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## **H**oly Brâncoveanu Martyrs – Model of Sacrifice and Supporters of Christian Culture

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### **Abstract:**

In this study I wrote about the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ on the Cross, as a prototype for the sacrifice of martyrs, a sacrificial work of confession of the Church continued by the family of the Holy Voivode Martyr Constantin Brâncoveanu until the martyrs of the communist period and today.

Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu and Lady Maria were responsible parents, with love for God, lovers of children, having a family with eleven children, to whom they offered a Christian education and inspired them in cultivating Orthodox spirituality and confessing the faith until the sacrifice of life.

Both Saint Constantine and Mary Brancoveanu and their children gave the Romanian people and our Church many spiritual-cultural works: buildings they founded (churches and monasteries), houses, schools, books, various objects, etc., all remaining in our country's heritage.

### **Keywords:**

Brâncoveanu, saint, Church, sacrifice, culture, family.

## **I. Introduction**

God is reached through love and sacrifice. These words correspond to the family of the Holy Voivode Martyr Constantin Brâncoveanu.

In the universe created by God, beyond history and its deeds, lies the relationship between man and woman, blessed by God and meant to transfigure the world through love and sacrifice. God's love has sent heaven down to earth and lifts people to the Source of life.

In these days of trial for the Romanian people and not only, we remember the Holy Martyrs of Brâncoveanu, their life and martyrdom, deepening and expressing the fundamental features of the life of the Brâncoveanu family on earth, who wanted to live forever. Those who want to accomplish something must make greater or lesser sacrifices. In order to fulfill the commandment of love for God and people, it is necessary to sacrifice.

Sacrifice means giving up something for the benefit of someone, it means offering to the divinity. Sacrifice means a gift to the divinity, giving up something precious, suffering, being hurt or killed.

## **II. The Christian and human dimension of the Brâncoveanu family**

In the case of the Holy Brâncoveni Martyrs, the sacrifice of children means the renunciation of childhood many joys, the acceptance of the status of son or daughter of the Country Voivode, the dramatic feeling of brothers' loss and the offering brought to God by the four boys who became martyrs.

The sacrifice of the parents, Saint Constantine and Lady Maria Brâncoveanu, expresses the love for God, the birth of babies, the mother's sacrifice for the family, and the father's urge to sacrifice for his own children, to which he was added in the crowd of martyrs.

Hence the current model and extrapolation of the spirit of sacrifice in the Christian-Romanian family, as well as the negative aspects of a contemporary life away from the moral values of Orthodoxy.

According to the Christian custom, Constantin Brâncoveanu married Maria in 1674 and they gave birth to eleven children: four boys and seven girls. Their marriage was not a "trial" and did not make them "prisoners", but sealed the love and devotion freely manifested in view of fulfilling

the promises before the Holy Altar. All the children were baptized and educated in the Orthodox faith. Some of them were married and brought children, that is grandchildren to their parents.

Having many hierarchs, teachers, and enlightened people at the royal court, St. Constantine and Mrs. Mary provided the children with a high education that bore fruit throughout their lives. Holy Scripture, holy writings, and scientific literature have been the food of education and preparation for the approach to earthly life and the acquisition of eternity.

Saint Martyr Voivode Constantin Brâncoveanu (1654-1714) lived 60 years and ruled Wallachia for 26 years. Lady Maria (born ? – 1729) lived about 75 years, being a sacrificial mother and a Lady of the nation who supported the Voivode in his work.

