A BOOK OF TRANSFIGURATION - CARDINAL IULIU HOSSU'S MEMOIR REVISITED IN 2018 -

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ABSTRACT. A Book of Transfiguration - Cardinal Iuliu Hossu's Memoir Revisited in 2018. - The present study focuses on analysing the memoir written by Cardinal Iuliu Hossu in 1961, during his house arrest at the Căldărușani Monastery, and published in 2003, after the fall of the communist regime in Romania. Iuliu Hossu (1885-1970), the Greek-Catholic bishop who in 1918 publicly read the text of the Resolution for the Union between Transylvania and Romania in Alba Iulia is an emblematic figure of Romanian history in the 20th century. During communism, this Greek Catholic clergyman endured a total of twenty-two years of house arrest and detention. My paper analyzes and synthesizes his testamentary memoir, infused by a special liturgical character, where the bishop (eventually cardinal) fully identifies with the living Romanian Greek Catholic Church, despite the persecutions and abuses it underwent at the hands of the communists.

Keywords: Iuliu Hossu, memoir, Gulag, Romania, communism, Greek Catholic Church, testament, resistance, survival.

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REZUMAT. Cartea transfigurării. Memoriile cardinalului Iuliu Hossu recitite în 2018. Studiul prezent este concentrat pe analiza memoriilor redactate de cardinalul Iuliu Hossu, în 1961, pe vremea când se afla în domiciliu forțat la mănăstirea Căldărușani. Memoriile cardinalului au fost publicate în 2003, după prăbușirea regimului comunist. Iuliu Hossu (1885-1970) a fost episcopul grecocatolic care a citit, în 1918 la Alba-Iulia, Rezoluția Unirii Transilvaniei cu România, o figură emblematică a istoriei românești în secolul XX. În perioada comunistă, ierarhul greco-catolic a îndurat douăzeci și doi de ani de detenție și domiciliu forțat. Lucrarea mea analizează și sintetizează memoriile testamentare ale ierarhului, care au un caracter liturgic aparte, datorită faptului că episcopul (mai târziu cardinal) se identifică întru totul cu Biserica vie Greco-Catolică, în ciuda persecuțiilor și abuzurilor de care această biserică a avut parte din partea autorităților comuniste.

Cuvinte- cheie: Iuliu Hossu, memorii, Gulag, România, comunism, Biserica Greco-Catolică, testament, rezistență, supraviețuire.

My second reading of *Our Faith Is Our Life*,² Cardinal Iuliu Hossu's memoir, proved to be three times more poignant than the first one, probably because the ethical and religious example provided by the bishop of Cluj-Gherla had decisively influenced my paternal grandfather, Vasile Cesereanu, which in turn rendered it into one of my own decisive spiritual milestones.³ However, the year 2018 suggests an alternative reason to consider the cardinal as an exemplary and charismatic personality: the former bishop of Cluj-Gherla is the person who publicly read the Resolution for the Union between Transylvania and Romania in Alba-Iulia in 1918, but was also put through a total of 22 years of house arrest and detention by the communists. Thirdly, this testamentary book, with its special liturgical dimension, allowed the bishop-cardinal and his followers to conflate his image with the living

² Our Faith is Our Life. A Memoir by Dr. Iuliu Hossu, Cardinal, edited by Fr. Silvestru Augustin Prunduş, OSBM, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Viaţa Creştină, 2003.

In the "Foreword" to the book *Persecution and Resistance. Vasile Cesereanu. A Greek Catholic Priest in the Files of the Securitate* (edited by Ruxandra Cesereanu, with a Foreword and Explanatory Note by Ruxandra Cesereanu), revised edition, Târgu Lăpuş, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, 2017, I showed that my paternal grandfather embraced the missionary and ethical model of Iuliu Hossu, not only as a spiritual teacher, but also as a human and historical example to be emulated beyond one's faith. To my paternal grandfather, his mentor's image became an occasion for spiritual comfort and obstinate resistance against persecution. Itwas not in vain that during his exile in Rome (1978-1984), Vasile Cesereanu carried on his person the emblematic and iconic portraits of Bishop and Cardinal Hossu.

