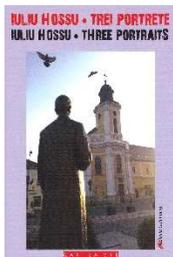


**Ruxandra Cesereanu, Ovidiu Ghitta, Gelu Hossu (eds.), *Iuliu Hossu. Trei portrete /Iuliu Hossu. Three Portraits*, (Târgu Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg), 2018, 264 p.**

**Roxana Motoceanu\***



The book *Iuliu Hossu. Three Portraits*, coordinated by Ruxandra Cesereanu, Ovidiu Ghitta, and Gelu Hossu, published in 2018 at Galaxia Gutenberg Publishing House in Târgu Lăpuș, is the result of an interdisciplinary project conducted by a *historian, a philologist, and an engineer* with a vocation for journalism. The volume edited in bilingual format, in Romanian and in English, is easy to read, being accessible to any reader, skilful or unskilful, Romanian or foreign, passionate about history or just interested in the life and martyrdom of Cardinal Iuliu Hossu. The construction of this volume resembles a triptych, a three-dimensional time facet, as the work describes three portraits of the same character: a young bishop involved in the act of the Great Union, a hierarch who does not give up his faith and his Church, imprisoned after the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948, and a man at the end of his earthly road, but who never abandoned his faith. As the authors state, the content of this book is an iconostasis of Cardinal Hossu's life. It contains life segments linked by them, resulting from different views and approaches. Historian Ovidiu Ghitta manages to capture the historical background preceding the Great Union, while Ruxandra Cesereanu, with her philological talent, sensitively processes the memories from detention and house arrest imposed upon the Cardinal. Gelu Hossu, as

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\* PhD candidate, Population Studies and Minorities History Doctoral School, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; e-mail: [roxanamotoceanu@yahoo.com](mailto:roxanamotoceanu@yahoo.com).

a descendant of the family, stops over the last part of Iuliu Hossu's life, highlighting the chronology of the passing away of this emblematic figure of Romanian Greek Catholicism.

The first part, which bears the signature of the historian, delicately combines the story with the historical facts. We are transposed into the atmosphere of a gloomy December 1948, when Bishop Hossu was arrested. Later on, there is an unexpected leap in time, after which Ghitta recovers from the writings, documents, and memoirs of the epoch the exuberant image of a young bishop trapped in the historical unrest of the year 1918. The picturesque settlement of Dragoslavele in Muscel Region is presented to us. There, in 1948, one of the estates of the Orthodox Church was transformed from a place of recreation and meditation into a gloomy destination. Iuliu Hossu, along with six other representatives of the Greek-Catholic Church, who no longer fitted the political-ideological context projected by the new party, were arrested and condemned to home detention in Dragoslavele. The barbed wire stretching around the building, the strict guard, the golden cage passed under the authority of a regime of *captivity and isolation* defined the place of detention of the six great prelates who were *timorous and, if they did not agree to adopt the solution of apostasy, they were to be suppressed little by little*.

Ovidiu Ghitta, the author of the first portrait of Iuliu Hossu, reconstructs the historical background of the year of the Great Union, and highlights the contribution of Iuliu Hossu and the Greek-Catholic Church in achieving the great desire of the Transylvanian Romanians. The end of the war, with the withdrawal of Russia from the conflict, the collapse of the eastern flank of the Entente, the memorandum elaborated by the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, submitted to the Pope and the primacy of Hungary, sent later to Emperor Carol, the election of a new bishop, reveal the unrest of that political era, but also the political and diplomatic skills of the young

Bishop Iuliu Hossu. The character and personality of this great man are highlighted against an extremely sensitive political background, where the stake for the nation was very high, and his involvement and that of the Church he was part of in the Great Union act were fundamental. Although he was trapped in all these convulsions, Iuliu Hossu did not lose his true vocation, that of guiding his parishioners, of helping them to overcome the war period, when social problems were exacerbated, poverty and hunger being the main enemies. His involvement in what constituted the crisis of the cultural domain, the allegations of non-patriotism brought to the Church, the actions to help the army, the widows, and the orphans of war were moments when *the significant features of his bishop profile came to light at that time*. The Cardinal's arrest on December 3, 1948, as well as his later imprisonment at Sighet Prison, could not affect his patriotism and deep faith. Subjected to torture and humiliation, he managed to visualise his diocese daily, pouring out blessings and prayers over the souls of church-goers. This was his compensatory exercise that brought him relief and hope.

The second portrait, outlined by Ruxandra Cesereanu, presents the memories of the Cardinal, written during detention. They are contained in three notebooks, which include fourteen years of martyrdom: the arrest, the home detention in Dragoslavele and Căldărușani, the imprisonment in Sighet Prison, and the house arrest in Curtea de Argeș, Ciorogârla, and Căldărușani Monastery. These notebooks were entrusted by Iuliu Hossu to one of his brothers, Traian Hossu. The author reveals his journey of suffering through his writings. He guides us through the years of detention, not only of his own, but of all those who did not reject their faith. After the arrest of 1948 follow the transport with the Securitate van to Sighet Prison, the eradication regimen they were subjected to, and the attempt to break their spirit. The surviving force of these martyrs resided in their adamant faith, the prayer as central

activity, as a form of survival and resistance against a punitive, exterminating regime. The exercise of visionary shepherding and imaginary liturgies determines the author to affirm that Iuliu Hossu lives his detention in an almost mystical way. The 1948 decree, according to which the Greek-Catholic Church no longer existed, became a purely scriptural fact for them, because it strengthened the church-goers' perception of a resilient and living Church, having faith in its resurrection close to the Christian model of the resurrection. These monks, priests, and non-apostatized prelates who survived the martyrdom became the surviving Church, and the one who *writes this unshaken act* is Iuliu Hossu in person, for whom detention determined the reinforcement and strengthening of his faith. Forcing them to a subhuman condition did not weaken their faith, but only their bodies, and the clerical clothing exchanged for regimentals as well as the confiscation of their rosaries were interpreted as spiritual exaltation. In the Cardinal's Memoirs, the author highlights a ritually resumed statement, like a mystical mantra, i.e. *our faith is our life*.

In the third part of the book, the last moments of the Cardinal's life as well as the avatars of his funeral are narrated sequentially, in chronological order. Although this part is written by a journalist in a professional manner, it causes the reader to go through it at an alert and emotionally involved pace; the events that happened after his death were a torrent of decisions and disputes. Most overwhelming are the intrusions of the informative notes and reports of the Securitate into the lives of those who were devoutly mourning him. In May 1970, Iuliu Hossu's health condition deteriorated. He was admitted to Colentina Hospital, but the news about the Cardinal's condition stirred the spirits. Bishop Todea, whom he had taught the *eschatological talents*, came to sit beside his bed. The testamentary dialogue he had with him contained four testimonies addressed to the Saviour, the Holy Father (the

Pope), the Church, and the church-goers, each containing a thought of his unwavering faith. The Cardinal's last words were: *I leave you the peace, I give you my peace.*

Many books, papers, studies, and memoirs have been written about Cardinal Iuliu Hossu's life, but this book easily surprises the man Iuliu Hossu in front of his great faith. Indeed, there are three portraits of the same man: a bishop, a prisoner, and a mere church-goer before his salvation. Beyond rank, position, or humbleness, he is the man in confrontation with his own faith at the crucial moments of his existence.