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**THE HISTORY OF THE ORTHODOX SEMINARY
“BISHOP IOAN POPASU” OF CARANSEBES
(1955-2008)**

DOCTORAL THESIS

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Summary

If the theological school in Caransebes has a well-deserved good reputation, it is due to several factors, among which, primarily, the town’s location in a region that has great historical and cultural potential. “The town of Caransebes was a place of confession for the Orthodox faith at the edge of the country and a town of defending national identity and unity, of rebuilding national unity alongside the town of Arad. This town contributed to the development of national consciousness, rebuilding national unity, which was achieved in 1918. Also, the Diocese of Caransebes lives on in the consciousness of the Romanian Orthodox Church as a bastion of theological culture” (His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, *Cathedral of Caransebes, the Forefathers’ Dream Come True*, in *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, new series, Year III, August-October 2010, page 36).

The Banat region, one of ethnogenesis for the Romanian people, represents an incunabulum of spoken and written language ever since immemorial times, as archaeological findings have shown. Certainly, back then faith was born as well, first a non-Christian monotheistic Geto-Dacian one, then Christian, as indicated by the logical and historical evidence of Christianity's incursion into Dacia.

Archaeological findings also speak of later monasteries with baptistery (Morisena-Cenad, County of Timis), where Christianisation was officiated, which implies catechumenate, meaning an elementary Christian education.

Later on, an organised form of Christian teaching developed in the monasteries located in Banat or its vicinity: Hodos-Bodrog (12th century), Vodita (14th century), Prislop (15th century), Caransebes (15th century), Lugoj, Mracunea, on the Danube Gorge, Bezdin, Saraca, Partos, Sangeorge, Varadia, Bazias (all 15th century).

The Protestant reform in the 16th century which, among others, demanded that the Holy Scripture be translated into the peoples' languages, lead to Calvinist personalities in Caransebes and neighbouring areas translating in 1582 at Orastie the first two books of the Old Testament (Genesis and Exodus), known under the generic name "Palia de la Orastie" ["The Pentateuch from Orastie"]. Besides the translators of the Pentateuch, the town of Caransebes also had the pleasure of having in its midst other men of culture, Lutheran Protestants or Roman-Catholics, who had studied abroad and owned valued libraries, contributing greatly to the cultural rise of the town: George Buitul, Mihail Halici father and son, as well as others.

In the face of the Protestant offensive, not only the Roman-Catholics, but the Orthodox as well initiated the so-called Counter Reform. In Caransebes, the bishops organised elementary forms of education – grammar schools or other types of school that should train priests as well as teachers in appropriating and handling the light, so necessary for the ordinary people.

With the birth and growth of the Habsburg Empire, all categories of education are given new dimensions, new forms of organisation, new trends, new objectives. "The Illyrian Nation" (Romanian, Serbs, Ruthenians), in Banat is privileged in a way, due to their contribution in the wars of expansion and preservation of the Empire. These privileges extend to the theological education as well, it was now allowed, valued and organised. The Enlightenment and these Illyrian privileges allow the possibility of organising forms of education in Carlovit, Varset, Timisoara, Arad, Caransebes and other places.

For the reestablishment of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania under the Hierarchy Andrei Saguna in 1864, with the two suffragan dioceses, of Arad and Caransebes, in Caransebes, the Divine Providence bestowed the title of Bishop upon Saguna's disciple, Ioan Popasu (1865-1889). He "translocates", i.e. moves the clerical school from Varset, where Romanian people from Banat also studied, to Caransebes, on the grounds that the sons of the frontier guards were poorer and had not the financial means to attend school in Varset. Starting with two teachers, the school initially takes the form of a Theological Institute (1865-1874), then a Pedagogical Theological Institute (1874-1924), Theological Academy (1924-1948). All schools have attracted teachers, competent staff that identified with the political and national fights of the Romanian people during those periods, and some of them even lost their right to teach because of that. They also benefited from the pastoring of capable hierarchs, starting with Ioan Popasu then Nicolae Popea (1889-1908), an active member of the Romanian Academy and others.

In time, the long-awaited moment arrived – December 1, 1918, when the Romanian people in Caransebes too brought their heart-felt contribution led by the local hierarchy, Bishop Miron Cristea (1910-1919), who later became Superior Metropolitan of the Romanian Orthodox Church (1920-1925) and the first Patriarch of Romania (1925-1939).

The academic form of the theological school in Caransebes continues until December 1948, when the new Communist laws put an end to it, as well as to the Diocese, on February 5, 1949, when it was incorporated into the Archdiocese of Timisoara, together now forming the Archdiocese of Timisoara and Caransebes. The Martyr Bishop Veniamin Nistor (1941-1949) is powerless in the face of the new political and social order of the time. The teachers who were members of the Academy became associates in other theological or diocesan schools, only Zeno Muntean and Constantin Vladu stayed on here.

