

THE PASTORAL PROFILE OF FATHER IOAN SABĂU REFLECTED IN THE DOCUMENTS FROM THE ARCHIVES OF SECURITY

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ABSTRACT. Father Ioan Sabau (1941-2009) had been a worthy priest and confessor of his faith who has built a grandiose church, such as a cathedral, in Vinerea locality, Alba county during a full communist era. The hallowing of this church had been the excuse of arresting Father Ioan, but the real reason for which he was taken into the Security attention was the “guilt” of completely achieving his priestly mission. The Father’s prosecution from the CNSAS archive contains almost 850 pages, from which it can be distinguished the pastoral face of father Ioan Sabau, his qualities and his diligences. If we bear in mind that all the hard work of the informers of the security was to find reasons to compromise the father, we do understand that the value of these confessions is given by the fact that they were some of the Father’s enemies.

Keywords: Father, confessor of the orthodox faith, communist era, priestly mission, Father Ioan Sabau, CNSAS archive, Vinerea locality.

Father Ioan Sabau (1914 – 2009) was to the attention of the Security for the “guilt” of fulfilling his priestly mission. The whole endeavor of informers and security was to find reasons to compromise the Father, but, nevertheless, the nearly 850 pages of documents from the CNSAS archive, it constitutes a true praise at his address, being one of the most powerful evidence about the worthiness of an exemplary priest, since it is a testimony that came exactly from his enemies.

In these documents we will attempt to identify, in the following several aspects of personality and pastoral activity of Fr. Ioan.

The Accuses Towards Fr. Ioan Sabau

The “guilt” brought to Fr. Ioan Sabau was to be lived the Christianity and to have availed himself of the priesthood in an exemplary way. In one informative note given by M.A.I. Hunedoara-Deva Region, “Crinul” report as follows: *“Fr. Sabau*

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says that it should be done something for the unity of all the believers... to make a front against the common enemy. Christianity is undergoing a big moral exam in the moments of speaking. Enemy of the faith and of the Church was looking to destroy it systematically."¹ Of course, such an attitude was regarded as an affront to the atheist communist regime ever since. As such, the person concerned must have been pursued, punished and annihilated.

The papers prepared in different moments of prosecution of the priest are recommended and always accentuated his main accusations:

"... he was selected as a priority attention, being reported with some tendentious manifestations towards the socio-political system in our country, also because of intensifying his religious concerns".²

"In Vinerea village he organized the association called "Saint George", whose members were manifesting hostile actions against the U.T.M. organization from this locality, and after banning religious activity of the "LORD'S ARMY", a religious association activity he continued to LEAD and to organize this association.

In 1948 he wrote a memoir to some Romanians being in the U.S.A. and in Belgium, asking a monetary aid for the construction of the church, and with that occasion he informed them about some events happened in our country, namely that near Cugir locality occurred an explosion at an ammunitions depot.

In the sermons of the church he makes agitation with enemy character towards the regime.

For these feats he was sent to trial, being judged and acquitted. Since 1956, on the occasion of the events in Hungary, he intensified his contra revolutionary activity, having some different vicious manifestations to the regime.

For the contra revolutionary activity that he progressed he was arrested, tried and sentenced to eight years of jail through the sentence no. 105 of T.M. Brasov.

Punishment has run in Aiud prison until 17 of July 1964 when he was absolved by the rest of the punishment.

In prison, as it results from the informative note given by the agent "PETRARCA" of the "K" organs, he had frequent vicious manifestations towards the regime ... he installs mysticism among inmates."³

"He is preoccupied even for the multiplication of one versified material from the Holy Scripture (which would have belonged to the God's Army) more accessible for the children's power in their religious education and he teach some religious lessons and songs with the students from Bobalna village in the former Greek-catholic church of the village which is more isolated. He is used to ask for and even to carry elucidation with young people that are going to get married to donate to the church fund amounts ranging between 300-1000 lei."⁴

¹ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. I, paper 6.

² ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 1.

³ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 14.

⁴ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 11.

“In the file of the Gendarmerie from Cugir in 1944-1945 it was noted as being dangerous for the State safety (old file from Antonescu’s time). He was convicted. He was a great nationalist. Sure he was afraid to act openly against the regime.

Then he sought with all his strength of work and persuasion (strong power of conviction) to channel all energies of the village to the construction and finalization of the church, for defying the regime. He managed through sermons, that you could interpret them as wanted if you came out of the sphere of religious mysticism. Here I think he speculated the fear of the farmers, especially women (that I see now in Vinerea) of the collectivization, respectively of the socialization of agriculture, the delivering of compulsory quotas and so on. That fear coupled with poor cultural preparation inherited and somehow continuing, reduced concern of the present directors, it gets people closer, particularly women, to church and prayers. Of this fact he took advantage and he speculated it in the favor of Father Sabau Ioan.”⁵

One of the informative notes included, in words few but essential, Father Ioan’s testimony about his guilt. The document reveals that Father was in the church during a rehearsal with the choir which he organized, when the “source” entered the church.

