

STOLEN CHURCH

**Martyrdom in
Communist
Romania**



**Father Alexander Ratiu
& Father William Virtue**

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& Father William Virtue**

Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.
Huntington, Indiana 46750

**Stolen Church: Martyrdom in
Communist Romania
English Edition**

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*Dedicated to
Our Lady of Fatima*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is based on the experiences of Father Alexander Ratiu and was written in collaboration with Father William Virtue. The authors accept responsibility for the judgments expressed herein.

We are grateful for the scholarly research provided by Monsignor Aloisiu L. Tautu, counselor of the Sacred Oriental Congregation and editor of *Buna Vestire*; to Father George Rus, coauthor with Father Ratiu of the manuscript "A Lost Gem of the Catholic Church in Romania"; and to Father George Muresan, former editor of the *Romanian Catholic Almanac*.

We are indebted to D. Bacu, author of *The Anti-Humans*; and, for information on the Ukrainian hierarchy, to Fathers Robert Moskal and Jaropolk Radkewycz, and to the diocese of St. Nicholas in Chicago.

We are also grateful for the kind interest shown in our work by Thomas Casaletto, Conrad W. Baars, M.D., and Fathers Louis G. Miller, C.S.S.R., John A. Hardon, S.J., Daniel S. Hamilton, and the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation.

Above all, we appreciate the support we have received from our families and parishioners. Particular thanks are due to Mrs. Margaret Virtue and Mrs. Barbara Sanders, who helped type the manuscript. We are grateful, too, to our bishop, Romeo R. Blanchette, D.D. (now retired), for the encouragement he has given us.

— Father Alexander Ratiu

— Father William Virtue

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PREFACE

Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven. . . .

—*Matthew 5:11-12*

The Romanian *Gulag* was a place of hellish torture and heavenly ecstasy. It was a purgatory for me, for the other priests, and for our bishops; it was an eternity of terror for the nearly one thousand Christian boys who were the victims of an experiment more cruel than any that man has inflicted on guinea pigs or rats.

When the Communists took power in Romania, an Eastern European nation about the size of the state of Illinois, they forced Byzantine-rite Catholics to join the Orthodox Church. To be a Catholic one must be in union with the pope. This theological truth explains why the bishops and priests did not join the Orthodox Church.

Reading the story of these heroic bishops and priests, you will meet men who are fully alive in emotion and moral virtue! These are men who express their emotions of warm affection, who are unafraid of their feelings of hate and anger in the presence of evil. I revere these twentieth-century martyrs — not only for their holy deaths, but also for the deeply human quality of their lives.

— A.R.

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SIXTEEN
YEARS A
PRISONER

T. CASALETTO

Arrest: October 1948

Then Jesus said to his disciples: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For he that will save his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it. For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?

—*Matthew 16:24-26*

I was arrested on October 29, 1948. Just after I had eaten lunch, government security agents came to the rectory and told me to get in their jeep for a ride to the diocesan chancery office, where they needed me to "sign some papers." We never went to the chancery; instead, I was taken to jail in town. The next day I was taken from Oradea to the Department of Internal Affairs in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. My arrest was no surprise; it climaxed a month of mounting tension. Every evening the parishioners crowded the church for Benediction. I urged them to remain faithful to the successor of St. Peter — the Pope. I began my talks with Christ's words: "You are 'Rock,' and on this rock I will build my church . . ." (Matthew 16:18). Fidelity to Jesus' teaching would cost me sixteen years of prison, labor camp, house arrest, and, finally, exile.

About a year and a half earlier, in May of 1947, I had been arrested for the first time and kept in jail until July of 1948. The Communists, who had taken over the Romanian government after the Soviet invasion in 1944, had launched a campaign to win the minds and hearts of Romanian youths over to Marxism. As a priest, I was very active in youth ministry — so much so that when the local Communist Party leaders instructed the youths to form an

organization in the town of Simleul Silvaniei, the teenagers chose me to be their leader.

This infuriated the Communists; so, I was arrested and imprisoned for over a year. When I was released, my bishop sent me to the parish in Oradea which was attached to the seminary church. Within three months my assignment in Oradea was to come to an abrupt halt.

During the months of September and October in 1948, the Communist government of Romania set in motion a plan to suppress the Catholic Church. The Communists had already taken control of another Church in Romania, the Orthodox Church — which is virtually the same faith as the Catholic Church, with the important exception that the Orthodox do not accept the authority of the pope. The Communists simply replaced the Orthodox leaders with new, government-appointed, pro-Communist bishops. Now the government wanted to force the Catholics to join the state-controlled Church, which was a puppet of the Communist Party. A law was passed decreeing that if more than fifty-five percent of the members of any parish joined another Church, then the church building and any other property would be transferred along with them to whatever Church they had joined.

On October 23, 1948, I was summoned to City Hall by the mayor of Oradea. I was brought to a large meeting room where I saw the mayor, flanked by his assistant and a government security agent, six city council members, and six Orthodox priests. Also present were two Catholic priests from the other two parishes in Oradea: Fathers Augustin Olah and Alexander Ciudariu. Addressing the three of us, the mayor's assistant spoke first: "Fathers, we expect you now to hand over your churches, rectories, and parish records. Over fifty-six percent of your parishioners have converted to the Orthodox Church." Then the Orthodox dean of the region, Archpriest Sava, read to us the special

ordinance, issued by the Council of Ministers in Bucharest, which assured the legality of this transfer of parish titles.

There was a moment of silence while everyone awaited our responses. Father Olah said, "I do not have the authority to give away my parish because the cathedral at Oradea really belongs to the bishop." Then Father Ciudariu, who appeared pale and exhausted, nervously told them he was willing to hand over his parish title. Later I learned that all through the night before he had been with security agents who had exerted intense pressure to render him cooperative.

Then all eyes fell on me to see what I would say. Rising from my chair, I stood before the mayor and the security agent, the city council, and the Orthodox priests. In a firm and angry voice I told them: "I absolutely refuse to deliver anything to you — not the church, not the rectory, and not the parish archives! I do not recognize this 'conversion' of my parishioners because this so-called *unification* of Catholic and Orthodox has been forced upon the laity by acts of terrorism, by illegal and unconstitutional means, which have been used to coerce many of my parishioners into joining the Orthodox Church. Fifty-six percent of the members of my congregation did not convert; I don't believe that even five percent of the faithful have left the Catholic Church! All that you have done I consider *not* done. It is all nothing. Zerol!"

They were dumbfounded. The mayor's assistant was speechless. An Orthodox priest leaned over and whispered to me, "Father Alexander, cooperate with them and do what they ask, just for now. Pretend to convert. Someday in the future everyone will become Catholic anyway! If you resist, you expose yourself to the danger of arrest." I ignored his cowardly appeal. The security agent decided to report what had happened to his superior, and Archpriest Sava reported my refusal to his brother-in-law, the Ortho-

dox bishop Nicholas Popovici. In the meantime, the Catholic priests were sent home.

For several days before this City Hall meeting my parishioners had been calling on me and complaining because the security agents were pressing them to sign over to the Orthodox Church, threatening that they would be fired from their jobs if they did not do as the security agents requested. I felt compassion for the faithful whose livelihoods were endangered. But I could not absolve them from their faith! I told them to follow the voice of conscience, and I urged them to imitate the bishop and the faithful priests of the diocese. It was not easy to show the parishioners an example of fidelity to the Church at that time because only a month earlier the pastor of our parish had broken under the pressure of the security agents and signed his conversion to the Orthodox Church. Then, ashamed of himself, he moved away from the parish and left me to be the administrator.

Four days after the meeting at City Hall, on October 27, security agents came to my rectory with Archpriest Sava and a lawyer named Pogany. Sava read me the official document of transfer. He declared the church and its property to be in the possession of the Orthodox. The lawyer told me to sign the document. When I flatly refused, he issued an order for the takeover of the parish. The security agents came and took the church keys; later that night they made an inventory of the church property.

I reported all that had happened to my bishop, Valeriu Frentiu, who supported my defense of the church. He urged me to continue to resist and, above all, to pray for the Catholic Church. Already, in July of 1948, the Communists had taken over the seminary in Oradea and put pictures of Marx and Stalin at the main entrance. They simply stole the property, just as they attempted to steal all the faithful.

During the night of October 28, Bishop Frentiu was arrested. Stripped of his pectoral cross and episcopal ring, he was taken away to Dragoslavele to join the other Catholic bishops in confinement. The next day I was arrested and taken to Neamtul, where I joined twenty-four Catholic priests who also had been arrested.

On October 31, the Orthodox bishop of Oradea, Nicolas Popovici, took over the Catholic cathedral at Oradea. Bishop Popovici at first had opposed Communism in Romania; later he adapted himself to the new godless government. He started to expound a new philosophy: "It is not prudent now to be lions, but we must be foxes." His nickname was "the Cunning Fox." Though he cooperated with the Communists as they stole our Church from its rightful leaders, Popovici refused to collaborate with the puppet Orthodox bishops newly installed by the Communists. He resented the new bishops. In 1952 he was removed and exiled to the monastery at Cheia, where he died in 1958. Rumor has it that he was poisoned.

The Orthodox bishops took possession of all the Catholic cathedrals and parishes. At Cluj, the Orthodox bishop Nicolas Colan reconsecrated the formerly Catholic cathedral. "We too honor the pope," he declared "— but at Rome, in his own home, not here — for he has nothing to do with us here." This remark came from the mouth of a man who, by a strange coincidence, had been protected by the Catholic bishop of Cluj during the Hungarian occupation of 1940-1944. At that time, Bishop Julius Hossu, who was highly respected by the Hungarians, interceded in behalf of the Orthodox clergy and faithful to protect their dignity and rights. Now Bishop Hossu's cathedral and entire diocese were being taken over with a proclamation of anti-Catholic bigotry by the very bishop whom Hossu had once shielded from injury!

The division among brothers in Christ is exactly what

the Communists exploited. Why did the Communists force the Catholics to join the Orthodox Church? Why were the Catholics especially persecuted? Was the martyrdom of the bishops and the imprisonment of many priests unavoidable? Couldn't the Catholics have found some means of coexistence with the Communists as the Orthodox had? After all, Catholics in other iron curtain countries of Europe found ways to adapt to the Communist regimes: Why couldn't the Romanian Catholic bishops and priests compromise? This book will answer these questions.

The Byzantine Rite

What would you think if you heard today that in one month American Catholics and Protestants would merge into one Christian Church? What would your response be if a person came to your door and asked you to sign a petition in favor of such a unification of Churches? What if tomorrow the national news media were to announce that the entire Catholic hierarchy was on a special spiritual retreat to pray for the coming unification? And what if next week it were announced that a large group of Catholic priests declared an act of official unification with the Protestant Churches in America?

Suppose, further, that a national celebration, to begin a month from today, were planned to commemorate this historic unification of the major Christian bodies in the United States? Would you feel relief that centuries of separation — all the dogmatic and denominational divisions — were finally being bridged by a new surge of brotherhood? You might have some misgivings about the inevitable concessions to be made; but, on the whole, would you not welcome the end of division?

Translate all of the above into what happened in Romania in 1948, when the Communist government forced the Catholics to unify with the Orthodox Church. The element of force was not obvious; the government controlled the media and many arrests were made in the dead of night.

The only obstacle to the Communist plan for unification was that the Catholic bishops would not give up their union with Rome. This was the one thing which the godless Communists wanted more than anything else — for how could they control the Church in Romania as long as Catholics obeyed the pope? To remove this obstacle to their program, the government arrested all of the bishops and any priests who remained obedient and faithful to the pope.

What made the unification easy was the common use of the Byzantine rite among both Catholics and Orthodox. Nothing needed to be changed in the liturgy — except that during the services the Catholics prayed in union with the pope. This had to be dropped by the Catholic priests who converted to the Orthodox Church.

In Romania, as in much of Eastern Christendom, most of the faithful belong to the Byzantine rite. In the Church, a *rite* is the ensemble of acts and words used in worship. A rite is also the very spirit and tone of the sacred ceremonies. It extends to the cultural heritage of the local Churches. The Catholic Church, in her marvelous unity and diversity, embraces many rites, although the essential acts and words of the sacraments are basically the same for all rites.

There are five different major rites in the Catholic Church. The two with the most members are the Latin rite of Rome and the Byzantine — or Greek — rite of Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey). In Romania a minority of Catholics — often of Hungarian descent — use the Latin, or Roman, rite. The Communists persecuted the faithful and

the hierarchy of the Latin rite: Their bishops and priests were imprisoned; some were martyred. The Communists are against all religions. They persecuted the Jewish people and all Christians. But this book is not about the Protestants who suffered. Their story has been told by Reverend Richard Wurmbrand, who spent many years in prison for his faith and lived to escape and tell the story in his famous book, *Tortured for Christ*. The Orthodox Church was also persecuted, as will be described in another part of this book. Some facts will also be given about the attack against the Catholics of the Latin rite in Romania, but the story of this book is mainly about the Communist suppression of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite.

Along with other rites used in the Eastern Christian Church, the Byzantine rite dates back to the most ancient customs of the early Church. The form of the Byzantine rite which is most often used is the one developed centuries ago in Constantinople by St. John Chrysostom, a bishop and a famous preacher in the capital city of the Eastern Roman Empire. In the course of history, the customs regarding this rite were handed down to Eastern Christians. Today they remain, almost unchanged, as the heritage of our Church. There are many differences between the Latin rite and the Byzantine rite, which can be seen in the ways in which the seven sacraments are administered and the ways churches are built and decorated. The most important features of each rite, however, are found in the manner of celebrating Holy Mass.

In the Eastern rites, the celebration of the Eucharist — Holy Mass — is called the *Divine Liturgy*. As it is celebrated in the Byzantine rite, the Divine Liturgy is enriched by many sensory symbols, which help the congregation feel a sense of being in touch with sacred time, place, and persons. By participation in a continuous sung dialogue with the priest, the attention of the faithful is drawn upwards to

the Holy Trinity. This is the Divine Liturgy in which man joins the angels in their heavenly praise of God. It is an act of contemplation before the throne of God, where the angels sing "Holy, holy, holy." The beautiful and mystical elements of the Byzantine rite are also expressed in the Preface and Sanctus of the Latin rite, and in the words following the Our Father, which are borrowed from the East: "For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory."

Following Vatican Council II, many of the liturgical changes introduced into the Latin rite, customs which seemed new to the Westerners, were in fact ancient customs freshly borrowed from the Eastern rites. This includes the use of the vernacular, concelebration, the kiss of peace, and Holy Communion under both species (the Easterners consecrate leavened bread). Catholics may receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church of any rite: We are all of the same faith in the Eucharist, which is our source of unity. We are all of equal dignity in the Church, and the members of all the rites together confess the essentials of the Creed. We share the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition; we are all in union with the successor of St. Peter, the pope. For Catholics, the primacy of the pope is not merely a matter of patriarchal rights over a territory; it is a matter of the pope's universal jurisdiction over all the faithful. In his relations with the members of the Eastern rites, the pope is assisted by the Sacred Oriental Congregation in the Vatican. One of the most obvious differences between the Latin and the Byzantine customs is that the Easterners have married clergy. The bishops, however, do not marry.

Approximately eight million Catholics belong to the various Eastern rites throughout the world. The Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite numbered about one and a half million faithful in 1948. There were about eighteen hundred priests and many religious brothers and sisters. There were almost two thousand parishes, many

parochial schools, and three theological academies. The Byzantine-rite Catholic Church had five dioceses and one vicariate. There were the dioceses of Blaj (with a vicariate in Bucharest), Cluj, Oradea, Lugoj, and Baia Mare.

The Byzantine Catholic Church in Romania goes back to the year 1700, when Orthodox Christians in Transylvania formed a union with Rome. Under the leadership of Bishop Athanasius of Alba Julia, thousands of clergy and faithful declared their obedience to the pope. In doing this they had the precedent of the Byzantine Catholic Churches of the Ukraine, whose union with Rome dates from the year 1596, and of Ruthenia, whose union took place in the year 1646.

Byzantine Catholics of the Western Ukraine — sometimes called Galicia (part of the Soviet Union) — and of Ruthenia (now part of Eastern Czechoslovakia and Poland) were persecuted in the same way as the Byzantine Catholics of Romania. The Catholics of the Byzantine rite in the Ukraine, in Ruthenia, and in Romania have been called *uniates* because of their historic unions with Rome. I avoid the term *uniate* because in reality it applies equally to all Catholics, and the Byzantine rite need not be singled out in this regard. To be Catholic *is* to be in union with the pope.

Many Catholics of the Byzantine rite from the Ukrainian, Ruthenian, and Romanian Churches immigrated to the United States. Today in America there are over 400,000 Ukrainians and Ruthenians in several Byzantine-rite eparchies (dioceses). There are about eight thousand Romanian Catholics in seventeen ethnic parishes under the authority of local, Latin-rite bishops (there is no Romanian bishop in America).

The Orthodox Church shares with Catholics the Byzantine rite, but members of that Church do not share our union with the pope. In the year 1054 A.D., the Eastern Sees of the Church rejected the authority of the pope and

formed a union of Churches with the See of Constantinople taking precedence. They chose for themselves the title *Orthodox*, which means "the true teaching." Today in the world there are about 145 million Orthodox faithful, most of whom live behind the iron curtain. Five million live in the United States. Catholics refer to Orthodox as "separated brethren." To further ecumenical relations the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity has been established in the Vatican.

On Retreat

Persecution and unjust imprisonment are not new in human history. It was not new to the priests of Romania. During the 1940s, when the Nazis occupied Hungary and northern Romania, I saw the persecution of the Jewish people and many times I helped save their lives. On one occasion two brothers and their sister, Jewish youths from Simleul Silvaniei whose last name was Weinberger, came to me at night seeking to escape being put in a ghetto. I entrusted them to a reliable parishioner by the name of Florea Cristea, who led them out of the danger zone, safely bringing them to southern Romania. We priests were accustomed to hiding and sheltering refugees in our basements, attics, and churches. In 1944, when the Soviet soldiers ravaged our land, we protected many women and young girls by giving them sanctuary in the church. I heard the story of one bishop who refused to let the soldiers assault the young girls who had taken refuge in his church: The soldiers shot the bishop on the spot.

From a purely social point of view, because religion nourishes the stability of family and national life and en-

courages responsibility in the workers, persecution of religion is one of the most irrational and counterproductive efforts of the Communist program.

Although persecution and imprisonment cause great suffering, there is great value in bearing the crosses God allows to come to us. Prison reveals the true character of a man. Priests of our diocese who had been important crumbled at the prospect of prison or after a short time of suffering. They could not take it. Other priests, who had not been so highly regarded, now, inside prison, proved how manly and spiritual they were. They shone "like sparks through stubble" (Wisdom 3:7).

Prison life was also a tremendous school of experience for all of us who were thrown together. There were bishops, priests, former ministers of state, diplomats, professors, journalists, and physicians. We often held classes in our free time, each prisoner teaching the subjects he knew. My background in philosophy enabled me to discuss issues with unbelievers in purely natural terms, to refute the errors in Communist thought, and to lay the groundwork for an explanation of the faith.

The most important source of strength to endure prison life was the habit of prayer. When we could, we prayed together. I prayed alone frequently: in my cell, or at my chores, or later in the camps while digging dirt and loading my wheelbarrow. In prison one either goes mad or becomes a saint. There is an absolute choice of either despair or hope. For instance, once I thought a fellow prisoner had gone mad when he told me through his windowless cell door that he had seen me in a vision while he slept. He was Stephan Tatarescu, a former government minister who had been put in solitary confinement. He told me he had been ready to commit suicide out of desperation until one night he had a vision in which I came to him as a knight and taught him a beautiful prayer of hope. Through the prison

door he recited this prayer to me, which I no longer remember. His inspiring dream gave him the hope he needed in order to endure.

Years later, outside of prison, we met in Bucharest. He remembered who I was and told me how the beautiful prayer had sustained his faith. In the meantime he had become a Catholic convert because of this miraculous encounter with a Catholic priest who ministered to him in need. I was amazed at the entire incident, and I am sure it was an act of God. But most of the narrative to follow is not about miracles, unless one were to speak of the moral miracle of the grace of perseverance.

It is not to our credit but entirely through the power of God that the bishops, priests, and faithful were able to resist the Communist pressure to betray the Church. After October of 1948, when twenty-five of us priests were confined together at the Orthodox monastery at Neamtul, an Orthodox abbot was sent to us by the government. He was supposed to lure us into accepting the unification scheme. Security agents at his side, the huge individual entered our small room. Abbot Arapas was well dressed and smelled of perfume and powder. He stood before us and said: "I am the inspector of monasteries in this diocese. Because Patriarch Justinian was unable to come to see you, I received permission from the Department of Internal Affairs to pay you this visit. The patriarch, seeing your situation and wishing to help free you, in his wisdom makes this offer to you: Embrace the Orthodox Church and the doors will be opened and you will go out unharmed."

We were insulted by this message and argued with him. Big drops of nervous sweat covered his fat face. I looked at him with bitterness, seeing the contrast between his well-nourished body and our exhausted ones. "Are we kept here for political crimes or because of our religious beliefs?" I asked him. "If it is for political crimes, then why

must we make a religious conversion to gain freedom? If it is for our religious beliefs, then why are we in jail at all?" Flustered by our questions, he hastily dismissed himself, repeating his offer: "I am not prepared to discuss with you theological matters. I am here to promise you freedom if you become Orthodox." His appeal impressed a few of the priests. Several days later four married priests complied with the terms of freedom, consented to the unification, and were set free.

While we were at Neamtul, the security agents, in the hope of changing our convictions, sent an Orthodox arch-priest, Father Baltazar from the town of Barlad, to live among us and talk with us each day. When he departed after five days, he expressed his sympathy and admiration for us. "I prayed more in the past five days," he said, "than I have in my twenty years as a priest! You faithful priests are the last spiritual hope and moral strength of the Romanian people. God will curse you if you deny your Church and convert to the Orthodox!" At these words of his we took heart.

On February 27, 1949, the six bishops and twenty-one priests were brought together to the monastery at Caldarusani. This beautiful monastery is located on the shores of a lake in the Vlasia Forest. On the grounds is a small house built for cantors of the liturgy. The house has three rooms, a chapel, and a laundry. This was our jail. Patriarch Justinian arranged everything. With his pastoral staff in his hands, he drew in the dirt a line around the house. Pointing to the line, he said, "Let the bishops and priests stay behind this line. If they do not like staying in their residence, then they must sign over to the Orthodox Church."

A barbed-wire fence was erected along the line the patriarch drew in the dirt. A squadron of fifty guards patrolled our new prison night and day. We were forbidden

any contact with the outside world. Our sole friends were Sister Iraida, a refugee nun who worked in the monastery kitchen, Friar Nikita, and Father Gregory, a pious monk and spiritual director of the monastery. These three kindly persons sometimes were able to give us news of what was happening throughout Romania. We learned from them that the national press and radio had announced that we were on a "spiritual retreat."

The bishops had brought with them a small amount of money. They gave much of it to the abbot of the monastery so he could buy wood for us for our stove in winter. Instead, the abbot took that money and also stole about three fourths of the funds the government had allocated for our support and used it to repair a damaged part of the monastery roof. The soldiers who guarded us, when they found this out, were scandalized. However, they were not of much help either: The officer in charge took the bishops' remaining money and sent his soldiers into the forest for wood. They came back with frozen, water-soaked logs. The forester of the Vlasia, a former student at the Catholic high school in Blaj, offered to cut and deliver wood to us free of charge. But the government forbade him to do it; ours was a cold winter.

We were nearly starved while at Caldarusani. Once we were given six hens, which Sister Iraida prepared for us. When they were roasted, the officer of the guards took a whole one for himself. On another occasion, when our food ration had been reduced to one piece of bread a month, Bishop John Balan, an emotional person, took his piece of bread, blessed it, and with tears in his eyes exclaimed, "O my God, I thank You that I can see and eat a morsel of bread!" We all shared his feeling of gratitude.

At Caldarusani, the bishops told us about the official suppression of our Church according to government decree No. 358, issued December 1, 1948. The bishops also told us

about their official memorandum of protest to the government. On the first day at Caldarusani, the bishops and priests swore an oath to persevere in the faith, to fight and suffer until the final triumph of our Church.

On one occasion, after we had made many requests for medical care (many of the men were over sixty years old), the Department of Internal Affairs sent two physicians to see us.

These doctors hastily interviewed each of us, asking questions about our families and our political attitudes! In their faces we could see an utter hatred for the Church. One of them sharply said, "By this persecution you are suffering a punishment for the Church's past inquisitions against heretics."

