

The Formation of Romanian Orthodox Missionary Preaching: Theological Education, Episcopal Leadership, and Ecclesial Identity in Banat and Transylvania in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT. Romanian Orthodox missionary preaching in Banat and Transylvania during the first half of the twentieth century took shape through the interaction of theological education, episcopal guidance, and the ecclesiastical and national challenges of the period. The theological schools of Arad, Caransebeş, Sibiu, Oradea, and Cluj trained clergy through homiletics, catechesis, liturgical practice, student societies, and ecclesiastical periodicals. Their activity was linked to the pastoral initiatives of Orthodox hierarchs, who promoted preaching as a means of doctrinal clarification, moral formation, and community consolidation. In a region marked by the Great Union of 1918, the Vienna Award, the Second World War, and intense interconfessional relations, missionary preaching became a central instrument of Romanian Orthodox self-understanding and pastoral action. Particular attention is given to the Orthodox response to Evangelical Protestant movements, described in Romanian ecclesiastical and historiographical usage as “Neo-Protestant” groups, and to the way bishops, professors, and students shaped a culture of the pulpit. The 2025 centenary of Grigorie Comşa’s accession to the episcopal see of Arad provides a timely occasion for reassessing the connection between theological formation, ecclesial identity, national consciousness, and pastoral responsibility. The article interprets preaching as a form of ecclesial formation, cultural leadership, and communal consolidation.

Keywords: Banat; ecclesial identity; Evangelical Protestant movements; interconfessional relations; missionary preaching; Orthodox episcopate; Orthodox homiletics; Romanian Orthodox Church; theological education; Transylvania.

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1. Introduction

The history of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat and Transylvania during the first half of the twentieth century, including the development of missionary preaching, may be divided into four specific stages. The first covered the years 1900–1918, a period in which ecclesiastical life unfolded, in the words of the future Patriarch Miron Cristea, “in a country under foreign rule”¹; the second, between 1918 and 1940, was characterized by the freedom and sovereignty gained through the act of Union of December 1, 1918; the third, between 1940 and 1945, was marked, for Transylvania, by the Vienna Award of 1940 and, for the whole of Romania, by the Second World War; the fourth, between 1945 and 1950, was the period in which, with the establishment of the totalitarian regime, religious freedoms were restricted².

The dynamics of interconfessional relations in Banat and Transylvania during the first half of the twentieth century had a significant impact on the way in which the Orthodox Church structured and formulated its missionary sermons. This period witnessed an adaptation of missionary messages and strategies, as the Church sought to respond effectively to interconfessional challenges and to preserve the integrity of Orthodox communities. The presence of certain Evangelical Protestant movements and the intensification of confessional competition led the Orthodox Church to develop a distinct missionary approach. In Romanian ecclesiastical and historiographical usage, these movements are commonly referred to as “Neo-Protestant” groups, especially Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals.

Romanian Orthodox hierarchs paid close attention to the establishment of theological schools in their dioceses, and for this reason Orthodox clergy were trained to respond directly and effectively to the doctrinal differences that arose in relation to these religious movements, using solid theological arguments in their sermons and demonstrating a sound knowledge of Holy Scripture. This led to a greater emphasis on theological education among the clergy, who were thus better prepared to answer the questions of the faithful³. Missionary sermons

¹ Elie Miron Cristea, *Pastorale și cuvântări ale unui episcop român în țară sub stăpânire străină* [Pastoral letters and addresses of a Romanian bishop in a country under foreign rule], vol. 2 (Bucharest, 1923), 306 pp.

² Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. Compendiu* [History of the Romanian Orthodox Church: A compendium], 3rd rev. ed. (Bucharest: BASILICA, 2013), 483–510

³ See Miron Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania, în prima jumătate a sec. al XX-lea* [Preaching in the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania in the first half of the twentieth century], 2nd ed. (Oradea: Editura Cogito, 2010), 356.

became an essential instrument for communicating Orthodox teachings and for responding to competing confessional influences and to the religious diversification of the age. Particular emphasis was placed on doctrinal clarity and on the relevance of the messages within the interconfessional context, with the aim of attracting and preserving the faithful within the Orthodox Church.

Major events such as the Union of 1918, the Vienna Award, and the Second World War had profound repercussions on ecclesiastical life in Banat and Transylvania. These events not only reshaped borders and political structures, but also influenced the way in which the Church fulfilled its spiritual and social role. The Union of 1918 was a turning point for the Romanian Orthodox Church, offering it the opportunity to extend its influence into the newly united territories. This event led to administrative and ecclesiastical unification and to the revitalization of spiritual life. Sermons and ecclesiastical activities began to reflect national sentiment more strongly and to contribute to the consolidation of national identity within the context of the new state reality. "In this socio-political and cultural context, the Romanian Orthodox Church developed a prolific homiletic activity with major implications for the preservation of the ecclesial and national consciousness of the Romanian people."⁴

The year 2025 marks the centenary of Grigorie Comșa's accession to the episcopal see of Arad, an anniversary that gives renewed relevance to the analysis of the ecclesiastical, educational, and missionary context in which his preaching activity took shape. Against this background, the role of theological schools and of Banat and Transylvanian hierarchs in the formation and orientation of Orthodox missionary preaching during the first half of the twentieth century acquires particular significance. In this region, missionary preaching appears as more than a pastoral reaction to confessional competition; it was the expression of an institutional culture shaped by theological academies, episcopal supervision, student societies, ecclesiastical periodicals, and national-ecclesial mobilization. Pastoral letters, diocesan publications, homiletic manuals, histories of theological schools, and Romanian ecclesiastical historiography make it possible to reconstruct the institutional and pastoral framework within which this culture of the pulpit developed.

This article therefore asks how Romanian Orthodox missionary preaching in Banat and Transylvania was formed during the first half of the twentieth century, and how theological education, episcopal leadership, ecclesiastical

⁴ Filip Albu, *Opera omiletică a Episcopului Grigorie Comșa al Aradului* [The homiletic work of Bishop Grigorie Comșa of Arad], doctoral thesis in theology (Arad: Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu” din Arad, 2010), 45.

publications, and pastoral responses to interconfessional competition contributed to the shaping of a distinct culture of the pulpit. More specifically, it examines three related questions: first, what role did the theological schools and academies of Arad, Caransebeș, Sibiu, Oradea, and Cluj play in the homiletic and missionary preparation of future clergy? Second, how did Orthodox hierarchs understand preaching as an instrument of doctrinal clarification, moral formation, and communal consolidation? Third, how did political events and confessional encounters influence the themes and functions of missionary preaching?

Methodologically, the study combines ecclesiastical-historical analysis with a contextual reading of homiletic and pastoral sources. It draws on histories of theological education, diocesan periodicals, pastoral letters, episcopal addresses, homiletic manuals, theological yearbooks, and Romanian ecclesiastical historiography. The article does not attempt to offer an exhaustive textual analysis of all sermons produced in the period under discussion. Rather, it reconstructs the institutional and pastoral framework within which missionary preaching was cultivated, practiced, and understood as a form of ecclesial formation and cultural leadership.

2. Theological Schools and Episcopal Leadership in Banat

The theological schools of Banat and Transylvania constituted the principal institutional framework in which future priests and theology professors received homiletic, catechetical, and missionary formation. Under episcopal guidance, these institutions shaped generations of clergy who linked Orthodox religious consciousness with Romanian national identity.

