

"BABEȘ-BOLYAI" UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
"ISIDOR TODORAN" DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

SUMMARY

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:

ARHIM. PROF. UNIV. DR. ABIL. TEOFIL (CRISTIAN) TIA

PHD CANDIDATE:

PR. TEODOR - MARIUS CORNEA

CLUJ-NAPOCA

2024

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PRIEST AUGUSTIN POP (1901-1985),
MEMORABLE SERVANT OF
TRANSYLVANIAN ORTHODOXY

-DOCTORAL THESIS-

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Keywords: *Augustin Pop, horthyst-fascist regime, survival, ministry, suffering, prison, shooting, confessor, preacher, testimonies*

The exhortation of the Holy Apostle Paul addressed to the Hebrews "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13,7), is very compelling in terms of outlining the personality of Father Augustin Pop and the transposition into our life of the gracious deeds that he has accomplished during his 84 years of earthly life.

The present doctoral thesis "The Priest Augustin Pop (1901-1985), a memorable servant of the Orthodox Church", under the coordination of Fr. Teofil (Cristian) Tia, strives to highlight the personality and mission of a country priest, who remained embedded in the memory of the inhabitants, a colossus of pastoral work and an quintessential model of priesthood for his descendants.

Augustin Pop was an Orthodox priest, with origins from Sălaj, one of the great orators and patriots of the 20th century, he was born on November 26, 1901 in the village of Bozna¹, Sălaj County, in the family of the priest Ioan and Maria Pop, grandson of the worthy of remembrance protopope of Huedinului, the martyred priest Aurel Munteanu. He spent his childhood in the village of Bălan, along with his brothers and sisters. At the age of 7 he becomes motherless and because of the family's financial problems, he started primary school at the Hungarian state school² in Zalău between 1908-1910, respectively in Jibou in 1912-1913, (now

¹ Cf. Birth certificate, No. 116/1901, issued by the People's Council of Agrij commune, in *Carnet de travail. Romanian People's Republic*, Series T.m. No. 532420, issued by the Romanian Orthodox Deanery, Bistrița Rayon, September 13, 1962, tab 2, in the Pop Family Archive.

² Considered "the school of the poor, with boys of craftsmen, ploughmen and simple laborers". DĂNUȚ POP, *Biserica și societate în Sălaj. Prototopiatul Ortodopiatul Românași*, Editura Caiete Silvane, Zalău, 2002, p. 93.

town since 1968), a former confessional reformed school until 1895³. He continued his secondary school studies in Gherla⁴ from 1913-1917⁵, where his first and last name were Hungarianized into "Papp Agoston". Beginning his studies far away from his birthplace and his loved ones, learning a language other than his mother tongue, would shape Father Augustin Pop, a strong personality, which he would greatly need later. He went through a fretful period between 1917-1919, which marked his youth⁶. Because of the First World War, he was taken far away from his birthplace, and in the school year 1918-1919 he attended Jászberény, a town in Hungary⁷, not so far from the Romanian border. The only surviving document from there is a certificate⁸ which mentions the school year 1918-1919. After his return to Romania, he enrolled in the seventh grade at the Teachers' Normal School⁹ in Zaláu, attending the school year 1919-1920¹⁰. He will complete his pre-university studies in Cluj¹¹, at the Normal School, in the school year (1920-1921), thus being part of the first graduating class of this institution. Between 1965 and 1990, this school was called Pedagogical High School, and in 1996, on the 125th anniversary of its existence, the school was renamed "Gheorghe Lazăr" National Pedagogical College¹².

Thanks to his thorough intellectual preparation and the good results he achieved during his years of study, the young Augustin Pop turned his steps towards the "Andreiană" Academy in Sibiu, which is considered the oldest orthodox theological education institution in our

³ DAIANA PINTEA, "File din istoria învățământului jibean" in *Caiete silvane*, an I (2005), nr. 6, p. 15.

⁴ Gherla - Magyar Királyi Állami Főgimnázium - Hungarian Royal State Gymnasium. It was the former Armenian-Catholic Gymnasium founded in 1861, which in 1894 became a state institution. The oldest secondary school in Gherla was founded in 1792. The building in which it operated was put into use in 1896. See SZONGOTH KRISTÓF, *Szamosújvár Szamosújvár Szabad Királyi Város monográfiája 1700-1900*, II kötet, Todorán Endre "Auróra" Könyvnyomdája, Szamosújvár, 1901, pp. 115-116.

⁵ Cf. *Gimnáziumi bizonyítvány*, June 29, 1914, May 22, 1915, June 23, 1916, June 8, 1917, 4 files, in Pop.

