

**THE BROTHERS OF THE
CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA
A century's presence and growth (1/2)**

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I. The beginnings: 1861-1871.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools first arrived in Romania in 1861, having been called there by Bishop Angelo Parsi, the Apostolic Administrator in Bucharest (1).

The first four Brothers came from Vienna and their mission was to take charge of the Saint Andrew primary school which was located on Calarasi Street in a building which had been the bishop's residence.

This beginning episode of Lasallian presence in Romania was short-lived since the superiors called the Brothers back to Vienna in 1871. Only Brother Wenceslaus Mary did not return. He had been the principal of the school and the director of the community before his death and he was buried in a Bucharest cemetery. His tomb in Romania served as a kind of claim for the return of the Brothers.

The Brothers' absence lasted for 27 years. In August, 1898, Bishop Xaverius Hornstein of Bucharest again requested the Brothers' help in taking charge of two small schools which were located at number 12 Calarasilor Street and number 122 Sirbey Voda Street. Twelve Brothers were sent to manage these two schools (2).

This new presence for the Brothers of the Christian Schools was approved by the National Ministry of Education, order number 49,589-1898.

II. THE SEED TAKES ROOT AND GROWS.

During the 1899-1900 school year a pre-school class located next to the number 12 Calarasilor Street school also began operations. This was for children under the age of seven and it had a bilingual program which functioned in Romanian and German.

At the same time the school expanded to include the first year of high school and an additional year was added for the next three years. The Education Ministry approved this expansion by public order number 8,569-1900.

Since space was at a premium, a new campus was rented in September, 1900 at number 3 Popa Tatu Street.

In 1902, Brother Egesio, the Director of the Calarasilor Street school became ill and subsequently died, probably from typhus. His legacy served as a good example of dedication to the Lasallian ministry in Romania. His last words were: "I offer my life for the good of the archbishop's schools and for the happiness of Romanian youth".

III. The "St. Joseph" and "St. Andrew Schools".

In 1906, the last expansion of the Popa Tatu Street school took place and it was moved to the Catholic seminary building next to the St. Joseph Cathedral, whence it took its name.

In 1913, Bishop Raymond Netzhammer opened a new boarding school on Calarasilor Street and gave it the name of "St. Andrew". The new school was home to some 100 boarders.

When the First World War broke out, the Brothers of German extraction were deported and housed in the Moldavia monastery. In 1918 they returned to take up their interrupted work at the St. Joseph and St. Andrew schools.

On September 1, 1926, both schools obtained recognition from the National Ministry of Education and the 1927-1928 school year began with all the appropriate official requirements.

At this time the enrollments grew to the point that more classrooms were needed since some of the primary grades had more than one section and some of the beginning high school classrooms had as many as 65 students.

Since the 1931-1932 academic year positions held by lay teachers began to be held by Romanian Brothers who had been prepared for these roles through religious and pedagogical formation. Some of these Brothers even pursued advanced studies at the University of Bucharest.

The Novitiate opened in Bucharest on June 26, 1940, with a group of six. Until that time the Novitiate had been in Vienna. The Bucharest Novitiate grew to house fifteen novices and in this same house the St. Anthony School opened in September, 1943.

In November, 1944, the Brothers of German ancestry were interned in concentration camps: two were in Tg. Jiu and four were in one of the monasteries in Bucharest on Pitar Mos Street. They were freed on August 23, 1945 and then they continued their work.

IV. THE BROTHERS IN THE PROVINCES.

– Craiova: in 1904 there was a primary school and a middle school staffed by four Brothers until 1944.

– Braila: this school lasted just three years from 1913 until 1916 due to the World War.

– Satu Mare: A primary school utilizing the Hungarian language opened in 1922. The number of classes was increased from four to seven. This activity ceased in 1948, the same time that other private schools closed as a result of the nationalization of all schools by the communist regime.

In 1943 there were four Brothers teaching at Satu Mare at the request of the Bishop. They left in 1948 due to the communist crackdown.

– Oradea: Educational activity began in 1926 and the Brothers came at the request of the Greek-Catholic Bishop Valerio Traian Frentiu to administer the primary school as a kind of practice school in association with the teacher training college in which the Brothers also taught foreign languages.

Also in Oradea, a house of formation was begun in 1926 with an Aspirancy program. Later on those in formation took courses at the teacher training college located here. Since August, 1940, at the directive of those in Vienna, young

Brothers were transferred to Blaj to take courses at the Greek-Catholic teacher training college there. Four classes earned their teaching diplomas in this way, the last group being in 1946.

After four months of interviews and judgments in the MAI Center on Uranus Street, the military tribunal found them guilty along with two former students from the St. Andrew School. The crime: having participated in Religion classes given at the Archbishopric.

