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**FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**  
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**THESIS**

**- Summary-**

***Pastoral relevance of Orthodox monasticism in  
Transylvania during the totalitarian regime.***

***Images of enriched fathers***

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***Pastoral relevance of Orthodox monasticism in Transylvania during the totalitarian regime. Images of enriched fathers***

**Keywords:** pastoral care, monasticism, the Church of Transylvania, fathers in communism, monastic medallions.

## **Summary**

From an editorial point of view, the paper comprises **six chapters**, preceded by an **Introduction** and a **concluding** chapter. Bibliographic sources are mentioned at the end of the paper.

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose**

The reason behind this theme was the research and highlight of the life and pastoral work of bishops, hieromonks and monks in the few monasteries in Transylvania during the totalitarian regime. Composing a unitary work from the conviction that these figures can be constituted in pastoral models and sources of inspiration, for the present and the future of our pastoral care and that their life and work can stand with Pateric, Prologue, Sbornic and Philocali, the lives and teachings of contemporary spiritual fathers.

We considered a sacred duty to research the pastoral work of the Transylvanian parents, who pastored in difficult social conditions. By doing this, we try to keep alive the memory of these worthy confessors of Christ and to follow their model, according to the exhortation of the Holy Apostle Paul: *“Remember of your elders, who have spoken the word of God to you, look carefully at how they ended their lives and follow their faith”* (Ev. 13,7)

In order to fulfill this approach, we initiated three research directions:

- a) study of the biography and the pastoral spiritual work of the main spiritual parents who lived during this period;
- b) research of monastic libraries and archives, which contain works and documents from the mentioned period;
- c) research and personal dialogue with parents living in monasteries in the totalitarian period, witnesses or connoisseurs of the life and work of the parents included in the work, recording facts and events preserved in the local monastery tradition.

#### **Novelty (Originality)**



In the nearly thirty years of monasticism, I have written dozens of biographies of contemporary saints and spiritual fathers. From the study and spiritual closeness with Father Ioanichie Bălan, the author of the *Romanian Pateric* and of the *Spiritual Conversations*, was born the desire to write a unitary work about the life and spiritual-pastoral work of the Orthodox spiritual fathers, and in the future to compile a Transylvanian Pateric or a similar book.

The elaboration of this paper was made by historical and spiritual-monographic study of the 11 monasteries opened totally or partially in Transylvania at that time, by studying the 33 biographies of some parents, hierarchs and hieromonks, who make up the *pastoral medallions* included in this paper. I researched the monasteries and hermitages in Transylvania, in the three directions mentioned, discovering the faces of *spiritual fathers* and pastoral works preserved only in the local tradition of monasteries.

As an example, we mention the work of Bishop Emilian Antal, forcibly domiciled at the Monastery "Saint Prophet Elijah" -Toplița, continued by Archimandrite Mihail Goia; of the hieromonk father Gavril Miholca from Nicula, in the parish of Cubleşul Someșan and at the Nicula Monastery; and especially the pastoral work of the martyred bishop Dr. Nicolae Popovici of Oradea, who through a pastoral action to reduce cohabitation, married four thousand concubines and baptized two tens of thousands of their children, a unique fact in the history of our church.

## **Research stage**

There is not yet a unitary work about the pastoral work of the spiritual fathers during the totalitarian regime. Much has been written and published about the pastoral and spiritual work of Father Arsenie Boca, from the Sâmbăta and Prislop monasteries; of Father Teofil Pârâian from the Sâmbăta Monastery; little about the special work of Father Serafim Popescu from the Sâmbăta Monastery and Father Dometie Manolache from Prislop.

It was also written about the pastoral-spiritual work of the Rohia Monastery, through the three spiritual fathers: Archbishop Justinian Chira, Archimandrite Seraphim Man and the monk-writer Nicolae Steinhardt. Little is known about the work from the “Saint Elijah” monastery - Toplița, Nicula, Moisei, Râmeț, Piatra Fântânele, Cășiel and Izbuc monasteries.