⁶ The Romanian army, on their way to Budapest, took him as an interpreter because he spoke Hungarian very well. From the Hungarian capital he returned alone on foot. Hungry and exhausted, he fed himself with grass and having no landmark, he fell asleep in the huge pusta, (these were told by Mrs. Maria Holbură's father).

⁷ AUGUSTIN POP, *Autobiography*, manuscript, Mijloceni Bârgăului, December 6, 1948, tab 1, in the Pop Family Archive.

⁸ Cf. *Iskolai bizonyítvány*, Nr. 213/1919, issued by All. El. Mépiskolai Tani Toképzőintézet, Jászberény, June 7, 1919, 1 tab, in Pop.

⁹ Cf. *Class certificate*, No. 444/1920, issued by the Normal School of Teachers in Zaláu, June 15, 1920, 2 pages, in the Pop Family Archives.

¹⁰ She excelled in vocal music, violin, drawing, handicrafts, agricultural practice and gymnastics.

¹¹ Cf. *Diploma of Competence for Teacher*, No. 81/1921, issued by the Normal School of Teachers in Cluj, September 21, 1921, tab 1, and Cf. *Class Certificate of the Normal School for Teachers in Cluj*, No. 370/1920/21, issued by the Normal School for Boys in Cluj, May 28, 1921, 3 tabs, in the Pop.

¹² "Reference moments in the evolution of the "Gh. Lazăr Cluj-Napoca on the 25th anniversary of its second century of existence" in *GHEORGHE STANCU* (coord.), *Anuarul Colegiului Pedagogic "Gheorghe Lazăr" Cluj-Napoca, 1971-1996*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, pp. 11-13.

country¹³ . He attended the Academy from 1921 to 1925, graduating in 1925, following a "fundamental examination", held on June 19 and 23, on the basis of Certificate No. 10¹⁴ .

After obtaining the title of "*Licentiate of the Theological Academy*" in Sibiu, he returned home to Bălan and here he addressed a request to Right Reverend Nicolae Ivan of Cluj for a job. The answer came very swiftly, and on September 5, 1925 he was appointed as a teacher of studies at the "*Theological Academy of Cluj*" for the school year 1925-1926¹⁵ , by the Romanian Orthodox Eparchial Council of Cluj. During this time, the young Augustin Pop continued his preparation for becoming a servant of Christ and on October 7, 1925 he passed the "*priestly qualification examination*", obtaining the "*Very good*" certificate¹⁶.

At the beginning of 1926, on January 31, the young theologian and teacher Augustin Pop, presents himself and takes the exam for the parish of Mijlocenii Bărgăului, which was vacant at the time. After the end of the school year, on August 19, he marries with a young woman named Rafila Bârsan¹⁷ , a graduate of the girls' normal school in Cluj¹⁸ . Thus, after the Holy Sacrament of Marriage, he was assigned by competition to the parish of Mijlocenii Bărgăului¹⁹ , being ordained priest on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on September 8, 1926 by The Right Reverend Dr. Bishop Nicolae Ivan²⁰ and is assigned the office of parish priest by the Bistrița's protopriest Grigore Pletosu²¹ , on September 19, 1926²² .

Throughout the 47 years of service (1926-1973) in the Parish of Mijlocenii Bărgăului, Father Augustin Pop has accomplished marvelous things and works, being a church founder

¹³ MIRCEA PĂCURARIU, *Two hundred years of theological education in Sibiu, 1786-1986*, Sibiu, 1987, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ Cf. *Fundamental Examination Certificate, No. 10/924/5*, issued by the Rectorate of the Romanian Orthodox Theological Academy of Sibiu, June 19/23, 1925, 1 tab, in the Pop Family Archive.

¹⁵ Cf. *Decision of appointment, No. 5222/1925*, issued by the Romanian Orthodox Eparchial Consistory Cluj, September 5, 1925, 1 tab, in the Pop Family Archive.

¹⁶ Cf. *Atestat de calificare, Nr. 6040/1925* , issued by the Consistorul diecezan Cluj, October 7, 1925, 1 tab, in the Pop.

¹⁷ Daughter of the Greek-Catholic priest Ioan Bârsan and the priestess Maria Bârsan from Ruștior, Năsăud County. RAFILA BÂRSAN (1904-1982) born February 15, 1904, Cf. *Birth Certificate, No. GS- 971927*, issued by the Romanian People's Republic, Series Ne No. 233414, Bistrița District, August 1, 1904, tab 2, in the Pop.

¹⁸ Cf. *Class certificate, No. 280/1923*, issued by the Girls' Normal School in Cluj, June 26, 1923, page 1, in the Pop Family Archives.