“The source informs that the 23rd of May 1965 he met with Father SABAU from Folt.

Source: Why did he arrest you? Of what were you culpable?

Sabau: For excessive zeal, I was too popular in Vinerea and I was assigned to the cult of personality.

Now I go well, I work here, me and my family we are established in Folt. The source also informs that the meeting hour was 19, 15. Every Sunday around this hour he led a chorus of the citizens in the church from Bobalna and he disturbs all the cultural activities from the village.”⁶

Therefore, the real “guilt” of Fr. Ioan was, in fact, to have too much zeal for serving the priestly mission. In a certain moment of detention, in the same cell with the Fr. there was an informer, who reported consistently every discussion which he assisted in the cell, that were particularly recorded in a long detailed information note. From this we find out that, while in custody, Fr. Ioan had convictions at Zarca because he exercised his priestly ministry among the prisoners.

⁵ Information note from 18th of October 1959 in ACNSAS, operative fund I 259463, vol. I, paper 27.

⁶ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper96.

On the 15-16 of October 1960, the prisoner Sabau Ioan has had the next discussions inside the room:

"I am taken on Zarca, being taken out of the factory, because a Jew, that came with a lot of about one hundred, by January 1960, sneaked that I made church service on the day of Easter. In fact, me and priest Popescu from Bucharest, we made a great service along with several priests, all the prisoners have breathed deep – of course that a Judas was found to sneak."⁷

"I don't know how, but it can be seen that the providence makes this to happen with me, because in 1949, when I was put away in Deva, it happened to me also at Easter to sing "Christ is risen!" in the room where there were over 100 political prisoners, when the windows were open, the jail was in town, and the world crowded on the street that blocked the walker circulation, listening to the religious song from the chests of over a hundred people.

When the Security Major heard, which was also the prison chief, he came into the room, and addressed to me personally with the following words: "You, legionary beast of priest, you make hooliganism, do you provoke the prisoners to hooliganism and fascist acts? You've got to die here without air, for thus you deserve!", and he put nails into the windows, not to be opened and nothing from the street to be heard. However, what happened? The prisoner Sabau Ioan continues to say further, being very satisfied of what happened. Instead of me dying – he says with a satisfying smile – the major of Security died because God did not bear him to take the lives of more than 100 innocent beings, locked in the room and with the windows blocked with nails, without air, of course that we could have been dead until evening, but the wonder of God shows itself, the major dies because he treated and, instead of taking one phial how it was written in the prescription to drink, he took another phial that was between others and dies, being buried with a lot of fast. He had over 30 crowns, put on the grave, that till morning they all burned, even the crucifix from the head. You see, God had punished him, that on the third day since he blocked our windows with nails and he threatened me with death, he was buried and the entire grave burned. The guards announced us of what happened."⁸

We specify that, starting with this moment, any time a religious holyday came, Fr. Ioan was isolated from other fellow cellmate, but nobody dared to take very drastic measures towards his holiness, fearing not to happen something like those happened with the major.

All these guilt referring to father Ioan are things that do honor to any true servant of the Savior Jesus Christ.

⁷ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 104.

⁸ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 105.

The Construction of the Church from Vinerea

Above all, the strongest reason of condemning Fr. Ioan was to build up and sanctificate the church from Vinerea, a real cathedral. The church was consecrated in 1957, and the following day after sanctification, the father was arrested, receiving the longest and toughest condemnation of all those received up to then. To raise a church, a big and beautiful one like it the church from Vinerea, in full era of persecution of the Church, it meant a real courage and even a defiance to the regime.

The construction of the church from Vinerea is linked to the creation of the "Saint George" Association, in 1946. Fr. Ioan has set up this association at Vinerea with the purpose to attract the youth to the church and to take charge of their education.

It was a religious-moral association, where many young people were involved, some high school students, other students in agronomy, medicine, or conservatory and which activate only during secondary schools holiday when students were coming home. The theatre plays prepared here were presented in the nearby localities, and the amounts gathered were used for building the church. The activity related to the "St. George" Association was not accepted by those who held power in the village, since it was considered that the association was founded to have an adversary activity to the organizations of "progressive" youth. At that time, in the village there was such an organization, with the name of "Youth Village Organization", that was in animosity and competing with the "St. George" Association. From such considerations this activity was one of the accusation heads for Fr. Ioan, as is evident from the summons of inquiry:

“Question: What character had the “St. George” Association from Vinerea?

Answer: It had a religious-moral character.

Question: Concretely, with what was dealing this association?

Answer: There were made religious plays, religious choirs and religious poems.

Question: What was the purpose of “St. George” Association?

Answer: The purpose of “St. George” Association from Vinerea was to educate youth in moral and religious spirit and only when the pupils from the secondary school were coming home for holiday.

