

Ion Vicovan

## Teodor M. Popescu - Great Scholar of Church History, Victim of the Communist Regime

### Abstract

He was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1893 in Boteni , Dâmbovița county, in the family of priest Marin and Safta Popescu . He did his the first three grades of primary school in the neighbouring village, then he went to “Enache Văcărescu” Secondary School of Târgoviște and the Central Seminary in Bucharest (1905-1913). He went to the Faculty of Theology and the Universitary Pedagogical Seminary; he got his PhD in Athens. He went ton to study in Leipzig, Paris and Sorbonne. At the same time, he attended the courses of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. After graduation, he taught at the Central Seminary in Bucharest, at the Theology Faculty of Kishinev and Bucharest.

Accused of deeds that he did not commit (legionary activity, acts against the working class and the revolutionary movement, serious



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slander against USSR etc.), he was imprisoned between 1959 and 1963 in Jilava and Aiud. In the prison, he stood out as a remarkable person, enduring with great humility the torments that underwent, faithfully keeping his dignity of good Christian, proving that the lessons he passed on to his students were a way of life and a creed. After his release, he worked in the Patriarchate (as librarian, reviser of religious books, member of the board for dialogue of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the Old Catholics, foreign Churches magazine reviewer). He wrote valuable works, not so much from the point of view of their number, given the political context, but particularly in terms of content. Through his life and work, he remains a model for all laymen involved in the life and work of the Church.

## Keywords

Romanian Orthodox Church, Teodor Popescu, communist prisons,

## General remarks

Teodor M. Popescu (1893-1973) was one of the greatest professors of Church History in our Church. With a solid scientific basis, acquired both in the country and abroad, rich knowledge in theological and other fields<sup>1</sup>, professor Popescu was acknowledged both within and outside the country, by those who knew him directly or indirectly, through his works.

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<sup>1</sup> The erudite professor, of an exceptional intellectual ability, "is part of the golden gallery of great professors and scholar of the Romanian Orthodox Church" (cf. prof. Adrian N. Popescu, Introduction to vol. „Prof. Teodor M. Popescu, *Meditații teologice*”, Ed. Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Bucureștilor, 1997, p. 9.

He was also a passionate (Orthodox) faithful and one of its great defenders even at the cost of his freedom, having suffered for so many years in communist prisons etc.

### Some biographical information

Therefore, the one who would become the great professor of Theology, faithfully and patiently suffering in communist prisons, Teodor M. Popescu was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1893<sup>2</sup> in Boteni , Dâmbovița county, in the family of priest Marin and Safta Popescu . Being a "good, obedient and diligent" child, he did his the first three grades of primary school in the village (Boteni), and the last two classes at the school of Conțești, graduating from the primary school with the first prize; he was actually awarded the first prize in all the five primary classes"<sup>3</sup>. He then went to "Enache Văcărescu" Secondary School of Târgoviște and the Central Seminary in Bucharest (1905-1913). Here he "learned diligently everything he could from the great teacher and principle Iuliu Scriban and all the other teachers.... He graduated from all the eight classes of the seminary with the highest grades while he also passed his graduation exam with the same grade... He had always been the first in everything. There had never been a similar case in the whole history of the Central Seminary."<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the information provided by the professor's brother, Vasile M. Popescu, he was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1893 (Vasile M. Popescu, *Viața lui Teodor M. Popescu*, in vol. „Un martir al crucii. Viața și scrierile lui Teodor M. Popescu”, Ed, Cristiana, București, 2006, p. 40) and not on the 1<sup>st</sup> June iunie as. Prof. Mircea Păcurariu mentions in his dictionary (*Dicționarul teologilor români*, ed. Enciclopedică, București, 2002, p. 382). Prof. Adrian N. Popescu also mentions the 1<sup>st</sup> June as birthday Data de 1 iunie, in his introduction to vol. „Prof. Teodor M. Popescu, *Meditații teologice*”, Ed. Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Bucureștilor, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Vasile M. Popescu, *op. cit.*, p.45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

We also mention that in the graduation exam, among the testing areas, there was a practical test to be taken in front of an examination board, after an ad hoc two hour preparation. Teodor M. Popescu prepared a “sermon for the troops going to war.” He got an A and Iuliu Scriban sent the text to “The Universe” newspaper that published it in its 173 issue on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1913.

