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Father Tudor Demian – Confessor and Mentor (Spiritual Father) to Young People and Later to Theologians in Arad

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Abstract

Since the ethnogenesis of this nation, the Church and its ministers have had an existence intertwined with the Romanian people themselves, even in the most difficult times. For this reason, since the first century, the Romanian people have had a special inclination towards the Church. The priest was also the village teacher. Because of this, the people supported the Church and stood by its ministers. Therefore, those who strove to train future priests had a noble mission to accomplish, beyond the obstacles raised or the suffering caused by one regime or another, namely the promoters of communist ideology. One such example is the testimony and mission of Father Tudor Demian, in this secularised world, far removed from the fundamental principles of the Creator, but which has become a living example of the knowledge and experience of spiritual principles.

Keywords

Church, communism, theology, school, confession, teacher, priest, totalitarianism, prison, conviction, training, spiritual, teaching, confession.

I. Introduction

The conscience of the people has always been linked to the Church and its ministers, which is why the Church was persecuted. “The express goal

of the new so-called democratic government was to destroy the Church as much as possible or to remove the Church and the faith of the Romanian people from society”¹. The assumption was that the only people who could be easily controlled were those who no longer had any principles to uphold, who no longer observed any moral law, in other words, those who had turned away from God’s law and obeyed only the laws established by the Communist Party.

Ever since the establishment and consolidation of communism, there have been priests who opposed the trend of forced atheization of the country. They showed that Christ the Savior is the center of human life and society, thereby demonstrating that the Church is a spiritual power that cannot be destroyed.

The Church’s resistance was characterized “by great sacrifice, not by acts of violence, not by shouting or hiding in the catacombs. The Church did not identify itself with any ideology or political system”².

The repressive policy of communism against the Romanian Orthodox Church materialized through the persecution of its ministers, the elimination of religion from schools, the forced retirement of bishops from their episcopal seats, the arrest of a significant number of priests, and the decrease in the number of monks, due to Decree 410/October 28, 1959. With the emergence of the Securitate in 1948, the arrests of clergymen were very visible and numerous. This year also marked a turning point for the whole country, with new frameworks being drawn up for all areas of activity. Because of this, Patriarch Justinian, with the support of the hierarchs, introduced a catechism program in holy places, but this project was blocked by the Securitate and the Ministry of Cults, at the proposal of communist leaders Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca.

Theological seminaries were closed - the only ones that remained open were those in Bucharest, Buzău, Craiova, Neamț Monastery, Cluj-Napoca, and Caransebeș. The theological academies in Transylvania and

¹ Alexandru MORARU, “The Romanian Church under Communist Dictatorship”, in: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Orthodox Theology*, XLVI (2001)/ 1-2, p. 33.

² Pavel VESA, *Orthodox Clergymen from Arad and Hunedoara Imprisoned as Political Prisoners (1945-1989)*, Publishing House of the Diocese of Deva and Hunedoara, Deva, 2014, p. 6.

Banat were abolished, and the only theology faculties that remained were those in Bucharest, Sibiu, and Cluj, and even those were closed after a short period of time. All this was aimed at training clergy with as little education as possible, who would be as vulnerable and easy to control by the communist authorities as possible.

In 1948, six dioceses were abolished: Argeş, Caransebeş, Constanţa, Huşi, Sighet, and the army diocese of Alba Iulia³, numerous Orthodox hierarchs were forcibly retired or confined to various monasteries. Added to this was another obvious fact: the suspicious deaths of clergy, ranging from patriarchs⁴, metropolitans⁵, bishops⁶, priests, and even monks⁷. Unfortunately, the entire country was controlled by the communist.

Theological periodicals from the interwar period were suppressed, with only one magazine allowed to exist in each metropolitan center. Of the Orthodox magazines, only *Telegraful român*, in Sibiu, was allowed to continue operating. Before being distributed to parishes, the hierarchs' pastoral letters were checked and censored by incompetent officials.

Not long after the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, numerous investigations and arrests of Orthodox priests followed, who were thrown into prisons in Jilava, Piteşti, Aiud, Gherla, Sighet, Târgu Ocna, etc. Some were assigned to work on the Danube-Black Sea Canal, while others were deported to Siberia.

