

ANTON DURCOVICI: FROM CRADLE TO THE FOOT OF CALVARY

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Riassunto: L'argomento di questo studio è centrato sulla vita del grande vescovo martire Anton Durcovici. Visto lo spazio limitato, le pagine seguenti si soffermano soprattutto sull'ultima parte dell'esistenza terrena di Durcovici: il ministero di pastore della diocesi di Iasi, culminando con l'arresto a Popesti Leordeni. Il lavoro ha un carattere prevalentemente biografico. Però vuole mettere in risalto anche dei principi teologici ed ecclesiali di cui si è avvallato il vescovo nella sua attività pastorale. Non viene dimenticata anche la dimensione esortativa: la fedeltà e la resistenza dei seguaci di Cristo per ottenere il premio del vincitore.

Parole chiave: Durcovici, resistenza, martirio, Calvario, comunismo.

We are about to witness a long-awaited moment by both historians and the Christians of the Diocese of Iasi and not only. The important event of the beatification of martyr Bishop Anton Durcovici has sparked great interest among the researchers of his biography, but we are aware that the further deepening of his life and activity cannot be limited. The official biography presented on May 17, 2014 and titled *The Martyr Bishop Anton Durcovici. From cradle to grave*, printed by the "Sapientia" Publishing in Iasi is a synthesis of the research conducted by Danut Dobos PhD, Emanuel Cosmovici and the priests Alois Moraru, Fabian Dobos, Stefan Lupu, Cornel Cadar and Isidor Iacovici, scientific summary that can be improved with new and valuable information. Of all these data, the present study summarizes certain information in order to give us the biographical landmarks of Anton Durcovici from cradle (birth – Deutsch Altenburg, May 17, 1888) to the foot of Calvary (his arrest – Popesti Leordeni, June 26, 1949), his martyrdom being presented in another study.

The documentary summary that I propose in this study is the result of an extensive research begun by Father Florian Müller¹ and continued by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iasi, through the Department of Scientific Research, from 1999 to 2002, when we have dedicated a special edition of the journal "Buletin istoric"² to this topic. However, our research has not stopped there, but continued until today, Danut Dobos, PhD, having an

¹ Florian MÜLLER, *Dr. Anton Durkowitzsch – ein Martyrer unserer Zeit*, Donzdorf 1992. Only the Romanian translation will be quoted from now on.

² The Roman Catholic Diocese of Iasi, through the Department of Scientific Research, *Buletin istoric* 3 (2002).

important role in this continuous effort, as he identified several biographical sources and generously offered us the documents discovered. Considering the archives as the safest means for closely following our martyr bishop, of the many sources that I had available, I have selected the personal notes of the student, priest, bishop and convict Anton Durcovici. I also recall some of the archives I have studied: the Vatican archives of the educational institutions where Anton Durcovici studied during 1906-1911, the Vatican Secret Archives, Archives of the *De Propaganda Fide* Congregation, the archives of the Catholic Dioceses of Bucharest and Iasi and the archives of the Roman Catholic Theological Institute of Iași etc.

As we can read in this Baptism certificate³, Anton was born on May 17, 1888, in Deutsch Altenburg⁴ (Austria), in house no. 38, into the family of Franz Durkowitsch și Maria Mittermaier⁵. He was baptized a few years later, on May 21, in the local church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary⁶, by the priest Josef Adolf Hall⁷, his godfather being F. Mittermaier from Deutsch Altenburg.

³ Document issued by Fr. G. Heinschink, the parish priest of the Catholic community of the Parish of Deutsch-Altenburg, on April 24, 1896, the baptism being registered under the *Registration of the baptized* column, tome D, p. 258, no. 19.

⁴ Until the eleventh century, the city was called "Altenburg". As indicated in the historical documents and by an inscription on a milestone from the Roman period: (T(itus) Calidius / P(ublilii filius) Cam(ilia tribu) Sever(us) / eq(ues) item optio / decur(io) coh(ortis) I Alpin(or)um / item (centurio) leg(ionis) XV Apoll(inaris) / annor(um) LVIII stip(endorium) XXXIII / h(ic) s(itus) e(st) / Q(uintus) Calidius fratri / posuit), at the beginning of the first century after Christ, Carnuntum was a military camp founded by General Tiberius; during the period 16-31, it became the centre of the Roman defence along the Danube; in 193, Septimius Sever was proclaimed king in Carnuntum and around the year 800 the first Germanic inhabitants settled down here. The first documentary mention of the form Deutsch-Altenburg dates back to 1083 (cf. „Geographie und Geschichte der Marktgemeinde Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, dem Geburtsort des Märtyrerbischofs Dr. Anton Durkowitsch“, in G. RABEDER – M. PACHER – G. WITHALM, *Die altpleistozänen Bären von Deutsch-Altenburg (Niederösterreich)*, Vienna 2010).

In the documents appeared later on we find the name "Deutsch-Altenburg", so as to make the distinction between this locality and the one in Hungary, the "Hungarian Altenburg" and to eliminate any confusion with the "Altenburg" region in Horn. As of 1928, the locality is given the name "Bad Deutsch-Altenburg". This name is probably given by an old pre-existing fortress with the name "Burg". (cf. F. Müllner – *BAD DEUTSCH-ALTENBURG, von der Frühzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, 1973)

⁵ *The pastoral letter* of Msgr. Marcu Glaser, addressed to all the priests and believers, on the appointment of Msgr. Anton Durcovici as Bishop of Iasi, of November 25, 1947, in the Archives of the Roman Catholic Theological Institute of Iasi (=AITRC Iași), file no. 3/1947 (*Episcopal correspondence*), f. 37; cf. *idem*, file no. 4/1947, f. 43; file no. 6/1947, ff. 64, 75, 82 and 104; file no. 9/1947, f. 169.

⁶ The Church of "Marienkirche" was built in 1028, upon order by King Stephen of Hungary.

⁷ Father Adolf Hall was the parish priest of the Deutsch Altenburg Parish during 1882-1890, being the 16th parish priest of the community. We mention that the Deutsch Altenburg Parish was created in 1717.

We do not know the exact reason why Anton Durcovici's ancestors settled down in Austria, but we can assume that they came to Deutsch Altenburg for economic reasons. Anton Durcovici's paternal grandfather had Croatian origins, his name was George Durkowitsch and he was a farmer, and his grandmother was called Ana Greigeritsch. As I have already mentioned, Anton's mother was called Mary Mittermaier, was born in 1857 and descended from a rather wealthy family: Anton Mittermaier and Maria Hofmeister⁸. The child Anton Durcovici has only known his paternal grandparents, as the maternal ones were already dead when he was born (1888). Anton's father, Franz Durkowitsch, was born on September 30, 1856 was of Croatian origin and had Austrian nationality, lived in Deutsch Altenburg⁹ at no. 38 and was a quarry worker. As a reservist, he participated in the actions of annexation of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, from where he returned ill with tuberculosis, which led to his premature death at only 36 years and five months old, on February 5, 1893¹⁰.