The eleven children were born in a period of 26 years, some living longer and others less:

1. Stanca (1676 – 1714) lived 38 years and was married to Radu, son of Ilias Voda, Lord of Moldova, without children.
2. Maria (1678 – 1697) lived 19 years and was married to Constantin Duca Voda, Ruler of Moldova, with whom she had two children.
3. Ilinca (1682 – 1758) lived 76 years, being married to Scarlat, the son of the dragoman Alexandru Mavrocordat, who died, and then remarried Șerban, the son of the logothete Șerban Greceanu, with whom she had five children.
4. Constantin (1683 – 1714), martyr, lived 31 years. He was married to Anita, the daughter of the stolnic Ioan Balș from Moldova. He worked fruitfully with the Holy Hierarch Antim Ivireanul, translating the book of Plutarch, “Parallel Lives”, and with the Abbot John of Hurezi, founding the hermitage of the “Holy Apostles”.
5. Ștefan (1685 – 1714), martyr, lived 29 years and was married to Bălașa, daughter of Ilie Cantacuzino from Moldova, having a child. Author of *Trei cuvinte de laudă (Three Words of Praise)*: one for Saint Constantine the Great, one for the Holy Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen and the third for the “Assumption of the Blessed Virgin”, he is credited with founding the hermitage “Saint Martyr Stephen” near the Hurezi Monastery.
6. Safta (1686 – 1747) she lived 61 years, being married to the logothete Iordache Crețulescu and having five children.

7. Radu (1690 – 1714), martyr, lived 24 years and was married to Maria, daughter of Antioh Cantemir, former Lord of Moldova. He wrote *Cuvântare la Patima cea mântuitoare a Cuvântului Dumnezeu și Om* (*Speech at the Saving Passion of the God Word and Man*) and *Cuvânt panegiric la Sfântul Nicolae* (*A Panegyric to St. Nicholas*).
8. Ancuța (1691 – 1730) lived 39 years, and being married to the postelnic Nicolae, son of Iordache Ruset, had three children.
9. Bălașa (1693 – 1752) lived 61 years and was married to Manolache Lambrino, the future ban of Craiova.
10. Smaranda (1696 – 1735) lived 39 years, being married to the stolnic Constantin, son of the great logothete Grigorie Băleanu.
11. Matei (1702 – 1714), martyr, lived only 12 years, ending his life with his father and brothers on August 15, 1714, in a martyrdom.

The Holy Hierarch John Chrysostom says that love and understanding are “the root of all goodness”. Love makes people a Christian family, which has the same purpose, which is oriented toward the same goal, perfection in Christ.

Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu and Lady Maria understood that the birth of babies did not prevent them in their personal fulfillment and social responsibilities. They put to heart the words of St. John Chrysostom who says: “Let no one regard marriage as a hindrance to the goodness of God, let no one regard the birth of children as an obstacle to virtue. If we are awake, then neither marriage nor the upbringing of children or anything else will stop us from pleasing God”<sup>1</sup>.

### III. The Gospel – the foundation of teaching for the Christian family

The birth of children is a blessing and a gift from God – the Source of life. The supernatural birth was ordained only to the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

The conversation of the Virgin Mary with the Archangel Gabriel about the birth of Jesus reveals to us that the Son of God is born in eternity of

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<sup>1</sup> Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Facere* (II), Omilia a XVIII-a, IV, transl. Pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 214.

the Father without a mother, and is born as a Man of the mother without a father: “And the angel said to her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1, 30-32).

Shortly after this, when receiving the baby Jesus in his arms, the Righteous Simeon prophesied, among other things, that this child was a sign of opposition (controversy, dispute, cross-examination), after which he warned the Blessed Virgin that a sword would pass through her soul (Luke 2, 34-35).

In the context of fear for his throne, Herod killed 14,000 infants in and around Bethlehem (which meant a great sacrifice, martyrdom) because of the Divine Infant called “King of the Jews” (Matt. 2,13-18).

Every birth of a baby is done with sacrifice and love. Some children have survived their time, others have gone on forever for various reasons, as we have seen from these few examples and from the history of the world.

From Christ to the present, many Christians have sacrificed themselves on the altar of faith in the Son of God and received martyrdom. Martyrs to the Kingdom of Heaven also ascended from our Dobrogea ancestors. After centuries of history and sacrifice, the fall of Constantinople under the Turks (1453) also meant their invasion of the Romanian lands several times.