Question: Talk about this association in a detailed way.

Answer: The “St. George” Association was founded in order to attract the youth to religion and to take charge of their education. Only young Romanians Orthodox were allowed. There were not allowed other nationalities, nor people without school. There were allowed young people that were attending different medium or superior school, there were the sons of wealthy men from the locality.”⁹

⁹ ACNSAS, operative archive, file P 15054, vol. I, paper 27.

Around the years 1946-1948, Fr. Ioan was left without funds and could no longer continue construction at the Church. Even before the First World War, many Romanians settled in the village Vinerea have settled in U.S.A.

Fr. Ioan was advised by their relatives from Vinerea, by their acquaintances with those who had grown up together, and some that had been in the U.S.A., but they came back in their country, in 1948, has compiled a memoir for the Romanians from U.S.A., coming from Vinerea, through which he asked them to help, how they will be able, at the building of the new Church from Vinerea. The memoir was multiplied in 3-4 copies and sent to the painter, Nitulescu from Bucharest, to send it by plane. The painter replied in a letter to the Father that he sent it. The painter's letter got in the hands of the security and it was the beginning of the Father's many sufferings, as can be seen from the investigation file. Americans didn't come to help.

For the same purpose, to get help for the Church, Father wrote to a citizen from Vinerea established in Brussels. But neither from him could he not receive help as he responded to the Father that he cannot send money in Romania.¹⁰

Those from the Security believed that in the memoir have been written things that would contribute to defame the country outside the borders. We know the content of the memoir from Father's Ioan investigation file. During an interrogation of 12 of February 1959, Fr. received ink and paper and he was asked to remake, from memory, that memo addressed to Romanians from U.S.A. Fr. replied that he may render it roughly, because it remembers its essential parts, just that he does no longer recalls certain passages of the Holy Scripture that he had used in the memoir. With a writing which betrays an exhausted body, Fr. Ioan put down on paper the following:

Brothers from Vinerea,

The Holy Scripture tells us that a good word from a brother from far is like a glass of water given to a thirsty worker. From great distance and from the streets of your childhood we bring you good words, we, your fellow villagers of yesterday, some your relatives.

Your childhood spin in memories at nostalgic hours can't be taken away from the pleasant glimpses from holidays, when you run like some lambs around the old church from the cemetery. Do you remember that, since childhood, the church was old and too small. Since then, it was talking intensely of a more suitable church for your big village. Fatality herself wanted to put into action the thought of believers here because, in two rows, two fires have destroyed it almost entirely. The material was packed and the work area was ready to start, but as you remember the flames of the First World War had started and throughout the toil of generation nothing

¹⁰ ACNSAS, operative archive, file P 15054, vol. I, paper 48.

remained. Years of restoration came, two decades leaked until I could resume in 1937 and thread we dug up the Foundation for the new Church. With burst we worked until 1941, when a new war was imposed to us and over our lands were sowed mourning- the prime of our youth and our men in full powers had to be destroyed slowly on the battle field. With widows, orphans and old people couldn't lead our yoke, being drained by any unnerved. Now we are in a period of recovery with so many ruins remaining on our own lands. Recently there has been an explosion of a munition warehouse near our village. The Church became totally unfit for the divine service; we had to start again, but our yarn powers do not help us. Your brothers from Vinerea, those who were work comrades on those places, tell us that you live your lives, and still remember that, even from the time when they were there, have you thought about something to squeeze funds for our Church. Now we pray to you warmly to bring the thread in your memory and, as far as possible, to help us by giving us strength to our weak heart.

We assure that as far as a patient in agony figure brightens when making him a blood transfusion, so your help will be for us a much larger gathering of our forces.

Good God ordain your days as you can once return in your village to pray in the Church for which we ask now your contribution, and we assure you that every time we leave the knees, we will remember of you.

On behalf of the believers of your childhood village,
Fr. Ioan Sabău¹¹

This memoir was one of the "causes" for the big conviction found to the father in 1958.

Tracking File Drawn up After the Release from Prison of Father Ioan Sabău

On 1st of August 1964, Father Ioan was released of Aiud and returned to his native village in Folt. Beginning with the 1st of October 1964 he was named priest at Bobalna.

All the sacrifice of Father Ioan for building the church remained deeply embedded in the consciences of the faithful ones from Vinerea:

"When I met with the assigned I was announced, with great satisfaction and joy, about the arrival of Sabău from jail, the man who was the soul of the village, who was able to create the most beautiful church in the region in the most critical periods, through which the Church passed. Bura said: Sabău sacrificed himself for Vinerea as Christ sacrificed for the mankind."¹²

¹¹ ACNSAS, operative archive, file P 15054, vol. I, papers102-103.

¹² ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 43.

