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## “The Chalice is my Life” - Father Ioan Iovan, the Eucharist Martyr in the Communist Prison

### Abstract

This paper offers a presentation of the most interesting figure in the Romanian ecclesial landscape engaged in the process of Eucharistic revival, Father Archimandrite Ioan Iovan (1922-2008), the autochthonous peer of the famous Russian Father, John of Kranstadt (1829-1908). The name of Father Ioan has been appraisingly mentioned in the famous report of the Tismăneanu Commission, and is synonymous to Christian dignity and spiritual resistance against communism. Theologically educated in the Transylvanian environment, between the model of missionary bishop Nicolae Popovici and that of the charismatic hieromonk Arsenie Boca, Father Ioan was destined for the delicate mission of exploding the liturgical formalism and Eucharistic unrelish in Church life. His pastoral



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course covers a pan-Romanian itinerary: Transylvania (Cluj) – Moldova (Sihastu, Vladimirești) – Muntenia (București, Plumbuita).

The fire test of Father Ioan's Eucharistic devotion was the prison, where he gave the proof of martyric dedication and a clear mystical vocation. The scenes of his liturgical service in the communist catacombs are worthy of a hagiographical dossier: the daily Liturgy celebrated on a Antimension sewed on the back of his sweatshirt, the Holy Communion distributed to his cell mates, the Holy Eucharist given to Nicolae Steinhardt, a vigorous ecumenism of sufferance, miracles of strength firmness in the faith.

## Keywords

Communion, Eucharist, sermon, Eucharistic theology, Ioan Iovan

## 1 The Holy Eucharist giver's tradition

The main concrete instances of priestly ministry in the community are those of catechist, confessor, celebrant, communion giver, animator and administrator. The communion giver, as a term, gathers the pastoral image of parent, preacher and nourisher of God's people from a certain place, one who gives a spiritual banquet of wisdom. The communion giver, by its original title, *El Comulgatorio*, is also an Eucharistic meditation manual, the one proposed by Baltasar Gracián in 1655, as a guide for the sacrament of the Eucharist, during the Counter-Reformation, according to a Baroque taste of retrieving the spiritual exercise of the Eucharist: "*El Comulgatorio* contains various meditations for those who attend Holy Communion to prepare, to take the Communion and give

thanks”<sup>1</sup>. There is even a Romanian sapiential tradition of the communion giver, recently illustrated through the example of Cantemir<sup>2</sup>. Briefly, the Communion giver is the Nourisher of God's people, in the meaning that the first pastoral care is the nutritional one. One of the most interesting figures in the Romanian ecclesial scene, engaged in the revival of the Eucharist, is the Archimandrite Fr. Ioan Iovan (1922-2008), represents to a large extent, the local correspondent of the famous Russian Fr., John of Kronstadt (1829-1908), he in par excellence a communion giver of Christ. Laudatory mentioned in the famous and controversial report of Tismăneanu committee, in the sequence dedicated to “Vladimirești phenomenon”<sup>3</sup>, the name of Fr. Ioan is synonymous with Christian dignity and spiritual martyr resistance against communism<sup>4</sup>, the refusal of careerist compromise and the red devil pact, champion of incessant liturgical ministry inside the communist prisons. The intransigent attitude of Fr. Ioan can be understood only in relation to his model, the martyr bishop Nicolae Popovici, his mentor and ordination bishop. The vision of Nicolae Popovici was appropriated by his disciple, Fr. Ioan Iovan, Confessor Father to the Vladimirești monastery in Galați County, who began to preach with much pathos, to thousands of pilgrims, the need of approaching Christ through the Eucharist, urging them to be prepared to testify the

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<sup>1</sup> Baltasar Gracián, *Cărțile omului desăvârșit. Eroul. Politicianul. Discernătorul. Oracolul manual. Cuminecătorul*, translated into Romanian by Sorin Mărculescu, București, Humanitas Publishing, 1994, pp. 353-484.

<sup>2</sup> Doina Curticăpeanu, *Amprenta constantinopolitană*, essay on Dimitrie Cantemir, *Divanul sau Gâlceava Înțeleptului cu Lumea sau Giudețul Sufletului cu Trupul*, written in Constantinople, Published in Iași in August 30, 1698, in *Tabor* no. 2 /2012, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Raportul comisiei Tismăneanu*, pp. 461-463.

<sup>4</sup> See *Cazul Vladimirești*, in Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu comunist*, București, Curtea veche Publishing, 2005, pp. 251-257.

Christian truth even at the cost of martyrdom. The political power could not accept such manifestations because they were too “ostentatious”, especially since most of those who took part assigned them clearly anti-communist meaning. For those reasons, the authorities acted strongly: they forced Bishop Popovici’s retirement in 1950, arrested Fr. Ioan in 1955 and abolished the Vladimirești monastery in 1956<sup>5</sup>.

The courage and the fervour of Fr. Ioan could not be stopped not even by the personal attempt of Bishop Nicolae Popovici who tried to determinate Fr. Ioan to moderate his radical anti-communist attitude<sup>6</sup>. Afterthough, Fr. Ioan confessed his inner call for a martyr dedication, total, for Christ and Church, at the proper time (kairos), chosen by God: “I want you to know that some were right when they said I was a little proud. I admit. Back then it was an opportunity to glorify God, to face the atheists. This was in my head. I did not consider myself a messenger. I had the opportunity, and honestly, I wanted to die for Christ. In prison, I regretted that I did not remain there. Excuse me, these are details. I wish I could give my life for Christ; are intimate details. (...). Honestly, now when it's the end, it was not any desire of personal increase, but to glorify and worship Christ and His Holy Mother. (...). I thought: Why should not I do it but other do?”<sup>7</sup> At the challenging question if he wanted to defeat the communism with a sermon, Fr. Ioan

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<sup>5</sup> George Eugen Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, Ionuț Alexandru Tudorie, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în anii regimului comunist. Observații pe marginea capitolului dedicat cultelor din „raportul Tismăneanu”, in Studii Teologice 2, 2009, pp. 7-103.*

<sup>6</sup> George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Despre curajul de a rosti: Episcopul Nicolae Popovici al Oradiei*, Galați, Partener Publishing, 2009, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica strareță Cristina: Interviuri realizate de Părintele Remus Onișor*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007, p. 56.

answered unstinted that he wanted to face the atheism in an organized and orthodox manner<sup>8</sup>.