The uprising of the Serbs seimeni and the home guards in Bucharest (1655, revolted against the ruler Constantin Serban Basarab) killed the voivode’s father, Matei (Papa) Brancoveanu, in 1655, when his child was only one year old; his grandfather, Preda Brâncoveanu was killed three years later (1658) in Targoviste, by order of Mihnea III (when the future Voivode was four years old).

In 1655, when the voivode’s father was killed, his grandfather Preda managed to escape.

“Thirsty for murder and put on the destruction of the family, the rebels rushed into the courtyards, empty-handed, demanding the body of little Constantine, the son of the one who was still writhing on the threshold in the steam of blood. A witness from

the time says that the servants quickly went out to meet the killers with a one-year-old child who was hurriedly snatched from the arms of a gypsy. The invaders smashed him to pieces and left. Therefore, the Brancoveanu era is due to some inspired servants and an unhappy maid. History is sometimes made that way. The child escapes a stupid and anonymous death to go to another, spectacular and full of meaning”<sup>2</sup>.

Interesting resemblance, of course keeping the proportions, between the sacrifice of Christ the Savior (Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the killing of babies by Herod) and the sacrifice of St. Constantine Brâncoveanu! The will of God, the guardian angel, and the divine work among men make it possible for us to survive in difficult conditions.

From the beginning, Constantin Brâncoveanu was heading for the sacrifice. His sacrifice was four-times because he had to see his boys martyred and his son-in-law, Counselor Ianache, and then receive the martyr’s death, which had been pursuing him for 59 years.

Prior to this, he had to travel the “Road of the Cross” from Bucharest to Constantinople, suffering in the Edicule and Epol, and then be “crucified” in front of the crowd on the cross of the Orthodox faith and the Romanian people.

From the sacrifice on the cross of the Savior Jesus Christ (“Pilate said to them: Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? They all said: Let him be crucified!”), Matt. 27, 22), to the crowd of thousands of martyrs the martyrdom of the Saints from Brâncoveni was added at the beginning of the 18th century. Voivode Constantine was shouted, “Let him be dethroned!” Up close, as if the Virgin Mary was looking at her Son crucified on the Cross, Lady Maria Brâncoveanu looked at the altar of sacrifice of her husband, children and son-in-law, knowing the turmoil of the soul and the rebirth of immortality in their lives.

From the martyrdom of the first Saints from Dobrogea (the persecutions of the pagan Roman Empire), to the sacrifice of Ana by Manole for the opera at Curtea de Argeș, and to the sacrifice of John, the Abbot of the Hurezi, on the altars of faith built by the goodwill of the Martyr Voivod Brâncoveanu, we have immortalized the love for eternity and the sacrifice for eternity that springs from the “earthly Jerusalem – the Holy Church”.

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<sup>2</sup> Valeriu ANANIA, *Cerurile Oltului*, Editura Episcopiei Râmnicului și Argeșului, Râmnicu Vâlcea, 1990, pp. 101-102.

“No one can reach God except by exalting himself through sacrifice”, said St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Faith in God and eternal life determined the Holy Voivode Constantin Brâncoveanu, together with his sons, to give up everything that is earthly. Listening to the words of the Holy Apostle Paul who says: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11, 1), we understand how the Romanian voivode related to the value of the immortal soul that can never be killed, as long as we believe in the work of God’s grace.

In times of great parental grief, the Voivode encourages his sons with words of hope:

“My sons, be brave, we have lost everything we had in this world, at least to save our souls and to wash away our sins with our blood ... Look to Christ, our Savior, how long He has endured for you, and with what death of disgrace He has died! Believe strongly in this and do not move from the Orthodox faith for this life and the world! Remember St. Paul, who says that no sword, no rush, no affliction, no other will separate him from Christ; that these labors and needs here are not worthy of the glory which Christ will give. But now, my sweet sons, let us wash away our sins with our blood”.

The fulfillment of the words of the Savior Jesus Christ is in such an attitude: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10, 37).