On leaving, the physicians hid the official Communist newspaper in the lavatory, knowing we would find and read it. Eagerly we scanned its columns; we had not seen any newspaper for almost a year. What was the purpose of the doctors' visit? They asked no medical questions; their behavior resembled a security investigation more than a physical examination. Their parting gift of Communist propaganda exposed their real motives. They were seeking to spread their own malady. Their questions were not intended to determine the condition of our bodies but to probe the strength of our souls.

Holy Orders



If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.

You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort.

— *Psalm 22:4*

During the summer of 1949 at Caldarusani, some of the married priests requested the bishops to make an effort to obtain freedom for those priests who had families. Bishop Frentiu pointed out to these priests that the bishops had already sent to the government a protest against the suppression of the Church and imprisonment of the clergy. "It is not necessary to shake hands with the devil a second time," he said. "This time he will tear our arm from our shoulder."

Bishop Hossu reminded these priests that the government had never answered the first memorandum. "We have done our duty," he said. "We must now await their answer, and we must be open to the will of God." At this remark, one of the priests burst out with feeling: "We are parents, we have children. The voice of blood is crying out to us." "Yes," Bishop Hossu replied, "but now the voice of the soul only must speak. Now Holy Orders takes precedence. Matrimony must yield and be sacrificed. Now we must love God and follow God." At this the priest insisted, "St. Thomas teaches that we must love God with the highest love, not emotionally." "Oh, my dear son," exclaimed Bishop Hossu, "you may quote more theology than all of us, but you do not have the gift of the Spirit given to a bishop. If your bishop tells you what to do, respond with obedience." We never forgot these words of Bishop Hossu. Our discussion ended and no new memorandum was sent. A year later this same priest undersigned his adherence to the Orthodox Church, was freed from prison and given a job in the Orthodox chancery.

Now, after thirty years, as I view the present situation of the Catholic Church, I see how vital is our obedience to the bishops in union with the pope. There are some who think that we need obey the magisterium only when it declares its teaching *ex cathedra* and most solemnly. If that were true, how seldom would be our need to follow these

shepherds! How widespread is the chaos that results from the present anarchy! Does the Church in the free world need a persecution to awaken to the necessity of obedience? We of the Byzantine rite in Romania witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit in our bishops, all of whom remained faithful to the union with the whole Church. Catholics outside the shadow of Communist tyranny should learn the meaning of "*sentire cum Ecclesia*" (to feel with the Church).

During the Fall of 1949, the papal nuncio to Romania succeeded in sending correspondence from the Vatican to the imprisoned bishops. Through a monk named Ipolit Ciubotariu, a convert to Catholicism, a letter from the Holy See to the nuncio regarding the clandestine bishops was smuggled into our prison at Caldarusani. The monk concealed the papers in a tiny tube which he hid in his body. We had to be as wise as serpents yet as pure as doves in order to survive the persecution.

On the morning of November 4, 1949, one of the priests came to us and said he had noticed something unusual in the chapel at dawn. When he had gone there to prepare for Mass, he found Bishop Frentiu's episcopal cross on the altar. The priest guessed that during the night the bishop had officiated at a special and secret Mass and, having left the chapel hurriedly, had forgotten his cross. We wondered if it might have been a consecration of new bishops, as the present bishops were not young men. We did not know what to think.

Much later, in 1951, at Sighet Prison, an inspector from Bucharest came into Cell 48. Looking at Titus Livius Chinezu, he said sharply, "You are a bishop *in pectore*." The clandestine bishop promptly said, "Yes, I am. It is not a shame to be a bishop." To John Chertes the inspector said the same thing, but Chertes denied it and blushed. Afterwards we all asked him if it were true. Since it was true, we

asked him why he tried to hide this great honor. He was a sensitive and timid man. The security men had discovered the consecration of the clandestine bishops sooner than we priests! Truly, the sons of darkness are more clever than the sons of light.

On several occasions during our confinement at the monastery, the bishops and priests discussed the reasons for the apostasy of the priests who undersigned to Orthodoxy. Two reasons came to their minds, the bishops said. First, the faith of these priests may have cooled because of a lack of prayer and regular meditation; the graces needed for strength during the persecution came only through prayer. Second, the bishops confessed that in some cases they were too lenient in admitting certain men to Holy Orders. "We should have observed more closely their seminary life," the bishops said. "We should have examined the individual candidates more thoroughly; we should have been less willing to give in to pressures of opinion, and instead of ordaining certain men priests, we should have been ready to say a kind but firm no. We had inner reservations about some of the men, yet we did not heed these premonitions. Instead, we pleased their families. Later on, when the difficult hour of persecution came, these men could not stand the test. If they had not been put in the position of the priesthood, they might never have been faced with the moral dilemmas which defeated them."

When those of us priests who were with the bishops heard these reflections, we felt within us the fear of the Lord which made us aware of our own weakness and total dependence upon God, who said to St. Paul: "My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

During our stay at Caldarusani, three of the bishops were taken, one by one, to the underground cells of the Department of Internal Affairs in Bucharest, where they

were tortured and interrogated. The Communists hoped to break down at least one bishop whom they could use to give an appearance of legitimacy to the unification with the Orthodox Church. Not one of the bishops compromised the union with Rome.

Journey to Jail

Sister Iraida, the cook at the monastery, came to us one day and said she had heard a rumor that the patriarch was angry that we had not converted, and that we would all be transferred. Soon afterwards, on May 24, 1950, soldiers arrived in two vans to transfer us to an unknown destination. All twenty-five clergymen were packed into these two black, windowless vans. There was a hole in the van through which we could see. The van stopped in the village of Tancabesti, which is where the famous nationalist patriot Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and his companions were strangled in 1938.

The soldiers got out of the van and we could see them talking by the roadside. The chilling thought came to our minds that, perhaps, we too were being brought to the site of our death. We gave each other absolution and awaited the moment. It turned out that the guards were merely discussing which route to take. Suddenly the soldiers jumped back into the truck and drove wildly down the country roads. It was very hot inside the sealed vans. A small fan on the roof barely worked. Some of the priests fainted. We breathed with our mouths open, trying to suck in some air. Desperately we pounded on the walls of the van and shouted at the driver. Finally the van stopped and the doors were opened. Air!

The van made another stop, this time in Baia Mare, where the soldiers got out and stretched their legs. We could see the chief of the soldiers, a giant of a fellow, talking with a skinny little villager. The chief struck the little civilian, grabbed him like a rag, opened the van, and threw the man in with us. The soldiers got back in the van and we were on our way through town when the man, who had been stunned, awoke in our midst. He looked up at all of us as if he were having a bad dream. Then, when he realized he was seeing a group of priests, he started screaming and yelling to be let go. Just outside town the van stopped and a guard opened the door and threw the man down to the ground, hitting and kicking him in the back. This incident is typical of the lawless way in which the Communists terrorize the population of Romania.

The next day along the way we enjoyed a brief but pleasant stop. We were allowed outside of the van beside a country stream. We drank fresh water and washed our faces, then rested in the soft grass. We gave thanks to God for this restorative and refreshing moment. The guards forbade us to talk with the bishops and aged priests who had been put in the other van. One of the drivers approached us in a friendly way and asked, "Do you know where they are taking you?" "No," we answered. "They are taking you to Sighet, on the boundary of the Soviet Union. From there they will hand you over to the Russians."

We were shocked and saddened at the prospect of being deported to Siberia. After our short rest by this stream, we were herded back into the vans. The truck climbed a hill full of serpentine turns, which the driver took at such a high speed that once the van almost overturned. We were thrown so hard against the panel of the van that we almost lost consciousness, and all of us vomited. When the van eventually reached flat ground again, we were pale as wax but thankful to be alive.

Two hours later we reached Sighet. It was night. As the van stopped at the entrance to the prison which was to be our home for years to come, the officer in charge of our caravan yelled, "Open the gate." "What are you bringing us?" the gatekeeper asked. "We have a herd of buffaloes," he answered. Thus the bishops and priests began a period of five years' internment at Sighet. In the free world outside of this prison, many Catholics criticize the pope; inside of this prison, the bishops and priests suffered for their obedience to and union with the pope.

Sighet Prison



With you I can break through any barrier,
with my God I can scale any wall.

— *Psalm 17:30*

The bishops and priests followed the footsteps of St. Paul, who endured beatings, shipwreck, and imprisonment for his faith in Jesus Christ. We too were "ambassadors in chains." We endured the same regimen as would a common criminal — even worse than that.

Prisons in the open societies of the free Western world might be justly accused of sometimes committing "the crime of punishment," because of prison conditions and the failure of rehabilitation programs. But they are mild institutions by comparison with Communist prisons. The "reeducation" which is forced upon unfortunate victims, the starvation, hard labor, and beatings — these do not serve the real purpose of prison, which should be to protect society from the incorrigibly violent and dishonest, who deserve confinement. It would seem instead that Communist pris-

ons are an outlet for sadistic officials and guards, who are the real criminals.

Prison is the paradigm of the Communist state. Prisons are the means of education for life in a prison state. Prisons are also the means of extermination of all persons who cannot adapt to Soviet society. In prison the leaders and intellectuals of a captive nation are either reeducated or executed. Out of this nightmarish instrument of social transformation there come two products, little different: a new man, *Homo Sovieticus*; or a corpse. Soviet Man is a specimen without God or people, without soul or freedom, a depersonalized robot of the state, dedicated to the state, a slave without will or personal opinion who obeys and carries out the orders of the Communist Party.

From 1948 until 1964, all the prisons in Romania were instruments of Communist social transformation. Estimates by a former director of prisons in Romania indicate that there were then about three hundred prisons in use for a nation of only twenty million people. Romania was an immense jail. The most notorious prisons were at Gherla, Sighet, Aiud, Pitesti, Jilava, Ramnicul Sarat, Galati, and Suceava. There were also forced-labor camps along the Danube River at construction sites at Salcia, Gradini, Periprava, and Grinzi. Several Orthodox monasteries were also turned into forced domiciles. There were entire villages which might have been considered under house arrest.

The mistreatment, terror, moral and physical torture, hunger, disease, forced labor, and complete isolation from the world transformed the prisons into death camps. The prison at Sighet was a two-story building built in three sections forming a T. There were a hundred and eight cells, of which thirty-six were isolation cells — cells for one prisoner. Besides the bishops and priests, there were about ninety other political prisoners at Sighet, bringing the total number of inmates to approximately one hundred and

fifty. The director, Vasile Ciolpan, a thirty-one-year-old former woodcutter, assigned the elderly bishops and priests to Cell 48, and the younger ones to Cell 44. As he finished reading to us the rules of the prison, he concluded: "Henceforth, I am your father. I hope you will all be comfortable in this retirement home."

Although we were forbidden to have any kind of literature or news, the *politruc* — political instructor and agent of the prison — gave us the July, 1950, issue of the Communist newspaper *Scanteia*, which carried an article charging that the papal nuncio, Bishop Gerald O'Hara, had been a spy for the American CIA. The politruc came into Cell 44 with the newspaper in his hands and said: "Look what your Apostolic Nuncio O'Hara is doing. He enjoyed diplomatic humanity, and now he has abused it! What do you say about that?" We all had to laugh at the politruc's ignorance. He thought the privilege of diplomats was *humanity*, when in fact the expression is "diplomatic *immunity*"! After reading the article about the trial, we could see that it was pure propaganda from top to bottom. "Sewn with a fine thread," as we say in Romanian. One of us answered, "If this is true, as it says here, then the nuncio has exceeded his mandate and will suffer the consequences."

The Disciplinary Regimen

How long must I bear grief in my soul,
this sorrow in my heart day and night?
How long shall my enemy prevail?

Look at me, answer me, Lord my God!
Give light to my eyes lest I fall asleep in death,
lest my enemy say: 'I have overcome him'. . . .

— *Psalm 12:3-5*

The prison regimen at Sighet Prison was one of absolute terror and dehumanization. The uniforms we wore, the numbers on our backs, the lack of personal address or fellowship, the routine and the silence — all were intended to destroy our sense of individual dignity and to prevent the development of any supportive community among us. We were isolated from the outside world with no literature, news, or correspondence. They were attempting to sentence us to complete intellectual death. To be cut off from society in general was difficult, but it was more painful to have no contact with family, friends, or the Church.

All of us prisoners wore identical striped "zebra" uniforms with numbers on our backs by which we were addressed both in the morning and in the evening at daily roll call. No personal names were used. Day and night the prisoners lay in their cells; even to stand up in the cell was forbidden. Guards in the courtyard were ready to shoot at any face that appeared at the high windows of the cells. If anyone peered into the small hole of a cell door or tried to speak to the inmate of another cell, he was beaten and thrown into solitary confinement for weeks or even months. No one was allowed to know the other prisoners at Sighet. Speech was absolutely forbidden. The guards listened at the doors of the cells and reported any conversations they overheard, sometimes distorting their reports — to the prisoner's peril. It was a grave offense to speak in a foreign language because the guards could not understand. In Communist prisons prayer was considered a foreign language.

While I was in Sighet I prayed the Rosary over and over again all day long, especially during the unending hours I spent in my cell during eighteen months of solitary confinement.

At least once each month we were surprised at night by a sudden check of cells, during which the guards came

in cursing God and the Church, and searching our bodies and the cells for pencils and scraps of paper, for needles and thread, for a nail, or a knife, or for any items we were not allowed to possess. Infractors were strictly punished. During a surprise check in July of 1952, the guards found a wooden fork on the person of Bishop Rusu. For his extraordinary crime, the bishop had to spend six hours naked in "the Black Cell."

This cold, dark hole, called *Neagra*, was a windowless closet with a link of chain on the floor in its center. The prisoner was stripped and chained in the center in an awkward position which prevented relaxation. In the summer the *Neagra* was like an oven; in the winter it was ice-cold. The food was severely rationed and pushed in to the prisoner through a small gate in the door. No contact with anyone was permitted. It was like being buried. The sense of frustration and deprivation in that total darkness was intense; the loneliness was answered only by prayer.

In prison, as in the entire country of Romania, the essential tool of Communist rule is terror. The inmates of Sighet were arrested illegally, they were subjected to the mindless and arbitrary whims of the personnel in charge. Prisoners had no recourse to law. There was no lawyer or newsman to defend them.

Illegally arrested, usually at night, cast into vans, transported without knowing their destination, locked in jail, sentenced without trial; subjected to the timetable dictated by the prison director, uncertain of the duration of their imprisonment, mistreated by the guards, punished for every trifle, completely isolated from the world, startled by each rumor or opening of a cell door, investigated on fantastic charges, scorned by the personnel, forgotten by all: The prisoners of Sighet lived in an inhuman atmosphere of nervousness and tension which created an abnormal state of mind. Some lost their spiritual balance and went mad or

became suicidal. Those who believed in God became holy. Prayer was the only defense.

Each day the bishops and priests were obliged to do exhausting labor. At five each morning they were awakened and brought to the prison basement. To fill the 800-gallon water tank of the prison, a water pump had to be turned by hand. We did this in pairs. After fifty turns our hearts felt as though they were ready to burst from the effort. It took an hour and a half of turning to fill the tank. This had to be done three times a day. We also took loads of coal and wood from trucks. In the winter it was painful to carry the ice-cold coal and wood with our bare hands. We cut up the wood with rusty old saws and axes. We washed the linen in two washtubs using soap made of oil. Our hands bled as we scrubbed the clothes. Twice each day we cleaned the prison hallways and lavatories.

When it was time to leave our cell for daily chores, or to go on a silent walk in the prison yard, the guard would unlock the cell door and call out, "Free."

The Alimentary and Sanitary Regimens

The bread I eat is ashes;
my drink is mingled with tears.

— *Psalm 101:10*

It is hard to imagine that the routine we endured was designed by a committee of physicians who set the schedule, rules, and regimen in order to break our resistance and crush our spirit. The alimentary and sanitary regimens were deliberately calculated so that a prisoner would not die immediately but would gradually become enfeebled through malnutrition.

Our daily diet consisted of barley, beans, cabbage, and potatoes. Once in a while we had a morsel of entrail meat. Breakfast consisted of a fraction of a cup of corn flour boiled with eight grams of sugar, and sometimes we were given three eighths of a cup of black coffee. For lunch and supper we ate a dish of porridge with a small serving of onion or cabbage soup. Sometimes we got potatoes in the soup. On Wednesdays we ate a half pound of bread, and on Fridays a pound of polenta (cornmeal). Altogether our daily ration was about 750 calories.

There was a complete lack of medical and dental care. Many prisoners suffered toothaches. I had a cavity on one side of my mouth for three years. I simply had to chew everything on the other side of my mouth. The prison doctor at Sighet was a man named Lungu. When he came into the cells the prisoners had to stand and say: "Long live comrade doctor! I am inmate so and so, I am sick." The doctor would smile and say, "How are you, what do you want me to do for you?" Then, instead of waiting for an answer, he would leave immediately. Most of the prison inmates were over the age of sixty-five and suffered from some illness. But the doctor passed them all by with his glacial smile.

For five years Lungu worked at Sighet. Then, in 1956, the Romanian government's medical board checked the records and licenses of all physicians and discovered that Lungu was an impostor who had stolen his documents from the body of a doctor who died in the Crimea. Lungu himself was arrested. When he was at Sighet he used to say, "Medicines are unnecessary, let nature take its course." Once in a while he gave his assistant pills to distribute to us, but the medical assistant, a former woodcutter, was worse than the fraudulent doctor. When prisoners fell seriously sick he beat them with his powerful fists to make them die sooner.

During the five years at Sighet, four of the bishops and

two of the priests died. They had never been convicted of a crime. With proper medical care they would not have died so young. The dying were isolated and neglected during their final agony. We were not allowed to go near their cells. I can remember hearing the groans of Bishops Durcovich and Chinezu, and of Father Maghiar. We prayed that God would mercifully shorten their suffering.

When they died, the fraudulent doctor issued a death certificate. Their burial lacked even the dignity of a coffin; the prison authorities simply used the same box over and over again to carry the bodies to the cemetery, where the dead were thrown in a shallow grave and covered with dirt. No cross or name was put on the site. In America cats and dogs get better funerals.

A Puppet Church

Their plan is only to destroy:
they take pleasure in lies.

— *Psalm 61:5*

While we were at Sighet, in the Summer of 1950, the government tried to pressure bishops and priests to form a puppet Church, which would be controlled by the Communists. Bishop Julius Hossu was called to the security chief of the prison, who told him to organize a Romanian National Catholic Church. Not only would this be a device for putting us under the control of the government, it would also be a wedge by which the government could eliminate the Latin-rite Catholics! In this National Catholic Church, according to the Communist plan, the pope might be given some honorary title, such as "Spiritual Leader," but the

selection and appointment of bishops must be exercised through the government of Romania.

Bishop Hossu refused, declaring he was not the senior bishop of our rite and had no authority to take such a vital step regarding the nature and constitution of the Church without the consent of the other bishops. Furthermore, he insisted that any discussion or decisions of this sort must be carried on with the knowledge and approval of the pope.

Because of his refusal to cooperate in this scheme, the prison authorities subjected all of us to more terror, insults, and labor. They tried day and night to make us collapse before their will. This pressure continued for three months until they realized the futility of their efforts. The prison guards confessed their admiration for the bishops and priests, recognizing in them the true shepherds of Romania.

The same day that Bishop Hossu had been invited to organize the puppet National Catholic Church, a priest of our rite undersigned his adherence to the Orthodox Church. Brought to us afterward, he nervously blurted out that he had "adhered to the Orthodox Church while professing the faith of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom." He was trying to salve his conscience by means of a mental reservation, an *equivocatio mentis*, by which he acknowledged the faith of the Church *before it was divided into East and West*. Our situation could not be aided by such casuistry. To the Communists, all that mattered was the signature they demanded. What you kept in your heart was irrelevant to them.

Jilava Prison



He has made me dwell in darkness
like the dead. . . .

— *Psalm 142:3*

Communists are not interested in the truth — but they do care about world opinion. The Geneva Conference of 1955 — involving the United States, Soviet Russia, Britain, and France — brought pressure on the Communists to release political prisoners and grant a degree of freedom of the press. When the Communist government of Romania sought admission to the United Nations, the condition imposed was greater freedom in Romania. In response to this the Communists closed many prisons throughout Romania and brought about eight thousand prisoners to the Jilava to await trial.

On April 9, 1955, we were transferred from Sighet to Jilava. Clandestine bishops John Ploscariu and John Chertes and many of the priests were loaded into a van. It took three days to load this van with 150 prisoners, four times its capacity. The van was dirty and reeked of its one small latrine. The weather was cold and rainy and the van was unheated. After three days of travel, we were half dead when we reached the prison of Jilava. This prison was an underground fortress which had been built in a defense trench outside Bucharest in 1895. The word *Jilava* means damp or humid. Water dripped from the ceilings and the clammy walls of the cells, falling into canals on the dirt floors. Neither light nor much air penetrated this subterranean prison in which we celebrated the Easter of 1955. We felt like the early Christians in the catacombs.

We learned that some former chiefs of police who were now prisoners were plotting to murder Augustine Albon, a former commander of the Danube-Black Sea canal labor projects who had been arrested and sentenced to nine years. They planned to kill a man who had no chance to defend himself, and to do it on the very day Jesus won victory over sin and death. We were able to persuade them to let him be; that was our triumph for Easter of 1955.

Three bishops who had been at Sighet were trans-

ferred to Gerota Hospital in Bucharest, but their health was beyond repair (the Communists hoped to prevent them from dying as martyrs. They were sent under house arrest to the monastery at Curtea de Arges. The clandestine bishops and the priests were sent out from Jilava to their hometowns for trial.

Amnesty and Job Hunting

They go out, they go out, full of tears,
carrying seed for the sowing. . . .

— *Psalm 125:6*

On October 25, 1955, after years in prison, I was in the local jail at Oradea for my trial. Everything there was conducted in utter secrecy so that the prisoners never knew what would happen next. To prevent us from seeing who was in jail with us, we were obliged to stay in our cells alone and to wear glasses with very dark lenses. The halls were covered with felt so the guards could come and go silently with prisoners or sneak up on us to spy.

My interrogator was Captain Wolf Zoltan, a man with a glass eye and very dramatic mannerisms. He entered the small courtroom with an air of importance as if he were on a stage playing to a vast audience which sat poised to applaud his every word and gesture. He interrogated me about my attitude toward the new government, its activities on behalf of the working class, my sympathy for any of the former political parties, and my efforts to resist the forced unification with the Orthodox Church. He pointed out that my arrest and imprisonment were justified by the (retroactive) laws which condemned defense of the (sup-

posedly) nonexistent Byzantine-rite Catholic Church. My crime, he informed me, had been to instigate activity contrary to the welfare of the workers: "For such a crime you should be given fifteen years' hard labor. But the government, out of wisdom and concern for the well-being of the people, and to promote peace among the Churches, now pardons you. You are free to go home."

I looked at him with amazement. "I am free? I cannot believe it!" Tears came to my eyes when he assured me I was free. How many thousands of times the prison guards had uttered that word, *free*, to announce that it was time to leave our cells for chores. What a bitter irony it had been to hear the word and know we were still slaves. Now, hearing the word seemed strange and incredible to me. After I was made to sign a promise not to talk about prison life to anyone, I walked out of the security building and returned home to my relatives.

The bishops and priests kept silent about their imprisonment. They were told by the government that they could not return to their former parishes, pray in public, or receive stipends for Masses. We were ordered to get civil jobs, and, above all, to conform to the rules of the Communist state. We were urged to appreciate the social, technical, and cultural progress which the Communist government claimed to have made on behalf of the workers. They pointed out to us such things as the new roads, factories, schools; the presence of electricity and mechanized agriculture.

We quickly perceived, however, that life in Romania was not better. Rather, there was a sense of desolation and a lack of spiritual culture, a poverty and enslavement of the workers, a complete lack of freedom, especially freedom of speech. There was everywhere a fear of spies and security agents, who infiltrated every town, every neighborhood, every family. Certainly there were no churches

being built in the country. Churches are not included in Communist five-year economic plans! We priests and bishops found ourselves in a new country indeed, with new beings, but lacking men and women, free and proud human beings.

How could we conform — as we were directed — to this new and strange state? Some of us got civil jobs in factories, offices, or in construction. Others of us could not find work. We were branded as ex-convicts and shunned by former friends, who feared any contact with us. We were treated as lepers who must live apart from society; nobody dared to associate with us or help us. Those of us whose parents were still living, or who had brothers or sisters, managed to find room and board. The rest were outcasts, who — though “free” — experienced isolation and want.