After the liberation, the Father was permanently pursued by security and informants who reported every move, every detail observed in his everyday life and the activity of the Father, informing the State authorities systematically regarding the persons who visited the Father, about his departures from the parish, about the content of the sermons that he delivered, about all the work that he performed. The Security file is full of informative notes, but the conclusion of all is that the Father has never manifested anger against the regime and that he was very balanced in statements. Many documents are highlighting the love that Father received from his former parishioners. One of those evidences of love is a note from a letter intercepted by the security, written by a believer from the parish of Orastie to someone from Baia Mare, in August 13th, 1964:

“Ionel came out from prison too, they were all on Sunday at the Church, and although he spent 6 years in jail he is young and very handsome, we all had a great joy when seeing us together. People from Vinerea are coming all the times to ask him to come in Vinerea, he refused to go, and they feel sorry for him; when he stayed at home a lot of people, men and women, came to see him.”¹³

It was the beginning of the winter and the family of the Father does not have any savings. From the informative data found at the Police station of Folt, we found that after the Father’s release from prison, “*it was formed a team in order to visit the residents of the village and ask to gather wood for the Church and for the priest.*” It was also gathered “*some corn to give to priest Sabau Ioan, who came out of the prison and has nothing to live with.*” It is specified a villager’s claim that “*we should help priest Sabau Ioan, who came out of prison, because he was*” *unjustly imprisoned by the communists*”.¹⁴ The residents of Vinerea came often to Folt, bringing bread and wine, and some supplies.

Although they knew that the priest is pursued, the believers of Vinerea never stopped to manifest love openly towards their shepherd:

“The day of 26 of December 1964, at the home of priest Ioan Sabau from Folt came several citizens of Vinerea with the train in the morning. They walked to the door of his house and refused to enter until the end of the Christmas carol, although the door was opened to them. At the end of the Christmas carol they went into the priest’s house filled with sadness, crying, and then they went together with him to the church in the Bobalna village”.¹⁵

¹³ ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. II, paper132.

¹⁴ ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. I, papers101-102.

¹⁵ ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 100.

“Regarding a demonstration of sympathy made by some inhabitants of Vinerea to former priest Ioan Sabau, released from jail as a political prisoner, facts that took place in August, the source tells the following. Things happened as follows: Priest Ioan Sabau and his wife, Alexandrina, went to Cugir. His wife, Sabau Alexandrina, got off the train in Vinerea, and he continued his road towards Cugir. His wife came in Vinerea at her Godson Todoran Dionisie, worker at UMC Cugir. Finding the news that Sabau Ioan will pass back to Folt with the train at 8 pm, several inhabitants gathered and made a demonstration of sympathy.”¹⁶

Not a day went by without a delegation, or an individual application to the Episcopacy made by residents from Vinerea who were demanding to be allowed to give them back their shepherd:

“It fully confirms the fact that a large number of faithful people insists that the priest should be brought back in the commune, asserting the idea that he enjoys a great confidence, being a good orator and his arrival would lead to a better understanding among citizens, at a multilateral progress of all. Moreover, it demonstrates that the CAP would work much better, as well as all public affairs.”¹⁷

At one time it was composed a memorandum signed by 600 people from Vinerea, it was addressed to the Bishop from Arad¹⁸. However, all the requests were rejected.

Sometimes the accents of discontent of the people from Vinerea were transformed into protests, as seen from a given source information note “Horestaing Hita” in Orăștie, at M.I.A. on 23rd of March 1967:

“Former Greek Catholic Christian peasants are struggling to bring into the village the priest Sabau by any method. (...) They made countless petitions to protos, episcopacy, etc. When they heard that they are going to have a priest named HALMAGHI or BUDAI, they said: «do we need Hungarian? NO. The Church is ours and we pay the priest so we have the right to bring whoever we want.». (...) They wanted the priest Sabau because he knows to practice wonderful service, he delivers nice sermons, they know him from childhood because he was the only under this system, with the risk of his life, who was able to build a beautiful church how none other is in the region. Micu Gheorghe told me that they have read a pastoral by which priests in the country were

¹⁶ ACNSAS, informative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 201.

¹⁷ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 141.

¹⁸ ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 52.

demanding financial help from the faithful people (since they had poorer parishes). In the church Micu said, « We do not give anything, because neither the Metropolia is giving us the priest we want. »¹⁹

The same zeal of serving his priestly mission has continued to be the principal accusation of Father Ioan:

“He is accomplishing his everyday service at the church during the Great Lent, like a monk”²⁰, as an informant from Bobalna reported. Another informant affirms that the aim of these religious services officiated by Father Ioan Sabau during the Great Lent was to “freshen up the religious-moral life of the believers. This is because latter it was found that many believers participate in evening prayers of the neo-cults, which are subsidized by foreign elements of our nation and which are not aimed by anything than breaking the unity of our Romanian nation, and the dissolution of the religious life.”²¹

In April 15, 1965 a verification was made in the management of the parish from Bobalna. Document drawn up on this occasion shed light on the results of the hard work deposed by father Ioan in less than a year:

“In the year 1964, when the parish was administrated by the Orthodox priest Candea Romulus from Boiu, the candles sold were valued at 1.000 lei, while in the first quarter of the year 1965 the candles sold were valued at 2.155 lei. This is due to the intensification of religious life in the parish by Fr. Ioan Sabau”.²² In the same document we find out that “the Orthodox priest Ioan Sabau formed a choir composed by about 15 people, most of whom they are women, in the parish church from Bobalna. A huge influence on the formation of the choir was the wife of the Cooperative of Agricultural Production President from Bobalna. This woman was very much appreciated by the priest and by the members of the church choir.