The worthiness of their love led them to the third birth of which the Holy Hierarch Antim Ivireanul speaks: after the bodily birth from the womb of the mother and the spiritual birth through Holy Baptism, there is “the third birth, of death, which is saving, without error and without danger to the faithful and just man, for he can no longer sin after death”<sup>3</sup>.

“A people that has given such people (martyrs) cannot disappear”, says Pastor Richard Wurmbrand.

The Christian Sacrifice has its source in the sacrifice on the Cross of the Savior Jesus Christ. Human sacrifice has its roots in the sacrificial love

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<sup>3</sup> Sfântul ANTIM IVIREANUL, *Didahii*, Editura Basilica, București, 2010, p. 199.

of the human person for fellow human beings. The latter is sanctified and acquires eternal values if they relate to God. We find the same features of sacrifice in the life and martyrdom of the Brâncoveni Saints and in the whole family.

The martyrs of the Christian Church understood and expressed both forms: Christian sacrifice and human sacrifice, fulfilling God's commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22, 37-39).

This is what happens in the family of Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu, because their love and sacrifice is not an accident, but a mystery that is revealed and understood in the state of communion with God.

The model of life and dedication for Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu and Lady Maria were the Holy Emperors Constantine the Great and his mother Elena, whose icons can be found in the church of Hurezi Monastery.

Of course, the love and sacrifice of the people of Brâncoveni are founded and sealed on the love and sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13, 34). This is about sacrificial love, which is crucified for one's neighbor. This means freedom and devotion, because we can choose between love and unlove, and offer our love through sacrifice, having the reason to serve the family.

The parents' sacrifice of childbirth makes meaning through Baptism, Communion with the Holy Sacraments, and their orientation and preparation for eternal life.

Having a house full of children (baptized and then some married), the family of Saint Constantine Brancoveanu understood God's blessing and the need for sacrifice on earth for eternity. The birth of many babies increased the communion between the spouses, deepened the essence of the marriage and the common responsibility.

#### **IV. Sacrificed family and fruitfulness in holiness and Christian culture**

The acquired culture, the advice of the clergyman Ioan de la Hurezi and of the Orthodox Hierarchs from Wallachia and from the court, bore in the life



of Saint Constantine and Lady Maria the experience of the holy revelation between the joy of life and the gift of immortality. Without exaggeration, we believe that the sacrifice of Archimandrite Ioan de la Hurezi, his love of perfecting the living faces of the Brâncoveanu family and the effort to paint the holy places in a divine light – model for contemporaries and descendants are the base of the **name** Brancoveanu referring to their foundations and theological and spiritual life.

Through the children's *icons*, the Holy Voivode Constantine and Lady Mary had the opportunity to see and observe how

“The child is an original biblical creature. The child is a creature of the spotless life, it is a flower open to the world, it is an exhortation to simplicity and beauty. The fragment of heaven given to man at the beginning speaks in him. The child is a great gift of our life here: he brings innocence, sweetness and kindness. The child sweetens our so bitter life; his little winged creature teaches us many lessons”<sup>4</sup>.

Before ascending to heaven, the Brâncoveni children often relieved the troubled life of the governor and then of the Voivode, bitter by the many pressures from the Turks and the numerous plots from the boyars.

Most children had already a way in earthly life, but most of them died in their youth.

There is so much cross in the life of this family that it is almost very difficult to notice such an icon of joy and suffering elsewhere!

The sacrifices that parents make for their children mean love and sacrifice, but in order for them to have eternal value, they must be sanctified and transfigured by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Both Saint Constantine and Maria Brancoveanu and their children gave many spiritual and cultural works to the Romanian people and to our Church: church buildings (monasteries and churches), houses, schools, books, miscellaneous objects, etc., all of which are partial gifts.

Father Constantin Galeriu writes that

“You can sacrifice something of your own, you can participate spiritually in the sacrifice of a fellow man, enduring with him;

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<sup>4</sup> Ernest BERNEA, *Îndemn la simplitate*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1995, pp. 108-109.

but the true sacrifice is to offer yourself; that is why you do not give anything until you give yourself, that is, I do not give what I have, but what I am”<sup>5</sup>.