The local authorities persecuted us, refused to hire us, and gave us no material support. I myself hunted for a job for ten months, always receiving the same answer: “We appreciate your experience and abilities and will help you to get a job if you will cooperate with us for the welfare of the people and the triumph of Communism in the world. Forget the past, forget your convictions, discard your opinions and beliefs. Take our friendly hands. Let us work together. You as a priest really have the same goals as we Communists. Give up your otherworldly mysticism and be practical; there is only one life — the one here on earth. The rest is nothing but the fantasy of the founders of religions, the idle dreams of popes and bishops. You are still young and can enjoy this life.”

Such foolish lures could not trap those of us who had suffered for our faith. We prayed and hoped. After a year or so, most of us had found work at humble and miserable jobs. As we worked, we planned to renew the struggle for the freedom of the Church.

1956: Back to the Catacombs

They come back, they come back, full of song,
carrying their sheaves.

— *Psalm 125:6*

At first, after our release from prison, we priests and bishops simply tried to make a living and restore our health. Eventually we sought to gather the remnants of the Church. In the five dioceses of Transylvania, there remained about seven hundred priests, two hundred nuns, and thousands of faithful. Meeting with these people was a joyful experience that gave us a surge of hope. The Church was still there in these neglected souls, who after years of persecution and expectation, were now gathering in spirit and in truth. Who can ever know or tell their sufferings and hopes in those years of persecution? Throughout that time, these good priests celebrated Holy Mass in the homes of the faithful, or in the still-open Latin-rite churches in the large cities. Of course, the security agents' informers tracked down these nests of resistance to the unification program. Yet there were hundreds of homes in which the bishops, priests, and faithful were now able to meet and pray together.

Our one desire was to restore the Church. The three titular bishops at the Curtea de Arges monastery were granted an audience with the prime minister of Romania, Peter Groza. Groza, a lawyer who had been a member of the Socialist Party back in 1930 (when it was illegal), often acted like a clown. Once during a meeting with the then-king, Ferdinand, a serious-minded man of German temperament, Groza poked fun at the king. Because of this, Groza was removed from his post with the Department of Commerce. During World War II, Groza joined the Commu-

nist Party, which, in 1945, installed him as prime minister. He betrayed Romanian interests in favor of the Soviets, handing over to Russia our natural resources — cattle, lumber, and oil. Though he himself was the son of an Orthodox priest, he shared in the persecution of all the Churches. When Bishop Julius Hossu requested permission to restore the Church, Groza responded as if the bishop had told a hilarious joke. He burst out with his punch line: "But Bishop, there are no Byzantine Catholics in Romania! Everyone is Orthodox, and there is no way to prove the existence of a Catholic Byzantine-rite Church." But the fool was wrong.

On April 23, 1956, the bishops sent a memorandum to the government. They pointed out the illegality of the suppression and insisted on their right to function as a Church according to the Romanian constitution. They received no answer. Next the bishops and priests began a campaign of petitions and memoranda signed by the faithful. Hundreds of thousands signed these petitions. The bombardment of signatures astonished and exasperated the government ministers. At the time of this restoration movement, even the Orthodox priests who had been assigned since 1948 to take over Catholic parishes expressed a desire to return to union with Rome along with their flocks, to whom they had become spiritually attached!

After two months of this campaign, government security agents took action. In July and August of 1956, the storm was unleashed. Their answer to the effort to restore the Church was arrest, violence, and terror. Bishop Rusu was arrested, as were many priests in Transylvania. Bishops Hossu and Balan were sent to Orthodox monasteries at Caldarusani and Ciorogarla. Sham trials were conducted; Bishop Rusu and the priests were convicted and sentenced to harsh prison terms. In this way the restoration attempt was annihilated. The hopes of a million and a half Catholic

faithful were stilled. Once again the Church was buried in the tomb; once again the Church was cast back into the catacombs.

Gherla Prison

The Geneva Conference of 1955 had led many naive people in our nation to believe that the government would allow a free exercise of human rights. Perhaps only bitter experience can teach people that Communist promises are no more than ruthless means to obtain control of people. Their only *truth* is the measure of usefulness to the Communist Party; the most useful promises to the people are often the most deceitful. The government promised to respect the rights of conscience, free speech, free assembly, free press, and so on, but none of these rights was effectively granted to the people.

In the spring of 1956, many people in Romania attempted to enjoy these human rights. They assembled openly and discussed politics in the press. Writers in Romania even dared to point out the inconsistencies of Communism as well as its humorous side. Some university students asked for academic freedom. All of these hopes were a mirage — a passing illusion of freedom. Had the government really relaxed its tyranny and granted genuine freedom, it would have been overthrown within twenty-four hours! Communist governments cannot last without making use of constant surveillance, terror, and violence. Fear and repression are the rule in all Communist states.

The security force, nicknamed "the Eye of the Communist Party," arrested many of the naive people who had actually attempted to enjoy human rights. By the summer

of 1958 the prison at Gherla had six thousand prisoners — ten times its capacity. This prison, to which we priests and bishops were sent, was surrounded by a moat and consisted of three pavilions, the oldest of which formerly had been a bishop's residence. There was a motto in Latin over the door of this central pavilion. I do not remember the moral it quoted, but it should have quoted Dante's inscription for the gates of hell: ABANDON HOPE, ALL WHO ENTER HERE.

It is impossible to fully describe the hellish condition of the inmates of this overcrowded prison. The windows were shuttered to keep the prisoners from looking outside. This also blocked out fresh air and light. The beds, in tiers of three or four, were stacked so high that the man on the top bunk felt his toes touch the ceiling. Some cells were lucky to boast a faucet with drinkable water, while other cells depended on a barrel set out each day. Barrels were also set out for hygienic purposes. These, naturally, gave off a terrible, suffocating stench. The prisoners were forbidden to sleep or lie down during the day. Those who broke this rule were beaten on the palms of their hands or the soles of their feet with a steel or rubber bar and isolated in the Black Cell.

Every third day we prisoners were taken out into the courtyard for half an hour's walk. We had to walk in a circle with our hands behind our backs. It was absolutely forbidden to lift up one's head and look around the grounds or up at the windows of the prison, or to attempt to give a signal to any other prisoner in the courtyard. Most of the time the prisoners were taken out barefoot and made to run in silence. We could neither talk, nor pray, nor sing in the cells. We suffered the same starvation diet here as at the other prisons: five to seven hundred calories a day.

Outside Gherla, mothers used to scare their children into behaving by threatening them with: "May Gherla gobble you up." For some the curse came true.

The most troublesome inmates were the youths of seventeen to twenty. They had been the social agitators who had demanded reforms in Romania in 1955, or who had tried to escape from the country. Now they were trapped. They were impatient, unruly, highstrung, aggressive, and impetuous. Often they violently quarreled and fought among themselves, creating an atmosphere of unbearable animosity. Like inmates of hell, they cursed, blasphemed, and used foul language.

We priests and bishops tried to live a Christian life of prayer, meditation, and abandonment to the will of God. We tried at times to restrain the young men and maintain order in the cells. This was our apostolate. We prudently exhorted the other inmates to pray. This was dangerous, for the guards punished any religious actions. We succeeded, however, and in some cases we were able to give instructions to the youths. Many of them became less disgraceful in their behavior, even polite and good, and developed a genuine esteem for the Catholic bishops and priests. Of that experience we have beautiful memories; none of us regrets his endeavors to lead these young souls to Christ.

Rebellion and Massacre

Calm your anger and forget your rage;
do not fret, it only leads to evil.
For those who do evil shall perish;
the patient shall inherit the land.

— *Psalm 36:8-9*

Of the 108 cells in Gherla, Cell 101 was the largest. In order to enter this cell, prisoners had to go through Cell

100, in which there was a sink with drinking water. For unknown reasons, the administration locked Cell 100, sealing it off from Cell 101. The two hundred prisoners in Cell 101 protested and asked to be allowed to use the water in Cell 100 as they had been accustomed to do. Permission was refused. On the morning of July 14, 1958, the prisoners in Cell 101 broke the window shutters and shouted loudly to those in neighboring cells to join in their action. Some of them did. The cells with older men did not follow suit; they were more prudent. We in the opposite wing of the prison, hearing the clamor, thought a fire must have broken out.

The prison director, Goiciu, nicknamed "the Brute," came to Cell 101 and confronted the prisoners, who accused him of being a criminal. They were furious. Goiciu fired through the door, wounding two students. At this the students barricaded the cell doors with their beds. The guards forced open the doors and rushed in with large clubs in their hands. They pulled the prisoners out of Cell 101 and threw them down the stairs. Prisoners were beaten by the hundreds. Most of them were innocent bystanders who had not joined in the upheaval, which was as ineffective as it had been righteous.

Among those beaten terribly was Father Theophilus Baliban. After the slaughter we counted fourteen dead and hundreds more wounded and horribly mutilated. Some days later the military tribunal of Cluj convicted a group of the ringleaders, mostly young students, adding fifteen years to their terms of imprisonment.

We later learned that Goiciu had deliberately provoked this incident just days before the youths were due to be released. A sadistic drunkard who tormented even his own wife and daughter, Goiciu was himself later brutally murdered by ex-convicts.

After the massacre, Goiciu increased the harsh dis-

cipline and intensified the beatings, isolation, and terror. The prisoners suffered both inside and outside the cells. Inside, we were oppressed by the smallness of the cells and by the mad conduct of the youths; and outside, by the guards, who were directed to keep up a constant reign of terror. The prisoners, including us priests and bishops, became tense, irritable, and exasperated.

During the winter of 1958 the flu broke out. A few imprisoned physicians, Doctors Cornea, Ciobanu, Mocanu, Romitan, Orasan, and Victor Gordan, tried to help the sick, but the guards despised the sick prisoners, saying to them: "You do not deserve the medicine, not even the food the Communist state gives you. What work did you do today, or yesterday, to earn the meals we so generously offer you? You did not plow or sow, or reap corn or wheat. Why do you expect to be fed?" One hundred and fifty men died that winter because of a lack of medicine.

In the spring of 1959 the prison doctor, Tinc, and his aide checked all of the younger prisoners, those under sixty, to determine their ability to perform physical labor. Those of us who passed this test were asked if we would like to work. To be sure, all of the prisoners desired to go anywhere outside of the prison, even if liberation would be upon the condition of labor. None of us asked about the type of work or where it would be. This did not matter to us at the moment. Some of us thought we might be allowed to work in factories and perhaps earn a bit more food, perhaps a chance to walk outside the cells and enjoy more light and air. Anything was preferable to the stench of the cells.

The terror and tortures which had been inflicted on us since the massacre, we later learned, had had a special purpose. The government had issued an order to salvage thousands of agricultural acres along the riverbanks of the Danube. Volunteer labor was not found. Thus, this work was designated for the prisoners, who had been conditioned to

desire even the misery of slave labor in preference to life in Gherla.

Forced-Labor Camp

Give us joy to balance our affliction
for the years when we knew misfortune.

— *Psalm 89:14*

In the summer of 1959, two groups of a thousand prisoners each were sent to the country to work on road construction and on the agricultural land-reclamation projects. The work involved draining swamps and building canals, retaining dams, and irrigation trenches. On August 7, 1959, our group was loaded into vans for the journey to begin the labor for which we had "volunteered."

As we boarded the train for the labor camps, many people from the town of Gherla gathered at the station. The prisoners, who had been isolated for so long, tried to speak with the people. The youths, especially, wanted to talk to the girls. Many prisoners wrote their names and home addresses on scraps of paper, which they threw out the windows in the hope that someone would write their families, telling them of the prisoners' whereabouts. The soldiers tried to stop this, but some parents and relatives did receive news of the prisoners in this way.

As we traveled to the Danube shores, we passed through my homeland of Transylvania. We went down to the foot of the volcanic mountains of Vrancea and into the valley of the beautiful Muresul River. The day of our trip was bright and sunny. We expanded our lungs and, rejoicing, inhaled this pure air. For so many years we had tasted

the foul stench of prisons. We were all pale as wax figures. Now we felt a return to life after our years in dark caverns. The contact with air and sun gave us a refreshed feeling, even though travel in the crowded van was terrible. On the morning of August 9, we reached the Danube, where we boarded an old French ship called *Gironde*. This ancient, rusted hulk looked like a bad omen to us. We were placed in the belly of this huge whale and our voyage began.

About three in the afternoon, we reached our destination and debarked. The smell of the weeds and plants along the shore was a new sensation which made us giddy. We were led on a path through the tall swamp grass. After so many years of inaction in prison, the walk was arduous. We could barely manage to carry our simple luggage of old clothes. I recall helping another prisoner, a Jewish fellow who fell from exhaustion. He was a former advisor in the Department of Commerce who had naively dared to criticize his comrades. He was convicted as a counterrevolutionary. We all felt like the Israelites exiled to Babylon in captivity. After a three-mile trek, we reached the labor camp at Stoenesti. Our colony was one of six which were under one administration. The work was directed by the Department of Agriculture, which provided food and money. The Department of Internal Affairs supplied the slaves — ourselves.

The camp was surrounded by barbed-wire fences with watchtowers at each corner. Inside the fence were two barracks, a well, a big ditch for the latrine, a kitchen, and an electrical generator. Outside the fence were the small, primitive buildings which housed the camp commander, the guards, and their families. My first impression of the camp was that the place was unfit even for animals.

At the main gate we were thoroughly searched — as though we might possess weapons! The prisoners were sent into the barracks to get a bed, wash up, and rest. We

could not truly rest, for the discomforts of travel had been a strain on our nerves. We were allowed one week to rest in the outdoors and restore our health. For those who suffered arthritis and rheumatism in the damp prisons, this was a wonderful chance for healing.

A week later, on August 15, we were put into brigades of a hundred men. When we were told the nature of our work — building dams along the shore — we thought of the Israelites who built the Pyramids. We then marched three miles to the site of the dam, where the guard in charge made a speech: "You came here as volunteers to work for the welfare of the nation which nourishes and protects you, and which now asks for your labor. I exhort you to take this task seriously. Otherwise you will be punished. You must work hard." We understood the meaning of our so-called volunteer work, knowing well the contradictory use of language employed by Communists.

We were given wheelbarrows, spades, and shovels, and made to work in crews of six. The first day we dug the ground, filled the wheelbarrows, and carried our load to the dam. After two hours we were exhausted. The guards insisted that we continue the work. But, after years of hardship in prisons, we were weak. Five days later when the sergeant saw that we could not keep up the pace demanded by the guards, he accused us of making a joke of the work. "You forget your duty," he said. "You asked for labor. Now do it! Otherwise we will dig you into the dam."

The Norm



. . . I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong.

— 2 Corinthians 12:10

One of the most dreaded words in a Communist state is *norm*. A norm is the amount of work a person is expected to do in a given amount of time. In factories, collective farms, and labor camps, each worker is expected to perform a specified quantity of work. This is a slave economy's replacement for the profit incentive. Each prisoner had a daily norm of two and a half cubic meters of dirt to be dug up, loaded on the wheelbarrow, and taken to the dam under construction. (Fifteen full wheelbarrows equal about one cubic meter; each full wheelbarrow held 260 pounds of dirt.) The dam was about a hundred and fifty meters from the ditches we dug.

Each day the guard in charge lined up the prisoners and announced the norm. He would look at the thousand slaves and say: "Prisoners, today the norm is two and a half cubic meters for each man. Do you understand? Let's get to work." We looked at one another and murmured some protest, but no one dared to refuse. In the beginning the work was very hard because we were not accustomed to such labor. Except for the peasants, few of us had worked with such implements before. As a youth, I had worked in the fields, helping my father and my brothers do farm chores. But this work was now a torture. In front of us was the dam; behind us were soldiers with watchdogs. Beyond them was more water, weeds, swamp, and croaking frogs.

A tremendous sadness and discouragement swept my soul as I sought a meaning in this miserable existence. I knew I had been arrested and imprisoned for my faith: I refused to deny the union of our Church with the whole Church under the vicar of Christ. I was punished because I would neither join the Orthodox Church nor comply with Communism. There was no time to complain or to cry; there was only this moment to answer Our Lord's call: "Whoever wants to be my follower must deny his very

self, and take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps" (Luke 9:23). As a priest, I was called to give an example of sacrifice and to help my fellowmen carry their crosses.

The doubts, sorrows, and bitterness of isolation on this island of savage work often besieged my heart during my three years of forced labor in this colony. But my faith always helped me overcome my human weakness and feelings of despair. I realized that the only way to survive and win the battle was to accept the regimen of slavery as the will of God for me now. That was the truth. Many priests had abandoned their faith and shunned the cross. But we, the priests and bishops in prison, were called to continue the struggle as witnesses to the faith.

I was in charge of our six-man crew, which included three students, a former officer, and a young factory worker. None of the students had ever used a spade or a shovel. On the first day we were all clumsy. Though we tried hard, we could not meet our norm. We did only one half of a cubic meter all day. We were exhausted. The guards prodded us on. The next day we worked even harder, but still we could not achieve the norm. It was not until September 9 that we succeeded in accomplishing the norm. The commander of the colony visited the construction site almost daily, threatening to punish the brigadiers if the prisoners did not perform the norm. Each evening the brigadiers met with the chief of production, who displayed his dissatisfaction with the quantity of work. The brigadiers repeatedly told the chief that the norm was too high, the conditions of work too severe, the food inadequate, and the water unhealthy. The commander of the colony did not agree. He claimed that the prisoners were refusing to work and sabotaging the construction. Convinced that we could do more work if we wanted to, he declared that he would prove it.

One day he tried. On September 9, 1959, at ten in the morning, the commander came to the construction site and reviewed all the brigades of workers. The crew next to ours was made up of six men, all near the age of sixty. They continually complained that the norm was too high, that they were too old and weak for this sort of work. The commander chose this very crew to prove his assertion that the norm could be attained. He ordered them to get to work. Very afraid of him, they put forth an enormous effort for one hour, digging and carrying at a frantic pace. After an hour, permitting them to rest, he was triumphant. "Do you see?" he asked the brigadier. "What did I tell you? The prisoners can perform their norm if they work constantly for an hour, then rest for a few minutes and return to work. Old as these men are, they did it. Am I not right?" The brigadier agreed — as he knew he must.

Seeing the fear and exhaustion in the faces of the six men, I became angry. "Commander, sir," I said, "I am prisoner Alexander Ratiu. May I report something politely without fear of punishment?" The commander assured me it was safe to speak up. "It will not be considered instigation if I tell the truth?" "Not at all," answered the commander. "Tell me what it is all about." So I said, "Sir, the standard of life and conditions of work in this forced-labor colony are not sufficient to give us the strength to perform the norm of two and a half cubic meters per person per day. Because of the lack of food, drinkable water, medicine, and proper tools, we cannot do what is required. We are weak, exhausted, and sick after our prison regimen in Gherla. Many prisoners are unaccustomed to manual labor. Even though these six men did the norm in your presence, they did so out of fear, forcing themselves for one hour. I know them and their capacity. They could not possibly work all day, every day, at such a pace. Unless you improve the conditions in the colony, we cannot do the norm."

While I spoke the prisoners gathered to hear me. I felt I must speak because the six men had been so completely intimidated by the presence of the commander. The commander argued with me for a while, but he did not succeed in winning me over to his viewpoint. I saw the disapproval in his face and heard the menace in his voice as he said, "I will show you who is right." After writing down my name, he left the construction site. The prisoners were elated that someone had finally had the courage to tell the truth. The guard turned to us and said, "You want better conditions of life and work?" With an ominous tone, he added, "So you will have them."

Back in the camp that evening, I was called to the office of the sergeant in charge of production. He checked my work record for the period August 15 through September 9. Our crew had not yet reached the norm. He looked at me with fury and said: "You see. You have been here for a month. You eat and drink and pray, and you do not do your norm. Do you think this colony is a church in which you can pray and instigate others to do the same?"

He cursed me and ordered me to take off my shoes. When I refused, he grabbed me and two guards threw me to the floor and pulled off my shoes. He hit the soles of my feet with a steel bar so many times that I cannot remember. At first I felt an intense pain in my brain. I almost lost consciousness.

They beat me until the soles of my feet were so swollen that I could not stand or walk. Then they dragged me up, put on my shoes, and threw me out of the office. I struggled back to my barracks. When the prisoners found out what happened, they were frightened. I was only the first victim. That night other prisoners were beaten, although not on the soles of their feet. That day the beatings started; they continued all the years we were in the forced-labor camps.

The Rewards

"Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure
... instead ... store up heavenly treasure. ..."

— *Matthew 6:19-20*

After the events of September 9, 1959, the situation in the colony became more difficult. The guards were ruder and more violent, and the prisoners more fearful. The norm was raised to three and a half cubic meters, an enormous work load. Some of the prisoners were the cause of this increase. Cowardly prisoners who sought to curry favor with the guards worked their utmost to achieve the norm. The guards then rewarded these prisoners, for there was no shortage of food in the warehouses. This tactic was used by the guards to exact more work from the prisoners, but the majority simply could not perform the norm.

Another tactic to make the prisoners strive to meet the norm was to reward them with the privilege of writing a postcard home and receiving a package of food and cigarettes. After so many years of imprisonment and being out of touch with their families, this was a tremendous lure. Prisoners who did the norm were given a postcard on which they wrote a message dictated by the officer. The typical wording went like this: "I am well. How are you? Please send me a package of food — bread, ham, sugar, powdered milk, and some cigarettes. Please tell my children to be good, to study and obey." That was the letter. The families received the cards. As they knew nothing about what we had to endure, they were overjoyed to learn that we were still alive.

But often these letters and packages produced tragic results. The prison authorities used them to extort more work from the prisoners. The small package could never

compensate for the labor. Furthermore, to send them, our families sacrificed a great deal themselves. Many prisoners renounced this cruel competition and were punished for not doing the norm.

The worst aspect of this blackmail was that the old and weak prisoners, who could not meet the norm, were excluded from any contact with their families, even during their last days on earth. If one of these old prisoners almost reached the norm but fell a little short, the officials refused him the chance to send a postcard. One old prisoner begged for a card but was told he did not deserve it. The man cried, for he had not been in touch with his family for years. The guard would not relent. Two days later the guard's daughter, an eight-year-old girl, fell under the wheel of a tractor and was killed. How sad and tragic, for she was an innocent little child. Yet, in this act of God, the prisoners saw a punishment for the sin of the father.

In the free world, it is considered a prisoner's right to be in touch with his family. With Communists, this humane practice becomes a barbarous means of extortion. The small packages we received were our pay for work as slaves of the Communist government.

No one in the free world — what remains of it — can appreciate what superhuman effort it took to perform our work under such antihuman conditions.

The Squealers

. . . The accuser of our brothers is cast out. . . .

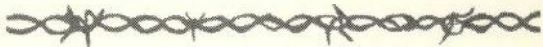
— *Revelation 12:10*

The system of surveillance in the prisons and labor camps was very tight. We were constantly observed for

signs of our frame of mind. Never were we given the right to privacy in conduct, speech, or prayer. One villainous method of terrorizing the prisoners was the use of informants. The spies were the most abject persons in the camps, prisons, and jails. They crept about and reported everything to the guards. Many of us were the victims of such perverse men, whom we called "the Squealers."

At first we did not know who the spies were among us. They were placed there to listen, to take part in our discussions and prayers, and at times to subtly provoke us to say something critical of the prison administration or the political situation in Romania. Then they could report us and earn their pay. Such spies made it difficult for us to pray — especially on Sundays. Often I was betrayed by them. Once I was put in the punishment cell, the hellish dark Black Cell, because I aided a man in that cell. One of the informers had seen and reported me. With sadness and nausea I remember the sort of men who were squealers. Like all of us, they were slaves, but out of cowardice and moral decrepitude they betrayed us for a material reward. I have no words to describe the repugnance I feel for their Judas-like conduct.

Reeducation



My enemies revile me,
saying to me all the day long:
'Where is your God?'

— *Psalms 41:11*

The camp officials would often propose to the priests a simple deal: "Convert to Orthodoxy and you will be set

free." When someone did sign himself over, after weariness, disgust, and discouragement; out of fear rather than conviction; when his energy and defenses had collapsed, the political officer — the "politruc" — would rejoice in this victory for "reeducation." The labor camp politruc argued with us in this fashion:

Is there any compromise of God or of the Church when you convert to Orthodoxy? The Orthodox believe in God, in the Church, in heaven. If they are saved by faith, why do you oppose embracing them? Besides, if the Orthodox comply with the government, why must Catholics refuse to be reconciled with us? What is the difference between one Church and another?