Greek Catholic Church, despite the persecutions and abuses it was undergoing at the hands of the communists.⁴

The text consists of three notebooks, covering the fourteen years between 1947 and 1962, and focusing on several central moments: the capture, the house arrest at the monasteries of Dragoslavele and Căldărușani, the incarceration in the Sighet jail, the house arrest at the monasteries of Curtea de Argeș, Ciorogârla și Căldărușani. In 1961, the three notebooks are secretly entrusted to Traian Hossu, one of the bishop's brothers. His Holiness Florentin, the current bishop of Cluj-Gherla, has pointed out how valuable the notebooks are as "both a spiritual testament, and a model for living," and has described Iuliu Hossu as a "master of spiritual life";⁵ Father Silvestru Augustin Prunduș and Father Alexandru Nicula compare the style of the memoir to that of Paul's Epistles.⁶

The book was conceived as a form of living prayer, an everlasting liturgy; despite the constant reference to the Way of the Cross (given the long house arrest and the detention in the Sighet prison), it remains bright, since it materialises a trial and a test the bishop sees as sent by God. Martyrdom is considered a means of strengthening faith, which turns the cardinal's memoir into an extended (albeit fragmented) testamentary pastoral letter. Both during his house arrest (in fact a subtler or milder form of deportation or concentration camp), and during his imprisonment, the bishop's thoughts visit the diocese to give communion, bless or offer spiritual love. This canonical mental visitation acts as a double pilgrimage, simultaneously in quest of remembrance and spiritual therapy. Iuliu Hossu endeavours to prove that, although the Greek Catholic Church has ceased to exist and has been officially dismantled (on paper), it remains alive, faithfully and fiercely guarded by souls and minds, finding its way to a stealthy survival. And the future would bring about its resurrection, including its official recognition; here, the bishop becomes prophetic and visionary. Just like Christ, the Greek Catholic Church will rise from the tomb: this metaphor fits the bishop's visionarism, since, during his persecution,

⁴ Several books researching the image of bishop-cardinal Iuliu Hossu, both as a clergyman anda sufferer, are worth mentioning here: 1. S. A. Prunduş, Clemente Plaianu, *Cardinal Iuliu Hossu*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Unitas, 1995; 2. Valer Hossu, *Bishop Iuliu Hossu*, *The Saint of the Great Union*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Napoca Star, 2008; 3. Valer Hossu, *The Announcer of the Romanian Sion*, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuş, 2011; 4. Simona Ştefana Zetea, Dan Ruscu (*eds.*), *Proceedings of the Symposium in Honour of Iuliu Hossu*, Târgu-Lăpuş, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, 2013; 5. Sergiu Soica, *Cardinal Iuliu Hossu in the Files of the Securitate. Briefing Notes*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 2016. Likewise, one must not forget the articles dedicated to the cardinal by Gelu Hossu in the cultural journal *Steaua* in 2017 and 2018.

⁵ Our Faith is Our Life. A Memoir by Dr. Iuliu Hossu, Cardinal, pp. 14, 16.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20.

allegorically and symbolically, the Greek Catholic Church comes closest to the resurrection of the Son of God. The bishop-confessor advises that the resurrection of the Church should be prepared, which is why he himself (symbolically and mentally) continues to provide guidance to his faithful flock, even during house arrest or detention. Through this re-foundational gesture, Iuliu Hossu takes on the resurrection of his Church, and the legacy of his memoir becomes "the testament of my love."

During his imprisonment, the bishop of Cluj-Gherla mainly occupies himself with prayer, because even under punitive circumstances prayer means survival, living, resistance. Detention, house arrrest, imprisonment will materialize in years of mental and spiritual pastorage. It is the very ascesis forced by the incarceration, or alternatively the simplicity and dearth of the monastery-camp in Dragoslavele, that inspires all arrested Greek Catholic bishops to celebrate mass, thus serenely accepting the Way of the Cross and the organized working of the Romanian Church United with Rome.

