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## **The Religious Education of Parents and Children During the Last Century in the Archdiocese of Arad**

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### **Abstract**

The Orthodox Romanians from Arad Eparchy, fought since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century for education in general, and for confessional education in particular, in the Romanian language, as we can notice out of the actions undertaken by Arad's Bishops, concretized in founding: the Pedagogical Institute (Preparandia) in the year 1912, the Theological Institute in the year 1822, the weekly newspapers: "Biserica și Școala" (1877), "Speranța" (1869) and "Lumina" (1873), of the diocesan typography (1879), of the confessional schools, and of the Civilian School for Girls (1895) etc.

Deepening the proposed theme, it represents the highlighting of the religious education received from parents, and through the liturgical and pastoral activities of the parishes, but also from the education that takes place through school and Church regarding the teaching of the Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Immediately after the Great Union from the 1st of December 1918 was accomplished, the representatives of the schools from Transylvania decided in a Congress, that the state education and the confessional education to be undertaken in the Romanian language. The Metropolitan Synod of Transylvania informed the believers, the schools, and the teachers, that the teaching of the study objects will be done only in Romanian language.

During the between wars period, the leadership of the Arad Eparchy, through the

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local meetings, it debated and promulgated decisions regarding the functioning of the confessional schools, of the religious education in schools, and of the theological education.

Once the communist regime instituted in our country (1948) it was disbanded the Orthodox Theological Academy of Arad, and the theological education in schools was excluded. It remained the catechetical activity in the eparchy's parishes and the missionary-educative actions of the eparchial choirs.

After communism's falling, in the year 1991, it has been reinstated the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Ilarion V. Felea" from Arad and it was founded the Orthodox Theological Seminary (1949), schools contributing to the formation of priests, religion professors, and spiritual guides.

The religious education of the children is done during the religious classes in schools, but also through catechesis classes and educative-churchly activities organized by the Arad's parishes. The parishes, the schools, the religious publications, as also the Church's mass-media, they have substantially contributed to the religious education of the parents and of the children in a changing society.

### **Keywords**

Arad, Church, children, education, school.

## **I. Introduction**

In the "Homage Year for the Pastoral Care of Parents and Children" in the Romanian Patriarchate, I found it appropriate to present a synthesis of the religious education of parents and children in the Diocese of Arad, in the last century for the International Symposium "Christian Education in a Pluralistic Culture: How Children Grow in Today's World".

The education or pastoral care of parents and children in a diocese can be approached from several perspectives: - the pastoral care of believers in parishes; - pastoral education of young people through theological schools (seminars, faculties); - pastoral education through religion classes and youth activities.

Through any type of education - pastoral care we must learn how to get closer to God. Through the religious education of parents and children, the Church wants to carry out the process of man getting closer or returning to God.

In history, man got near or moved away from the Creator, but if we think about the historical moments that parents and children went through in the Diocese of Arad in the twentieth century we consider four periods:

1. The Diocese under foreign occupation; 2. The interwar period; 3. The period of the communist regime; 4. Education or pastoral care in times of religious freedom.

Regarding the educational activity of parents and children, both priests and teachers of theology and religion took into account three considerations: 1. Respect for human dignity as the image of God; 2. The eternal purpose of the human person; 3. Respect for free will.

Education also addressed the body and the soul at once, as a creation of God.

In the educational process, it was used the Word of God (John I), following the teaching of the Church which is useful for an authentic Christian life preparatory for eternal life.

The cultivation of virtues through religious education confirms the exhortations of Holy Scripture which says, "The word of God is the source of wisdom" (Sirach 1, 5). Cultivating the truth of faith among mature parents, but also young people and children, involves the application of several rules or methodological elements related to the specifics of the educated category in a historical context.

The factors involved in religious education are inspired by the Teacher of the world, Jesus Christ the Saviour, the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers as teachers of the world, as St. Apostle Paul rightly instructs his disciple St. Apostle Timothy, saying: "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (I Tim. 4, 16).