After the death of his father Franz, the Durcovici family faced great hardships and privation. The young widow strove to provide for her sons, Francis and Anthony, working as a washerwoman and seamstress. In these circumstances, Maria Durcovici had to look for another way to support the family. She had an aunt, married to an inn owner, named Österreicher, who settled in Bessarabia and owned a small inn with a postal station in Chisinau, called "The Rooster". In 1877, the Russo-Turkish war broke out, and Chisinau became an important centre behind the Russian front. Very rich tsarist officers constantly visited "The Rooster" inn and so the Österreicher family quickly accumulated a significant wealth. Later on, Chisinau was deserted turning into a small provincial town and the Österreicher family sold the inn and bought a restaurant in Iasi¹¹. It was to this location that Maria Durcovici decided to come together with her two children. After a boat trip on the Danube through Budapest, Belgrade, the Iron Gates and Galati, and then by cart all the way through Moldova, Anton Durcovici arrived in Iasi together with his family, where his aunt received him with great joy¹².

⁸ Archives of the "Saint Joseph" Cathedral Church in Bucharest, *Matricula mortuorum*, tome VIII, p. 413.

⁹ Cf. Anton DURCOVICI, *Note personale*, in the Archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iași (= AERC Iași), personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

¹⁰ Cf. Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, Iași 1993, 9; cf. IDEM, "Declarație pentru procesul de beatificare a ep. Anton Durcovici", in *Dosarul pentru beatificarea episcopului Anton Durcovici*, Iași 1999, 182.

¹¹ Cf. Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 9.

¹² Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 11.

After a year, Mr Österreicher died, after which his wife sold the restaurant and moved from Iasi to Bucharest¹³.

Regarding the issue of Anton Durcovici's first arrival in Iasi, we wonder about the date when this occurred. The first biographer of the martyr bishop presents a few testimonies that clearly speak of the year 1896. Subsequently, as published in all the works up to date, researchers from Iasi issued another hypothesis: 1894, relying on the studies that Anton Durcovici attended at the Parochial School in Iasi during the scholastic year 1895-1896. During the preparation of this study, we have discovered a keepsake that Anton's brother, Franz Durkowitsch, received on the day of his Confirmation, June 5, 1895 – in the church dedicated to “St. Stephen”, from the bishop Coloman Belopotoczky (1845-1914)¹⁴, document which indicates another date for the arrival of the Durcovici family in Iasi: 1895.

As we do not have any correspondence between Maria Durcovici and her aunt in Iasi, we assume that the coming to the capital of Moldova occurred in the summer of 1895, after which the brothers Franz and Anton Durcovici tried to learn Romanian. In the autumn of the same year they were both admitted to the Roman-Catholic elementary school in the Parish of Iasi, which enabled students to better deepen general knowledge *according to the best Western methods*¹⁵. As the present study only focuses on Anton Durcovici, we mention now that Franz also attended courses at the Parish school in Iasi and Ploiesti, and once settled in Bucharest, he embraced the profession of sculptor specializing in restoration¹⁶. He married Margaret Aigner, and then settled in Hainburg where he died. Before moving there, in the autumn of 1933, he paid a visit to his brother, Fr. Anton Durcovici, on his way back from Rome. On a family photo taken on that occasion we can see some of the relatives of Franz Durkowitsch.

Considering the documents found after the year 2000, we reach the conclusion that the Durkowitsch family arrived in Iasi in the summer of 1895¹⁷, and almost immediately Anton Durcovici was admitted in the first

¹³ Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 59. In the statement for the beatification of Martyr Bishop Anton Durcovici, Father Florian Müller argues that the departure to Bucharest occurred in 1898, without mentioning that the Durkowitsch family lived in Ploiesti between 1896 and 1898.

¹⁴ *Gedenkblatt Franz Durkowitsch*, in the Archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iași (= AERC Iași), file *Anton Durcovici – various documents*, unnumbered.

¹⁵ Cf. Archives of the Malopolskiej Province in Kracow (photocopies in AITRC Iași), doc. no. 3572, f. 125.

¹⁶ Cf. Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 59.

¹⁷ Although he contradicts himself on several occasions in his work *Dr. Anton Durkowitsch – ein Martyrer unserer Zeit*, Donzdorf, 1992, published in Romanian translation by “Presa Bună” Publishers in Iași, in 1993, and in Italian translation by the “Sapientia” Publishers

grade at the Primary school for boys of the Catholic Parish of Iasi¹⁸, which he finished in June 1896, with good results, as witnessed by the document issued for his registration with the schools in Bucharest¹⁹. In his certificate of studies issued on April 20, 1898 by the principal of the school in Iasi, Fr. Francisc Janik, the student Anton Durcovici finished the school year 1895-1896 with the following results: Romanian language – 7, mathematics – 9.50, other sciences – 7.25, dexterities – 7.75, general average mean – 7.87. With these grades, according to the *School transcript of records*, page 163, he successfully completed the first grade, being ranked third out of a total of 16 students. During the school year when Anton Durcovici went to this school, 1895-1896, a total of about 50 Catholic students attended the Parochial school in Iasi, together with other Orthodox or Lutheran children. It was not until the beginning of the new scholastic year, 1896-1897, that the Functioning authorization (recognition) of the school was issued, in November 18, 1896. The main educational subjects were: Religion, German, Romanian, reading and mathematics.

In the summer of 1896, Anton Durcovici left the capital of Moldova and was registered with the Catholic school in Ploiesti, where he attended the first grade classes in Romanian and the second grade classes in German²⁰. The parish of that town was amongst the largest Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Bucharest, with 1,800 faithful; the parish priest was Fr. Iuliu Hering, who was also director of the Parish primary school²¹. Father Felix Pongracz founded the school in 1856, which functioned at first in a rented house. After the completion of the construction of the church in 1864, the house at its right, which served as a chapel, was renovated and made available to the school, which functioned here until 1904, when a building was bought on the C. Enescu street, at no. 11 (today known as Aurel Vlaicu Street).

Back when Anton Durcovici studied here, this school had a ground and a first floor and it had the shape of a square occupying the whole yard. The Catholic School in Ploiesti, with teaching in Romanian, observed the public curricula, but also taught children French, German and handwork and craft. In his certificate issued on February 9, 1897 by the priest director of

in Iași, in 2012, father Müller mentions in his statement on occasion of the process of beatification: “In 1895, mother Maria, together with her two children, Anton and Franz, moved to Iasi (Romania), to one of her aunts who owned a restaurant”.

¹⁸ Cf. Alois MORARU – Dănuț DOBOS, “Din istoria operelor sociale catolice din Moldova pâna la 1948”, *Buletin istoric* 1 (2000) 457.

¹⁹ Cf. AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

²⁰ Cf. AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

²¹ Cf. *Schematismus ven. cleri Archidioeceseos Bucharestiensis lat. rit. pro anno Domini 1896*, 70.

the school, Iuliu Herring, the student Anton Durcovici obtained the following results for the semester September 1896 – January 1897: conduct – 8, diligence – 6, religion and biblical history – 7, calligraphy and dictation – 7, arithmetic – 6, Romanian language – 6, German – 7, drawing – 6²². Seventy students attended this school during the school year 1897-1898²³.