The priest Ioan Sabau has decided that at the end of April this year, the preparing of the choir will end; he knows that they need to be involved in the agriculture campaign.

The Director of Communal Council from Folt will take care of the wife of the President of the Cooperative Production by training her in cultural work within the locality shelter.”²³

¹⁹ ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 56.

²⁰ ACNSAS, operative fond, file I 259463, vol.III, paper 147.

²¹ ACNSAS, operative fond, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 68.

²² ACNSAS, operative fond, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 98.

²³ Idem.

The Pastoral Qualities of Father Ioan Sabau Reflected in the Pages of the File Tracking

From the archive documents placed in the CNSAS results *the good moral prestige* of Father Ioan. Here are some of the characteristics of Father Ioan, made by the informants:

“The character: open, ambitious, spiteful. Morality: good. Due to the fact that the named is a Priest, he enjoys a good moral authority in the municipality. He is treated with reverence and submission by the people. He is esteemed by the intellectuals.”²⁴

“He is a kind of intellectualist, and as far as I met him, he is proud with no reason, and I understand that he has a mystical inner feeling, he has great power of expression and he is deeply conscious of the Bible and of an extensive general culture sphere. (...) He is obviously distancing himself from any other priest in the surroundings and he is appreciated as such.”²⁵

“I can say that he is an example of a man and a priest, he doesn't highlight any sort of addiction, he is an able and honest man. He is sometimes ironic or performs a joke that someone may interpret wrongly, as he would do it out of animosity. I do not see in this man any meanness; despite how many troubles and hardships his family got, they encounter them with manhood, you can't see at him anything but courage and confidence.”²⁶

Father Ioan Sabau *ruled the “pastoral art”*, he had that ability to find its way to every single soul, to win as much of them for God, for the Church, for Salvation, he knew how to speak to every man as his own heart needed:

“The source informs that, on 21st of March 1967, at 15 hours, he was at the funeral of Craciun Ana, a funeral where a lot of people were present, because the news that the priest Sabau from Folt is coming spread in the village, and the people talked that if they would have a priest in the village the people would go to work on the collective property in crowds. The source asked the two advisers who were part of the Church's Council: why would the people come as you speak? Because he knows each one and knows how to talk to them and he was together with them in any local work. At these talk other companions were present, they spoke about this priest: he could be a simple general of the army and the people would go working on the collective property, because he spoke to each person with affection and he behaves very

²⁴ ACNSAS, operative fond, file I 259463, vol. I, paper 10.

²⁵ ACNSAS, operative fond, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 143.

²⁶ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 37.

nice with the world and he has the gift to speak to the people so that he can be understood. At these discussions participated very many people.”²⁷

“He has a great influence on the people in the parish: whatever he says, they do.”²⁸

Of this influence of the priest upon people were afraid the political representatives. This ability of Father Ioan to congregate people around him was envied by some of the leaders of the social institutions in that time, who intensely desired to dominate the community, but they didn't have neither the skill or love, or the ideals of Father Ioan. So, for example, we learn about the Principal of the school from Bobalna that he was very jealous on the achievements of Father Ioan and on his ability to gather people around him:

“Talking with Todor Ioan, also called Maxim, a carpenter at Bobalna.

Source: Where are you going?

Maxim says: To Orastie, I have to do some shopping for the holidays.

Source: So, what else is new for you, how are you satisfied with the priest?

Maxim says: Great, we formed a chorus on four voices only from those who are married and my wife's a part. Twice a week, in the evenings, they make a rehearsal with the priest, and in the rest of the time in the Church Tescaru lead us. Despite of this initiative some began to show up, as headmaster, who cannot see this achievement because he is sure that he will not be able to achieve anything, and neither does he compete because he doesn't know how to behave with people. He is very intrigued because the faithful are making everything free of charge for the Church and for their priest, and for the school he has to pay every service in cash. He is looking for prohibit children to attend church services; as long as religion is free, why are the children's parents fighting for this fact? It turns out that he doesn't realize that you can't love someone with repugnance, or by force.”²⁹

Father Ioan did not say anything when they had to give “those of the Caesar to Caesar”, but he knew that all the people have a great confidence in him and he will not allow doing anything to discredit him, but he kept to the dignity of the priesthood that he wears. From an informative note given to M.I.A., Orastie, on the 11th of May 1967 we hear about such a situation in which Father Ioan had to choose between his priest mission requirements and demands of the Communist regime:

²⁷ ACNSAS, operative archive, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 54.