Although ashamed like a child after the appearance of Tismăneanu committee report and responded with great spiritual delicacy, writing immediately to the Patriarch Teoctist against the manner the Orthodox Romanian Church's<sup>9</sup> image was presented in this document<sup>10</sup>, it must be appreciated his constant solidarity with the Church and its hierarchy, along with his anti-communist prophetic reaction in the memorandum<sup>11</sup> addressed in January 25, 1955 to the members of the ORC's synod. Even though there is still a detailed critical study of the so-called Vladimirești phenomenon, the testimonies of contemporaries are edifying: talking about Vladimirești, Fr. Iustin Pârvu says: “It was a great spiritual work, a divine work of Providence facing communism. The charges of anti-canonical things that were happening there was actually a Communist manoeuvre that attempted, by the power of the Church to bring them accusations of misconducting the canons. As if the Communists were interested in canons. It was a diabolical and nefarious manoeuvre meant to stop a great spiritual work. Fr. Ioan did there a special mission”<sup>12</sup>.

Along with Fr. Ioan's memorandum, another series of texts-document such as “The defrocking sentence”<sup>13</sup> (Archdiocesan monastic consistory), “Certificate of defrocking sentence receipt”<sup>14</sup> (Fr. Ioan Iovan), “Responding to the defrocking”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53

<sup>9</sup> From now on ORC

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, note 151.

<sup>11</sup> *Memoriul adresat membrilor Sinodului BOR la 25 ianurie 1955*, Publisher Vasile Manea in the volume Preot Ioan Iovan, *A fost frumos la Gherla!*, Cluj-Napoca, Patmos Publishing, 2008, pp. 29-80.

<sup>12</sup> Confession of Father Justin Pârvu addressed to the monah Moise Iorgovan de la Oașa.

<sup>13</sup> *Părintele Ioan, Mărturisitorul Iubirii*, Brăila, 2011, pp. 102-110.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 113-127.

(nun Mihaela Iordache), the brochure "The Return of the Prodigal Sons"<sup>16</sup> (nun Theodosia Lațcu) and, last but not least, the Patriarch Justinian Marina pleading<sup>17</sup>, to the political authorities (Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, First secretary of CC of RWP<sup>18</sup>) against the anti-religious actions of the state, helps us to make a picture of the persecution initiated by the communist regime and the internal disputes of ORC due to this pressure. In any case, most competent experts<sup>19</sup> recognized in Fr. Ioan the embodiment of the most radical and theological opposition to the Communist regime and its militant atheism and the Vladimirești monastery, a symbol of anti-communist resistance suppressed by force in two rounds: first by arresting the leadership of the monastery on the night of March 30, 1955, and then through the arrest, removal and expulsion of the nuns in early 1956, after the most ample Security actions (220 officers involved) at the request of the communist assaulted with memories for the release of Fr. Ioan and the nuns Veronica (Gurău) and Michaela (Iordache). Despite the wickedness of the world, Vladimirești monastery managed to conquer Romania through these three valuable people having a true martyr effigy: Fr. Ioan, the nuns Mihaela and Theodosia. The first of them succeeded in converting popular religious enthusiasm to a Eucharistic fervour through a consistent catechesis and an exemplary spiritual involvement: Petru Pandrea considered Fr. Ioan a formidable preacher of rural masses, religiously benighted but eager for faith, for a living church "and we tend to admit it, being one who mostly valued the popular religiosity aspects, expressed in the visions of nun Veronica. Moreover, he

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/oficial1/teodosia.html>; George Enache, *Berdiaev și comunismul*, Dialog Teologic 25, 2010, pp. 96-98.

<sup>17</sup> George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Patriarhul Justinian și Biserica Ortodoxă Română în anii 1948-1964*, Galați, Partener Publishing, pp. 225-228.

<sup>18</sup> Central committee of Romanian Workers' Party

<sup>19</sup> George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Monahismul ortodox și puterea comunistă în România anilor '50*, Galați, Partener Publishing, p. 67.

wanted a union of the whole Church, hierarchy, clergy and believers, confessing the Orthodox faith until the end. Would have been better if the Romanian land was filled up with martyrs? Or prudence has its own virtues? At least at one point, Fr. Iovan was absolutely right: that of the one of religious freedom”<sup>20</sup>.

## **2 Eucharistic Transylvania, the formation environment of Father Ioan Iovan**

Father Ioan cannot be understood without his native environment, the parental Transylvania, where he was born, in June 26, 1922, as the eighth child of a priestly family, Fr. Gavrilă and his wife Maria Jovan, “daddy and mommy”, dear people which he revered his entire life. From them he learned the spiritual alphabet of life, love of God and love of nation.

Fr. Iovan was present at the National Assembly in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918 and he was animated by an ardent patriotism and parental care for the moral life of its believers. He was a sympathizer of the “Army of God” which fights against alcoholism and modern moral deviations especially in rural parishes. The moral foundations of Fr. Ioan Iovan were well embroidered in his theological childhood by his father, Iovan Gavrilă, invested by the parish of Husasăul de Criș (1920-1941), who was at the same time, his first model of Eucharistic piety:

“As I was a little child, I did not missed the church. I said many times, I have been saved from abortion. Even though this I found out later. I loved to be in the altar with my daddy, moving around the Holy Table. Although I was little, I noticed he was no longer my dad during the Liturgy. He was there; I did not know the word, back then, a special

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<sup>20</sup> George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană*, București, Nemira Publishing, 2005, pp. 588-589.

personality. I did not dare to think he was my father. I also saw the respect and the reverence that faithful had, he did not seem my father at all and please believe that from time to time, daddy noticed, he saw that crave, that love I had to go to the altar. He did not force me, I was dear to him, so I thought, and probably because my brothers were more laics than I was. Love of a parent. I notice something special happens, especially at the Transubstantiation, at the invocation prayer. He prayed so deeply, transformed, transfigured when his eyes, immediately began to moisten. Now I say, retrospectively, how much devotion he had that he won me over. No patriarch, no Saint, no a pious man did not give me such an impetus for both the Liturgy, the Eucharist, as daddy did"<sup>21</sup>.

Theologically formed in the Transylvanian environment, among his model, the missionary bishop Nicolae Popovici (1903-1960) and the charismatic hieromonk Arsenie Boca (1910-1989), Fr. Ioan will be assigned for the delicate mission of unsettling the liturgical formalism in the Church's life and the Eucharist inappetence of it. This diagnosis might sound rough, but it is the real one, grieved noted, in 1936, by Nechifor Crainic, in a lecture dedicated to Western Eucharistic mystics:

"Viewed in terms of the great religious interest, modern psychology, loving the political dictatorship, is, by itself, better prepared than ever before in history, to undergo the mysteries of religion. But instead of the humble author's voice who shout: 'Obey!', we should hear the passionate, loving voice of Church calling to obedience. But nowadays clergy people seem to have forgotten themselves the Saviour's sacraments. However, is there a more forsaken and uncultivated Mystery, in our Church today, as the Holy Eucharist? While Catholics held annually Eucharistic

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<sup>21</sup> *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica strareță Cristina: Interviuri realizate de Părintele Remus Onișor*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007, p. 32.