To his argument we answered:

According to our Catholic faith, we cannot be co-workers with a Communist government because it is atheistic. It denies God, religion, and the Church. The Communists deny free practice of religion; they deprive people of freedom of conscience, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech and press. If the Orthodox choose to comply with such conditions, that is their decision before God and man. We will not be puppets of our enemies.

The arguments the politruc used were in vain. One day the camp reeducator, after making some stupid remark about the Pope, challenged us: "Which priest among you has something to say to this?" Nobody answered. "Is there no priest who dares to speak?" he asked again. "Hey you" — he was pointing at me — "what can you say?"

I answered: "If all that your newspaper is claiming about the Pope is true, I might have to agree. But I do not know that the report is factual."

"So," he shouted back to me, "you do not believe our official newspaper — you are still an enemy of the government, of the Romanian people; you are not yet educated. You must remain in prison many years until you change your mind."

The prisoners gave each other a disgusted look. We were powerless to do anything. The educator continued his ranting. Those who contradicted him were punished by isolation, beatings, and curses.

The Department of Internal Affairs in Romania sent youths to their labor camps to be reeducators of the prisoners. It was their duty to organize a Communist library, schedule talks and films on Communist social, political, and agricultural systems.

On Sundays the reeducator read us the editorials from Communist newspapers reporting government care for people, factory output, agricultural progress, and visits of Communist officials. All of these articles were full of exaggerations and lies, flattering to the government and the Soviet Union.

The reeducation always pointed out the bad news from the United States and Western Europe — the strikes, demonstrations, and arrests of Communists. The conclusion he tried to urge upon us was that Communists are superior and happy; others are inferior and unhappy. The reeducator got no results. He was a mere youth of twenty-one and his lectures were ridiculous.

Eventually the commander of the camp realized that such lessons were pointless and stopped all reeducation activity for a while. Naturally, the intelligence, common sense, and life experience of the priests and other prisoners resisted such nonsense. Most of us were educated men:

Many of the laymen were scientists, doctors, engineers, and politicians.

To those of us who were believing Catholics, our inner education in Wisdom and an inexhaustible daily resource — especially while carrying the wheelbarrows of dirt — was the constant repetition of the Rosary.

In a Chinese Communist prison on the other side of the world, Bishop James Walsh of Maryknoll felt the same way we did. Later on, in freedom, he wrote: "My greatest support during twelve years of imprisonment was the Rosary. The Rosary's fifteen Mysteries provided a clear and complete review of the great central truths of religion, and imparted remembrance, gratitude, consolation and hope. It was simple enough for a child, yet rich enough to meet all needs."

The Lord's Day



Many are the trials of the just man
but from them all the Lord will rescue him.

— *Psalm 33:20*

In atheistic Communism there is no such thing as Sunday; nor is there a true day of rest in a servile state. Neither worship of God nor true leisure exists for Communists. We priests and bishops were forced to work on Sunday mornings in spite of our protest against this. When we experienced the alternative, punishment, we complied with the demand to work.

There was one prisoner, John Rusneak, a Jehovah's Witness, who absolutely refused to work on Saturdays. He took literally the law to keep holy the Sabbath. One Satur-

day there was a confrontation. This prisoner adamantly refused to work. The commander told me to persuade him or else he would be terribly punished. "It is not my duty to change his mind," I told the commander. "Persuasion is in vain, for he is firm in his faith." The commander was displeased with my answer. He forced the prisoner to climb into the wheelbarrow. Then he catapulted him into a thornbush. Still the man refused to work. The guards tore off his clothes and he was again thrown, this time naked, into the thorns. He was scratched and bleeding all over his body, but still he refused to work. About a thousand prisoners on the construction site observed this barbarous action and, in indignation, loudly berated the shameful behavior of the commander and the guards. But the prisoners quickly shut up lest the guards mark the ones who had cried out. Torn and bloodied, yet victorious, the prisoner was finally left alone; and we all shared a sense of victory in the defeat of the prison commander.

Starvation



I am exhausted with my groaning;
every night I drench my pillow with tears;
I bedew my bed with weeping. . . .
I have grown old surrounded by my foes.

— *Psalm 6:7-8*

The half-cooked foods, the infected water, and the lack of medicine caused many prisoners to fall sick with the severe diarrhea and bleeding caused by dysentery. Sick prisoners received only milk and fried potatoes — nothing else. Each camp had a doctor and an infirmary, but

almost no medicine. What few drugs there may have been were not "wasted" on us prisoners. Some prisoners who were physicians were appointed to take care of those who were ill. They tried their best, but their medical advice was usually ignored by the authorities. According to Communist ideology, prisoners can be refused medical treatment on the grounds that, as "enemies of the people," they do not deserve it. Many of the sick were forced to work until they dropped dead. Several prisoners who survived the labor camps on the Danube River, Romanian physicians who now reside in the United States, can verify my report.

The extremes of starvation in the forced-labor camps exceeded even the extermination regimen of the prisons. We arose at five in the morning and were rushed through a breakfast of black coffee, corn bread, barley meal, and a few grams of sugar. At six we would line up in columns, crew by crew, and march the three miles to our work site. In rainy weather it was difficult to transport the meals along the muddy path to the construction site, so we did not get lunch until two or three o'clock in the afternoon. We became very tired and hungry, and it took strenuous effort to continue working and stay warm until lunch arrived. When we returned to camp in the evening, we were fed supper only on the condition that we had completed our daily norm of work. Many who did not do the quota were beaten to death.

In the fall and winter we suffered most. Each evening two brigades were assigned to help the cooks clean the potatoes, which were stored in bins outside. Although these potatoes were nearly frozen, the prisoners tried to eat them — which deducted from the meager rations for us all.

Sheep and cattle in the camp were kept in open stables day and night. The rain and snow chilled them to the bone. We compared their situation with ours, realizing that there was no difference in the treatment.

One day we passed by a steaming dung heap where scraps of beets had been thrown to feed the cattle and sheep. As we passed by, some of the prisoners rushed over to the dunghill to pick up and eat these scraps of beets. The guards vainly tried to stop this infectious action. The starved prisoners snatched the scraps and ate them as though they were precious sugar or bread. I thought how torture and starvation degrade human beings, even as the Prodigal Son ate the husks of the pigs to fill his belly because no one offered him food. Yet he had abandoned his loving father, whereas we were faithful to our Heavenly Father, who permitted this suffering in our lives.

Some days we gathered notchweeds and thistles, stamped them into our cups with a spoon, sprinkled them with salt, and ate them. These periods of starvation were the most dreadful times in our lives. When we slept we had nightmares about food, and in the morning our pillows were full of saliva. No one can imagine the torture of starvation; only those who have survived it know how starvation differs from mere hunger.

Hunger is a physical phenomenon, normal and usual; it is a sign of health and good functioning of the organism. When man is hungry he eats until he is satiated. His appetite satisfied, he no longer thinks about food and doesn't concern himself about what he will eat tomorrow. There are days and even weeks in one's lifetime when, out of temporary sickness, one has to endure hunger. There may be a drought, a war, or some other cause for food shortages, but hunger remains at a physical level: It does not result in a continual preoccupation. A person is usually able to overlook hunger because he is free to move and live with the hope of its eventual satisfaction.

But starvation is a complex psychophysical phenomenon. It is a tool used by an authority — a government or a police state — to subdue prisoners. It is done systemat-

ically, with insidious calculation, to serve a carefully chosen goal. The famished individual sees and knows it. Whether in the jail or in forced-labor camp, the prisoners are convinced that the authorities torture them through hunger. The warehouses are full of food and meals are served at the right time, but the portion is insufficient and the smell of the food creates a dreadful appetite.

The lack of food leaves a craving in the body and an inner one in the soul, an obsession which tortures the victim with agonizing intensity. After each tiny meal he is hungrier than before. The inmate is certain that after the next meal he will remain hungry. At the height of the torment is not knowing how long the famine will last. This anxiety state can lead to despair and suicide. The Communist regime at Bucharest regularly used this method of starvation. It is an extraordinary crime. To be hungry is endurable. To be famished is agonizing.

The Cranes



All you birds of the air, bless the Lord. . . .

— *Daniel 3:80*

The delta of the Danube River is one of the richest regions in Europe for the study of wild plants and birds. Almost all the flora and fauna of Europe are found in this region. Every year in the spring and fall, botanists and other scientists come to study the migrating birds. We prisoners loved the plants and birds in whose company we lived for almost eight years. They were the friendly neighbors and companions who understood us and shared in our sufferings and isolation.

The weeping willow trees bowed down in sorrow over our unhappy destiny. At lunch we sat in their shade. The birds were lovely visitors who could fly unharmed over our cursed place just as birds fly over the Dead Sea.

We took great consolation in their presence. Although the plants and birds could not talk, they told us many beautiful things: There is a God in heaven, a Creator of all things, who watches over His creatures and guides their existence.

Most of all we loved the cranes and their *crew, crew* singsong, which, like our souls, was sad and depressed. In the fall, when the winds blew cold and the first frost covered the fields, the cranes would fly south over our heads, singing their sad song, leaving in our souls a sensation of loneliness and despair.

In the spring the cranes returned and announced the coming of pleasant weather. We noted that nothing had changed in our lives despite the changing of seasons and the passing of years. Spring and summer passed, fall came again, and we remained slaves.

In all my life I was never so sad and desolate as in those moments. Even today in freedom when I hear the migrating birds pass over my house, my soul startles and fills with sadness and bitterness. Those days of loneliness, despair and slavery, abandonment and death return to me once more. The prisoners working today as slaves — do they, too, listen to the everlasting cry of the cranes?

Who knows how soon or in what nation next the Communists will open other forced-labor camps in order to crush the will-to-freedom of an unhappy people? The cranes, symbols of our suffering, still fly over the Church of Silence. Like their song and their flight, the prayers of the bishops, priests, and faithful of Romania soar above the clouds and rise ever upward to the throne of the Holy Trinity.

On the Branch



It is he who gives bread to the hungry,
the Lord, who sets prisoners free. . . .

— *Psalm 145:7*

During the winter we stayed in camp. At this time of the year we compared ourselves to birds resting in a tree — “on the branch,” as we called it. On such days we gathered for prayer.

Prayer is the food of the soul, always in freedom and more so in slavery. Surrounded by the walls of hatred, the only way to escape was to pray. Thus was our faith and patience strengthened.

We prayed all the time: in the morning, on the way to work, at work, on the way back to camp, and at night. We prayed the breviary, which we knew by heart. We prayed the Rosary. While lugging the wheelbarrow, I recited the decades of the Rosary. How many prayers we raised to God in that place! On the last day, God will reveal how many Our Fathers and Hail Marys were said by the thousands of suffering prisoners of Communism throughout the world, while their tears and perspiration fell in large drops to water the ground and sanctify the earth. These prayers will one day convert the unbelievers.

Prayer was the one activity of the prisoners which the Communists could not stop. Communists fear prayer. They do not believe in God, but they are superstitious. They fear that prayer has a magic power to strengthen the soul of the believer. In every other respect prayer is meaningless to them. Their minds are closed against the reality of God's existence, their hearts shut to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For them there is no God, no grace, no spirit. It is difficult for them to give up their materialistic convictions.

Today in some Communist countries, the Catholic Church exists by means of compromise with the government. Religion is considered the private "problem" of the believer. The Church must never penetrate public life. All devotion must be kept private. In the prisons and labor camps this same prohibition against any outward expression of faith prevented us from gathering freely to pray. In spite of this, the bishops and priests and faithful did take the great risk of praying together. Some of the prisoners with whom we lived were traitors and persecutors of the Church; it was impossible to avoid them or to escape their spying on us because they lived with us day and night.

Occasionally we were able to celebrate a clandestine Mass. Through the kindness of several prisoners who worked in the camp warehouse (may God forever bless them!), we were able to get bread and wine. We took every precaution against detection. We chose a hiding place within the barracks and said Mass sitting on a low bunk while one of the prisoners watched for guards. We had no missal, altar, paten, or chalice. Our knees served as the altar, our handkerchiefs were the altar linens. Our cup was the chalice and our minds the prayer books. We knew the Mass prayers by heart and the Holy Spirit helped us to pray.

God provided us with a moment to consecrate our prison community life in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. We shared Holy Communion with hundreds of other prisoners who desired this sacred union in Christ and who sought His comfort and strength in this difficult hour. We were never so happy. We never felt the presence of God so intimately; and we never prayed more seriously, confidently, and successfully than in those prison barracks.

Once when we were caught while praying, a former Communist officer, Andreica, who was now a prisoner and a squealer, said to me: "I have finally caught you and I am

going to report you to the commander." The next day we were given a long talk about transgressions of the camp rule. "Do not turn the camp into a church," we were warned. How could this atheist understand that the members of the Church are the living Body of Christ!

Truly, the vast slave-labor camps on the Danube shores were an enormous sanctuary in which the sacrifices of the prisoners sowed the seed for a new Christian Romania of the future. Here was the true Church of the Romanian people, the Church of the martyrs, from which will come forth a new and glorious flowering of faith.

Easter 1962

The Lord God has given me
a well-trained tongue,
That I might know how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.
Morning after morning
he opens my ear that I may hear. . . .

—*Isaiah 50:4*

Because the winter of 1961-62 was severe, we prisoners could not work and were kept in our barracks. Because we were not working, our meal ration was reduced. While we stayed in the barracks there was more time to pray and to preach.

As spring came, the waters of the Danube flooded the surrounding fields. Our camp became a tiny island in a sea of water. Only a small dike around the colony spared us from the flood. As the waters subsided, some of the prisoners were sent out to cut trees. The clergy and intellectuals

were not given work. This was meant as a punishment, for it prevented us from earning a chance to send letters home.

Before Easter we scheduled spiritual retreats, one week for the laymen and another for the bishops and priests. We had three hours of conferences each day. During Holy Week itself, the priests took turns giving sermons. Father Augustine Prundus and I each preached two hours a day. We had a choir — and how beautifully they sang! One prisoner was appointed to be a lookout for the guards.

On Easter Sunday we reached the climax of our memorial of the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ. How close we felt to His Paschal Mystery and how deeply we united ourselves with Christ's obedient surrender to His Father's will! Our Easter ceremony was full of emotion. That morning, Father Augustine gave a sermon on the Resurrection. An Orthodox priest also spoke of our hope of victory in Christ. A teacher and layman, Demetrius Sarbu, a prison convert from atheism to Catholicism, addressed us in the following words:

Dear friends, today we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord. We know Him and we adore Him. Our weak and sinful persons are not worthy to contemplate Him in glory. Yet, in His mercy, we are called in faith and love. Regardless of our race, our beliefs, our social class, we are called to give thanks to Christ. After our weeks of discussion and prayer, we are now here in His presence, one with Him as He was one with His Father at the Last Supper, and as He is now one with His Father in heaven. I have often dreamt of the day when, in freedom — or even here in captivity — the citizens of our nation would pray and adore Christ with one heart, mind, and voice. My dream is now realized, at least for

this moment. Let all of us here make a vow to be one always, united through Christ in our very being.

These words, pronounced slowly and in a warm voice, touched our souls. We wept with happiness. Sarbu was a noble and great speaker. A former university professor of philosophy, he now taught his students in the prison camp. We were happy for him because through his years of suffering and meditation he found God through the Church, the sacrament of the unity of the human race.

Ecumenism

. . . All of you should be
like-minded, sympathetic,
loving toward one another,
kindly disposed, and humble.

— 1 Peter 3:8

For many years in the labor camps the Catholics and Orthodox and faithful of many other denominations lived together, sharing prayer, meditation, and dialogue. With the inspiring Orthodox monks from Vladimiresti, we discussed the obstacles to Christian unity and prayed for that unity. We were unaware that the Second Vatican Council was seeking this same goal; but in our own way we contributed to ecumenical progress.

One outstanding priest among us was Father Chiriac. A former pastor of an Orthodox church in Bucharest who later converted to Catholicism, he felt strongly about the union of the Churches with the pope. His approach was to compare the Church to the Kingdom of God in heaven:

"We pray every day the Our Father, in which we seek the Kingdom of God to be 'on earth as it is in heaven,' where there is one Father and Lord of all, one community of worshippers. Let us work for such unity on earth."

Throughout the persecution and in prison, many Orthodox priests and faithful shared in suffering for the faith. This Orthodox priest was an example to us; his witness in prison put to shame many Catholic priests who betrayed the union with Rome.

A Convert

The fool has said in his heart:

'There is no God above.'

Their deeds are corrupt, depraved. . . .

Will the evil-doers not understand?

They eat up my people

as though they were eating bread. . . .

— *Psalm 13:1, 4*

Demetrius Munteanu had been an interrogator for the government security agency. He was raised in the spirit of atheism and licentiousness, and had studied in Paris. A former Communist youth leader, he had visited the Soviet Union and enjoyed the esteem of Party leaders. He had lived a carefree life, blind to the needs and misfortunes of the Romanian people. In his own mind, the cruel tyranny of Communism was justified by the utopian illusion of eventual social justice.

One day he opened his eyes to the reality of Communist injustice, terror, and mistreatment of persons. He faced up to the vicious means employed by the government

to attain its objectives. He had to concede the total disregard for human life practiced by men who claimed to be bettering the human condition and perfecting mankind through an impersonal institution. He saw how Communism oppresses the human spirit. Finally, he was struck by the total dissonance between human happiness and deceitful Communist promises. In a memorandum to the government, he protested some of the abuses he saw. He criticized the vile means being employed in the present in the name of future benefits. But the Communists do not allow criticism. Their cause may be advanced by any method, but by no means may it be opposed.

Demetrius was arrested in 1956 and sent to the forced-labor camp. He was treated harshly and often made to work alone. After much torture and humiliation, he turned to God. One day he asked me to allow him to pray with our group. We said yes. He confessed his sins and became a convert to the Church. From that day his faith was his strength and consolation. He had a purpose in life. His case illustrates what is always true: Realistic and honest men cannot abide Communism for long; sooner or later they realize that the impersonal goals of that system cannot justify its manifold cruelties. The present time and real people are too important to be sacrificed in the name of a classless Communist utopia of the future.

There were other cases of conversion in prison. In distress, in suffering and abandonment, men find salvation in Christ, who is the only solution to the misery of injustice. The meaning of life is found in Christ and in no one else. Demetrius was able to celebrate this with us on Easter of 1962. That Easter was a unique celebration in my life. Because of that young man's sincere conversion, Easter was for me an unforgettably happy day in an unhappy condition.

The terror of camp life never ceased. In 1962, two of

the youths who had been with us in prison, and now in labor camp, attempted to escape while on the path to the labor site. A soldier caught sight of them. One of the escapees, John Biro, stopped and put up his hands in surrender. The guard promptly shot him in the back. The other lad was shot in the legs while running.

The soldier was worried that he had done wrong by shooting John, the lad who had surrendered, but the camp commander assured the soldier he had done right: He had given Communist justice. The commander made the prisoners watch while the boy's body was carried away. Then he delivered a speech about John Biro's mistake, warning all who had similar ideas. He said the republic must defend itself against any internal enemies.

House Arrest



. . . I was punished by the Lord,
but not doomed to die.

— *Psalms 117:18*

Two days after the murder of John Biro in the forced-labor camp, many of us were transferred to a district of Romania called "the House-Arrest Domain." This was comprised of over twenty villages taken over by the government to serve a new purpose.

The House-Arrest Domain was a residence for incorrigible political and religious prisoners, that is, those who had resisted reeducation. The Communists wanted to isolate us from Romanian society. The House-Arrest Domain was not a prison or a labor camp, but might be compared to the American Indian reservations of an earlier era, or to to-

day's Palestinian camps in Israel and the Middle East where displaced Arabs are detained. In these large-scale camps, the residents are under a sort of martial law. In Romania we could not go more than fifteen kilometers from our house, nor could we leave the Domain to go to our family home. Our relatives could visit us on occasion.

In the House-Arrest Domain we had jobs and were paid a small wage. I worked at construction jobs and sometimes cleaned out stables, poultry houses, and hog pens. I had a small garden. My neighbor, Father Basil Streza, was at first too weak to work, so I supported him, too, on my meager income while he recovered from the prison regimen and cooked our meals. Eventually he started doing light work in the vineyards. All of us in the Domain helped each other. We were worn out by our years of slave labor and suffering, yet we had a strong spirit which sprang from our common faith confirmed in battle. There were ten Catholic priests and a number of laity in my neighborhood. We formed a small parish of sorts and celebrated the Divine Liturgy together in a cottage under the leadership of Father George Patrascu.

Two remarkable persons I met and became friends with were Alexander and Emelia Bratu. We lived in the village of Latesti, where we gathered for liturgies and social life. Alexander is Orthodox, a lawyer and accountant who was active in the National Peasant Party, which the Communists suppressed. He has been in and out of jails and labor camps since 1947. His wife, Emelia, is a Catholic who had been married to Peter Vaida, a national patriot who was killed by the Communists while in prison. In 1977 the Bratus escaped from Romania and immigrated to New York City.

Mrs. Bratu is a highly gifted composer and pianist, perhaps the world's first woman opera composer of superior merit. Her marvelous opera *Ileana Cosanzeana* gives

voice to the ardent cry of a people longing to be freed from a tyrant. The opera is based on an ancient Romanian legend of a kidnapped princess who is rescued from a dragon's lair by a young hero, who also frees the slaves from the dragon's dungeon. The Communists, fully aware of the opera's inflammatory potential, have never permitted it to be performed in its complete form with libretto. Perhaps the operas of Emelia Bratu must wait for another season, another time in Romania.

I cannot forget the first reunion I had with my family after so many years in prisons and labor camps. My aged father, my brother Gregory, his wife, Maria, and their children were allowed to visit me in Latesti in the Domain. I cannot describe the emotion which flooded my heart when I embraced them. During those years of separation they never knew whether I was alive or dead. Once the authorities had told them I died and that they should come and identify the corpse. In fear and trembling, they went to the Oradea morgue only to discover that the body they viewed was not mine. Now they were meeting me, alive and unchanged from my true self.

Reflecting on the years of prison, my father remarked to me, "You must have been born under a bad zodiac!" I said to him, "Even if I had been born under any other sign, I would have acted as I have because all of us, especially the priests, have been called to defend our Church." "But," he asked, "what about those who escaped or who avoided arrest?" "That is their business," I replied. "I do not believe anyone was exempt from the struggle. If all of the priests had resisted along with the heroic bishops, the fate of our Church might have been different."

On May 9, 1963, while I was still at Latesti, I heard of the death of Bishop Alexander Rusu. Then, in January of 1964, my brother Gregory died. The security men would not permit me to leave the House-Arrest Domain to attend

his funeral. I know that the years of harassment he suffered hastened his death. When I was stationed at the parish in Oradea, he was part-time caretaker. When I was arrested, he and his family were persecuted. He almost lost his job on the railroad. Now, as I neared the end of my years in confinement, I was to be reunited with his family a few months after he died: On April 9, 1964, Nicolae Ceau-sescu, the newly installed premier of Romania, issued a decree of amnesty for all political prisoners. Thus, I was freed from the House-Arrest Domain.

Freedom

When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,
it seemed like a dream.

— *Psalm 125:1*

After sixteen years of confinement in prisons, in labor camps, and under house arrest (except for the ten-month interval in 1955-56), I was now a free man. I felt almost reborn. Only someone who has been imprisoned for a long time can imagine how I felt. The government forbade us to speak about our prison experiences. Before we were set free, a security agent told us: "You must try to accustom yourself to the accomplishments of the Communist government and cooperate for the welfare of the Romanian people. You will abstain from any criticism or activity against the present social system. Otherwise we will investigate you and put you in places worse than you were before."

As we were dismissed, a security agent pointed with pride to the countryside and boasted to me, "See what Communism has done for the people: new roads, modern

farms and factories, and electricity everywhere." To him I said, "But show me a *man!*"

When I arrived at my home village after so many years of absence, I found what seemed to be a new world. The old people were intimidated and told me: "Father, all things have changed. We can do nothing. We are old and have abandoned ourselves to the will of God. We have lost all our possessions and are collective farmers. All belongs to the state; we are mere slaves who must keep our mouths shut — or face prison."

I stayed at the house of my deceased brother. His oldest son, John, nineteen, told me: "Stay with us. I earn a living by my factory work. If we do not die of hunger, neither will you." In 1965 I looked for a job in the nearby town of Satu Mare. For four years I put in applications but could not get work. I even applied to the general director of unemployment in Bucharest. Several times I was hired for a few weeks and then fired.