After graduating from the seminary, in the same year (1913), he became a student of the Faculty of Theology of Bucharest (1913-1919), with an interruption due to World War I, in which he also took part as an officer (lieutenant)<sup>5</sup>. In the same period, he attended the Pedagogical University Seminary of Bucharest (1918-1919).

Due to the precarious situation of the family, the young student began to “manage his own resources as well as he could to earn his living.” Thus, he became a church singer at St. Stephen Church while the Central Seminary offered him a room in exchange for occupying such positions as school counsellor or substitute teacher when a teacher was missing. Among other things, he substituted for the German teacher or the one of the Department of needlework; later he also substituted for the school counsellor, receiving for the above activities various (small) amounts of money<sup>6</sup>.

After graduation from the University of Bucharest, since this university did not award PhD titles, at the exhortation of Dragomir Demetrescu, professor of Church History, he decided to go to Athens where he got a specialization study grant (1919-

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<sup>5</sup> At his request of incorporation, he went to the military school of infantry set up in Botoșani (from October 1916 until December 1917) for the preparation of reserve officers, advancing to corporal, sergeant, sergeant student, second lieutenant , being sent to war with the infantry regiment (*ibid.*, 69), and being discharged on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1918).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57.

1922)<sup>7</sup> and where, in 1922, he defended his PhD thesis<sup>8</sup>. He also went on study grants to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Leipzig (1922-1923)<sup>9</sup>, the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Paris, the Catholic Institute of Paris and Ecole Pratique de Hautes Etudes, Sorbonne, the Department of Religious Studies while he also attended the courses of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (1923-1925).

After graduating from so many prestigious educational institutions, on his return home, he taught church history at the Central Seminary in Bucharest (1925-1926), the Faculty of Theology of Chişinău (1926-1927), the Faculty of Theology of Bucharest (1927 -1948), and after the change of the name of this valuable theological institutions (in University Theological Institute), he worked here until 1959, when he was arrested and sentenced by the Military Court of Bucharest to 15 years in prison. He was imprisoned until 1963, when he was pardoned.

On his appointment as professor, Teodor M. Popescu "started titanic work: systematizing the courses, methodology guidance

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<sup>7</sup> He applied to the Faculty of Theology, but being under the obligation to enroll to other classes as well, he also applied to the Faculty of Letters.

<sup>8</sup> His PhD thesis, 171 pages, was entitled "The Historical and Psychological Causes of Persecution". It seems that the thesis was defended in 1921, as on the 20<sup>th</sup> June, he asked the Ministry of Education in Bucharest, "according to the regulation on scholarships", to offer him 2000 drachmas to help him print his thesis (*ibid.*, p 78). We also mention that for about a year, he worked at the Romanian Legation in Athens as Chancellor-interpreter (first substitute, then holder, pp. 78-79, 82). Among the professors he had in Athens there were "the great professor Hrysostomos Papadopoulos, later the Archbishop of Athens and Metropolitan of Greece", to whom Teodor M. Popescu always bore great respect while he also reviewed some of his works." (p.83)

<sup>9</sup> He went to Leipzig at the end of October, 1922, where he studied until the end of the academic year of 1923. Here, he attended both the classes of the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Philosophy (pp.87-88).

for students, getting the students used to gathering bibliographic information etc". He taught Church History to both his students and priests as well as how to prepare for becoming and being priests. To this end, he addressed, in writing or orally, a lot of issues with formative role<sup>10</sup>.

As professor, he published a lot of extremely valuable studies in church history, covering a variety of topics. He also published numerous articles, reviews, notes, sermons "defined by great stores of knowledge, scientific exactness, critical research of sources, objectivity and clarity"<sup>11</sup> Thus, between 1920 and 1930, he wrote 12 studies and articles<sup>12</sup>, constituting 9 written speeches<sup>13</sup>. Since 1930, after his settling down at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest and giving up his teaching position in

