
CORRECTING HISTORICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF FILO-CALVINISM IN IOAN ZOBA'S BOOKS (17th CENTURY)

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Abstract

The first Romanian liturgical books emerged under the pressure of Reformation ideas, rapidly spread in Transylvania through Hungarian and German ethnic groups. The theological confrontations here led to confessional separation and political struggles, each group trying to increase their number attracting Romanians, who were Orthodox. Hence, Calvinist Transylvanian leaders suggested an insidious cultural proselytism, through the Orthodox service books, which they asked to be translated into Romanian - one of the important ideas of the Reformation.

Thus, against the Orthodox traditionalist current, and even against the ecclesiastic hierarchy, during the 16th-17th century has been initiated the substitution of Slavonic with Romanian spoken language in liturgical ministration. In this work archpriest Ioan Zoba from Vinț (a village near Alba-Iulia, Romania) had a considerable contribution.

This study is an attempt of moral rehabilitation of Ioan Zoba who was unfairly accused by some important Romanian historians of adherence to the Calvinistic doctrine (part of 16th and 17th centuries the religion of the political power in Transylvania was Calvinist).

Keywords: Romanian liturgical books, Ioan Zoba, Orthodox doctrine, confessional interferences

1. Introduction

By far the most controversial personality of the Orthodox Church from Transylvania in the second half of the 17th century, the Orthodox archpriest Ioan Zoba from Vinț continues to be an exceptional figure, whose profile has not been fully elucidated yet in Romanian historiography [1]. With very few exceptions, most of the studies in the last century, inspired in tandem by remarkable authors such as A. Bunea, N. Iorga, I. Lupaș, M. Păcurariu, etc., but without a minimal verification of the sources, considered him as filo-Calvinist, an accusation strong enough to reprobate the author and his work. Actually, the Orthodoxy of the doctrine professed by Ioan Zoba, reflected in his books, seemed a secondary issue, considered as being in the Church's competence, not

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in that of linguists or historians. Thus, Ioan Zoba continued to remain in the historical conscience of the Orthodox Church as a negative character: an Orthodox priest, ‘sold to Calvinists’, ‘an instrument of the Calvinists’ in the propaganda of the confessional tear-up of the Romanians in Ardeal, the opportunist, who occupied high hierarchical positions through political and ecclesiastical schemes, the one who made no bones about judging and condemning his own metropolitan in order to please his Calvinist supporters [2].

After analysing his work we will prove that beyond his political relations with the Calvinist administration of the Principality, his Orthodoxy is unquestionable and the few passages suspected of Protestant proselytism should not be judged isolated from his entire printing work, whose content is Orthodox as well, nor should it be isolated from the context in which he lived, a context impregnated by the ideas of the Reform.

2. Ioan Zoba and his time

The echoes of the Reform in Europe quickly reached Transylvania and the innovator ideas of remonstrator Luther affected the minds of the religious leaders here. The irreconcilable disputes led to the segregation of the Reform in Ardeal (Aiud, 1564), and as a result of the Calvinist ascension, the pressure of the administration of the Principality upon the Orthodox increased. There were decrees through which those who did not adhere to Calvinism, regardless of their hierarchical rank, were banished from the country and the Orthodox priests who did not celebrate the services in Romanian – a vehicle of the Reform’s insinuation among Romanians [3] – had to be severely punished. This was the context in which the first Romanian books appeared, obviously ecclesiastical books: *Tâlcul Evangheliilor*, *Psaltirea*, *Liturghierul*, *Molitfelnicul*. The author of this cultural event which occurred in the years 1566-1570, the deacon Coresi, did not seem to be interested in the fidelity of the text’s Orthodoxy [4]. However, despite the intricate text, vassal to the Slavonic language and syntax and sometimes with a text that has nothing in common with the practices of the Orthodox Church [1, p. 47-48], Coresi’s printings had the audacity of pioneerdom and “the cultural Coresian and Calvinist revolution” possessed the gift of initiating an irreversible process.