## **II. Religious education of parents and children in the diocese of Arad - historical landmarks and interferences**

At the turn of the 19th - 20th centuries, the diocese of Arad was in a permanent struggle to affirm the Romanian national identity and the Orthodox faith, so that hierarchs, clergy and many personalities of socio-political life were involved in the process of Romanianization of education and of administrative institutions, as well as the acquisition of the freedom of the Romanian people.

The re-establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania (1864, based in Sibiu), under the pastorate of the Holy Hierarch Andrei

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Șaguna, the establishment of confessional schools in parishes, the scholarly and educational activity of Bishops Ioan Mețianu (1875-1898), Iosif Goldiș (1899-190) were placed on the existence of two Romanian schools in Arad: *Preparandia*, established in 1812, and *The theological-pedagogical institute* in 1822, and the process of Romanianization of the Diocesan Centre and the archpresbyteries of the Diocese of Arad, dominated by the presence of the Serbian Orthodox clergy.

Given a limited training and few means for pastoral care and education (I mean books, magazines and textbooks in Romanian, which were very few), the clergy in the parishes strove to spread the teaching of the Church, to preach and catechize the faithful in order to the understand and administrate the Holy Mysteries and especially the Mysteries of Baptism, Confession and Marriage.

The diocese of Arad took special care of the Romanian schools, even though many of the laws from Budapest (for example Appony Albert's Law of 1907) were against teaching in Romanian.

“Based on the consistory and synodal dispositions, starting with 1902, religion was introduced in all confessional schools, the priests having the obligation to teach it. In 1917-1918, out of 280 cases, in 183 religion was taught by priests and in 97 by the teacher”<sup>1</sup>.

However, the subject of religion has not been taught in all schools, or the hours required for this subject have not always been provided in the school programs fairly.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, denominational schools were well organized and had a special educational capacity.

In the school year 1902-1903, there were 423 teachers, 40,470 children between 6 and 12 years, 14,315 children between 12 and 15 years, children reviewed, of which 26,229 (6-12 years) and 5,187 (12-15 years) attended school. In the school year 1906-1907, there were 388 teachers, 38,783 children (6-12 years), 8,233 (12-15 years) were enrolled, out of 42,507 (6-12 years) and 17,385 (12-15 years) children reviewed<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Pr. Dr. Paul VEȘA, *Episcopia Aradului. Istorie. Cultură. Mentalități (1706-1918)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Dr. Vasile POPEANGĂ, “Dezvoltarea Școlilor populare românești pe teritoriul Episcopiei Aradului”, in: *Episcopia Aradului. Istorie, Viață culturală, Monumente de artă*, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 1989, p.197.

Romanian parishes have largely payed the costs of supporting confessional schools, given that the Hungarian state did not support Romanian and Orthodox education.

During the unfavourable conditions before the First World War, “Romanian national schools decreased from 428 in 1908 to 414 in 1911”<sup>3</sup>.

Professor Roman Ciorogariu, the future bishop of Oradea (1921-1936), had a very important role in supporting the Romanian confessional education, who was the director of the *Pedagogical - Theological Institute in Arad* for 16 years (1901-1917).

A good supporter of Arad theological education from the interwar period was the Rev. professor Teodor Botiș (1873-1940), who led the *Theological Institute* (1917-1938) and campaigned for its transformation into an *Academy* (1927) with four years of studies: at the same time, he was editor of the diocesan papers “Biserica și Școala” and “Calendarul Diecezan”.

After the start of the First World War, school attendance decreased, because many teachers were mobilized, so that “in the school year 1916-1917, out of 293 permanent teachers in the Diocese of Arad, 120, i.e. 40.95% were in active military service”<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, “the educational capacity of the Romanian school decreased due to the hospitalization (in camps) of some priests and teachers, who were considered dangerous by the state authorities for the activity they carried out in the Romanian villages”<sup>5</sup>.

As a material support for the Romanian and Orthodox education, from the Diocesan Centre of Arad, through the care of Bishop Ioan Mețianu the building to the right of the Old Cathedral “Saint John the Baptist” was built between 1875-1876, where the diocesan *Theological Institute* functioned for a time (1876-1884), after “Preparandia” and “Theology” merged into a single Institute in 1876<sup>6</sup>.