I tried to join the small Latin rite, which was still in existence, but the vicar in Satu Mare told me: "The government absolutely forbids me to accept you into the Latin clergy. Those of us who are Hungarian, German, or Armenian and belong to the Latin rite are not allowed to interfere in the Romanian situation. The government considers the 1948 unification of Churches to be the final solution."

As soon as I was able to get in touch with other priests and friends in northern Romania, I learned the actual condition of our Church. Some Catholic priests were working in parishes under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox bishops. Other Catholic priests were working at civil jobs. Bishop Julius Hirtea of Oradea advised me to abstain from organizing any religious activity because that would again expose me to arrest and conviction. Bishop Hirtea's opinion was that we should pray, confide in God, and hope that

the government would annul decree No. 358 of December 1, 1948, which had closed our Church.

I knew then as I know now — some fourteen years later — that the Communist government would not repair the fault, the crime committed against our Church. Nor would the officials of the Orthodox Church be eager to return what they had taken from us. It was clear that, for some time to come, there would be no religious freedom and no chance to restore our Church.

At the time the amnesty was granted, in 1964, I had heard from Father Streza that according to United States law anyone born in America could reapply for American citizenship. Both of us had been born in the United States: My parents had immigrated to Pennsylvania and later returned to Romania after my birth. I filed an application at the American Embassy in Bucharest and received my American citizenship papers. I applied at once to the Romanian government for a passport and a visa to go to the United States. A year later I got an answer: No passport or visa would be issued. Not wanting to give up, I reapplied.

In the meantime, needing an income, I utilized my linguistic background and began giving private lessons in Latin, Italian, French, German, and English. From home to home I rode my bicycle and gave lessons. After one year of conducting these tutorials, I put in an application for the second time at a school. I had heard there was an opening for a language teacher. I had to get approval from the security to take such a job.

When I went to see the security officer, he mentioned my private tutoring, which had been observed by the security agency. I said to him, "Thank you. I slept well at night, knowing that I was so carefully watched and no one could harm me." He laughed. "We have no objection to your application to teach at this time," he said. "The Church is something of the past, obsolete and retrograde, which has

finished its mission in history. We do not need her. We raise our children without God or the Church. I was once a Catholic, but now I have no faith.

"We do not seek to change your convictions. We will show you our appreciation and trust. You are an educated man, still young and capable of working for the welfare of the people. We understand you and ask you to understand us. What is past is forever over. I approve your application. To show you the confidence of the Communist regime, we will let you teach — on the condition that you conform to the official program of the Ministry of National Education.

"You must never utter a word about religion or even allude to religious matters. You may not say one word about God, Christ, or the Church — even should the students ask about these topics. Do you promise that?"

"Yes," I said. Then I left and received an appointment teaching foreign languages twenty-four hours a week at a junior high school. That was in the fall of 1968.

I was happy to be in touch with the young people, and they joyfully received me. They found out that I was a priest and that I had been in prison. After my first year, the security chief, John Hontau, called me to his office and asked me many questions about the past school year. Then he surprised me by gravely saying: "I am glad you like your work, but I must point out that you did not keep your promise." Startled, I said, "I did my best to faithfully do my duties; I complied with all of your conditions." "No," he insisted, "you did not keep your promises." I tried to think of what he meant. "Do you remember that you promised us last year not to tell the students anything about Christ or the Church?" "Yes, and I kept that promise." "No," he said. "Do you recall that one day a boy asked you how to say *Jesus Christ* in English, and on another day a girl asked you how to say *church* in English? You answered, although you promised us not to talk about religion."

I did remember the instances. At first I had refused to answer the children, but when they persisted in asking me, I told them. My only response to his accusation was silence. I was amazed that they even had informants among the students. But such is the Communist world.

I continued to teach in the school and to tutor in languages in the evenings. I joined the teachers' choir and enjoyed this singing company. Almost every week the members of the local Communist Party had meetings for the teachers, from which I was excluded. After three years of teaching, however, they invited me to come. On this occasion I was completely enlightened regarding their true goals. They talked openly, saying that the teachers had an obligation to teach atheism, to eradicate any belief in God, the Church, the soul, or heavenly life. The teachers were told to use materialistic interpretations of science to show the nonexistence of God or a heavenly kingdom. Teachers were given orders to schedule extracurricular activities on Sundays so that students could not attend Mass. Religion was to be seen as a private "problem."

At this time security called me in for a conference at which they insolently proposed to recognize me as a full member of the teaching staff on the condition that I become an informer against my fellow teachers and also report on the activities of the remaining priests of the Byzantine Catholic Church. I refused their offer.

I Have a Home



You are the helper of the orphan.

— *Psalm 9:14*

In the meantime, I learned of the death of our last titular bishop, Cardinal Julius Hossu. During this time I felt like a spiritual orphan since my Mother Church was

suppressed in the catacombs. I knew, however, that Romanian immigrants in the United States had established Byzantine-rite parishes. My hope was to finally obtain permission to immigrate to America, where the Church was still free and where I would be able to exercise my priestly ministry. Therefore, I persisted in my requests for a passport and a visa.

From 1965 until 1969 I applied, always getting a negative answer. But in 1969 President Nixon visited Romania and asked that individuals who had American citizenship be allowed to emigrate. Once again I went to the government with my application for a passport. After another year of waiting, on October 10, 1970, the government finally granted me a passport and a visa.

I had also applied for permission to take with me my sister-in-law and her children. The government refused to grant them passports or visas. Back in 1964, because of my brother's death and my release from prison, I had been made their legal guardian. I was most persistent in asking the Romanian Communist government for permission to take my brother's family with me to America. Finally, on February 19, 1971, after six years of applications and waiting, I got passports and visas for all of us: myself, my sister-in-law Maria, and for three of her children — Maria, George, and Octavian. That very day we left Romania for the United States.

We came to the Romanian-American neighborhood in Aurora, Illinois, where I got a job in a factory in order to support the family. I continually applied for a position as a parish priest. It had been twenty-two years since I was able to exercise my pastoral ministry. Finally, after three years, I was accepted by a local Latin-rite diocese. Bishop Romeo Blanchette received me into the diocese of Joliet in Illinois. I am no longer an orphan; I have a spiritual father. Because there are no Romanian Catholic parishes of the Byzantine

rite in the Joliet diocese, the Vatican gave me an indult (permission) to say Holy Mass in the Latin rite. I will always belong to the beautiful, symbolic, and mystical Byzantine rite. On occasion I celebrate the Divine Liturgy according to St. John Chrysostom. My spiritual mother, the Catholic Church, is like a marvelous prism which displays the light of Christ in a splendid rainbow of diverse people and rites.

Although the United States of America is the land of my birth and my present home, and although I was raised from childhood in Romania and lived there for fifty years, my true home is the Heavenly Kingdom of God, which begins on earth in the Catholic Church.

Under the leadership of the pope, we are all part of a worldwide Eucharistic Community. In the Church all are equal partakers of the Divine Nature and share in the seven sacraments. It is consoling to share the blessings, graces, and gifts of the Mystical Body of Christ, to participate in the joys of the Bride of Christ, to live among the People of God, and to be sheltered under the roof of the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Through the Church, not only we who believe but all mankind enjoys the power of her intercession with God.

I thank God for my joys and I pray for the freedom of the Church in Romania, for the restoration of our Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite. My mind and heart are always with the persecuted members of Christ throughout the world and, especially, with the Catholics in my beloved and unhappy Romania. I belong to them, I pray for them, and I wish I could make them know how I fight for their freedom and that I will never forget them as long as I live.



THE
PITESTO
BRAIN-
WASHING
EXPERI-
MENT

T. CASALETTO

Reeducation



Like my brothers, I offer up my body and my life for our ancestral laws, imploring God to show mercy soon to our nation. . . .

— 2 Maccabees 7:37

“I have a doctoral degree in Communism, and I will show you my diploma.” So spoke Reverend Richard Wurmbbrand, the Lutheran minister who was ransomed from a Romanian Communist prison after fourteen years of suffering for Christ. Testifying before the United States Congress, Reverend Wurmbbrand took off his shirt and displayed the ugly marks of torture on his body. “When Christ was faced by doubting Thomas,” he said, “He simply showed him His wounds.”

The school of Communist reeducation often hands out such diplomas. When Communists attain power in a nation, they use any means to transform the entire society and mold the people into Soviet Man. As a totalitarian government, the Communist regime in Romania wanted total control over each citizen’s loyalty and very personality.

In 1948 the government arrested a thousand students at university centers — in Bucharest, Iasi, and Blaj — and put them through the infamous Pitesti experiment, engineered by Moscow directors who sought to perfect methods of brainwashing. After the experiment ended, but while the boys were still in the Romanian prison system in 1952, an inmate of one of the prisons pieced together the incredible story from various firsthand accounts, which he later assembled into his book, *The Anti-Humans*. This chapter is based on that book. All indented quotations appearing in this chapter are from *The Anti-Humans* by D. Bacu (307 pages, \$5.50 prepaid) and are used by permission

of the present publishers of that work: T.L.C., P.O. Box 3, Monticello, Illinois 61859. Bacu writes:

Other prisoners, transferred from the forced-labor camps on the Danube-Black Sea Canal, brought news that increased my suspicions regarding an entire category of prisoners who had once been most dedicated and most faithful defenders of the nation's freedom — the student body. Accusations were brought against them which to the unknowing observer seemed utterly revolting. . . . The "re-educated students," they said, beat them, denounced them, were spies for the secret police, increased the work norms, and tortured any who could not meet them. . . .

But further news, instead of refuting what I hoped was not true, actually confirmed aspects which entered the domain of the tragic. This time it was a student who spoke to me. I had known him in years past at the Polytechnical School in Bucharest. At first he would not speak; he was afraid of everyone. . . . It was from him that I found out . . . about the "unmaskings." All the students who were at Pitesti passed through these "unmaskings." He told me . . . that something terrifying took place there. They were tortured in such a manner that all — absolutely all — students became informers, so that they were robbed of their manly nature and became simple robots in the hands of political officers. They were depersonalized.

"Who did the torturing?"

"The 're-educated' ones."

"Who were these 're-educated' ones?"

"Other students who preceded us in 're-education,' in 'unmasking,' as it is also called."

Another prisoner Bacu met told him in an impassive voice, while he avoided looking at him:

"Beware of me! I am a student. And this ought to tell you much. Beware not only of me but of all students, especially of those who are your friends. They can hurt you much more because you cannot perceive behind the mask each of us wears the vast abyss that now separates us from what we were not too long ago, from what we wanted to be."

"Why do you warn me?"

"Because, if the 'unmaskings' are going to be repeated, I will not be able to keep quiet upon questioning, and I am afraid that you would talk before I do. An unconfessed detail can cost one his life. . . . We have become more cowardly than you can imagine."

One young man, formerly a student of literature, told Bacu of his experiences at Pitesti. Bacu records the aftermath of that conversation:

When the young man finished his narrative — this was several years after the "unmaskings" — an indescribable despair could be read on his face. Then he concluded: "By an unimaginable fatality, we became the gravediggers of our own aspirations, of our own souls. For never again will we be able to raise our heads. Christians once died happily for their faith. But we, also Christians, could not attain that

happiness. We became the tools of the Communism that we heartily detested. . . . It was as if Satan had grabbed us from the hands of God. . . . I may seem to be whole, but in reality I am only the wreck of myself, discredited in the eyes of my friends, and despised by my enemies. And yet, in essence, we were guilty of nothing, really."

There are few published reports about the Pitesti torture: Those who survived and escaped Romania now become nauseated and unnerved if they try to recall the experience. They cannot finish telling their gruesome story.

The cold-blooded and unnatural crime of Pitesti is like the immoral behavior happening today in Western societies, as well as behind the iron curtain, where man himself is considered the supreme being — no longer created by God, but a creative divinity himself who can do as he pleases. The irony of this form of atheism is that, instead of elevating the dignity of man, its effect is to reduce the human condition to less than that of an animal. The antihuman Pitesti experiment was inflicted on Romanian youths in the name of Communist *liberation of the people*. The human cost of this liberation is a slaughter of innocent persons so massive in this century that one is forced to conclude

. . . either that man has come to feel the necessity to kill as intensely as he has felt the desire to live, or that through a logical perversion of a desire to accomplish an ideal, he can easily and with scarcely a twinge of conscience be made to murder the very person to whom he once intended to give happiness. . . .

Brainwashing is only one species in the larger class of persuasion. Lenin once said, "The bolder the lie, the bet-

ter" — because people fall for the most daring deceits. These masters of deceit use lies in the forms of ideology and mass-media propaganda to undermine nations and then to control captive peoples.

Propaganda is the preferred weapon of Communist psychological warfare. In the cases of individuals who resist — leaders who are immune to propaganda and bribery — the Communists deal with them by using a more effective tool: brainwashing.

Brainwashing is the frightening process by which a human being is forcibly transformed into Soviet Man. Brainwashing is a total assault on the human person. Commenting on the infamous Pitesti experiment, Conrad W. Baars, M.D., said: "The satanic rape of the psyches of a thousand Christian boys is a thousand times worse than the horrors I witnessed as a prisoner in the concentration camp of Buchenwald." Brainwashing aims to violate the mind and will of the individual; it seeks to turn a human person into either a cowering animal or a programmed robot. This vicious antihumanism is Communism's legacy to the human race!

Brainwashing began when the Soviets exploited the behavioral psychology of the brilliant Russian researcher Ivan Pavlov. The Bolsheviks in Moscow provided Pavlov with financial support and Pavlov gave them the results of his studies on the control of behavior in animals. Soviet psychologists later applied Pavlov's discoveries to man. The Communist Party used Pavlov's methods to extract information and confessions from prisoners in order to conduct public trials at which political prisoners customarily repented of their "crimes" against Communism. The most infamous example of this was the show trial of Cardinal Jozsef Mindzenty.

The Moscow directors of research planned the Pitesti brainwashing experiments from 1949 to 1951. The aim of

their study was to test the power of brainwashing to change the loyalties of individuals. Back in those days, the technique was crude compared to the more sophisticated methods of today, when the brainwashers have recourse to a new arsenal of drugs and devices.

In Red China, brainwashing has developed as a group process — a social duty. This approach is keyed to the Chinese society-centered mentality. A number of Catholic priests have returned from Red China and can speak from painful firsthand experience of brainwashing. Vivid accounts of such experiences are to be found in such books as *Four Years in a Red Hell* (Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1956) by Father Harold Rigney, S.V.D., and in *The Communist Persuasion* (New York, P.J. Kenedy, 1956) by Father Eleutherius Winance, O.S.B.

The Chinese emphasis on social conformity was blended with brainwashing and later used in North Korea to break down prisoners of war. The aim was to demoralize the opponent by turning heroes into traitors. Among the South Korean prisoners held by the Communists was Sun Myung Moon.

Some time after his eventual release, Moon started a supposedly anti-Communist religious cult. One wonders whether Moon's Unification Church employs Communist-inspired techniques of brainwashing — purged of overt violence, of course, and camouflaged as religious formation — to control the loyalties of the young people who follow him. False prophets like the Reverend Moon are not entirely to blame for the cultism on which they thrive; the increase in cults is clearly linked to the spiritual void in contemporary life. Today, through the influence of television and other mass media, a form of brainwashing touches virtually all of social life.

Propaganda and brainwashing affect the normal person; individuals who are out of contact with reality are less

attentive and, therefore, less reachable. Thus it was that, in 1948, Communists in Romania subjected intelligent, athletic, emotionally and morally stable youths to a terrifying brainwashing experiment at Pitesti Prison. Although Catholic and Orthodox youths were in the minority at the colleges, they were the only students who were arrested. Only these Christian youths — especially Catholic boys — were forced into this hell of physical and moral violence. Even after the experiment had ended, its horror showed in their faces:

It was night. Now and then the moon shone through the car window, lighting the faces of the three. They were strange faces. I had passed through many prisons in Romania; I had met thousands of prisoners, but never had my eyes rested on such faces. Beneath the pallor common to all prisoners, their faces reflected an exceptional physical weakness. And over the emaciated faces a shadow of terror which stemmed from some uncommon experience — gave all three a frightening appearance. When, late in the night, the student who was handcuffed to me fell asleep from exhaustion and rested his head on my shoulder, I could no longer suppress a reaction to the fear that overcame me; I moved my shoulder to wake him up. His head, illuminated by the light of the moon, appeared to be that of the corpse of one who had died surprised by a horror so hideous that it had accompanied him into the world beyond. In former times he had been a swimming champion and a man of courage.

That encounter in a train compartment moved D. Bacu, who was also a prisoner of the Communists, to discover the facts of Pitesti and later write them in his book,

The Anti-Humans. Not one of approximately a thousand youths was able to resist the brainwashing techniques that had been perfected by years of research in Soviet laboratories. Widespread propaganda represents Soviet psychiatric abuse as simply an extreme reaction to political dissent, but the facts of Pitesti expose the deliberate, anti-human and anti-Christian intent and method of Communist brainwashing. The motto at Pitesti was: Their destruction through themselves. A man divided against himself cannot stand. Pitesti induced a sort of schizoid state in which the former self and the new self were in conflict, each striving for possession of a tortured psyche.

Stages of Brainwashing

For three months, each group of young men was put through an experiment in which they were conditioned to obey the will of their new masters. The aim was to stimulate in these young men a fear so intense that their very capacity for freedom of action would be destroyed. The Pitesti method may be described as an attempt to induce a fear neurosis in the youths (See Anna A. Terruwe, M.D., and Conrad W. Baars, M.D., "The Repressive Neurosis," in *Loving and Curing the Neurotic*, New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington, 1972, pp. 85-90). In this way the commands could remain effective long after the experiment was completed.

Some students, out of despair, tried to stop the agony by provoking beatings, hoping to be killed by a misplaced blow. The torturers, however, were strictly forbidden to hit the students in any spot where the blow could be fatal. Nevertheless, about fifteen of the students died of the beatings, and, despite the security measures, a few students

managed to commit suicide. Those who did not die were forced to go on living a nightmare in which resistance was futile. This captivity was a cause of despair. Many of the students

. . . were oppressed by an unexplainable sense of resignation that seemed to create a climate for accepting any kind of torture as a sort of deserved punishment. . . .

How cunning were these tormentors who exploited man's moral motives: our sense of guilt, our need to repent, and our need for absolution.

There are three stages in the brainwashing process: punishment and humiliation, confession and disavowal of old loyalties, indoctrination and conversion to a new loyalty. If you remove the elements of force and terror, these stages are basic to any change of heart. Father L. Triviere has observed how the Red Chinese have distorted the process of Christian conversion by turning it inside out (see Jean Monsterleet, *Martyrs in China*, Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956, pp. 254-257). The Red Chinese approach to brainwashing involves an *examination of conscience* in which the *penitent* admits his *sins against the people*; after the *confession* of these crimes, there is a *penance*, which is followed by a *reintegration into the community*.

Not in morbid curiosity but with eyes open to the reality of evil, let us examine the three stages in this dialectic of self-contradiction. These three trials are symbolic of evil at its zenith and man at his weakest. And although man fails, the God-man, Jesus, overcame the temptations in the desert. Jesus was able to fulfill the command which men have failed to obey: "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). His victory is our only hope.

• Pain and Fear: The First Temptation

Jesus answered him, "Scripture has it,
'Not on bread alone shall man live.'"

— Luke 4:4

Pitesti, a maximum security prison, was built in the early 1900s. Outside the town limits, far from any homes, the spot was well suited for torture because no one could hear the screams from within its walls. The Communists named Pitesti "The Center for Student Reeducation." The new masters wanted each of the students to hand over to them "all his heart."

At first the youths were classified into four groups according to their degrees of resistance to Communism. To do this the Communists had made careful case studies of their backgrounds, political activities, and religious commitments. Those thought easiest to break underwent the experiment first to guarantee the success of the initial run. These students were taken to a room in the prison. There they were surrounded by another group of youths. This second group had been given the alternative of collaborating in the torture or becoming its victims. These recruited assassins then began to accuse the students of harboring an antiworker mentality:

"We . . . have decided to rehabilitate ourselves in the eyes of the workers' regime, for we realize that what we did was against the interests of the working people and the Party. . . . You are an obstacle to our desired rehabilitation because of your antiworker attitude. . . . Renounce your previous convictions and . . . join our group. If you will not . . . we will use against you all means at our disposal."

At a given signal they pulled out hidden clubs and started to beat the students. The prison guards joined in this attack. Although the students fought back valiantly, they were outnumbered. They were beaten into unconsciousness that day; for several days afterward the merciless beatings were repeated. In the following weeks, they were subjected to an exhausting regimen of labor as well as endlessly repeated physical exercises. The exercises often involved cleaning the floor with a rag that was clenched between the student's teeth. Lest this task be done too slowly, another student — one of the "rehabilitated" ones — would ride on the lad's back, goading him on. At night, the boys slept on cots. Other students — those who had already been through the experiment — sat at the foot of each cot. The moment a student appeared to fall off into a deep sleep, the boy at the end of the cot was required to strike him hard on the soles of his bare feet with a rubber hose. Each night was an agony during which the student anxiously tried *not* to fall asleep. Mortally weary and in constant fear of pain, the student soon reached a state of helplessness and passive desperation.

In this first stage of the brainwashing, the experimenters arranged to have intense pain sensations accompany eating and drinking. At mealtimes the students were made to kneel on the floor with their hands behind their backs and lap up scalding-hot food from bowls as fast as they could. The same bowls also contained the students' feces. Eating became a source of humiliation as well as of pain. The senses of taste, smell, and touch were repeatedly associated with pain.

At times the student was isolated in such a way that he was deprived of all normal sense stimuli. To further confuse and disorient him, he was restricted in motor activity as well as deprived of sleep.

It became very difficult for the student to keep his

mental balance. Tortured, starved, sleepless, terrified, trapped, alone, at the edge of death but not allowed to die, the student at last reached a point at which he would plead to give incriminating evidence against himself. No longer able to deny the repeated accusations of crimes against the Communist state, he vigorously denounced himself, even fabricating details of imaginary crimes to escape for a moment the constant torture.

• The Unmasking: The Second Temptation

Next the devil took him to the holy city, set him on the parapet of the temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. Scripture has it: 'He will bid his angels take care of you. . . .'"

— *Matthew 4:5-6*

After a month and a half of torments, the student was completely vulnerable. Penetrating the depths of the student's personality, the experimenters now demanded that he deny his identity as a worthwhile human being and "expose" himself as a criminal monster. He was forced to distort his entire personal history. The unmasking took the form of a written confession of his "crimes." The student was required to dwell at length on every misdeed he had ever done prior to his arrest — even things he intended to do or merely thought about doing. Nothing was to be omitted. The experimenters probed the most intimate recesses of the student's soul, violating his conscience while he was helpless in mind and will. They quite systematically sought to abolish everything that gave firm anchorage to the youth so that they could possess "all his soul."

The student had to actively deny his faith by grossly blaspheming the Eucharist. The student was forced to scream sacred melodies in which vile words replaced hymns; do degrading genital acts and eat feces. This obscene parody was intended to transform the Mass into a demonic drama of evil and hate.

The student was forced to break away from his family and country, from all he had learned at home and school. Parents and teachers had to be slandered and degraded. The student had to picture his mother as an object of filth and scorn, a prostitute who gave birth to a moral monster. His father, too, had to be seen as a thief and a cheat. Everyone had to be portrayed in detail with incredible vulgarity. National heroes of the pre-Communist era had to be cast as traitors with the basest motivations.

Now the student was forced to deny his own identity (his 'mask') by writing a false autobiography in which he repudiated his inner beliefs, thoughts, and former goodness. He had to defame himself and draw from his earliest memories a negative theme showing his extreme vices, deficiencies, and vile sins. His moral decadence had to be shown by inventing a history of sexual deviance, which he in time accepted into his subconscious mind. At this point the experimenters achieved the goal of the unmasking: making the lie so real to the victim that he forgot everything that formerly made sense.

At this vulnerable moment the sudden blow was struck branding the flinching youth with a new identity.

His chaotic mental state and the unreal coordinates along which his consciousness moved throughout the months of torture turned lies into truth and truth into lies, much as the body gradually accustoms itself to narcotic poisons and develops a dependence on them.