¹⁹ AUGUSTIN POP, *Life and activity*, manuscript, Mijlocenii Bărgăului, 1963, tab 2, in the Pop Family Archive.

²⁰ Archives of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj - Fond: *Priests' files*, Book of ordinations and ordinations beginning December 17, 1921, ending December 31, 1977, position 114.

²¹ (1848-1934), former teacher of the poet George Coșbuc. Grigore Pletosu has been written about. Here are some of the most recent titles: MARIUS DAN GOGA, "Activitatea unui erudit slujitor al Bisericii", in: *Altarul Banatului*, SN, XXVII (2016) 1-3, pp. 120-129; IULIU-MARIUS MORARIU, *Restitutio Grigore Pletosu*, Eikon / Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2014; GRIGORE LINUL, "Preotul Grigore Pletosu la Năsăud", in: *Cuibul Visurilor*, XVI (2011) 5, p. 8; IULIU-MARIUS MORARIU, "Protoiereul astrict Grigore Pletosu - cleric and scholar from Năsăud", in: *Transilvania*, SN, XLI (CXLV) (2013) 3, pp. 28-32; VASILE BOIERU, "Grigore Pletosu - protopopul de Bistrița", in: *Ardealul*, II (1942) 15, p. 2.

²² Cf. National Archives Bistrița-Năsăud, Fond: *Romanian Orthodox parish office of Mijlocenii Bărgăului*, Act no. 9, years 1880-1946, minutes no. 45 of September 16, 1926.

and a nurturer of souls, for which the Right Reverend Bishop Nicolae Colan, acknowledging his merits, awarded him in 1947, with the red zone (belt)²³, in 1963 the Right Reverend Bishop Teofil Herineanu decorated him with the title of iconom stavrofor²⁴, and eleven years later in 1974, he was awarded the Jubilee Medal²⁵.

Research topic methodology. Throughout the entire study process, we aimed to consult the existing bibliography referring to the person of Father Augustin Pop, which unfortunately is relatively limited. The volumes and journals published until the present, mention Father Augustin Pop as a victim of the Horthyst regime and recount the tragedy of his assassination, nonetheless, none of them, do not include a witnessing, missionary-pastoral perspective of the life and work of Father Augustin Pop. We stress to mention the fact that the research was laborious, because to a large extent, it was underpinned by the study of the personal archive of the father but also by numerous other archives, as follows : National Archives of Bistrița-Năsăud, National Archives of Sălaj, Archive of Archdiocese of Vad, Feleacului and Clujului, The Archive of Parish Mijloscii Bârgăului, Archive of the City Hall of Josenii Bârgăului, Archive of the City Hall of Prundu Bârgăului, Archive of Bistrita City, National Archives of the Bucharest City, Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive and Ministry of National Defense Archive. Therefore, the present research consists in an in-depth study of the sources that provide information on the life and the missionary-pastoral and witnessing activity of Father Augustin Pop. This category of informational sources includes: Father Augustin Pop's notebooks, including outlines of sermons, various notes, drafts of letters, the report of the tragedy of his assassination, outlines of some priestly conferences, audio recordings, interviews, from which we could infer the thinking and conception of the father on priestly service, located in the Pop Family Archive²⁶.

Actuality of the research topic. As mentioned above, the bibliography related to Father Augustin Pop is relatively limited and some aspects of his life are mentioned, both locally, the Bârgăului Valley and the City of Bistrița, was often mentioned the suffering he went through and his death sentence by shooting on October 10, 1944. When it comes to the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj, nothing was written referring to the personality of Father. Therefore, under the guidance of Father and Professor Teofil Tia, we thought to place Father Augustin Pop among the great Transylvanian priests, who fulfilled their priestly mission with

²³ AUGUSTIN POP, *Service Record, No. 4169*, dated 20.07.1947, page 13, in the Pop Family Archives.

²⁴ AUGUSTIN POP, *Service Record, No. 6401*, dated 26.12.1963, page 13, in the Pop Family Archives.

²⁵ AUGUSTIN POP, *Jubilee Medal, 30 years since the Liberation of Romania from Fascist domination*, dated August 23, 1974, in the Pop Family Archives.

²⁶ The Pop Family Archive is owned by Mrs. Maria Holbură, goddaughter-in-law of Father Augustin Pop.

tremenduous zeal and defended the ancestral faith, at the expense of their lives. Thus, as a founder of a church and a nurturer of souls, Father Augustin Pop represents a role model for the new generations of clergy, who need, like him, to constantly adapt to pastoral challenges, to find new strategies to guide their faithful on the path to salvation.

