

ORTHODOX SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE THROUGH THE EUCHARIST IN ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PRISONS

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores how Holy Communion was administered and the Eucharist was celebrated among political prisoners of the Orthodox faith in Romanian communist prisons. The main information is taken from memoirs of those who survived the Romanian gulag, but some informative notes found in the funds of the National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archive also contain interesting details that complete the picture of the liturgical act in detention. Priests had to face several practical and liturgical constraints, such as the lack of Eucharistic elements in accordance with Orthodox practice, the absence of liturgical vestments and objects that had to be improvised, and the difficulty of preserving and distributing the Holy Gifts, which had to be protected from profanation. The harsh conditions also led some ministers to step back from certain liturgical rigors that are usually obligatory. Moreover, given the state of shared suffering, on a few occasions confessional barriers were ignored and inter-communion celebrations took place.

Keywords

Romanian gulag; Divine liturgy; Communion; Ecumenism; Political detainees

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A defining aspect of the communist ideology was militant atheism, which sought to nullify or minimize religious dimensions in the life of the ‘new man’ and to remove the Church from social life.¹ The communist regime in Romania, however, did not explicitly repress

¹ See, for example: Paul Froese, ‘Forced Secularization in Soviet Russia: Why an Atheistic Monopoly Failed,’ *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43.1 (2004): 35–50.

the faith, but justified the imprisonment of clergy, monks and theologians on the grounds of ‘counter-revolutionary’ activity, a loosely defined concept.² The *Securitate* (i.e., the secret police agency in communist Romania) understood any expression of authentic Christian life as legionary propaganda³ – even though many of those who were condemned were not followers of the Legionary Movement⁴ –, since some inmates with a legionary past practiced ‘religious mysticism’.⁵ The prisons and forced labour camps in Romania, modelled on the Soviet gulag,⁶ involved, in addition to the repression of the inter-war political class and the elimination of the intellectual elite, the extermination of a significant number of Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Roman-Catholic and Protestant clerics and theologians. The communist prisons were intended to be places of ‘re-education’ for the moral restructuring of political detainees in accordance with communist ideology. The *Securitate* also undermined the spiritual life of political prisoners, which they claimed was preparation for the organized continuation of counter-revolutionary activity once released.⁷ Paradoxically, the communist

² Dragoș Ursu, ‘Ortodoxia și comunismul. Memoria unei istorii traumatice,’ in *Biserica și Statul: perspective diacronice asupra unei relații polivalente*, ed. R. Brudiu, M. Qaramah (Iasi: Doxologia, 2023), 280; Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

³ For the Legionary Movement in Romania, see, for example: L. Volovici, *Nationalism Ideology and Antisemitism. The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991); S. Fischer-Galati, ‘Codreanu, Romanian National Traditions and Charisma,’ in *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe*, ed. A. Costa Pinto, R. Eatwell and S. U. Larsen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 107–112; R. Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015). For the ideological conflict between communists and the Legionary Movement, see: Tiberiu Tănase, *Legionarism vs. Comunism. Considerații privind raporturile dintre mișcarea legionară și Partidul Comunist Român în perioada 1941–1948* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2020).

⁴ A striking example is the accusation made against the theologian and professor Teodor M. Popescu during his investigation in 1959: ‘You are a legionary because you are a theologian and being a theologian you are anti-communist, and being anti-communist means being a legionary’; George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, ‘Biserica Ortodoxă Română și Securitatea. Note de lectură,’ in *Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare și represiune în România comunistă* (București: Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, 2001), 112.

⁵ Dragoș Ursu, *Reeducare și represiune în comunism. O istorie politică a închisorii Aiud* (București: Corint, 2024), 265.

⁶ Antoanela Paula Mureșan, ‘The Gulag Archipelago model in the experience of Romanian communist prisons,’ *Analele Universității din Oradea. Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene* 5 (2013): 197–208.

⁷ Ursu, *Reeducare*, 277. A report of the Aiud prison task force, written in 1964, is very instructive in this respect: ‘The first category, which we consider the most dangerous, is made up of legionaries who, under the pretext of renouncing legionary activity,

prisons became places of rediscovering the authentic experience of the Christian faith, of assuming a martyric conscience and freedom of the spirit. The spiritual resistance in communist prisons also manifested itself in the liturgy, which was adapted to the harsh conditions. Priests had an essential role in animating liturgical life in prison, through the celebration of the daily Hours, the recitation of psalms and various prayers or hymns, Bible readings and catechesis, but above all through the Sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist.

In a report from 1959, Colonel Gheorghe Crăciun, commander of Aiud prison, affirmed the role of the clergy in initiating and intensifying the liturgical life in detention: ‘Priests and students of theology – not all of them, but some and, I could say, most of them – maintain a bad state of mind as priests on the eve of feasts ask “Who wants to confess?” or “Who desires to take Communion?” or announce that a fast is beginning and so on.’⁸

This paper explores how Holy Communion was administered and the Eucharist celebrated among political prisoners of the Orthodox faith in Romanian communist prisons.⁹ There are several studies dedicated to religious life in the Romanian communist prisons, which illustrate how Christian faith and spirituality offered strength and resilience to political prisoners.¹⁰ Although previous studies highlighted the

claim that they cannot renounce Christian practices and faith.’ See: ACNSAS, Documentary fund, file 12609, vol. 6, f. 78.

⁸ ACNSAS, Documentary fund, file 13484, vol. 13, f. 189.

⁹ It should be noted that ministers and believers of other Christian confessions also realized clandestine liturgical practices in communist prisons both in Romania and other Eastern European communist countries; see, for example: Richard Wurmbbrand, *Christ in the communist prisons* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1968), who shares some information of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant religious services in communist prisons in Romania; Jan Synek, *Svobodni v nesvobodě. Náboženský život ve věznicích v období komunistického režimu* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2013), 102–158, where the author explores the liturgical life of Catholics and other confession in communists prisons in Czechoslovakia; Pavol Minarik, ‘Official and Underground: The Survival Strategy of the Catholic Church in Communist Czechoslovakia,’ *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 24.3 (2023): 332–351; Andriy Oliynyk, ‘Liturgical and Pastoral Activity as a Crime in Soviet Ukraine: The Case of Greek Catholic Priest, Roman Bakhtalovskyy, CSsR (1897–1985),’ *Religions* 12.3 (2021): 174. DOI: 10.3390/rel12030174.