Congresses in different continents, with hundreds of thousands of people taking the Eucharist, in our Church we can finger-count the old women taking the communion and the children forced by the school authorities to do it. The Eucharistic Lord often lies on the altar table without even being touched by the bishop or the priest, went for an electoral propaganda in a holyday. It's a departure from everything that is specific and essential to the Christian religion. Because religion means union with God and the only way available to everyone, for getting in union with God, is the Sacrament of the Eucharist"<sup>22</sup>.

Fr. Ioan seems to be a response to this immense frustration. His pastoral route includes a pan-Romanian itinerary, Transylvania (Cluj) - Moldavia (Hermit, Vladimirești) - Muntenia (Bucharest, Cernica, Plumbuita): Confessor Father of Vladimirești monastery, sent there by Fr. Arsenie with a specific mandate and invested as priest by his mentor, Bishop Nicolae Popovici, he will be invested in the prophetic mission of opening a spiritual front against the communism, armed with the sword of the word (missionary and penitential preaching) and the Eucharist cure (frequently giving the Holy Communion<sup>23</sup>), denied by the official Church (defrocked) after a radical anti-communist pleading addressed to the conciliarity; he became Confessor Father in the hell of the communist prisons, transformed into catacombs of an exceptional spiritual resistance against the re-education, through daily ministry and unceasing prayer; gradually rehabilitated after the general amnesty (1964) and then after the fall of the communist regime (1989), he providentially returned to his native Transylvania through the special care of Andrei Andreicuț, Archbishop of Alba (n. 1949) and that of Fr. Professor Ilie Moldovan (1928-

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<sup>22</sup> Nichifor Crainic, *Curs de mistică germană*, in *Idem, Cursurile de mistică*, ed. Ioan Ică jr., Sibiu, Deisis Publishing, 2010, pp. 597-598.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Taft, *The Frequency of the Eucharist throughout History*, In *Concilium* 152, 1982, pp. 13-24.

2012) where, along with his disciple, nun Cristina Chichernea (n. 1934) founded a nuns convent in the locality called Recea, in the vicinity of Târgu Mureș airport, having a strong missionary role, promoting the frequent communion taking and continual spiritual care for the Church members and pilgrims.

The apocalyptic context for Communism instauration cannot explain until the end the Eucharistic creed of Fr. Ioan Iovan, similar to that of the early Church, and the other half of the answer is that of the Transylvanian Eucharistic paradigm he was formed in. Not by chance, in the same province came forward other priests having a deeply Eucharistic orientation, priests such as Fr. Miron Mihăilescu (1914-1998) from Ocna Sibiului, disciple and secretary of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, who gave up an academic career for the daily liturgical service.<sup>24</sup> This paradigm profile can be partially configured through the research on the theological Transylvanian media<sup>25</sup>, particularly The Theological Review (Sibiu), The Christian Culture (Blaj), the diocesan Orthodox and Greek Catholic magazines and, not least, The Eucharistic Missionary (Bixad, 1935-1945). Stands out easily the Orthodox theologians predilection for the general themes of Eucharistic piety and for those related to the epiclesis controversy and, where the Greek Catholics, to the frequent and daily communion and but also the attempt of planting inside the Romanians piety the Western Eucharistic adoration<sup>26</sup>. The

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<sup>24</sup> *Iubind ca Dumnezeu. Liturghii după liturghii cu Părintele Miron Mihăilescu*, Gabriela Publishing, București, Christiana Publishing, 2004; Idem, *Vorbește Dumnezeu*, București, Christiana Publishing, 2005; Idem, *Sfânta Liturghie, Pâinea cea de-a pururi. Predici, exegeze și comentarii*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Nicolae, *Ethosul euharistic transilvănean oglindit în presa teologică ortodoxă și greco-catolică în secolul XX*, International Symposium „Comunicare și cuminecare”, Deva, 27-28 iunie 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Father Ioan does not agree this “special Eucharistic cult”, mentioning that aspect in his bachelor’s degree thesis: *Sfânta Împărtășanie, calea desăvârșirii creștine*, p. 28: „A distinction that I actually remembered a about time receiving the Holy Eucharist, in the West there is a special

promoters of the Eucharistic apostolate in the Transylvanian area were the Basilian monks who had the Prislop, Nicula, Moisei and Bixad monasteries as centers of their mission. While, Bixad distinguished as the main site of the Eucharist movement, illustrated mainly by the friar Augustine Pop. It is however significant that shortly before 1955, the Patriarch Justinian Marina (1901-1977) wanted to send Fr. Ioan there, Eucharist especially due to his Eucharistic profile mirrored in his mission, for the reinstatement of the monastery.<sup>27</sup> We do not know to what extent Fr. Ioan known the Eucharistic apostolate developed by the Greek Catholic pew, in Transylvania, including Bihor, his birthplace, but we believe that providential people are nothin but God's answers to the problems of the world. In this regard, Fr. Ioan Iovan represents the pioneer of the Eucharistic Orthodox apostolate in the Romanian area.

One of the ripeness sermons of Fr. Ioan proves the Eucharistic searching and piety of the young theologian Silviu Iovan, who received, from his bachelor's degree coordinator, Fr. Florea Muresan (1907-1961), future martyr of Aiud's communist high security prison, the advice to take the Holy Communion very often, to learn directly from Christ how to do his theological promotion work, which became the Eucharistic creed of a lifetime pastoral ministry under the discrete guidance of Virgin Mary, Mother of God and his priesthood white key:

"Who approached me to the Liturgy and the Eucharist, than the Mother of God? Who gave me that thought then, and now? I shudder when Christians come to tell their matters. At that time their faces tremble, trembles their eyes too, they begin to cry and I am melt away! This is what I do for living!

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Eucharistic cult. We do not have a special Eucharistic cult. The Eucharist is framed only in Mass."

<sup>27</sup> *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica strareță Cristina: Interviuuri realizate de Părintele Remus Onișor*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007, p. 81.