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<sup>10</sup> He wrote the following: *Educația în facultate* (1931), *Sub teroarea ignoranței agresive* (1931), *Biserica și răspunsurile preoției*, *Notă la articolul „Studentii nomazi”* (1934), *Învățămintele pentru studenți de la patronul nostru* (1936), *Scoala și viața* (1936), *Spiritul tânărului teolog*, *Sfințenia și răspunderea preoției* (1952), *Predica-o mărturie a preotului* (1954), *Familia preotului* (1955), *Preotul, păstor al Sfințelor tradiții* (1955), *Colaboratorii preotului* (1955), *Preotul văzut de credincioși* (1955), *Îndrumări metodice de lucru pentru studenții în teologie* (1956), *Evanghelia- cartea preotului* (1957), *Teologia și preoția în lumina Evangheliei*, *Preotul, omul dragostei creștine*, *Eroismul preoțesc* (1955), *Pregătirea pentru preoție* (1957), *Preoția vremii* (1957)(*ibidem*, pp. 101-102).

<sup>11</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Dicționarul teologilor români*, p. 383. See also *Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei Românești*, EIBMO, Bucharest, 2010, pp. 502-503.

<sup>12</sup> More relevant are: *Autobiografia Apostolului Pavel* (Atena, 1920), PhD thesis (Atena, 1922), *Divin și uman la vechii istorici bisericești* (Atena, 1924), *Simbolul Sinodului II ecumenic. Studiu istoric și critic* (Atena, 1924), *Denaturarea istoriei lui Origen* (1936), *Istoria creștinismului ca istorie a culturii* (1927), *Cucerirea Constantinopolului de Latini ca mijloc de unificare cu Roma* (1929)(*ibidem*, pp.104-105).

<sup>13</sup> More relevant are: *La sărbătoarea eroilor* (Paris, 1924, nepublicată), *L'Eglise Orthodoxe* (Paris, 1925, nepublicată), *Patronii Universității* (1926), *Rolul istoriei în înțelegerea creștinismului* (1927), *Sfântul Atanasie Patriarhul Alexandriei* (1927), *Ce dorește românismul creștinismului* (1928)(*ibidem*, p. 105).

Chişinău, he "committed himself only to his work in Bucharest: his teaching position, the political stands, the pulpit, the articles to religious journals, studies and reviews. His work suddenly became prodigious<sup>14</sup>, and he kept it at this rate until the day of his arrest - 4/5 March 1959"<sup>15</sup>.

Regarding his relations with his students, Professor Teodor M. Popescu, "being by nature and education an orderly character with regard to his thinking and acting, imposed on himself rigorous discipline in teaching as well as on the students in studies and exams."<sup>16</sup> According to a personal note, he held classes and seminars regularly, with no absence, he held the exams on time, carefully reading graduation or doctoral research papers. To better prepare first year students, some of them being high school graduates, he held a weekly one extra-hour of proseminar, in which he guided his students in searching for bibliography and sources as well as in the scientific method of doing research. He employed the same

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<sup>14</sup> We mention that he carefully prepared course of Church History for students, writing *The Church History with Concepts of Patrology*. Subsequently, he made a synthesis of The Universal History of the Church. He started the review of biblical and liturgical texts, translated from Slavic or Greek, and together with Bishop Irineu Mihălcescu, in 1937 and 1938, he worked on the revision of the New Testament and Psalms, the 1922 edition of the Holy Synod. Also, in 1955, he intended to publish, in five volumes, The Universal History of the Church, a project that was not carried out due to the censorship of the communist authorities. However, at the request of Patriarch Justinian, he collaborated with two professors to write a course for student of theological institutes, publishing it in two volumes in 1956 at EIBMBOR. Unfortunately, after his death, only "a load of bibliographical notes" could be found." (*ibid*, p.107).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105. We also mention that "on his arrest, 60 books of science, many journals of his specialty, a large number of manuscripts and other documents, over 40 notebooks including research data and bibliographical notes, brochures with extracts from his works were confiscated from his home." (*ibidem*, p. 107).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 111.

method with the doctoral students, allowing students who were to write graduation research papers to participate.

On the other hand, being aware of the quality of his work in training students, in his turn, he would demand of them the same hard work. For this reason, he was especially demanding in exams, “where superficiality was out of question and no outside intervention would change his decision regarding his fair grading. Students knew this and they would study seriously”<sup>17</sup>.