This undertaking, though not foreign to the hierarchy, was slow in entering the preoccupations of the Romanian bishops, who regarded the Calvinist endeavours of translating the Romanian liturgy rather as “poison for the souls’ death” exposed by their brothers across the mountains [5], than as a great cultural victory. Nevertheless, despite the hierarchy’s opposition, a great number of priests, urged by the desire to see their parishioners understand God’s word, accepted formally the Calvinists’ claims, but kept unchanged the fidelity to the Orthodox Church [6], continuing altogether the work of translating liturgical texts.

Showing remarkable diplomacy, the Romanians defeated the reforming proselytist programme of the authorities, transforming the movement into a counter-reform in which the benefit was largely that of Romanians. The few communities that embraced the Reform had a short life [7], but the schools which were founded and the printed books contributed to the emergence of a Romanian culture and elite and, especially to the imposition of the Romanian language in the Church [5, p. 81].

In this context, as early as the end of the 16th century, in Alba Iulia was founded a Slavonic-Orthodox printing press [3], but books in Romanian were printed only in the 17th century, as a result of Gabriel Bethlen's support, continued by the two Rákoczy and by Mihail Apafi [8]. This printing press offered books such as *Noul Testament*, 1648 (*The New Testament*) and *Psaltirea*, 1651 (*The Psalter*), but also the books of Ioan Zoba from Vinț.

Ennobled by the Prince Mihail Apafi in 1664 'for special cultural merits' and appointed in 1667 'juror of the Metropolitanate's properties', Ioan Zoba was also 'notary of the great assembly', the most important position after that of Metropolitan, position which made him both respected and redoubtable. Unfortunately, the conflict with at least two of his superiors – metropolitans Sava and Ioasaf - contributed decisively to the deterioration of his image in the eyes of posterity. His contemporaries, however, appreciated him, for otherwise one cannot explain his election as successor of metropolitan Iosif Budai. Nevertheless, the Prince preferred the Greek Ioasaf, infirming thus the strategy imagined by the Greek-Catholic historiography [1, p. 16-28].

In this conjuncture, the worthy archpriest was left the opportunity of affirming himself in the direction not used by the hierarchs in Alba Iulia after Metropolitan Simion Ștefan – the printing activity. He founded 'the new printing press' in Sebeș and published here *Sicriul de aur. Carte de propovedanie la morți* (*The Golden Coffin. Funeral sermons at death people*) – a collection of 15 homiletic funeral models [9]. The following years were equally fruitful. Benefitting from the vacancy after the death of Sava Veștemeanul, taking a full advantage of his position in Church hierarchy, Ioan Zoba moved the printing press to Alba Iulia, where he printed succesively: *Cărare pre scurt spre fapte bune îndereptătoare* (*Short path towards good deeds*), 1685 [10]; *Ceasloveț* (*The Book of Hours or Horologion*), 1685 [11], *Rânduiala diaconstvelor* (*Formulary for Deaconry* – a short version of The order of Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, Vesper and Matins), 1687 [2] and *Molităvnicul* (*The book of needs or Euchologion*), 1689 [1], the last one being certainly his most renowned work. Zoba's cultural work proves that, at least in Transylvania, the pro-Romanian linguistic movement had overcome the old fears as concerns the Calvinist proselytism. The preoccupations of translators were different and his effort must be circumscribed to higher aims, such as the desire: 1) to standardize the liturgical ecclesiastical practices and to correct the mistakes; 2) to offer an homiletic model of funeral practices [12]; 3) to allow the people to have access to the evangelical text and its explanation; 4) to modernise and homogenise the

spoken language, which left ineffaceable marks upon the cult and the Romanian language [13].

3. Doctrines in conflict

In order to establish the historical truth we analysed all the issues raised by Zoba's texts, which might through their content be close or identify with positions of the Protestant theology. Then we tried to explain them from the perspective of the Orthodox Church doctrine.