After two years in Ploiesti, in the summer of 1898, the Durcovici family moved to Bucharest in a house on Izvor Street, at no. 81, where Anton was enrolled in the fourth grade of the “Saint Andrew” Primary School on Calea Calarasilor, no. 10²⁴. As he mentioned in a personal note²⁵, during this school year, on May 22, 1899, Anton Durcovici received the Sacrament of Confirmation²⁶. During the school year 1899-1900, besides the Primary school on Calea Călărășilor, no. 12, the first high school class was created and Anton Durcovici was one of the students. He was one of the 452 students who began a new school year on September 15, 1899²⁷. Between 1899-1901, the student Anton Durcovici attended the first two years of secondary school at the Archdiocesan School on Calea Călărășilor, no. 10, managed by fr. Egesius²⁸. At the end of this period of time, more precisely on July 6, 1901, the student Anton Durcovici was given a certificate of studies for enrolment at the Archdiocesan Seminary in Bucharest²⁹.

At Father Luciu Fetz’s recommendation and based on the “certificate for the successful completion of the second grade in sciences at the Catholic Archdiocesan School in Bucharest”, on September 9, 1901, Anton Durcovici

²² Cf. AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

²³ Cf. *Schematismus ven. cleri Archidioeceseos Bucharestiensis lat. rit. pro anno Domini 1897*, 8 and 14.

²⁴ “St. Joseph” Public Archdiocesan Primary School in Bucharest, *Anuarul I – anul școlar 1929-1930*, Bucharest 1929, 3; cf. Matei SEIKEL, *Școala Arhiepiscopală „Sf. Andrei”*, *anuar. Anii școlari 1816-1930*, Bucharest 1930, 28.

²⁵ Following closely the notes in these personal observations, document kept in the AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, we can correlate the data collected from various documents with those recorded by Anton Durcovici himself.

²⁶ *Note personale*, in AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered. The document issued on July 20, 1905, by the vicar priest Leon Pourriere, certifies that he received the sacrament of Confirmation on May 25, 1899, from the Archbishop of Bucharest, Monsignor Francisc Xaveriu von Hornstein, in the “metropolitan church dedicated to Saint Joseph” in Bucharest, his godfather being Rudolf Seer. The Confirmation of the child Anton Durcovici was recorded in the Register of the Confirmed in 1899, at number 63. (cf. APF Rome, fund „*Nuova Serie*”, tome 494, f. 224)

²⁷ Cf. *Schematismus ven. cleri Archidioeceseos Bucharestiensis lat. rit. pro anno Domini 1899*, 11; cf. Matei SEIKEL, *Școala Arhiepiscopală „Sf. Andrei”*, *anuar. Anii școlari 1816-1930*, 58-60.

²⁸ *Schematismus ven. cleri Archidioeceseos Bucharestiensis lat. rit. pro anno Domini 1900*, Bucharest 1900, XI.

²⁹ Cf. AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

was admitted by the future Archbishop Raymund Netzhammer to the “Holy Spirit” Archdiocesan Seminary in Bucharest. The student passed the examination with the Director of studies, Fr. Carol Auner³⁰, the minutes of the examination being recorded in the school archives under no. 195/1901-2³¹. In order for him to be admitted, Anton Durcovici had also received another recommendation from fr. Egesius, from the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, director of the Archdiocesan Schools, on July 9, 1901³². Looking at the transcripts of school results and registers’ sheets, we can notice the progress made by the student Anton Durcovici progress during secondary school years³³. In September 1902, Anton Durcovici was received in the fourth grade of sciences, and finished as *the first among five*, with an average of 7.83, with *exemplary* conduct, *very good* attention and *very good* diligence³⁴. The following school year of 1904-1905 will bring for the student Anton Durcovici a special novelty: he begins to study philosophy, coordinated by Fr. Paul Wloczka, already in the sixth grade of high school education. After five years, the seminarian Anton Durcovici graduated high school (grades 3-7), successfully passing the Baccalaureate exam³⁵. On October 6, 1906, the Director of Studies of the “Holy Spirit” Seminary, Fr. Carol Auner handed him his high school diploma. A few days later, on October 23, the management of the “Holy Spirit” Seminary in Bucharest issued the *Certificate of Maturity of the student Anton Durcovici*³⁶.

The Roman period follows for Anton Durcovici, between 1906 and 1911. On October 30, 1906 loaded with a file of certificates of studies and good conduct³⁷, as well as numerous recommendations from the superiors, he stepped for the first time in the Eternal City³⁸. The first academic year in Rome began on November 4, 1906 being enrolled at the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas, scholastic philosophy class, in order to complete the courses attended during the 6th and 7th year at the “Holy Spirit” Seminary in Bucharest³⁹. After more than a year spent in Rome, on December 8,

³⁰ Cf. *Schematismus ven. cleri Archidioeceseos Bucharestiensis lat. rit. pro anno Domini 1902*, Bucharest 1902, X.

³¹ Cf. AARC Bucharest, fund the “Holy Spirit” Seminary, *Matricola 1893-1932*, 174.

³² AARC Bucharest, fund the “Holy Spirit” Seminary, file no. 2 (1878-1942), f. 98.

³³ AARC Bucharest, fund the “Holy Spirit” Seminary, *Matricola 1893-1932*, 174.

³⁴ AARC Bucharest, fund the “Holy Spirit” Seminary, *Matricola 1893-1932*, 190.

³⁵ Cf. Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 13.

³⁶ APF Roma, fund „*Nuova Serie*”, tome 494, f. 227.

³⁷ Besides these, we also discover additional documents: medical protocols, medical certificates etc., released by doctors in Deutsch Altenburg and Bucharest. (cf. APF Rome, fund „*Nuova Serie*”, tome 494, ff. 225-226)

³⁸ Cf. Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 13-14.

³⁹ Cf. Anton DURCOVICI, *Note personale*, in AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered. In the booklet of the “De Propaganda Fide” Congregation, *Alumni Colegii Urbani*, at page 7 it is mentioned that Anton Durcovici began his studies on November 2, 1906.

1907, the seminarian Anton also made his oath of fidelity to the Urban Pontifical College⁴⁰, before Cardinal Gotti, prefect of the „De Propaganda Fide” Congregation at that time⁴¹. The seminarian Anton Durcovici has not neglected the obligations assumed or entrusted and, as he hoped, during the same academic year he received the tonsure in the Basilica of “St. John Lateran”, on March 14, 1908, and a year later, on July 25, 1909, he also received the subdiaconate⁴² in the church of Saint Appollinaris in Rome. During the two years dedicated to the completion of his philosophical formation, the student Anton Durcovici prepared the paper “Anima humana, licet omnius spiritualis, corpori tamen unitur ut forma substantialis”⁴³, deepening the work of the *Angelical Doctor* – Saint Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274). Following the completion of these academic studies and the presentation of his thesis, the seminarian from Bucharest obtained the doctorate degree in Philosophy at the famous University of St. Thomas Aquinas, his diploma being signed by Cardinal Satolli on December 3, 1908⁴⁴. With such a solid philosophical basis, the seminarian Anton Durcovici dedicated himself with great diligence and tireless industriousness to the study of theology at the “De Propaganda Fide” College, the culmination of the years of theology being the presentation of the doctoral thesis at the Urban University in June 1910⁴⁵.