As long as his nervous system responded to only rational commands, the student could maintain a normal line of behavior. But the moment fear altered this subordination, his nervous system became his mind's greatest enemy. Any kind of reaction was possible when the entire organism was set quivering, as if touched by fire, by the appearance of the bludgeon. . . . If natural reticence and dignity endeavored still to hide something . . . , his nervous system betrayed him unequivocally. It was at this moment the fusion took place, the hoped-for result of all the planning by the experimenters: the complete reversal, for an indeterminate time, of the values in which the student had always believed.

From then on for an indefinite period, the student would see the world as a god with two faces; the first, which he had thought was real, had now become unreal; the second, fantastic and ugly beyond any previous imaginings, now had become real. . . .

The lie, becoming more and more dominant as truth was denied, invaded the entire consciousness of the individual, who finally accepted it as a biological necessity for survival.

Yet, deep down, the youth's ego, buried by the force of instinctive drives, still groped for the truth. He had been shattered like a broken mirror, and the hideous image which the experimenters had forced him to reconstruct from the pieces drove him to seek a new source of security. Now he was dependent on the experimenters' lies.

• A New Loyalty: The Third Temptation

The devil then . . . displayed before him all the kingdoms of the world . . . promising, "All those will I bestow on

you if you prostrate yourself in honor before me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! Scripture has it: 'You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore.' "

— *Matthew 4:8-10*

The brainwashers had achieved power over the student. He identified with his new masters and transferred to them his loyalty. A slave to their commands, he became a subject craving the reward they could bestow — relief from pain and fear. Half crazed with fear, having regressed to this infantile state of dependence, he became their puppet on strings, jerking at their whim.

The first task the experimenters exacted of the student victim was to immediately activate his new persona. He was now to prove his loyalty to them by a final act of self-destruction and hypocrisy. It was not enough that he had, as it were, thrown himself down to destruction; now he must give to his new masters "all his strength." Those who had undergone the unmasking now had to administer the same treatment to the next group of students. They were required to inflict torment with unrestrained violence: Should one of the reeducated ones be seen being lenient in the beatings he gave, or being careless in depriving the victims of sleep; or if he were suspected of accepting a confession without a maximum of debasement, this relapse into mercy was viewed as a breach of his new loyalty — an act of treason showing sympathy for the enemy and cause to send him once again through the terror of the unmasking. When the students were forced to inflict this torture on others, or simply to witness the torture, their imaginations fantastically exaggerated the pain. This had a stronger psychological effect than if they themselves were being struck. The Communists have found this feature of

brainwashing so useful that they have given it a special name: *watching the spectacle*. One student described this to Bacu:

"Watching others being tortured, I had the impression that I had been bound and placed on a powder keg, and that a madman constantly circled around the keg with a lighted candle. I expected the flame to touch the powder at any moment, and that the keg with me on it would be blown up. That could have happened at any time; in other words, if a re-educator suddenly took the notion that I had been given too light a punishment for my suspected guilt, he could have transferred me from 'spectator' to 'sufferer' on the spot — the equivalent of setting off the powder with the candle flame."

At Pitesti and in the prison at Gherla, new prisoners, students of high-school age, became victims of the brainwashing and were added to the ranks of the reeducated students. The first victims, the college-age students, were used to trap the younger students. The older students would approach the teenagers as big brothers who sought to enlist their juniors in a secret, anti-Communist movement of a patriotic and religious nature. The imprisoned boys of high-school age enthusiastically and sincerely responded. They were enlisted as followers of St. Michael the Archangel in the battle of good against evil. The experimenters, disciples of Lucifer, must have taken pride in this particularly cruel deception. Their attitude was: "The greater the height, the more absolute the fall." The new assassins were planted in the cells of the younger students, where they deliberately renewed old acquaintances and friendships. The reeducated ones were then used to confront the new students and, by a sudden betrayal, stun

them into confessing anti-Communist crimes so that they could be sentenced to years of imprisonment and hard labor in camps. Often the stage of gaining confidence was used as a preparation for the brainwashing itself.

It always began by gathering the new boys into a room. At a signal, the reeducated ones pulled out concealed cudgels and demonstrated their new loyalty by ferociously beating the high-school students.

Imagine the collapse produced in the soul of a boy less than twenty years old when his counselor, his model of honor, courage, and integrity but a few days earlier, turned out to be his betrayer.

The reeducated victim emerged rigid, mechanically efficient, incapable of emotional rapport, and pathologically fearful. *He himself was now an antihuman.*

Like unleashed mad dogs, these reeducated students were sent to the prisons and forced-labor camps, where the entire life and work of the prisoners fell under their control. The reeducated ones were willing to carry out fantastic orders. They terrorized the inmates of the prisons and camps, circulating among the prisoners, eavesdropping, and gathering information. Everyone was kept in a state of anxiety about what he said and did. At the labor camps, the reeducated ones were responsible for seeing that each day's work norm was done. They drove the workers harshly, pushing some to death from exhaustion. The prisoners did not know what had been done to these students to make them behave so cruelly; therefore, the students were hated and resented by the prisoners.

Eventually word leaked out about the Pitesti experiments, and the prisoners began to realize what had been inflicted upon the students. Once the experiment ended, the students could begin to take their first faltering foot-

steps on the long and painful journey back from hell. Each of the young men was crossing

. . . a real abyss between what he had been and what he had become. The unmaskings left scars on the surface, and down deep there was still an open, bleeding wound.

So long as the danger of another unmasking persisted . . . fear, deception and pain . . . became allies in psychopathic states, making a man his own enemy, making him frantically repress and strangle his own mind and soul to keep his tormented body alive.

The great obstacle . . . was the haunting fear, locked into every fiber of the unmasked victim, that any day the reeducation terror might be resumed.

To the other inmates of the prisons, these reeducated students no longer seemed to be of the human species, but mutants incapable of human communication.

Breaching this impenetrable wall could be attempted only by those who had been able to maintain their souls intact and had, furthermore, a compassion which they wished to share with those so desperately in need of it.

On a one-to-one basis, the prisoners forgave the students and began to show them acts of personal kindness. They made the students once again feel their own goodness (see Conrad W. Baars, M.D., and Anna A. Teruwe, M.D., *Healing the Unaffirmed: Recognizing the Deprivation Neurosis*, New York: Alba House, 1976, pp 73-119). Through emotional affirmation they offered the students a healing touch:

Gradually, slowly, the concepts and values that had been destroyed by the re-educators were revived . . . as individuals were shown an affectionate sympathy and understanding of their suffering, and were convinced of our desire to do the right thing.

The students began to believe that times had changed, that they might venture back to normality without fear of another unmasking.

In addition to alleviating the fear of another unmasking, we had to destroy also their conviction that Communist Russia was invincible. . . . The re-educated had lost all power of discernment. Their only truth was that which was decreed by the Communist Party's official paper. . . . Attempts to refute with reasoning and argument the lies that had paralyzed their ability to think were worse than useless. We found that a well-placed joke or witticism accomplished more good than an hour of argument.

A soul that has been submerged for years has more need for a warm word, we found, than for logical explanation; like a plant kept in the dark, it needs the sun. . . .

The majority of the students had had a faith in God so strong that it survived deep within them in spite of every attempt to destroy it, and when circumstances made it possible, it re-appeared as if from hibernation and proved to be the determining factor in their recovery.

Then, as at the end of Jesus' last temptation, "the devil left him, and angels came and waited upon him" (Matthew 9:11).

The Antihuman

As a psycho-political tool, the purpose of the brainwashing was to change the convictions of a thousand students who had been hostile to the regime. But, on a deeper level, the experimenters were seeking to determine with scientific accuracy the extent to which a man could be robbed of his God-given personality and molded into a monster of deceit and evil. It is believed that the experimenters deliberately stopped the punishments in order to assess the degree of permanence of the brainwashing. The eventual recovery of a majority of the victims proved that the transformation was not irreversible. Perhaps, this side of death, the recovery of the student's own personality is the most astounding proof that each man has a unique, immortal soul.

The work of the experimenters has been described not as *inhuman* but as *antihuman* because of the dominant note of assault upon the human personality. This element of the Pitesti experiments is evidence of the real source behind the power at work. One of the victims, Roman Braga, a young man who survived the ordeal and became an Orthodox priest, wrote in 1978: "I think that there is no other mind than Lucifer's capable of imagining the Pitesti system that kept a man suspended between to be and not to be, at the limits of madness and reality, tortured by the idea that he might disappear — no, not as a physical entity, but as a *spiritual person*." Satan cannot attack God directly, but he tries to destroy God's masterpiece of creation, the human person. Militant efforts to deny God's existence are also an assault on man. As Jacques Maritain prophetically wrote in 1946: "How could God still live in a world from which His image, that is to say the free and spiritual personality of man, is in the act of being effaced?" (*Integral*

Humanism, Notre Dame, Ind.: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1973, p. 34).

By attacking his human identity and religious faith, the experimenters sought to destroy the student's natural life as well as his supernatural life. The blasphemous elements of the brainwashing were aimed chiefly against participation in the Eucharist. The enemies of the Church wanted to pervert man's transformation in Christ into a liturgy of evil, like a Black Mass at which the Body of Christ is desecrated. Here the members of Christ's Body, these young men, were desecrated.

The agent of the Soviets was a brute named Eugene Turcanu, who personally conducted the torture of the students. By a twist of Communist logic, he himself was put on trial in 1954 and condemned to death. Because he obeyed the directors and ran this antihuman experiment, he was charged with committing "crimes against humanity which discredited the Communist regime in the eyes of the people and world opinion." The crime was that anyone might think less of Communism! By condemning him publicly, the Communists tried to show their sense of justice. The trial of Turcanu was supposed to erase the guilt of the Soviets.

The prison site in Romania where such vicious, anti-human crimes were committed was wracked by an earthquake on March 6, 1977. The quake's epicenter was Pitesti: Even nature was horrified at the Pitesti experiments.

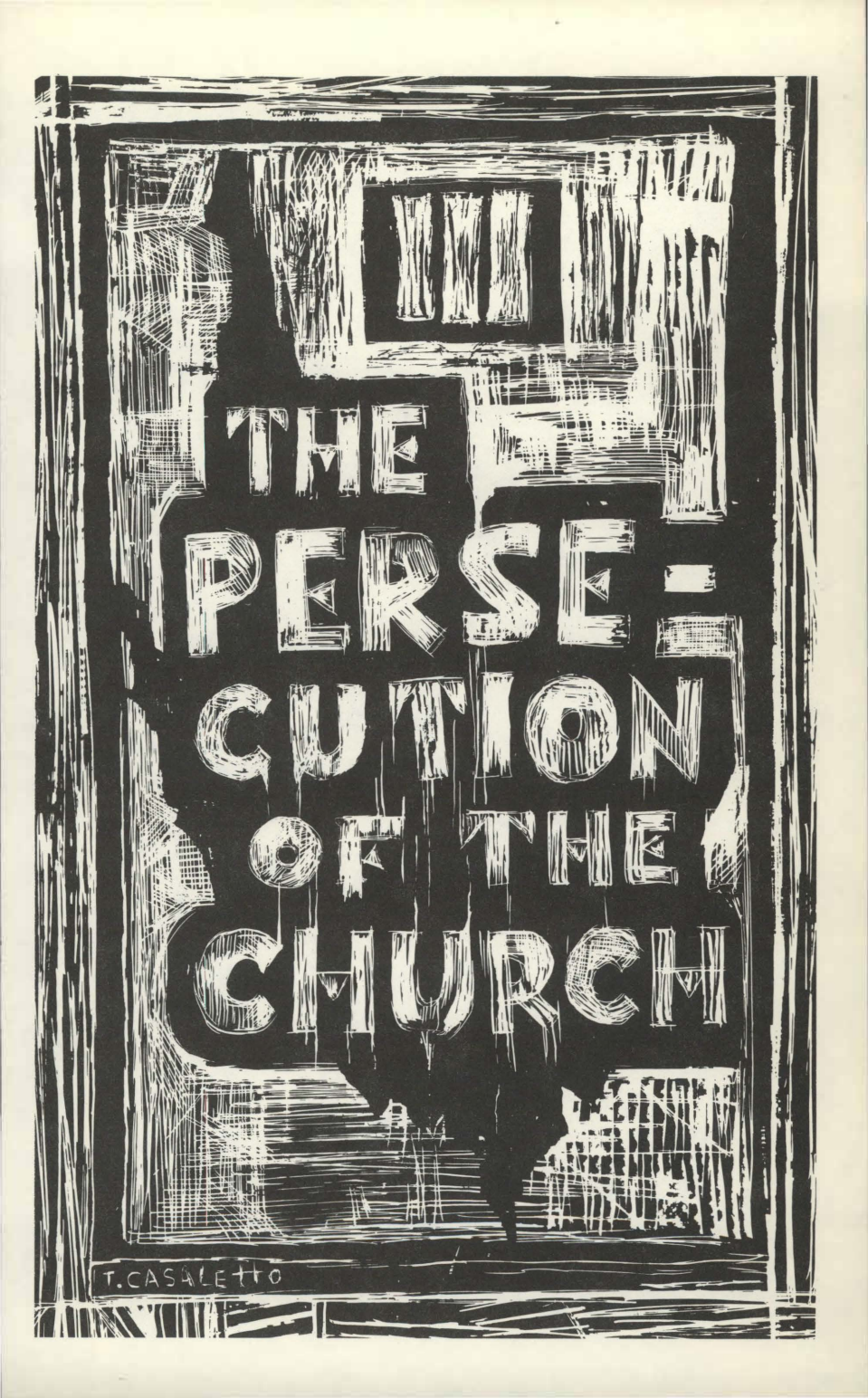
Death and Life

There is no technique for making oneself invulnerable to such antihuman brainwashing. A man cannot disengage

himself from his own human nature. Man is an incarnate being — body and soul. His life flows through his entire organism. Brainwashing is like a force which constricts the river of life within the person, choking and damming up the flow, dumping polluted wastes into the stream, stirring up mud from the depths.

But creation comes from God and, in the course of time, the river of life finds its way back to the ocean of immortality which is its source. The waters carry away the fallen branches, break up the obstacles, and assume once again their true direction and strength. In this springtime, the primordial sources of creation and baptism renew the river of life with ever-fresh water and speed us on our way to the true goal.

Submerged in death with Christ, we also rise with Christ. Our life comes from God and returns to God. A recurring theme in our liturgy is the prayer: Lord God, we praise you for creating man, and still more for restoring him in Christ.



THE
PERSECUTION
OF THE
CHURCH

T. CASALETTO

Catholics of the Byzantine Rite

How ironic that the atheistic Communists have become apostles and missionaries of the Orthodox Church! Their mission, however, is not to save souls but to crush the Catholics. The Communists try to create national Churches through which they hope to control all Christians. In spite of their efforts to destroy the Church from within, it is impossible to put God in exile.

It is a demonic disease which makes men hate those who believe in God. It is this hate which was unleashed against the Byzantine Catholics. What happened in our Church in Romania first happened in the Ukraine and Ruthenia, where the heroic bishops, priests, and faithful suffered for the faith. In their unwavering fidelity to the Holy See, Byzantine-rite Catholics have, as Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen remarked, drunk deeply of the cup of Gethsemane.

The Communist tactic of unification of Churches was used first in the Soviet-controlled territories of the Ukraine and the Carpatho-Ukraine to force the Byzantine Catholics to reject their union with Rome and convert to the Orthodox Church. In 1944, the Orthodox patriarch of Moscow called on the Byzantine Catholics to "return to their mother," that is, to join the Orthodox Church. The Catholics refused, and the persecution began.

Ukrainian Bishop Josyf Slipyi and all the members of the Byzantine Catholic hierarchy were imprisoned and urged to apostatize. Thousands of clergy and laity were arrested in 1946, many of whom were sent to Siberian camps never to return. The government security agents gathered forced signatures from the Catholic faithful as tokens of a conversion to Orthodoxy. A synod of apostate Catholic priests was convoked. These priests, obeying orders from

the government, "abolished" the union with Rome. These apostate priests had no authority to annul the unions formed centuries before at Brest-Litovsk and Uzhorod by the bishops, priests, and faithful who had freely chosen to obey the pope. Not one Catholic bishop of the Ukraine or Ruthenia participated in the Communist-convoked false synods of disobedient priests who bowed to their new masters. From 1947 until 1959, many Ukrainian and Ruthenian bishops, priests, religious, and laity died after enduring years of suffering.

From the Carpatho-Ukraine, Bishop Stojka of Mukachev disappeared on May 31, 1943. His successor, Bishop Theodore Romza, was beaten by soldiers on October 27, 1947, and died of head injuries five days later. In the Ukraine, Josyf Slipyi, bishop of Lvov (later made a cardinal), was arrested on April 11, 1945, and sent to various prisons and labor camps until 1963, when he was released from Siberia. Cardinal Slipyi lives today in Rome. His auxiliary, Bishop Nicetas Budka, was arrested the same day and remained in prison until his death on October 6, 1949, in Karaganda, a labor camp in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

Bishop Gregory Khomyshyn, of the diocese of Stanislav, was arrested on April 11, 1945; he died in prison on January 17, 1947. His auxiliary, Bishop Ivan Latyshevsky, arrested the same day, remained in prison until released from a Kazakh camp in 1956. He died on December 2, 1957, in Stanislav.

Bishop Josaphat Kotzylovsky, O.S.B.M., of the diocese of Peremyshl, was arrested June 26, 1946, and remained in jail until his death in Kiev on August 21, 1947. His auxiliary, Bishop Gregory Lakota, arrested the same day, died in November of 1950 in a labor camp in Vorkuta, Siberia.

The apostolic visitors for Ukrainian immigrants were

also arrested: Bishop Nicholas Charnetsky, C.S.S.R., of Volyn, was in a Siberian camp from 1945 until 1956. He died April 2, 1959, in Lvov. Monsignor Peter Verhun, apostolic visitor to Germany, was in a Siberian camp from 1945 until his death on February 7, 1957.

In Czechoslovakia, in the diocese of Priashiv (Presov), Bishop Paul Goydych, O.S.B.M., was arrested March 28, 1950, and died in prison on July 19, 1960, in Leopoldov, Czechoslovakia. His coadjutor, Bishop Basil Hopko, was arrested the same day and imprisoned in Leopoldov until 1966. He is now living in Czechoslovakia, as far as I am able to determine. From Lutsk, Basil Velychokovsky was imprisoned from 1945 to 1955 and again from 1969 to 1972. Upon his release, he immigrated to Canada, where he died in June of 1973 in Winnipeg.

No Man Can Serve Two Masters

To hold power in Russia, Lenin imitated the Czars who had dominated the Orthodox Church by controlling the clergy and exploiting religion as a means of reducing the peasants to resignation and obedience. The sad situation of the Russian Orthodox Church under both the Czars and the Communists was described in an open letter written in September of 1974 at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church members living outside of Russia by Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

The sins of submission and betrayal perpetrated by the hierarchy fix all the responsibility . . . on them. [Their sins] do not touch . . . the countless conscientious priests and the masses who pray in the churches.

[We] . . . deplore the false line of servility begun by the metropolitan Sergio . . . and brought to even lower depths by his followers. Couldn't they have understood that the unavoidable rebirth of the Church did not depend upon their signatures?

Only now have we learned, and not completely, that one is never to bend spiritually nor to concede even a small iota to that inhumane force. . . . Each and every concession made signifies ruin. Under this regime, we can enlarge ourselves only with firmness. . . .

The methods by which the Communists control the Church and undermine religion are exemplified by an incident I heard about from a Romanian Orthodox priest who had attended the Pan-Orthodox Synod in Moscow in 1948. This priest told me that after a concelebrated liturgy, he had unvested and left the sacristy. As he was on his way out, he remembered that he had left something, so he went back into the sacristy. There, to his astonishment, he saw one of the Russian Orthodox priests removing a phony beard — the beard he wore when playing the role of a priest! In reality he was a spy. At the time of the forced unification, the Communists compromised as many of the clergy as possible. When the puppet Church is established, they require the clergy to be spies. In Romania the Orthodox clergy were obliged by the government to attend a special program of indoctrination in Bucharest. The course was called "Pastoral Orientation of the Clergy for the Prosperity and Peace of the People."

Those Orthodox bishops who resisted government control were replaced by more compliant men. This is how the Romanian Orthodox Church was persecuted. From 1946 until 1950, the Communist government of Romania

removed from office many Orthodox bishops. These men were exiled to monasteries, where they lived in retirement with a limited degree of freedom. For instance, the Orthodox metropolitans Mihalcescu and Criveanu were replaced by "peoples prelates." Bishops Triteanu, Petrovici, Gherontie, and others were removed from office by the Romanian Department of Cults. Two patriarchal vicars and nine archpriests (deans) were replaced by government appointees.

The newly installed patriarch, Justinian Marina, was the chief tool of the Communist takeover of the Orthodox. Justinian had long sympathized with the Communists. In 1944, when the Communist Party was illegal, he had sheltered George Gheorghiu-Dej, a Communist leader who escaped from prison. Dej later became secretary of the Party. Justinian shared in the slanders which the Communists used as a pretext for removing Metropolitan Mihalcescu. No one knows who is to blame for the poisoning death of Mihalcescu. Justinian succeeded him as metropolitan of Iasi. Justinian was helped by his ally Dej, who directed the National Assembly and Holy Synod to elect Justinian patriarch in May of 1948. Even Bishop Popovici, who collaborated with the Communists, insisted that Justinian's election was invalid.

When Justinian became patriarch, he openly declared his approval of the Communist Party. Vehemently anti-Catholic, he denounced the Pope and the concordat with the Vatican. Justinian personally led the program for the suppression of the Byzantine Catholic Church and supervised the imprisonment of the Catholic bishops and priests at his summer villa and in the Orthodox monasteries. "I have a knife in my hand," he remarked, "and I will use it." He was referring to the Communist security guards at his disposal. When Justinian celebrated the Communist theft of our Church, he proclaimed the unification "a day of

great joy, the day of liberation from the hostile captivity of Rome."

There was one Orthodox bishop whom the Communists did not need to replace because he was already on their side as early as 1944, when the truce with Russia had been signed: the Orthodox metropolitan of Sibiu, Bishop Nicholas Balan (not to be confused with John Balan, the martyred Catholic bishop). At the time of the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, Metropolitan Balan sent a fawning letter to Metropolitan Alexei of Leningrad (and later of Moscow; also the son-in-law of Nikita Khrushchev). In the letter Balan stated:

If Romania has made any mistakes in the past, and if she was on the side of the Germans against Russia in the war, it was only because of the corruption of the Romanian people as a result of the union of 1700, which connected a Church (in Romania) with Rome, and which to this very day divides Romania into two Churches.

This Orthodox bishop, Nicholas Balan, nicknamed "the Relentless One," was a suitable tool for the Communists in their forced unification of Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Balan represented the most slavish mode of adaptation of the Church to civil power. When Bishop Hossu of our Church was brought before the prime minister of Romania in an attempt to convince the bishop to lead the Catholics in unification, Prime Minister Peter Groza made this cynical remark to Hossu about Bishop Balan: "He was a servant all his life under former King Carl; then under Antonescu's government; and now we'll use him too. We have a dossier on him and could file charges against him. But we need him for this action against you — since you will not cooperate with us." Groza held a dinner party when the Soviet metropolitan Alexei visited Romania. On

that occasion, Alexei spoke publicly against the Catholic Church, referring to the Vatican as a "tool of warmongering capitalism and an obstacle to peace and progress."

A true union of Christians is desirable and good. The historic divisions of Christianity, first into Catholic and Orthodox, then further into the many other Protestant denominations, has been exploited by the enemies of Christ. The decline of the Church has exaggerated the power of the State. The division of the Church has weakened the power of religion in Western culture. This is one cause of the present moral vacuum in which man's thirst for deliverance and need for faith has been perverted by Communism and secular humanism and even by a growing interest in occultism. These philosophies either make a god of man — or of the devil.

An example of how the Communists undermine religion is the way in which they paid off the newly installed Orthodox bishops. The Romanian government subsidized the Orthodox bishops with good salaries and luxurious residences, in which they were required to live. This was meant to embarrass the bishops before the people, the great majority of whom had a lower standard of living. This lent credibility to the propaganda charge that the Church exploits the workers, and also made Church leaders appear to be hypocrites because they preached poverty and charity but seemed to live in a grandly self-indulgent style.

Throughout all of this, the leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church summed up their attitude of adaptation and coexistence with the Communists with cunning excuses like: "We must hold hands with the devil until we cross the bridge"; and "The devil is not as black as you say." Some of the leaders saw compromise as a means of protecting and saving the Church. But the Church herself is not the goal; the Church is the means of our salvation in Christ. Jesus did not teach us to save the Church at all

costs and by any method. Jesus commissioned us to go out and preach the Gospel, in season and out of season. He told us that for this we would be persecuted, suffer, and even die.