The working technique used was that specific to the norms of use in the Faculties of Orthodox Theology of the Romanian Patriarchate. The abbreviated journals or collections are found in the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the paper. In regard to the citation of Father Augustin's notebooks, we have kept the notation of the notebooks made by Father Augustin himself, and the unnumbered notebooks, we have named them with the words marked by Father Augustin on the cover.

Presentation by chapters. The work is comprised of five chapters, some subchapters and sub-subchapters, being preceded by the list of abbreviations and a foreword, interpreted as a small introduction, followed by the motivation for the choice of the research topic, its importance and topicality, the objectives and sources of the research, the stage and methodology of the research and the research stake, and at the end I added the conclusions and some appendices and photographs that include remarkable documents regarding the life and work of the father, as well as the list of bibliography that I have researched in this paper.

The first chapter presents the political and ecclesiastical context of Northern Transylvania during the period of the Horthyst domination. The five sub-chapters delve into the Second Vienna Award and its consequences, the situation in which the Orthodox Church found itself at that time, the methods of oppression used against the Romanians, and the mistreated priests in Northern Transylvania between 1940 and 1944. In the fifth sub-chapter, which also consists of five sub-subchapters, the places in the county of Sălaj where the abominable acts of the ruling authorities took place are presented.

The second chapter presents the life and work of Father Augustin Pop, also a victim of the totalitarian Horthyst regime. It presents his distressing childhood and his primary, secondary and academic studies far away from his native lands, a brief history of the parish of Mijlocenii Bârgăului, the parish he ministered for 47 years and the work he carried out there, his political indictment, as well as the arrest of him and six other people, his death sentencing, his survival through a godly manner, his retirement and his passing away.

Chapter III was designed to showcase one of the many gifts that the Good Lord gave to Father Augustin Pop, that is oratory. Both in the parish and in the beautiful Bârgăului Valley, where he was often asked to attend funerals or priestly conferences, he comforted the faithful

with his homilies spoken from his soul to other souls, conveying the message of the Resurrection, of love and good thoughts to the darkest realms of the human mind. That is why the third chapter has been dedicated to the homiletic and catechetical work of the father, made up of outlines of sermons and catecheses dating back from his university days, sermons at the most important feasts of the church year, as well as funeral sermons. I used as the title of this chapter, homiletical and catechetical work, in order to emphasize the assiduous work in the 23 years (1950-1973), in which Father Augustin Pop wrote in the form of outlines, his sermons on Sundays, feasts and major feasts, contained in the 12 volumes that are in the Pop Family Archive, still unpublished, which in the near future I would like to prepare to be published in a homiletical volume.

In chapter IV we tried to emphasize the beautiful intellectual and cultural-artistic activity of the father. Thus, the priestly conferences where the father attended and held orations on a certain theme or delivered a thematic sermon are presented, the choral activity and majestic library that he owned and often researched is also exhibited, documenting for his sermons and conferences or lending a book to children and faithful people who were eager for reading and knowledge.

Chapter V entitled "Testimonies about a memorable soul", I have dedicated to the testimonies of people who knew Father Augustin Pop. For the making of this last chapter I have interviewed 11 people at their homes. I mention the fact that I listened to compelling testimonies and that the father, although long gone to the eternal rest, remained alive in the heart, memory and life of these people. The people interviewed, although different in their professions (e.g. : teachers, professors, priests, military officers and ordinary people), outline, through their testimony, the portrait of an emblematic personality who was Father Augustin Pop.

One of the reasons why I have chosen to approach this theme, as I stated in the motivation for the choice of the research theme, is for the sake of reconstructing (by researching existing documents) the life and activity of the meritorious Father Augustin Pop, as an homage and gratitude to him and his activity, but also, simultaneously as a duty towards Pastoral Theology, where Father Augustin Pop must be mentioned as a worthy servant of God and of the Romanian nation.

Father Augustin Pop's pastoral work took place in a time when the horthysto-fascist regime was trying to cast its shadows over people's souls and to extinguish any light that might have guided them on the right path. Throughout this entire period Father Augustin Pop was a priest who knew and comprehended the times in which he lived, assumed his priesthood with all its consequences and understood his calling and mission during the troubled age in which

he was assigned to serve. The sense of mightiness in the priestly service and the thrill of responsibility before God were constant companions to the priest, and it was in the very tension between these two feelings that he carried out all his priestly activity.

Enlightened by the good thought and gratitude, besides the work, which we hope will impress many readers, this year 2024, when it will be 80 years since the shooting of²⁷ (October 10, 1944) and 39 years since his death (March 8, 1985), we want to pay another homage to Father Augustin Pop, through a symposium which is to be organised on October 10 in the Martyr-Community Prundu-Bârgăului.

²⁷ By a divine miracle survivor. His passing to the eternal after 41 years.