2.1. The Arad Theological-Pedagogical Institute and the Formation of Homiletic Culture

The first of these schools in Banat was the Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Arad, which dated back to 1823 in the form of a clerical school, united with the normal school, initially with a two-year duration and, from 1825 onward, with a three-year duration⁵. Among the theological disciplines taught there, beginning in 1834, were Ecclesiastical Rhetoric — Homiletics — and Oratorical Style — Practical Homiletics. Transformed into an Institute through the union of the two sections in 1876, it was led from 1901 by Roman

⁵ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* [History of the Romanian Orthodox Church], vol. 3 (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1981), 249.

Ciorogariu, professor of homiletics and future bishop of Oradea from 1917. This certainly explains the fact that, “in addition to the other disciplines studied, the young theologians of Arad received solid homiletic training, being offered the opportunity to overcome their emotions and display their oratorical qualities already during their studies, by delivering sermons on various occasions.”⁶

The cultural and religious contribution of this Institute, later transformed into an Academy in 1927, abusively abolished in 1948 and re-established after 1990 as a Faculty of Theology⁷, was also made possible through the founding of the “Reading Society of the Romanian Theologians of Arad” in 1867, as well as through the appearance of the literary-ecclesiastical publication *Speranța* in 1869, later transformed into *Lumina* in 1871⁸.

The promotion of Romanian culture and Orthodox theology entered a new stage with the accession to the leadership of the Diocese of Arad of a former graduate of the Theological Institute, Bishop Ioan Papp (1903–1925). Among his many pastoral-missionary activities, mention must first be made of his concern regarding the expansion of Evangelical Protestant missionary activity, a phenomenon perceived by the Orthodox hierarchy as an important pastoral challenge. This major concern is reflected extensively in the pastoral letters sent to priests before the beginning of the First World War, in which he urged them to beware of “false prophets,” “foreign to our language and faith,”⁹ who sought to attract Orthodox believers to their erroneous teachings. Faced with this pastoral challenge, Bishop Papp considered it necessary that, under his leadership, the clergy of the diocese should intensify their catechetical and preaching activity in order to consolidate Orthodox identity.¹⁰

The second major concern may be considered the full involvement of Bishop Ioan Papp in the struggle to promote education in the Romanian language through confessional schools, important institutions of Romanian cultural formation, thus continuing the work of educating children which had been successfully carried out by his predecessor, Bishop Ioan Meșianu. In this context, we shall mention the important role of the diocesan bulletin of the Diocese of Arad, *Biserica și Școala* [*The Church and the School*], published at the initiative of Bishop Ioan Meșianu on January 30, 1877, which established itself as a true platform for the

⁶ Miron Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat în prima jumătate a sec. al XX-lea* [Preaching in the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat in the first half of the twentieth century], 2nd ed. (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2010), 7–9.

⁷ The Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Arad celebrated its bicentenary in 2022.

⁸ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 7.

⁹ Ioan I. Papp, “Pastorală de Paști” [Easter pastoral letter], *Biserica și Școala*, no. 13 (1904): 103.

¹⁰ See P. Chirica, “Sectele religioase” [Religious sects], *Biserica și Școala* 48, no. 49 (1924): 1–2

defense of Romanian cultural and ecclesiastical institutions in Banat and Transylvania. A direct relationship may, moreover, be established between the pastoral-missionary work of the one who would later become metropolitan in Sibiu and his achievements as bishop in Arad, materialized in “the organization and guidance of hundreds of Romanian confessional primary schools.”¹¹

In turn, Bishop Ioan Papp took care of education in the Romanian language, a conclusive example being the Orthodox Civil School for Girls in Arad, which he founded and provided with the necessary resources. This cultural and social achievement of the bishop was accomplished in a difficult context, since “the Hungarian government was conducting the fiercest campaign to abolish the autonomy of the Romanian Orthodox Church and to seize the confessional schools.”¹² Even after the achievement of the Great Union, the bishop did not cease to advise the faithful of his diocese to send their children to school, so that they might learn a trade and also receive a religious and moral education.

A substantial missionary component is found in Bishop Ioan Papp’s pastoral letters from the wartime period and from the years immediately following it. The former reflect the Church’s care for the soldiers at the front as well as for their families, who had to be helped and protected, while the latter contain assessments of the destruction suffered by many churches and of the persecutions endured by priests and teachers at the hands of foreign rule¹³. These pastoral letters never fail to combat social evils and passions of every kind, which weigh upon Christian morality and lead some people away from the Church and toward religious indifferentism.

In continuity with these pastoral and missionary concerns, Grigorie Comșa’s episcopate in Arad between 1925 and 1935 acquired particular importance for the revival of theological education and for the development of missionary preaching. His contribution to the renewal of the Arad theological school, understood as a source of ecclesiastical culture and clerical formation, supported a broader revitalization of church life in the diocese. The centenary of his accession to the episcopal see of Arad, marked in 2025, offers a relevant chronological point of reference for reassessing the relationship between homiletic formation, pastoral leadership, and Orthodox missionary activity in interwar Banat. In the address delivered at his installation as Bishop of Arad, Comșa reminded the priests that “if we do not teach the people, neither shall

¹¹ Mircea Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români* [Dictionary of Romanian theologians], 3rd ed. (Sibiu: Editura Andreiana, 2014), 381.

¹² Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 24–25.

¹³ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 31–33.

we have the happiness of seeing the results of the pulpit, among which the most important must be: the confession of sins before the priest and deeds worthy of repentance.”¹⁴ This recognition of the central role of preaching in the priestly mission would be reiterated throughout his episcopal ministry, alongside his sustained concern for theological education and high-quality homiletic formation.

Certainly, the foremost place in the preaching activity of the Arad hierarch was occupied by missionary preaching, also called apologetic preaching in homiletic treatises¹⁵, usually delivered on the occasion of canonical visits and church consecrations. In his very first year of missionary activity, he “made 65 canonical visits and participated in countless religious gatherings, bringing the light of the Gospel of Christ into the vast Diocese of Arad through the sermons he delivered and through his books and brochures distributed in every parish.”¹⁶

The apologetic dimension of missionary preaching is evident in the fact that, in addition to responding to proselytizing initiatives by Evangelical Protestant groups, this thematic preaching aimed to prepare the faithful for encounters with competing religious discourses, through a better knowledge of Orthodox faith and spirituality. Here too must be included the nationalist component, namely the defense of national existence, of the Romanian language and culture, which constitutes the context and specificity of ecclesiastical preaching. His patriotic sentiment, affirmed throughout his entire episcopal ministry, became evident on the occasion of his pastoral visits to Romanian parishes in Yugoslavia and in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, when he evoked before the Romanian diaspora, as we would say today, glorious pages from the past of the nation and of the Romanian Orthodox Church.¹⁷ Bishop Grigorie Comșa was, moreover, among the first Transylvanian hierarchs to draw attention to the fact that, after the reunification of Romania, a powerful propaganda campaign had been launched against the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Church that had preserved the unity of the Romanian soul throughout a troubled history.¹⁸

It must be mentioned that in Arad, Roman Ciorogariu was succeeded by two professors of homiletics, both doctors of theology, Romul Nestor and Simion

¹⁴ Grigorie Comșa, “Cuvântarea la instalarea în scaunul episcopal al Episcopiei Aradului” [Address at the installation in the episcopal see of the Diocese of Arad] (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1925), 18.