¹⁰ See, for example: Marius Alin Teican, ‘From Revolt to Spiritual Consciousness: The Understanding of Suffering in Romanian Communist Prisons,’ *Ortodoksia* 64 (2024): 81–95; Dragoș Ursu, ‘Resistance through Faith inside the Romanian Gulag. Case study: the. Aiud re-education,’ *Altarul Reintegrării* suppl. 2 (2017): 135–149; Ruxandra Cesereanu, ‘Resistance Solutions in the Communist Prisons and Concentration Camps of Romania Memoirist Writings of the Romanian Gulag,’ *Transylvanian Review* 25, suppl. 2 (2016): 203–215; George Enache, ‘Christian Life in Communist

presence of the Eucharist as a significant expression of the martyric conscience of faithful detainees,¹¹ less attention was given to analysing the Eucharistic sacramental event per se in the repressive detention environment. Here, the primary source of information is taken from the memoirs of those who survived Romanian gulags, with additional material drawn from the National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archive [ACNSAS]. The aim was not a quantitative inventory of information on the celebration of the Eucharist in the communist prisons, but a qualitative presentation of those descriptions concerning the sacramental act, starting with the preparation/procurement of the items needed to celebrate the Eucharist, the manner of celebration, and realization of the sacramental event through Communion. Descriptions of Eucharistic celebrations in the memorial literature are extremely disparate and often only provide a brief summary. The majority of the accounts concern the period 1949–1964, during which the Romanian communist regime adopted a totalitarian stance of political repression and religious suppression. Most accounts regard sacramental events that took place in the prisons of Pitești, Aiud, and Gherla. The Pitești penitentiary is renowned for its brutal ‘re-education’ program, involving psychological and physical torture aimed at breaking the faith and moral values of the detainees. This program was later implemented in Aiud and Gherla prisons, where religious practices were strictly forbidden under threat of harsh punishment.¹² Another important site, however, is the Târgu-Ocna sanatorium prison which became a place of intense spiritual resistance, with prisoners engaging in clandestine prayer and religious services, due to the presence of the ‘group of mystics’ – political prisoners, who through prayer and hesychasm

Prisons in Romania. Case Study: Valeriu Gafencu,’ *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați. Seria Istorie* 11 (2012): 207–222.

¹¹ See: George Daniel Achim, ‘Euharistia – viețuire în Hristos în temnițele comuniste,’ *Altarul Reîntregirii* 19, suppl. 2 (2014): 79–90; Dragoș Ursu, ‘Euharistia ca fundament al martiriului în închisorile comuniste,’ *Altarul Reîntregirii* 19, suppl. 2 (2014): 429–434; Jan Nicolae, ‘Potirul este viața mea.’ Părintele Ioan Iovan cuminecătorul. Euharistie și martiriu în viața unui preot român în închisorile comuniste,’ *Altarul Reîntregirii* 19, suppl. 1 (2014): 327–358.

¹² See, for example: Alin Mureșan, Dumitru Lăcătușu, *Casa Terorii: documente privind penitenciarul Pitești (1947–1977)* (Iași: Polirom, 2009); Mircea Stănescu, *Reeducarea în România comunistă (1945–1952). Aiud, Suceava, Pitești, Brașov* (Iași: Polirom, 2010); Ursu, *Reeducare*.

underwent intense spiritual transformation and mystical experiences while enduring persecution.¹⁵

1. The Eucharistic reserve and the distribution of the Holy Gifts

Celebration of the Eucharist was discouraged. Lack of access to bread and wine and other items necessary for its celebration, as well as significant risks to the clergy who participated made it very challenging. However, there was no shortage of opportunities, and prominent ministers in prisons succeeded in creating a minimal liturgical context for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Sometimes, for example, they were able to engage in this ministry by applying the principle of *oikonomia* to overcome the more typical canonical or liturgical rigors. Still, frequency of Communion was generally sporadic. However, there were a few emblematic priestly figures who managed to administer the Sacrament daily. For example, an note by *Bucur Dumitru* (conspiratorial name), on December 2, 1959 at Gherla penitentiary, about his cell-mate, Fr. Ioan Iovan, one of the most renowned clerics in the Romanian communist prisons,¹⁴ is very revealing:

[Ioan Iovan] constantly maintains a mystical and uplifting religious atmosphere through liturgical services twice a day, daily communion and confession and daily talks on the lives of saints. Every morning 30–40 prisoners receive Holy Communion, and last Sunday the number reached 45 out of the 55 in the room. At any hour of the day or night he is ready to hear someone’s confession, or to give Communion to someone. For this, he is credited with a saintly life that places him above all the priests in the prison. Even believers of other denominations have a sense of awe for this man, which is why his word carries great weight among the inmates. Among the most ardent followers of Fr. Iovan are the following: Mussat Radu, Berdena S. Mihai, Barbu Stan, Chelșoiu Nicanor and Rociu. They take daily communion and fully approve of the mystical aspect of Fr. Iovan’s activities.¹⁵

¹⁵ Dragoș Ursu, ‘Viața spirituală și ethosul misionar în închisorile comuniste. Studiu de caz: Închisoarea Târgu-Ocna între anii 1950–1953,’ *Altarul Reîntregirii* 3 (2015): 307–317.

¹⁴ Vasile Manea, *Preoți ortodocși în închisorile comuniste* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2004), 143–145.

¹⁵ ACNSAS, Informative fund, file 211014, vol. 1, ff. 234–236.

Similarly, Nicu Cucoli, who was imprisoned in 1959 in Jilava penitentiary (a transit and sorting penitentiary for counter-revolutionary adherents¹⁶) for legionary activity, remembers how Fr. Chiriac, who was imprisoned the same year, used to celebrate the Eucharist and give Communion to inmates almost every day. Cucoli recounts that: '[Fr. Chiriac] would impart [the Holy Gifts] to us with such faith and joy as I have never seen. He lived so intensely the moment of the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion that it is hard for me to relate.'¹⁷

At times, Eucharistic reserve procured from outside prison walls was used. For example, Fr. Justin Pârnu, another renowned priest who was incarcerated at Aiud penitentiary in 1949, and from 1955 to 1959,¹⁸ tells of how clerics who knew they were about to be arrested by the communists would prepare the Eucharist so that they could take it with them before imprisonment:

Holy Communion was brought from outside, mostly by prisoners who had been condemned once before. ... They would take a little piece of bread, white or black, and they would make pea-shaped lumps into which they would put the Sacrament. They would make two, three, four, five hundred such pieces. They would take the coat or the cloak in which they were to be imprisoned, and they stuffed the Holy Communion all over the coat. Thus, the Eucharist was brought inside prisons.¹⁹

Sometimes, humane wardens discreetly brought the Holy Gifts to imprisoned priests. Fr. Dimitrie Bejan, who was imprisoned at Aiud penitentiary in 1959,²⁰ testified that a priest from the city sent him the dried Holy Gifts (the Eucharistic reserve) through a guard.²¹

¹⁶ *Dicționarul penitenciarelor din România comunistă*, ed. Andrei Muraru (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 555–563.