The reasons for the imprisonment of the clergy were mostly false or fabricated. Some were told at trial that they had opposed collectivization, or given food to the hungry, or helped those in need, or simply lent a religious magazine to a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance, but most were arrested because they served the Lord Jesus Christ. These gestures were considered propaganda hostile to the new social order⁸.

³ Mircea PĂCURARIU, "Confessional Pride", in: *Telegraful român*, 1994/9-10, p. 2

⁴ Nicodim, Iustin and probably Iustinian.

⁵ Irineu Mihălcescu of Moldova, Firmilian of Oltenia, Vasile Lăzărescu of Banat, Nicolae Mladin of Ardeal.

⁶ Grigore Leu of Huşi, Nicolae Popovici of Oradia, Andrei Magieru of Arad, Emilian Antal, Visarion Aştileanu of Arad.

⁷ Fabian SEICHE, *Romanian Martyrs and Confessors of the 20th Century. Communist Prisons in Romania*, Agaton Publishing House, Făgăraş, 2010, p. 85.

⁸ Gabriel Valeriu BASA, *Romanian Priests and Monks in Communist Prisons, license thesis*, Sibiu 1994, typed manuscript, pp. 40–45

II. Father Demian Tudor. Some biographical information

Father Tudor Demian was born on April 9, 1912, in Arad⁹, his parents, Tudor and Maria Arsa, were peasants of modest means.

After graduating from primary school in the Micălaca Veche neighborhood, he attended the prestigious Moise Nicoară High School in Arad between 1923 and 1930. He passed his baccalaureate exam with flying colors. Keen to learn as much as possible about the mysteries of God, he enrolled at the Theological Academy in Arad and then attended the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest. As the culmination of all his studies, he took his bachelor's degree exam on the topic: "The Sectarian Monograph of Arad County", obtaining the grade "magna cum laude".

From October 1, 1937, to October 1, 1938, he served as prefect of studies at the Theological Academy in Arad, and from the fall of 1938 to the fall of 1938, he served as economic secretary at the same institution, while also filling in for the chair of Patrology.

On October 1, 1939, after starting a family by marrying Lucreția Popovici, God chose him to serve at the Holy Altar. He was ordained a deacon and then a priest by the late Bishop Andrei Magieru for the parish of Arad-Șega, and after three years he was transferred to the parish of Arad-Centru, where he served until 1958¹⁰.

From 1952-1958, he was elected head of the parish office. During this period, he was very active, overseeing the painting of the interior of the cathedral church¹¹.

He served as a minister of God in several parishes: Arad-Șega (1939-1942), Old Cathedral (1942-1958), Pecica (1964-1975), Arad-Micălaca-Veche (1974-1995).

⁹ *Yearbook of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology Arad*, II/ 1994-1995, Arad, 1995, pp.178-180.

¹⁰ The personal details are in accordance with the testimony recorded at the father's residence on 14 January 1994.

¹¹ At this cathedral, he worked alongside Dr. Ilarion V. Felea, Florea Codreanu, Petru Bogdan, and Viorel Mișuțiu.

III. Publishing activity

Father Tudor Demian was a man who wrote from the heart and for the soul. This was perceived as such by his contemporaries. And that is precisely why, fearing the danger of being, through his published articles, one of those who revealed the true purpose of communist doctrine and, at the same time, a promoter of true Christian principles, he was sentenced to prison.

Between 1945 and 1947, he served as editor of the magazine *Biserica și Școala* (*Church and School*). This position made it much easier for him to publish numerous articles, studies, and editorials. Among the most important articles published in *Biserica și Școala* are the following: *The soul is naturally Christian (Anima est naturaliter christiana)*¹², *Was Christianity destroyed in Soviet Russia?*¹³, *Can religion be destroyed?*¹⁴, *Religion is the opium of the people?*¹⁵

In the first two articles, the author highlights the fact that Soviet communist domination was coming to an end due to the war with Germany: “The disintegration of the Bolshevik chaos that is rapidly approaching will show us their true monstrosity”¹⁶, but at the same time, all the resistance and repression against faith could not remove it from the hearts and minds of the Russian people.