¹⁵ Vasile Gordon, ed., Adrian Ivan, and Nicușor Beldiman, *Omiletica* [Homiletics] (Bucharest: BASILICA, 2015), 391.

¹⁶ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 61.

¹⁷ See *Biserica și Școala* 52, nos. 47–48 (1928): 1–7.

¹⁸ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 63–64.

Șiclovan, who trained future clergy with great professionalism and enthusiasm, preparing them to excel in the art of preaching and catechizing the faithful. This explains the fact that “in parallel with missionary activity, the students carried out a rich homiletic activity, delivering a series of sermons in the chapel of the penitentiary and of the hospital in Arad, (...) the final-year students being scheduled to preach on every feast day.”¹⁹

The successor of Bishop Grigorie Comșa in the leadership of the Diocese of Arad, Bishop Andrei Magieru, who had been the first rector of the Theological Academy of Oradea, founded in 1923, was interested from the very beginning in “the improvement of theological education, with the aim of forming a generation of priests capable of confronting the problems of the time. In this regard, he placed particular emphasis on the solid homiletic training of priests.”²⁰

During the nine years in which he served as hierarch-vicar in the Diocese of Oradea, alongside the venerable Bishop Roman Ciorogariu, he visited numerous parishes, observed the level of the priests’ training and the frequency with which they preached, corrected the shortcomings he noticed, and urged them to deliver well-prepared sermons. Having thus acquired extensive pastoral-missionary experience, Bishop Andrei Magieru also wished to have, in the Diocese of Arad, conscientious priests who would work with great zeal and self-sacrifice in their parishes.²¹ To this end, in 1938, through a circular order, he reminded priests of their duty to preach on every Sunday and national feast day: “Likewise, no national celebration shall remain without an address in church. We shall proceed by disciplinary means, for negligence and incapacity, against those priests whose pulpits shall remain silent from now on.”²²

The ever-increasing pastoral-missionary demands required the full involvement of the clergy in strengthening Orthodox teaching in the context of confessional competition and in affirming and consolidating the national ideal, which was to be affected at the beginning of the Second World War. A conclusive example is provided by the content of a special Pastoral Letter addressed to the clergy and the faithful, in which Bishop Andrei Magieru urged the defense of the homeland in the context of the approaching war: “We do not covet a single patch

¹⁹ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 12.

²⁰ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 79.

²¹ “Cuvântarea la instalare a PS Episcop Andrei” [Address at the installation of His Grace Bishop Andrei], *Biserica și Școala* 60, nos. 6–7 (1936): 4.

²² Quoted in Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 100.

of foreign land, but we would remain sealed with shame by history if we did not know how to defend the country that God has given us.”²³

This learned hierarch, a living conscience of the Orthodox Church, followed in the line of his illustrious predecessor, Bishop Grigorie Comșa, expressed concern regarding the effects of Evangelical Protestant missionary activity on the cohesion of Orthodox communities, making the following observations: “With what ease our people have been divided into religious sects, which preach hatred toward those who have remained faithful to the ancestral Church. This was the first fragmentation of our soul. Judging today, after the passage of time, those apostles of hatred by their fruits, who can still say that Christ the Lord was the One who sent them among our people?”²⁴

Like his predecessor in the episcopal see of Arad, Andrei Magieru paid great attention to missionary activity, first in the Diocese of Oradea and later in that of Arad, “delivering impressive missionary sermons within religious circles,”²⁵ or on other occasions, for example to former Greek Catholics who had returned to Orthodoxy, and during the war by encouraging wounded Romanian soldiers in hospitals. The Arad case shows that missionary preaching developed at the intersection of theological instruction, episcopal supervision, and the defense of Romanian confessional education. Homiletic formation was therefore inseparable from the broader pastoral task of preserving Orthodox identity in a competitive religious environment.

2.2. The Caransebeș Theological-Pedagogical Institute and Missionary Formation

The second theological school in Banat was the Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Caransebeș, established when Ioan Popasu, the first bishop of the Diocese of Caransebeș, transferred the Romanian section of the Clerical School from Vârșeț, in accordance with the decision of the Sibiu Synod of 1865. From 1874, a pedagogical section was also included, as already existed in Sibiu and Arad, and from 1896 the length of study was extended to four years. Through the efforts of this hierarch, numerous elementary, or popular, schools were founded in the diocese, together with a printing house in which a series of works were printed, as well as the diocesan bulletin, entitled *Foaia diecezană*, which represented

²³ Andrei Magieru, *Pastorală* [Pastoral letter], 1939, quoted in Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 83.

²⁴ Quoted in Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 94.

²⁵ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 94.

a platform of Romanian Orthodoxy in this diocese, keeping alive in the hearts of clergy and faithful the ideal of union with Romania.²⁶

With the inherent difficulties of any beginning, this Institute, where competent teaching staff taught, followed an ascending course under the next worthy hierarchs, Nicolae Popea and Miron Cristea, the future patriarch of Romania, who knew how to invigorate the teaching activity of the theological school and ecclesiastical life in general. The scholar-hierarchs of this diocese, true models for theology students, also distinguished themselves through their cultural contributions, some of them becoming members of the Romanian Academy. They instilled in the future clergy of the diocese love for the nation and for the Orthodox faith, as well as a sense of pastoral responsibility.

Bishop Nicolae Popea, a distinguished scholar and member of the Romanian Academy, had been, in his youth, the secretary of Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna and a professor at the Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Sibiu, learning from his mentor the art of ecclesiastical leadership. Thus, in 1889, when he was elected bishop of Caransebeș, he led the diocese with great wisdom and devotion. He showed special care for the Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Caransebeș, erecting a new building in 1891, and concerned himself with sending young men to study, with confessional schools, and with improving the material condition of the diocese²⁷. Shepherding the diocese until 1908, he was the hierarch who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, prepared and intensified the awakening of the Romanians and their preparation for the making of the Great Union, through the strong affirmation of their national and religious identity with their brothers in Romania.

After assuming leadership of the diocese, Bishop Miron Cristea urged the young theology students, in the address delivered at the opening of the 1913 school year, to acquire solid knowledge, because in order to guide the faithful whom they would shepherd, “love, faith, persevering work, and patience are needed.”²⁸ On the cultural level, Bishop Miron Cristea “defended the Romanian confessional schools of Banat against the attempts of the Budapest Government to abolish them,”²⁹ successfully continuing the struggle of his predecessors to defend the national identity of the Romanians in a very difficult historical context.

The professors of homiletics at the beginning of the twentieth century at this theological Institute, which was transformed into a Theological Academy in 1927 — Moise Ienciu, Dimitrie Cioloca, and Archpriest Andrei Ghidiu — strove to

²⁶ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 505.

²⁷ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 505–6.

²⁸ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 19.

²⁹ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 190.

train the students thoroughly, so that they would be capable of using preaching and catechesis to preserve Orthodox identity in the context of the missionary activity of Evangelical Protestant groups. The special contribution of the cultural society “Ioan Popasu” of the Theological Institute, founded in 1868, must also be noted; through it, during the First World War, theology students carried out extensive missionary work by collecting funds for disabled soldiers and for war orphans.