¹⁷ Manu Ionuț Dragoș, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română sub regimul comunist. Clerici ortodocși în închisorile comuniste (1945–1964)* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu, 2017), 192.

¹⁸ See: Nicolae Cătălin Luchian, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Clerici și mireni mărturisitori din Arhiepiscopia Iașilor, în închisorile comuniste (1945–1964)* (Iași: Doxologia, 2017), 123–124.

¹⁹ 'Părintele Justin Pârnu: Împărtășania și Sf. Liturghie în temniță,' *Atitudini*, December 13, 2023, <https://atitudini.com/2023/12/parintele-justin-parvu-impartasania-si-sf-liturghie-in-temnita>.

²⁰ See: Luchian, Petcu, *Clerici*, 37–40; Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Dicționarul clericilor și mirenilor ortodocși români mărturisitori în detenția comunistă [1945–1964]* (București: Basilica, 2017), 40–43.

²¹ Dimitrie Bejan, *Vifornița cea mare* (București: Editura Tehnică, 1996), 88.

Occasionally, trustworthy guards even distributed the Holy Gifts among certain inmates, putting themselves at high risk. *Târâianu*, an informant and cellmate of Fr. Ioan Iovan at Brăila penitentiary, reported that on the evening of July 13, 1955, after 10 p.m., Fr. Iovan asked Sergeant Gheorghe to take Communion to Fr. Gherasim who was sick.²²

Nevertheless, it was extremely difficult to preserve the Holy Gifts and offer Communion to inmates who did not have a priest in their cells. One place where the Holy Gifts were left to be taken by other prisoners was the toilet, as Fr. Justin Pârveu testifies:

In the morning, the bedpans were taken by the inmates to be emptied at the stone closet. There, by Morse code, we would announce to the neighboring cell: ‘Look, we have something up there...’ We had a certain place where Communion, holy water and antidoron were placed. Whoever went there first ran there, because the guardian was following him, went in, grabbed it, put it in his pocket and took it to the cell.²⁵

Fr. Constantin Voicescu, who was imprisoned in Târgu-Ocna sanatorium-penitentiary from 1950 to 1954,²⁴ recounts how Fr. Viorel Todea, who was hospitalized there between 1953–1954,²⁵ distributed the Holy Gifts: ‘[Fr. Todea] was keeping the Holy Communion. We would confess and partake like in the catacombs, in a bathroom somewhere. Or we would go for a walk and confess, and in a corner, we would receive Communion.’²⁶

Fr. Ioan Giurgiu, who was in detention between 1959 and 1964 at Aiud, Pitești and Salcia labor camp,²⁷ used to keep the Eucharistic

²² Andrei Andreicut, *Mărturisitori pentru Hristos* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2005), 61–62; ACNSAS, file P. 160, vol. 11, f. 5.

²⁵ ‘Părintele Justin Pârveu: Împărtășania și Sf. Liturghie în temniță,’ *Atitudini*, December 13, 2023, <https://atitudini.com/2023/12/parintele-justin-parveu-impartasania-si-sf-liturghie-in-temnita>.

²⁴ Constantin I. Stan, ‘Părintele Constantin Voicescu și reeducările de la Târgu Ocna și Aiud,’ *Analele Buzăului 2* (2010): 199–208; Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 358–360.

²⁵ Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 343–345.

²⁶ Mihai Rădulescu, *Rugul Aprins: duhovnicii ortodoxiei, sub lespezi, în gherlele comuniste* (București: Ramida, 2013), 234.

²⁷ Salcia was situated in the Danube Delta, where inmates (including political detainees, intellectuals and members of the clergy) were subjected to gruelling labor, often working long hours in extreme weather conditions; *Dicționarul penitenciarelor*, 141–145.

reserve in a toothpaste tube, which was passed between inmates who partook at certain critical moments.²⁸

Most often, the Holy Gifts were hidden by prisoners in their clothing, as Fr. Dimitrie Bejan testified: ‘I kept [the Holy Communion] hidden in the collar of my shirt, and when I was prepared, I would partake. And if one of the prisoners was sick or dying, I heard his confession and gave him Communion on the sly, and so he would depart to Christ.’²⁹ Likewise, Grigorie Caraza relates that when he was in detention late in the fall of 1955 in Aiud prison, he believed that he would die soon, and asked the priest in his cell, who had the Holy Gifts hidden in his cloth, to hear his confession:

The priest asked the other two companions to retreat to the corner of the bed near the door and even to stand and talk, thus blocking the prying eyes of the guard who was watching us from the door. ... After performing this Sacrament [i.e., Confession, A/N], he unfastened with a nail the hem of his linen cloth in a certain place, from which he took out – wrapped in a piece of clean cloth – a crumb of Bread that had been soaked in Wine. It was the Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of the Savior.³⁰

After partaking, Caraza smelled a powerful odor of basil, which overwhelmed him. Asking the priest where he was keeping basil, the priest replied that he did not have any, assuring him that he had had an experience of divine grace.

According to the testimony of Emanoil Paraschivaș, Fr. Ilie Lăcătușu kept the Holy Gifts hidden in the hem of his shirt sleeve at Periprava labor camp,³¹ where they met sometime between 1961 and 1964.³² The two were in separate cells. Paraschivaș relates how he received Communion:

On Saturday, when the bells started ringing at the church near the prison, I heard, through Morse code through the ceiling of my cell: ‘Ready.’ I went

²⁸ Dumitru Bogdan Bădiță, *Martiri și mărturie creștină în temnițele comuniste din România* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Bucharest, 2020), 194.

²⁹ Bejan, *Vișornia*, 88.

³⁰ Grigore Caraza, *Aiud însângerat* (Iași: TipoMoldova, 2015), 77.

³¹ Situated in the Danube Delta, as Salcia, this labor camp was renowned for its extermination regime; *Dicționarul penitenciarelor*, 136–140.