From a spiritual point of view, the 1948 decree outlawing the latter has an entirely different effect to what the auhorities had in mind: forced into house arrest in the Dragoslavele si Căldărusani monasteries, the bishops see themselves even more acutely as representing the enduring, living Church, precisely because of the oppression, suffering and persecution. Confined to monasteries turned into concentration camps, the bishops form the very surviving Church, defying the hostile forces. Therefore, although forcefully abolished by the official documents of the communist regime, the Romanian Church United with Rome stays alive through the persistent faith of all its bishops. And the one who writes down this act of endurance (as unwavering proof, rock and testament) is Iuliu Hossu through his memoir, which reaches beyond a metaphysical and ethical testimony. The bishop of Cluj-Gherla never fails to show that detention and house arrest have led to the strengthening and consolidation of his devotion, since the Greek Catholic Church, by tranforming forced destruction into concrete survival, has fortified its faith, turning it into the foundation of God, a rock in Apostle Peter's sense, sanctioned by Christ to become the founding rock of Christianity. The house arrest enforced by the Romanian communist system on the Greek Catholic prelates will become an abode in and with Christ, a monk's cell, a transfiguration of suffering. The paucity of living conditions and the humiliations and mocking the bishops endure at the hands of the authorities are turned, through renewal and transfiguration, into the serene welcoming of sorrow. The mystical key sentence, ritually reoccuring in the whole of the cardinal's memoir as the heart's prayer, has this exact meaning:

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

Our faith is our life. This life principle provides both the inner prayer and the justification against his opressors (communist officials or Orthodox clergy). Reviewing the cardinal's memoir, Ion Pop also notices that it takes on a "Biblical, liturgical frame," and "the memory of Biblical acts becomes the moulding pattern."

Although some of the Orthodox clergy come out as deceitful, Iuliu Hossu does not dismiss the possible coming together of Greek Catholics and Orthodox believers, but sees it as founded on mutual respect and appreciation, rather than violence and abuse. He prophetically envisions the future freedom of the Romanian Church United with Rome as the embracing of all Romanian Christians, no matter what their denomination is. Such unifying and symbolical dimensions intuited and suggested by the bishop's memoir are very important, particulary in 2018!

On recalling the year 1948, when the illegal decree proclaiming the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church was passed, Iuliu Hossu mentions some anniversaries that might repair the illegitimacy of the communists' act: 250 years since the Union with Rome, 100 year since the Revolution of 1848, 30 years since the Union of Romania and Transylvania; these temporal milestones are meant to remind the potential reader of the possibility of the whole country's eventual resurrection – through faith or on a symbolic level.

In the reclusion of the personal cell occupied by the bishop-confessor during his detention or house arrest, the Christian holidays bring back the experience and inner remembrance of the former pastorage; the effect is a "spiritual feast," a revival, strengthening and embrace in God. 10 The vulnerability and withdrawal wished for by the communist (and Orthodox) officials are counteracted by spiritual fortification, strengthening, spiritual preparation, the "petrification" produced by faith (as in the collective consent to be Peter, the rock of Christ's Church.) At one point, Iuliu Hossu describes the captive bishops as "new children" (one occasion, but not the only one, is when they sing Christmas carols), since detention or camp-like monasteries render the imprisoned Greek Catholic clergy innocent and pure, which leads to fervent and testimonial faith. When he finds the solution of mentally revisiting he diocese he still continues to guide, however clandestinely, the confessor mentions a kind of "spiritual" renewal"11 allowing faith to grow and regenerate, rather than diminish. Through the practice of this inner spiritual exertion, the captive bishops become sowers and growers of the seeds of faith and embody the very Church United with Rome. Even the difficult removal from the Căldărușani monastery

⁸ Ion Pop. "Our faith is our life," in *România literară*, no. 5, 11-17, February 2004, pp. 14-15.

⁹ Our Faith is Our Life. A Memoir by Dr. Iuliu Hossu, Cardinal, p. 144.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

to the Sighet prison (in the van of the Securitate, at winter time), is turned into the recollection of a canonical visitation; the infernal journey becomes *metanoia* under the guidance of Christ the Sufferer and the Redeemer.¹²

Bodily unfreedom is healed and compensated through a yearning spiritual freedom; the coercive outside is overcome by the inside that remains unconquered by the oppressors. Imprisonment and house arrest are modern forms of the wilderness and the desert, and the bishop-confessor thus symbolically becomes a Desert Father, suffering for God. The spiritual and religious journey turns to rite in order to overcome the incarcerated body: "I chose the unconstrained way of the soul, souring in fuller, happier freedom, unbound by either time, or distance, with every tightening of the body's shackles."13 The bishop of Cluj-Gherla is accompanied in these spiritual journeys by the souls of all Greek Catholic priests and followers: the journey is directed towards an immense union and communion that allows the Church, forced into clandestinity and obliterated by the communists, to come alive, to survive and, especially, to bear fruit. The intensity of this liturgy (simultaneously interior and collective) produces a form of rapture to the heavens, as it becomes an ecumenical hyperbole: the "small and derelict chapel of Căldărușani" where the imprisoned bishops celebrated mass, contains all the faithful, albeit invisibly. 14 For the Greek Catholic bishops, the Way of the Cross (the imprisonment, the house arrest) represents the road to Emmaus and a new time of the Acts of the Apostles! The memoir is written in a Pauline style, and Iuliu Hossu is clearly an admirer of Apostle Paul; however, despite the Pauline style of his testamentary reminiscences, his role is given by Peter's missionarism, providing strength for and in faith.

