

ARCHBISHOP TEOFIL HERINEANU A PASTORAL MISSION OF SACRIFICE DURING PERSECUTION

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Abstract. Bishop Teofil Herineanu (who later became archbishop), belongs to the category of Transylvanian personalities who militated for the interests of Romanians in quite turbulent times, and the moment of starting his ecclesiastical activity, the political situation was unfavorable, taking place at time in which there were significant changes in all respects for the Church and the Nation; namely the second half of the twentieth century, a period that culminated with the establishment of communism. Being a bishop in those troubled years in which the Christian faith was long challenged by the new leadership of the state, and yet to stand upright, animating and comforting a sad and troubled people was not an easy mission for Herineanu. Bishop Teofil, “the man of prayer and compassion” was put in front of such trials, and he succeeded to remain in the memory of the faithful of Cluj as a reliable support. After a brief biography of this ecclesiastical personality, the aspects related to philanthropy will be highlighted, as well as the missionary activity carried out by Teofil Herineanu both as bishop of Roman and Huși, and as archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj. Converting to orthodoxy in the context of the changes that took place in 1948, throughout his pastorate as a bishop of Roman and Huși, as well as his pastorate as archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, Teofil Herineanu was noted for his many acts of philanthropy towards the poor, sick and helpless. He also helped the families of priests in communist prisons and to widows and orphans who asked for his support.

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The Bishop and later the Archbishop Teofil Herineanu belongs to the category of Romanian personalities from Transylvania, who campaigned for the interests of the Romanians in a rather turbulent period for them and the context of his entry into the scene of ecclesiastical and political life was a rather unfavorable one, taking place at a time when significant changes were announced from all points of view for the Church and the Nation, namely the second half of the 20th century, a period that culminated with the establishment of communism.

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He was one of the longest-lived hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church, covering practically the entire communist period (he became a Bishop in 1949, until the transition to eternal ones in 1992).

To hold the title of prelate in those turbulent times, when even faith in God was challenged, and yet to remain intact, bringing comfort and encouragement to a frustrated and troubled people, was by no means an easy pastoral mission. Bishop Herineanu was also faced with such trials, he remained in the memory of the faithful as: "the man of prayer and charity"¹.

At the hour of pious remembrance, in a year in which we commemorate 31 years of transition to the eternal ones, the present presentation aims to emphasize the personality of this man, who wrote history himself because he lived and served in a troubled and challenging time. However, he managed to maintain his integrity and courageously express his convictions, even when he felt isolated and alone.

Through his deep faith and dedication to the Church and the community he served, Bishop Teofil became a source of inspiration for many and managed to bring light and hope amid despair.

The future Orthodox hierarch, Teofil Herineanu, was born on November 11, 1909, in the village of Arcalia, the county of Bistrița-Năsăud, in a family of Greek Catholic peasants. He followed secondary studies at "Andrei Mureșanu" High School in Dej (1920-1921) and "George Barițiu" High School in Cluj (1921-1928). After that, he graduated from the United Theological Academy in Gherla-Cluj (1928-1932) and attended specialization courses at the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology in Paris (1929-1930). He was ordained a celibate Greek Catholic priest and served for 17 years in the parishes of Ceaba (1932-1937)², Băbuț (1937-1947)³, and Panticu (1947-1948)⁴ in Cluj County.

In the fall of 1948, in a context marked by significant events, Teofil Herineanu decided to switch to the Orthodox Church. In the autobiography kept in the file of the former Security, he testified: "*My attitude during the transitions was: the turmoil of the soul and repeated meetings with my believers*"⁵. His choice to convert took place at a time when Romania was facing profound changes, including in the religious sphere.

The political and social changes of that time had a significant impact on the Greek Catholic Church, which was facing pressure and persecution from the communist regime. In this tense context, many religious leaders had to make difficult decisions and make choices that deeply affected their lives and ministry.

Thus, the transition to Orthodoxy was a crucial moment in Herineanu's spiritual and ecclesiastical journey, reflecting the complexity and challenges of the times in which he lived and served.