³² For Fr. Ilie Lăcătușu (1909–1985), see: Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 185–188

to the window and in a hole made by someone in the shutter that was stopping the sun from shining on me, I saw a string hanging from the window, which brought me the true Light.³⁵

Fr. Zosim Oancea recounts that, during his detention in Aiud penitentiary where he was imprisoned from 1949 until 1957,³⁴ the Eucharist was distributed among prisoners through faithful detainees called ‘parachutes,’ who sent the Holy Gifts to all the floors of the prison. Fr. Zosim recounts:

The Eucharist was put in a little bag, from which the person who received it, on each floor, distributed it across the floor. Every day pills of kneaded bread were made, in which a crumb of Holy Communion was put, thus allowing more people to receive it. The communion followed a ritual signaled through beating in the pipe. At the first beating the prayer was said; at the next beating everyone swallowed the pill; and at the last beating everyone knew that, as a priest, I said the prayers after Holy Communion.³⁵

If there were no priests, lay inmates would partake of the Holy Gifts by themselves, in solitude. This practice was permitted given the extreme circumstances. However, from a liturgical point of view this was significant, since the Byzantine rite does not accept the practice of the faithful administering the Eucharist to themselves, not even in the case of hermits. Yet, in such case, lay detainees partook of the Holy Gifts with great reverence, after previously receiving a priest’s permission, thus maintaining as much of the Church’s liturgical order as possible. For example, Ioan Ianolide, who was considered by the *Securitate* as one of the vectors of ‘religious mysticism’ in communist prisons,³⁶ recounts how he partook from the Eucharistic reserve during Christmas in Pitești penitentiary in 1949. After he confessed to a priest who was in another cell, using Morse code through the pipe of the radiator, he partook of the Presanctified Gifts, which were concealed in a fold of his coat:

³⁵ Emanoil Paraschivaș, *Jocul destinului* (București: Editura Brad, 2000), 135.

³⁴ Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 251–252.

³⁵ Zosim Oancea, *Datoria de a mărturisi. Închisorile unui preot ortodox* (București: Harisma, 1995), 183–184.

³⁶ See: Adrian Nicolae Petcu, ‘Spiritualitate creștină versus legionarism în detenția comunistă. Studiu de caz: Ioan Ianolide,’ *Tabor* 10 (2015): 47–49.

The preparatory prayers for Communion had been said by the priest [from another cell; A/N]. I searched in a fold of my coat with dozens of patches layered one on top of the other, and from a tiny silk bag I took out a particle of the Holy Sacraments, hidden in a millet grain, which I kept as my most precious possession. The Holy Sacraments were brought into the dungeon by a devious and dangerous way, through a monk who had been arrested about two years before, and who had entrusted the Bread and Wine to the inmates who wished to commune. So, as I was about to take the crumb of Communion, I do not know how I dropped it. I began to look for it feverishly, but I could not find it. Then, I decided to wipe with my tongue a portion of the floorboard where I thought it had fallen, but I still could not find it. I assumed the Communion had taken place. I brightened and returned to the bedside in prayer.³⁷

Similarly, Nicolae Steinhardt – a jew who was baptized into the Orthodox faith in Jilava penitentiary in 1960³⁸ – recounts how he and his cell companions took Communion in Gherla prison on Pascha in 1961:

A long time ago, Marinică P. told Sile Cătălinoiu and me that he has, perfectly sewn in a corner of a handkerchief, some crumbs of Communion, given to him about three years ago by Fr. Ioan Iovan, the confessor of Vladimirești Monastery. We decided, however, in the absence of a priest in the cell, to partake on our own. We fasted on Saturday and Sunday mornings and we kept some of Saturday's food ... Marinică knew perfectly all the prayers before Communion. ... We fasted, we prayed. At noon on Sunday, we went up to the fourth floor where Sile's bed was. Marinică recited at length the whole series of prayers. Then we each said: 'I believe, O Lord, and I confess...' ³⁹ and 'Take, eat...' ⁴⁰ From the bridge of our palms, carefully washed, we each swallowed a crumb of Communion; the crumbs were unbelievably small, almost invisible. ... Marinică then said the thanksgiving prayers.⁴¹

As shown in the quotation above, even under the starvation conditions of the extermination regime imposed in some prisons, inmates

³⁷ Ioan Ianolide, *Întoarcerea la Hristos* (București: Christiana, 2006), 263–264.

³⁸ Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 321–324.

³⁹ A preparatory prayer for Communion.

⁴⁰ The words of institution.

⁴¹ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii* (Rohia: Editura Mănăstirii Rohia, 2005), 209–210.

prepared themselves by prayer and fasting prior to receiving the Holy Gifts. Virgil Maxim also attests to such an ascetic practice describing Pascha night at Jilava prison in 1951. Throughout Holy Week, the faithful detainees imposed a program of silence, meditation and prayer. On Pascha, they woke up at midnight: ‘Some of whom I had revealed that I had the Holy Communion, received a crumb and they were very pleased. Most did not think themselves worthy to receive it.’⁴²

According to Steinhardt a Communion ritual was improvised. Prayers of the usual Office of Holy Communion, which is found in the Horologion,⁴³ were recited from memory and formed the main part of the ‘ritual.’ Other elements were added, depending on the piety and memory of the detainees. Steinhardt, for example, recounts the recitation of the institution narrative, which is a part of the Byzantine anaphora.

2. The celebration of the Eucharist

The difficulty of obtaining the Eucharist in the hostile and discouraging atmosphere of religious prohibition in detention encouraged liturgical aberrations. One such case took place in 1957 at Râmnicu Sărat penitentiary – a prison recognized for its isolation and starvation of political prisoners –⁴⁴, as recalled by the former politician Ion Diaconescu:

[I]n one year, engineer Puiu, our friend who was with us, after we confessed to Fr. Balica, asked the confessor, through Morse, if he could also give us Communion through Morse code. ... He proposed that we each would keep a piece of cornbread, the priest would say the necessary prayers, we would concentrate on his signal, and he would bless our corn! The priest replied that he could not imagine such a thing. He told him that wine was needed, that corn flour was not suitable, and that other things were also required.⁴⁵

The priest’s opposition was understandable. The *Hieratikon* clearly stipulated the use of leavened bread, made of pure wheat flour, with

⁴² Virgil Maxim, *Imn pentru crucea purtată* (București: Editura Antim, 2002), 242–244.