²⁸ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper147.

²⁹ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 193.

“In the Bobalna village the communists have the perspective to build a new cooperative building. On the day of 28th of April 1967, I met priest Sabau and comrade Iancu Gh. and Călin from the URCC Orastie in front of the cooperative of Folt, they said that they arrived to hold a meeting in order to make the people of the village understand that, in addition to labor, they had to help also with cash, after the economic strength of each other (about 50% of the value of the work). Comrade Iancu thanked the priest for the competition that he has given in order to help people understand that they had to contribute with manpower and it asks again to communicate the new disposition relative available to the monetary contribution. At this new request, the priest did not give a definite affirmative answer. After leaving them, I went home with the priest. On the road, the priest said: I have communicated to the people that they have the task of the contribution in labor days. Now, when I have to communicate to them that they must help also with money, what would they say? Don't I discredit myself and the institution?

If I do it, I am discredited, but if I don't do it it's even worse, they think that I am who knows what. In this situation I don't have to do it.”³⁰

Father John was a true *apostle and missionary*. He fought with everything that brings death to the soul: with atheism, with materialism, with sectarianism, with carelessness. Once, when he was in prison, he discussed with his cell comrades about his missionary aspirations. Because one of them was found to be a traitor they were recorded in the pages of the Father's files:

“I am planning to buy a car, that I will personally drive and I will go from village to village and from city to city to strengthen the Union of churches into one, thereby contributing much to the strengthening of the Christian religion, against Freemasonry and communism. I'll be a religious missionary of Transylvania. I know the German language and for that I thank mister engineer Florescu Ilie (detention colleague i.n.) that helped me to be even better, because I will use it in my religious propaganda, as you need German language in Northern Transylvania and anywhere else.”³¹

The prison experience has not intimidated him; the Father kept his missionary enthusiasm and went further:

“The source informs that Father Sabau had expressed his concern towards the dangers of reformed sects, in which he sees the hand of some strange powers, and he expressed the conviction that our State is making a mistake by not taking any action against them. He also expressed the regret that the parents are unable to bring their children to church, unlike other reformed

³⁰ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 49.

³¹ Informative note in the ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 118.

sects or even Jews where they can take the children with them. Related to this issue he said that some (unidentified) have interpreted that he would go against party policy, which is very wrong and in disaccord of what he wanted to express. The source informs that the priest is loved by the faithful people and that he is doing his duty".³²

"In a discussion held in September, among others problems he spoke about the reformed people, and by the discussion results that he doesn't accept them, taking an attitude of disrespect for them. He also affirmed that our State should take a stand against these reformed, but he accepts them, because the children of the reformed are going to their meetings, and Orthodox children are not allowed to come to church, being somehow restricted."³³

The Father's desire for the truth of orthodoxy was not against love for all people. Father knew to preach orthodoxy that he lived so that other denominations admired him.

"One morning at the 5.45 hours I found the priest in ferry on the Mures. Asking him where he was going, he said that he goes to celebrate the service of Holy Mystery of Unction in Vinerea. On this occasion he told me that he is forced to return from Vinerea in Folt as soon as possible to take part at a funeral of Cornea Ioan, the father-in-law of the church singer Ioan Adam.

After the funeral, at which the priest Ioan Sabau spoke, I heard different people from the village saying that he spoke so sentimental that all priests have cried. *Avram Juja of Solomon who is reformed and does not attend the Orthodox church but the Baptist one, took part at the funeral and says that would also like to have a priest like that because he will squeeze tears from a stone speaking with his Golden mouth.*"³⁴

"The day of 27th of February 1966 I witnessed a conversation between the carpenter Todor Ioan and the source (Bobalna). The source said: you came up with all the family in the dialogue between the commune of Folt and Turdas. Todor says: Yes, I have come to see our talents. We, the people of Bobalna, have a church choir of all to praise, but without the priest Sabau all these remained hidden. He is the engine which moves all the aggregates. *Even the reformed people admire him.*"³⁵

Father Ioan was speaking with so much *courage*, that the people who heard him trembled with fear at the thought that, perhaps, immediately after the sermon he will be arrested. Although he was often called to the police station, and to the security, however he never made compromises in terms of

³² ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 70.

³³ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 52.

³⁴ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 100.

³⁵ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 192.

the faith and the truth he preached. We have testimonies from the informative note of a snitch, imprisoned in the same cell with father, who gave the following information stored in the file of the priest:

“In one day of January 1961, about the 15th-16th of January, talking in the room, (inmate Sabau Ioan) says the following:

In the year 1944, during the month of June, the day of the Jews, I was elected by the priests to keep a sermon at the tomb of heroes and, a lot of people being present, around thousands of auditors, I have mentioned, among others, the heroism of the Romanian soldier along with the German in the fight for the cross, country and Church, taken against the communist hordes.