The priest was very direct about professing his faith. He was against the anti-religious propaganda that had been spread in the former Soviet Union: “which, after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, had assumed the role of protector of all churches belonging to Eastern Christianity”¹⁷. Russia, thanks to the Bolsheviks: “ended up captive and devastated under

¹² *Biserica și Școala*, year LXV, nr. 35, 31, August 1941.

¹³ *Biserica și Școala*, year LXVI, nr. 29, 19, July 1942.

¹⁴ *Biserica și Școala*, year LXVI, nr. 30, 26, July 1942.

¹⁵ *Biserica și Școala*, year LXVI, nr. 31, 2, August 1942.

¹⁶ Tudor DEMIAN, “Anima est naturaliter christiana”, in: *Biserica și Școala*, LXV (1941)/35, p. 285.

¹⁷ Tudor DEMIAN, “Anima est naturaliter christiana”, p. 285.

the knout¹⁸ of the cruelest persecution that the history of mankind has ever known”¹⁹.

The Soviets undertook a persistent effort to cleanse the minds of future generations of everything related to morality and religious life: “propaganda guided by blind fanaticism and education based on the denial of everything related to religion were used in an effort to turn young Russians into the most daring enemies of God”²⁰.

In addition, numerous clergymen were deported:

“thousands of priests are deported to the icy darkness of Siberia, or killed without any human scruples, and the gigantic cathedrals from which Christian hymns of praise once resounded have been desecrated and turned into warehouses and stables for animals”²¹.

However, the Christian conscience of young Russians could not be destroyed: “the flame of faith in God burned, perhaps latently, but it never ceased to burn in the souls of the Russians”²².

The central theme of the second article is a continuation of the first. The priest is just as blunt in his language, which helps us understand his confessional personality, which does not confuse values with non-values, good with evil, sin with virtue, light with darkness: “From Nero to Diocletian, from Julian the Apostate to Al Hakem, the Christian religion has never known such diabolical persecution and rare systematic perseverance as in the Orthodox Russia of yesterday”²³.

The means used by the Bolsheviks to eradicate Christian consciousness were far more terrifying than those used by previous emperors: “The denial of Bolshevism is total and more apocalyptic than all the opposition that has come before, and the means used far surpass even the diabolical

¹⁸ A whip made from a leather strap or rope, which was used in Tsarist Russia to beat people.

¹⁹ Tudor DEMIAN, “Anima est naturaliter christiana”, p. 285.

²⁰ Tudor DEMIAN, “Anima est naturaliter christiana”, p. 285.

²¹ Tudor DEMIAN, “Anima est naturaliter christiana”, p. 285.

²² Tudor DEMIAN, “Anima est naturaliter christiana”, p. 285.

²³ Tudor DEMIAN, “Was Christianity destroyed in Soviet Russia?”, in: *Biserica și Școala*, LXVI (1942)/ 29, p. 237

inventions concocted by the fantasies of so-called mad emperors such as Nero, Commodus, Julian, and others”²⁴. The servants of God: “the clergy in particular, were persecuted with an unprecedented sadism, amid the countless persecutions they endured, for the simple reason that they were the Apostles of the surest path to elevate man to the summit of the highest perfection of his own being”²⁵. Priests and believers alike were deported to Siberia, a which place became “the largest cemetery of freedom on earth”²⁶. Priests who managed to be released from Siberia were forced to live far from the holy altars, unable to perform holy services.

The last two articles opposing militant atheism have the same theme, the essence and origin of religion. These articles present Father Tudor as a thorough apologist for Christianity and a very good connoisseur of atheistic negations²⁷.

In Soviet Russia, the imposed thinking was that every citizen had to be a militant atheist, spreading anti-ecclesiastical and anti-religious teachings.

In these articles, the priest analyzes Karl Marx’s thoughts on religion, who said that “in order to achieve complete happiness, man must remove all religious beliefs from his path”²⁸. The author offers appropriate criticism of the origin and nature of religion, stating that its origin and nature are found in God, and that when we speak of religion, it is revelatory.