With the presentation of his doctorate thesis in theology, the student Anton Durcovici finished his theological studies, but as he was too young, more precisely not yet 24 years of age, as he did not have the canonical age yet, his ordination was postponed. Therefore, he remained at the college, and Rector Bonzano asked him to accept the mission of prefect of the first year following a rigorous regulation⁴⁶. Meanwhile, with a canonical dispensation of 19 months and 25 days granted by the Holy See, he received

⁴⁰ *Regolamento del Venerabile Pontificio Collegio Urbano „De Propaganda Fide”* stated at no. 4: “All the Urban College students are required to make the pontifical vow before the Cardinal Prefect or his delegate, six months after the entry into college, if aged 14 or six months after the date of fulfilment of this age, if entered in college at a younger age”. (ACU Rome, file 4/19)

⁴¹ Cf. ACU Roma, *Libro per i giuramenti degli alunni dall'anno 1905 all' anno...*, 63

⁴² Cf. Anton DURCOVICI, *Note personale*, in AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

⁴³ The summary of this paper, presented during the examination of December 3, 1908, has been represented by Anton Durcovici during the philosophy lessons he gave in Bucharest on March 7, 1941 – for students in the 7th grade, and in Timișul de Jos, on March 7, 1945 – for students in the 8th grade. (Cf. AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered)

⁴⁴ AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

⁴⁵ AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

⁴⁶ ACU Rome, file XI 4/17, ff. 23-26.

permission from Pope Pius X on August 18, 1910⁴⁷ and on September 24, 1910 the theologian Anton Durcovici was ordained priest in the Basilica San Giovanni in Laterano through the laying on of Cardinal Petru Respighi's⁴⁸ hands. The following day, the Sunday of September 25, 1910 and the Nineteenth of Ordinary Time, the new priest celebrated his first Mass in the Chapel of the Urban College, during which songs for the welcoming of the new priest were interpreted as well as Ravello's Missa⁴⁹. As Rector Bonzano⁵⁰ anticipated, besides his duties as prefect Anton Durcovici took up the study of Canon Law at the Seminario Romano, where he completed a degree in Law in a year's time, obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in ecclesiastical law on July 3, 1911⁵¹.

After the end of the academic year 1910-1911 and the final university examination in Canon Law, on July 29, 1911, the priest Anton Durcovici left Rome, a day after finishing his duties as prefect of the Urban College⁵². It is worth mentioning the words noted in the "Remarks" section of a folder: "Exemplar in omnibus excelentissimus. Pietate, ingenio disciplinae observantia omnium princeps"⁵³. As the first biographer of the priest Anton Durcovici told us, on his way to Bucharest he stopped at the shrine of Loreto and visited his birthplace. He celebrated his first Mass in Deutsch Altenburg, surrounded by his relatives⁵⁴.

From Vienna, the priest Anton Durcovici arrived in Bucharest on August 23, 1911, where he received several missions from his superiors⁵⁵: professor and prefect of the Seminary in Bucharest, teacher at the secondary

⁴⁷ The document was signed by Msgr. Alois Vecchia, secretary of the "De Propaganda Fide" Congregation between 1899-1911 (cf. Peter Guilday, "The Sacred Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, 1622-1922", in *The Catholic Historical Review*, tome 6, Cleveland 1922, 485), and has the number 1669/1910. (copy in AERC Iași, file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered)

⁴⁸ Cf. ACU Rome, file II/2, *Ordinazioni degli alunni del Coll. Urbano*, f. 56.

⁴⁹ ACU Rome, file IV/25, *Diario Musico*, f. 231.

⁵⁰ In order to remove all confusions made in some papers and studies printed so far, between Giovanni Bonzano and Giovanni Bergamo, we mention here that the rector Giovanni Vincenzo Bonzano occupied this function until February 2, 1912, when he was appointed apostolic delegate to the United States and titular bishop of Melitene by Pope Pius X. There is no rector of the "De Propaganda Fide" College by the name of Bergamo.

⁵¹ AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

⁵² Cf. ACU Rome, file *Alumni Colegii Urbani*, p. 7.

⁵³ ACU Rome, file IV, *Elenco degli alunni del Collegio Urbano, dall'anno 1895 all'anno 1962*, position 258.

⁵⁴ Cf. Florian MÜLLER, *Viața episcopului de Iași dr. Anton Durcovici, martir*, 15.

⁵⁵ For those wanting to trace the priest and later on bishop Durcovici "step by step", we suggest the detailed analysis of the file *Liber Missarum sacerdotis Durcovici*. The Archives of the Roman-Catholic Theological Institute of Iași only has the last such registry, indicating the intention, stipend, type, place and date of the Mass celebrated, as well as some observations for the period of time between March 1943 – June 1949.

school attached to the “St. Andrew” boarding school, “parochus currens” (administrator) of the parishes in Giurgiu (1911-1916), Buzau (1913-1916) and Targoviste (1911-1916, 1923-1924, 1926-1927), rector of the chapel of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion (August 1911 – August 1920), prefect of the “St. Andrew” Catholic school and teacher at the “Tomis” Science School (February 1918 – August 1920), and director of the “St. Andrew” Catholic school (August 21, 1920 – July 1925). In September 1924 he was appointed director of the Archdiocesan Seminary and then of the Theological Academy. Despite being given so many missions, he also found time to be confessor at the cathedral of St. Joseph, president of the Men’s Marian Congregation (from May 1920), spiritual of the “tertiaries”, censor of books...: a life of work, zeal and dedication. As he wrote in a personal record, Anton Durcovici temporarily administered the churches dedicated to the Holy Saviour (February-December 1918), to Saint Helena (February to September 1919) and again the one in Targoviste (March 1923 – August 1924)⁵⁶. Besides the teaching and pastoral activities already mentioned, many others can be added, which have been less presented in the biographies dedicated to the Bishop Durcovici. One of these refers to the essential contribution made for the printing of the Catholic newspaper of information and opinion titled “Farul nou”, on January 1, 1934. We also mention the fact that in the interwar period he collaborated with articles in publications such as “Revista Catolica”, “Jugendfreund” and “Crainicul”. Since November 3, 1936, every Tuesday evening father Anton Durcovici presented 26 theology lessons inspired by the works of St. Thomas of Aquinas in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Bucharest. This vast and fruitful activity led to his awarding with several honorary titles, such as Canon of the Archdiocesan Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Bucharest (March 8, 1923), pro-synodal judge for the archdiocesan tribunal in Bucharest, pro-synodal examiner, domestic prelate of His Holiness Pope Pius XI, and also decorated by the King of Romania with the “Crown of Romania” receiving the rank of officer⁵⁷.