The Sighet penitentiary epitomizes the darkest part of the memoir. Despite the degradation they are facd with (despite the debased body): "We'll put the buffaloes in the stable!," 15 a guard warns, the bishop's life remains one of constant spirtual serenity and illumination. The soul and the spirit compensate for the sullying and the punishing of the body by the prison authorities (through hunger, cold and humiliation). The method is transfiguration: when stripped of the priestly cloth and dressed in prison uniform, the Greek Catholic clergymen are transfigured, seeing themselves as ordained for prison, in the name of their faith. "There is no bishop here," 16 Vasile Ciolpan, the crude prison warden, replies when Iuliu Hossu introduces himself as such upon his incarceration.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 204-205.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

However, precisely despite his persecution and disavowal by the authorities, Iuliu Hossu remains the bishop even in prison, becoming a "rock" of the victimized, but surviving Church. Although his rosary is confiscated and he is forbidden to celebrate mass in Sighet for four months and seven months, because he knows the liturgy by heart, the bishop of Cluj-Gherla will celebrate it mentally, with his whole spirit and soul. All the tragic events - the persecution, the capture, the house arrest, the detention – become "a struggle to bear witness."¹⁷ The Sighet jail, the harshest and most brutal of all prisons, turns into an opportunity for spiritual sustenance. Because they are poorly fed, the Greek Catholic priests get thin, but this bodily fragility catalyzes their constant spiritual ascension. The whole persecution becomes spiritual preparation, an ordeal for Christ and self-offering: the descent into hell turns into an ascent, since "Here, sinking into the depths of the soul, man finds many things, he knows and learns much, this is the greatest school, the ultimate university, as I called it here: the ultimate practical school."¹⁸ The starvation that transforms the prisoners into ghosts is worsened by the poor hygiene: it is not out of impudence that the bishop recounts this, but in order to justify and suggest the spiritual ascent needed to compensate for the abject circumstances the detainees (priests, monks, nuns) were facing. Baths, shavings, haircuts, washing latrines are all perceived as penace, but, accepted through faith, they contributed to the soul's rising towards God. The prisoners at Sighet were enslaved (as the confessor bitterly notices), and the jail was a form of slavery, a descent into the subhuman; but the slaves yearned for the reverse, therapeutic, redeeming communion with the superhuman. Hence, the persistent advice the bishop gives priests and followers alike: Hold strong in your faith!, since the first who keep their faith are the suffering bishops.

The body may be tormented or even killed, but the soul is resurrected – this is a constant spiritual motion in Cardinal Hossu's memoir. Therefore, an act like breaking bread in prison becomes an Eucharistic ceremony, and the jail is ritualistically turned into a Supper at Emmaus. The prisoners' communion with Christ lies at the heart of their resistance: "He came to us, He stayed with us, our soul rejoiced from within this abode of pain, and nobody could rob us of our joy. Lord Jesus stayed with us, we celebrated our feasts with Him. He was to us the Feast of the feastless." Being with Christ or in Christ crowns the life of a witness to faith, especially if he suffers constantly without objecting to the suffering. Without using the word, the bishop Iuliu Hossu looks for the supernatural triumph of the sufferer who thus obtains "the crown of the

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 299.

fearless and unvanquished witnesses to faith."²⁰ In this vein, the book also contains funereal prayers (liturgies) for two of the bishops (Valeriu Traian Frențiu and Ioan Suciu), thus declaring its status as the book of books, both on prayer and survival, and on the passing of the soul. His loyalty to the Greek Catholic faith, his complete self-offering, his honesty and honor, firmness, frankness and fairness, his fidelity and openness – all these qualities turn Iuliu Hossu into a maxim alter in the eyes of the authorities; one of the Sighet guards calls him an "old fool," but the insult becomes the praising of a holy man who lives his detention almost mystically.