The same bishop Ioan Mețianu took care of erecting another building for the Institute, between 1884-1885, where the Theological-Pedagogical

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Gheorghe CIUHANDU, *Școala noastră poporală și darea culturală*, Arad, 1918, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Vasile POPEANGĂ, “Dezvoltarea Școlilor populare românești...”, p.199.

<sup>5</sup> Vasile POPEANGĂ, “Dezvoltarea Școlilor populare românești...”, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Preot Prof. Dr. Mircea PĂCURARIU, “Învățământul teologic la Arad”, in: *Episcopia Aradului. Istorie, Viață culturală, Monumente de artă*, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 1989, pp. 158-159.

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Institute functioned, then the Theological Institute, the Theological Academy during the years 1885-1948, and since 1996, the current Faculty of Orthodox Theology.

Also, through the care of the Diocesan Centre and with the consistent support of the Bessarabian Vasile Stroescu (1845-1926), the building for the *Civil School for Girls* was built next to the episcopal residence in 1912. The great patron Stroescu (the first President of the Parliament of Greater Romania) also supported the construction of churches, so that Bishop Ioan Ignatie Papp (1902-1925) consecrated 60 new churches<sup>7</sup>, who contributed to the religious education of the faithful by the priests' serving. The distinguished philanthropist and supporter of Romanian education built and repaired 100 schools and 200 churches from his own funds approximately.

Most of the graduates of the *Theological-Pedagogical Institute* entered the clergy, contributing to the development of church life, to enlightening the people through worship, preaching, spiritual events and making the books and magazines published in the diocese available for reading.

Along with the hierarchs, the priests also militated and fought for the achievement of the unity of the Romanian nation from December 1, 1918, thereby hoping to improve the conditions of service, education and mission in the parishes.

After 1919, several graduates of the Theological Institute from Arad (...) attended the courses of secondary teachers training (Religion, Romanian language, History and other disciplines), organized at the University of Cluj. They became teachers at various theoretical and commercial high schools or at normal (pedagogical) schools, thus bringing their contribution to the Romanianization of Romanian education and to the development of national culture after the achievement of our state unity<sup>8</sup>.

"Preparandia" was founded in 1812 and had an important role in Romanian secular and religious education through the efforts of one of the founders, the priest Dimitrie Țichindeal (1775-1818), but also of the skilled teachers who advocated for an education in Romanian.

This school trained many generations of teachers, professors and priests, contributing substantially to the education of Romanians in the

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<sup>7</sup> Prot. Dr. Gheorghe LIȚIU, "Istoria Eparhiei Aradului", in: *Episcopia Aradului. Istorie...*, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Mircea PĂCĂRARIU, "Învățământul teologic la Arad", p. 165.

Arad region and to the affirmation of the Romanian identity and the Orthodox faith.

The unification of *Preparandia* and the *Orthodox Theological Institute*, then the transformation into a *Normal Orthodox School* under the patronage of the Diocese of Arad and other changes in the status of the school, led to personal and institutional disputes, but also to high or less successful school stages<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the activity of the Theological Institute from Arad, the historical evolution in the field was different, because in 1919 the former “Preparandia” (pedagogical section) separated becoming the Normal Orthodox School, with 8 classes; then the Institute will become a Theological Academy with 4 years of study, starting from 1927 until 1948, when it will be abolished and transformed into the “Clergy Guidance Centre” (1948-1952), dependent on the institute of University degree from Sibiu<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, with all the insistence of Bishop Andrei Magieru, the *Theological Academy* ceases to exist during the communist regime, after more than 120 years of activities, even if the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided that a Theological Institute of university degree operate in Arad, Bucharest, Iasi, Sibiu<sup>11</sup>. Some of the teachers who strongly supported the theological education of Arad continued to carry out teaching activities at the *Clergy Guidance Centre*, as following: Rev. professors Ilarion V. Felea (Supervisor) and Petre Deheleanu, and others went to the Theological Institutes in Sibiu and Cluj.

