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Doctoral Thesis Summary

*Ioan Bunea the priest – preacher,
catechist and pedagogical role-model*

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Key words

Ioan Bunea, biography, priest/father, preacher, sermon, catechist, catechesis, pedagogue, education, published sermons, sermons in manuscript, homiletic genres, the sermon's style, confessions.

Summary

The priest Ioan Bunea represents the kind image of the man chosen by God to be His servant. It is the image of the man who ceaselessly follows His will, of the man who received with a humble heart all the joy and the sadness that the life threw at him. It is the face of the priest who, although he lived through two World Wars and the communist regime, contrary to his mission, did not leave the right faith. More than this, he fought for its growth, which made him deserve the characterisation made by Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania: “Holy man, preacher, catechist, teacher, pedagogue and spiritual father, priest Ioan Bunea carried all the gifts that allowed the access to the mysterious depths of the human soul.”

Christ’s message addressed to his apostles, but with an echo across centuries proves that his ministers were chosen by divine will: “you have not chosen Me but I have chosen you.”(In.15,16) This verse is relevant moreover for the way in which I chose to closely research father Ioan Bunea’s life. The first contact, with this revered father, was at the end of the high school cycle, at the graduation ceremony I was offered the Ioan Bunea prize, accompanied by his posthumous volume: *From the great gallery of the converted*. It was a first meeting at all random, because a little later, during university, when I was trying to find a research theme from the Romanian Orthodox Church sphere during the communist regime, the providence made me find out that he was one of the incarcerated priests. This is how I began to search for more information about his holiness and wrote the undergraduate thesis, coordinated by reverend father Alexandru Bunea. Consequently, I studied in depth his homiletic work in the dissertation thesis, coordinated by reverend father Vasile Gordon.

What surprised me during these two research phases is the fact that, with every sermon I read, with every archived document, I discovered an amazing personality in the theological field. A serious field, who had never neglected his God-given ministry, and who gave his own interest to the Church, both from an administrative and editorial perspective and a spiritual holy perspective. And this last aspect, although is not the most visible, it is the most important, and it is the reason that his revered father makes him one of the greatest theological professors in Cluj. His inheritance is the students he helped model and who had him as a real role model of being Christ’s servant.

The thesis is divided in six chapters that cover the entire life and activity of Reverend father Ioan Bunea, wanting to emphasize the three parts of the title. The first chapter is biographic. The most important moments in his biography will be noted: his childhood, not

an easy one, his studies, the beginning of his missionary service, his didactic activity, the arrest and the pastoral activities after his release. Because his biography has been analysed in other papers and in 2015 the autobiography that the father wrote was published, we chose to have a short biographic presentation, insisting only on the most important aspects of his life: his childhood, his studies, the beginning of his missionary service, his didactic activity, the arrest's moment, the trial and detention period, and his pastoral activity after he was set free in the parishes Someșeni and „Schimbarea la Față” in Cluj-Napoca.

Beginning with the second chapter we emphasized the dedication he had serving the typed letter, of the word, the editorial activity of Rev.fr. Ioan Bunea. From his university studies he began to publish various articles and converges in *Renasterea/ Rebirth*, something he would continue doing all his life. Looking back we can see his wish to build a name for himself in the specialized journalism. Consequently, there are a huge number of articles and volumes which he published. We shall present in this section beginning with the writings published during his lifetime and continuing with the posthumous, those unpublished and finishing with the studies, articles, evocations and reviews. Although the articles number was impressive, at the end of his life, the reverend father regretted not having been able to enrich his bibliographical list.

From the reverend father Ioan Bunea's life, we could easily see the difficulties he had to face. As a result, the difficulty he had in publishing his writings during his lifestyle. Therefore, although he wanted to publish various volumes, some having been prepared for this, his wish was just partially realized. It happened at the end of his life when his two sermons volumes comprising not only Sundays and holidays lectures but also parenesics at christenings, weddings and funerals. The other part of reverend father Ioan Bunea's work can be found not only in the volumes which were published after his passing, being published by his family and close disciples, but also in numerous articles he published from 1933, when he became priest in Nasaud, and religion teacher at the *George Cosbuc Graniceresc/Border High school* in the city. He continued to publish in *Renasterea* magazine of our diocese, and in various metropolitan periodicals in the Patriarchy.

Even from his childhood we can see that reverend father Ioan Bunea had a particular attraction for the written letter. This is the reason why he continued his studies after finishing his secondary education. Wanting to gain more knowledge, he was one of the deserving students, even though his material situation didn't allow him to solely focus on his studies. The situation was similar during university, but, in spite of the minuses, through a huge amount of work and personal sacrifice, he managed to finish with good grades, both at the

Theological Academy and the History and Philosophy Faculty in Cluj-Napoca. The intellectual level he reached and the desire to share his acquired knowledge recommended him in published some articles in the time's periodicals and magazines, especially in *Renasterea* magazine, of Cluj Diocese.

