19/05/2021

19th-century “Father of Romanian autocephaly” is candidate for canonization



At its session in February, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church resolved to begin the canonization process of several Romanian confessors and missionaries under communism to mark the 140th anniversary of autocephaly and the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Patriarchate in 2025.

In March, His Grace Bishop Varlaam of Ploești named Elder Cleopa (Ilie) of Sihăstria Monastery, the great theologian Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, and Elder Gherasim (Iscu) of Tismana Monastery as three confessors of the faith whom the Holy Synod wants to canonize.

On Saturday, the name of another luminary of the Romanian Church whom the Synod is considering canonizing was announced: Bishop Melchisedec Ştefănescu, the 19th-century hierarch known as the father of the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

On the 129th anniversary of Bp. Melchisedek's repose, His Eminence Archbishop Ioachim of Roman and Bacău spoke about the possibility of his canonization in 2025, noting that the file for his canonization is being prepared, reports the Basilica News Agency.

"May God order this painting [of Bp. Melchisedec] to become an icon," Abp. Ioachim said after severing a memorial parastas celebrated at the hierarch's tomb in the city of Roman. He also noted that an Akathist and Vespers service have already been composed, and there is already a chapel in Bp. Melchisedec's honor.

"We hope that all these will be reviewed by the Synodal commissions, and we will be glad if a great hierarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church is declared a saint in our generation," emphasized the hierarch of Roman and Bacău.

Speaking of the holy relics of Bp. Melchisedec, Abp. Ioachim noted that "they rest in the Diocesan Chapel of St. Antipas of Calapodești, beautiful, whole, yellow, and fragrant."

"If God and the saint from Heaven will, he will be canonized in 2025, when we celebrate 140 years of autocephaly," the hierarch added.

It was Bp. Melchisedec who compiled the reply letter from the Romanian Synod to Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III in the late-19th century on the issue of consecration Chrism in Bucharest [the prerogative of an autocephalous Church—Ed.], and the letter sent to Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim IV that called for the recognition of Romanian autocephaly.

Bp. Melchisedec was known and respected throughout the Orthodox Church in his time, Abp. Ioachim noted.

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Bp. Melchisedec was born in the village of Gârcina in Neamţ County, on February 15, 1823. He graduated as valedictorian from the Theological Seminary in Socola in 1843. He was tonsured as a monk that same year, receiving the name Melchisedec.

He was ordained as a hierodeacon on August 16, 1844. Two years later, he went to

study at the Theological Academy in Kiev, becoming just the second Romanian to graduate from the school. He was ordained as a hieromonk in Kiev on October 3, 1851.

Returning to Romania, he held the position of professor and spiritual father at the Seminary in Socola for five years. He was elevated to the rank of archimandrite on January 12, 1856, and appointed rector of the Seminary in Huşi.

In 1857, he was elected deputy in the ad-hoc divan by the clergy from Huşi, where he supported the desire to unite the two Romanian principalities south and east of the Carpathians, becoming one of the leaders of the struggle for union. The deputies also drafted a program for Church reform, including calling for autocephaly and an end to the election of foreign bishops, stressing the need to end dependence on Constantinople.

He was appointed locum tenens of Diocese of Huşi on January 15, 1861, and was ordained Bishop of Iasi on December 30, 1862.

On May 27, 1865, he was officially installed as ruling hierarch of the newly-established Diocese of the Lower Danube. On February 22, 1879, he was elected bishop of Roman, where he worked with the same zeal, until his departure to the Lord in 1892.

Bp. Melchisedec is also well known for his great wealth of scholarly historical works.

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