⁴³ *The Unabbreviated Horologion or Book of the Hours* (Holy Trinity Publications, 1997), 377–395.

⁴⁴ *Dicționarul penitenciarelor*, 440–451.

⁴⁵ Mihai Rădulescu, Irineu Slătineanu, *Preoți în cătușe* (București: Ramida, 1997), 22.

clean water and a little salt. If the minister dares to use bread made from other seeds or to which other foods have been added (milk, egg, etc.), the Sacrament is not valid and the minister is deprived of the grace of priesthood.⁴⁶ Bread for celebrating the Divine Liturgy would usually have been procured from the daily ration of the detainees. However, the lack of pure liturgical wine was also a major issue. Again, the *Hieratikon* was very specific about the necessity of using a pure and quality wine: 'And if anyone dares to celebrate the Sacrament with other juices, apart from the wine of the vine itself, or with vinegary wine, or mixed with anything else, he will not celebrate the Sacrament at all, rather the priest will be in grave sin and will be deprived of the priesthood.'⁴⁷ Nevertheless, when the Eucharistic reserve was consumed, to ensure the continuation of the Holy Gifts, priests had to improvise, relying on the theological justification of *oikonomia*, given the extreme pastoral need, while expressing concern for the validity of the Sacrament. A common solution was the use of medicinal wine.

For example, in Aiud prison, Fr. Zosim used therapeutic tonic wine from the prison infirmary and a loaf of bread from his daily ration.⁴⁸ Fr. Viorel Todea remembers how in Târgu-Ocna penitentiary, where he was in detention from 1951 until 1954, the sick political prisoners in danger of death asked him to receive their confession and to give them Communion. For this, he used tonic wine and his own chest as altar for the celebration of the Eucharist:

[W]ith God's will, with the bread and tonic wine strained through the wadding, and my chest as altar, we celebrated the Eucharist and so we had Holy Communion all the time for those who wanted it, and they left the world with a peaceful heart. The less sick came to partake also. When body searches were carried out to find the Holy Communion, a guard found the box in which Fr. Todea kept the Holy Sacrament. However, he said to the priest: 'Don't worry! May God watch over you!'⁴⁹

Some priests managed to produce a sort of wine substitute from fermented marmalade. Fr. Constantin Voicescu recounts that in

⁴⁶ *Liturghier* (București: Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, 1937), 359–360.

⁴⁷ *Liturghier*, 354.

⁴⁸ Oancea, *Datoria de a mărturisi*, 183.

⁴⁹ Viorel Todea, 'Amintiri din gulagul comunist,' in *Noi nu am avut tinerețe. Cronica rezistenței anticomuniste, 1945–1989* (Alba Iulia: Altip, 2005), 153.

Târgu-Ocna penitentiary he used to prepare his wine from the marmalade he received in his food ration or he used the tonic wine he obtained among his medicines.⁵⁰ Similarly, Fr. Dumitru Bălașa recalls how the Eucharistic elements were prepared for the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord in Aiud penitentiary (where he was imprisoned in 1960):

Occasionally, instead of cornbread or polenta, we would get a slice of bread, about the size of two boxes of matches. Rarely in the morning we were given two acorns of marmalade. ... One man's slice of bread was the 'artos.' I would put a cup of water in a canteen – we did not have enough water – and mixed it with the marmalade. In three days, it fermented and we would make a kind of wine.⁵¹

In 1963, Fr. Dumitru Bălașa was transferred from Aiud to the Salcia forced labor colony where he was able to celebrate the Eucharist, preparing the liturgical wine from the raisins he received as a packet:

[O]n Sundays, we had cleaning day ..., but still found time to celebrate the Eucharist. Those sentenced to many years in prison were the martyrs on whose chests we, the 'Bandits,' namely 3–4 priests, celebrated the Divine Liturgy. ... [S]ome of us who were entitled to a package were given raisins from home. We made wine from them. Here, we weren't staked out by the guards. We celebrated the Eucharist, which lasted an hour, and literally everyone took Communion. Among us, there were also some cowards who did not take part in the celebration, fearing the snitches who had begun to believe that if they serve the devil, they would get home faster.⁵²

Occasionally, guards with conscience would smuggle wine inside prisons and give it to priests. Fr. Justin Pârveu recounts that when he was in the mine in Baia Sprie (1950), a few humane guards brought him wine and bread for the Eucharist.⁵³ A similar case is remembered by Fr. Ioan Vladovici, who was imprisoned in Borzești labor camp. Because he helped a guard take a quantity of flour from the camp for his family

⁵⁰ Rădulescu, *Rugul aprins*, 234.

⁵¹ Dumitru Bălașa, 'Sfânta Liturghie în celulă,' *Porunca iubirii* 3 (2001): 34.

⁵² Bălașa, 'Sfânta Liturghie,' 35.

⁵³ Ieromonahul Teognost, *Părintele Justin Pârveu și bogăția unei vieți dăruită lui Hristos*, vol. 1 (Iași: Credința Strămoșească, 2006), 125.

displaced near the prison, the guard gave him a return a small bottle of penicillin with wine and some thin finger-thick ampoules in which he was later able to keep Holy Communion.⁵⁴ Fr. Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, an emblematic figure of the anti-communist resistance,⁵⁵ also recounted how, after his second imprisonment in 1979 in Aiud penitentiary, a guard brought him bread to celebrate the Eucharist.⁵⁶

However, in extreme situations, some priests celebrated the Eucharist with water instead of wine. One of the outstanding spiritual figures in Romanian communist prisons was Fr. Arsenie Papacioc.⁵⁷ According to an informative note given on February 8, 1960 at Aiud penitentiary by a cellmate, *Andreescu Teodor* (conspiratorial name),⁵⁸ the hieromonk used water instead of wine for the Eucharist:

By 7 o'clock, when the call is made, the Liturgy is over. At the moment of communion, everyone in the room takes a piece of bread and a sip of water. The priest was trying to excuse the shortages in which he was obliged to officiate the Liturgy, saying: 'I do the Liturgy as in church and if the good Lord sees our need and wills it, this bread and water is his very Body and Blood.' Because this practice is officiated daily, now each one, in turn, gives from his bread the piece that is used the next day as Eucharist.

⁵⁴ Dragoș, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română sub regimul comunist*, 189.