The educational-theological role of the Theological Academy in the spiritual-cultural context of the twentieth century was also shaped by the collaboration of professors of theology with the publications of the time, such as: “Biserica și Școala”, “Semănătorul” (Nicolae Iorga,, Ion

<sup>9</sup> See Doru BOGDAN, *Preparandia din Arad în conștiința cultural-istorică a epocii sale 1812-2012*, Editura Nigredo, Arad, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Mihail-Simion SĂSĂUJAN, “Desființarea Academiei Teologice (1948) și Centrul de îndrumare a clerului din Arad (1948-1952)”, in: Pr. prof. dr. Cristinel IOJA, pr. lect. dr. Filip ALBU, arhid. asist. drd. Tiberiu ARDELEAN (COORD.), *Teologia în Universitate: 25 de ani de asumare a tradiției, de formare teologică și cercetare științifică în Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă din Arad*, Editura Astra Museum, Sibiu, 2016, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Mihail-Simion SĂSĂUJAN, “Desființarea Academiei Teologice...”, p. 46.

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Agârbiceanu, Ovidiu Ghibu, Lucian Blaga et al.), publications in collections “Biblioteca păstorului ortodox”, “Biblioteca Semănătorul”, “Biblioteca creștinului ortodox”, in which hierarchs and theologians wrote, like T.M. Popescu, Irineu Mihălcescu, Grigorie Comșa, Tit Simedrea etc<sup>12</sup>.

### III. Religious education of young people through the Faculty of Orthodox Theology

The Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Arad will be re-established after the fall of the communist regime, in 1991 and operates within the State University “Aurel Vlaicu” in Arad<sup>13</sup>. With a professionally growing teaching staff and a firm commitment to theological education, the Faculty of Theology reopened with the blessing of His Eminence Father Timotei, Archbishop of Arad, has developed specializations for the training of future priests, teachers and specialized staff: Pastoral Theology, Theology - Letters (1992), Theology - Didactics (3 years), Theology - Social Work (1997/3 years), Theology - English (2001), Theology - History (2004); at the same time, master’s and doctoral studies and a series of publications were developed, as following: “Teologia”, “Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă”, “Calea Mântuirii” and the magazine “Studia Theologica et Historica Aradensia” (publications of the “Center for Theological - Historical and Pastoral - Missionary Prognosis Studies”), volumes of symposia and conferences, but also of the Doctoral School<sup>14</sup>.

The preparation and education of students in the spirit of the Saviour Jesus Christ Church teaching and of the secular sciences contributed to the continuation of priestly service in the parishes of the diocese, to the provision of teachers for state education for the discipline of Religion and mostly to the religious formation of Arad.

According to the statistics of the Faculty of Theology, in this educational unit 59 students (1991-1995) began the educational process, and between

<sup>12</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Cristinel IOJA, “Învățământul Teologic Ortodox din Arad. Itinerar. Forme. Perspective”, in: Pr. prof. univ. dr. Cristinel IOJA, protos. lect. univ. dr. Nicolae TANG (coord.), *Învățământul Teologic Ortodox din Arad. Itinerar. Forme. Perspective*, ediție bilingvă, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, Arad, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Cristinel IOJA, “Învățământul Teologic Ortodox din Arad...”, pp. 96-120.

<sup>14</sup> Cristinel IOJA, “Învățământul Teologic Ortodox din Arad...”, pp. 96-120.



the years 1991-2019, 1258 students graduated (only the specialization Pastoral Theology).

Since 1996, the Faculty of Theology has returned home, in the building built and destined for it since 1885 by Bishop Ioan Meșianu. I mentioned this important historical-institutional journey because behind it is the sacrificial work of theology teachers, who educated and trained generations of priests, ministers of the Holy Altar, who in turn prepared the faithful for the Kingdom of God.

The educational programs were supported with great competence and completed by the publications of the faculty, mentioned above, to which is added the “Centre for Theological-Historical Studies and Pastoral-Missionary Prognosis”, which organizes various spiritual-scientific events of national and international character, of research and transmission of the Church and secular teaching.

In a multi-denominational climate, the *Faculty of Theology* and *Theological Seminary* (founded in 1994), together with parishes and monasteries, contribute to the pastoral care and education of believers in a missionary and apologetic spirit to preserve Orthodox values and promote them in the regional, Romanian and universal space.