Lord, how expensive food it is! And then, my dear, it was the Mother of God who taught me, back then, when I took my bachelor's degree thesis with Fr. Florea Muresan, She taught me what to do. He, Fr. Muresan, advised me about the Holy Eucharist and the diligence to consume It and I took the Communion the whole time. Now, backward-looking, I realize how God worked. I tell you, my dear, to believe in the mercy of God and His Mother, because He had mercy on my unworthiness and carried me away from my pits, even when, as a young man, I searched for them. He made me avoid them! Until put in my mind: 'Wait, you will be a priest, you will put your hand on the Chalice, on the epitrachil, and how you should be?!' Now, there I am 77 years, my dear, I can only say that: 'The Mother of God, with omophorion, reshaped my priesthood!' I couldn't – dear Mother of God – if wasn't she, I couldn't stay with such devotion in the Orthodoxy when those heavy dogmatic and canonical strain came upon me! Dear ones, I don't want to weary you. Everything was said about me, I think I cleared it out; they don't belong to me anymore. The only thing that I act for with all my determination: whoever touches my theology and orthodoxy, I will stand, I will stand tall and I will not accept! I mustn't fail and have deviations. I never had, and I will not, as long as the Chalice is my life, is my purpose, is my food, is Heaven on Earth!!! In the Chalice, in the spoon I give and also in my being is God. I beg you, believe!"<sup>28</sup>

The Eucharistic vocation of Fr. Ioan was manifested continuously both in spiritual and academic plan, the transition from Fr. Florea bachelor's degree thesis coordination to the Ph.D. with Fr. Dumitru Muresan Stăniloae for the deepening of

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<sup>28</sup> Audio recorded sermon, Recea monastery, June 26, 1999, transcript by Raita Septimiu, *Părintele Ioan Iovan. Un model omiletic contemporan, Alba Iulia*, 2013, p. 85.

the same theme: “Holy Eucharist and mystical life”<sup>29</sup>. Eucharistic mysticism was his concern for a lifetime and even if not completed by a theoretical work, although his doctoral studies remained unfinished his ministry, on long term, was way more valuable to the Church. Later, Fr. Florea Muresan wanted to go to Vladimirești and become a disciple of his disciple.

In a catastrophic Stalinist context has been reached one of the most interesting Romanian Eucharistic controversy<sup>30</sup> caused by the paradoxical success accomplished by Fr. Ioan Iovan’s mission promoted at Vladimirești in a traditionalist Moldavia, set upon the sacramental customs as “ancestral fate” (Fr. Agapie Corbu). In order to understand the stakes and the symbolic relations involved in the Eucharistic dispute in ROC, in the 50s of the twentieth century, a good analysis of the ecclesiastic, political and social context, in Romania is required. Would be necessary a critical approach of the many texts written under the pressure and under the emotion of the moment, against the Eucharistic moment. Under illustrious signatures (Dumitru Stăniloae, Petru Vintilescu, Ilie Cleopa) and the influence of religious prominent figures of the time (Sandu Tudor, Andrei Scrima, Arsenie Papacioc, Grigore Băbuș), was published in the 50s a whole group of polemical texts, against the “Vladimirești phenomenon” aiming at practical theology in the context of the huge public success of hieromonk Ioan Iovan, risking to create a real political trouble. Under the ample theological volutes were criticized the deviations from traditionalist orthodox line and the legitimate force interventions of the ecclesiastical authority

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<sup>29</sup> *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica strareță Cristina: Interviu realizate de Părintele Remus Onișor, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007, p. 41.*

<sup>30</sup> Jan Nicolae, *Controversa euharistică românească de la mijlocul secolului XX: dialogul epistolar episcop Nicolae Popovici-părintele Ilie Cleopa*, The VII<sup>th</sup> International Symposium „Mehedinți - istorie, cultură, spiritualitate”, Drobeta Turnu Severin, 12-14 mai 2014.

(St. Synod, Patriarchy, local Archdiocese) who did not want a conflict with the communist authorities, newly installed with the Soviet tanks. This phenomenon cannot be fully understood without an investigation specific to the religious sociology<sup>31</sup> regarding the community of Vladimirești, its “miraculous constitution”<sup>32</sup> but also about symbolic links<sup>33</sup> and disputes within the Romanian Orthodox monasticism from the mid-twentieth century.

On the other hand, the dispute between the line represented by Father Ioan Iovan spiritual and the one embodied in the person of Fr. Ilie Cleopa seems to reiterate, within the Romanian space, the reserves of Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894) to John of Kronstadt (1829-1908) and his Eucharistic ministry.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the monasteries Vladimirești and Slatina, where two spiritual fathers activated have been twinned for a long period of time and most of the spiritual children of Fr. Ioan were sent to the sister convent to become monks. Moreover, Fr. Cleopa took part in the official delegation of Patriarch Justinian, especially in the summer of 1954, for the repeated inspection of Vladimirești, alongside Arsenie Papacioc, Daniel Sandu Tudor, Andrei Scrima, Roman Braga, Bartolomeu Anania, a.s.o.

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<sup>31</sup> See *Religiozitate populară și rezistență anticomunistă în România*, in George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană*, București, Nemira Publishing, 2005, pp. 498-589.

<sup>32</sup> Criticisms against the “visions” the abbess of Vladimirești were expressed by Mihai Urzică, *Minuni și false minuni*, București, Anastasia Publishing, 1993, pp. 230-250, sister Cristina in Remus Onișor, in volume *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica stareță Cristina*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007, pp. 129-197.

<sup>33</sup> See *Relații cu mânăstirea Vladimirești*, in Antonie Plămădeală, *Cine sunt eu? Ce spun eu despre mine. Interviu cu arhim. Teofil Părăian*, Sibiu, 2003, pp. 79-86.

<sup>34</sup> Ioan Ică jr, *Sfântul Ioan din Kronstadt între Liturghie și revoluție*, an introducing study in Ioan din Kronstadt, *Liturghia – cerul pe pământ. Cuetări mistice despre Biserică și cultul ortodox*, translated into Romanian by Boris Buzilă, Sibiu, Deisis Publishing, 2002, pp. 32-33.

Patriarch Justinian church policy had the endorsement of these great Fathers who collided with the martyr enthusiasm of Vladimirești, unwilling to the communist regime compromise. Unfortunately, the lack of a bias and that of a theological approach echoes until today to the double suspicion, of the church and state, regarding Vladimirești. No matter how much discernment is needed in reading the documents these do not lay when discover us that the opponents of the Vladimirești community turned into ruthless enemies and fiery combatants driven by moment and passions, sometimes being very human. Unfortunately, the frequent Communion theme remained, in mid-twentieth century, a toxic issue<sup>35</sup>, on a minefield of prejudice.