⁵⁵ See: Manea, *Preoți ortodocși*, 66; also: Lavinia Stan, 'Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, the Forgotten Anticommunist Dissident,' in *Liberals, Conservatives, and Mavericks: On Christian Churches of Eastern Europe since 1980. A Festschrift for Sabrina P. Ramet*, ed. Frank Cibulka and Zachary T. Irwin (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2024), 205–221.

⁵⁶ '[W]ith that bread I think I celebrated the most beautiful Liturgy, the most uplifting. At the end, the guard came, opened the door and said to me: 'Father – it was the first time he had ever called me 'Father', until then he had called me 'popă'[in Romanian, this is a pejorative term for 'priest', A/N] – wherever you go, don't tell anyone that I gave you bread, for they'll kick me out!' He said 'them' as if he belonged to my side, not theirs. I replied: 'No, Mr. Warden! What can I say? Well, you served with me here; you were the angel who brought me the body of Jesus! How can I talk about it and hurt you?' ... Well, God inspired him, no doubt; it was not his good thought. However, since then he became gentler. He stopped insulting me, he stopped kicking me. That gesture changed him;' 'Cea mai frumoasă Liturghie a părintelui Gheorghe Calciu din temnița Aiudului,' *Fericiți cei prigonți pentru dreptate*, March 3, 2011, <https://fericiteicprigoniti.net/cea-mai-frumoasa-liturghie-a-parintelui-gheorghe-calcu-din-temnita-aiudului>.

⁵⁷ Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 261–266.

⁵⁸ ACNSAS, Informative fund, file 185003, vol. 3, ff. 183–193.

Fr. Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa⁵⁹ also recounted how he celebrated the Eucharist with bread and water during his second imprisonment in 1979 in Aiud penitentiary: ‘I had no wine, but only bread, and I used water as wine, because the Savior had turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana, and I thought that here too, in my suffering, it would be sanctified. I celebrated [the Eucharist] every Sunday.’⁶⁰

The use of water instead of wine in the Eucharist presented a significant theological and canonical dilemma, since the Orthodox Church does not accept consecration without wine as valid. Using water was however an act of profound faith. The priests trusted that God’s grace would compensate for their deprivation, acknowledging his ability to work outside normal means and make their offering acceptable.

The lack of suitable liturgical objects, vestments and of the antimimension, which serves as a ‘movable’ altar and in which holy martyr relics are sewn, was another serious reason for the inner turmoil for priests who wished to celebrate the Eucharist according to liturgical and canonical norms.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Fr. Arsenie Papacioc illustrates how such shortcomings were overcome. This is what his cellmate in Aiud penitentiary recalls in the note already mentioned above:

He easily overcame all the difficulties he encountered and simply and practically improvised all the utensils he needed ... Instead of the epitrachelion, without which the Divine Liturgy could not be celebrated, he made a string chain, which he very piously passed around his neck in the morning, after blessing it first, and then, after the Liturgy, he wrapped it around a button on his coat. The stove takes the place of the Holy Table and the Holy Cross

⁵⁹ Manea, *Preoți ortodocși*, 66; see also: Lavinia Stan, ‘Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, the Forgotten Anticommunist Dissident,’ in *Liberals, Conservatives, and Mavericks: On Christian Churches of Eastern Europe since 1980. A Festschrift for Sabrina P. Ramet*, ed. Frank Cibulka and Zachary T. Irwin (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2024), 203–221.

⁶⁰ ‘Cea mai frumoasă Liturghie a părintelui Gheorghe Calciu din temnița Aiudului,’ *Fericiți cei prizoniți pentru dreptate*, March 3, 2011, <https://fericiteiceiprizoniti.net/cea-mai-frumoasa-liturghie-a-parintelui-gheorghe-calcu-din-temnita-aiudului>.

⁶¹ The liturgical handbooks of the time prevented the priest from performing any liturgical act unless he had the epitrachelion and prohibited the celebration of the Eucharist in the absence of the antimimension; Vasile Mitrofanovici, Teodor Tarnavski, Nectarie Nicolae Cotlarciuc, *Liturgica Bisericii Ortodoxe. Cursuri universitare* (Cernăuți: Editura Consiliului Eparhial Ortodox Român din Bucovina, 1929), 248, 257; Ilie Teodorescu, *Îndrumări liturgice pentru preoți și popor* (București: Editura Librăriei Socec & Co, 1923), 26, 54; Badea Cireșanu, *Tezaurul liturgic al Sfintei Biserici Creștine Ortodoxe de Răsărit*, vol. 3 (București: Tipografia Gutenberg, 1912), 100.

is made of two tiny sticks kept loose, in the back pocket of his coat, in order to avoid suspicion. He fits these carefully on the stove before morning prayer begins, and puts a thicker piece of wood in front of them, so as not to be seen through the peephole. The holy diskos is a piece of wood that he carries very carefully in the back pocket of his pants. The water-cup takes the place of the holy chalice, in which he puts water instead of wine. He withholds bread from the ration he receives in the morning, cutting with a certain ritual only from the top, as the holy Lamb. The only thing he misses is the antimimension, which he can no longer improvise, for it requires a martyr's bone. Initially, he had a piece of the relics of St. Mercurius, but he lost it with great sorrow in a search in Jilava prison.⁶²

Sometimes clerics or monks managed to bring holy relics into prisons, as Fr. Constantin Voicescu testifies: 'In Aiud, there was someone who had holy relics with him. The Eucharist could be celebrated.'⁶³ In his turn, at Galați penitentiary, where he was imprisoned in 1955, Fr. Ioan Iovan had sewn on the back of his tank top the antimimension, and as a chalice he used an ebonite medicine box, which he had consecrated.⁶⁴ Fr. Zosim Oancea, during his detention in Aiud penitentiary, improvised an antimimension, sewing a sliver of the Holy Body in a corner of a handkerchief: 'As if by a miracle I found on me, sewn in a corner of my coat, a crumb of Holy Communion. I sewed it in the corner of a handkerchief, and in this way, I also had an antimimension, thinking that this particle of Holy Communion replaced the holy relics.'⁶⁵

To substitute the antimimension, there were cases in which priests celebrated the Eucharist on the chest of either dying prisoners or of senior condemned inmates, who were considered true martyrs. Fr. Justin Pârvu relates one such case. There were eight sick people in the infirmary of Gherla penitentiary, where he was imprisoned in 1954. One of them was dying. Fr. Justin heard his confession. The next night, Fr. Justin, together with other two priests, celebrated the Eucharist on the body of the dying man. Fr. Justin confesses: 'I have never celebrated a [Divine] Liturgy, a more fervent prayer, in all vestments, according to all liturgical rules, as I have done it on this body.' Everyone

⁶² ACNSAS, Informative fund, file 185003, vol. 3, ff. 183–193.