His ascension to the episcopate took place in a context marked by disputes and tensions between Patriarch Justinian and the Ministry of Cults, especially regarding the appointment of new hierarchs for the vacant dioceses of Iași, Roman, and Galați. In 1949, the National Church Assembly had the responsibility of electing the new holders for these dioceses.

In the case of the dioceses of Iași and Galați, the selection of new hierarchs was blocked due to disagreements between the Patriarch and the Government. However, in the case of the diocese of Roman, on June 8, 1949, the celibate priest Teofil Herineanu was elected to the position. His election took place in front of the patriarchal vicar Teoctist Arăpașu and Benedict Ghiuș, the latter being rejected by the communist authorities. Herineanu thus represented a compromise solution between the Patriarch's camp and the Department of Cults, which was trying, at any cost, to propel Valerian Zaharia into the Synod, whom the communist regime saw favorably, despite his legionary past⁶.

This choice was the result of delicate negotiations and political influence exerted on the process of appointing the new hierarchs. It was an attempt to find a balance between the interests of the Orthodox Church and the control exercised over it by the communist authorities.

For Bishop Teofil Herineanu, this election represented a great responsibility and a challenge. He had to navigate the tensions between the various parties involved and exercise his ministry in a politically complicated climate.

Thus, his rise to the episcopate was marked by the difficult circumstances of the time, reflecting the complexity of the relationship between the Church and the communist authorities. Bishop Teofil Herineanu was a figure who was involved in the events of that period and had to wisely manage external challenges and pressures to carry out his ministry correctly and effectively.

The reason for choosing the young priest from Cluj for the See of Roman was, indeed, to consolidate the union process of 1948 and to confirm the equal status of the Greek Catholics with that of the traditional Orthodox. The communist authorities hoped that by appointing obedient hierarchs, they would be able to undermine the Church from within.

However, the election of Herineanu for the See of Roman completely contradicted the intentions of the communist authorities. He proved to be a worthy bishop who served with dignity and achieved many achievements.

On June 29, 1949, priest Teofil was ordained a monk at the Cetățuia Monastery, and on August 21 he received the ordination to the rank of hierarch at the Dragoslavele Hermitage. This solemn ceremony took place under the leadership of Patriarch Justinian, in the presence of Metropolitans Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania and Firmilian Marin of Oltenia.

The one who made him a monk and accompanied the future Bishop Teofil in this process was Vicar Bishop Teoctist Arăpașu, who had previously been his competitor in the elections for the See of Roman. The ordination event took place discreetly in the hermitage's small church⁷, being closely watched by the Security.

After this ordination, Bishop Teofil was enthroned as Bishop of Roman and Huși seven days later, on August 28, 1949.

Thus, the ordination and enthronement of Bishop Teofil Herineanu were significant events in his spiritual and ecclesiastical career, marking the beginning of a new stage in his service as hierarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. He called this period "apprenticeship to Orthodoxy"⁸. In the eyes of the authorities, he had become a powerful hierarch with a well-defined personality who was viewed with suspicion

and under constant surveillance by the secret services. He was accused of actions considered hostile to the regime, such as ignoring recommendations issued by religious officials as offenses and impermissible interference in the running of the diocese.

During his pastorate, the Diocese of Roman experienced a remarkable spiritual revival, which strengthened the faith of the people. However, this caused more and more mistrust among the authorities. Bishop Teofil lived the first years of his mandate at Roman in an atmosphere of insecurity, amplified by the tumultuous political situation. This climate was perceived by his contemporaries as a personal drama that Herineanu experienced. As a result, he agreed to open up to only a few close people, such as his mother and a few trusted clerics, with whom he shared his worries and troubles⁹.

This difficult period also brought with it personal and professional challenges for Bishop Teofil. However, he continued to serve his believers with devotion and promote Christian values, even in the face of pressure and obstacles from the authorities. Through his perseverance and the spiritual rebirth he engendered, he became a symbol of faith and courage in the face of communist oppression.

These personal reservations and precautions which the young Bishop took were the subject of much speculation and slander against him. Because of the political context and existing tensions, any gesture of caution or limitation of his circle of trust was misinterpreted and exaggerated in various ways.