The first bishop of the Diocese of Caransebeş after the achievement of the reunification of the Romanian nation, Iosif Traian Bădescu, paid special attention to the activity of the Theological Institute and, after many efforts, succeeded in 1927 in transforming this Institute into a Theological Academy, with a four-year bachelor’s degree cycle. During that period of spiritual and cultural effervescence, theology students organized, within the “Ioan Popasu” society, artistic programs, commemorations of hierarchs from Banat or Transylvania, and study trips throughout Romania. In this context, mention must be made of the existence of a “Missionary Association” of fourth-year students, which organized missions in the villages around the city of Caransebeş, with the participation of several professors who preached, while the students offered artistic programs to the locals, with a strong impact upon them.³⁰

The next bishop of Caransebeş, Vasile Lăzărescu (1934–1941), who later became bishop and archbishop of Timișoara and metropolitan of Banat, already had rich academic teaching experience, begun in Sibiu and continued in Oradea³¹, as professor of Dogmatics and Moral Theology, which explains his substantial and fruitful involvement in the life of the Theological Academy of Banat. In addition to the administrative resources that would ensure the proper development of student life, he strove to fill the vacant teaching positions, to grant numerous scholarships to outstanding students, and to ask theology professors to publish more and more studies and articles; in a word, to promote and intensify the cultural and spiritual life of the theology students, priests, and faithful of his diocese.

Both in Caransebeş and in Timișoara, he was concerned with the cultural life of the two dioceses, carefully guiding and supervising the diocesan bulletins *Foaia diecezană* in Caransebeş and *Biserica Bănăţeană* in Timișoara, the homiletic journal *Duh și Adevăr*, and the journals *Mitropolia Banatului* and *Calendarul Eparhial*. Through these publications, he intensified ecclesiastical life and theological culture,

³⁰ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 20–21.

³¹ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 332–33.

encouraging professors and students to publish studies and articles, sermons, and ecclesiastical addresses. All these positive actions and remarkable achievements prepared priests and theologians to withstand the difficulties that were to arise after the establishment of the totalitarian regime in Romania.³²

Fully aware of the approach of difficult times for the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bishop Vasile Lăzărescu consistently sought to ensure that theology students received a solid education within the Academy, accompanied by thorough spiritual formation, so that, as priests, they might become fully involved in the pastoral-missionary work of the parishes, offering the faithful examples of authentic Christian life and strengthening them in the Orthodox faith.³³

The last bishop of the Diocese of Caransebeș, Veniamin Nistor, an illustrious Romanian scholar who shepherded the diocese between 1941 and 1949, followed in the line of his predecessors, protecting and developing ecclesiastical life and giving special attention to the Theological Academy and to the monasteries. His activity as a military priest during the First World War made him deeply sensitive to the sufferings of Romanian soldiers wounded on the battlefield, whom he constantly strengthened spiritually and encouraged, as a true shepherd of souls. Before becoming bishop, he published in many journals; therefore, once he came to the helm of the Diocese of Caransebeș, a new journal entitled *Altarul Banatului* appeared at his initiative, beginning in 1944, in which the professors of the Theological Academy published studies, in parallel with the old *Foaia Diecezană*, which continued to appear.³⁴

In the pastoral letters published during the war, Bishop Veniamin Nistor urged the faithful of the diocese to remain attached to the Orthodox tradition, in the context of the intensified missionary activity of certain Evangelical Protestant groups. He expressed the same view in his Easter Pastoral Letter of 1945, warning the faithful to remain within the bosom of the Church and to beware of the proselytism of false apostles, who proclaim “another Gospel, according to human tradition” (Colossians 2:8). Another eloquent example is the New Year Pastoral Letter of 1948, through which he urged them to preserve the good values of our Christian nation and to listen to the priests, so as to remain connected to the pastoral and liturgical life of the parish.

The missionary-apologetic dimension is, moreover, very present in all his occasional sermons and addresses, from those delivered on the occasion of his election, investiture, and ordination, to those given during his countless

³² Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 333.

³³ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 22.

³⁴ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 458.

canonical visits and church consecrations.³⁵ The Caransebeș experience confirms the same pattern: theological schools did not merely transmit doctrinal knowledge, but created practical missionary networks through student societies, diocesan periodicals, public preaching, and charitable initiatives. In this case too, episcopal leadership transformed theological education into a wider pastoral instrument, capable of linking doctrinal formation, ecclesiastical culture, and national responsibility.

3. Theological Schools and Episcopal Leadership in Transylvania

National and social issues were central to the pastoral-missionary work of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania and Banat, because here “the Church was the sole leader of the Romanian people under foreign rule, and it was natural that all the efforts of the hierarchs and of the more learned priests should first be directed toward these issues and only afterward toward theological ones.”³⁶ Nevertheless, theological literature and the ecclesiastical press developed progressively, as we have observed, thanks to the sustained activity of the hierarchs and theology professors.

The national-ecclesiastical context was very similar in the two Romanian provinces, Banat and Transylvania, before the achievement of the Great Union, having many points in common, such as: similar developments of the theological schools, which began as sections of pedagogy and theology at the beginning of the nineteenth century, continued by becoming, through their union, diocesan theological-pedagogical institutes, and later, in the first half of the twentieth century, were transformed into Theological Academies with a four-year duration; scholar-hierarchs who successively led two dioceses, some of whom had previously been professors of theology; cultural societies established to support the promotion of theological education and student life; large-scale missionary activities, with the direct involvement of hierarchs, theology professors, and theology students; and the development of theological publishing through journals and diocesan bulletins. The spiritual and cultural life of the Romanians in the two provinces, even under the difficult conditions of that era, underwent substantial development, as national spirit and Orthodox faith asserted themselves ever more strongly through the contributions of the hierarchs and clergy, with the main objective of achieving union with Romania.³⁷

³⁵ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 164–68.

³⁶ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 3, 287.

³⁷ Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. Compendiu*, 472–74.

3.1. The “Andreian” Seminary of Sibiu and the Șagunian Homiletic Legacy

The first and oldest theological school in Transylvania was the “Andreian” Seminary in Sibiu, originating in 1804 in the form of courses for future teachers and future candidates for ordination. Through the effort and skill of the future Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, the six-month courses were extended to one year in 1846, then to two years of study in 1854, and, from 1861, to three years, in the form of a pedagogical-theological seminary institute.³⁸

Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna’s institutional vision was also materialized, as is known, in the cultural field through “the organization of Romanian Orthodox primary and secondary education in Transylvania, placed under the guidance of the Church,”³⁹ through the founding of the newspaper *Telegraful Român* in 1853, and through the establishment of the ASTRA Association in 1861. “The exhortations in the cultural and educational sphere bore fruit, for the Șagunian ideal, which did not prove to be a utopia, was constant, as he so often preached from the pulpit: the elevation of the people through culture and Christian education, toward the attainment of social and national rights.”⁴⁰

The hierarch who led the Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Sibiu at the beginning of the twentieth century was Metropolitan Ioan Mețianu, who had previously led the Diocese of Arad and who continued the ecclesiastical policy of Saint Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna. Among his remarkable achievements we mention: “the guidance of the construction works of the metropolitan cathedral in Sibiu (1902–1906), of a new building for the Theological-Pedagogical Institute, of the activity of this Institute and of the nearly 800 confessional primary schools in the Archdiocese of Sibiu; the establishment of various foundations for the support of Romanian pupils and students or for other cultural and philanthropic purposes.”⁴¹

Through his efforts, the Institute’s courses were extended to four years in 1907, and the number of professors, as well as their specialized training, increased exponentially. Among the professors of homiletics, a discipline illustrated in the nineteenth century by the famous Zaharia Boiu, the following stand out: Dr. Vasile

³⁸ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania, în prima jumătate a sec. al XX-lea*, 28–29.