Because of these four monumental articles, Father Tudor Demian was sentenced to prison in 1959.

He published numerous articles in the magazine *Biserica și Școala* (*Church and School*), such as: “Lângă popor” (“Among the People”) (no. 15, April 8, 1945, pp. 105-106), “Duh misionar” (“Missionary Spirit”) (no. 4, January 20, 1946, pp. 17-18), “Organizarea misionarismului religios în Eparhia Aradului” (“The Organization of Religious Missionary Work in the Diocese of Arad”) (no. 33-34, October 20-27, 1946, pp. 325-356). All these articles reveal that the author manifested a priestly conscience,

²⁴ Tudor DEMIAN, “Was Christianity destroyed in Soviet Russia?”, p. 237.

²⁵ Tudor DEMIAN, “Was Christianity destroyed in Soviet Russia?”, p. 237.

²⁶ Tudor DEMIAN, “Was Christianity destroyed in Soviet Russia?”, p. 237.

²⁷ Vasile VLAD, “One of the Editors of the Magazine *Biserica și Școala*”, in: *Teologia*, I (1997)/ 3-4, p. 113

²⁸ Vasile VLAD, “One of the Editors of the Magazine *Biserica și Școala*”, p. 113.

bearing in mind what St. Paul the Apostle said: “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Cor 9, 22).

His incessant reading led to the creation of a colossal book of liturgical sermons entitled *Jertfa laudei (The Sacrifice of Praise)*, published in Arad by Diecezana Publishing House in 1945. This book contains sermons for every Sunday of the year.

He was also a regular contributor to other magazines, such as *Școala Vremii*, published in Arad, *Tribuna Română*, published in Arad, and *Duh și Adevăr*, published in Timișoara.

IV. Imprisonments

The year 1949 marked the great trial of Father Tudor Demian’s life: “the road to Calvary began on the night of Epiphany in 1949, when, immediately after midnight, four officers from Securitate broke into his home and threatened him with a gun”²⁹.

He was imprisoned for “conspiring against the social order” and sentenced to 10 months in prison (January 6, 1949-October 28, 1949). He was also convicted for four articles written while he was editor of the diocesan newsletter *Biserica și Școala (Church and School)* and was released on January 4, 1950³⁰.

After his release, he returned home and was proposed by the Diocese of Arad to become a minister at the Arad-Centru parish. Although Decision No. 5/689 of 1950 provided for the suspension of his state salary for his “anti-democratic” attitude,

“eight years of constant service to Christ followed, during which time he had to deal with very delicate situations due to the ‘clerical mediocrity’ of some ministers of the diocese at that time, who felt threatened, in their imposture, by the uprightness and open

²⁹ Pavel VESA, *Orthodox Spirituality in Arad. History of the Romanian Orthodox Parish of Arad-Centru*. Publishing House of the Archdiocese of Arad, 2015, p. 132.

³⁰ Vasile MANEA, *Orthodox Priests in Communist Prisons*, Patmos Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 255.

rebuke addressed by priests of the stature of Ilarion Felea, Petru Deheleanu, Florea Codreanu, and Lucian Emandi”³¹.

The harshest sentence handed down to Father Tudor Demian was to be carried out on September 25, 1958, when he was convicted again, but this time to 20 years of hard labor and 8 years of civic degradation.

Along with him, other prominent priests from Arad were also convicted, among whom it is worth mentioning the teacher par excellence of Arad theology, today Saint Martyr Priest Ilarion V. Felea, Father Alexandru Budai, who at that time held the position of archpriest of Arad, and Father Aurel Moise, who served at the parish of Șega II.