Along with the passing of the years, after he perfected his theological knowledge and his missionary experience enriched his intellectual profile, he published a series of studies in some important magazines of the Romanian Patriarchy: *The Ardeal Diocese*, *The Banat Diocese*, *The Romanian Orthodox Church* and *the Moldovian and Sucevei Diocese*. Reverend father Ioan Bunea's editorial activity was rewarded with the publication of two sermons volumes, *Teachings from Sundays and Holidays* (1983) and *Teachings at christenings, weddings and funerals* (1986).

After his death, his family wanted to bring to life a part of his holiness writings that were kept only in manuscript. Consequently, a series of important papers of Romanian orthodoxy saw the light of the press: *From the great converts' gallery*, *The Psychology of Prayer*, *The Moral Consciousness Phenomenology*, *Memorial*, *The Life and Activity of the Saint Augustine* and an interview he had before his death with professor father Vasile Stanciu, published in 2017.

Being an ambitious man, with high targets, the reverend father wanted to publish more and to enrich the specialty literature with more titles that he did. This truth is told in a wide interview he gave professor father Vasile Stanciu: "Certainly I wanted to accomplish more in the specialty publishing, but my life was tougher, more overwhelming than I had believed. The bulldozer blade was unforgiving; therefore what I could put together in my area of specialty was far less – in my youth's enthusiasm – of what I had thought I would do." The next two chapters would comprise the presentation of homiletic activities which I focused most on. As a result, in chapter three we will emphasize the homiletic activity as it results from the sermons he published in two volumes, and religious magazines: *The Ardeal Diocese*, *The Banat Diocese*, *The Oltenia Diocese* and other as such.

The exposition was one chronological and was actually the summary of each sermon. The sermons were not the only ones we kept. Having been a meticulous preacher, who would work on each speech, the sermons were kept in his personal archive and their manuscripts. Some were published but others are unique. We will remember all in chapter 3.

Reverend father Ioan Bunea had a rich missionary experience, of almost 48 years, which were completed by the years he taught. During this time he managed to perfect his homiletic discourse, which is why his sermons were published in the religious magazines of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy, and at the end of his life were gathered in two volumes, in 1983 and 1986. On fair grounds, was he later named “the great preacher of Cluj” by great bishop Visarion Rășinăreanu.

Although many words of wisdom given by his holiness were published, in his personal archive are unique sermons that were delivered throughout his missionary years. These were heard only by his believers and contributed to his religious formation. Either they were Sunday sermons or occasional ones delivered on various religious services, we can observe that reverend father Ioan Bunea’s sermons were prepared with great care and seriousness, with a certain aim. Moreover, they are well structured sermons, with a precise subject, that offers much information for the wanted theme. In the following pages we will make a presentation of his homiletic work which we inherited, stopping only not only on published sermons but also on those in manuscript.

In the same chapter we shall present his holiness perspective on his religious education. It is majorly emphasised the connection between what would be ideal to among the three major factors of the religious education: Family, Church and School. The theoretical concepts were put into practice in the catechetical activities which reverend father Ioan Bunea initiated as a priest and religion teacher in Năsăud, Turda, Cluj-Napoca and as confessor of the orthodox students in Cluj-Napoca. Finally, three catechesis published in periodicals will be presented.

Reverend father Ioan Bunea took the divine Logos by heart not only as a priest but also as a teacher; either he taught Religion or other theological subjects at the Orthodox Seminary in Cluj-Napoca. In both situations, he shared his knowledge and life experience with his students to raise them as reliable members of society and church. Following reverend father Ioan Bunea’s life chronology, we can notice two directions he focused his didactic activity on. One is theoretical, and appears in his didactic writings and one practical, that shows in the application of the previously enounced theoretical principles, with his students, during class, and extracurricular activities in the religious societies he used to coordinate.

Moreover, reverend father Ioan Bunea was not only an educational practitioner but also a theoretician. Particularly in his articles he would tell his opinion on education. This would have happened after 1933, when he starts to teach at the *George Cosbuc Graniceresc/Border High school* in Nasaud. His thoughts about education come from

practice, from the experience he had among the youth. He didn't write only from the theoretical knowledge he had acquired, but he knew the educational system from the inside with its pluses and minuses. These aspects were put on paper and were shared with the readers of „Renașterea” in Cluj and „Revista teologică” in Sibiu.