⁶³ Rădulescu, *Rugul Aprins*, 234.

⁶⁴ Cristina Chichernea, *Părintele Ioan Iovan de la Mănăstirea Nașterii Maicii Domnului – Recea de Mureș* (Târgu Mureș: s.n., 2010), 42.

⁶⁵ Oancea, *Datoria de a mărturisi*, 183.

took Communion. The one on whose body they had celebrated the Eucharist died within two hours. Three other sick people who had communed died within a week.⁶⁶ Fr. Ioan Vladovici used to celebrate the Divina Liturgy in a similar manner during his detention in Borzești labor camp:

[F]inding ourselves ... with the minimum necessary for the celebration of the Holy Sacrament, we retreated somewhere in a sheltered pit on the site. ... [U]sually, a priest would sit down on his back, and we would celebrate the Eucharist on his chest. We were inspired in this by the fact that the Divine Liturgy is usually celebrated only on the antimension, which symbolizes the shroud of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in it are sewn parts of a martyr's relics. During this time, one of us stood on watch while the rest prayed, saying the appropriate prayers, which we knew by heart. ... [W]e whispered the prayers and the formulas: 'Take, eat...' and 'Drink from this, all of you...'. We did not have much time, but at least for the consecration there was always time.⁶⁷

Fr. Dumitru Bălașa recalls how he celebrated the Eucharist in Aiud penitentiary, serving in a similar manner on the chest of a prisoner for the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, but offers more details on the form of the rite which was celebrated:

The prisoner with the longest sentence would lay on the floor, while the oldest priest – for, thank God, there were enough of us – placed the slice of bread and the wine in the canteen on the chest of the one lying face up. With a towel on his shoulder,⁶⁸ instead of an epitachelion, he gave the blessing with his palms crossed: 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' It was answered: 'Amen.' Then followed the great synapte – all from memory. Readings from the Apostle and Gospels were said from memory, the [Eucharistic] gifts were consecrated, while all seven of us knelt. ... We blessed them both, sang the 'Lord's Prayer,' and the elder priest gave to each one a little piece of the Lord's Body and each

⁶⁶ Adrian Alui Gheorghe, *Părintele Justin Pârnu și morală unei vieți castigate* (Iași: Credința Strămoșească, 2007), 94.

⁶⁷ Dragoș, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română sub regimul comunist*, 189.

⁶⁸ According to St. Symeon of Thessalonica, in case of necessity, if a priest does not have an epitachelion, he may use a towel or even a piece of rope; *Responsiones ad Gabrielem Pentapolitanum*, PG 155, 868–869.

one tasted from the canteen three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The ‘lifer’ would then rise and make three prostrations, saying: ‘Bless and forgive me, a sinner,’ and he would be given a particle and the Holy Blood from the canteen. There were discussions, whether our sacrifice is received or not? ‘Where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them’ [Matt. 18:20]. We all began to believe that the Divine Liturgy celebrated on a martyr, an innocent condemned man, instead of an altar or antimension, ... was accepted. Prayers were said with tears, thinking of those at home, thinking of our dead. The heavens opened, and we saw the light surrounding the Divinity. Hope in the Almighty’s help strengthened us in suffering, in pain, and even if we died, we died in God, in eternity.⁶⁹

The celebration of the full Divine Liturgy was obviously impossible, so priests had to focus only on the essential parts of the rite – which has the Anaphora as its heart –, maintaining however as much as possible of its normal sequence. Litanies and readings were said from memory and sometimes hymns were whispered. Another important part of the precommunion rites was the Lord’s prayer, which fostered the unity of the faithful prisoners as sons of God, who forgive those who trespass against them. Priests and their lay companions were not only worried about the guards, but also the informers among them. In such cases, priests would celebrate the Divine Liturgy on their own, in great secrecy. Fr. Zosim recounts that in Aiud penitentiary, if he had an informer in his cell, he would perform the consecration of the Eucharistic gifts at night, lying on his back in bed, covered with a blanket and with the antimension and the elements on his chest.⁷⁰

Fr. Calciu-Dumitreasa recounts how deacon Tudor Bej,⁷¹ whom he met in Aiud prison in 1961, officiated the Liturgy:

He rarely celebrated the Liturgy. He was sitting on the bed and we were sitting in our places or walking around, to make it appear to the supervisor that we were doing the usual cell duties. Meanwhile, we were listening to him saying what he knew by heart from the Divine Liturgy. We listened, walked around and responded in a low voice ‘Lord have mercy’

⁶⁹ Bălașa, ‘Sfânta Liturghie,’ 35.

⁷⁰ Oancea, *Datoria de a mărturisi*, 183.

⁷¹ Petcu, *Dicționarul*, 38–39.

or whatever. Then, gave us Communion with what he had in the folds of his shirt. He took out a very small sliver, and he crumble it up even more so we could all partake. Beyond the encouragement he gave us, the grace of Holy Communion strengthened our souls very much.⁷²

That testimony exposes an interesting practice. As a deacon, Bej could not properly celebrate the Eucharist: he could not say the anaphora, nor the prayers attributed to the priest. However, he integrated communion from the Eucharistic reserve into an improvised rite on the structure of an ordinary celebration. Most likely, he was saying the diaconal litanies of the Divine Liturgy, and certain hymns or liturgical responses specific to it were sung. It is curious why deacon Bej would have resorted to such a practice when the *Typika Office*⁷³ was more adequate. It is possible, however, that the function of this service as a communion rite was not known to most Romanian clergy at the time.

It should be noted that the hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church has never contested the validity of the Eucharist celebrated in communist prisons under the conditions described above.

3. Liturgy and ecumenism

The Orthodox Church prohibits participation in inter-confessional Eucharistic celebrations. However, despite confessional differences, prisoners of various Christian traditions (Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Roman-Catholic, Protestant), showed unity in suffering. An extraordinary moment was the inter-confessional Eucharistic celebration (Orthodox and Catholic) in Văcărești prison,⁷⁴ on Pascha of 1956, about which Fr. Iovan testifies:

[I]n Văcărești, in the harsh conditions of detention, I experienced a moment of great spiritual elevation. I managed to convince, not without difficulty, the Roman-Catholic vicar, Fr. Xaveriu from Iași⁷⁵ (he died in prison), and

⁷² *Viața părintelui Gheorghe Calciu după mărturiile sale și ale altora* (București: Christiana, 2007), 70–71.