Vlad, the former minister of Cults and Agriculture tells me to stop giving such sermons because it seeks reconciliation with Russia. I replied: you are old but you have no knowledge about what is communism. To shake hands and reconcile with communism, it means to cut off one's nose. Communism means devouring fire, sure death. The Church will be turned into cattle manure, the estates will be taken from you and you will live in the dungeons, where you'll die among all the proprietors from across the country. Two months later, the Russians are coming, the land and court is taken from him, being hold up in a prison in Sighet, where he dies. His son, an agricultural engineer, tells me that what I told his father was correct, like a prophet. His son, Mircea Vlad, he is also convicted.”³⁶

The same information note contains a convincing paragraph about the *freedom of the spirit* that Father Ioan experienced in prison, about the courage and temerity of sharing his sorrows with his suffering comrades. It's sad that among them a traitor was found also, but the Divine Providence changed the course of events as we can learn today from that “blabbermouth” what feelings and experiences Father Ioan had in the difficult years of imprisonment:

“The inmate Ioan Sabau”: The Church persecution of paganism in-between the 1st and the 4th century lasted for 300 years, and they were bloody, Christians being hanged, burned alive in the fiery furnaces, all the martyrs and the saints of the Church have been tormented on hot iron grids, or feeded to the Lions to be torne apart, etc. but the Communist persecution is more tough, because beside the flesh wounds there are also those of the soul by not letting the world to go to church, like I said once, it abducts the right to worship God and attend Church services, etc. The children are receiving a bad education,

³⁶ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I259463, vol.II, papers 117-118.

promiscuity is fashionable, the lie and the perversity are systematically cultivated, so we talk about a body torment in prison and a soul torment by darkening it with all the wild methods of Russian Steppe.³⁷

From the pages of the dossier we learn about the courage with which father Ioan was speaking within the conferences at which he took part. So, for example, at a conference targeting priests from Deva, the 8th of April 1968:

The theme of the Conference was: "the priest and the current ethics". There were present about 80 priests. After reading the Conference held by Grosu Valer, the sign up to speak followed. Several priests signed up to speak, among them was the priest Ioan Sabau from the former rank of Orastie, probably from the parish of Bobalna. This priest, after having made an introduction, sought to decrease the moral ethics of today, saying that there's nothing new, it was all the same from the beginning of Christianity. He came with a quote from comrade Ceausescu's Congress with the leaders of the country's religious affairs, saying that "Foreign Journalists have put up, among other questions, to the Chief of the Jewish cult: How do you feel in an atheist state? Question at which the head of this cult answered that we feel perfect, we enjoy the freedom that we haven't had under past regimes (bourgeois)". The priest Sabau has not commented further on the question, seeking to remain merely the expression of journalist that *we live in an atheist state*.

After the interventions of the other speakers, who have highlighted the measures taken by the State and which are *a product of the new ethics*, the source says: *For his attitude he has been criticized by the Bishop, who has not allowed anymore to say anything else, saying that he has not learned anything from the suffering through which he passed. Fr. Sabau said: If you don't like it, send me there again.*³⁸

One of the great charismas of Father Ioan Sabau was the *oratorical talent*, with which he opened the hearts of the faithful people and he has been very much loved by them. A citizen of Bobalna, secretly spied by an informant, had the following confession:

"We, the people of Bobalna, we are very proud with such a priest, we all go with the biggest love to the church because there is no divine service without preaching and each time he says something new. I once asked the priest from where he may find so many words and he said to me: the science is endless and many events had occurred since the world exists, you just have to know to look for them and to make a selection."³⁹

³⁷ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 104.

³⁸ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 182.

³⁹ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 37.

After leaving prison in Aiud, Father was often called to Vinerea and in the surrounding area, especially for the Holy Unction and for some funerals. His word brought much consolation and encouragement in those hard times, being seen as *"a man of tremendous spiritual vocation; it was impossible not to be emotionally affected by heavenly truth cause the sermons which he holds at funerals."*⁴⁰ Someone said joking, that he spoke so nicely at funerals that you wanted to say: God, why didn't I die, to enjoy such a sermon?

The father's presence at funerals and his every time sermon brought a lot of comfort to the sorrowful souls:

"Regarding the so-called Craciun Gelu from Vinerea, the source informs you that: (...) The mother of so called Craciun Gelu died during this week and he said that he was very sad because there not everyone invited came to the funeral. He said that however he has the satisfaction of the speech of Fr. Ioan Sabau who emphasized all the sufferings of his mother when her sons were in prison."⁴¹

Eventually, Fr. Ioan was prohibited to go to funerals in other localities, which disheartened him:

"From the discussions held, I deduced that he was unsatisfied not by the State or the regime, but by the Church leadership, which has prohibited him to go to funerals in other localities, without knowing the reason.

