, similar to the one the Hungarians carried out against the Romanians before, and daily arrests of Romanians are made in different localities in Banat ..."<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Constantin BRĂTESCU, *Biserica strămoșească...*, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Radu PAIUȘAN, *Mișcarea națională din Banat și Marea Unire 1895-1919*, Editura de Vest, Timișoara 1993, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> Ioan MUNTEANU, Dumitru TOMONI, Vasile Mircea ZABERCA, *Banatul și Marea Unire...*, p. 264

<sup>31</sup> Service of the National Archives, Fond *Direcția Generală a Poliției și Siguranței Generale*, dosar 8/1919, fila 13.



The memoirs of priest Moise Bărbulescu from Herneacova described that in 1919 he was sought by the Serbian authorities to be killed because of his national activity, and his house was full of refugees priests, teachers and peasants around Timișoara, even protopresbyter Ioan Oprea of Timisoara being sheltered by him<sup>32</sup>.

All these situations lasted on until the establishment of the Romanian administration in Timisoara and the withdrawal of the Serbian army. The Romanian administration was established in Timișoara only on July 28, by taking over the Prefecture of Timiș-Torontal County by dr. Aurel Cosma.<sup>33</sup> On the evening of July 29, 1919, protopresbyter Ioan Oprea was present in the room of Kronprinz hotel in Timisoara, where a banquet was organized for the new prefect Aurel Cosma<sup>34</sup>. Ioan Oprea also led a delegation of priests who congratulated prefect Aurel Cosma on his new dignity. In his speech, protopresbyter Ioan Oprea said:

“We have often climbed these steps, in order to pay tribute to the dignitaries required by the politeness of the official connections, but we confess that we have always done it only within the rigid formalities and with an inconsolable heart, knowing that I came to aliens, or even enemies. But now, dear mister prefect, when we have a true friend and brother by blood and faith at the leadership of the county, we have come with the love, and the trust that brothers have towards brothers, in order to pay the homage of the clergy and the Church of which you have made yourself worthy by the distinguished qualities that were at the same time a step to the dignity in which the confidence of our national leadership has placed you<sup>35</sup>.”

In the same spirit, Dr. Aurel Cosma emphasized: “I appreciate the brilliant role of the Church in our national and cultural life and I recognize that in the long-standing work of the construction of Great Romania, the best part belongs to the priesthood and to the Romanian Church<sup>36</sup>.”

<sup>32</sup> Grigore N. POPESCU, *Preoțimea română și întregirea neamului. Temnițe și lagăre*, Tipografia Vremea, București, 1940, pp. 317-319.

<sup>33</sup> For details, Vasile DUDAȘ, *Aurel Cosma (1867–1931)*, Editura Mirton, Timișoara, 1998.

<sup>34</sup> *Banatul*, Lugoj, an I, nr. 47 din 1 august 1919, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Banatul*, Timișoara, an I, nr. 23 din 20 iulie 1919, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Banatul*, Timișoara, an I, nr. 23 din 20 iulie 1919, p. 3..

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On August 1, 1919, the first Romanian gendarmes arrived in Timișoara, and on August 3, 1919, the units of the Romanian Army made their solemn entry into the city under the command of Colonel Virgil Economu.<sup>37</sup> The involvement of protopresbyter Ioan Oprea at the time when the Romanian Army entered the city of Bega was very important. Although not known long ago, the news of the entry of Romanian soldiers into Timișoara

“widened as the lightning bolt among the Romanians and the enthusiasm was so great that men and women, young and old, rushed to take part in the big celebration of brothers’ reception who have brought us the freedom desired for centuries. The manifestation of the public for this uplifting moment was spontaneous and instinctive, and not organized and proceeded in the most perfect order, although the mass influx was enormous”<sup>38</sup>.

Press sources estimated that more than 100,000 people from all over Banat, arrived by train, with carts or by horse, and were present at this Romanian celebration. The prefect, Dr. Aurel Cosma uttered the first word of welcome, at the entrance to the city. Then, at the Church of *St. Elijah* in Fabric on an improvised altar, protopresbyter Ioan Oprea of Timișoara assisted by six priests held a service of thanksgiving, and addressed a word to the soldiers. The liturgical answers were given by the hundreds of Romanian choristers who came from the villages near Timișoara. Protopresbyter Oprea welcomed the Romanian Army, and Colonel Virgil Economu replied: “God has always been in the hearts of Romanians, in pure hearts, with valid feelings and has taught us that the Romanians should love each other and not live apart”<sup>39</sup>.