On October 30, 1947, Pope Pius XII appointed the priest Anton Durcovici as Bishop of Iasi⁵⁸. Within a few days, more precisely on November 14, King Michael I signed the decree 2137 of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, recognizing his appointment to the dignity and function as Bishop of the

⁵⁶ Cf. *Note personale*, in AERC Iași, personal file *Anton Durcovici*, unnumbered.

⁵⁷ Alois MORARU, *Viața eroică a episcopului Anton Durcovici (cateheze)*, Presa Bună, Iași 2013.

⁵⁸ AERC Iași, file *Corespondență cu familia*, f. 14; cf. Alois MORARU – Iosif RĂCHITEANU, *Păstorii Diecezei de Iași și rectorii Seminarului diecezan*, Iași 2004, 29; cf. Ioan MĂRTINAȘ – Gaspar BACHMAIER, *Bine ai venit, Stăpâne!*, Iași 1948, 11-13.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Iasi⁵⁹. On November 18, 1947, the Ministry of Religious Affairs informed the chosen bishop that he was to be recognized only after taking the oath of fidelity to the sovereign and obedience to the laws of the country⁶⁰. In his own turn, on November 27, 1947, Bishop Durcovici sent the Ministry of Religious Affairs the copy of the speech he was to read before the king on occasion of his taking of the oath, asking to be notified about the date and schedule of the ceremonies⁶¹. Inexplicably, however, Msgr. Anton Durcovici will have to wait almost five months until his consecration as bishop. The oath taking has been delayed in the first phase (November 27 to December 20, 1947) as King Michael was on a visit to England, to attend the wedding of the future Queen Elizabeth II. Upon his return to the country, the king moved to Sinaia, from where he will be called on December 30, 1947 to Bucharest and forced to abdicate. Between January 1 to April 1, 1948, the Groza government did everything in its power to delay as much as possible the loyalty oath, and therefore the consecration⁶². This delay has caused some confusion in the two Catholic dioceses, of Bucharest and Iasi, with the farewell ceremonies scheduled for Bishop Durcovici to leave the faithful people of Bucharest on the evening of November 30, 1947, as well as the ceremony for his the consecration in the cathedral of Iași scheduled for the first half of December 1947⁶³.

Meanwhile, on November 25, 1947, the apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Iași, bishop Marcu Glaser, sent a circular letter to all Catholics in Moldova informing them about the appointment of Mgr. Anton Durcovici as bishop of Iași. The letter was to be read in every parish church, as well as in all the subsidiary churches, on the first Sunday after receiving it. After a brief presentation of the biography of the new bishop of Iasi, Msgr. Marcu Glaser describes his personality, inviting the faithful to pray for the elected bishop of the Diocese of Iasi, for him to be able to guide the flock to the port of salvation⁶⁴. On January 2, 1948, the chosen Bishop Durcovici went on an audience to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, suggesting to the Minister Ion Nistor that he be sworn in before the Metropolitan Archbishop Alexandru Cisar, being assisted by a government representative. Bishop Durcovici motivated his request by saying that the Denominations Act of 1928 did not expressly provide the authority before which one had

⁵⁹ *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 264/14 November 1947, part I.

⁶⁰ AERC Iași, file 1/1947, f. 180.

⁶¹ AERC Iași, file 1/1948, ff. 67-72.

⁶² Cf. Dănuț DOBOȘ, „Noi mărturii privind viața și activitatea episcopului Anton Durcovici”, in *Buletin istoric* 3 (2002) 59.

⁶³ Cf. AERC Iași, file 1/1947, f. 23; file 2/1954, ff. 31-35,38-39.

⁶⁴ AERC Iași, file 3/1936, f. 175; AITRC Iași, file 3/1947, ff. 37-38.

to be sworn in⁶⁵. The Ministry of Religious Affairs refused this request, but promised to find a way for the swearing in ceremony. On the same day, before the archbishop Alexandru Cisar, he took his oath of loyalty to the Popular Republic of Romania, as the government required all priests and bishops in the country to do. We present the text of this oath: “I swear to be faithful to the People and to defend the Popular Republic of Romania against all enemies from inside and from abroad. I swear to observe the laws of the Popular Republic of Romania and to keep the secret in the service established by the State”⁶⁶. Finally, in a telegram to the bishop elected, in March 1948, the Minister Ioan Nistor notified him on the date he had set for the taking of the oath of fidelity, April 1, 1948, at 10 o'clock at the presidency of the Council of Ministers⁶⁷. The chosen Bishop Durcovici, like all the other Catholic bishops, added the following phrase to the oath required by the Romanian government “all that is not against the law of God and the salvation of souls”⁶⁸.

This impasse overcome, Anton Durcovici was consecrated bishop on April 5, 1948 in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Bucharest by Archbishop Gerald Patrick O'Hara, apostolic nuncio in Romania, accompanied by Archbishop Alexandru Cisar and Bishop Marcu Glaser⁶⁹. The procession went from the bishop's palace to the cathedral, where the organ resounded and where the episcopal ordination would begin shortly. A special ceremony followed, which profoundly touched those present. A festive dinner was organized after the Mass in the palace of the Apostolic Nunciature, with many speeches and many photos⁷⁰.

After the consecration and the preparation of the transfer to Iași, Bishop Durcovici arrived in the Moldovan capital, by train, on April 13, 1948, accompanied by Canons Gheorghe Horvath and Gustav Müller. Bishop Marcu Glaser greeted him at the train station, while the cathedral priests, professors and seminarians waited him at the bishopric residence, receiving him in a resounding chorus⁷¹. The Council of the Diocese of Iasi established the protocol for the takeover of the diocese, and the following day, the enthronement ceremony took place in the Cathedral of the Assumption⁷². The new bishop gave a short speech, which he ended as follows: “Therefore God has

⁶⁵ Cf. AERC Iași, file 1/1948, f. 98.

⁶⁶ AERC Iași, file 2/1945, f. 45.

⁶⁷ AERC Iași, file 2/1948, f. 27.

⁶⁸ AERC Iași, file 2/1937, f. 380.

⁶⁹ Cf. AERC Iași, file *Corespondență cu familia*, f. 15; cf. Dănuț DOBOȘ – Anton DESPINESCU, *Episcopul Anton Durcovici. O viață închinată lui Dumnezeu și Bisericii*, Iași 2002, 115.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ioan MĂRTINAȘ – Gaspar BACHMAIER, *Bine ai venit, Stăpâne!*, 18-27.

⁷¹ Cf. AERC Iași, file 1/1948, f. 123.