We must also that pedagogy was an important part of his concerns. Thus, he made great effort to improve his methods of teaching and training the future priests and theology intellectuals so as to “go beyond the old training pattern that became insufficient for the new requirements of the theological field, to get students accustomed to capitalizing on the knowledge gained from courses, seminars and exams, to dare assert themselves more thoroughly in the spiritual realm”. To this end, he supported a magazine for theology students, *Rays of Light*, where both teachers and students worked.<sup>18</sup>

We also mention that, in 1936, he took part as a delegate of the Romanian Patriarchate in the Orthodox Theological Faculties Congress, held in Athens, where he presented the paper “L' Eglise et la culture” that was subsequently published. Also, in 1948, he was part of our Patriarchate delegation participating in the conference of the Primates and representatives of the Orthodox Churches in Moscow, celebrating 500 years of autocephalous Russian Orthodox Church, occasion on which he gave two lectures<sup>19</sup>. Among his important concerns, we also mention the issue of the date of Easter. Between 1942 and 1946, he was the Dean of Faculty of Bucharest, between 1946

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p.114.

<sup>19</sup> *Atitudinea Vaticanului față de ortodoxie în ultimii 30 de ani*, în limba franceză (68 p), in the proceedings of the conference, and *Concordatele în general și cu Concordatul cu România* (*ibidem*, p. 115).



and 1948 assistant Dean of the same institution<sup>20</sup>. In the period during which he was a dean, he attended an official task in Katyn, Poland, where he would find the horrors committed by the communist Soviet military authorities, ordered by Stalin, against several thousand Polish officers. He also published in this period two articles that had a great saying in his condemnation: *From Nero to Stalin* and *The Communist Antichristian*<sup>21</sup>.

### **The arrest, conviction and imprisonment**

After the onset of communism, the Security began to monitor him on suspicion of foreign relations due to the fact that he had studied abroad, as we have already seen, and thus he knew many foreigners. On the other hand, the new regime began a campaign against the Church and he, as a devoted professor of theology, had a special activity among students, which was not perceived to be a good thing.

The first documentary references related to his monitoring by security dates from 1946. On the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1946, the General Directorate of Police "ordered the examination of the history and the current political activity of Popescu Teodor, professor at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest"<sup>22</sup>. The conclusion is clear and interesting at the same time. It is clear since it is said, verbatim, that "he is not enrolled and is not part of any political organization. He is known by his colleagues and students as a peaceful man and devout Orthodox worshipper. Searched in the files, the note reads, the prefecture does not know the

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<sup>20</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, pp. 383-384.

<sup>21</sup> Adrian N. Popescu, introduction to vol. „Prof. Teodor M. Popescu, *Meditații teologice*”, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Anexă documentară-Profesorul Teodor M. Popescu în documentele securității*, in vol. „Un martir al crucii-viața și scrierile lui Teodor M. Popescu, ed. Christiana, București, 2006, p. 380.

aforementioned accused person. He is currently the interim president of the Association *Nation Altars*, a cultural and religious association ...”<sup>23</sup>.

We would say that the note is interesting since although he had no political affiliation or sympathy, he was further pursued and even convicted and imprisoned. Almost the same wording and even the same conclusion appear in another report released two years later. The report made on the occasion of some communist security checks of potential “enemies of the people”, dated June 2, 1948, of Professor Teodor M. Popescu, among others, recorded: “he did not adhere to any political organization in any form, nor did he hold any political position. *He is totally disinterested in any political action* (our emphasis), being preoccupied only with teaching, being considered one of the best-trained professors of theology. Demanding but fair with the students”. Moreover, the report states on his work as a professor and his relations with the Legionaries: “during the legionary regime, he was repeatedly threatened, in writing and verbally, with assault. The legionary press led a violent campaign against him, being the only professor that, during the legionary strikes, continued his classes, even when had vials with different gases thrown into the room”<sup>24</sup>.