Just as Luther imposed the Scripture as the only foundation of faith (*sola scriptura*) and its interpretation as a chance for every Christian, Protestantism became the historical turning of a multitude of interpretations and hence a multitude of doctrines. However, there are general positions adopted by the majority of the reformers which differ radically from the Orthodox Church (and from the Roman Catholic Church with which it had a litigation), especially as concerns the number and value of the Sacraments, grace, salvation and holiness, the meaning and significance of the Church, sacramental priesthood, the role of the saints, icons and relics in worship. Can Zoba have professed such theological ideas? Can he have been contaminated by the Protestant thinking which was not foreign to him when a little more than one hundred years had passed since the first Romanian versions of the Lutheran *Catechism* appeared (Sibiu, 1544 and Braşov 1560) and the same period of time had elapsed since the institution of the reformed Romanian episcopacy (1566), which strove to attract the Romanians towards the Reform [14]? Can Zoba have become the mercenary of the new doctrines looking for sympathizers in Transylvania?

3.1. *The number and meaning of the Sacraments*

One of the delicate issues raised by the Protestant theology is the number of the Sacraments and their significance. In general, reformers admit only two Sacraments – the Baptism and the Eucharist, attributing them roles and contents different from those of the Orthodox Church doctrine. In their thinking even these do not produce real effects; they are just an assurance of the eternal life, for (irresistible) grace is only in God's hand and who, as a consequence, saves and punishes whoever he wants (predestination). As the distance between earth and heaven is radical and definitive, the Sacraments are not participation in Christ's sacrifice, but at the most, assurance of the absolution. The consequence of this thinking was catastrophic for Protestantism, and, despite Luther's opposition, the other reformers even came to denying Christ's real presence in the Liturgy [15].

From the foreword of *Molităvnic* – where he makes a theological reflection on the Sacraments – we can understand at least partly the theology professed by the archpriest from Vinţ regarding this topic. In a sort of scholasticism Zoba attempts to make distinctions and classifications, comparisons and analyses in order to explain to the reader the number and the

meaning of the Sacraments of the Church. Using a terminology that he is not very familiar with (maybe also because of the language, not yet defined in the doctrinal field), he mistakes terms, not making a clear distinction between mystery and sacrament, symbol and sign [16]. At the same time, trying to explain the number and the significance of the Sacraments as sacerdotal ministration, based on the Pauline theology, Zoba considers that the sacraments were revealed typologically in the Old Testament: “*for the law having a shadow of things to come*” (*Hebrews 10*); thus he identifies seven Sacraments of the old Law: Circumcision, the Paschal Lamb, the Passage of the Red Sea, Manna, the Water from the Stone, the Brass Serpent [1, f. IVr-v]. For him, two of the sacraments of the Old Law are completely different: the circumcision and the paschal lamb. Unfortunately, even though he warns the reader that he will add ‘other seven Sacraments’, eventually he mentions only five: Baptism, Chrismation, Marriage, Confession and Holy Unction. Starting from this list, many hurried to consider him contaminated by the Protestant theology, which one knows as having problems in admitting the complete number of Sacraments.

Out of practical reasons, in the liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church, the Eucharist and the Orders are not comprised in the Euchologion, but in distinct books: the Hieratikon and the Archieratikon. But certainly what is of interest to us is not Zoba’s maths knowledge, but the fact that he knows the concept of ‘seven Sacraments’ and the idea of typological parallelism. Moreover, we would find it hard to believe that, under the supposed Protestant influence Zoba left out exactly the Sacraments acknowledged (under one form or another) by historical Protestantism. Eventually, the careful reader will manage to identify the missing Sacraments between the lines. Firstly, Zoba himself announces that he will write about the Lord’s Supper (the Eucharist) in a special book: “The second was the Paschal lamb, about which I will not write because instead of that there is the Lord’s Supper now; if God grants us help to print that Sacrament, too, we will write in turn.” [1, f. IVr]

Unfortunately, either he did not have the time to print it, or it has not reached us. He could equally have referred to a Hieratikon, more ample than *Rânduiala diaconstvelor*, or maybe identical to the Slavonic-Romanian printed by Metropolitan Theodosius (1680), to which he wanted to add an explanatory foreword. Secondly, even if the list of the enumerated Sacraments does not include Orders, this detail must be attributed either to Zoba’s desire to please the Calvinist authorities (apologists of universal priesthood to the detriment of sacramental priesthood), or he may have considered it a work reserved exclusively to the hierarchy. Even if he does not mention it *expressis verbis*, this Sacrament must be identified in the very existence of *Molităvnicul* (*Euchologion*) – the main service book of the priest, that Zoba considers as having a strong pneumatic and patristic meaning: “Everything shows that its creator was from the beginning the Holy Spirit, who inspired holy men.” [1, f. VIr], – affirmation meant to reinforce the priests’ confidence in the authenticity and accuracy of the text.