However, it is important to emphasize that this was only one of the many obstacles he encountered in his ministry and that he remained a hierarch devoted to the Church and his faith. Despite the rumors and attacks against him, Bishop Teofil continued to exercise his mission with integrity and to be involved in the promotion of Christian values, being an example of courage and dignity in the face of adversity.

Throughout the period that he was at the helm of the Eparchy of Roman and Huși, Bishop Teofil Herineanu carried out a remarkable missionary and charitable activity, having as priorities various projects aimed at strengthening the faith and providing support to the community.

One of the areas in which he became passionately involved was the printing of prayer books in large numbers, considering their importance in the spiritual life of the faithful. Through his efforts, prayer books were made and distributed to spread the word of God and encourage religious practice.

At the same time, Bishop Teofil took care of the families of priests who had been imprisoned for political reasons, offering them moral and material support. He understood the difficulties and sufferings these families were going through and tried to bring them comfort in those difficult times.

Also, Bishop Teofil intervened in the defense of the nuns from the Vladimiresti Monastery, who were subjected to violence by the authorities. Through his actions and his influence, he was able to protect and support this monastic community in the face of abuse and repression.

Another remarkable aspect of his pastorate was the placement in the best parishes of more than 40 priests released from prisons who had been persecuted for political reasons. This action was viewed with mistrust and hostility by the communist

authorities, who considered that Bishop Teofil was supporting undesirable persons and challenging the imposed regime.

Unfortunately, the authorities implemented various tactics to compromise the figure of hierarch Teofil, including the instrumentation of a tax evasion process. These accusations were tendentiously constructed to diminish his influence and prestige in the eyes of the faithful and to weaken him before the ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

After the implementation of the tax evasion file, Bishop Teofil Herineanu was subjected to continuous computer monitoring and tracking by the authorities and Security. This action was mainly aimed at weakening his influence and undermining his pastoral and missionary activities.¹⁰

After coming to Cluj, Bishop Teofil continued to be under constant pressure from the security apparatus. This included surveillance and recording of his activities, interception of mail, and monitoring of people in his circle of influence. The purpose was to obtain compromising information or to find grounds for accusations against him.

Thus, despite constant pressure and persecution, Herineanu managed to remain a strong spiritual leader, dedicated to serving the faithful and promoting Christian values. He faced challenges and continued to work for the good of his community, bringing hope and encouragement in a difficult and tense context.

With the election of Metropolitan Nicolae Colan as Metropolitan of Transylvania, the See of Bishop of Vad, Feleac, and Cluj became vacant. Following this event, on December 19, 1957, Teofil Herineanu was unanimously elected to occupy this position. The enthronement ceremony took place in the Cathedral of Cluj, on December 22, 1957¹¹.

The election of Teofil Herineanu as Bishop of Cluj marked a new stage in the life of the local Church. Through his devotion and wisdom, he made a significant contribution to the development and affirmation of the Orthodox community in Cluj and throughout the diocese.

Upon his arrival in Cluj, Herineanu was met by a cold and hostile atmosphere, generated both by the confessional tensions between the Greek Catholics and the Orthodox and by the existing rivalries between those who had returned to Orthodoxy and the old Orthodox¹². The conflict of interests and the pressure exerted by the returning Greek Catholic clergy to obtain privileged positions in the management of the Transylvanian dioceses amplified this tension.

In this difficult context, Bishop Herineanu was viewed with distrust by the local clergy because once he arrived in Cluj, he imposed rigorous discipline and strict conduct, both in the liturgical service and in the pastoral activity of the priests. This led to accusations that he had introduced "a new rite instead of the Transylvanian one"¹³, which amplified the priests dissatisfaction.

The concern and seriousness with which Herineanu approached the liturgical service according to the typical orthodox, learned during his time at Roman, caused controversies and dissensions among the priests. They felt that the new rules and requirements imposed by the Bishop prevented them from carrying out their work in the way they were used to. Nevertheless, the Bishop maintained his determination to

promote a high-quality liturgical service based on the Orthodox tradition and the rigorous observance of the typical.