Since 1949, the professor will be presented in the Security documents with a radically changed biography, in order to frame his condemnation and imprisonment, as it had happened to all the intellectuals of the country. If Professor Teodor M. Popescu had appeared in the monitoring documents of the Security as having no political affiliation or adherence, having been made to suffer by Legionaries, he is now paradoxically described as a Legionary, fascist theologian, as one who had acted against the communist movement and against the USSR regime. For now on, he would be described in the Security documents as “hostile to our democratic system, standing out

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<sup>23</sup> ACNSAS, file 706, vol. I, f.70, in Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 3, f. 14-15, 18-18v. in Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

through different articles of mystical and insulting nature to the USSR". In order to somehow justify the monitoring, the Security added to his folder an earlier article written by Professor Teodor M. Popescu, entitled "The communist antichristianity", published in 1942, considered "to insult the USSR.". Starting with "his history of libellous articles against the communist regime of Romania, the Security intensified his monitoring against him". This was motivated especially by the fact that the professor held lectures during the courses of missionary guidance for the priests, among whom he may have spread "hostile ideas".

Interestingly enough, after 1949, Professor Teodor M. Popescu no longer appears so much in the Security documents, as the same researcher, Adrian Nicolae Petcu<sup>25</sup>, asserts and, as it seems, no longer so "gulty" (guilty).

For example, in 1953, the professor is presented in a note as "having had serious conflicts with some Legionaries" that "he took a stand in 1934-1935 against the Legionary Movement, eliminating Legionary students, not allowing them to take the exams, supporting the removal of Professor Grigore Cristescu due to Legionary allegiance", that he "had conflicts with Nichifor Crainic, but not less acute and less visible." In the same document, Teodor Popescu was characterized as part of the group of Stăniloae teachers, N. Chițescu, Justin Moisescu, Ioan Pulpea, Mihai Bulacu, Ioan Coman and others who "does not take nor is able to take or participate in any action against the regime"<sup>26</sup>.

His monitoring by the Security was even closer after 1958, "when some agents ... from the Institute of Bucharest provide several informative denigrating notes". Furthermore, according to Adrian Nicolae Petcu, the Security agent makes up a case against the professor relying on previous documents while also using the informative notes sent by "agents directed to this

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 38, p. 383.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 109-110, in Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

purpose". Since the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1958, the security agents "emphasized the Professor's participation in the 'staging of Vinita' and in the publishing of "From Nero to Stalin". In May 1938, a Security agent ordered that "information regarding Professor Teodor Popescu and Patriarch be gathered", in the context of the conflict between Patriarch Justinian Marina and the political power" on the issue of the Romanian monasticism. Consequently, since August 1958, the number of informative notes against Professor Teodor M. Popescu increase. The idea of his recruitment as an agent emerges from the archive documents of the Security. In order to fulfil this plan, on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 1959, the Security will order that the monitoring information be sent to the Criminal Investigation Department. The response received on the 16<sup>th</sup> January shows that he may be accused of the offence of "high activity against the working class", penalized by Article 193, paragraph 4 of the Penal Code"<sup>27</sup> In the same month of 1959, Professor Teodor M. Popescu turned down the offer of the Security of enrolling as an informant, thus avoiding jail with which he was threatened. Following his refusal, Captain Cristea Ioan of the Denominations Section, the Department of Internal Information State Security, proposed the arrest and prosecution of Professor Teodor M. Popescu, charging him of several offences. Unfortunately, some of the professors of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest contributed to the investigation and conviction, as the same well-known ANCSAS researcher, Adrian Nicolae Petcu<sup>28</sup>, asserts. Closely monitored and often questioned, his file ended up with so many pages being added up to the date of the trial, June 2, 1959, that it counted 5,000 pages.

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<sup>27</sup> ACNSAS, file 706, vol. I, f. 35, 36, in Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 391-392.

Rejecting the charges<sup>29</sup> as well as the proposal of becoming a collaborator of the Security Service, in the night of the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March 1959, he was taken away from his home by a team of the Security, consisting of five people, and sent to Jilava. The arrest warrant included the grounds of his arrest: "acts against the state order." After very thorough search, the militia men confiscated "a lot of books of theology, history magazines, brochures, a lot of notebooks and blotters containing studying notes, many manuscripts, articles, letters form and to foreign or Romanian study partners of theological studies, and a lot of bibliographical notes from books he had read over the years."<sup>30</sup> Although he had no fault found so as to be convicted, the Security would use any pretext; in this regard, the communist imagination and the freedom of their people to invent were boundless. In fact, Teodor M. Popescu "remained one of the strongest pillars of the Church, of Orthodoxy, of Romanian Christianity, of the ancestors' religion, which was interpreted as a challenge to the communist omnipotence and a wall against the destruction of Christianity and its servants in our country"<sup>31</sup>. To show how arbitrary the arresting decision was and how great the power of the regime manifested through investigation was, we replicate the statement that the investigator of the Security captain Ion Teodoru: "I arrested you, I'll investigate you, I'll blame you, I'll judge you blame you