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V. THE DIASPORA.

Just as preparations for the fiftieth anniversary (1898-1948) of Lasallian presence in Romania were getting under way, the shocking news came that the communist regime was nationalizing the private schools. As of this date, August 1, 1948, there were four communities: two in Bucharest and two in Satu Mare. There were 38 Brothers of which 9 were Austro-German and they had to be repatriated.

The remaining Brothers devoted themselves to catechesis in six different centers in Bucharest, ministering to 400 children and young people.

By the decree of 810-1948 the Ministry Council ordered the suppression of all religious congregations that dealt in social or educational works. At the head of the list were the Brothers of the Christian Schools. By the same decree religious personnel were confined to one of two places: the Roman Catholic archbishoprics of Bucharest and Alba Julia.

The Lasallian communities of the St. Joseph and the St. Andrew schools had to take refuge on the second floor of the Catholic Archbishopric forming just one community. Those in Satu Mare were allowed to remain in that city.

In order to survive those years, the Brothers devoted themselves to various jobs: some worked as mechanics, some did lathe working, some taught accounting courses or worked in state companies. The older Brothers taught private language classes at several different family homes. The younger ones managed to continue their university studies.

But things did not stay so calm because on the night of January 20, 1950, several "security personnel" arrived on the floor where the Brothers lived. They said that they were searching for weapons. Six Brothers, three from the Archbishopric and three from the Nuncio's residence were convicted without any type of due process and they were sent to work areas of the Danube-Black Sea Canal and to the Bicaz channel.

On March 4, 1950, Brother Tarsicio was "invited" to testify before the police. He returned some 15 days later. He had been implicated in a strange series of events because of his activities with the Apostolic Nuncio. He was sentenced to 16 years of hard labor for the crime of "high treason". This was only the beginning of very difficult times.

All the Brothers received many warnings, some more than others; the general impression was that they were being closely watched and followed no matter where they traveled in the city as they went to their various jobs.

On August 21, 1958, the attacks continued again. This time Brothers Tiberius and Dominic were arrested in Timisul and Brothers Augustine and Florentin were also arrested three days later in Bucharest.

(1) The "General History of the Institute" by G. Rigault, Volume 6, Chapter 3, pages 218-222 speaks about the beginnings of this Lasallian ministry in Romania. The historian places the beginnings in the union of its principal regions: Valachia and Moldavia along with Transylvania are like a Latin island in eastern Europe.

Later he speaks of the relation with Bishop Parsi of Nicopolis, the administrator of Valachia, an Italian Passionist, who came into contact with Brother Mainaudin in Vienna. Previously, Brother Modesto had dealt with Bishop Parsi at the request of Brother Philippe, Superior General.

Two Brothers, Modesto and Wenceslaus Mary, traveled to Bucharest on April 29, 1861 and they stayed at the bishop's residence from May 2-12. The date was set for the opening of the community and the school for September 15 of the same year.

There was a slight delay since it did not open until October 11 with some 50 students in attendance. Classes were taught in three languages: Romanian, German and Hungarian. Little by little the enrollment increased: in 1862, there were 120 students; in 1863, 175; in 1866, 250. By 1864 there were seven Brothers in the community.

Teaching expanded to include other subjects such as science, history, drawing as well as choral music. It was a school open to all creeds even though the majority of students were Catholic.

The superiors' hopes for the recruitment of vocations were frustrated and this was one of the primary reasons that the Brothers withdrew to Vienna when the community closed on July 29, 1871.

(2) Also in the "General History of the Institute", Volume 8, Chapter 3, pages 202-205, the author speaks of a second Lasallian presence in the country with some 10 years of experience from 1861-1871.

In 1898, Bishop Xavier Hornstein asked for Brothers for the Catholic Schools of the Bishop of Bucharest.

On August 17, 1898, the first ten Brothers arrived with Brother Egesio as Director. Student registration was held beginning on September 2 and classes began on September 13.

In a letter addressed to the Brother Assistant Madir Joseph, there is a reference to the way in which Brother Egesio taught. It stated that two lay teachers taught in Romanian; six Brothers taught in German and Hungarian; advanced classes were taught in French. In the early years there were 350 students at St. Andrew and 94 at the branch on Popa Tatu Street. Later on the author paints a portrait of Brother Egesio's personality (18 lines).

In 1900 the school was restructured and commercial subjects were added such as stenography, accounting, commercial correspondence and English.

There were 400 students in attendance at St. Andrew for the 1901-1902 academic year and 118 at Popa Tatu with another 45 in the high school section. There were 14 Brothers and 3 lay teachers. In 1904-1905 there were 620 students taught by 16 Brothers and 5 lay teachers.