³⁹ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 630.

⁴⁰ Nicușor Beldiman, *Predica în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Muntenia în secolul al XX-lea. Analiză și evaluare* [Preaching in the Romanian Orthodox Church in Wallachia in the twentieth century: Analysis and evaluation] (Giurgiu: Editura Episcopiei Giurgiului, 2013), 41.

⁴¹ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 381.

Stan, who later became vicar of the Archdiocese of Sibiu and then bishop of Maramureș in 1938, and Dr. Silviu Dragomir. At the beginning of the twentieth century, George Aramă's *Homiletics* (Bucharest, 1913) was used as a textbook.⁴²

Although Metropolitan Ioan Mețianu was advanced in age when he assumed leadership in Sibiu, he undertook several canonical visits to parishes and consecrated churches, regularly delivering missionary sermons that had a special impact upon his listeners. With regard to his missionary activity, mention must also be made of his permanent concern for the confessional schools, which he visited frequently and which, through his pastoral care, came to benefit from libraries established through his efforts. He is also responsible for the introduction of priestly conferences, which also aimed at the homiletic and catechetical improvement of the clergy in a decisive era for raising the religious and cultural level of the Romanians in Transylvania⁴³. His initiatives and efforts to keep alive the national consciousness and the sense of belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church among the faithful of his diocese at the beginning of the twentieth century had beneficial results, especially in the difficult context of the growing pressures exerted by the Budapest government to restrict the religious rights of the Romanians. All his pastoral-administrative actions were directed toward missionary work, since, in addition to all the previously mentioned difficulties, one must also take into account the intensification of Evangelical Protestant missionary activity, with visible pastoral effects in some parishes.

Similarly to the two Theological Institutes in Banat, the students of the Sibiu Institute carried out, under the guidance of their professors, numerous cultural-missionary activities, such as cultural and artistic programs in which, alongside poems or carols, occasional addresses were delivered, some of which were published in *Telegraful Român*. From a missionary point of view, the participation of the theology students' choir in countless church consecrations must be emphasized, the musical concerts performed being received by the faithful with particular joy. During that period, while he was in Sibiu as secretary of *Telegraful Român* and deacon at the metropolitan cathedral, the future bishop of Arad, Grigorie Comșa, noted in this newspaper that the "Andrei Șaguna" Reading Society, which every year organized cultural gatherings on the anniversary of the great Șaguna's death, had great merit in the sound preparation of the future missionaries of Romanianism.⁴⁴

⁴² See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 30.

⁴³ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 71.

⁴⁴ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 32.

A decisive stage in the activity of this theological school came after the achievement of the Great Union, more precisely after 1921, when the newly elected metropolitan of Transylvania, Nicolae Bălan, raised the old Theological Institute of Sibiu to the rank of academy, under the name “Andreian Theological Academy,” with the right to issue bachelor’s degrees in 1943, later becoming a University-Level Theological Institute in 1948⁴⁵. Aware of the imperative of thoroughly educating and training future priests, Metropolitan Bălan asked theology professors “to raise the level of the students’ training, and the students to raise their work to the level of the new requirements.”⁴⁶

With regard to the development of missionary preaching, which increased simultaneously in all the dioceses of Transylvania and Banat after the First World War, the metropolitan of Sibiu distinguished himself through numerous substantial and persuasive addresses of an apologetic-missionary character, delivered on the occasion of canonical visits and church consecrations, as well as during visits made to schools and high schools in Transylvanian towns. During the Second World War, the metropolitan’s missionary activity stands out in liberated Bessarabia and in military hospitals, where he was accompanied by other hierarchs and numerous clergy.⁴⁷

Another desideratum of Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan was fulfilled by sending the best-prepared students, with scholarships, to universities in the West; they later became eminent professors of the theological academy or high-ranking hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Among the teaching staff who taught Homiletics were Gheorghe Secaş, Spiridon Căndeia, and Dumitru Călugăr, and, for one academic year, 1938–1939, Professor Liviu Stan, later professor of Ecclesiastical Law.⁴⁸

Last but not least, inspired by the exceptional pastoral-missionary work of their metropolitan, the Sibiu students of the interwar period voluntarily engaged in a series of missionary projects, such as collecting funds for the needy and offering donations for the renovation of churches and monasteries. These actions were also stimulated by the activity of the professors of homiletics, through whom they discovered the classical models of pastoral ministry represented by the great Hierarchs of Orthodoxy.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 50.

⁴⁶ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 33.

⁴⁷ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 110–16.

⁴⁸ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 34–35.

⁴⁹ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 38.

3.2. The Oradea Theological Academy and Practical Missionary Training

The second theological school in Transylvania, in chronological order, was that of the Diocese of Oradea. It was founded in 1923 through the persistent efforts of Bishop Roman Ciorogariu, who had previously led the Theological-Pedagogical Institute of Arad, first as a Theological Institute and then as a four-year Theological Academy. His teaching experience in Arad helped Bishop Roman organize the new institution of theological education impeccably, combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Thus, the theology students “were scheduled to preach and sing at the ‘Sunday School’ in Oradea, so that they might become accustomed to the art of oratory and missionary work, both so necessary in pastoral activity. In order to increase their theological knowledge, a series of conferences were organized within religious, catechetical, and pastoral circles.”⁵⁰

Missionary preaching was cultivated and promoted by Bishop Roman, even though, due to his age and health, he carried out only a small number of church consecrations and canonical visits. He was deeply concerned with strengthening the preaching activity of the priests in his diocese, asking the clergy to catechize pupils and to preach at services held outside churches, seeking to provide a catechetical and pastoral response to the missionary activity of Evangelical Protestant groups. Mention must be made of his initiative, materialized in the appearance of the sermon collection entitled *Biblioteca amvonului* [*The Library of the Pulpit*], the establishment of *Biblioteca bunului creștin* [*The Library of the Good Christian*], and the editing of the *Calendarul diecezan* [*Diocesan Calendar*], all of which had the declared purpose of raising the theological and cultural level of priests and parishioners.⁵¹

A novel decision for academic theological education in Transylvania, taken by the Diocesan Council of Oradea, was the admission in 1929 of a female baccalaureate graduate as a student, on the grounds that young women theologians would become collaborators of priests in the religious education of the people. Later, all theological faculties and academies in the country would also admit girls, who would become religion teachers until 1948, a situation that would resume after 1990.

The first rector of this academy was the professor of New Testament and hierarch-vicar of the Diocese of Oradea, Andrei Magieru, who became bishop of Arad in 1935.⁵² As in the other institutions of theological education in

⁵⁰ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 42.

⁵¹ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 152–53.

⁵² Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 351.

Banat and Transylvania, the theology students of Oradea were also involved in missionary activities, especially through preaching. One such example was the “organization of ‘missionary vespers’ at the church in the city center, in which theology students participated with chants, conferences, and sermons.”⁵³ Along the same lines were the catechism classes held by theology students in primary schools during religion lessons, which enjoyed highly favorable results. Similarly to the other academies, the students of Oradea founded the “Academic Society for Collective Self-Education and Extracurricular Activity, Athanasius the Great,” under whose auspices they organized cultural-religious and missionary activities. A special impulse was given to theological education through the organization of the first congress of theology professors from Transylvania, held on April 19–20, 1935, focused on evaluating the methods of training the future clergy.⁵⁴

The Theological Academy of Oradea entered a higher stage of development beginning in 1936, through the appointment as bishop of the Sibiu professor Nicolae Popovici, who had a rich teaching and scholarly activity at the Theological Academy of Sibiu.⁵⁵ He was consistently concerned with the training of students, personally attending the examinations conducted by professors, and with increasing the number of books in the academy’s library. The missionary and catechetical activity of the students increased considerably, as did homiletic practice, the professors of homiletics being Priest Petre Procopovici and Priest Dimitrie Bodea.