⁷³ For this service, see: *The Unabbreviated Holorogion*, 135–144.

⁷⁴ This was a transit prison for political detainees and also served as hospital of the General Directorate of Penitentiaries; *Dicționarul penitenciarelor*, 525–530.

⁷⁵ In fact, Egon Xaveriu Haider (1920–1956) was the vicar of the Roman-Catholic parish of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Brăila. He was arrested by the communist

the Greek-Catholic priest Nicolae Opreș,⁷⁶ former parish priest at Bonțida near Cluj, to celebrate the Paschal Liturgy together. With only one moment of hesitation on the part of the vicar, that of the consecration, when the descent of the Holy Spirit was invoked for the transformation of the gifts,⁷⁷ everything took place in a communion in which we all found ourselves, regardless of our confession, as sons of God, united in Christ. This was followed by the communion of all the prisoners in an atmosphere of spiritual exultation.⁷⁸

From this account it is not clear how the inter-confessional celebration took place and what was the exact role of the Catholic ministers in the liturgical act or if Fr. Iovan was the only one who recited the Anaphora, while the others ministers participated just in silent prayer. What is clear is that all shared the same Communion.

This was not the only moment of inter-confessional communion in which Fr. Iovan was involved. The Greek-Catholic writer Nicolae Balotă testifies about inter-confessional communion in Jilava penitentiary in the same year:

The Catholic priests recited the words of the Mass every day [in prison], but this was not a Eucharist, not having the necessary liturgical wine. I myself had learned the entire text of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (including the priest's silent prayers), as well as the text of the Latin Mass. ... However, Fr. Iovan ... in Jilava celebrated the Eucharist daily; his service was not only the recitation of the liturgical text, valuable in itself as a chain of prayers, but it contained the essential liturgical mystery: the

authorities in 1952 on charges of spying for the Vatican and died in 1956 in the Văcărești hospital prison.

⁷⁶ Not much is known about the Greek-Catholic priest Nicolae Opreș. According to his criminal records, he was born in 1901 in Armeni near Cluj and spent 16 years in the communist prisons of Aiud, Jilava, Văcărești, Gherla and Galați.

⁷⁷ The reluctance of the Catholic minister was due to the traditional theological view of the Catholic Church that transubstantiation takes place at the moment of the words of institution, while the teaching of the Orthodox Church emphasises that the consecration occurs during the invocation of the Holy Spirit, or epiclesis. Today, however, the doctrine of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on this subject is that the words of institution and the invocation of the Holy Spirit form an indivisible whole and both are necessary for a valid celebration of the Eucharist; see: Josef Krupa, 'The role of the epiclesis in transubstantiation,' *Colloquia Theologica Ottaviana* 37 (2021): 115–128.

⁷⁸ Cornel Nistea [interview with Fr. Ioan Iovan], 'În căutarea sensului suferinței,' Părintele Ioan Iovan, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://ioaniovann.ro/12-interviuri/9-in-cautarea-sensului-suferintei>.

transubstantiation. From him I was able to take Communion, and when we were separated he entrusted to me, in a tiny little bag with several little crumbs barely bigger than the needle's thread, the Holy Communion. ... Catholics and Orthodox alike partook of this Communion. I would be happy if this ecumenism from the communist prisons could bind us as brothers in a free world.⁷⁹

On another occasion, when he was in Gherla penitentiary, Fr. Ioan celebrated the Eucharist with the Greek-Catholic priest Nicolae Opreș, with whom he celebrated Pascha at Văcărești, who offered him the liturgical answers of the psalter.⁸⁰ It is worth mentioning that the Holy Synod of the Romanian Patriarchate has not formulated an official point of view on Fr. Ioan Ioan's inter-confessional Eucharistic celebrations.

Conclusions

Although under prohibition, the celebration of the Eucharist and the distribution of the Eucharistic Gifts in communist prisons was a reality that nourished the life of the Church in a detention environment that sought to annihilate any form of Christian spirituality. The Eucharist affirmed the detainees' faith and spiritual identity, directly defying the 're-education' sought by the atheistic communist regime. By being in a state of martyrdom, faithful prisoners experienced more intensely the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. Priests had a central role in the dynamics of the liturgical life of those imprisoned, assuming the repressive measures of the prison apparatus. Their ministry had to face several practical and liturgical constraints, such as the lack of Eucharistic elements in accordance with Orthodox practice, the absence of liturgical objects that had to be improvised and the difficulty of preserving and distributing the Holy Gifts, which had to be protected from profanation. The harsh conditions also led some ministers to step back from certain liturgical rigors that would normally have been obligatory. Thus, instead of liturgical wine made from grapes, tonic wine

⁷⁹ Nicolae Balotă, *Peregrin prin patria cuvintelor* (București: EuroPress, 2015), 80–81. On another occasion, Balotă recounts about Fr. Ioan: 'He, the Orthodox, gave us Communion and made me, the Catholic, the bearer of the crumbs of Communion for others, in the prison cells where I was to end up;' Cosmin Ciotloș [interview with Nicolae Balotă], 'Nu eu am ales Abisul luminat...', *România literară* 4 (2010): 10–11.

⁸⁰ Chichernea, *Părintele Ioan Ioan*, 54.

(which could be made from various fruits) or water was sometimes used. Moreover, in cases of isolation, the Eucharist was celebrated by the priest alone, without assistance.

The moments of Eucharistic communion in communist prisons were authentic and intense Christian experiences for those who participated with a sincere conscience. The *Securitate* sought through violence, isolation, informants and psychological warfare to disassociate political prisoners from each other; to break their trust in one another and prevent collective resistance both in prison and especially after release. However, the communal aspect of the Eucharist played a crucial role in fostering solidarity among inmates and reinforced their conscience that they are part of a suffering but living Church. Prisoners participated actively in the sacramental event both through prayer and their efforts to provide the Eucharistic matters, to maintain the secrecy of the Sacrament, to preserve the Holy Gifts and to impart them to other prisoners. Moreover, even some guards expressed solidarity with the faithful detainees, by providing materials necessary for the Eucharist, allowing moments for prayer, or even distributing the Holy Gifts to prisoners. These apparently small acts of humanity were in fact significant gestures of moral consciousness and even faith in an oppressive system that promoted atheistic ideology.

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