## **Relevance**

Our doctoral thesis proposes as pastoral models, hierarchs, hieromonks and monks, needy and workers in monasticism and the Orthodox Church in Transylvania during the totalitarian regime, a period in which the pastoral work of the Church was limited and obstructed, and priests and monks greedily treated. I included in spiritual medallions, which render the life, prayer and pastoral work, the mentioned spiritual parents. From Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, the founder of the Transylvanian priesthood and monasticism, who reopened the Sâmbăta Monastery, to Archbishop Justinian Chira, who founded in Rohia, the first monastic school in Romania in the totalitarian regime. From the great clergy of the Sâmbăta Monastery, fathers Arsenie Boca and Serafim Popescu (after 1980 and father Teofil Părăian), to the archimandrites Dometie Manolache and Ioachim Popa, the clergymen of the Râmeț Monastery, the archimandrite Serafim Man, the clergyman. From parents Varahiil Jitaru, Serafim Măciucă and Cleopa Nanu from Nicula Monastery, Mihail Goiaia and Emilian Telcean, from Toplița Monastery, to parents Vasile Vasilache, Arsenie Papacioc, Mina Dobzeu, Roman Braga, Dosoftei Murariu, Adrian Făgețean and Arsenie Praja, who in the years when they were pastor temporarily in the Orthodox Church of Transylvania, made a special pastoral work, which requires a lot of courage and boldness. Organizing catechetical programs with young people and adults, in the parishes where they served (the most eloquent example is Father Roman Braga in Oaș County), enduring harassment, arrests, investigations and persecution by the communist authorities.

### ***1. Pastoral excellence in the archdiocese of Sibiu***

*Pastoral excellence* in Transylvanian Orthodox monasticism, during the totalitarian regime, reflected in the lives of the *spiritual fathers* mentioned in this work, has as fundamental constituent elements: strong faith in God (Hebrews 11: 6), unceasing prayer (I Thess. 5:17),

knowledge and good preparation, wisdom and innocence (Matthew 10:16), patience, brotherly and divine love, giving and sacrificing. (II Peter 1.7).

The revival of Transylvanian Orthodox monasticism, which has begun in the interwar period, is deeply rooted in the martyrdom caused by the action of the political regime in Vienna. After two centuries of waiting, in faith and hope, after which patience and waiting ended, with the achievement of the Great Union in 1918. Transylvanian Orthodox monasticism revived in 1923, with the establishment of the Rohia Monastery, and later in 1928, Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania reopened the old voivodship monastery, the foundation of Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu from Sâmbăta de Sus. The two monasteries will be the main centers for the development of monastic life, mission and pastoral care, for the spiritual radiance of the entire Orthodox Church of Transylvania.

Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan developed an intense and complex pastoral work, culturalization and spiritualization of the clergy and the people, *wanting the spirit and teaching of the gospel to penetrate all social strata of Romanian society*. He organized diocesan and parish libraries, wrote pastoral studies and guidelines, and served and preached in hundreds of parish churches. A fighter for church unity, he raised the cultural-theological level of priests, offering scholarships for students and doctoral students. Among them, pr. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Spiridon Câdea, Nicolae Neaga, metropolitans dr. Nicolae Colan and Nicolae Mladin, the bishop dr. Nicolae Popovici and the hieromonks Arsenie Zian Boca and Dumitru Serafim Popescu. He renovated many parish churches. He initiated the construction of churches-cathedrals, in Târgu Mureș, Orăștie, Hunedoara, Mediaș, Sighișoara, Sfântul Gheorghe and Brad.

Metropolitans Nicolae Colan and Nicolae Mladin, his successors in the metropolitan seat, distinguished themselves by a rich preaching, pastoral, didactic and journalistic activity. Good mentors for young people, for whom they wrote articles, books and brochures. The first one left behind *New Testament Studies, the second one, Studies of Moral and Mystical Theology*.

Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, who pastored in the last years of the totalitarian regime, restored the Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery. Theologian, historian and church writer, he left to posterity a rich work of theology, pastoral care and spirituality. Writings such as: *Tradition and freedom in Orthodox spirituality, New interpretations of old texts, The Priest in the Church, in the world, at home, have become classics for Romanian theological literature*.