### **3 The Eucaristic and Missionary pattern of Saint John of Kronstadt**

Regarding the daily communion of Vladimirești and Sihuștru, Petre Pandrea, the monks lawyer, initially used a funny hypothesis, placing this habit between homeopathy and addiction: daily Communion or homeopathic doses addiction (Periș, May 11, 1955):

"I have hated a little the Sihuștru monastery monks because they were lacto-vegetarians and they drank a little wine by taking the daily Communion, made of Proskomedie and wine. (...) is not their daily communion an addiction taken in homeopathic doses? (...). I know my drinkers and the simple drunkards, the selected drinkers and the pathetic drunks. I now, have a question, does the daily Communion, taken at a certain hour, give similar symptoms to the everyday alcohol

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<sup>35</sup> Antonie Plămădeală, Teofil Părăian, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

drinking? (...) The Catholics and the Vladimirești monks daily Communion is a low-dose, homeopathic addiction”<sup>36</sup>. The Eucharistic piety admiration of Father John of Kronstadt echoes the thesis of Father Ioan Iovan who quotes a substantial and relevant passage<sup>37</sup> about the epiclesis from a paper of popularization of the Eucharistic missionary pattern,<sup>38</sup> published in Bessarabia in 1935. In addition, the mystical union between the priest and the altar that he was consecrated is illustrated in the account remembered by the Russian metropolitan bishop Nicolae Krutițki probably in his paper "Religious discourses" translated by the Romanian theologian Nicolae M. Popescu (1881-1963), in Bucharest, during 1949-1952. If today Fr. John of Kronstadt, officially canonised by the Russian Church of diaspora (Jordanville, New York) in 1964, when Fr. Ioan Iovan was released from the communist prison, and by the Moscow Patriarchate in June 8, 1990, is known and loved in 50s of the twentieth century, when Fr. Iovan invoke his pattern he was barely known by the Romanian theologians. The problems were aggravated after the Father Ioan evidence of intransigence, following his mentor pattern, Bishop Nicolae Popovici's,<sup>39</sup> against the religious policy of the communist regime and towards the ecclesiastical hierarchy attitude of collaboration with the atheist authority, trying to impose the priority of state's reasons in relation to the divine:

“The insulting memorandum of Father Ioan Silviu Iovan fell into the hands of security that led to arrest. Indeed, Father Ioan telegraphed to me at Alexandria as their lawyer, the following, and the moment he was arrested:

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<sup>36</sup> Petre Pandrea, *Călugărul alb*, pp. 146-151.

<sup>37</sup> Arhimandritul Ioan Iovan, *Sfânta Împărtășanie, calea desăvârșirii creștine*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolae Nicov, *Părintele Ioan Kronstadtschi. Un chip de păstor misioanr ortodox*, Chișinău, Uniunea clericilor ortodocși din Basarabia Publishing, 1935.

<sup>39</sup> See George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Despre curajul de a rosti: Episcopul Nicolae Popovici al Oradiei*, Galați, Partener Publishing, 2009.



"Thanks for the love! Do not make any appeal, no recall, and no complaint! These people have sold their conscience. Now, they sell the church. Who sold the church? Obviously, security was alarmed. It acted strongly. Fr. Ioan, Micaela and Sister Veronica waited, for a long time the martyrdom. They foresee it. There are people having the mystical message of suffering and crucifixion. I would be inclined to say they wanted the martyrdom as a fulfillment of the prophecy. Micaela told me softly, whistling her thin lips, with a hysteroidal lit face – Did not, Sister Veronica, told us, after her visions that the land of Vladimirești splashed with blood? If is to be happened, than happened an hour earlier! The nuns and monks of Sihastru and Vladimirești were waiting the arrests, arrests and blooded martyrdom. They wanted to shed their blood as Jesus did on the cross. They wanted the imitatio Christi, dying for their faith, being example for those having a weak faith. The cold ones, the atheist floes are their natural partners, theirs, the fervent, those persecuted by the icy belzebuth"<sup>40</sup>.

In a letter addressed to Peter Pandrea, by the nuns of Vladmirești, we can see their full solidarity to their confessor,

"Fr. Ioan cannot abandon now, in the midst of fighting, the most valuable weapon – The Divine Liturgy. It does not make him tired, on the contrary is giving him peace of mind, health and life. (...). We also believe that the Holy Synod is guided by the Spirit of God and it cannot decide to throw away the most devoted servant of the Church, on the ground that a herd of 300 believers could not accept to scatter by taking their pastor, entrusted by up above, by Christ, the Great shepherd. (...). (As a matter of fact, we noticed they started to send us along with the Greek gifts, flour mixed with soda, with the label: for wafers made at the monastery, to S. Veronica and Fr. Ioan). If it be possible,

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 262.

let this cup pass from us (better as for those pouring it), nevertheless not as we will, but as God wilt". (Signed by the sisters Tiberia and Mihaela; to Petre Pandrea, May 29, 1954)<sup>41</sup>.

#### **4 Homiletic and pastoral portrait of Father Ioan Iovan**

Petru Pandrea's memories reconstruct the homiletic portrait and the pastoral profile of Fr. Ioan, of an innately sympathetic pathetic for simple people and of a frontal, exciting, vibrant communications, "Sister Veronica loves him with an overwhelming love of a mother for her prodigy child. The hieromonk Ioan has a beautiful baritone diction and is a matchless orator for the rural masses. On Sundays, the oral work starts at 7 in the morning and ends at 14, for 7 hours is rhetoric and nervous tension; beads of sweat, barely perceptible, appear over his broad, poetical forehead; His eyes are on fire; white skin on the forehead and face, in contrast to his black beard and the long hair, he becomes pale, almost copper, under the influence of a virulent jaundice barely past, blooming over again because of the long fasting and effort. Obviously, Sister Veronica's maternal instinct panics. At a sermon about the Holy Spirit in the June 13, 1954, with thousands of listeners, having their heads bowed while tears slowly invading their eyes, the breeze, slowly rolling the golden words upon Vladimirești suddenly turned into a tempest and was about to lift the hieromonk up above the dais and throw him in the air. I was at his feet on a seat of honour having the feeling that Fairies or very pure spirits wanted to raise him up. Ioan had a very inspired sermon, careless about the wind, squeezing the audience tears. He squeezed a few to me too, because I was tired, I had not slept for several nights,

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<sup>41</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 281-282.

melancholic by profession, remembering my deaths and that of some familiar people, recently slayed one after another. Life is hard in Moldo-Wallachia. And even a imperturbable Mandarin may stealthily wipe a tear, rolled his serenity in the infamy ravine beneath the soles! I did not wept since an Easter Mass, right under the guards' nose in my prison of Ocnele mari thievishly officiated by our good Orthodox priests, all skin and bones – oh my! - compared to Catholic prelates and Protestant ministers that we lived with for about four years!"<sup>42</sup>