We understand from the Old and New Testaments that

“Jesus Christ is both a gift and a sacrifice. In Him the gift that descends to us is God Himself, the sacrifice that ascends to the Father is not a mere man, but God – Man. The grace of this gift descends to the «lowest» of our creation, and the sacrifice ascends through Him to the right hand of the Father. Perfect union made in both directions”<sup>6</sup>.

Christ the Lord gave himself completely for the redemption of men from sin: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3, 16).

This is what happened to Saint Constantine and his sons and to the counselor Ianache: they gave themselves to the Church of God through a total and personal sacrifice, body and soul, dedicated to God, and became prayers for the Romanian nation before the throne of the Holy Trinity.

Of course, God does not want us to die, but He wants us to be alive, He wants us to live with Him forever, to be sanctified, enriched in divine grace and beauty. Jesus Christ tells the disciples: “I came that they (people) may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10, 10).

The sacrifice of the Saints of Brâncoveni brings a lot of pain, but also a lot of longing from the family left in the earthly life. To stop seeing your sons, as a mother, to stop seeing your brothers, as sisters, means a great deal of suffering and a lot of longing.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae, defining longing, makes us understand the condition of Lady Maria and her daughters after the moment of August 15, 1714. He says that

“Longing is the acute feeling of the absence of those on his horizon, who bear their name, who cannot be filled by others. In longing there is a sui generis presence of the absent; the pain

<sup>5</sup> Părintele GALERIU, *Jertfă și răscumpărare*, Editura Harisma, București, 1991, p. 205.

<sup>6</sup> Părintele GALERIU, *Jertfă și răscumpărare*, p. 202.

of their absence is experienced. But it is through this pain that one lives at the same time, a kind of indelible presence of them in consciousness. Their absence is a torment, because it is not a total absence, it is not a forgetfulness. In longing man is alone or without the desired one, and at the same time he is not alone: he is with the desired one. But the one who is desired is not present in flesh and blood, but is represented by longing<sup>77</sup>.

These feelings and sentiments, states and manifestations were in the souls of the Brâncovens, survivors of the martyrdom of their father, husband and brothers.

It is a condition that everyone lives when they break up with a loved one. How interestingly Father Staniloae points out that “the absence of those who are gone is torment, because it is not a total absence”, they did not die, but moved to another plane of existence, and through prayer we are in communion with them and await reunion in eternity.

Hope in the public resurrection (the Creed, “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come”) makes us bear this longing for revival.

Many of us have been through such a situation, and we have had and still have a longing for those who have left this world.

From the longing for temporary separation in the Brâncoveanu family, to the longing for reunion in the Kingdom of God, the longing for holy communion at the table of silence and in front of the Holy Altar, raising the kollyva and the candle to an eternal remembrance and eternal love and prayer.

But having a Holy Father and Holy Brethren is too complex a situation to be described in a few words.

What Father Stăniloae said happened in the Brâncoveanu family:

“You want more for the person with whom you have previously had a long communion, because in that communion its warmth was discovered, as a necessary atmosphere of your existence. (...). Until you are far from it, you have no rest, you are on

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<sup>77</sup> Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Editura Elion, București, 2001, p. 102.

the road. Through longing, the breath of familiar warmth of the person with whom you have been in communion comes to you from a distance. Longing calls you to her”<sup>8</sup>.

Looking at the lives of the saints, we notice in reference to them that we often sacrifice our time for insignificant things. However, it is necessary to sacrifice pieces of our earthly life in order to pray to God to sanctify the time of earthly existence, transfiguring it into eternal time.

Going to the Hurezi Monastery, in the church we find the tomb of Brâncoveanu, which is empty; but we hope that by the prayer of the Brâncoveni Saints and by the present work dedicated to them, we will light a candle in the darkness of this world that no longer has time to reflect on the values of the Christian sacrifice and the sacrifices of those around us.