However, the complaints and criticism from the priests did not move Bishop Teofil away from the direction he considered correct for the proper functioning of the church. He continued his efforts to strengthen the Orthodox faith and provide spiritual guidance to the faithful, maintaining strict discipline in services and pastoral activities.

With time, through his example and the visible results of his activity, Herineanu managed to gain the trust and respect of the priests and believers in Cluj. He demonstrated that commitment and discipline are necessary to build a strong and thriving church community.

One of the aspects that Bishop Teofil did not shy away from highlighting publicly was the neglect of the formation of priests devoted to their mission within the Orthodox schools¹⁴. He believed that the spiritual, theological, and pastoral training of priests is essential for the effective and dedicated service of the community.

By highlighting this issue, Bishop Teofil Herineanu was trying to draw attention to the need for adequate education and training for priests so that they can properly fulfill their pastoral mission and provide spiritual guidance to the faithful effectively. He encouraged the involvement in the continuous development and formation of priests to strengthen and improve their ministry.

The Security documents indeed show that Bishop Teofil Herineanu was accused of distant behavior towards his subordinates. These accusations refer to the fact that he maintained a certain distance and reserve in his relationship with the priests of his diocese, being sometimes considered less approachable or communicative. The exact reasons for this distant behavior are not specified in the documents and are open to interpretation.

In addition, it is mentioned that Bishop Teofil did not maintain protocol ties with the representatives of the Department of Cults or with other hierarchs in the Synod¹⁵. This refers to the fact that he was not actively involved in the protocol and formal aspects of church relations at the administrative level and did not regularly participate in meetings and events organized by the Department of Cults or the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

These accusations can be seen in the context of the complex relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the communist authorities during that period. Bishop Teofil Herineanu had a hostile attitude towards the communist regime and was involved in activities that supported the Orthodox faith and values. This could have created a sense of distrust and distance from the authorities and could have influenced his relations with representatives of the Department of Cults.

It is important to note that the Security documents must be analyzed with caution, given the context in which they were drawn up and the possible political or ideological motives behind them. It is possible that these accusations were used to discredit and exert pressure on Bishop Teofil Herineanu in the context in which he had an outstanding missionary and charitable activity.

Despite all the difficulties and accusations against him, Herineanu managed to build a balanced status and alleviate the tensions and rivalries among the clergy. This

allowed him to have a vast mission field and to devote himself entirely to his pastoral ministry. A remarkable aspect of his attitude was the respect and paternal care he showed towards the unreturned Greek Catholic clergy.

Herineanu adopted an open and constructive approach to the relationship with the Greek Catholic clergy, offering them support and facilitating their integration into the administration and other institutions of the Diocese. This gesture had the role of providing them with material support and recognizing their efforts in the service of the Church. Through this, he tried to create an environment of understanding and collaboration between the Orthodox clergy and non-returned Greek Catholics, promoting dialogue and reconciliation between the two denominations.

However, the Security always suspected Bishop Teofil of harboring his sympathies towards the Greek Catholics and showing them in his private surroundings. This was a quasi-permanent accusation that remained with him and helped to keep constant pressure on him from the Communist authorities. But, even in these conditions, he managed to carry out his missionary and pastoral activity, dedicating himself entirely to the service and the good of his believers.

The fact that Teofil received a Catholic education in Cluj and Paris is well documented and is recognized as a significant influence on his religious and missionary profile.

According to the information coming from those close to the hierarch and recorded in the Security documents, Teofil was devoted to reading books of French sermons and meditations¹⁶. It is also noted that Teofil regularly attended daily mass and spent an hour each evening meditating in the Archdiocese's chapel. These religious practices highlight his commitment to his faith and spirituality.

Herineanu, as a former Greek Catholic priest, was aware that this status offered him a certain freedom of action and relative independence in the eyes of the communist authorities. This position allowed him to have a more open approach and give support to those who had been released from communist prisons.

Indeed, along with the patriarch Justinian, Herineanu was one of the few hierarchs who welcomed the freed clergy into his diocese. This gesture was significant because, at that time, the Romanian Orthodox Church was under the strong influence of the communist regime, and the Greek Catholic clergy and many monks from the monasteries were persecuted and imprisoned for their faith.