It was decided by God that the course of the theological school in Caransebes should not cease with the year 1948, it continued in the form of the School for Church Singers that operated ever since 1931, under the name The Diocesan School for Church Singers, with 3 study years, having been founded by the first Bishop of Banat, Iosif Traian Badescu (1920-1933). The School for Church Singers functioned with two study years, 1948-1951, then as a Secondary School for Church Singers with three study years, 1952-1954, then with two school cycles, cycle I in 1954, lasting two years, and also in 1954 cycle II foreseen with the same duration. In the Fall of 1955, another study year is added to cycle II, thus becoming a Seminary, more accurately a School for

Church Singers the first two years and Seminary the last three years. The school's name was The School for Church Singers and Seminary, functioning between 1955 and 1978. After two study years the students underwent a graduation examination to become church singers, but all those who graduated followed the Seminary at the end of which they underwent another, more thorough, graduation examination, in the presence of the school's governing hierarchs and under the chairmanship of a university professor from the University Theological Institute of Sibiu. Also present at these exams were the regional or central representatives of the Department of Religious Affairs.

The changes in Romanian education gave the Seminary too a new analytical curriculum and a new name, The Orthodox Seminary, being integrated into the secondary education system (1978-1990). Following the events of 1989, more precisely starting with the year 1993 the theological education is being funded by the Ministry of Education, though being also controlled by the Church, which gives its consent in appointing staff members and concerning the content of the analytical curricula. The name of theological schools is now "Secondary Orthodox Seminary", with five study years (1993-2008). It bears the same name since 2008 until the present time, though with only four study years.

Alongside the Seminary functioned the School for Church Singers, with a separate curriculum, but just for a few years. It was established during the 1976-1977 school year and functioned for only two years. After the Revolution it was re-established, but suffered the same quick demise. The Post Secondary School for Church Singers (1993-1996) functioned within the Seminary too. The school lasted 3 years, having a single graduating class, its graduates were granted the right to function as elementary school teachers.

To carry out its activity, the Seminary of Caransebes needed material resources, given that the building of the former Academy had been nationalised in 1948. The Metropolitan Vasile Lazarescu of Banat makes available the offices of the former diocesan residence, and these premises are inaugurated as a teaching unit on January 30, 1955. Given that the accommodations for the students were abysmal, the same Metropolitan Vasile Lazarescu initiated in 1957, commencing in 1958, the construction of a boarding home, finished only in the Fall of 1963, under his successor, His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu. The latter can truthfully be named the founder of the Seminary of Caransebes. The school now receives a number of

essential improvements and changes, both from a material point of view, as well as that of the instructive, educational, religious and moral process.

Having come at the helm of the Diocese in the Spring of 1962, the first thing he does is make available the library of the former Academy for students and staff. This after several “reviews” by the state authorities, but the library was opened partially in 1962, and fully in 1963, and in the following year, 1964, a special opening for a librarian was created. The second action was allowing the school to use, also in 1962, the chapel of the former diocesan residence, more precisely the Chapel of Hierarchs. If, until then, the morning and evening prayers, as well as the Vespers and Matins, were performed on the corridors of the school, they could now be performed in the chapel. The students and staff also went to the town cathedral for the Saturday night Vesper, the Matins and the Holy Mass on Sunday. Also made available, for use as the principal’s office, was the office of the former bishop, and as staff room, the chamber right in front of it. Also during his first years in office, credited to His Eminence Nicolae Corneanu of Banat is a small detail, a seemingly insignificant one, but one that had a big impact on the learning process. The students were granted access to the residence’s park where they could sit and study when the weather permitted it. In this spirit, later on, in 1970, the stone wall that separated the residence’s park from the school yard was also torn down. In the place of the former diocesan museum, a dining hall with 100-200 places was set up, and in the new boarding home, placed into service in the Fall of 1963, a library was set up. In 1967 the class rooms were set up, parquet flooring was installed, new furniture put in, the archive, the wardrobe were outfitted with metallic cabinets. In 1968 the chapel was frescoed by the painter and teacher Anastasie Demian. The school and boarding home were outfitted between 1968 and 1969 with central heating and connected to one of the thermal plants of the town. Due to growing student numbers, between 1969 and 1970 a second floor was built onto the boarding home, which benefited in the academic year 1970-1971 from a having another floor available. The boarding home could house up to 300 students. Between 1972 and 1973 also built inside the school yard was another wing, where the kitchen, the dining hall, and a festive hall seating 300 were located. All these were outfitted with new appliances and furniture, being dedicated on April 3, 1973. So that the students and staff should no longer need to go to the town cathedral, His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat commissioned the build of a place of worship, to exclusively serve the needs of the school, without being part of the parochial circuit or having any parochial

commitments. The place for the future church of the Seminary was dedicated in 1976, built between 1976 and 1982, and made available for morning and evening prayers in 1979, the construction was then dedicated in 1980, and the painting in 1982. Painted as a mural by the painter Ioan Seculea-Gorj. This church was of real use, the students could here, alternately assisted by each of the staff, officiate services, sing in the lectern split up in groups, as well as carry out their Catechetics and Homiletics practice.