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<sup>29</sup> He was accused of 5 criminal deeds: 1. criticism against the political communist regime 2. the professors and students of the Institute of Theology are adepts of Legionary politics 3. he organized Legionary help with another professor from the institute, Nicolae Balca 4. The Theological Institute has too many departments and too many professors and the number should be reduced 5. The Theological Institute is a problem to be solved and for this reason he was asked to cooperate with the Security. (Vasile M. Popescu, *Viața lui Teodor M. Popescu*, p. 118).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 120.

and you'll get at least 15 years"<sup>32</sup>, which is exactly what happened.

We must mention that throughout the investigation, Professor Teodor M. Popescu was beaten, tortured, threatened with death, cursed and insulted in the vilest way, treated with ferocious brutality and vulgarity. He was interrogated on several charges, mentioned in a footnote above, but they insisted on the following:

- Legionary activity;
- Intense action against the working class and the revolutionary movement, enemy of the people;
- Serious calumny against the Soviet Union on religion and inciting to war against the USSR;
- Instigator of the people in warlike actions through the Church and priests;
- Supporter of Fascism in political life;
- Holding, in the Dalles Hall and to the students, a number of conferences, directed against the state and favouring the Church;
- Through such conferences, he allegedly urged the governments to act against the working class and against the revolutionary repression in Romania, and supported Fascism;
- Being faithful (in religious terms) and fanatical, so being a criminal<sup>33</sup>.

Obviously, none of the allegations were true, but, as stated above, Professor Teodor M. Popescu had to be condemned and in order to be sentenced, he had to be accused (not necessarily proven guilty). In his personal notes, an excerpt showing he rejected any sympathy for the Legion was preserved: "the legionary movement was neither my concept

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 122. The "reasoning" of the Security was very simple: "you are a legionary because you are theologian and being theologian means you are against communism, being against communist means being a legionary" (Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 400).

nor political doctrine as idea, action, preoccupation, pleasure or delusion, neither ambition nor bloody inclination, nothing of what characterizes the Legionaries, imagined heroes of the nation, killers of Professor Nicolae Iorga"<sup>34</sup>.

As for the accusation of anti-Soviet attitude, we should say that he was informed through all the means available about the situation of the Church of that country and took a stand against the persecutions and abuse committed by the communist authorities against the Church and its servants. The opening speech of the classes of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest in November 1941, at the request of the theology students, the professor spoke about his research on what happened to the Church in the Soviet Russia. In fact, "he only did what he was supposed to do as professor, theologian and historian"<sup>35</sup>.

On the other hand, as we all know, the Security used various immoral "tools", people willing to give false information to provide prosecution reasons for those who were undesirable for the regime. The same happened in the case of Teodor M. Popescu, he was denounced slanderously because in the period he studied in Athens, "he allegedly lived with his host there, whom he married and with whom he came back home and that woman was his real wife (in 1959)". This statement is, according to the professor's brother, "a lie" that could not get any lower than that; he then demonstrated its falseness, showing that the professor had been married only once and that the one who made the statement intended nothing else but to take his position as professor.