An intense pastoral work was developed at the Sâmbăta Monastery, especially through the three great spiritual fathers: Arsenie Boca, Serafim Popescu and Teofil Părăian.

At the Toplița Monastery, Bishop Emilian Antal performed an important liturgical-pastoral work, for the needs of the faithful, the Holy Mass and the Sacrament of the Holy Anointing were served daily in the monastery. Through the Sacrament of Confession and spiritual discussions, he brought back to Orthodoxy thousands of Romanian believers, forcibly Hungarianized and converted to Roman Catholicism, during the Vienna Dictate. His work was continued by Archimandrite Mihail Goia, one of the most important abbots of Transylvanian Orthodox monasticism in the last century.

## **2. Spirituality and pastoral care in the diocese of Alba Iulia**

In the diocese of Alba Iulia, re-established in 1975, Bishop Emilian Birdaș developed an intense pastoral and municipal work, building and restoring over eighty churches. He also initiated the construction of a new church (architectural monument) and a monastery ensemble, at the monastery protected by the Holy Hierarch Ghelasie from Râmeț.

Officially reopened in 1942, through the efforts of the local hieromonk Evlogie Oța, who came from the Holy Mount Athos, at the urging of the Mother of God, it was transformed into a nunnery in 1955. Here a strong hearth of spirituality was formed, through the community of nuns led the abbess of Jerusalem Ghibu.

The soul of the ascetic hearth were the clergymen of the monastery and of the thousands of pilgrims, Archimandrite Dometie Manolache, and then Archimandrite Ioachim Popa. Former student and doctoral student of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, he lived a holy life and passed on to the Lord, only fifty years old, after serving the Holy Mass. His great teacher said of him: *“His zealous missionary spirit, zeal for devotion, and service cannot be replaced by anyone. He was a hero of the faith and a pure soul of great holiness”*. Father Ioachim Popa, a rock of spirituality, followed him in service with Father Filota. Also in the diocese of Alba Iulia, Father Archimandrite Sava Cimponca performed an intense spiritual work, at the Hermitage of St. Lazarus for a short time.

## **3. Pastoral work in the archdiocese of Cluj**

Re-established in 1921, with its headquarters in Cluj, on the foundations of the Stefanian dioceses, from Vad and Feleac, the diocese of Cluj had the first monastery in Transylvania, built after almost two hundred years of interdictions, the Rohia Monastery.

Founded by the priest Nicolae Gherman, at the urging of the Mother of God, through her child Anuța, Rohia monastery would be the New Zion of Transylvania, where tens of thousands of Christians from Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare, Bistrița, Alba and Mureș counties climbed. After a first stage of development, through the dignity of the Bessarabian abbot, Gherontie Guțiu, she flourished, both in urban-household and in pastoral spirituality and during the sad period of the Dictate, being the only place of relief, hope and strengthening for Christians in Northern Transylvania. Elder Nifon Matei and Bishop Nicolae Colan were the only spiritual landmarks under foreign occupation.

During the totalitarian period, the abbot Justinian Chira founded in Rohia a school of spirituality and pastoral care, according to the Savior's command "do and learn" (Matthew 5:19).

With this imperative served hierarchs from Cluj, priests, hieromonks from the monasteries of this diocese, in the totalitarian period, preaching *with time and without time* the word of the Gospel, increasing the flame of piety and faith in Romanian society.

Metropolitan Nicolae Colan was a great preacher and spiritual writer. He was a good mentor of the student priesthood and youth, a fine and realistic observer of his contemporary pastoral problems, lucid, steadfast and wise in solving them.

Archbishop Teofil Herineanu was a great prayer, liturgist and clergyman, who increased the spiritual life in the diocese, by raising the moral life of the priests, serving the Mass according to the ordinance, practicing confession, through incessant prayer and vigil.

The vicar bishop was accompanied by the vicar bishop Justinian Chira Maramureș, who took care of the good preparation of the future priests, their material and spiritual condition. A charismatic preacher, he served Holy Masses, preaching fiery sermons, which transformed souls, uniting them through faith, love and obedience to Christ. He grew spiritually disciples who were Christ-loving monks and enlighteners of the people.

