

A Grain of Truth of our Christian Faith and Romanian Immigration to the United States

The Roumanians present a characteristic common to some of the other ethnic immigrant groups in that they draw from different geographical environments: the Old Kingdom of Roumania, the Transcarpathian provinces of Banat, Transylvania, and Bukovina, (formerly under the Austro-Hungarian rule); the provinces of Epirus, Thessaly, and Pindus, (formerly under the Turkish and Greek flags), now incorporated in Greece, Albania, Turkey and Jugo-Slavia.

In order to preserve these geographical distinctions, Roumanians are referred to as Romanians, Transylvanians, and Romanian Macedonians. In view of this diversity, in the home background, because of the geographical barriers which isolated them for many centuries from each other, the problems related to the assimilation of these Romanians became of special interest.

Their economic adaptation to the American environment is of just as great an interest as their social assimilation because of 89% of the Romanian immigrants belong to the class of farm laborers and only 4% to the professional class.

The immigrants from Romania, to the United States belong to the so-called "new immigration," which has in the years contributed to the social structure of American life a variety of ethnic elements from southeastern Europe.

Springing from a country itself streaked with a variegated population, the stream of immigration from Romania has carried out of the cradle of the country not only people from its ethnic stock, but also the Romanian Jews, Turks, Germans, Bulgarians and others who formed one-eighth of the total population of the Old Kingdom of Romania.

The United States has also received the contribution of other streams of Romanians immigrants, coming from such countries as Austria-Hungary, Russia, Turkey and Greece, where Romanians had settled long ago and where they have maintained their racial characteristics despite the differences in citizenship, surroundings, other nationalities of antagonistic interests.

According to the leaders, in about 1890 the Romanians began to come in very small numbers, the Transylvanians about 1896. Records show however, that sporadic immigrations of Romanians came to American prior to 1890. We shall have to wait for a number of years before the influx of Romanians assumes the numerical importance and the continuity which lend to it the character of a group migration.

From 1901 on, the "Romanian immigration" to the United States increased constantly, except for the war periods up to 1924, totaling by 1928, 146,826. Romanians for the period of 1899-1928, of whom 10% came from the Old Kingdom of Romania; 83.4% from Transylvania, still under the Austro-Hungary rule, and 6.6% from, the countries of Turkey, Greece, Russia and others. The numerical superiority of the Transylvanians must be borne in mind when seeking an explanation of their decided leadership in the Romanian social organizations in the United States.

Looking at the Romanian immigrants from the standpoint of their previous occupations, it is seen that a very small number of them are trained in the professions, a few as skilled workers, with the majority belonging to the unskilled workers class. That the immigration was primarily agricultural is evidenced by the figures referring to the whole period 1899-1927, 89% were farm laborers and unskilled workers, 4% skilled workers, 6.6% were other occupations and only 0.4% were identified as professional.

From a religious standpoint, those Romanian immigrants were of three categories: (1.) The Greek Orthodox Church, which claims more than 90,000 members of Romanians, Macedo-

nians, and Transylvanians; (2.) The Greek Catholic or Uniate Church, which had a membership of 1,700 solely among the Transylvanians, and (3.) The Romanian Baptist Church which numbered about 850 members.

A summary of the outstanding features of the Romanian immigration to the U.S. disclosed the fact that the majority of the immigrants, the Transylvanians have come from the provinces ruled in the pre-war period by Austria-Hungary, a few from the Old Kingdom and only a small number of Romanian-Macedonians from Epirus. These Romanians are a group of able-bodied people, mostly from the peasant class, and in respect to age, sex, marital conditions and occupations, as well equipped for productive work.

As to causes which brought this human raw material within the gates of the U.S., to discover what prompted these people to face the hardship of breaking home ties, of risking their savings and making the adjustments demanded by their new environment, I will attempt to make in succeeding lines.

The causes underlying the immigration of peasants from Transylvania are very complex. In addition to the psychological motives, influenced by social and economic circumstances, there is also to be considered the tense political situation in which they lived. Their homes were on the western slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, thus bringing them under the Austria-Hungarian rule.

As subjects of the dual empire, they were supposed to enjoy the privileges of freedom of religion and language guaranteed by the Law of Nationalities of 1868. But as this law was never respected by the Hungarians, the fate of the Romanians, whose claims to an autonomous government under the direct rule of Austria Francis Joseph, had been disregarded by accepting the Ausgleich of 1867, and was left to the discretion of the Magyar administration.