During the trial, the Military Court endorsed the charges of the investigator on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1959, the defendant being charged for his activity prior to 1944, which is why the court had nothing to debate. The defence attorney Radu Soare was not allowed to study the file which was considered secret,

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<sup>34</sup> Vasile M. Popescu, *Viața lui Teodor M. Popescu*, p. 122.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p.124. The speech was published in BOR, anul LX, no.4/ 1942, pp.13-50.

becoming aware of allegations when the charges were publicly uttered. Basically, the hearing was limited to the reading of the charges by the prosecutor, to the defence of the defendant by his attorney who was allowed to speak five minutes while the defendant was allowed to speak only for one minute during which he was only able to say that the time was not necessary for his defence. He was denied any witness.<sup>36</sup>

It was a “mock” trial, ending with his being sentenced to 15 years in prison, the seizure of all his assets, the pay the trial costs. Teodor M. Popescu’s appeal was rejected, as expected (by decision no. 374 / July 13, 1959), so he was sent back to Jilava where he spent three more months, being subjected, like the other political prisoners, to extermination.”<sup>37</sup>

We highlight the fact that Professor Teodor M. Popescu’s arrest was not an isolated occurrence in the political context of the time – that is, the period of the second wave of arrests of priests, many of whom, as we found in a request issued by the Security, being close to Patriarch Justinian. Several “lots: were arrested: Viforâta (led by Bartolomeu Anania), Rugul Aprins (led by Daniel Sandu Tudor), the group of the priests of the Diocese of Arad (led by Hilarion Felea) and many others<sup>38</sup>.

After six months in Jilava, he was transferred to another prison, of even “harsher regime”, to Aiud. The Orthodox Churches and the Faculties of Theology of the Orthodox world as well as other churches and other countries where his work was known soon heard the news of his arrest and conviction. After nearly four years of detention in Aiud, the most fearful prison in the communist Romania, he was released in 1963, receiving a pension only after four years after his release (in 1967, a pension of 2193 lei per month ).

After his release in 1964, at the request of the University Theological Institute in Bucharest, Patriarch Justinian approved

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<sup>36</sup> Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

<sup>37</sup> Vasile M. Popescu, *Viața lui Teodor M. Popescu*, pp. 139-147.

<sup>38</sup> Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 392.



that Teodor M. Popescu hold the course of Modern Greek for magistrates and students, being paid for this activity by the Patriarchate. Since 1966, he was appointed librarian at the Patriarchal Administration; only after a month, he was transferred to the Biblical Institute to correct religious books that were to be printed. In the same period, he was appointed a member of the local committee of the Holy Synod for the study and development of the Romanian Orthodox Church positions in the theological dialogue with the Old Catholic Churches, committee chaired by Ioan G. Coman<sup>39</sup>. Later, he was asked by the Patriarch to review foreign magazines that he received from other Churches. After his release, he continued his scientific activity, publishing different studies and articles such as *These include the problem of determining The Date of Easter* , published in *Orthodoxy* , no. 3 / 1964 , pp. 334-344 .

Writing his 327 sermons (195 for Sunday feasts and 132 for repasts) holds a special place in his activity of this period. On the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1972, on leaving his workplace, he was beaten by Security agents until he fainted. He was hospitalized and then he returned home. His health being rather poor, in early March he was hospitalized again, where he died on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1973.

After 1990, many of his works, especially his research studies, were collected and published by some of his disciples. Thus, the following volumes appeared: *Biserica mărturisitoare*, *Biserica și cultura*, and *Meditații teologice*.

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<sup>39</sup> Vasile M. Popescu, *Viața lui Teodor M. Popescu*, pp.156-160.

## Conclusions

Teodor M. Popescu, “the unparalleled historian”<sup>40</sup> “was one of the foremost professors of Theology of our Church. Good connoisseur of classical and several foreign languages, with a thorough theological education, keen on church history enthusiast, he wrote fundamental works in the field of historical theology until today.

He was also always concerned with the education of the future priests, both in terms of their theological and spiritual preparation, in this regard holding special courses of introduction to historical sources, developing studies of methodology, supporting and writing theological meditations of high spiritual value.

Due to his involvement, as a layman, in the life of the Church, he was imprisoned by the communist authorities, doing four years of prison in Aiud and Jilava, remaining loyal to his principles of life and faith that he confessed with the same conviction in the most difficult moments of his life. For everything he did for the Church, for the Romanian and not only Romanian theology, for his exemplary Christian life, he remains a model of layman to be followed by as many as possible.

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<sup>40</sup> Adrian N. Popescu, *Profesorul Teodor M. Popescu (1893-1973)*, in vol. Prof. Teodor M. Popescu, *Meditații teologice*, Ed. Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Bucurștilor, 1997, p. 9.