Many of those who found shelter in the Diocese of Cluj under the protection of Herineanu were important figures of the Church and monastic life. Among them were Father Arsenie Papacioc, Archimandrite Vasile Vasilachi, Father Mina Dobzeu, and Nicolae Steinhardt, who would later become known as Father Nicolae from Rohia.

This gesture had a significant impact on the life and work of these personalities, giving them refuge and the opportunity to continue their activity and influence in the religious community.

Herineanu was aware of the impact that the communist regime had on the culture and spirituality of the population and considered it necessary to provide solid religious training for young people and all believers in the Diocese of Cluj. Since other

religions could catechize their children, Herineanu considered that the Romanian Orthodox Church should also do so.

Thus, under the leadership of Herineanu, a catechetical program organized in the Diocese of Cluj was implemented to provide adequate religious training. This program aimed to provide a spiritual counterweight to the propaganda and pseudo-culture promoted by the communist regime.

In this context, in August 1958, with the support of Bishop Teofil Herineanu, priest Liviu Galaction Munteanu and priest Ioan Bunea from the Theological Seminary in Cluj wrote the "Analytical program of catechetical lessons from the primary course for the school year 1958-1959". The purpose of this program was to provide an appropriate structure and content for catechism lessons in primary education.

Through these actions, Herineanu demonstrated determination and the desire to offer believers solid religious training and a spiritual antidote to the influences of the communist regime. This initiative had a significant impact in providing religious education for young people and strengthening faith in a hostile context. Teofil indeed sought the support of Patriarch Justinian and Metropolitans Iustin Moisescu and Nicolae Bălan for the implementation of an action to catechize children at the level of the entire Church¹⁷. He wished to obtain an official gyre of the Holy Synod for this act.

Despite this approach, the reaction of the Security was not favorable. The two authors of the aforementioned catechetical program, priest Liviu Galaction Munteanu and priest Ioan Bunea were arrested. Unfortunately, Father Munteanu died in Aiud prison in 1961. This was a tragedy and a loss for the Romanian Orthodox Church and the fight against the communist regime. On the other hand, the Security tried to isolate and monitor Bishop Teofil Herineanu, considering him the moral author of this catechetical manifesto and involved in promoting an activity considered incompatible with the communist regime.

These events illustrate the difficulties and opposition encountered in the implementation of religious and catechetical actions during the communist regime in Romania. Despite the pressures and persecutions, Teofil and other hierarchs and priests fought for the promotion of religious and educational values at personal risk and those close to them.

The 60s were challenging for the hierarch Teofil Herineanu from Cluj, as he felt an increase in the hostility of the authorities towards him. At the same time, there was tension among the priests of his Diocese, and his collaborators did not always share his ideas and projects.

A report of the Cluj Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior, dated September 14, 1962, emphasized the fact that the pilgrimage and the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos at the Nicula monastery gained a greater scope due to the presence of the Hierarch Herineanu. The authorities were worried about the impact of this celebration and wanted to minimize its importance and reduce the number of pilgrims¹⁸. However, Hierarch Herineanu did not participate in the pilgrimage, yielding to the pressure and recommendations of the Security. In addition, his collaborators, instead of supporting him, opposed his intention to participate in

this event, using the arguments of the authorities who were reserved in the face of organized manifestations of faith in public space¹⁹.

On June 11, 1973, by the decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Diocese of Cluj was elevated to the rank of Archdiocese, signifying a recognition of the importance and prestige of this diocese. As a result, Bishop Teofil was enthroned in the new dignity of Archbishop of Cluj on September 9, 1973²⁰.

This promotion of the Diocese of Cluj to the status of Archdiocese represents a recognition of the work and the significant contribution made by Bishop Teofil in the service and leadership of the local church and the consolidation of the position of this diocese within the Romanian Orthodox Church.

As Archbishop of Cluj, Teofil played a significant role in the defense and promotion of religious rights and freedom of conscience in the context of restrictions and persecutions imposed by the communist regime.

Of course, during the communist regime, Archbishop Herineanu was subject to restrictions and limitations in his missionary and pastoral actions by the Department of Religions, a state-controlled institution. It tried to influence the appointment of collaborators and the selection of priests for city parishes, to prevent the building of churches in developed urban areas, and to control religious publications.