#### **IV. Church and cultural publications and libraries and their role in the religious education of parents and children**

In the first half of the twentieth century, but also during the communist period, in addition to theology and confessional schools (religion in schools), a consistent contribution to the education of parents and children had the religious and theological publications of the Diocese of Arad, constituted in parish collections and libraries, of some associations, as following: “Biblioteca reuniunii învățătorilor arădeni”, “Librăria Diecezană” (1909), the cultural associations: “Asociația națională arădeană pentru cultura poporului român” (1862), “Societățile de lectură ale elevilor” (“Societatea de lectură a teologilor români din Arad”), “Societatea de lectură și coruri sătești” (the choir “Armonia” - 1919), “Reuniunea femeilor române arădene”, their activities being supported by the Diocese of Arad and by people who love the Church and culture<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Vasile POPEANGĂ, “Dezvoltarea Școlilor populare românești...”, pp. 205-222.

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Despite the restrictions of the Hungarian authorities, the number of ecclesiastical libraries in Arad increased in 1899 to 173, and in 1916 28 more parish or school libraries were established. Their purpose was “to make available to school youth, adults, and older believers, books and ‘good and useful writings’ of a religious, moral, cultural, and practical nature, but lightly written”<sup>16</sup>. These libraries, together with those of the diocese and the monasteries, supported the religious educational process and the spiritual-cultural formation of the faithful and monks of the diocese.

Regarding Church and cultural publications and libraries, readers’ interest in reading increases or decreases depending on the historical-social periods. For example,

“in 1916 there were 314 subscribers to the magazine «Biserica și Școala», at a diocese with 18 archparishes, 588 parishes and 600 schools. For this reason, the desire to increase the number of readers is justified, all the more «Biserica și Școala» was the official magazine of the diocese and kept the relation between the centre and the parishes under the jurisdiction of the Episcopate”<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to this magazine with a religious, moral and cultural theme, on the initiative of Bishop Ioan Meșianu in 1880 the “Diocesan Calendar” appeared, aiming at the religious and social information and education of the Romanians<sup>18</sup>.

The sectarian and neo-Protestant proselytism manifested in the twentieth century in Transylvania and especially in Arad, determined the hierarchs and clerics to take church-missionary measures by dynamizing the ministry, catechesis, sermons, publications and apologetic actions.

## **V. The educational role and service of hierarchs**

For example, bishop Ioan Papp (1902-1925) served the Church of the Diocese of Arad in conditions of suffering for the people, war and foreign

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<sup>16</sup> Paul VESA, *Episcopia Aradului...*, p. 365.

<sup>17</sup> Paul VESA, *Episcopia Aradului...*, p. 362.

<sup>18</sup> Paul VESA, *Episcopia Aradului...*, p. 363.

oppression, but also in the permanent struggle for unity of the Romanian people, also concerned with the education and schooling of Romanian children, supporting denominational schools and insisting on church actions, that “all children be ‘educated’, and be provided with religious education”<sup>19</sup>.

Also, bishop Grigorie Comșa (1915-1935) carried out a complex activity of religious edification of the faithful of Arad (he founded 43 new parishes; he built 41 churches, 11 chapels and supervised the repair of 179 churches)<sup>20</sup>, and combating sectarian proselytism (made over 379 canonical visits to parishes)<sup>21</sup>, through various actions and personal publications, over 90 books, brochures, magazines, pastorals, of which we mention: “Predici pentru toate duminicile de peste an și alte ocaziuni” (Arad, 1918), “Călăuza cunoașterii și combaterii sectelor” (București, 1925 și Arad, 1927), “Pastorația individuală și colectivă” (Arad, 1929); “Tineretul României” (Arad, 1932), work awarded by the Romanian Academy<sup>22</sup>.

The bishop’s concern for educating the youth and guiding the faithful materialized in the organization of the “Society of St. George” in 169 parishes, “Society of St. Catherine for high school students” in Arad and Timisoara, Association of the “Lord’s Army” in 72 parishes (for the guidance of the elderly), “Romanian Orthodox Brotherhood Society” (for the religious cultivation of the people of Arad), as well as the reorganization and activation of 117 cultural houses, and the organization of Church choirs in 171 parishes<sup>23</sup>.