The Pattern of Persecution

Communist persecution of religion is not haphazard; it follows a well-developed, overall plan, which is adapted to the varying circumstances of the Church in each nation. Albert Galter made a classic study of this pattern of persecution of the Church in Eastern Europe and identified some of the common elements. In *The Red Book of the Persecuted Church* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1957), Galter mentions some of the conditions to which the Communists tailor their attacks on religion: the various rites, other denominations in the nation, Communist strength in the nation, the potential impact abroad, and the psychological factor.

This last element, the psychological factor, the Communists call "the technique of the vice." The persecution proceeds by alternately tightening and then relaxing the pressure against the Church. The government deliberately angers the people and the clergy by severe measures against religion; then it grants some small concession in order to reduce popular indignation. This small favor keeps the people from focusing on all they have lost. They are allowed a small victory to make them forget the enormous defeat. Lenin described this tactic as taking two steps forward and one step backward. The Communists take away much religious freedom and return a morsel of it; the victim is expected to be satisfied with what little he gets.

Galter identifies some of the permanent features of Communist persecution of religion: anti-Catholic propaganda; laws against the Church; suppression of Catholic press and associations; nationalization of Catholic schools and confiscation of school property; exclusion of the Church from charitable works; expulsion of the papal nuncio; imprisonment, trial, or exile of the loyal hierarchy and priests; formation of a national Church under the guidance of those priests who are willing to become puppets of the civil government; and imperilment of the employment and educational opportunities of practicing Catholics and their families.

Through these means the Communist government hopes to destroy the organization of the Church. They try to avoid making visible martyrs, who might become heroes for the resistance effort on the part of the Church.

Likewise, they seek not to push the Church underground, where it might be beyond their reach. Instead they want a puppet Church, one they can manage for their own purposes.

One of the chief tools used by Communists is propaganda, by which they attempt to legitimize their activities. Thus, the suppression of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite is camouflaged as a "spontaneous unification" of Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The Communists count on the apathy of the free world. For thirty years now the suppression of our Church has been ignored by the media and textbooks.

A recent television series entitled *The Long Search*, claiming to be a factual presentation of man's quest for religious salvation, included an hour-long show on the Byzantine rite in Romania. There was no mention of the suppression of the Catholics, although the show frankly dealt with the Communist toleration of the Orthodox in their practice of religion.

• Propaganda

"In times of war," as the old saying goes, "truth is the first casualty." Nowhere is this more true than in ideological warfare, or what is called psychological warfare, in which governments sacrifice truth to deliberate half-truths and truths-out-of-context in order to serve a propaganda purpose.

Effective propaganda often avoids outright lies because of the risk of refutation by the facts. Propaganda prefers to seem as accurate as possible — while still distorting the truth. It is like a magic act in which the magician focuses the audience's attention on his one hand in order to make them ignore what he is doing with his other hand. For instance, a classic propaganda strategy is to occupy people's attention with the *two sides* of an issue — while the premise itself is forgotten.

In Romania, Communist propaganda promoting the unification of Churches focused attention on two alleged sides of the issue: Should Catholics join the Orthodox and be patriotic, or should they stay tied to the Vatican and be ruled by a foreigner (the pope)? The false premise taken for granted is that the pope's rule is temporal (worldly), when, in fact, it is really spiritual and not in conflict with national patriotism. Another manufactured two-sided issue was the argument over whether the Catholics would continue to divide the Church in Romania or work to unite it under the Orthodox. The false premise is that our union with Rome is destroying the unity of the Church.

During the years from 1945 to 1948, the Communist government of Romania conducted a propaganda campaign to discredit all religion, but especially the Catholic Church. The logic of the Communist propaganda always took the same form: The Vatican divides Church unity in Romania;

the Orthodox can unify Romania; therefore, all the faithful in Romania should join the Orthodox Church, which is national and independent (of Rome). The Communists portrayed the pope and the bishops as the greatest enemies of the Romanian nation because they represented an international power which was antinational and, thus, unpatriotic. Therefore, any Romanian who obeyed them was not a good citizen.

The government issued a pamphlet by an English Freemason. Entitled "The Vatican," it interpreted the activity and mission of the pope as an intrigue against European culture. Other slanderous and false pamphlets were circulated, including "Espionage and Treason in the Shadow of the Cross," "The Anti-Christian and Anti-democratic Policy of the Vatican," "Poison under the Cross," and others of the same ilk.

The basic charge leveled against the Catholic Church was always that the Church is part of an international plot to dominate the world. A striking parallel to this attitude is the longstanding prejudice among American nativist bigots who have historically accused American Catholics of the same crime: political allegiance to a foreign ruler, the pope, who is supposedly plotting to take over America and make it part of a world empire.

In the U.S. this sort of bigotry has been logically refuted by the Church, most recently by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In Romania, Catholics were not free to rebut the libels and illogic of Communist anti-Catholic propaganda. The Catholic press was muzzled in the name of a fictitious postwar paper shortage. Nowhere could the Church purchase paper for printing. According to the Communists, freedom of the press means you are free only to praise Communism and approve everything the government does.

In February of 1948, Secretary Dej of the Communist Party stated: "The new constitution of Romania will not allow Catholic citizens to be submissive to the directives of a foreign ruler; it will not allow Romanians to be tempted by the American gold calf, at whose feet the Vatican wants to bring its faithful." He accused the Catholic Church, as an agent of world imperialism, of hindering the accomplishment of a people's democracy in Romania. He claimed that, though the people of Romania approved of the popular democracy, the Catholic bishops and priests opposed the new government. He accused the Church of being obscure and mystical and leading the people backward instead of toward social progress. The key word repeated *ad nauseam* by the Communists is that the Church is "reactionary."

At the centennial anniversary of Romanian independence, celebrated at Liberty Field in Blaj on May 15, 1948, Orthodox Bishop Balan, assigned by the government to deliver the address, stated that Romania had achieved "a glorious national unity but has failed in Church unity." Romanians, he said, should have been united nine hundred years ago in Orthodoxy, but political circumstances prevented it. As a representative of "the true Church of Romania," he now called on all Byzantine Catholics to shake off the "foreign domination" of Rome, and to "come home." This speech broadcast on radio and reported in the press, was delivered in the presence of Catholic Bishop Suci, who was not allowed to give any response.

On the occasion of his election as Orthodox patriarch, Justinian spoke of his goal of achieving the religious unification of the Romanian people and wiping away the painful divisions of two and a half centuries (referring to our union with Rome since 1700). At his installation on June 6, 1948, Justinian echoed Orthodox Bishop Balan, appealing to the Catholic bishops and priests to "return home," and to re-

nounce obedience to the pope and "Vatican imperialism." "Today," he exulted, "the government has created all the conditions for the unity of Romania in one national Church. . . ."

At the Pan-Orthodox Congress in Moscow in July of 1948, attended by the patriarchs of Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Egypt, resolutions accused the Vatican and the Pope of being warmongers and collaborators with American imperialism. How ironic the statement of Patriarch Alexei of Moscow at the first plenary session:

The papacy . . . attempts by force to detach Orthodox peoples from the Orthodox Church. . . . This blindness of the papacy is incomprehensible if it can count as Christian acquisition a flock attracted in a way so unworthy. . . . The Orthodox can . . . influence the Church of Rome, to free it from spiritual blindness and to call upon it to reject all worldly methods or propaganda and intrigue. . . .

These utterances of more than thirty years ago are a most apt indictment of those Church leaders who were servants of the Kremlin. In the Ukraine, for instance, there was the sad case of Father Gabriel Kostelnik, whose son was held in prison by the Communists in order to blackmail him into betraying the Byzantine Catholic Church by becoming the leader of the unification program. Later he was shot dead by a youth. The Communists did not fail to exploit his assassination, calling it an act of revenge for the unification by a "Vatican agent." At the Pan-Orthodox Congress, this apostate priest inveighed against

. . . all missionary apparatus of the Roman Catholics: monastic orders, associations, institutions, propaganda organizations of every kind must be

dismissed and banished if they cannot be made harmless to Orthodoxy.

Orthodox Archbishop Hermogenes of Kazan addressed the congress on "Papism":

From the content of the concordats with the Vatican, one clearly sees that the activity of the Vatican often bears the character of national betrayal. . . .

In contrast to this "unpatriotic" Catholic activity, the Orthodox archbishop boasted of the manner in which his Church had consistently *adapted* itself to the State:

The Orthodox Church never betrayed the interests of its country. Not one of the existing Orthodox Churches has ever . . . put into practice a policy independent of its nation's policy.

At this same 1948 congress in Moscow, the Romanian patriarch, Justinian, openly declared that the Catholic union with Rome in 1700 would cease to exist by October of that year. Romanian Catholics, he predicted, would soon return to the womb of the Orthodox Church.

One Orthodox prelate at the congress confidentially informed Bishop Aftenie of our Church about the coming attack on the Catholic Church. Bishop Aftenie was amazed at the very idea and could not be convinced that it was true. None of the other members of the Catholic hierarchy imagined that the Orthodox leaders would be involved in such a sinister program. However, the persistent appeals to return to "the mother Church," and the anti-Catholic propaganda impressed the Catholics with the fact that the threat was unlike any before.

In response to the situation, the Byzantine-rite Catho-

lic bishops issued their famous pastoral letter of June 29, 1948. Communist censors would not permit publication of the letter. Typewritten copies of the letter were delivered by courier to the parish priests, who read it from their pulpits at Sunday Masses. This letter expressed the bishops' official response to the appeal for unification. The theme of the letter is that true unity in the Church is union with the pope, the successor of St. Peter. This marvelous letter is a document of doctrinal and moral strength in the face of persecution and apostasy.

The Pastoral Letter of 1948

I bid you resolve not to worry about your defense beforehand, for I will give you words and a wisdom which none of your adversaries can take exception to or contradict.

— *Luke 21:14-15*

When Jesus was brought before Annas, the high priest, a guard slapped Jesus in the face. Jesus turned to the guard and firmly said, "If I said anything wrong produce the evidence, but if I spoke the truth why hit me?" (John 18:23).

Without violence, but with assertion, Jesus defended himself. So, too, the bishops of our Church, staying within the law, defended the Church. They boldly proclaimed the truth, just as the Apostles did on Pentecost morning after the Holy Spirit filled them with courage.

By means of the pastoral letter of 1948 and numerous other memoranda of protest to the Communist government, the heroic Catholic bishops declared with St. Paul, "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the

sake of the truth" (2 Corinthians 13:8). They were deliberately referring to this truth: "You are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church" (Matthew 16:18). The bishops were teaching that only through union with Peter do men become true disciples of Jesus:

What Significance Has the Holy Union with Rome?

In this hour of terrible stress, an hour when people and countries seek one Father, one brotherhood, and one spiritual unity; in this hour under the guise of a friendly invitation to "return home," there is an attempt to root us out of the bosom of the Church of Jesus, to separate us from the flock shepherded by His chosen pastor, Peter, and his successors, the popes of Rome, to cut us off from the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Two hundred and fifty years ago our fathers . . . of their own free will united with the Catholic Church. . . .

Holy union with Rome signifies our return to the flock of Jesus Christ, that we, too, might be His lambs; for only to Peter and his successors did the Lord say: "Feed My sheep, feed My lambs."

Who would dare accuse us bishops and you sons of the Catholic Church of having shattered the unity of faith and, instead of uniting ourselves, of separating ourselves from the Church of Christ . . .? And what does disruption or schism signify if not estrangement from the authority established by Christ? And which legitimate Church authority

might this be, from which the Church of Rome has separated herself? . . . There exists but a single religious authority from which one can separate and, in so doing, cut oneself off from the Church of Christ itself, and that authority is the pope, the bishop of Rome. . . .

The ties that bind us to the pope . . . are not of a human order, subject to change, but are of divine order; it is our duty, therefore, to endure for their sake any abuse, blows, threats, imprisonment, or even impoverishment . . . for "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us."

Brother priests of the Lord, stand beside us, your bishops; and you, beloved sons, stand beside the priests of the Romanian Catholic Church, establishing yourselves firmly on the foundation which is Peter. . . .

— (*Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, June 29, 1948*)

• **Laws Against The Church**

There were three areas in which the Romanian Communist government interfered in the life of the Churches in Romania, especially in the activities of the Catholic Church.

Laws were passed forbidding any relations with "foreign denominations or creeds."

The concordat with the Vatican was denounced by the government. All communications with the Vatican were required to go through civil channels. This was an intolerable effort to censor and control papal jurisdiction over the Church in Romania. In 1950, some staff members at the papal nunciature in Bucharest were put on trial as foreign spies. The papal nuncio, Bishop Patrick O'Hara, was eventually expelled from Romania. These measures were aimed at cutting off the Church from the pope.

Laws were passed to "reform" education in Romania.

All schools were nationalized. The property of all Church-affiliated schools was taken over by the government — with no restitution being made. The textbooks were rewritten to promote Communist teachings. All religious symbols were removed from the school buildings and the name of God was never mentioned again with reverence. The aim was to introduce Communism to the next generation and to eliminate all religious influence over youth. Unlike in America, where teachers are so little respected that their salaries are lower than those of garbage collectors, in Communist states anyone who has daily intellectual and moral influence over the nation's youth is treated with honor and benefits. Any student who is disrespectful toward a teacher is severely punished.

Laws were passed establishing a Romanian Department of Cults.

This department was to govern religious activities and insure that they "did not go against the national constitution." The constitution stipulates that there should be freedom to be *for* religion, as well as freedom to be *against*

religion. The Department of Cults, not surprisingly, interpreted the law in favor of the latter freedom. The laws required all heads of Churches to be approved by the Department of Cults — a practice already in effect with regard to the Orthodox Church in Romania.

The new laws gave the Department of Cults authority to investigate all activities of the Churches. One of the most critical of these laws stipulated that a diocese must have at least 750,000 faithful. This had little effect on the number of Orthodox dioceses, but it reduced our dioceses from five to two. The Byzantine-rite bishops were all deposed except Bishop Hossu in Cluj and Bishop Aftenie in the vicariate of Bucharest. The other bishops simply were no longer recognized as such by the government.

One of the new laws was a crucial part of the forthcoming unification program. The law stated that if more than fifty percent of the members of a particular parish join another denomination, then the church building and all church properties become part of that conversion. The laws governing cults also repeated the prohibitions against relations with foreign religious leaders. On August 27, 1948, the Catholic bishops of both rites met and issued a memorandum to the Romanian government. The bishops pointed out aspects of these laws which they could not, in conscience, obey.

• Unification

All of the interferences from outside the Church could not do as much damage to it as a blow from within the Church itself. Patriarch Justinian announced that it was "time to gather back into the stalls the sheep stolen from the Orthodox nearly 250 years ago at the time of the union

with Rome." The method of returning these sheep to the Orthodox Church of Romania was the same as that used by the Communists to unify Catholics of the Byzantine rite with the Orthodox in the Ukraine and Carpatho-Ukraine. It was done through a signature campaign, traitorous priests, and a mock council.

During September of 1948, the Catholic bishops were kept under house arrest to prevent them from blocking the "spontaneous return" to Orthodoxy. For five days security agents conducted a sweeping signature campaign in which they pressured the priests and faithful to sign the following petition:

We, the undersigned, delegate a priest [unnamed] to be our representative for the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite at the congress at Cluj, to be presided over by Bishop Hossu, where the unification of Churches will be discussed. We will abide by their decision.

The anonymous delegates turned out to be thirty-six apostate Catholic priests who betrayed their faith under pressure of intimidation, blackmail, and bribes. They were priests who had been guilty of civil offenses, or who had been disobedient toward their bishops (and therefore likely candidates to oppose the bishops). Some were simply ambitious men. Each of them was paid for his services a sum of \$2,600. The Communists had studied these individuals beforehand to find weaknesses of character that might be exploited for their purposes.

In spite of the claim in the wording of the petition, Bishop Hossu had nothing to do with the planned assembly at Cluj. In fact, on September 30, 1948, despite the guards at his residence, he was able to send out a letter to the bishops, clergy, and faithful, to be read at the Masses on Sun-

day, October 3. He stated that any priest who had participated in this assembly was automatically excommunicated from the Church.

This assembly, which Catholics called "the Mock Council of Cluj," was held October 1, 1948. The thirty-six apostate priests declared their return to the Orthodox Church, asserting that they represented the almost two million faithful and eighteen hundred Catholic priests of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite. On October 3, Patriarch Justinian, who had planned the entire fiasco, officially received the thirty-six priests into the Orthodox Church. He proclaimed a festival at Alba Julia (where the union of 1700 with Rome had been accomplished) to celebrate "the liberation from the captivity of Rome." On October 21, 1948, the Communists announced that the unification of Churches — completed in one month's time — was cause for national rejoicing.

Many Catholic priests who had signed the petition now went to the government and insisted on retracting their signatures. The government refused to accept any recantations. Many of the faithful already knew the futility of such efforts; their names had been put on the petition and *then* they were told: "If you don't want your name on the petition, you must come to the town hall and ask to have it removed." They were given the simple alternatives: Sign, or lose your job. In this way the Communist government converted over fifty-five percent in each parish to Orthodoxy and justified turning over the churches to the Orthodox.

After the Mock Council of Cluj, the Catholic bishops were released from house arrest. Immediately afterward, on October 7, 1948, the bishops of both rites met and addressed a letter to Prime Minister Groza. The bishops pointed out the hostile atmosphere created by the government, the measures of oppression, the lack of religious

freedom, and the interference in the Church's divine mission. They never received an answer to this letter or to any of the other memoranda they sent to the Communist government.

The faithful listened to the Catholic bishops and priests preach their last sermons from the pulpits of the churches. Bishop Suciu pronounced solemnly: "The Good Friday bell has rung for the Romanian Catholic Church. At no cost let us go where souls are sold. Neither Christ nor the Church is for sale." The priests urged the people not to compromise their faith, not to betray the union with the pope. Every evening that October the churches were filled with people praying for the Church.

Government security agents approached the Catholic priests with the offer: "If you unify with the Orthodox, you may still pray for the pope at Mass as Catholics do — only you must do it silently, under your breath. *All we ask is that you do not mention the pope's name out loud.*" Of course, by this compromise of our integrity they would have destroyed the union with Rome. We would then no longer be Catholics. "We don't want martyrs," the agents said to us, "just renegades." To the Communists, the most important thing was loyalty to the pope. This loyalty the Catholic bishops and many priests refused to betray. Because the Communists could not find a renegade bishop, they decided to eliminate the leaders of our Church.

By the end of October, all six Catholic bishops and a number of strongly anti-Communist priests had been arrested at night in secret. Contrary to Romanian law, there was no warrant of arrest, no trial, no sentence. They were simply taken away, no one knew where. The Orthodox bishops took over the Catholic dioceses and churches.

Catholic religious orders of men and women were also suppressed. The Jesuits were expelled and the Basilians arrested. On October 30, 1948, Mass was celebrated for the

last time for the sisters of the Congregation of the Mother of God at their monastery near Blaj. During the day electricity was cut off, and at night Communist soldiers came and beat the sisters who were praying in chapel. The nuns were taken to an Orthodox monastery. There they were such good examples of inspiring faith and prayer that the patriarch feared they would convert the Orthodox nuns to Catholicism. Orthodox priests were then sent to try to talk the Catholic nuns into converting. Finally, the government sent these nuns and others from various religious orders of women back to their family homes with a strict prohibition against forming their community again. The nuns were not allowed to wear religious habits or to perform the apostolates which sisters had customarily pursued — teaching and nursing. For many years these women lived celibate lives in the world, praying and keeping underground contact with members of their congregations. Some did get married. The regular nurses in Communist hospitals were so unreliable and stole so much medicine that, finally, the government let the nuns return to work as nurses. But they were still forbidden to wear the habit or live in community.

The Orthodox monastery at Vladimiresti, with four hundred nuns under the leadership of Mother Veronica, had become a shining star among the religious houses in Romania. The spiritual director, Father John, was closely united with Catholics, and this Orthodox priest had introduced to the nuns Catholic customs, such as praying the rosary and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Father John's ecumenical spirit could not abide the forced unification of Churches, so he wrote a memorandum to Patriarch Justinian. He criticized the treachery of the unification program. Patriarch Justinian was infuriated and demanded the government investigate the monastery. The patriarch accused the nuns of hiding fugitives from the government.

Repressive measures were applied to squelch the renewal of religious life at Vladimiresti.

The Latin Rite

Throughout the program of unification of the Byzantine-rite Catholics with the Orthodox, all of the Catholic hierarchy of both rites had acted together to protest the government's denial of religious freedom. The Latin Catholic Church was not subjected to a unification, but it was persecuted. The Communist government recognized only two Latin-rite bishops, Marton Aron of Alba Julia and Anthony Durcovich of Iasi. The bishops of Bucharest, Timisoara, and Oradea were deposed.

During 1949 the Communists turned their attention to creating a schism within the Latin-rite Catholic Church by pressuring a priest to lead a movement for a National Catholic Church which would be independent of Rome. The five Catholic bishops were arrested and four of them eventually died in prison. Bishop Alexander Cisar of Bucharest died in the prison at Jilava in 1953. Bishop Augustine Pacha of Timisoara died upon release in 1955. Bishop Francis Scheffler of Oradea died in prison at either Jilava or Ghencea in 1957. And from the diocese of Iasi, Bishop Anthony Durcovich was in Sighet Prison in 1950. Just before he died, his secretary, Father Rafael Friedrich, managed to get near the door of the cell. To let the person in the cell know he was a priest, and to find out who it was (only the priests spoke Latin), Father Friedrich whispered in Latin, "*Laudetur Jesus Christus*" (Praised be Jesus Christ). From inside the cell he heard a weak voice respond, "*Hic Antonius moribundus*" (Here Anthony is dying). In these simple words

Bishop Durcovich let us know that he was in that cell, and that he was indeed dying. On December 10, 1951, he went to his eternal reward. He was buried in a cemetery on the shores of the Iza River, which flows by Sighet.

The only surviving Latin-rite bishop was Marton Aron of Alba Julia, who had been in Sighet prison in 1950 but was later released and is still living, I believe, in retirement in Alba Julia. Many Latin-rite priests spent up to fourteen years in prisons and labor camps. I know of one particularly gruesome case: Father Ambrose George died of starvation and cold at the Grind labor camp. His body was eaten by rats.

Decree No. 358

During 1948 and 1949, the persecution of the Catholic Church reached its greatest intensity. Our bishops were kept under arrest at Patriarch Justinian's summer villa. Later they were sent to prison, never to return to their dioceses. The priests who refused to cooperate with the Communists were kept under arrest at the Orthodox monastery at Neamtul.

On December 1, 1948, the Communist government issued decree No. 358, which officially abolished our Church. It declared that, since the unification, the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite had ceased to exist. From their confinement at the villa at Dragoslavele, all six Catholic bishops protested this decree, asserting that the unification was illegal, forced, and unconstitutional. Their memorandum to the government was never answered. The papal nuncio, too, had protested this unification program — before he was expelled from Romania. The

Communists told him that the return to Orthodoxy was "spontaneous." To this day the Communists maintain that fiction.

From the year 1698 (when the union of 1700 got its impetus) until the year 1948 is two hundred and fifty years: the 250th anniversary of the union with Rome. The Communists have tried to annul that union and to destroy our Byzantine-rite Catholic Church through the traitorous act of thirty-six apostate priests who were guided by Patriarch Justinian.

Like the Pharisees of old, the enemies of Christ had bribed a Judas and then carried away Christ to Calvary. When the Church was suppressed they rolled a stone across the tomb and stationed on guard the forces of paganism. But from the silence of that tomb, the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite shall rise victorious.

Portraits of the Bishops and Priests

The foundation of the city wall was
ornate with precious stones. . . .

— *Revelation 21:19*

In his first speech to the College of Cardinals, on October 17, 1978, Pope John Paul II, recalling St. John Fisher, an English cardinal beheaded in 1535 for his fidelity to the pope, said: "In our times there are not lacking those persons who have not been spared the experience of imprisonment, of suffering, and of humiliation for Christ." Referring to the scarlet vestments of the cardinals, the Pope also said, "Yours is a garment of blood that recalls and presents the blood that the Apostles, bishops, and cardinals have

shed for Christ in the course of the centuries." Romanian Catholic bishops surrendered their lives in witness to the truth of God's revelation. That is what it means to be a martyr.