Thus, despite the restrictions and limitations imposed by the communist regime, Teofil kept his determination and personal conviction in his mission, continuing to serve and preach by Christian faith and values. Thus, prayer and Holy Scripture represented Teofil's spiritual foundation and were essential in shaping his conscience and the priests he shepherded. Prayer was also his salvation when the hostile environment overwhelmed him²¹. These were the sources of inspiration and guidance in his missionary and ecclesial service.

At the beginning of the 90s, the period of transition and democratic opening in Romania, confessional tensions appeared in Transylvania, including between the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church. During this period, Archbishop Teofil Herineanu showed wisdom and pastoral tact in managing these tensions²².

Archbishop Teofil showed unwavering devotion to the Orthodox Church, being at the same time open and receptive to the Greek Catholic community. He did not turn his back on the Greek Catholics but promoted dialogue, communication, and reconciliation between the two denominations.

Teofil's wisdom and pastoral tact contributed to the creation of a climate of understanding and mutual respect between Orthodox and Greek Catholics during that difficult period. He sought to build bridges of communication and collaboration rather than stoking tensions and deepening the rift between the two communities.

Through this wise and loving approach, Herineanu showed that fundamental Christian values, such as understanding, love, and respect, must be prioritized in overcoming conflicts and building a more united and harmonious community.

Archbishop Teofil Herineanu pastored the Diocese of Cluj until 1992 when he passed away. He was buried in the necropolis in the basement of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Cluj, next to its founder, Bishop Nicolae Ivan.

Through his involvement in the reactivation of the University Theological Institute in Cluj and through the collaboration with the Theological Institute in Sibiu, Archbishop Teofil laid the foundations for a solid and relevant theological education for the needs of the time. These efforts contributed to the extension of the tradition of theological education in Cluj and the creation of a new generation of Church servants prepared to face challenges and spread the Christian message in modern society.

After the Revolution of 1989, the period of transition and restructuring brought with it various tensions and confusion within the Church.

It is understandable that in a post-revolutionary context, in which there was a desire for change and freedom of expression, some priests wanted to be actively involved in the management process of the Diocese. However, Archbishop Teofil, as the hierarch of the Church, had the responsibility to ensure the proper functioning of the institution and to preserve the cohesion and unity within the religious community.

Faced with these challenges and claims, Archbishop Teofil had to manage the situation with tact and discernment. He sought to promote dialogue and understanding, to listen and take into account the concerns and opinions of priests without compromising the fundamental values and principles of the Church. A balanced approach was needed to ensure that priests felt involved and represented within the diocese while decisions and final authority remained in the hands of the hierarch.

Under these circumstances, Archbishop Teofil had to make difficult choices and find solutions that would balance the needs and aspirations of the priests with the institutional requirements of the Church. Even in the face of challenges and tensions, he remained a calm and wise spiritual leader, always seeking to promote unity and collaboration among the clergy and faithful.

The life and activity of Archbishop Teofil Herineanu were indeed marked by the tumultuous and challenging times that the Church went through during the communist period, but he was a hierarch with a deep ecclesiastical conscience who felt intensely the turmoil and challenges of his times.

In conclusion, the life and activity of Archbishop Teofil Herineanu is an impressive story of courage, resistance, and devotion to faith and community. He lived in a difficult period of Romania's history, witnessing the persecutions and restrictions imposed by the communist regime. However, Teofil Herineanu demonstrated a strong determination to exercise his pastoral and religious mission, fighting for his values and engaging in the service of his believers. He was a dedicated hierarch and spiritual leader gifted with pastoral wisdom and tact. During his pastorate, he had to face challenges and tensions but also manage a period of transition and confusion among the faithful. With wisdom and understanding, he encouraged dialogue, love, and respect between different faiths, promoting understanding and reconciliation.

Although he did not receive the recognition he fully deserved during his lifetime and was often maligned or forgotten by his contemporaries, posterity should give him his rightful place in history as one of the most long-lived and influential Orthodox hierarchs of his time.

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