⁷² Ioan MĂRTINAȘ – Gaspar BACHMAIER, *Bine ai venit, Stăpâne!*, 35-36.

sent me, his humble servant, to the Diocese of Iasi in order not that I may be served, but in order that I may serve everyone with all my might until my last breath". The sermon was delivered by Father Ioan Mărtinaș and after the Mass, the Bishop walked down the middle of the cathedral blessing the congregation. Accompanied by the sounds of the organ and the orchestra playing Händel's *Hallelujah*, the procession walked toward the bishop's palace. The coat of arms of Bishop Anton Durcovici features a ship that carries the Lamb of God with the banner of victory, set on a stormy sea; above it, in the middle, is the cross between the crozier and the mitre and at the bottom is the bishop's motto: *Beatus populus cuius Dominus est Deus* (Ps 143,15) ("Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord")⁷³. Many photos were taken on this occasion, and later on integrated in the volume „Bine ai venit, Stăpâne!” (“Welcome, Master!”), work published under the coordination of Fathers Ioan Mărtinaș and Gaspar Bachmeier. The book includes “reverential documents, speeches and notes upon the consecration and enthronement of His Excellency Msgr. dr. Anton Durcovici as Catholic bishop of Iași”⁷⁴.

The pastoral work carried out by Blessed Anton Durcovici as bishop of Iasi is based on his being aware that God has chosen him as shepherd to guide the Catholics in Moldova. The new bishop signed his first pastoral letter on the very day of his enthronement in the cathedral of Iasi (April 14, 1948). Addressing both the clergy and lay people, Bishop Durcovici expressed his hope to be among them as soon as possible, just as the shepherd wishes to be among his sheep and the father together with his children. Then he expresses his feeling of adoration of Christ present in the Holy Communion in all the churches of the diocese, asking Him to reverse his graces upon the whole local Catholic Church of Iasi⁷⁵. The new bishop of Iasi explains then the motto on his coat of arms: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (Ps 143.15), urging his subjects to be strong in their faith, virtue that is to be fed through participation in the holy sacraments, especially by receiving the Holy Communion, which is the only path to true happiness and to the kingdom of the divine Lamb. The first pastoral letter of Bishop Anton Durcovici ends with the invitation to all the Catholics in Moldova to support him in his pastoral work through prayer.

⁷³ See the study prepared by Anton COȘA, „Stema episcopului Anton Durcovici”, published in Ștefan LUPU (coord.), *În umbra crucii*, Iași 2013, 198-207.

⁷⁴ Dănuț DOBOȘ, „Episcopul Anton Durcovici: *Bine ai venit, Stăpâne!*”, in Ștefan LUPU (coord.), *În umbra crucii*, 397-398.

⁷⁵ AERC Iași, file 3/1936, ff. 181-183. Bishop Anton Durcovici asked that this pastoral letter be read from the pulpit in all parish churches and subsidiary churches on the first Sunday or solemnity upon its receipt.

After a month, in his circular letter of May 21 1948, Bishop Anton Durcovicci announces the schedule of his canonical visits and to confer the sacrament of Confirmation⁷⁶: Galați (Sunday, June 6, 1948), Butea (Thursday, June 10, 1948), Fărcășeni (Saturday, June 12, 1948), Răchiteni (Sunday, June 13, 1948), Adjudei (Tuesday, June 15, 1948), Buruienești (Thursday, June 17, 1948), Oțeleni (Sunday, June 20, 1948), Tămășeni (Sunday, July 4, 1948), Sagna (Monday, July 5, 1948), Roman (Tuesday, July 6 1948). For different reason, this program has undergone some changes, but has been improved with other visits.

On July 18, 1948, Bishop Durcovicci sends out another circular letter announcing the schedule of his canonical visits and to confer the sacrament of Confirmation in the northern part of the diocese by Bishop Marcu Glaser⁷⁷: Suceava (August 1-2, 1948), Gura Humorului (August 3-4, 1948), Vatra Dornei (August 5-6, 1948), Câmpulung (August 7-8, 1948), Rădăuți (August 9-10, 1948), Siret (August 11-12, 1948), Cacica (August 13-14, 1948), August 15, 1948: the feast day and the pilgrimage to Cacica with the presence of the bishops. On August 7, 1948, bishop Durcovicci notifies Bishop Marcu Glaser, who was in Siret, that he can no longer come to Cacica, being retained in Iasi: "Our seminar is closed and taken into state ownership. They have been working at the inventory for five days now and it is still not done. They have also started inventorying at the episcopal house yesterday. It will probably take a week"⁷⁸. The same circular announces his canonical visit and the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation at: Hălăucești (Sunday, August 29, 1948), Zăpodia (Monday, August 30, 1948), another subsidiary church (Tuesday, August 31, 1948), Barticești (Wednesday, September 1, 1948), Gherăești (Thursday, September 2, 1948), Iugani (Saturday, September 4, 1948), Săbăoani (Sunday, September 5, 1948), Pildești (Monday, September 6, 1948).

A month later, on August 25, 1948, Bishop Marcu Glaser, vicar general, sends a circular letter presenting the schedule of the canonical visits and the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation in the Deanery of Iasi⁷⁹: Cotnari (Sunday, September 5, 1948, arrival on Saturday, September 4), Bălțați (Monday, September 6, 1948, arrival in the morning at 9 o'clock, return to Iasi in the evening), Răducăneni (Wednesday, September 8, 1948, arrival on Tuesday at 6 o'clock in the evening), Adămești (Friday, September 10, 1948, by train, leaving at 6.15 o'clock in the morning) and

⁷⁶ AERC Iași, file 3/1948, f. 337.

⁷⁷ AERC Iași, file 3/1948, f. 394.

⁷⁸ AERC Iași, f. 427.

⁷⁹ AERC Iași, f. 440.

Huși (Sunday, September 12, 1948, going to Huși by train, leaving the day before).

During Bishop Anton Durcovici's canonical visit to some parishes in the diocese of Iasi and, after January 1949⁸⁰ to some communities in the Archdiocese of Bucharest (Deanery of Oltenia), the prelate, while conferring the sacrament of Confirmation during the holy Mass, urged the young confirmed and those present at the celebration to keep intact the faith they have received through Baptism and the spiritual bond with the Holy See. All these are presented in detail, by the Bishop of Iasi, in his statement on April 26, 1950 while in the custody of the Securitate (Department of State Security, the secret police agency of Communist Romania) in Bucharest⁸¹. We present below a few paragraphs of this statement, in which we can identify some places of the Diocese of Iasi that have been visited and blessed by Bishop Anton Durcovici;

The subject of my preaching to the faithful in Iasi and during the canonical visits both in Moldova and the Deanery of Oltenia was one of the dogmatic or moral truths of the Catholic catechism, urging the faithful to strongly keep these truths and to conscientiously observe Christian duties.