The memorialist is a witness to the success and popularity of the kind confessor and detached and beautiful preacher, with an angelic figure compared to the Romanian national poet "Ioan, the hieromonk, has something (in his physical creation) of the young poet Eminescu, a few asperities of rural Transylvania, a deep baritone voice, slender waist, but a fiery buck, open and determined. At the confession of June 12, 1954, he is my confessor and invited me so I could take the Holy Communion; I told him that my only real shame of this interlude is my pride! I atoned five years in jail and remained me the pride towards jailers and prosecutors. He absolved me of my sin, as a true Orthodox priest. Untimely! Is not the pride a cardinal sin for Catholics? The enemies accused him of catholicity! He is an orthodox, our orthodox, Ioan Silviu Iovan. He was not very familiar to the notion of sin; "Isn't Fr. Ioan Iovan preaching to 15 thousand pilgrims every summer, every Sunday? Haven't they come on the muddy field, on the snowdrifts and in the chill Siberian wind, hundreds, even 2-3 thousands wayfarers, every holiday?"<sup>43</sup>

If it was talked about Vladmirești as a Romanian Lourdes serving the Russian communist forces, the memorialist compares Fr. Ioan to Martin Luther, in the best sense of reformism: "Martin Luther appeared in Wallachia, at Sihustru,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 319.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13; p. 106.

and preaches at Vladimirești under the mantle of Ioan-Silviu Iovan, surrounded by masses of people according to Andrei Scrima pleonasm in the Patriarchate library”<sup>44</sup>.

The personal Communion of Pandrea is an event that causes a true remembrance of its mystagogical, Eucharistic route and a sacramental image of a vintage behaviour in a European ecumenical context: “First Communion, on the Vladmirești scene. I was like a stubborn mule. I hesitated for a moment. Sister’s Veronica energy mother does not knows any obstacles and her eyes, her mouth’s attitude and her reluctance defeated my hesitation derived from pure shyness and theological confusion. I’ve confessed my sins, in the night before, to the monk, in a chat about pride, my cardinal sin, who stroked it with too much kindness. He did not agree my flashing pride that seemed a bit like his pride. Witness and confessor, confessor and penitent, both wrapped too comfortable, in the mantle of pride. (...). I went up on the dais; I bowed with my forefather’s piety and I took the Communion, in the sight of thousands of people, (...).”<sup>45</sup>

The spiritual and religious state of the witness, Peter Pandrea, is also a fresco for the religious life studious interwar youth: “I bow only inside the church, not to offend those around me, when I’m alone I never bow, from a very long time, exactly since I left high school of Valea Voievozilor. There we went to church every morning, a historic church called “mânăstirea din Deal”. Our religion teacher, Fr. Alexandru Dolinescu, used to read a psalm. At breakfast time, lunch time, tea time and supper I used to say two prayers. At the beginning and the end of our classes, I use to say two other prayers, in total 11 daily prayers. Before bedtime I added one more. For Easter, before leaving for vacation, we confessed and he gave us the Communion. After a while I lost the ritual. I tried to regain it in a dramatic battle

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 320-321

with myself, in the three semesters I spent in Berlin and Paris. I lost it irretrievably”<sup>46</sup>.

Pandrea identified in the heart of the conflict in the BOR of the 50s, a dispute between two rigid religious trends, legitimate and complementary, one traditionalist and sophisticated theologically intellectualist, and the other, popular and focused on a retrieved penitential and Eucharistic piety: “This ecclesiastical war is stupid and dogmatic groundless, both sides being orthodox and well-intentioned. Everything comes from ego and lack of tact”<sup>47</sup>.

Father Ioan intransigence is explained in a memorial note from 10.XII. 1954, on behalf of his special vocation at Vladimirești mission: “Now I understand Father Ioan Silviu Iovan, who stubbornly opposes its removal from there, where he has a mission, a message to say and people to comfort, there at Vladimirești, the maidens’ monastery, that Garden of the Mother of God, founded by Mother Veronica. How can I leave before harvesting without anguish of heart for the ground I have ploughed, dug and weeded? This is the harvest, dying in honour”<sup>48</sup>.

## **5 The Eucharistic victory of the priestly work of Father Ioan Iovan**

On April 28, 1995, the Life-giving Fount celebration, when was ordained as a Archimandrite, Father Ioan said at the festive meeting<sup>49</sup>, having in the auditorium Nathan Blum, the American consul in Cluj, the Romanian resistance through faith in the communist catacombs: “are present here, at the Fount, all the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 339.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 336.

<sup>49</sup> V. Bota, *Întreit praznic la Mănăstirea Recea*, in *Credința Străbună*, VI<sup>th</sup>, no. 5 (110), May 1995, p. 3.

ecclesiastical ranks and Christians of all generations, all calling their orthodox belief and confession. There are foreign people present here; brought by God to destroy what has been done between 1054 and 1600. American Consul, Sir, look at the Romanian people present at this celebration and send to the American people that I loved and that I always wanted to come but at a certain moment they were not longer brothers of us and they threw us into the arms of communism. Now you have to apologize, not to accuse us. Romanian people knew how to keep alive their faith in God, even in the catacombs of communism. I dare, on behalf of this people gathered here, to tell you that we don't remember the evil, our souls are filed of honour and we have no patience dealing with hypocrisy..."<sup>50</sup> His Eucharistic sob echoes also in the thanksgiving words at Recea monastery dedication service from September 7, 2003, he spoken in front of two patriarchs Theoctist and Petros VII, and of the great liturgical gatherings: "Do you bless and thank you for you have brought His Holiness Pope-Patriarch Petros of Alexandria. (...) There is another gift that all those present at this dedication service receive: is the holy and Eucharistic presence of our God, along with the sacred bishops, priests and deacons, along with orthodox people in a Christian spirit and Romanian unit"<sup>51</sup>.

The supreme test of Fr. Ioan's Eucharistic piety was the prison where he proved a martyr commitment and a clear mystical vocation certified by many testimonies<sup>52</sup> (Nicolae Balota, Liviu Brânzaș, Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, Aspazia Oțel Petrescul, Nicolae Grebenea, Costache Caragață). Scenes of ministry in

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem.*, p.3.

<sup>51</sup> Arhim. Ioan Iovan, *Mărturie providențială*, in *Credința străbună*, XIII<sup>th</sup>, no. 9 (210), September 2003, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Nicolae Balotă, *Calea, adevărul și viața. Meditații religioase*, București, Eminescu Publishing, 1995, second edition in 1999; *Caietul albastru*, București, Ideea Europeană, 2007;

communist catacombs are worthy of a hagiographic file<sup>53</sup>: daily service on the antimimension sewed on the back of his sweatshirt, holy Eucharist distributed to his suffering mates, miracles of an unyielding and firmness faith, a vigorous suffering ecumenism and the liturgical episode in Văcărești: “Here at Văcărești, I lived, in harsh conditions of detention, a time of great spiritual exaltation. I managed to convince them, not without difficulty, the Roman Catholic Vicar-Father Xavieru, of Iasi (he died in prison) and the Greek Catholic Father Oprîș Nicolae, parish priest in Bonțida near Cluj, to officiate together Resurrection Liturgy. Besides the Vicar-Father’s little moment of hesitation, at the consecration, when we asked the Holy Ghost descent for the Transubstantiation, everything went into a communion in whom we find all, regardless of religion, sons of God, united in Christ; moment followed by the communion of all the prisoners in a spiritual ecstasy atmosphere. I realised that this moment of sublime happiness was a crossroads of my life.