Destined to the strict use of the priests in order to fulfil their sacerdotal mission, the *Euchologion* contains liturgical rituals fermented in the grace's dwelling and baked in the embers of the doctrinal disputes along the centuries, accepted and lived by priests and believers as quasi-dogmatical revelations. Therefore, in the Orthodox Church the rituals of the services are hard to change, almost imperceptibly in one's lifetime, and the *Euchologion* is the book which confers sacramental and dogmatic authority, certainty in the efficiency of prayers experimented for centuries. That Zoba professed the Oriental faith can be easily seen from his linguistic reflex: the terminology used is signally Oriental (of Slavonic source), we identified only one incidence of a term with Protestant tinge – the Lord's Supper [1, f. IVr] – as a matter of fact, a term used even in works which appeared to the South of the Carpathians. Although the cultural *background* developed in the arena of the theological disputes between the different Protestant groups in Ardeal (which Zoba, inevitably must have witnessed) may have left marks in the language he used in his books, our opinion is that he did not adhere knowingly to the ideas of the Reform; and the five Sacraments he mentions are, anyway, more than even the most traditional Protestants accept.

3.2. Justification in Christ and the issue of good deeds

In *Sicriul de aur* (The Golden Coffin) especially there are some passages that send Zoba's theology in the dispute regarding the use of good deeds in the issue of salvation. The Protestant theology asserts the incompatibility between merit and grace, according to the principle (reduced to essence) that grace is a gift of God to all people who believe (Romans 4.4-6). Being a gift, grace cannot be earned through personal efforts; in other words, God cannot re(pay) us for what He has already offered gratuitously. Consequently, good deeds cannot add anything to man; their result is not getting the grace; on the contrary, they are the consequence of grace, offered to the believer by Christ gratuitously. The issue introduced by Luther, who opposed the Roman-Catholic theory of 'the treasury of merit', coming up with the theory of 'justification through faith' was run to an extreme by Jean Calvin: man can no longer do anything for himself, salvation being a matter belonging to God exclusively. He is the one Who chooses from the beginning who will go to eternal happiness and who will go to eternal damnation. Being predestined, salvation no longer depends on him and the direct consequence is that personal deeds are useless, because man can no longer change the destiny pre-established by God from eternity [17].

As the issue was lively debated in the epoch and Zoba's intellectual development took place in the Calvinist college in Bălgrad, the issue of deeds insinuated in *Sicriul de aur* (*The Golden Coffin*), especially in the 10th Sermon (*Propovedania*, in Romanian ancient language), where there are a few paragraphs that might call into question Zoba's Orthodoxy. Indeed, interpreting the Pauline text in Philippians 2.13 about human will subject to the divine will, Ioan Zoba seems to subscribe to the Protestant theology, asserting that the state

of holiness cannot be obtained through personal deeds or through somebody else's intercession: "[The righteous] are not those who might amend themselves with their deeds or belongings or with the deeds, belongings or virtue of other sinners. For nobody can amend himself with his deeds. Why? For man's deeds, if good, they are from God, not from him". [...] Nor can man amend himself with the deeds of other sinners; for what man cannot do for himself, he cannot do for another. [...]By righteous one should understand all those made right by the Lord Jesus Christ, whose sins he cleansed with His holy blood and whose transgressions He forgives." [9, f. 109r-v]

But elsewhere, writing about the moral state at the end of man's life he asserts the necessity of good deeds, which he even considers as a chief obligation of the Christians: "Therefore, my dear brothers and God's Christians, we ought to keep death in mind all the time and live in a divine way, working good deeds. For in what deeds death will find us, in those deeds we will rise at God's judgment." [1, f. 207v]