As the school now had at its disposal such important material resources, it was only natural that the instructive and educational process not be determining. The foremost goal was the religious, moral and pastoral training. In this sense, ever since 1969, trips to parishes were organised for the students, so that they could come into contact with actual parish life; Church personalities, Theology professors were then invited to hold various lectures and religious meditations. All religious and historical festive moments were accompanied by celebrations, where students could contribute by reciting poetry and performing choral songs. The school choir became so adapt it even participated in numerous festivals, both at home and abroad, returning from everywhere with diplomas and medals. To mention just a few of the places where the choir performed: Vienna, Graz, Berlin, Paris, Madrid, Rome-The Vatican, Ankara, Chisinau, etc.

From a pedagogical and methodical point of view, a methodological circle, where current pedagogical issues were debated, functioned permanently, also, teachers had open lessons in class, that were afterwards analysed, a literary circle lead by Archdeacon Teacher Cornel Olariu was active between 1953 and 1969, and a classical languages circle lead by Priest Teacher Sorin Cosma between 1969-1976. At the suggestion of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat a single study circle, that should include several theological and secular cultural areas, was maintained. At the disposal of staff and students was also the Methodics office between the years 1978-1990, outfitted with, at that moment, technically advanced equipment: magnetic recorder, epidiascope, slide projector, etc. A radio-relay station functioned within the school during the same period; the students could listen to religious meditations, Byzantine music, etc. It had a closed circuit inside the school's boarding home.

Students always received patriotic and civil training too. Homeroom class played an important role in this. Until 1964, the themes were pro-Soviet, and after they tended to have a patriotic tinge, with subjects like legislation, internal and external politics being discussed.

Anniversary themes acquire a significant role now. Many are presented by political and cultural personalities of the time, as well as members of the school's staff. The patriotic and civic training was then completed through patriotic work carried out in agricultural and fruit-growing units around town or the Centre for Vegetables and Fruits in town. The entire educational activity of the Seminary, but especially the patriotic and civic one, was closely monitored by the Department of Religious Affairs, through its regional inspectors. Not all of these had a cultural background, being rather simple enforcers, pursuers and commanders of orders, expressing state policy in religious life, including in that of theological schools. Many of them made trouble for the Church and its people, and they can't be forgiven and forgotten for that. Back then no one could speak out against them, it meant risking one's livelihood or fate. It was the harshest period for both students and their teachers and the hierarchs. If the school was too sought after by candidates, they imposed enrolment restrictions, sorting the files of those whose parents were members of the Communist Party, of those who had relatives abroad, or of those who had relatives with civil and criminal convictions, etc. Many times it happened that the school in Caransebes had between 2 and 5 places open at admittance for the entire Metropolitan Church. The class was then completed with students from the Archdiocese of Bucharest and Craiova. The school put a lot of value on discipline, on attire. Our students would and still do recognise each other among the mass of students in the towns where the schools function. Any disciplinary transgression is punished progressively starting from reprimand, getting a lower grade for conduct, deducting first one and then more points from it, expulsion or transfer to another school. To prevent cases of indiscipline, the school is in permanent contact through mail with the students' parents, as well as inviting them to stop by personally at the school. Also, yearly (even twice a year) meetings with the parents were organised, as well as meetings with the priests who had recommended them for the Seminary. The general situation and that of each single student were analysed during these meetings, admitting suggestions from the parents and the guiding priests too. The students are trained in school to have an interethnic cultural openness, as well as an inter-confessional and interreligious theological openness. After all that His Eminence Father Nicolae Corneanu of Banat has done for the theological school here, it would be desirable that the Seminary of Caransebes be renamed after him, while he is still alive, and its current name, that of "Bishop Ioan Popasu", be given to the theological graduate school here.

Once the Diocese of Caransebes was re-established in 1994, the Seminary was governed by the Bishops Emilian Birdas and Laurentiu Streza (current Metropolitan of Ardeal). Both gave the school autonomy and the material and moral support it needed.

In 2006, with the arrival of His Holiness Lucian Mic, the school life takes on new dimensions, by relocating the Seminary into a new, though slightly smaller, building, outfitted with everything necessary. His Holiness has always shown his support, by getting involved very much into the school life, both personally, as well as through his associates; he also assisted the instructive and educational process by teaching himself some classes at the Seminary.

Between 1955 and 2008, at the Seminary in Caransebes a number of 1677 students have graduated, these went on to become priests within the Romanian Patriarchate and abroad (54 at the Romanians in the Diaspora and 29 at the Serbian and Ukrainian Vicariate here). During this period the Seminary had 59 tenured teachers and 79 tenured in other schools, who substituted at the Seminary. Out of the 59 tenured staff, 22 advanced to theological higher education, other 26 (one of them a hierarch) did not teach at the Seminary, but directly at Faculties of Theology. One graduate of the Seminary, not ordained as priest, became a university professor within the secular higher education. 67 graduates are servants of the Church within the higher Church administration, and 17 have been (some still are) teachers at Seminaries around the country.

We hope to be able to carry on what our forefathers have built with so many sacrifices and put so much trust in.