From the Fabric Church, the military convoy headed for the Lord’s Square in Cetate followed by a huge crowd, where the official solemnity of receiving the Army was to take place. The first speech from the Square was uttered by protopresbyter Ioan Oprea:

“We have been waiting for you with longing, from Michael’s days. We warmly embrace you in the days of the glorious King

<sup>37</sup> I. MUNTEANU, V. M. ZABERCA, M. SĂRBU, *Banatul și Marea Unire*, p.78

<sup>38</sup> <http://evz.ro/intrarii-armatei-regale-timisoara.html>

<sup>39</sup> *Banatul românesc*, Lugoj, an I, nr. 49 din 7 august 1919, p. 2.

Ferdinand, this smiling archangel, whose spirit you took when you defeated at Mărășești. You sealed the bond of union with your blood. That is why we call you *Hosanna; you are welcome in the name of the Lord*. We worship in front of your flag. Long live the brave soldier Colonel Economu and his soldiers, long live King and Queen, long live His Highness Prince Carol, Long live the Great Romania!<sup>40</sup>.

Another great manifestation of Romanian solidarity took place in Timișoara on August 10, 1919. The great assembly from Timișoara, as it was called, was held at the market of the city where “a huge crowd from all the places of Banat came to protest against the rebellious injustice of dividing the richest and most united Romanian province”<sup>41</sup>. Special trains arrived at the train station in Timișoara, bringing entire villages of Romanians led by their priests, who walked the streets singing and waving tricolour flags in their hands. The meeting started at 10.30 am with a religious service officiated by the protopresbyter of Timișoara, Ioan Oprea, assisted by priests Micu from Bucovăț and Ionescu from Jebel, the answers being offered by the choir “Ion Vidu” from Lugoj who was present at the event. At the end of the service, “kneeling and with a moving voice, the pious protopresbyter reads a hot prayer to God, begging His protection over our nation and dynasty”<sup>42</sup>.

After speeches delivered by protopresbyters George Popovici from Lugoj, Ioan Sîrbu from Rudăria and Gherasim Sîrbu from Belinț, Avram Imbroane, the director of the newspaper *Banatul* of Lugoj also spoke, then protopresbyter Oprea read the resolution from Timișoara:

- “1. We declare the unity of the whole Banat with the Romanian state forever under the sceptre of the Romanian dynasty;
2. We swear faith and obedience to HM King Ferdinand I, ruler of all Romanians;
3. We pay our tribute to the glorious Romanian army for the great work and sacrifice placed on the altar of our emancipation from the yoke of a thousand years, for the defeat of Hungarian

<sup>40</sup> *Banatul românesc*, Lugoj, an I, nr. 49 din 7 august 1919, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Banatul*, Timișoara, an I, no. 51 from August 13, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Banatul*, Timișoara, an I, no. 51 from August 13, 1919, p. 1.

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Bolshevism and for the triumphal entry into the capital of Hungary;

4. We are grateful for the decisions of our Sovereign and his advisers to impose on everyone the respect of the historical, territorial and sovereign rights of the Romanian state and nation;

5. We demand the observance of the treaty of August 4, 1916, concluded by the Romanian kingdom with the great allied powers; we demand the whole Banat province with its natural borders, Danube, Tisza and Mures, from the historical, ethnographic and economic point of view, - we protest, therefore, against any attempt to arbitrarily change the boundaries of Great Romania;

6. We protest against any attempt to undermine the sovereignty of the Romanian nation and state under any pretext, and against any interference in the internal affairs of the Romanian state<sup>743</sup>.

In the autumn of 1919, Ioan Oprea was also elected deputy in the Romanian Parliament, from Giroc constituency<sup>44</sup>.