With regard to Bishop Nicolae Popovici’s missionary preaching, it must be emphasized that it was characterized by breadth, deep theology, and a distinguished homiletic style. He delivered addresses not only at church consecrations, but also at the consecration of bells and roadside crosses, using every occasion to strengthen his flock in faith and moral life. A special place is occupied by his missionary preaching in Bessarabia and on the front, also occasioned by the reconsecration of churches. Later, he would undertake pastoral missions on the western front as well, encouraging officers and soldiers and praying for the wounded or the sick.⁵⁶

Following the Vienna Award in 1940, the Academy of Oradea had to be moved to Arad and Caransebeș for one year, then reunited in Timișoara through the goodwill of Bishop Vasile Lăzărescu, a former professor of theology at the Academy of Oradea.⁵⁷ There, the professors from Oradea continued their teaching

⁵³ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 43.

⁵⁴ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 44–45.

⁵⁵ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 531.

⁵⁶ See Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 179–89.

⁵⁷ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 332–33. On the sufferings of the Church in Transylvania, see Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. Compendiu*, 494–96.

activity during the difficult period of the war, publishing numerous studies and articles in the two Timișoara journals *Biserica Bănățeană* and *Duh și Adevăr*, while the students had the opportunity to preach in the city's churches and to catechize in primary schools.

Through its 28 classes of priests, the Theological Academy of Oradea made a major contribution to the training of clergy in the diocese, thanks to exceptional hierarchs and professors of high academic standing. Its re-establishment as a Faculty of Orthodox Theology within the University of Oradea reconnected the thread of academic formation for the priests of this diocese.

3.3. The Cluj Theological Academy and the Expansion of Missionary Outreach

The third theological school in Transylvania was the Theological Academy of Cluj, founded as a Theological Institute in 1924 and transformed into a four-year academy in 1925. The initiative for its establishment belonged to Bishop Nicolae Ivan, after his election in 1921 as bishop of the revived Diocese of Vad, Feleac, and Cluj.⁵⁸ Contemporaneous institutional sources confirm this orientation: the Academy's 1930 yearbook presents the school as an institution of higher religious and moral culture, founded through Bishop Nicolae Ivan's efforts in order to prepare future preachers of the Gospel for one of the most exposed regions of the country and to provide the eparchy with learned priests capable of serving its pastoral, religious, and national needs.⁵⁹ Recent studies devoted specifically to the history of Orthodox theological education in Cluj allow a more precise understanding of the institutional context in which this academy emerged. Iuliu-Marius Morariu has shown that the foundation of the Cluj theological school was not an isolated administrative act, but the result of repeated initiatives undertaken by Nicolae Ivan both before and after his installation as bishop. As early as 1919 and again in 1921, Ivan raised the question of establishing a theological institution for the new eparchy, while in 1924 he returned to this project from the position of diocesan hierarch. The establishment of the institute was supported by the Eparchial Consistory and by negotiations with the Ministry of Cults, the Ministry of Public Instruction, and the University of Cluj. In this sense, the Theological Institute of Cluj, opened in 1924 and raised in 1925 to the rank of Theological Academy with a four-year curriculum, must be understood as

⁵⁸ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 320.

⁵⁹ *Academia Teologică Ortodoxă Română, Cluj. Anuarul (1924–1930)* (Cluj: Tiparul Tipografiei Eparhiei Ortodoxe Române, 1930), 3, 7.

part of the broader ecclesiastical and cultural consolidation of the revived Diocese of Vad, Feleac, and Cluj.⁶⁰

From the first year of the academy's existence, the theological society "Orthodox Faith" was established, consisting of two sections: a literary section for internal activity and a second section, devoted to missionary outreach and music, for external activity. Under its auspices, the students, accompanied by theology professors, visited numerous parishes, delivering sermons during Vespers and then presenting cultural and artistic programs. Under the guidance of the professor of homiletics, Andrei Buzdug, fourth-year students preached every Saturday and Sunday in Saint Nicholas Church in Cluj, and within the homiletics seminar they were scheduled to deliver a cycle of sermons in the Heroes' Chapel in the city. All these preaching and missionary activities were extensively reflected in the journal *Renasterea*, which is still published today in Cluj.⁶¹ The activity of the student society also confirms that homiletic formation in Cluj was closely connected with practical missionary training. According to Morariu, the "Orthodox Faith" Academic Society was founded shortly after the opening of the institute, on October 24, 1924, and functioned as a framework for cultural, literary, and ecclesiastical initiatives. Its existence placed the Cluj academy in continuity with similar student societies attached to other Romanian theological schools, where extracurricular activity was understood as an extension of clerical formation. For the future priests trained in Cluj, preaching, public speaking, parish visits, cultural programs, and participation in ecclesiastical publications formed a single pedagogical environment, in which theological learning was gradually translated into missionary practice.⁶² The Academy's curriculum confirms the same connection between theological instruction and missionary practice. Homiletics was taught both theoretically and practically, "missionary guidance" was included among the subjects studied by third-year students, and fourth-year students were required to complete catechetical and homiletic exercises. The yearbook also records that, under the guidance of their professors, students undertook missionary visits to villages and towns of the eparchy, where they participated in liturgical services, delivered conferences and edifying sermons, offered concerts, and involved the theologians' choir.

⁶⁰ Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Învățământul teologic universitar în Eparhia Clujului în perioada interbelică," *Acta Mvsei Porolissensis* 34 (2012): 259–65; "Istoria facultății," Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj-Napoca, accessed June 28, 2026, <https://ot.ubbcluj.ro/istoric/>

⁶¹ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 53.

⁶² Morariu, "Învățământul teologic universitar," 263–64.

Preaching was therefore integrated into a wider program of pastoral-apologetic formation, in which classroom instruction, parish mission, ecclesiastical music, and public religious culture functioned together.⁶³

A specific feature of this theological academy was, at the initiative of Bishop Nicolae Ivan, the permission granted to students to attend courses at the Faculty of Letters or at other faculties in Cluj “in order to listen to the lectures of distinguished professors.” Likewise, the bishop organized the teaching of special courses for theology students by professors from the Agricultural Academy, in order to offer future priests an orientation toward occupations compatible with the priesthood.⁶⁴ Here one can observe Bishop Ivan’s extremely broad vision of priestly pastoral ministry, which would later be confirmed by the worthiness of the priests in rural areas, who would become models for their parishioners not only from a religious and moral point of view, but also as leading householders.