Departing from the liberal policy of the Hapsburg dynasty the Hungarian Diet pursued a policy of strong Magyarization. Not daring openly to contradict the Law of Nationalities of 1868, it resorted to a series of intricate measures which created a great deal of dissatisfaction and suffering among the Transylvanians. The latter saw their electoral freedom curtailed by high taxes and still more by the iniquitous class system of taxation. They had to pay four times the amount of taxation levied on the Hungarians living in the other electoral districts.

In the reaction to this policy of forced assimilation, the Transylvanians created in 1881 the National Romanian Party of Hungary, which demanded first, the autonomy of Transylvania; second, the use of the Romanian language in administration and justice in Romanian inhabited countries; third, the appointment of Romanian officials in these countries or of Hungarian officials who could speak Romanian; fourth, the religious and cultural autonomy and state subsidy for Romanian schools; fifth, the curtailment of Magyarization policy. But despite its efforts the National Romanian Party failed to have its claims recognized by the Hungarian government.

The economic situation of the Transylvanian peasants was highly unsatisfactory. Political pressure, small wages and the general economic depression in Hungary kept it at a low level. Only a few Transylvanian peasants held property.

As a direct result of this general economic depression the Transylvanian peasants were forced to borrow money and mortgage their small land holdings. Economic pressure hardened the Transylvanian peasant and embittered his feelings.

But all these causes together would have been ineffective were they not supported by some elements in the character of Transylvanian peasant. Unlike his passive, fatalistic, Romanian brother, he is known for his daring and his spirit of independence which he holds as a sacred heritage from his ancestors. Despite their long-drawn struggle for equality of opportunities, or perhaps on its account, they have a keener sense of their rights and they fought more in

preserving them. It is due to this daring spirit and the causes of dissatisfaction which had been created, that the Transylvanians reacted and decided to leave for the United States.

For the presentation of the home backgrounds of the Romanians, Transylvanians, I have gathered an idea of hardships and limited opportunities that they had in their native villages and of the motives which decided them to migrate to America. For the Romanians of the Greek Catholic faith, the church has been a rallying point of their group ever since its formative period and it has initiated all the other organizations. This is due to the prestige that the Catholic Church has for its members and to the leadership it assumes in any faith community.

Organized very well for missionary work, the Uniate or Greek Catholic Church of Transylvania has sent to America prelates trained in the Theological Faculty of Blaj, and in Rome where they obtained a broader point of view. Of high moral character, they commanded the respect of their flock by their zeal in promoting the well-being of their parishioners. They were able to collaborate with their parish committees in erecting churches, parochial schools, working with social organizations of mutual help and the press. This exclusiveness was not compulsory, it allowed individual members to join the other Romanian organizations of another creed.

It helped however by making Catholicism the basis of membership, and to reinforce the solidarity of the Romanian Catholics. This group allegiance, based on religious belief, was strengthened by the encouragement that the Romanian Catholics received from their bishops in Transylvania and from the higher prelates of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States.

With such an enlightened leadership on the part of its prelates and with a keen cooperation on the part of its members the Greek Catholic Church continues to be the Romanian Catholic's stronghold in their social organization. In this context, like other churches in the United States, was born the Romanian Catholic Church in Aurora, Illinois.

In the early spring of 1906, Romanian immigrants living in Aurora, Illinois considered a need for their own church. According to the minutes of January 17, 1909, written by the parish council, and having in attendance were Arch-Bishop Peter 1. Muldoon, of Rockford and priests Dr. Alexandru Nicolescu, Alexander Pop, and Dr. Epaminonda Lucaciu.

A quote from those minutes reads "the foundation of this parish was placed in 1906, when the missionary priest Dr. Epaminonda Lucaciu going from house to house, made registration of all faithful christians and urged them to organize."

In 1908, the parish house on north Lincoln Avenue was purchased for \$3500 and was used for church services. In early spring construction of the church began. The parishioners were forced to use the church for services even while under construction as the parish size rapidly increased.

On July 4, 1909, Bishop Muldoon, D.D. of Rockford blessed the now completed church. Fr. Lucaciu's task in Aurora was completed and he went on to other missionary work.

Rev. Fr. Ioan Pop, newly arrived from Romania, was named as the new pastor.

Very Rev. Fr. Aurel Pater