The pastoral and spiritual work begun in Rohia was continued by Father Seraphim Man, a prayer and preacher of patristic stature, who worked in construction during the day, and in the morning, in the evening and at midnight, served in the church. Abbot and clergyman who gave himself to the disciples with much patience and sacrificial love.

In 1948, the spiritual life at the Nicula Monastery resumed. The abbot Varahiil Jitarul also became the exarch of the monasteries in the diocese, and the fathers, Serafim Măciucă and Cleopa Nanu, served daily the Holy Mass and other services, welcoming the crowds of pilgrims who come for prayer to Nicula, by offering useful words and advice for their spiritual needs.

During 1955-1959, at the initiative of Archimandrite Varahil Jitarul, under the spiritual protection of Archimandrite Justinian Chira, the monastery “Ascension of the Holy Cross” from Strâmbu-Cășiel was reopened, carrying out a beautiful spiritual and pastoral work in the area. Reopened after 1991, today it is one of the most flourishing monasteries in the Archdiocese of Cluj.

The Piatra Fântânele Monastery was built in 1928, at the border between Bistrița and Suceava counties. For over forty years, Father Abbot Vasile Lunčan has done a beautiful pastoral, spiritual and administrative work. Those who followed him were the great clergymen of Romania, Dometie Manolache and Adrian Făgețean and Dumitru Zamisticu. Theologian, philosopher and jurist, martyr of the communist dungeons, the latter soon achieved a national spiritual focus. For this, he was arrested again, dying as a martyr in a hospice, where he was imprisoned by the authorities of the totalitarian regime.

#### **4. The flame of faith in the diocese of Oradea**

Re-established after the Great Union, the Orthodox diocese of Oradea received a blessing. After the founding of the founding bishop, Roman Ciorogariu, it was pastored, between 1936-1955, by Bishop Dr. Nicolae Popovici, with the grace of an apostle and martyr. A fellow student and teacher with Father Dumitru Stăniloae, a perfect theologian and intellectual, Bishop Nicolae was gifted by God with a zeal for fire. Ever since he was a teacher in Sibiu, he had been preaching several sermons a week. At the Cathedral of Oradea and in the diocese, his fiery sermons ignited faith and love for Christ, until martyrdom. He was the only bishop who openly confessed that he did not conceive or accept a Romanian society and culture without Christ. His pastoral actions, springing from apostolic courage, a burning faith and love, led to his removal from the episcopate and his martyrdom. From his valuable theological and pastoral works, the books remained: *the Eucharistic Epiclesis and Altar Slabs*.

At the helm of the diocese came Bishop Valerian Zaharia, dismissed for the courage to openly oppose the abolition of monasticism, by decree 410/1959. The last years of the totalitarian regime, the diocese of Oradea was pastored by the gentle bishop Dr. Vasile Coman, great servant and interpreter of the Holy Mass, who pastored the priests, monks and believers in this area with much spiritual love, being loved in turn by all.

#### **5. Great clergymen of the country in Transylvania**

After the general decree for the release of political prisoners from 1964, Bishop Teofil Herineanul received several former political prisoners, famous clergymen of Romania, in the diocese of Cluj,. Among them, the first is archimandrite Dr. Vasile Vasilache, who pastored for five years the parish of Bobâlna, in Cluj County. Son of a priest, brother with an archimandrite Dr. Haralambie Vasilache, who died a martyr at the Gherla prison. Former secretary to Patriarch Nicodemus and preacher of the Patriarchate, abbot of the Antim monastery, member and host of the spiritual meetings at Rugul Aprins, he left an indelible memory among Transylvanian believers, whose spiritual lights still remain today.