At the same time, the great number of passages asserting the necessity of good deeds (see *Sicriul de aur* -The Golden Coffin, Sermon 3, f.30r; f.30v; f.31r; f.31v; Sermon 10, 105v; Sermon 13, f.137r; f.143v; f.144 r etc.) as compared to the passage in the 10th Sermon (*Propovedania*, in Romanian language) which denies it, enables us to think that Zoba never viewed the good deeds in the terms of the Protestant (Calvinist) theology; in the sense that deeds succeed the grace, respectively salvation. He even affirms that man will receive a reward for his deeds. "One must prize the good times and the occasion to make good deeds and stay away from all evil." [10, f. 5r] This is the reason why we must re-evaluate his affirmation in the context of his whole 10th Sermon. This sermon is destined to be read at the funeral of a good man who lived doing good deeds. In this context of the death of a devout, kind man Zoba makes an exercise of rhetoric, asking himself: Why does the good man die and the evil ones go on living? Why does the good man suffer from grief while sinners lead a comfortable life? [9, Sermon 10, f. 102v-103r] After a long justification of the need not to trust others and work our own salvation, Zoba affirms that man must do good deeds, the only ones that offer eternal happiness; that material goods and temporal power (but also God's blessing) must be used to do good, in view of salvation, for they do not belong to man, neither do they spring from personal merit. Thus, his conclusion is logical: "Forgiveness is not given without a holy life. That is why Saint Paul the Apostle scolds the Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 14, saying: Follow peace with all men, without which no man shall see the Lord." [9, Sermon 10, f. 105v]

3.3. *The intercession of the living for the dead*

Asserting that Christ's work is the unique intercessor between God and man, the Protestant theology refuses the intercession of the holy angels and of the saints, as well as the use of icons or relics in worship. This is the reason why the texts that call into question the work of the saints can be intriguing. In *Sicriul*

de aur (The Golden Coffin) Zoba says: “For neither the holy angels, nor the souls of the saints departed from this world or the great men, the emperors and princes have that power to protect people from hunger, from thirst, from being burnt by the sun or any other heat or to take them to water. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God...” [9, Sermon 11, f. 112v]

However, in the sermons of *Molităvnic (Euchologion)* he urges people to pray for the souls of the departed: “Therefore we ought to pray God for the souls of our dead people. For it is written in the second Book of the Maccabees, chapter 12, verse 46, saying: The prayer and alms for the souls departed from this world are very useful. [1, f. 204v]

There are other paragraphs which lead us to understand the use of the prayers for one another, so that everyone must with “prayer fight afore God for all friends” because everyone is “a limb and spouse to those, in the mystery of God’s body” [10, f. 23v]. Among those who can intercede to God for us he considers the priests, “for they carry the deputation of the heavenly God” [10, 83v] and “celebrate the holy Sacraments” [10, f. 81r-v]. This is the reason why they are worthy of great honour.

A proof of the doctrine professed in the books printed under his authority can be found in *Rânduiala diaconstvelor* (Formulary for deaconry) where is inserted the Litany for the departed. Aware of the Protestants’ aversion to the prayers and memorial services for the departed, this work, in conformity with the liturgy in Ungrovlahia [2], certifies the lack of Protestant intrusions in the text and especially the fact that he was not a man serving the Protestants. The first printed text of the Divine Liturgy (Macarie, 1508) [18] does not contain this litany, although today the ritual instructions stipulate the uttering of this litany in two situations: a) in the case of a Liturgy for the departed and b) when believers bring offerings in the name of the departed. Neither Coresi (1570), nor Dosoftei (1680) comprise it in the liturgy. Instead, it is to be found in the text of the Liturgy of Theodosius (1680), with the same formulas and ritual instructions: “And if there is an offering or liturgy for the departed, the deacon or priest, says the litany” [2, p. 41]. This detail cannot but reinforce the conviction that he was not working in direction desired by the Protestants.