As for the visits to the communities in the centre of the diocese, we can see that the first visit was in Gherăești, occasioned by the feast day of the church, on May 19, 1948. After visiting other Catholic communities of the diocese, Bishop Anton Durcovici arrived in Butea on June 11, 1948, where he preached about the Holy Trinity, patron of the church, inviting the faithful "to honour the three divine persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit when they make the sign of the cross". After visiting the communities of Șcheia and Fărcășeni, while being in Oteleni, between 13 and 16 June 1948, he preached about Saint Anna, the patron of the church and "recalled the obligation of parents to educate their children the Christian way". From there he went to Buruienеști, where, he conferred the sacrament of Confirmation on June 17, preaching about St. Joseph, "a model of Christian worker, diligent and conscientious, combining prayer and work". A day later, Bishop Anton Durcovici was in Adjudeni, where he spoke about the Holy Spirit as "the one who sanctifies the Christian soul" and recalled that a Christian has the duty not to offend this distinguished guest by

⁸⁰ On January 17, 1949 Bishop Anton Durcovici was appointed apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Bucharest, as Archbishop Alexandru Cisar had given his resignation for political reasons. (cf. Ovidiu BOZGAN, *România versus Vatican. Persecuția Bisericii Catolice din România Comunistă în lumina documentelor diplomatice franceze*, Bucharest 2000, 56, note 22)

⁸¹ Cf. Anton DURCOVICI, *Nu sunt de acord. Declarații din arestul Securității București*, Iași 2011, 69-89.

committing sin. After his pastoral visit in the community of Rotunda, the bishop Anton Durcovici visited the parish of Răchiteni, on June 20, 1948. There he preached about Saint Anthony of Padua, who is “example and help for all Christians in the hardships of life”. He urged the faithful to work without being discouraged, despite the damages caused by the River Siret flooding the village.

After two weeks spent in Iasi, Bishop Anton Durcovici visited the parish of Săbăoani, on July 3, where he spoke about God the Almighty, “that no one can match, urging those present to fully trust Him”. In the city of Roman, on July 4, 1948, he spoke about “the duty of every Christian to save his soul and about the personal responsibility of each person before the judgment of God”. A day later he visited the community in Tămășeni and then the parish of Gherăești again (July 6).

In July and August 1948, the Bishop Anton Durcovici interrupted the visits to the centre of the bishopric, being spotted in other parts of the Diocese of Iasi as well as in Bucharest, Oradea and Iasi. In early September, Bishop Durcovici is again present in the Roman area, where we find him for three days in Gherăești (1-3), and after he visits the communities in Iugani and Barticești. On September 5th he is back to Săbăoani, after which he visits the Catholic community in Pildești⁸². Here, on September 6th, he preaches about the patron of the church, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and “urges the faithful to live in dignity on earth and never forget the heavenly homeland”. There followed many other visits to parishes in Piatra Neamt, Bacau, Onesti and Focsani. After all these visits, the Bishop Anton Durcovici concluded: “In many places in Moldova, there is a custom according to which after the Mass during the canonical visit, believers, in front of the parish house or clergy house, thank the Bishop and express their wishes; a custom which has also been preserved for the visits in 1948, because local authorities also wanted to keep this tradition for the faithful to know that religion is free. To their thanking, I always responded very briefly, so I do not think my answer lasted more than a minute, that I would not forget them in my prayers not even for a day, for God to always help them in everything related to their soul and body; afterwards giving them the hierarchical blessing, I concluded with the Catholic greeting: Praised be Jesus Christ”⁸³.

So, after the enthronement Bishop Anton Durcovici went from parish to parish, to consecrate them to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. As indicated by the contemporaries, the faithful people received the bishop as a messenger from God. Some people accompanied him from one parish to

⁸² The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, fund *Penal*, file 38, f. 102.

⁸³ Anton DURCOVICI, *Nu sunt de acord...*, 89.

another, being fascinated by his ascetic, spiritualized persona. During three months, from June 6 to September 12, 1948, the Bishop of Iași visited and administered the sacrament of Confirmation in many communities. This was the shepherd sent by God as a shepherd to guide the flock in the terrible times of communist persecution. Little wonder, then, that the Securitate began to take note, but was afraid to act because they feared the people. Upon his return to Iasi, the Securitate summoned Bishop Durcovici. He refused to go, but the following day a general arrived at the bishop's palace to arrest him. He was so impressed by the Bishop that he left as he had come. As we read in the archive documents, the officers of the Securitate tried to capture even the slightest political meaning in the words Bishop Durcovici uttered during his canonical visits or during the sermons of the Masses. The Bishop's correspondence and circular letters were closely monitored in order to detect any information considered as "antidemocratic". With the wisdom and prudence that characterized him, the Bishop of Iasi did not offer the Securitate any opportunity to accuse him of something that flagrantly infringed the state laws and, therefore, the Securitate tried to recruit informants among the Catholic priests, but failed to do so:

The penetrations among the Catholics for the purpose of obtaining information is the most spiny issue. (...) The objective is to expand the informative network, by penetrating as deeply as possible among the clerical elements, in order to know any action undermining the regime in due time⁸⁴.

The Bishop of Iasi was followed step by step and the Securitate was seeking any occasion to have him arrested. Bishop Durcovici's effort in reorganizing the religious life in the Diocese of Iasi under the continuous pressure from the government and the communist police was remarkable. In the most difficult moments, such as when priests were arrested or during the dramatic events from Fundu Răcăciuni, Făraoani, Prăjești, Oteleni, Bargauani and Butea of 1949, the bishop imposed the most urgent and appropriate measures. Their purpose was to urge priests and villagers to maintain public order and peace, on the one hand, and not to provoke the communist authorities, on the other hand⁸⁵. Sensing the strategy of communist challenges, Bishop Durcovici permanently visited the Catholic communities to calm the spirits and encourage the faithful, as well as to collect information on the events as they occurred⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Newspaper *Scântea* 1450 (June 13, 1949).

⁸⁵ The Archive of the Diocese of Iasi contains the file of the referendums of March 1949, the original minutes with the voting results, signed by the village mayors and parish priests and the decision taken by the bishop.

⁸⁶ Cf. Dănuț DOBOȘ, „Episcopul Dr. Anton Durcovici – martir al Bisericii Catolice”, *Buletin istoric* 1 (2000) 133-134.

As mentioned already, besides the major challenges in the Diocese of Iasi, Bishop Durcovici had to also deal with those in the Archdiocese of Bucharest, making both physical and mental superhuman efforts. He will be constantly forced to dedicate himself to the problems at the level of the relation with the communist state and the violation of religious freedoms by the state, problems that worsened in the summer of 1948. We refer in particular to the unilateral termination of the Concordat by the communist regime on July 18, 1948, and the decrees 175, 176 and 177 of August 1948 on the communist education reform and the regime of religions in the new realities of communist Romania⁸⁷. In assessing as accurately as possible the consequences of these antireligious actions, Bishop Durcovici asked a confidential report from the lawyer Anton Vladimir Frollo from Bucharest, who wrote that through its hostile acts the communist government openly declared their hostility to the Catholic Church⁸⁸.

Faced with these laws, Bishop Durcovici signed in August 1948 a memorandum in which he disputed all the normative communist acts on religious matters⁸⁹. The closing down of the seminars in Iasi and Bucharest particularly affected him, as he was seeing the efforts made and work carried out for 36 years completely thwarted. On September 2, 1948, he requested the Ministry of Religious Affairs that the properties and assets of the seminars in Iasi, Halaucesti and Luizi Calugara be given back to him, as well as the Franciscan Novitiate in Săbăoani⁹⁰. Furthermore, in an attempt to rescue the premises of the former Catholic institutes and schools, on September 9, 1948, he asked the government that those institutions be declared *monasteries*. He will ask that the same be done for the school buildings in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest: on January 28, 1949 he asked the Ministry of Religious Affairs that the buildings of the Brothers of the Christian Schools be declared monasteries, but he was unsuccessful⁹¹. Related to the Seminary in Iasi, in the autumn of 1948, Bishop Durcovici committed to solve this issue in the only way imposed and accepted by the government, by organizing a joint seminar in Alba Iulia. In doing so, he prepared a project of the seminary, which he then proposed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In a letter sent on September 9, 1948, to the archbishop Alexandru Cisar, Bishop Durcovici wrote the following: “Our thought, as you know, is that by doing so we will prepare students up to the

⁸⁷ Cf. Cornel DAMIAN, „Concordatul dintre Sfântul Scaun și România – aspecte istorico-juridice”, *Pro memoria*, Bucharest 2 (2003) 172.