Along with Father Vasile, some other great fathers pastored in Transylvania. Father Arsenie Papacioc pastored in Filea de Jos, being declared the best priest in the diocese. Father Mina Dobzeu, a bright figure in the recent history of our Church, pastor at Jimbor Parish with Filia Buza Cătun. The famous theologian and missionary, Archimandrite Dosoftei Murariu, former abbot of Putna, pastored Poiana Parish, Sohodol commune, Alba County and Deda Parish, Mureș county. Another famous member of Rugul Aprins, who went through the Pitești experiment, Archimandrite Roman Braga, the one who suffered a lot of torments, shepherded at Negrești Oaș Parish, Satu Mare County and Sârbi Parish, Bihor County. The famous confessor, Father Adrian Făgețean, pastored at Filea de Jos Parish and Piatra Fântânele Monastery. The hieroschimonah (according to some data the hierarch) Nil Dorobanțu, the mad barefoot for Christ, served at the Nicula monastery and its surroundings, bringing to orthodoxy hundreds of neo-Protestants, and Father Arsenie Praja, the barefoot hermit from Cheile Râmețului, pastored in that village and in Poșaga. Monastery

## **6. Pastoral methods used by these fathers**

The pastoral method that never fails is the method of personal example. The method used by Christ, the Apostles and the Holy Fathers. The method that includes all the spiritual experience, and the one that the spiritual parents mentioned above also used.

About this method, Metropolitan Nicolae Colan wrote: “The most conquering way of preaching the Gospel and its redemptive stories remains, without a doubt, preaching through the parable of life. If our Lord Jesus Christ had been satisfied with the living proclamation of His divine teachings, without living according to their exhortations, he would have remained a great sage, a great moralist, a great mentor, but He would not have become worthy, nor would His proclamation have reached "the ends of the earth." What won the hearts of the multitudes

who were fortunate enough to be able to hear His divine preaching was not only His comforting word and His wise command, but also His life, woven of deeds of incomparable moral beauty — and especially the most pure sacrifice. Who redeemed the world from the bondage of sin and death. Still living with the body among His disciples, He was able to say to them, "I have given you an example" and the parable caught on.

## **Final conclusion**

The relevant pastoral work of the Orthodox monks from Transylvania, during the totalitarian regime, was carried out on the way of fulfilling and preaching the divine commandments, which does not take into account time or place. The conditions of persecution and minimization of the role of faith in social life, however, required a special pastoral strategy. The partial (sometimes total) lack of religious freedom required a special spiritual training of the monks of that time. The monks, well prepared from a theological, spiritual and cultural point of view, were meant to be sources of light and faith, in a society in which, in the form of materialistic progress, unbelief and spiritual darkness were preached.

Because there was no time for a long period of preparation, purification, enlightenment, and union with God, Church ministers were selected for monastic life only by those who, as a family, lived a godly, working, and praying life. Those of impeccable moral and spiritual conduct, with a good social impact, were prepared for the service of God and men.

Therefore, a first conclusion that is imposed on the way in which the monastic pastorate took place in Transylvania is the good selection of future monks and priests, made especially at the Rohia and Sâmbăta monasteries, which gave birth to a vigorous monasticism, with a strong influence for the faithful.

The second conclusion consists in the fact that the exceptional pastoral work of some hieromonks like Father Arsenie Boca or Justinian Chira, decisively influenced the Transylvanian Orthodox monasticism.

The third conclusion is that the work, the prayers and the sufferings of these parents were the spiritual seeds of the monasticism that flourished in all the Transylvanian dioceses, in the conditions of religious freedom, regained after 1990.

All these parents mentioned in our work, from those with fame and a halo of saints, to the most modest, are a precious gift that God has made for us. Remembering their work, their zeal and diligence, we can consider them living stones in the building of the Church, important links in the chain of history of Transylvanian Orthodox monasticism.



The Orthodox Christians of the present, clergy, monks, reading their life and work, following their faith, can find living models of service and luminous icons of holiness.

Notes.

1. *Father Dometie Manolache – a bright face of virtues and sacrificial devotion*, p. 137
2. *Between time and eternity. The life of father Arsenie Papacioc*, ed a II-a, Edit. Accent Print, 2015, p. 217.
3. Archbishop and Metropolitan of Transylvania Nicolae Colan, *Theology and Orthodox Spirituality. Studies, articles, translations*, Edit. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 231.