Missionary preaching was constantly in the attention and concerns of Bishop Nicolae Ivan, being prompted by the countless church consecrations and solemn dedications. Also belonging to the missionary sphere was the founding of the first monastery in the diocese, “Saint Anne” at Rohia, as well as the fact that missionary sermons were most often accompanied by donations from the high hierarchy. As a crowning point of his entire pastoral-missionary activity, it is mentioned that

“his most generous and impressive gesture was the offering of his entire movable and immovable fortune to the diocese, by testamentary disposition, which stipulated that the entire remaining patrimony should constitute the ‘Bishop Nicolae Ivan Foundation.’ From its income, one third was to be given as scholarships for eminent students at the Theological Academy of Cluj, another third for helping Orthodox pupils in the diocese who attended schools of all levels, and the final third for the maintenance of the cathedral.”⁶⁵

In 1936, a new stage opened in the development of the Theological Academy of Cluj, owing to the installation of the new bishop, Nicolae Colan, an eminent professor and rector of the Theological Academy of Sibiu until that time. A prominent personality of ecclesiastical, theological, and cultural life in Transylvania, Bishop Nicolae Colan revitalized both the teaching activity of the academy and the spiritual and missionary preparation of the theology students. Other foundations of his were a School of Church Singers and an Orthodox high

⁶³ *Academia Teologică Ortodoxă Română, Cluj. Anuarul (1924–1930)*, 26–27, 31–32, 34–35, 40–41.

⁶⁴ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 54.

⁶⁵ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 211.

school in Cluj, some of whose graduates later chose to be admitted to the academy.⁶⁶ This development continued the institutional direction established under Bishop Nicolae Ivan. Morariu emphasizes that Ivan's achievement lay not only in founding a school for the preparation of future clergy, but also in integrating theological education into the wider academic and cultural life of Cluj. The presence of professors connected with both theological and university milieus, the concern for a solid curriculum, and the effort to secure ecclesiastical control over priestly formation reveal the academy's double function: it served the pastoral needs of the diocese and contributed to the consolidation of Orthodox presence within the intellectual life of interwar Cluj. Under Nicolae Colan, this legacy acquired renewed importance, especially in the difficult context of the late interwar period and the Second World War.⁶⁷

A special chapter in his pastoral activity was missionary preaching, connected, as in the case of the other Transylvanian hierarchs, with church consecrations and canonical visits. The exceptional quality of these addresses, due to his high theological training, was noted by all his contemporaries. It must be mentioned that his pastoral-missionary activity took place under extremely difficult conditions, since "he remained the only hierarch in occupied Transylvania, but continued with the same apostolic zeal to descend into the midst of his flock."⁶⁸

The concrete measures taken to strengthen preaching activity in churches were few in number, but ten practical pieces of advice for priests have remained from him, concerning the content, form, and manner of delivering sermons, which were published in the Cluj journal *Renașterea*, nos. 27–28, in 1940.⁶⁹

The high hierarch of Cluj, who later returned to Sibiu as metropolitan after the abolition of the Theological Institute of Cluj in 1952, was successfully assisted in Cluj by the new rector of the Academy, Professor Liviu Munteanu, who became deeply involved, with great self-sacrifice, in the theological and spiritual formation of the students. Under his wise leadership, "the internal and external activity of the students was maintained during this period as well, as they carried out extensive religious propaganda and acquired solid homiletic training."⁷⁰ During the difficult period of the war, the theology students acted as true missionaries, some of them being enlisted in the army, many sacrificing themselves for country and faith.

⁶⁶ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 153–54.

⁶⁷ Morariu, "Învățământul teologic universitar," 264–65.

⁶⁸ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 229.

⁶⁹ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 233.

⁷⁰ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 55.

In 1948, the Theological Academy of Cluj was transformed into the Romanian Orthodox Theological Institute, with the same priest-professor Liviu Munteanu as rector, a man of vast theological culture and prodigious academic activity.⁷¹ Through his direct involvement, the theology students became good preachers, and not only through words, but also through deeds. One such example was “their participation in the funeral of a Greek-Catholic theology student from Blaj, impressing those present through this sign of brotherhood among clergy. A gesture worthy of all praise was the effort made to print the Bible for the blind.”⁷²

In place of the Theological Institute, abusively abolished by the communist regime in 1952, an Orthodox Theological Seminary was established in 1955, which carried forward the tradition of theological education, even at this intermediate level. The return to university level took place, as throughout Transylvania and Banat, after 1990; in 1992–1993 the institute was integrated into Babeş-Bolyai University as the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Cluj-Napoca. Today, the faculty continues the institutional tradition inaugurated in 1924, offering undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral programs within the university framework.⁷³ More recent accounts of the faculty’s development emphasize the continuity between theological education, liturgical formation, homiletic practice, and pastoral-missionary responsibility: the daily spiritual program includes short homiletic meditations, sermons delivered by students under the guidance of the professor of Homiletics and Catechetics, and catechetical activities connected with the liturgical life of the faculty and the metropolitan cathedral.⁷⁴ The Transylvanian academies broadened this model by connecting homiletic formation with cultural leadership, social education, and the pastoral management of interconfessional relations. In Sibiu, Oradea, and Cluj, missionary preaching was shaped not only through classroom instruction, but also through student societies, episcopal initiatives, ecclesiastical publications, parish missions, and public acts of religious and national solidarity.

⁷¹ Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, 432.

⁷² Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 56–57.

⁷³ Cosmin Trif, “Învățământul teologic universitar ortodox în Cluj-Napoca, din 1924 până azi,” *Radio Renașterea*, accessed June 28, 2026, <https://radiorenasterea.ro/invatamantul-teologic-universitar-ortodox-in-cluj-napoca-din-1924-pana-azi/>; “Istoria facultății,” *Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj-Napoca*, accessed June 28, 2026, <https://ot.ubbcluj.ro/istoric/>.

⁷⁴ Teofil Tia, “O facultate teologică «world-class», de reper internațional – Învățământul teologic ortodox universitar clujean în primul deceniu al păstoririi Înaltpreasfințitului Părinte Arhiepiscop și Mitropolit Andrei,” in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj-Napoca* 25 (2021–2022): 226–260, esp. 229–230.

4. The Army Diocese

Although not confined to Banat and Transylvania, the Army Diocese is relevant to this study because its first hierarchs emerged from the same Transylvanian theological and ecclesiastical milieu and extended this homiletic culture into the military sphere. The institutionalization of missionary preaching was not limited to diocesan and academic settings. The Army Diocese extended the same homiletic and pastoral logic into the military sphere, where preaching combined religious instruction, moral encouragement, and patriotic mobilization. Between 1921 and 1948, the bishops of the Army and the military priests under their guidance contributed to the development of a specific form of missionary preaching addressed to officers and soldiers.

The first two bishops, Justinian Teculescu and Ioan Stroia, were originally from Transylvania, had theological studies in Sibiu, and organized the Romanian military clergy during the interwar period. On the occasion of visits made to various garrisons, the two hierarchs delivered occasional addresses of a missionary character to Romanian officers and soldiers, speaking to them about faith in God and love for nation and country. Bishop Ioan Stroia “was the first military hierarch to consecrate military churches and chapels, occasions on which he delivered countless addresses with great resonance in the souls of his listeners.”⁷⁵

The third and last bishop of the Army, Partenie Ciopron, doctor of theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cernăuți, was originally from Moldavia and led the military clergy during the campaigns of the Second World War. In addition to founding the military journal *Arma cuvântului* [*The Weapon of the Word*] and the *Calendarul ostașului* [*The Soldier's Calendar*], he drew up “a unified plan of activity for all active priests of the army and in all areas of military pastoral ministry.”⁷⁶

Bishop Partenie accompanied the Romanian army throughout the military campaign through numerous visits by which he encouraged the soldiers and military priests, as well as through the pastoral letters sent on the great feasts, pastoral-missionary actions with a powerful spiritual and patriotic impact.