Researching the texts that the father wrote about education, we can notice ideas he insisted upon and those he considered of utmost importance as: *the necessity of the religious-moral education of the youth, the key role the family has in the educational process and the necessity of Church and School collaboration in the educational act, mostly of the religious-moral one.*

Given this possible separation of the didactic activity of reverend father Ioan Bunea, in this chapter we will show what his holiness did in his didactic and catechetical activity, and how he understood the educational process especially the religious education's, as we can determine from his published articles on the subject.

In the fourth chapter we will make an analysis of the sermons signed by reverend father Ioan Bunea from the homiletic genres that he uses. For each genre we will choose one or two sermons to explain his presence in the homiletic world. The homiletic genres which shall be presented are: the thematic sermons, the panegyrics and the parenesics. In the last category we find speeches at being installed in the parish, christening, weddings and funerals.

After we will have presented the homiletic corpus, signed by reverend father Ioan Bunea, we can easily notice the diversity of the utilized homiletic genres. On the other hand, this is due to the religious service's nature which presupposes his taking part in the most important moments in a person's life, and his desire to be a servant of the Ambon, of use to those who listen.

Even without a detailed analysis of his sermons, we can notice that they belong to all the homiletic genres in the book. Most of them are thematic sermons, but in the homiletic corpus we can find parenesics and a series of panegyrics. There is something that needs clarification. Although the sermons belong in the up-named categories, there are cases, where we can find exegetic paragraphs.

The second to last part of the thesis is dedicated to the writing and argumentative modalities that the father used to give strength to his sermons. The structure of the sermons will be analysed, the way he gives arguments for each statement, the types of arguments and a few stylistic elements that his grace uses.

A servant of the Ambon who gives a sermon according to a plan shows on the one hand determination and respect of the word of the Holy Scripture, and on the other hand to

the ones he addresses to. Having been an organized and serious person, reverend father Ioan Bunea took very much into consideration the way he used to come in front of his listeners. His notes and sermons kept in manuscript are a proof to this. If we strictly refer to his sermon plan, we will notice the same seriousness. His sermons shall always have an introduction, content and conclusion. The other points in the plan are used but not always with keenness.

For a successful sermon the persuasion means are vital. In any of the sermons we shall read, we will notice that he uses many helping devices to strengthen the presented ideas. The power of his message comes from these arguments that he uses. Firstly, a preacher searches for his on hand source: The Holy Scripture, The Holy Fathers or the liturgical texts. Then, depending on the acquired culture, he can find arguments in history, nature, science, philosophy and many more. In his sermon, reverend father Ioan Bunea used the majority of the argumentation types.

The triumph of a preacher and of his sermon is given by the homiletic style he possesses. Generally, style can be defined by the majority of the linguistic means that a writer uses to express his thoughts and feelings. Or, according to The Romanian Explicative Dictionary (RED), the style is the talent, the art to express ones ideas and feelings in a chosen, personal form.

Among the general qualities we can find in reverend father Ioan Bunea's style we emphasize: purity, brevity and clarity. This is a thing noticed by reverend father Vasile Nemes: "The clarity and precision are his preaching style qualities. Even the sermons' language is elevated, given the clarity of the exposition, the logical stream of thoughts and the strict following of the theme he presents. These all make his sermons a deep message to not only warm the heart but also determine the believers wish when receiving the message he spreads. To emphasize these qualities in the father's writing, we shall give various examples for each given quality.

The last chapter comprises a few testimonies of reverend father Ioan Bunea. There is a series of interviews that I recorded with those who knew him and collaborated with him. Firstly the father's grandchildren, Mister Catalin Bia, then his close disciples, and reverend fathers Vasile Stanciu and Stelian Tofana and one of his collaborators who admired him the most: reverend father Iustin Tira.

Reverend father Ioan Bunea was a servant who dedicated his whole life to serve the church. He understood that being a priest is not a job but a calling. Also, he acknowledged that it identifies with the mission, and the most important part of the mission was the religious construction of the faithful. This belief is stressed when he says that: "the apostolate

is closely related to the priest's mission. The servants of the alter are called to be a holy harp for their believers, the heralds of the divine truths and building parable of what rises and serves the man.”

Reverend father Ioan Bunea is one priest with vocation. He can be a role model, first and foremost because of the life he had, dedicated solely to his mission he had been given. His years teaching, with the amount of published articles and studies, but especially his homiletic work proves his seriousness in putting into practice the need of preaching. All these made him immortal in our Church's memory as one of the greatest preachers in Ardeal.

We consider that the present paper was a necessary endeavour, because Reverend father Ioan Bunea was one of the greatest teachers and preachers of Cluj during communist times. Although in recent years a series of details and events have come to light from the father's life, his theological and homiletic work has not been researched as a whole. It can not only be a real source of inspiration for the preachers but also a rich material whose actuality is well regarded.