⁸⁸ Cf. AERC Iași, file 1/1948, ff. 73-74.

⁸⁹ AERC Iași, file 1/1948, ff. 114-115

⁹⁰ AERC Iași, file 2/1948, unnumbered.

⁹¹ AERC Iași, file 2/1948, unnumbered.

priesthood according to a program of about nine years⁹². The government rejected this project, as well as Durcovici's observations related to the Cantor School in Alba Iulia⁹³.

Amid this general hostility to the Catholic Church⁹⁴ and to monasticism, the communist authorities had an extremely critical vision of the Roman Catholic orders and congregations. Between 1948-1951 the regime's unfavourable comments against the Catholic Church abound⁹⁵. After the decree by which bishop Ioan Suciuc is removed from his see appears in the *Official Gazette* on September 3, 1948, on September 18 the other bishops are removed from their sees as well: Traian Frențiu of Oradea; Alexandru Rusu from Baia-Mare; Ioan Balan from Lugoj. Only Iuliu Hossu from Cluj and Vasile Aftenie from Bucharest (he was vicar general) remained in their sees. The government hoped that they would be more concessive. Then, gradually, the Roman Catholic bishops followed⁹⁶. The persecution of the Catholic Church, following the Soviet model, led to a virulent anti-Catholic and anti-papal campaign, which Bishop Anton Durcovici had to condemn. The international structure of the Catholic Church was not to the liking of new regime, the Vatican being associated to the "Western imperialist camp", which led to the repeal of the Concordat between the Holy See and Romania, on July 18, 1948, ending all subsequent agreements. As an immediate consequence, the Apostolic Nuncio in Bucharest was expelled from Romania. Before the expulsion, at the request of Pope Pius XII, the Nuncio Gerald Patrick O'Hara secretly consecrated several bishops: Ioan Ploscaru, Ioan Dragomir, Ioan Chertes, Iuliu Hirtea, Alexandru Todea, Ioan Duma etc. They have assured a certain continuity of the Catholic Church in Romania. This campaign included direct persecutions and diversionary tactics

⁹² AERC Iași, file 3/1948, f. 34.

⁹³ AERC Iași, file 1/1948, f. 261.

⁹⁴ Of the dozens of books published and that address this issue, we only mention a few recent ones: Sergiu GROSSU, *Calvarul României Creștine*, Chișinău 1992; Cicerone IONIȚOIU, *Cartea de aur a rezistenței românești împotriva comunismului*, tome I, Bucharest 1995; THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF TOTALITARIANISM, *Biserica întemnițată. România, 1944-1989*, Bucharest 1998; Ovidiu BOZGAN, *România versus Vatican (Persecuția Bisericii Catolice din România comunistă în lumina documentelor diplomatice franceze)*, Bucharest 2000; Gheorghe PĂTRAȘCU, *Zile de încercare și de har – amintiri din închisoare*, Roman 2002; Ion BOTA – Cicerone IONIȚOIU, *Martiri și mărturisitori ai Bisericii din România (1945-1989)*, Cluj-Napoca 2001; M. BUCUR – L. STAN, *Persecuția Bisericii Catolice în România. Documente din Arhiva Europei Libere (1948-1960)*, Târgu-Lăpuș 2005; THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ROMANIA, *Biserica Romano-Catolică din România în timpul prigoanei comuniste (1948-1989)*, Iași 2008; Stephane COURTOIS (coord.), *Dicționarul comunismului*, tome I, Iași 2008 etc.

⁹⁵ See the National Archives of Romania, fund *Direcția Generală a Poliției*, file 114/1948.

⁹⁶ Cf. Dănuț DOBOȘ – Anton DESPINESCU, *Episcopul Anton Durcovici...*, 119.

to discredit the Church according to local circumstances, the number of believers, the organizational structure and the intensity of religious life. Moreover, anti-Catholic propaganda aimed to prepare the public opinion to accept measures that would limit the autonomy of the Church, the nationalization of denominational schools, the confiscation of church properties and the termination of all existing agreements with the Vatican. The priests and hierarchs who opposed the cooperation with the regime were replaced by vicars general elected among the canons of those institutions, as they did not want a “church of catacombs”, that is an institution outside the control of the communist regime⁹⁷.

Forced by these political tensions, without being aware of it, on June 9, 1949, Bishop Anton Durcovici celebrated his last Mass in Iasi, in the chapel of the episcopal palace, “to honour the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with a personal intention”⁹⁸. Following that day, as apostolic administrator of the diocese of Bucharest⁹⁹, bishop Durcovici made several canonical visits in order to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in Turnu-Severin (June 12), Craiova (June 13), Târgu-Jiu (June 14), Râmnicu-Vâlcea (June 16), Slatina (June 17), Pitești (June 18) and Câmpulung-Muscel (June 19)¹⁰⁰.

The same was scheduled for Sunday, June 26, 1949, when the sacrament of Confirmation was to be administered in the parish of Popești Leordeni. Bishop Durcovici had spent the night in the Archbishop’s palace in Bucharest and planned to ride to Popești Leordeni in the morning in the Archbishop’s car. At 7 o’clock on Sunday morning the Archbishop’s driver informed him that the palace was surrounded by Securitate forces and that the car was not allowed to leave. Father Vasile Begu arrived by taxi to the Archbishop’s palace and asked Bishop Durcovici to go and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation as six hundred and fifty young people waited inside the church. The bishop decided to go, although he was in real danger, accompanied by professor Rafael Friedrich. They left the palace, on foot, passing in front of the cathedral, where many people had already gathered for the Holy Mass. They took a tram to the last stop, near the Belu Cemetery and set off to Popești, 2 kilometers away. As soon as they were out in the open fields a car caught up with them and three Securitate men got out and forced Bishop Durcovici inside.

Thus begins a new phase of Bishop Anton Durcovici’s Calvary, which will end with his martyr death, on December 10, 1951, in a cell in Sighetu Marmației.

⁹⁷ Cf. The Vatican Secret Archives, fund *Arh. Nunz. Romania*, file 108, f. 228

⁹⁸ AITRC Iași, *Liber missarum*, the day of 9th June 1949.

⁹⁹ Cf. The Vatican Secret Archives, fund *Arh. Nunz. Romania*, file 108, f. 108.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Anton DURCOVICI, *Nu sunt de acord...*, 79-83.