3.4. Moral theology

The moral theology professed by Zoba is reflected in *Cărare pe scurt spre fapte bune îndreptătoare (Short path towards good deeds)*, a short ethical and moral treaty of English - Protestant origin, translated by Zoba after a Hungarian variant of Ștefan Matko and placed at the disposal of Romanian Orthodox Christians. Although it appears not to reflect Zoba’s thinking, this work is still in conformity with the doctrine and moral of the Orthodox Church, for we have not identified anything that might call into question this fidelity. Moreover, taking into consideration the language used, we suppose that Zoba allowed himself to intervene in the text and adapt it where he found it necessary, trying to give the text an authentic Orthodox image. Other moral ideas are also to be found in

Sicriul de aur (The Golden Coffin), or in *Cazaniile la oameni morți (Catecheses for funerals)*.

Writing about marriage, he recommends that “the husband should be of right law” (Orthodox) [10, f. 50v] (the parentheses belongs to the original text), otherwise between the spouses there might appear misunderstandings. In the sermons in *Molităvnic (Euchologion)* as well, he addresses the readers as “Orthodox Christians” [1, f. 201v, f. 206v]. Obviously, one might reply that any doctrine considers itself ‘Orthodox’, but the fact that he explains the right law through the parentheses ‘Orthodox’ indicates Zoba’s wish to identify this right faith with Orthodoxy. Being preoccupied by the clergy and their relations with the believers, he asserts that priests worthy of respect are “the good ones that confess the Orthodox law; therefore one should only obey, accept and fulfil the words of these and as for the ones having a different law, one should avoid and beware of them” [10, f. 83av]. In the Romanian context such an affirmation must have had the gift of reinforcing the attachment to the Orthodox faith and increase the reticence to the circulating confessional deceits: “[...] the righteous is happy at the end of his life for he died in a right faith that is indeed catholic and is not part of this world’s deceits, who lure the people with vain words.” [1, f. 215r] Zoba recommends fasting (“Let us spend this holy fasting period in bodily purity and obedience to the Church.” [1, f. 211v]) and the confession of sins (“Because if man dies without confession and repentance, after his death he is nothing but enemy of truth, joy of the devil and eternal damnation in fire.” [1, f. 214r]). He also recommends prayer and almsgiving (“...until we do not live in peace and love with our brothers, God will not receive our prayers, fasting, sacrifice or any other good deeds.” [1, f. 214r]), practices denied by Protestantism.

4. Conclusions

Due to these considerations, contrary to the assumptions of finding ideas opposing the Orthodox Church in his books, we believe that:

1. Despite the simplistic deductions of the old historiography that regarded the act of ennoblement and his ecclesiastic ascension as the effect of confessional servility, it becomes more prominent that, on the whole, his printing work contributed to the cultural and ecclesiastic consolidation of the Romanian nation and of the Orthodox Church.
2. Ioan Zoba must have belonged to the Orthodox Church that he assumed and identified himself with (“the teachers of our Church, John Damascene and others, resemble this world...” [1, f. 202r]) and for whose prosperity he worked. If between the lines he wrote or only printed one might identify with difficulty reverberations of some Protestant teachings [16], this must not be attributed to his wish to change the Romanian Church into a Calvinist one, but rather to a collective *habitus* mindset of the epoch he belonged to, an epoch when the ideas of the Reform were propagated with great enthusiasm [19]. If be it only transiently that history preserves documents that might call into question his confessional sincerity, we must

believe that for the archpriest of Vinț the Reform meant at most accepting a faith in which understanding and reason had to play an important part than it meant the doctrinal ideas about justification, good deeds, sacraments, etc.

Out of the political and ecclesiastical programme imposed on the Romanian Church by the Calvinist Princes, Zoba took over only what he used “to the benefit and understanding of the Romanian Orthodox Church” [2, f. 1r] and “to the consolidation of the Romanian nation” [10, f. IIr]). Therefore, we do not err if we affirm that Ioan Zoba was a visionary, preoccupied by the reformation of his nation’s Church, by the discipline of the clergy, a man who felt the need for an authentic Orthodoxy that is accepted and understood knowingly.

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