At the end of Holy Liturgy, animated by a single divine joy we sang together all the prisoners, from the bottom of our souls, “Christ is risen”, loudly, which drew the attention of our supervisors. We, priests, were liable to severe punishment. Instantly all prisoners were concerned to defend us by a body shield. In front is the aviation captain Cucu, an intelligent man and very good organizer. When the officer complained that we have made a religious service, which was strictly forbidden, Captain Cucu replied, in a quiet but determined tone: “Please, officer, don’t offend un on the Easter day. It my birthday and my fellow sang to me “Christ is risen”<sup>54</sup>. Along with Father Ioan, the protagonists of this episode wonderful Easter day Fr. Egon

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<sup>53</sup> Monahia Cristina, *Părintele Ioan Iovan de la mănăstirea Recea de Mureș*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2002, pp. 37-68.

<sup>54</sup> Cornel Nistea, *În căutarea sensului suferinței - interviu cu părintele Ioan Iovan de la Mănăstirea din Recea*.

Xavieru Haider<sup>55</sup> (1920-1956), who was arrested altogether with Menges and Monseigneur Vladimir Ghika recently canonized, after he was surreptitiously appointed auxiliary bishop (ordinarius substitute), and the Greek Catholic Fr. Nicolae Vasile Opreș (n.1901) Bontida's parish priest (1942-1946) released in 1964 after 16 years in prison. Father Ioan Iovan is one of the few priests who testified at the end of the prison experience: "My joy in prison was the Holy Liturgy"<sup>56</sup>.

One of the many testimonies to this respect belongs to Father Ioan Sabau (1914-2009) who joined to Fr. Ioan's figure that of a wonderful hesychast confessor, Father Julian Stoicescu (1911-1996), both being totally involved in supporting the spiritual resistance in the prison of Aiud by the years '59-60s, in a delicate moment of fallen under the pressure of re-education:

"Father Iulian - and all who knew him have testified - he never let a man disconsolate. They also said that he had managed to acquire the unceasing prayer - he easily moved his lips continuously, in the words of prayer. Was a great benefit his coming in the midst of the weakest. Some priests, under the pressure of in misery, starvation, have fallen, and the world began to clamour against the priests. When Fr. Julian came he managed to restore the sanctity of the man: they looked to him as a saint, because he sacrificed himself every time he saw another weak and helplessness fellow, especially when we needed to struggle hard inside cell. He always sought to work for everyone. So prisoners had come to join him, as they joined Fr. Ioan of Vladimirești, they only get strengthened by touching him. And he succeeded - even if it was mostly in isolation - through akatists and prayers communicated by the Morse

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<sup>55</sup> Dănuț Doboș, *Pr. Egon Xavieru Haider. Harul de a muri în închisoare (L'art de mourir en prison)*, in *Pro Memoria*, 2004, 3, pp.164-175.

<sup>56</sup> *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica strareță Cristina: Interviuri realizate de Părintele Remus Onișor*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007, p. 91.



code, he managed to strengthen the whole detention barrack and to keep it in the intensity of prayer and meditation"<sup>57</sup>.

A similar testimony I have personally received in 2012, at the university summer class, took part in front of the terrible prison, dedicated to the Pitesti phenomenon, testimony of the famous Tache Rodas, one of the young people disfigured by the completely demonic re-education, and subsequently got to Aiud's barracks, where he was greeted with a parental warm and spiritual foresight by Fr. Ioan Iovan "Brother Tache, you've suffered a lot, I've been praying for you for a couple weeks".

The writer Nicolae Balotă, a Greek-Catholic practicing, mentioned in frequent occasions in his books or on television shows with much respect, Father Ioan, as one of the profoundly mystical figures he encountered in communist prisons, sending the other to meet him<sup>58</sup>: "this faith so welcoming was not only given to us, the Christians. I've met in prison Muslim priests, Tatars from Dobrogea, countryside priests with little theological knowledge, but with a lot of heart. We met, of course, many believers of various Christian denominations, and above all my Catholic priests, who are more numerous, but we all shared the same living water of faith. (...) Besides the rare virtues he was endowed with, this good man of Christ was the only priest in the Romanian communist prisons who had, through a miraculous circumstances contest, the Holy Communion. (...) Father Iovan, during, the short period of time we spent together at Jilava, made a daily Eucharist; his liturgy was not just reciting the liturgical, but contained the essential

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<sup>57</sup> „Mirosea a sfințenie, a a evlavie, a bunătate...”, Interview of Ioan Sabău, in: Costion Nicolescu (ed.), *Un preot de foc: Părintele Iulian*, București, Bizantină Publishing, 2000, p. 201.

<sup>58</sup> „Du-te să-l cunoști pe Părintele Iovan”, George Arion's interview in 1999 - *O istorie a societății românești contemporane în interviuri (1990 - 1999)*, Vol. II, "Premiile Flacăra - România" foundation Publishing, 1999, pp. 525-532.

mystery of the liturgy: Transubstantiation. With him I could get the communion, and when we separated he gave me a tiny pouch with tiny crumbs of Holy Communion. I, a simply faithful, could be the bearer of the Eucharist, on the grounds of an ancient exhortation of St. Basil the Great, for periods of persecution. Of this Communion partook, both Catholics and Orthodox. I would be happy if the communist prisons' ecumenism could bind us as brothers in a free world"<sup>59</sup>.

The same essential meeting is evoked explicitly again in the same key of the suffering ecumenism. After nine months of investigation, Father Liviu Brânzaș, along with two other cell mates have met Fr. Ioan: "But a few days later the first words of that bearded angel were when he began to whisper St. John Chrysostom liturgy, Fr. Ioan Iovan? He had to share the Orthodox and make me, a Catholic, the bearer of the Eucharist grains for the others fellows"<sup>60</sup>.

Father Ioan deplored the absence of a maximum martyr liability in the Church of his time and noticed the tragic resignation of the Christian moral dignity: "Today, not the primacy or the synod raises or make falls the Christianity, but the presence or absence of the good faith of those who represent the Church. For not the form but the spirit creates the Christian life. The nowadays Church of Christ does no miss popes or patriarchs, but saints and heroes of the Christian ideal. (...) Thus, social barriers rose between Christians and the church and the believers were separated. The final target of the apostolic life is sacrifice. Only then will be realized the great Christian revival"<sup>61</sup>.