Another quality of the bishop-confessor is not being anti-Orthodox. Iuliu Hossu only blames the Orthodox clergy who had collaborated with the communist authorities; in all the monasteries where he is sent into house arrest (Curtea de Argeș, the Trivale hermitage, Ciorogârla, even Căldărușani), the confessor constantly praises the unblemished behaviour of the monks and nuns, or that of the Orthodox abbots or villagers living near the prison monasteries. Moreover, the bishop of Cluj-Gherla foresees the eventual triumph against atheistic communism, during a novel time of ecumenism: "the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic together, fighting side by side, brothers in sorrow, many brothers in the death of prison, for the same nation."²¹ The communist prisons and camps created a community of sufferers among Greek Catholic and Orthodox believers (and among other denominations, too), and the bishop hopes that this community can last during the coming freedom.

After being released from the Sighet prison and entering a new, more lenient stage of house arrest, Bishop Iuliu Hossu is suddenly surrounded by visitors and seekers of his blessing: they all expect words of comfort and firmness in faith, which are promptly offered. The bishop of Cluj-Gherla is perceived by the faithful as representing the Church itself. As he explains at the end of his memoir, the persecution had signified both trial and love, both confrontation and exaltation. The persecution occasioned a new form of sowing the seeds of faith and catalyzed a new form of inner force, while pain and even death fortified the soul: "the precious dead in prisons gave the faithful their invincible strength; the persecution heartened them, the jails steeled their faith; the precious dead were the force of the living." 22

This is the background of the composition of the 1956 Memorandum for the reinstatement of the Greek Catholic Church, signed by three bishops: Alexandru Rusu, Iuliu Hossu and Ioan Bălan. Many people thought in 1956 that Iuliu Hossu had not survived the Sighet prison, and therefore the news that he

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 311.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 354.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 422.

was alive and he could even be visited at the monasteries where he had been sent into house arrest came as a fully-fledged resurrection; naturally, this symbolic resurrection, with its prophetic value, triggered the anger and even wrath of some of the Orthodox clergy: "they were greatly alarmed, on receiving the news that I was still living and had been spotted by several brothers, seeing the one they had thought dead still moving about and alive; a wave of quick love came about in the midst of those they had presumed gone; they erred in touching the so-called dead and they became frightened that he was alive; they wished to secure their offence by smothering our Church through the missionaries sent to Transylvania, but instead, they awoke the dead, to their great fright/.../."23 As a punishment for this resurrection, and for the 19t6 Memorandum, the three bishops who had survived Sighet are separated: Iuliu Hossu is sent to the Căldărușani monastery, where "the citadel of his soul" continues to be strongly fortified, despite the siege of the communist and Orthodox authorities. The way of the Cross becomes "the royal path." 24 The liturgy he relentlessly celebrates alone at Căldărușani is "the centre and soul of my life," and this unvanquished spiritual citadel can only be entered by God.

The ending of Iuliu Hossu's memoir constitutes a testament of his love for the Greek Catholic believers and the remaining clergy, but also a bridge towards permanence, the fruit borne by the enduring seeds of faith, comfort, an urge to elevate ourselves, and, especially, a visionary testimony of the faith that the Church United with Rome will be reborn and fruitful again. This is, as I have already mentioned, a book of transfiguration. The ending also represents the liturgical consecration of the future clandestine bishops who will make up the new church in its new catacombs, hidden from the communist authorities. The religious (even mystical) life of the new catacombs will stay just as strong until it finally has the opportunity to reveal itself officially.

It is commendable that Cardinal Hossu's memoir was published in an Italian translation, ²⁵ and that it may some time be published in English and French (for now, only certain fragments have been translated); it should be translated into and published in as many languages as possible, so that the suffering, but in particular the mystical and visionary experience of this exceptional religious personality can be known internationally.

(Translated by Petronia Petrar)

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 441.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 454.

La nostra fede e la nostra vita, translated into Italian by Professor Giuseppe Munarini with Cristian Florin Sabău and Ioan Mărginean-Cocis; the book was published in 2016 by the Dehoniane House, Bologna, edited by Professor Marco dalla Torre, with explanatory notes by Professor Munarini; the Preface was written by His Holiness, Florentin Crihălmeanu, bishop of Cluj-Gherla.

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