Among the Ten Commandments, by the fifth, God urges us to honor our parents: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Exodus 20, 12).

It is natural to honor our parents, for they are the ones who gave birth to us and raised us, educated us, and helped us in our earthly life. We are obliged to love them, to listen to them, at the urging of the Holy Apostle Paul: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph 6, 1). “My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 6, 20). The children of Voivode Brâncoveanu listened to the exhortations of their father and mother.

At the same time, it is good not to upset our parents, but to help them whenever needed: “O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives” (Sirach 3, 12).

Children have a duty to honor godparents, and all people. Parents naturally lean toward their children, caring for them, and providing them with a Christian education that will teach them to love God and His Church.

The Holy Apostle Paul also says: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6, 4).

Parental tears shed for children cannot be counted; they express the feeling of maternal and paternal love for “life” and the fruit of love.

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<sup>8</sup> Pr. Dumitru STĂNILĂ, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, pp. 105-106.

The child comes into the world from non-existence to existence by the will of God and the love of the parents. Children are clean, powerless, and deprived of their own strength, so they need shelter, food, care, defense, and love, depending on the love of those around them. From the moment they are born, parents no longer live for themselves, but for their children, their children's lives are their own.

The Son of God Became a Child of the Virgin Mary out of boundless and humble love for man.

“The Lord Jesus had no children in the flesh, but he had disciples, spiritual sons, to whom he said: «Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven » (Matt 19, 14). Moreover, Jesus the Savior raised the son of the widow of Nain and the daughter of Jairus, bringing joy to the grieving parents. Love for children is, therefore, the beginning of an understanding of God's parental love for people. Children who lack parental love cannot grow fully spiritually, and adults who cannot show selfless, brotherly, and parental love for their fellow man cannot fully respond to Heavenly Father's parental love”<sup>9</sup>.

## V. The Christian family between the past and the present

Saint Constantine and Lady Mary were responsible parents, with love for God, lovers of children, having a family with eleven children whom they cared for, offered them a Christian education and a purpose in life. Even though they had eleven children, they did not abandon them or give them the “freedom” to do what they wanted. They gave birth to children to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Their love was a Christian, sacrificial and altruistic one, which we hardly meet today, when selfishness, indifference and individualism predominate in the world, camouflaged by a *telenovela* love.

Today, divorces, abortion, debauchery, child abandonment have become common in the developed, computerized, communicative human society, but in a moral and economic crisis.

<sup>9</sup> †DANIEL, Mitropolitul Moldovei și Bucovinei, *Daruri de Crăciun – înțelesuri ale sărbătorii Nașterii Domnului*, Edit. Trinitas, Iași, 2005, pp. 50-51

Orphans, poor children, sick children, children without childhood need parental love, the help of institutions that promote the life and dignity of man-child, but also human rights.

After the Second World War, there were over 45,000 orphans in Moldova, and the Church, through the work of Patriarch Justinian (then Vicar Bishop of the Metropolitan of Moldova), together with the priests, managed to help these innocent and alone children, through the philanthropic social program *open assistance and closed assistance*.

As we see in the world,

“Modern society does not need a family, or at least a strong, unitary family, in which relationships are based on love and faithfulness, which participate in a traditional culture, or which have a universe of spiritual values. The family (parents) thinks about the future of the children, saves, invests in their education and finds meaning and happiness in these very love relationships that animate the connection between its members, in the capacity for sacrifice, which makes them give up many comforts, pleasures and fun. Husbands and wives who love each other and have more children are the weakest consumers. They have a much smaller disposition, time or money to invest in the entertainment industry or in the beauty industry (creams, clothes, objects), which will make them perform in attracting attention, in sexual seduction. Such a family becomes a real enemy of consumer culture. That’s why advertising shooting, mainly through the world of television phantasmagorias, bombards people’s minds with messages that will separate them until the final breakup of the family in which they live”<sup>10</sup>.