In 1948, the communist regime abolished the Army Diocese, depriving officers and soldiers of the beneficial presence of the Orthodox Church among them. Since 1994, religious assistance has been resumed in the Romanian Army, with positions for military priests being filled by competition and coordinated

⁷⁵ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 242.

⁷⁶ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 245–46.

by one of the patriarchal vicar-bishops. The Army Diocese thus extended the culture of missionary preaching beyond parish and academic contexts, adapting it to the moral and patriotic needs of military life.

5. Missionary Themes and Homiletic Functions

On the basis of the institutional and pastoral material examined above, several recurring missionary themes and homiletic functions may be identified. First, missionary preaching had a doctrinal and apologetic function, seeking to clarify Orthodox teaching in relation to Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Greek-Catholic, and secularizing influences. Second, it had a moral and catechetical function, urging the faithful toward repentance, sacramental life, family responsibility, parish participation, and resistance to religious indifference. Third, it had an ecclesial function, strengthening the bond between clergy, faithful, parish, school, and diocese. Fourth, it had a national and cultural function, especially in relation to the Great Union, the defense of Romanian confessional schools, the Vienna Award, the Second World War, and the pastoral care of Romanian communities outside the country. These functions show that missionary preaching operated as a pastoral mechanism through which Orthodox identity, religious instruction, and communal solidarity were continuously reinforced.

6. Conclusion

Missionary preaching in Banat and Transylvania during the first half of the twentieth century emerged from a dense institutional network composed of theological academies, episcopal initiatives, student societies, diocesan publications, and pastoral responses to political and confessional change. The theological schools and academies, together with the hierarchs who guided the destinies of the dioceses in these two Romanian provinces, occupied a central position within this network. Although the historical periods differed — before and after the Great Union of 1918, during the interwar period, and during the Second World War — the pastoral and educational activity of the metropolitans and bishops, together with the consistent development of theological education, favored the flourishing of ecclesiastical life in Banat and Transylvania.

One of the causes underlying this positive evolution of ecclesiastical life was certainly the theological, preaching, and cultural legacy of Saint Metropolitan

Andrei Țaguna.⁷⁷ His example as a distinguished and devoted shepherd of souls, with sustained concerns for the promotion of preaching by all priests in the diocese — whom he urged through his pastoral letters to catechize the faithful people — was taken up by all the hierarchs of Transylvania and Banat who followed him. The circulars addressed to archpriests and priests contained appeals to the clergy not to deprive the faithful of spiritual nourishment on Sundays and feast days, as is evident from the following example: “I request the whole of my beloved priesthood to strive to compose and deliver ecclesiastical addresses, that is, to teach and enlighten our parishioners.”⁷⁸ In order to encourage priests in their preaching and catechetical activity, the great Transylvanian metropolitan asked them to send him their ecclesiastical addresses so that they might be printed and published.

Another challenge taken into account by Saint Andrei Țaguna was the intense preaching activity of the other Christian confessions in Transylvania and Banat, which he wished to counteract; Orthodox believers could resist proselytizing actions only through a thorough knowledge of the right faith. This also explains the fact that “preaching activity was more cultivated in Transylvania, owing to the proximity of the Protestant Churches, in which, as is known, liturgical simplifications left preaching in the central place, creating a true missionary competition materialized through the delivery of well-composed sermons, which were published in the journals of the time and in volumes of sermons.”⁷⁹

Through all the ecclesiastical reforms he carried out, among which the religious and moral education of the Romanians was cultivated and promoted with great diligence, he sought “through sermons to instruct the people in accordance with the virtues of the Christian faith (...) In this regard, a priority was the establishment of hundreds of schools, the convincing of parents to send their children to study, a salutary effort for raising the nation from the darkness of ignorance.”⁸⁰ On this solid foundation appeared and were formed the hierarchs, clergy, and theology professors who succeeded, often under adverse conditions, in training entire generations of priests capable of responding to Protestant confessional influences and, later, Evangelical Protestant confessional influences, in order to explain through sermons the truths of Orthodox faith and

⁷⁷ Mircea Păcurariu, *O viață închinată Bisericii și neamului. Sfântul Ierarh Andrei Țaguna* [A life dedicated to the Church and the nation: Saint Hierarch Andrei Țaguna] (Sibiu: Editura Andreiana, 2012), chaps. 7–8, 210–378.

⁷⁸ Păcurariu, *O viață închinată Bisericii și neamului*, 346.

⁷⁹ Beldiman, *Predica în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Muntenia în secolul al XX-lea*, 46.

⁸⁰ Beldiman, *Predica în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Muntenia în secolul al XX-lea*, 41.

morality, to shape the souls of Orthodox believers, and to make them defenders of Orthodox and Romanian values.

Also as part of the Şagunian tradition, it must be mentioned that all the Transylvanian hierarchs were concerned with printing books of sermons for priests, containing interpretations of the Sunday and feast-day Gospels, as well as catechisms or books of instruction, so that their sermons would be biblically and patristically grounded, with examples from the lives of the saints and illustrated by stories of moral character.⁸¹ The pastoral letters addressed to the clergy on the great ecclesiastical feasts or on special occasions, as well as the addresses delivered on the occasion of the consecration of churches, are considered by specialists to have a pronounced missionary character, because they contained exhortations, advice, and requests for the defense of the Orthodox faith, the catechizing of believers, and a pastoral response to the proselytizing activity of other confessions. Along the same missionary line may also be placed the pastoral letter signed by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan and the other four Transylvanian and Banat bishops in 1936, through which they expressed an attitude of rejection and condemnation of the totalitarianism spreading from the East.⁸²

In this ecclesiastical-national context, the Romanian Orthodox Church in Banat and Transylvania

“paid special attention also to the theory of preaching, publishing in the pages of ecclesiastical journals, alongside pastoral letters, sermons, and occasional addresses of the hierarchs and clergy, a series of articles and studies, systematically offering homiletic guidance for fruitful preaching. The professors of the theological academies carried out a rich scholarly activity by publishing specialized works, many of them containing didactic and practical references for the improvement of preaching activity.”⁸³

Father Professor Miron Erdei of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Oradea, to whom the preceding observations belong, offers numerous examples of these specialized works in his two books devoted to the history of preaching in Transylvania and Banat.⁸⁴ “Thanks to these concerns, ecclesiastical preaching recorded visible progress, both in content and in form, without

⁸¹ Păcurariu, *O viață închinată Bisericii și neamului*, 354.

⁸² Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 168.

⁸³ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 337.

⁸⁴ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat*, 196–205; Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 337–57.

distancing itself from Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, but rather updating them, thus preserving Romanian preaching within the bimillennial channel of Christian tradition.”⁸⁵

Romanian Orthodox missionary preaching in this period should therefore be understood as a form of ecclesial formation, cultural leadership, and communal consolidation. Its development was fully connected with the evolution of ecclesiastical life as a whole, while the preaching activity of Orthodox hierarchs and priests contributed to the defense of Orthodox faith and morality, to the cultivation of national consciousness and linguistic unity, and to the cultural and social advancement of Romanians in these provinces. The missionary-apologetic character of this preaching reveals an ascending trajectory in which theological education, episcopal leadership, and pastoral responsibility converged.

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⁸⁵ Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Transilvania*, 357.

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