And so he tells me an accidental happening not long ago at a funeral of a retired priest in Calan. Sure, there were invited several priests, and when he arrived, closer to the end because he had been late, the others asked him to preach - the truth of the matter is that he's a very talented orator.

At first he refused, he avoided, but eventually he accepted because they have insisted and in that moment he thought it was right to talk about the condition of the priest in the past and his condition of today, the role he has had in the past, and the importance and the value that he has today, especially about the maintenance of spiritual and national unity of the state.

How did he spoke, he doesn't know, but he knows that at the end of his sermon a Secretary of a Party from Calan (I do not remember his name) came and told him in front of the others that if the Church would have only half of such priests then he would be convinced that there would be no sectarian. And then, if a person who has no tangency with the Church is expressing that manner, then why the leadership of the church stands against him and obliges him to no longer come out from the confines of his parish, since the neo-religious representatives are coming from the country edge."⁴²

⁴⁰ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 43.

⁴¹ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 58.

⁴² ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 35.

Sometimes, he was definitely forbidden to participate in some church services, with categorical threats. In August 1978 at Chimindia it was a wedding of two young people from the "Lord's Army", where about 1000 people participated, they have come from all over the country, many of them were theologians and members of the "Lord's Army". An informant stated that "*Avramescu and Sabau did not come because they were promised that they would be arrested if they participate*"⁴³ and from the talk with Father Sabau he understood that "*he runs away from home because he was afraid of them, and he shouldn't be Sunday at home because he's not allowed to attend the wedding in Chimindia.*"⁴⁴

The documents from the archives CNSAS highlights even the *goodness and humanity* that characterized Father Ioan. Thus, for example, an informant reported the following:

"I hired on the 21st of August 1967 the painter Rositoiu Constantin from Bobalna, who is also a singer at the Church, to paint two rooms for me. During this time I chatted with him.

Source say: How are you satisfied with the superior, with the priest?

Rositoiu says: Very satisfied, I do not know if there is another priest like this one in the country, if there are 2 or 3 like him.

Source says: How does he behave with the subordinates and faithful people?

Rositoiu says: With us, those who sing, I can say that he carries very well, as so does with the faithful people. For example, if gifts are brought to a divine service (bread and wine) he gives us all of it, but we, by shame, we offer him a part. He does not drink; also he does not eat too much, he is fed by the Spirit of God".⁴⁵

As a bearer of the priesthood of Christ, love and caring of Father Ioan did not limit only to the believers that he shepherded, but he was pouring out to all the oppressed, regardless of the religion or ethnicity, whether they were good or bad.

Even if he did not approve the immoral facts of some of them, the Father was sensitive to their pain and suffering:

"The source informs you about priest Sabau from the village of Bobalna as follows: in a discussion at his home, the so called expressed his concern on the "Gypsy danger" and about the error of our state that it does not take drastic measures against the Gypsies, who have become a plague to our society

⁴³ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 66.

⁴⁴ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 67.

⁴⁵ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. II, paper 37.

through their behavior towards humankind, thefts, etc. In the same discussion he expressed his Christian “pity” towards the Gypsies and he said that he helped families harassed with clothes, food and even to get rid of lice and bugs into an outbreak of infection of this kind.”⁴⁶

From the proceedings of expropriation the *humble life* of Father Ioan and of his family is highlighted: he had only a sofa bed with a crate, a pendulum clock, a radio and a library.⁴⁷

All efforts of the informers to compromise Father Ioan remained fruitless. Being watched closely, the father continued his sacrifice in order to serving the Church, living in the greater modesty and simplicity of life:

“After having several discussions with the priest Ioan Sabau from Bobalna, I report the following:

After his release from prison, following the recent events, he realized that in the intellectual field he could not do almost anything, being closely watched and then, in order to justify his paycheck that he receives, he began to carry out on administrative field of the household; in this way, over the years he built a church and a home office from foundation, he made capital repairs to another Church, he painted it all around and so on.

He states that all his life he worked for others and for him he did not do almost nothing and he argues the fact that now, at the old age, he does not have the material possibility neither to buy an apartment in the city so that he is forced to repair his parental home in Folt, which was flooded twice and after retirement he should return and spend the last years of life here.”⁴⁸

Even if it is the Chronicle of a suffering life, Father Ioan’s file is a powerful testimony about the worthiness of his Holiness, even more as it is a testimony that came from those who had the duty to accuse. There may not be a bigger vengeance than to force your enemy to recognize your godness and superiority. This was the only revenge of father Ioan, made with the power of the one who said, “But take heart! I have overcome the world!”

⁴⁶ ACNSAS, operative fund, file I 259463, vol. III, paper 70.

⁴⁷ ACNSAS, operative archive, file P 015054, vol. I, paper 173.

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