Over time, Father Tudor Demian would recall those particularly difficult moments:

“Immediately after our arrest on September 25, 1958, the public opinion of the Orthodox faithful in Arad showed and expressed particular hostility towards these three leaders of the Diocese and even towards our colleague, the parish priest, who also wanted a high administrative position in the Diocese, openly accusing them of being largely responsible for our arrest. This is reinforced by the fact that the investigator Necula Mihai from Bucharest, who came to Arad to seek statements and witnesses for the prosecution among the priests and believers in Arad, as he himself told me during an investigation, obtained written and signed statements only from the vicar of the Diocese³² and administrative-ecclesiastical advisor³³, statements that he also made at the trial, which took place in secret in Cluj. Personally, I read before the trial the statement written and signed by the administrative-church advisor, included in my indictment file, which the investigator Necula Mihai gave me to read, and

³¹ Testimony recorded at the priest’s residence on January 14, 1994.

³² At that time, the diocesan vicar was priest Dr. Gheorghe Lițiu.

³³ At that time, there were two church advisors working at the Diocese of Arad, the first being Father Cornel Oros and the other Petru Vancu.

of course the vicar's statement was in the file of my parish colleague, priest and professor dr. Ilarion Felea"³⁴.

He was imprisoned in the dungeons of Gherla and Jilava, and shortly thereafter transferred to the Aiud Penitentiary. On May 30, 1961, he was sent to Unit 0957 Ostrov, Salcia section.

V. Release, subsequent activity and death

Released for the second time, he returned home, eager to serve at the Holy Altar, and requested to be reinstated in the parish, but this was not possible because the bishop at the time, Teoctist of Arad, agreed to remove Tudor Demian from Arad and punish him disciplinarily and ecclesiastically³⁵. Following the debates of the Church Consistory, it was decided:

“total suspension from performing sacred duties for a period equivalent to that of the criminal sentence, effectively served by the defendant and which it considers to have already been executed, in the period between his conviction and release, through the pardoning of the remainder of the sentence”³⁶.

Not long after, on October 1, 1964, he was appointed parish priest in Pecica, serving until 1974. The arrival of the new bishop, Visarion Aștileanu, as head of the Diocese of Arad, fulfilled Father Tudor's wish to become a priest in Micălaca Veche.

The year 1991 brought the reopening of the former Theological Academy of Arad, this time under the name of the Faculty of Theology. Among the professors of that time was Father Tudor Demian. The mission

³⁴ Testimony recorded at the priest's home on January 14, 1994. Cf. Vasile VLAD, “One of the Editors of the Magazine *Biserica și Școala*”, p. 109.

³⁵ Pavel VESA, *Orthodox Clerics from Arad and Hunedoara Imprisoned for Political Reasons (1945-1989)*, p. 96.

³⁶ Pavel VESA, *Orthodox Clerics from Arad and Hunedoara Imprisoned for Political Reasons (1945-1989)*, p. 96.

he took on, which he paid for with personal sacrifice, to guide the younger generations in the midst of which he was given to live, and in this context the young theology students to become servants of the holy altars and examples for those around them, was accomplished with perfection. “Father Tudor Demian was laid as the cornerstone of the new edifice of theology in Arad. He was entrusted with the spiritual guidance and formation of young students, the priests of tomorrow”³⁷. He worked as a teacher until 1994.

After a long illness, he passed away on 14 July 2001. The funeral service for the Father was held in the cathedral in Arad, officiated by His Eminence, Bishop Timotei Sevciciu.

VI. Conclusion

A true lover of books, a fearless defender of the ancestral faith in the turbulent times in which the Romanian people lived for four and a half centuries, and a mentor to generations of young people and theology students, he was characterised by these defining elements, so that Father Tudor, as he was known to post-December theology students in Arad, had the unique opportunity to listen to him, learn from him, and be formed as authentic Christians and fearless preachers. In this way, they came to bear witness to the confession and teaching of the one who was a living source of the spiritual principles of Christ’s teaching

Looking back, we see that the first to be persecuted and oppressed were the clergy who opposed anti-ecclesial ideology, keeping alive the principles of Christocentrism and theocentrism, which proved to be in opposition to the principle of anthropocentrism promoted by communism.

This living faith determined their dignified attitude and vitality, springing from the power of faith and love for their fellow human beings, in the struggle for the spiritual formation of all generations that they were destined to encounter on their journey through this life.

³⁷ Vasile VLAD, “One of the Editors of the Magazine Biserica și Școala”, p. 111.