## VI. An exceptional educator: Rev. professor Ilarion V. Felea

One of the most gifted priests and teachers of the Diocese of Arad in the twentieth century was Rev. professor Ilarion V. Felea. Priest in the Church,

<sup>19</sup> Miron ERDEI, “Viața și activitatea omiletică a Episcopului Ioan I. Papp al Aradului”, in: *Teologia*, VI (2002) 3-4, p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Miron ERDEI, “Viața și activitatea omiletică a Episcopului Dr. Grigorie Gh. Comșa al Aradului”, in: *Teologia*, VII (2003) 2, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Miron ERDEI, “Viața și activitatea omiletică a Episcopului Dr. Grigorie Gh. Comșa al Aradului”, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Filip ALBU, “Activitatea misionar-pastorală a Episcopului dr. Grigorie Comșa al Aradului (1925-1935)”, in: *Teologia*, XII (2008) 2, pp. 104-106.

<sup>23</sup> Miron ERDEI, “Viața și activitatea omiletică a Episcopului Dr. Grigorie Gh. Comșa al Aradului”, p. 30.

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professor and father at the department, missionary in society, Father Felea carried out a remarkable and necessary church activity in a changing and unfavourable historical context of the Church, by educating pupils and students, pastoring the faithful in the spirit of the Gospel of the Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the preface to the book *Religia Culturii (The Religion of the Culture)*, the priest Ilarion Felea wrote:

“I dedicated the work to students, educators and creators of cultural values, because in their souls ideas are met and kneaded more intensely, - in order to help them form a fruitful and beneficent conception about the world and about life, through their leaven, enlightened by the Christian religious ideal. The hope and future of the Church is the good education and instruction of the youth”<sup>24</sup>.

For many years Father Professor wrote the newspaper “Calea Mântuirii” (1935, 1943-1947) and the magazine “Biserica și Școala” (1939-1947), he collaborated with articles and studies in the other diocesan magazines in the country.

According to contemporaries, Father Ilarion was highly listened and valued by young people and believers in general (the testimony of Mother Patricia Codău, former abbess of the Arad-Gai monastery), for which the communist-atheist regime arrested him in 1958 and convicted him in 1959 to 20 years in prison. He died in the prison of Aiud<sup>25</sup>.

The reports of the Cultural and Education Sector, as well as the archival documents of the Diocese of Arad from 1918-1948, are relevant regarding the catechetical activity and the religious education the students, young people and parents benefited of.

“Association of Orthodox Clergy of Transylvania” (1919) was coordinated by professor, counsellor, scholar (60 books) and the Arad patriot Gheorghe Ciuhandu (1875-1947). It had a branch in Arad, and together with the other Church units and means it strengthened the religious

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<sup>24</sup> Ilarion V. FELEA, *Religia Culturii*, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 1994, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Preot Ilarion V. FELEA, *Spre Tabor*, Vol. I: *Pregătirea*, Editura Crigarux, Piatra Neamț, 2007, pp. 9-11.

spirit among the faithful and continued educational-cultural activity in Orthodox vision.

The priest Mihai Cosma proposed that religious conferences be organized within the *People's Academy* and under the patronage of the "Romanian Orthodox Women's Society". The Diocesan Consistory of Arad approved these activities to be implemented with the help of theology teachers, religion teachers and the Orthodox clergy for the benefit of all<sup>26</sup>.

## VII. The activity of the priests from the diocese of Arad for the religious education of young people

In a report addressed to the Arad Diocesan Council, the cultural counsellor Gheorghe Ciuhandu referred to the catechetical priests who met in the 13 archparishes and held the catechetical conferences in year 1927, according to the theme sent<sup>27</sup>. At the same time, having experience in pastoral care, the priests proposed an analytical plan of the religion textbooks.

Bishop Grigorie Comșa laid down certain tasks regarding the effectiveness of the archparish catechetical conferences, resumed after the war only in 1927, given that priests should find "the most appropriate means for religious education to penetrate as deeply as possible and be made as effectively, in the realm of the mind of youth and in the life of the Christian and the citizen of tomorrow"<sup>28</sup>.