After the establishment of the Romanian administration in Banat, as a protopresbyter of Timișoara, Ioan Oprea took an active part in organizing the primary education in the city and in the county, and set up social assistance institutions for war orphans<sup>45</sup>.

#### IV. Withdrawal from priesthood

On February 8, 1922<sup>46</sup> Ioan Oprea asked Ioan Papp, the bishop of Arad, to give him a vacation, and then *Biserica și Scoala*, the magazine of the Diocese of Arad, announced that

“following Father protopresbyter Ioan Oprea’s resignation from the Protopresbyteriate of Timisoara, the management of this

<sup>43</sup> *Banatul*, Timișoara, an I, no. 51 from August 13, 1919, p. 1. See also Miodrag CIURUȘCHIN, “Mișcarea națională românească pentru unirea Banatului cu România (februarie-august 1919)”, in: *Analele Banatului. Arheologie-Istorie*, XIX (2011), p. 464.

<sup>44</sup> *Banatul românesc*, Timișoara, an I, nr. 83 din 5 noiembrie 1919, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Virgil POPOVICI, *Ortodoxismul...*, p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> Archive of the Diocese of Arad, *Fond Bisericesc* III, Dosar 64/1922, nr. înreg. 341 din 8/21 februarie 1922.

Protopresbyteriate affairs was entrusted to Father protopresbyter Dr. Patrachie Tiucra from Vinga until his fulfilment in his path, who becomes a Protopresbyteriate administrator<sup>47</sup>.

The resignation from the office of protopresbyter and priest at only 37 years old, places a question mark on protopresbyter Ioan Oprea. Historiography does not record anything about the reason for the renunciation of the priesthood and even speaks admiringly of his ecclesiastical activity. It is only shown that “he withdraws from the forehead of the Protopresbyteriate to the regret of the clergy and his believers, so that he can carry out his activity also on the administrative field”<sup>48</sup>. His last mention at the Church affairs was in 1943 when he signed a document requested by the Institute of National History at the University Ferdinand I of Cluj-Sibiu. Thus, he showed his quality as a participant in the Great Union:

“According to the convocation no. 5527 C / 1943 of the holy Diocese of Timisoara, and as a delegate to the National Assembly of Alba Iulia, I send the requested photo. I represented Protopresbyteriate of Timișoara as a delegate in my capacity as titular protopresbyter of Timișoara. Born on January 2, 1885 in Bandul de Campie, Mureș County. Timisoara, December 12, 1943. Signs Ioan Oprea, general director of Torontal Bank and Trade House, former protopresbyter of Timisoara”<sup>49</sup>.

Posterity states that, after his wife died and in order to be able to raise his children (he had two children: Miron and Ionel)<sup>50</sup> he re-married, giving up priesthood. He remained close to the church of St. *Elijah* in Fabric-Timișoara, a place where he participated every Sunday at the service, having a place in the chair of protopresbyter as an act of honour. People still appreciated him, and he became an influential businessperson in the

<sup>47</sup> *Biserica și Școala*, Arad, XLVI (8/21 mai 1922) 19, p. 1

<sup>48</sup> Virgil POPOVICI, *Ortodoxismul...*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>49</sup> Mircea VAIDA VOEVOD, Gelu NEAMȚU, *1 Decembrie 1918. Mărturiile ale participanților votanți ai Marii Uniri*, vol. II, Editura Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Ioan RUSU ABRUDEANU, *Patriarhul României Dr. Miron Cristea, Înalt Regent ...*, p. 36.

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interwar Timisoara<sup>51</sup>. Unfortunately, no concrete data are known about his death, but most likely, he suffered because of the communist regime. We hope that further research will also clarify this aspect of Ioan Oprea's life, the former protopresbyter of Timisoara.

Beyond the personal accents of his life, protopresbyter Ioan Oprea's activity during the First World War, the struggle for the support of Christ's Church in hard times and the significant contribution he made to the union of Banat with Romania, highlights him as the most important Church personality of Timisoara from the time of the great turmoil for the unity of the Romanian people.

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<sup>51</sup> Information received from HH Timotei Seviciu, Archbishop of Arad, (n. 4 iunie 1936, Timișoara), who grew up in the pulpit of the Church from Fabric and who knew him personally (recorded, June 5, 2019).