His liturgical ministry and the spiritual attitude during detention brought him inconveniences even after his release in

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<sup>59</sup> Nicolae Balotă, *Peregrin prin patria cuvintelor*, Europress Group, digital edition, 2012, [books.google.ro/books?isbn=6068012468](https://books.google.ro/books?isbn=6068012468).

<sup>60</sup> Nicolae Balotă, „Nu eu am ales Abisul luminat...”, *Cosmin Ciotloș*, in: *România literară*, no. 4, 2010.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 283-284.

1964. After a turning point (1965-1979) and the search for reconciliation with the church hierarchy, followed the first partial rehabilitation episodes of Fr. Ioan Iovan, the defrocking annulment (June 26, 1979) and the permission of free service at Cernica (1979-1980) and Plumbuita (1980-1989) monasteries. The bishop Antonie Plămădeală was the official starter of reconciliation with the Church, morally supported by a number of high quality people as the vicar bishop Roman of Ialomița, the Frs. Dumitru Fecioru (1905-1988) and Olimp Căciulă (1905-1979), who had a big influence and high positions in the patriarchal administration. Much of the details of this period have been cleared out by Fr. Ioan himself in the testimony<sup>62</sup> offered on various occasions.

Bishop Andrei Andreicut, advised by Fr. Ilie Moldovan, gave an essential impetus to exploit the holiness halo with which Fr. Ioan got out of prison, by seeking a Transylvanian place to found a monastery having the pure orthodox value practiced at Vladimirești expressed in asceticism and Communion preaching. It would be an interesting list that of the wanderings in searching of this place: Alba Iulia (the memorial church of Michael the Brave), Strungari, Țara Moșilor, Recea - Mureș (according to Prof. Frs. Dumitru Vanca and Simion Todoran). The monastery founded at the gates of Mureș County will have a special missionary impact for a lot of believers, bishops, priests and laymen from Transylvania (Tg. Mures, Reghin, Târnăveni, Dumbrăveni, Alba Iulia, Sibiu, Cluj, a.s.o.) and across the country. The favourable conditions of the mission amid on the religious enthusiasm of the '90s, enjoyed a different kind of openness to the Eucharistic theology of the the Orthodox diaspora and the dissemination of theological literature devoted to Eucharistic ecclesiology (N. Affanasiev, Al.

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<sup>62</sup> *Cuvinte împărtășite de Părintele Ioan și maica strareță Cristina: Interviu realizate de Părintele Remus Onișor, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing, 2007.*

Schmemmann, I. Zizioulas and others) and the Athonite Eucharistic dispute of the almsgivers (Ioan Ică jr.). Although somewhat strategically isolated Father Ioan figure began to be gradually assumed in the manifold of contemporary great spiritual fathers and confessors of communist prisons, researched and respected by a number of bishops (Andrei Andreicuț, Serafim Joantă, Iosif Pop, Laurențiu Streza, Irineu Pop, Siluan Șpan a.o.) and branded theologians (Mircea Păcurariu, Ion Bria, Vasile Mihoc). Amid challenging the legitimacy of the work Eucharistic cold held at Hermitage, in the 90s, full of meaningful meeting between Father Ioan Iovan and Father Ilie Cleopa. Publication dedicated undergraduate thesis centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church will enlighten public mystical Eucharistic vocation Fr. Ioan Iovan priest recovering cuminecător image of divine love embodied in the chalice, called in his sermons, “my life”. The publication fis bachelor degree thesis dedicated thesis dedicated to the Eucharist centrality in the mystic life of the Church will enlighten the public Eucharistic vocation of Fr. Ioan Iovan, recovering the image of the priest as the Communion giver of the divine love embodied in the chalice, called in his sermons, “my life”.

After the publication of this thesis, Fr. Ioan Ică jr., finding the clean vocation of Fr. Ioan Iovan demonstrates that one cannot speak without a specific nuance of “the maniacal mono-eucharistism of Vladimirești” for his case is not very different from that of Fr. John of Kronstadt<sup>63</sup>: Fr. Moldovan knew Eucharist and spiritual work of Fr. Ioan of Vladimirești and Plumbuita due the relationship he had with Fr. Arsenie Boca,

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<sup>63</sup> A comparative study on the eucharistic theology of the two pioneers of the modern eucharistic apostolate (in progress): Jan Nicolae, Lucian Colda, *Epistimizarea Euharistiei la Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur și teologia corifeilor renașterii euharistice moderne, Părinții Ioan de Kronstadt și Ioan Iovan*, Symposium dedicated to St. John Chrysostom, Tismana, 3-5 noiembrie 2014.

who sent Fr. Ioan at Vladimirești, and with Fr. Ștefan Slevoacă, close friend and frequent guest of Vladimirești monastery during its time of glory. Fr. Ioan has assumed the spiritual work in his native Transylvania and was a source of light and peace, after 1991, for both Romanian and for every hurt soul, in search of God, regardless of ethnic origin. There were many Hungarians who received the prayers of Father Ioan or who have confessed in their native language, spoken by Fr. Ioan since his childhood. A good picture of this spiritual work could be provided by the homiletics archive kept at Recea monastery and his close disciples of which echoes the figure of one of the most important popular preachers of the Romanians.

After a systematic research on the archival fund of NCSA<sup>64</sup> (George Enache, Adrian Petcu, Vasile Manea, monk Moise Iorgovan,), Fr. Ioan Iovan's figure regains the stature of a martyr Christian dignity model. Furthermore it is the exemplary figure of Romanian Church which consciously the suffering as the one that had to be accepted as a pure sacrifice for freedom of belief and Eucharistic normality retrieval<sup>65</sup>. The Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania, old friend of Fr. Ioan was right in his homily<sup>66</sup> at the funeral of his dear friend, in May 19, 2008 was right to say that it is a just a little possible that father's Ioan eucharistical figure to be forgotten. This Eucharist and spiritual profile was noted in his obituary: "We remained friends and there in prison while I was struggling to preach the word of God, Father Ioan Iovan, confessed as many as he could and give them the Communion if any flying bird brought a

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<sup>64</sup> National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives

<sup>65</sup> Hrisostomos Stamoulis, *Sfânta Euharistie și „păguboasa evlavie”*, The Internațional Project „*Hristos în cetate*” (Arad, March 25, 2014), coord. Arhim. Teofan Mada, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Predica IPS Bartolomeu Anania la înmormântarea Părintelui Ioan*, in: Monahia Cristina, *Părintele Ioan Iovan*, f.e, Tg. Mureș, 2010, pp. 120-125.

grape for the priest to do the Holy Communion"<sup>67</sup>. Only now, when approaching the seven years period since the death of Fr. Ioan, he begins to be retrieved by his proper light.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 120-125.