Religious teachers, priest-teachers, and teachers were also urged to attend conferences in order to work together effectively in the process of religious education and Christian education.

In the report of the Cultural Sector to the Diocesan Assembly from 1932, Gheorghe Ciuhandu presented the situation of the catechesis of the youth in the Primary Schools and in the Secondary Schools: high schools, normal, professional and apprenticeship schools. Thus, there were a number of 43 teachers (school year 1930/31) and a number of 4053 pupils and students in all schools. Religious education is presented as a satisfying

<sup>26</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948, Colecție de documente, Studii introductive de Vasile POPEANGĂ and pr. Vasile POP, Note și comentarii Vasile Popeangă, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 2006, p. 143.*

<sup>27</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, pp. 289-292.

<sup>28</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, p. 293.

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activity (this includes the participation of students in the Sacrament of Confession and the Eucharist), in terms of the results<sup>29</sup>.

In a circular (no. 190/1933) addressed to the archpriests and priests of the diocese, Bishop Comșa informed them of the request of the “Association of Teachers from Arad County”, so that teachers could participate in the archpriest’s catechetical conferences. This is because the world war left its mark on the moral life of the faithful, and the priests together with the teachers to work on the development of religious education, on the Christian-moral education of young and old, given the lack of denominational schools<sup>30</sup>.

Another circular specified that in each “church commune there should be two societies, one for youth and one for adults”<sup>31</sup>.

We mention the fact that schoolteacher and teachers of religion had the duty to take students to Church to participate at the Holy Liturgy and the Sacrament of Confession and the Eucharist. Some schools had organized Church Chapels in their complex, where religious services were performed, for example: the “Elena Ghiba Birta” High School, the “Moise Nicoară” High School, the “Dimitrie Țichindeal” Normal School from Arad.

Throughout the interwar period there was a constant struggle of the Church (including the Diocese of Arad), for the re-establishment of confessional schools and for the preservation of religion in schools in all cycles of education, for students and young people to benefit from an adequate and necessary Christian-Orthodox education towards the formation of the good Christians and Romanians of the Church and of our nation<sup>32</sup>.

At the Diocesan Assembly in 1948, the counsellor of the cultural and educational sector reported that “the number of students catechized and examined at the end of the school year 1947 was thus presented in the archparishes: Arad 3459/ compared to last year when they were 3398; Buteni 2170/2310; Cermei: 1338/1364; Chișineu Criș: 2523/2344; Gurahonț: 1774/1801; Hălmațiu: 1214/1345; Ineu: 2213/2149; Radna: 1311/1817; Pecica: 987/120; Săvârșin: 938/879; Șiria: 1910/2024.

<sup>29</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, pp. 392-393.

<sup>30</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, pp. 400-404.

<sup>31</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, p. 470.

<sup>32</sup> *Episcopia Aradului în vremuri de răscruce istorică 1918-1948...*, pp. 659-668.

This statistic shows a decrease in the number of students catechized and examined in religion in most archparishes, in the conditions of establishing the communist regime in Romania and then excluding the discipline of religion from the school curriculum.

## VII. Conclusions

After 1989, the Romanian Orthodox Church took the necessary steps with the Ministry of Education for the discipline of Religion to be reintroduced in the curricula, taking into account the historical role of the Church in educating the Romanian people.

In a first stage, religion was taught in priestly schools, then the young graduates of the Faculty of Theology (from all specializations) and of Theological Seminaries were the ones who engaged in the educational-religious process carrying out didactic, catechetical, and religious activities until today, for the formation of students in School and Church.

In 2017, religious education in the Diocese of Arad was implemented with the support of 143 teachers of religion, of which 13 clergy and 93 full-time staff.

Of course, the religious education of children is achieved through the religion classes in schools, but also through catechesis classes and educational-church activities organized by the parishes of the Diocese of Arad. Parishes, schools, religious publications, and the Church's media have contributed and continue to contribute substantially to the religious education of parents and children in an ever-changing society.