In Brâncoveanu’s time, the Romanian society was positioned differently, and it was related to other values. The parents were not bombarded with consumer and *anti-family* advertising, but were brave enough to face the hardships of life in order to have a large and united family. Selfishness, individualism and indifference in the family and community did not have

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<sup>10</sup> Virgiliu GHEORGHE, *Știința și războiul sfârșitului lumii*, Editura Prodromos, București, 2008, p. 48.

the connotations of today's world. Parents at the time were not intrigued by the fact that they could not provide their children with things accessible only to the rich. Today's children suffer from not having their friends' or advertised toys. There is stress in families due to lack of money and inability to get some things you want quickly.

Compared to other periods in the history of the Romanian nation, we see that

“Never in the history of the world have women and men been terrorized more than in the age of television by the loss of beauty, youth, the threat of old age and death, because on television old age, with all its rules, values and dignity, does not exist”<sup>11</sup>.

During these years, the separations of the families also intervened due to the migration abroad of one of the parents, who went to work and increase the family's income. We also meet parents who left their children in the care of relatives and left the country for the same reason. These situations cause great drama and trauma to children, who suffer from a lack of family unity and parental love.

Parents' debts to children can be summed up in one word: love, and children's debt to parents must be gratitude.

In these times, we need to pay more attention to the Christian family in the light of the teachings of the Savior Jesus Christ, to help them rediscover the meaning of their lives and to acquire the proper behavior and means necessary for a united, harmonious and resilient home.

“The family is founded and blessed by God to continue life on earth, to keep faith and moral life in society, to raise faithful and loving children, to overcome all bodily and spiritual temptations”<sup>12</sup>.

Aristotle said: “The child lives from the mother's life, sees with the mother's eyes, speaks the mother's language, feels with the mother's heart. The mother is half the children”.

So was Lady Maria Brâncoveanu for her children, a sacrificial altar, which was saved by the birth and raising of infants, according to the Saint

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<sup>11</sup> Virgiliu GHEORGHE, *Știința și războiul sfârșitului lumii*, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Irina LEONTE, “Familia creștină: părinți și copii”, in: *Familia creștină azi*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 1995, p. 160.

Apostle Paul: “Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (I Tim. 2, 15).

“The love between parents and children is shown by their upbringing and education. Through education, parents show concern for the holy treasure of God: children (...). The child is a lily, and in his righteousness, he sees the angels of God. «Give me the eye of a child for life, and I will see only the happy light of heaven», said Nichifor Crainic. Love and prayer reveal to children the Father of the world and of men: love and prayer make them love and receive in their soul His holy, protective, and saving icon, for the rest of their life”<sup>13</sup>.

## **VI. Conclusions**

The family of the Holy Voivode Martyr Constantin Brâncoveanu and of Lady Maria represents a model and a hope in prayer for all of us.

Looking at the faces of the Brâncoveanu family from the votive paintings from the Hurezi and Surpatele monasteries, we observe the contemplation of the Cross and the light of the Resurrection which reveals the vocation of sacrifice and the virtue of love cultivated in the Church of God’s glory. The votive painting expresses the icon of the wedding, the Mystery of marriage, the union between Christ and the Church, as well as the union of the family with the Church, the ship that takes her to the harbor of the Kingdom of God, as St. John Chrysostom says: “Marriage is the Mysterious Icon of the Church”.

Through their sacrifice, the Holy Martyrs of Brâncoveni became “good victorious martyrs”, who, through their faith in the Son of God, gave meaning to suffering and death, showing us the true identity and the desire to live forever.

The imprint left in the monasteries of Hurezi, Surpatele, Sâmbăta de Sus, Cozia, Arnota and many other monasteries, churches and secular constructions highlights the spiritual and cultural dimension of the founders from the Brâncoveanu family.

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<sup>13</sup> Irina LEONTE, “Familia creștină: părinți și copii”, pp. 161-162.