The confessors and martyrs of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite are our precious gems. A martyr gives his life for the faith; a confessor is one who suffers — but does not die — for the faith. Let us look more closely at the many facets of these jewels — the martyrs and confessors who now crown the Romanian Catholic Church.

In the personalities of these individuals we discover the cherished qualities of affective and moral life which are the marks of maturity and holiness. These bishops and priests possessed a sound emotional life as the foundation of their moral life. Confronted as they were with a threat to the Church, these men rallied to her defense with a resolute, angry courage.

The leadership given by our bishops and priests offers a solid example of the manly vocation described by a Catholic psychiatrist who himself was an inmate of a Nazi concentration camp. Conrad W. Baars, M.D., praises the mature priest who is "ready to risk betrayal, imprisonment, torture and even death" for the sake of the Church ("A Priest for All Seasons, Masculine and Celibate," Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972, p. 48). The witness given by such a priest is radiant with warm and rich emotions of love, desire, and joy in all that is good. He is also aroused by hate, courage, and anger to oppose what is evil, not only to save himself, but to "destroy the evil, to prevent it from spreading and harming others too."

How necessary is the virtue of fortitude! Evils do not go away simply by themselves. A brave priest refuses to be crushed by difficulties and is prepared to die in battle for what is good. He uses every legitimate means to overcome the denial of religious freedom and the suppression of the

Church. He acts with a just wrath and intense hatred of wickedness. Yet, he prays lovingly for the conversion of his enemies, and forgives them as Jesus forgave those who injured him. Not broken by sorrow, such a priest is able to endure a humiliating passion and death, surrendering his spirit into the hands of God the Father.

Again and again we saw in our heroic bishops and priests a power greater than human strength and virtue: It was the Person and power of the Holy Spirit. We saw the action of the sevenfold Gifts of the Holy Spirit. With great Reverence and Awe of God, the bishops hated the sin of apostacy, to which they were tempted, and they realized keenly their own mortal weakness and need of Almighty God. Moved by a divine Courage, they did not shrink from sacrifice and imprisonment: "In him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything" (Philippians 4:13). By Piety, they praised God even when He permitted them, like holy Job, to suffer. With the help of Counsel, they guided their speech and actions in order to prudently govern the persecuted Church and to respond to the false accusations made against them. With Understanding and Knowledge, the bishops interpreted Scripture and Tradition in defense of the union with Rome and their obedience to the pope. They did not fall for the lures of the Communists, who wanted a national (puppet) Church. Instead the bishops estimated the things of this world as men who have longed for a far greater good — the divine reward. In Wisdom, the bishops and priests hoped for the Beatific Vision, a gift far greater than any earthly blessing.

The Courageous Bishops

"I will strike the shepherd and the sheep
of the flock will be dispersed."

— *Matthew 26:31*

The following were the bishops of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite in 1948, when the persecution broke out: of the primatial see of Blaj, Bishop John Suciu, who died in Sighet Prison, May 27, 1953; of the vicariate of Bucharest, Bishop Vasile Aftenie, who died in jail in Bucharest on May 10, 1950; his clandestine successor, Bishop Titus Livius Chinezu, who died on January 15, 1955, in Sighet prison; of Cluj, Cardinal Julius Hossu (made a cardinal *in pectore* by Pope Paul VI in 1969), who died in Colentina Hospital in Bucharest on May 28, 1970; of my home diocese of Oradea, Bishop Valerian Frentiu, who died on July 11, 1952, in Sighet Prison; of Lugoj, Bishop John Balan, who died on August 4, 1960, in a hospital in Bucharest, where he was taken after release from house arrest; of Baia Mare, Bishop Alexander Rusu, who died in Gherla Prison on May 9, 1963.

Vasile Aftenie was auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Blaj, including Alba-Julia and Fagaras; he was metropolitan vicar of Bucharest and of the provinces of the "Old Realm" — Muntenia and Moldavia.

Born July 14, 1899, in Lodromani, of peasant parents, he studied in Blaj and in Rome. While studying theology at the Angelicum Atheneum in Rome, he lived at the College of St. Athanasius.

During his later life, Bishop Aftenie often returned in his thoughts and prayers to that early Father of the Church, St. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, in the fourth century. Four times Bishop Athanasius was exiled from his See by Arian heretics, who used their influence with the Eastern Roman emperor to intimidate many bishops and laity. These heretics denied the revealed truth that Jesus Christ is both God and man. By his heroic defense of the true teachings of the Church as found in the Nicene Creed, Athanasius handed down to us the apostolic

teaching. By his heroic defense of the unity of the Church, Bishop Aftenie has given us a witness to our one, holy, catholic, and apostolic faith.

Vasile Aftenie was ordained a priest in 1926. After having taught and been rector at the Theological Academy in Blaj and archpriest (dean) in Bucharest, he was consecrated a bishop in 1940.

From 1941 to 1944, Vasile Aftenie developed a fruitful charitable apostolate for all who were stricken by the calamities of war. From 1945 to 1948, he intensified religious life in the largest Byzantine-rite Catholic parish in Bucharest and defended the rights of the Church in the face of a mounting Communist political and social campaign. He devoted himself to organizing Catholic youth and maintained brotherly relations with his fellow priests.

Bishop Aftenie was an ecumenical man, open to all men of faith and beloved by many for his warmth, good humor, and pleasant company. He was also a prudent man, above all tactful in speech. On one occasion the Communist mayor of Bucharest, Mr. Doncea, demanded that the bishop move out of his episcopal residence within twenty-four hours — or be bound fast with a rope. Bishop Aftenie replied to the mayor: "Even Jesus was bound, though innocently. It will be an honor for me to follow my Master and Savior."

Government and security agents constantly followed the bishop during 1948. One day on the streetcar, an agent said to him, "Well, your excellency, you may travel freely for now, but as long as you refuse to unify with the Orthodox, I will be following you." "I know well that you pursue me," the bishop said. "You do your duty, and I will do mine."

When the group of thirty-six renegade Catholic priests met with Bishop Aftenie to attempt to persuade him to join them in the Communist-engineered unification of

Churches, which would require breaking away from Rome, Bishop Aftenie answered in a way which showed his genuine concern for their apostacy and an honest expression of his own dignity: "My dearly beloved brothers, our faith is not a shirt to put on at night and take off in the morning. I cannot now deny what I have preached my entire life."

Because he refused to betray his faith in union with the vicar of Christ, he was arrested by the Communist government on October 29, 1948, and taken to Dragoslavele. There he found his five fellow Romanian Byzantine-rite Catholic bishops. Dragoslavele was the Orthodox patriarch's summer villa, which the government had transformed into a detention camp.

Here the bishops found it necessary to gather branches and sticks for a fire. Some days they did not even receive the small portion of polenta (corn meal) which was their daily fare. They were under the custody of the patriarch, Justinian, until they should pass over to the Orthodox Church. If this were done, the Communist government would be able to exert total control over the Churches in Romania by excluding the influence and authority of the pope.

One Orthodox priest who was later arrested himself (and whom I met in a cell in Sighet Prison) told me that he had reproached Justinian for not providing sufficient food for the bishops. On one occasion Justinian visited the near-starving bishops and invited them to dine with him on roast turkey. He encouraged them to unite with his Church so that they could go home and no longer leave their flocks untended. To Bishop Aftenie, the patriarch said: "Excellency, you were so understanding when you were free. Now try to grasp the real situation of the Church in order to save it — and yourself." Bishop Aftenie told him what he had said to the thirty-six renegade priests: "I cannot contradict what I have taught all my life."

The bishops at Dragoslavele were thunderstruck to hear, on December 4, 1948, that their rite had been officially suppressed three days earlier. They wrote a memorandum to the Communist government in which they pointed out that there was no legal basis for decree No. 358, the decree of suppression, and that the forced unification of Churches was a violation of the Romanian constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion.

In 1949 the bishops were transferred to Caldarusani, a monastery in the forest of Vlasia. There the bishops found the twenty-one faithful priests who had been transferred from their imprisonment in the monastery at Neamtul. The regimen at Caldarusani was harsher than at Dragoslavele, yet Bishop Aftenie maintained his habitual quiet and good disposition.

On May 25, 1949, the bishop was taken to the Department of Internal Affairs in Bucharest, where he underwent interrogation and torture. Before leaving Caldarusani, he said to us, "My brothers, if they isolate me, my death is sure." He feared loneliness, for he was a man who loved company.

In Bucharest he was kept in a subterranean cell. There he was questioned about his organization of Catholic youth and about his assistance to fugitives from government pursuit who had hidden in the mountains. Bishop Aftenie was beaten and finally killed on May 10, 1950. Word reached us that he was shot to death by an official of the Department of Internal Affairs. Bishop Aftenie's head was covered with wounds. The wooden box into which they threw his battered body was too short and his feet stuck out. This was before the Communists became more sophisticated. Later on they avoided direct execution and even tried to prevent the other bishops from dying in prison lest the martyrdom be so evident.

Bishop Aftenie was buried in Belu Cemetery in Bu-

charest. His initials, V.A., were put on the simple grave marker. He was the first bishop-martyr of the Romanian Byzantine-rite Catholic Church. Today the faithful of Bucharest and its environs cannot be stopped from venerating Bishop Aftenie's memory at this humble grave site. It is said that miracles have occurred after prayers at his grave.

Valeriu Trajan Frentiu was bishop of Oradea. Born April 25, 1875, in Resita, he studied in Budapest and Vienna in the seminaries of St. Barbara and St. Pazmany, and was ordained in 1900. He worked in the chancery of Lugoj, then as archpriest of Oradea, and was consecrated bishop of Lugoj, in 1913, and bishop of Oradea in 1922. After Bishop Nicolescu's death in 1941, Valeriu Frentiu was made temporary metropolitan of Blaj from 1941 until 1947.

Bishop Frentiu, a mild and deeply pious man, organized associations to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and intercessory prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He renewed the seminary of Oradea and the academy of theology, and encouraged the seminarians to choose celibacy. He was an appreciative patron of art and music as well as an able administrator of his diocese, building about twenty-five churches, a school for boys in Oradea, and the high schools in Beius for boys and girls. At his invitation, religious and teaching orders came into the diocese to give religious instruction in a number of parishes and schools.

From 1940 to 1944, the period during World War II when Hungarian troops were invading Transylvania, the bishop was forbidden to return to his residence in Oradea. Bishop Frentiu persevered in his prayers and writings in defense of the Church. He protested the Communist government's 1948 arbitrary nationalization of all private schools. He also protested the imprisonment of priests for their religious and educational work with youth.

His defense of the Church through a crusade of sermons, circular letters, petitions, and interventions to the government culminated in his arrest at midnight on October 29, 1948. He was taken to Dragoslavele to join the other bishops. Because of insufficient food, heat, and medicine, he became seriously ill and was sent to Rucar Hospital. His ride to the hospital was ludicrous: Four armed guards sat beside the sick, aged bishop. What were they afraid of?

Four months later he was sent to the monastery at Caldarusani. Here the bishop shared two small rooms with the other bishops. For fifteen months they, along with twenty-one priests, were isolated from society and from their dioceses. They underwent many privations. Their diet of seven hundred calories per day amounted to gradual starvation. The aim of this regimen was to destroy the resistance of the bishops and clergy who were, in their persons, the enduring expression of the perseverance of the Romanian Byzantine-rite Catholic Church. Our leaders refused to bow before the Communists; they would not obey these heralds of the apocalyptic beast.

Throughout all of this suffering, Bishop Frentiu was serene and even optimistic, celebrating Mass daily — the one favor granted to the bishops at the monastery.

Bishop Frentiu was later transferred to Sighet Prison and put into Cell 48. He never abandoned hope in the eventual restoration of the Church; he used to say that on Easter Sunday, 1950, he would celebrate Holy Mass in the Cathedral at Oradea.

Of course, he never did. He lived his last two years in a cell with three other bishops and eight aged priests. Into their arms he collapsed in death on July 11, 1952. He was seventy-seven years old. His last four years of suffering contributed to the sanctification of his soul.

He was buried at night by security guards in a ditch dug in the abandoned Jewish cemetery on the shore of the

Iza, a tributary stream of the Tisa River. There were no funeral prayers and no grave marker. Thus was Bishop Frentiu rewarded by the illegal and temporary masters of Romania's destiny. And thus did he receive the crown of martyrdom from his Creator's hands.

Bishop Frentiu was my diocesan bishop. In 1935 he accepted me into the seminary at Oradea. In 1937 he sent me on to higher studies in Rome. He ordained me a deacon in 1940. We mourn him along with the bishops, priests, and faithful, who will remember him forever.

John Suciu was bishop of Blaj, the historic center of the Romanian Byzantine-rite Catholic Church. He was born in that city on December 4, 1907, the son of a married priest and nephew of the famous canon and preacher, John Coltor. From childhood he manifested extraordinary intelligence and memory, diligence, and devotion to his faith.

In 1925 he was sent to Rome to study at the Angelicum Athenaeum while residing at the College of St. Athanasius. He had a sensitive nature and enjoyed taking trips through Italy to observe the flora and fauna. He even kept pet snakes, a hobby which later attracted the curiosity of youths.

On November 29, 1931, he was ordained a priest in Rome. He returned to Romania for his assignment as a religion teacher at the boys' high school in Blaj. An ascetical man whose room at the school was an attic garret, he had a talent for telling stories, was a good psychologist, and had the gift of discernment of souls. With his black and sparkling eyes, he seemed able to probe to the depths of any heart. He was forgiving and full of kindness, always inspiring courage and optimism.

Enflamed with love and apostolic zeal, the young priest fully understood the mission entrusted to him by his ordinary. He realized that the youth were his apostolate.

With his marvelous gift for oratory and skill in writing, he taught and published a magazine, *The New Youth*. He wrote pamphlets about the holy lives of European youths, and two books, *Heroism* (1942) and *Youth* (1943). His biographies of heroes provided inspiring examples for Romanian youth.

An army officer named Captain Draghicescu (I was to meet him later in the prison at Gherla) told me that while in battle on the Eastern Front in Stalingrad — when Romanian troops were surrounded by the Communists and all seemed hopeless — he happened to find Bishop Suciu's book *Heroism*. Reading this book restored his confidence in God and in himself. When he finally did reach safety and freedom, he thanked God for His gift of courage which came to him through reading this book.

John Suciu's wise advice and his biographies of virtuous individuals inspired many youths, especially among the students in Bucharest and Cluj. He adapted the message of Christianity to the needs of the students. His incisively logical expositions were written in a warm and captivating style full of antithesis and comparisons. His retreat conferences earned the esteem of the young adults.

After seven years in this apostolate, he was consecrated auxiliary bishop of Oradea on July 20, 1940. Only thirty-two years old, he was nicknamed "Bishop of the Youth." He once told me: "At first I thought that the administration of the diocese would keep me from my former work as a preacher and writer. But not so: I am not exhausted, I feel myself restored with tenfold energy." As a bishop, in the fullness of Holy Orders, he developed an even more fruitful doctrinal and pastoral activity.

After the Hungarians occupied northern Transylvania, and with Bishop Frentiu exiled from that diocese, young Bishop Suciu was left alone to lead the Church in Oradea. He visited the parishes and comforted those who

suffered under the new rule. He interceded with the occupational government, striving to protect his flock from many injustices — from pillage, terror, even death. Those were four arduous years. In the autumn of 1940, the populace of two villages was slaughtered by soldiers. As a true Romanian patriot, Bishop Suciu was deeply saddened by this slaughter. Years later, when he was able, he gave voice to his anguish by celebrating a Mass at the grave site of those who had been massacred.

During his episcopacy, Bishop Suciu continued to teach the faith through his writing. He wrote a textbook for elementary-school students; a meditation book, *The Wounds of the Lord*; and a prayerbook for children, *The First Meeting*. He gathered material for a family trilogy — *The Father, The Mother, The Child* — but finished only *The Mother*. The Communists stole the rough drafts of the other two works, as well as an unfinished manuscript of the bishop's book on the life of St. John Bosco. These works are lost forever.

In 1947, Bishop Suciu was made provisional leader of the archdiocese of Blaj and apostolic administrator until a new metropolitan could be elected. Since 1945, when the Communist government came into power, civil liberties had been severely limited and the free press completely suppressed. While others might bow to state interference in the Church, the Catholic bishops asserted their rightful independence in matters of faith. Thus, they became the focus of the Communist persecution of religion which intensified in 1948.

Providentially, the lion's part in this resistance to Communist domination was reserved for the youngest bishop, John Suciu. He preached masterful sermons in the cathedral at Blaj, forever imprinting his oratory on the souls of the faithful. Some of his sermons were taken down in shorthand to be handed down as a precious heritage.

While still a young priest, John Suciu had foreseen the persecutions as he observed the ferment of Communism stirring in Soviet Russia; and, especially, as he witnessed the persecution of the Church in the Ukraine. He wrote his books on heroism to prepare young people for the days ahead for both the Romanian people and the Church. In *Heroism* he writes:

I wish to transform all the stars into tongues of fire, all the sands of the seas into mouths which shout, and all human wounds into lips which speak — because I want to ring like a furious bell to sound the alarm in the depths of your soul, to beat energetically against the walls of indifference, the covers of commodity in which you wrap the life of your youth. Get out from your swaddling clothes. Step up to your manly rank, your vocation to live heroically.

Today, and in the days to come, there is one kind of person not to be: a traitor. There is only one kind of life which will not be treason: it is the heroic life. This heroism is a smile of divine poetry leaving its print in our human clay. This heroism, and only this, can redeem the world.

In the epilogue of his biography of a virtuous young Italian, Bishop Suciu exhorts the reader: "Conquer life through the joy of faith. Beat the monster of sin, young man: do not be mediocre!"

In *The Wounds of the Lord*, the bishop develops the idea of heroic participation in the Lord's sufferings:

The wounds of Jesus are signs of victory. Each victory that reaches eternity is bathed in the Lord's wounds.

On the day of his episcopal consecration, Bishop Suciú foretold the trouble and martyrdom he would undergo:

I do not feel that my consecration as bishop is an enthronement on an episcopal chair, but is an ascension to the cross. I feel I am united with the eternal interests of Jesus Christ, of His Church, His flock — not with the high dignity of a purple arm-chair. Now will be fulfilled in me what is lacking in the passion of Jesus Christ for His Church. I will be the companion of the thorny crown of Christ more than of the diadem of glory; feeling the petals of blood upon the Divine forehead more than tasting the perfume of heavenly joy. When St. John Bosco was ordained, his devout mother said: "My son, henceforth you begin to suffer; you are crucified with Christ on the cross."

During the persecution, Bishop Suciú sent many letters of encouragement to the priests, the faithful, and particularly to the youth, addressing them thus:

Now is the hour of Christian heroism in our Romanian land. The Romanian Catholic Byzantine-rite Church — true expression of Romanian culture and Roman Catholic faith — is the authentic presence of our Holy Redeemer among Romanians, and in Christ we suffer persecution. Jesus Himself, in His Mystical Body, is again beaten, spat upon, crowned with thorns and crucified. The city of Christ's Church in Romania is attacked by the sons of darkness. Do not write on the pages of history the words "coward" and "traitor." Fight for our patrimony of eternal truth and light. Fight for the sole means of salvation for men: the Church in union with its Head — Jesus Christ.

Behold, I write to you, young men, because you are strong.

Ever since 1925, the bishop had been convinced that only martyr-saints could rouse Romania from stupor and indifference. He told the priests and laity: "The Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite still lacks the beauty of martyrdom. . . . It still lacks the wounds of Our Savior. Only persecution can give us the crown of martyrdom and show to the whole world what we are: sons and apostles of the true Church."

Bishop John Suciu's struggles to defend the Church, and his life of suffering in prison abundantly prove his sanctity. Nobody and nothing could stop him from following the crucified Jesus in order to drink from the chalice of the sufferings of Calvary.

Communist authorities relentlessly pursued him on his last visitations to the parishes of his vast archdiocese of Blaj. During October of 1948, cordons of soldiers tried to block his entry to the cathedral at Blaj, which was crowded with the faithful who longed to hear the bishop preach the most beautiful sermon he ever delivered. Only a saint could have shown this timely courage.

With the other bishops, he was arrested on October 29, 1948. He too was imprisoned at Dragoslavele and later at Caldarusani. In May of 1949, he was transferred to the dungeons below the Department of Internal Affairs in Bucharest. There he underwent insults, torture, and hunger. In September of 1950, he was sent to Sighet Prison. On May 27, 1953, he was at last freed from his bodily sufferings. He died in the arms of his fellow bishops and priests in Cell 44.

The news of his death spread like lightning to the other cells; we knew he died a saint. He lived as he believed and he died as he lived, with a crown of holiness

upon his martyr's head. He was buried beside the other martyrs of the Church in that same abandoned cemetery on the shore of the Iza, just outside Sighet, without any prayers at his burial and without a cross on his grave. The soil of Romania is enriched with a martyr-saint.

At the entrance to the sanctuary of Byzantine-rite churches there is a screen decorated by icons — portraits of holy persons — called the *iconostasis* (the icon stand). In Romania it is said that John Suciu is "a saint who seems to have stepped right out of the iconostasis."

John Balan was bishop of Lugoj. Born at Teius on February 10, 1880, he studied in Blaj, Budapest, and Vienna. Balan was ordained June 24, 1903, and later appointed archpriest in Bucharest. During World War I he was well known for his parochial and patriotic activities.

Bishop Balan was a scholar who knew many languages, including Hebrew and Greek, and prepared a new translation of the Bible. The Old Testament text of his translation was published, but that of the New Testament remained a manuscript which Bishop Balan hoped to print and of which he often spoke while he was in prison with us.

During the persecution of the Church, many Catholics and non-Catholics crowded the Cathedral of Lugoj to hear Bishop Balan unmask the criminal acts of the Communist government. Religious ceremonies were forbidden during the day, so the bishop held evening devotions at which he preached, exhorting the faithful to pray for the union of our Church with Rome.

In October of 1948 the government ordered the Orthodox archpriest in Lugoj to occupy the Catholic cathedral. He refused. Security agents then ordered the Cathedral pastor, Father John Ploscariu, to hand the cathedral over to them. He, too, refused to cooperate with the Communists in their unification scheme.

Bishop Balan knew very well the intent behind this Communist drive to sever the union with Rome and unite the Byzantine-rite Catholics with the Orthodox. It was a clever plot to buy the submission of the Orthodox to the Communists by appealing to the Orthodox resentment of the historic union of 1700.

While he was in Rome as a consultant for the Pontifical Commission for the Codification of Eastern Canon Law, John Balan did extensive research on the papal correspondence with the Church in Romania and with the Eastern patriarchs. There is now no doubt that for many centuries the popes exercised jurisdiction over the territory of Romania, and that the Latin origins of the Church in Romania are ample precedent for the 1700 union with Rome — which preserved the Byzantine rite while restoring the acceptance of the pope's primacy.

The Communists wanted no outside influence over the Churches they were seeking to control and eventually eliminate. A man like Bishop Balan was an obstacle to their campaign. He as well as the other bishops of the Romanian Byzantine-rite Catholic Church had to be stopped. On October 29, 1948, Bishop Balan was arrested while at prayer in his chapel. He was ready. His packed suitcase stood beside his prie-dieu. A number of the faithful gathered outside his residence, offering to defend the arrested bishop. He told them to return home; God was his refuge and defense, and the will of God must be fulfilled.

Like the other bishops, he was taken to Dragoslavele, to Caldarusani, and then to Sighet — where he stayed almost five years, from May 24, 1950, until January 5, 1955. After that he spent five years under house arrest at the monasteries at Curtea de Arges and Ciorogarla, near Bucharest.

During April of 1955, after his release from Sighet, Bishop Balan and the other two surviving bishops, Hossu

and Rusu, addressed a memorandum to the Communist government in which they requested the restoration of the Romanian Byzantine-rite Catholic Church. For this effort Bishop Balan was rearrested and isolated at the monastery at Ciorogarla, where he endured an antihuman regimen of privation and suffering. He fell sick and was taken to a Bucharest hospital, where he died on August 4, 1960, at the age of seventy-nine. His grave is in Belu Cemetery in Bucharest.

We rely on Bishop John Balan's constant intercession to God for the freedom of our Church and our country. I pray that his martyrdom will bear fruit in the true union of the Church throughout the world.

Titus Livius Chinezu, consecrated in prison as clandestine bishop of the vicariate of Bucharest, was the successor of the martyred bishop Vasile Aftenie. Titus Chinezu, the son of a married priest, was born in 1904. He finished his studies in Rome at the Angelicum, living at the College of St. Athanasius. Ordained in 1920, he was appointed teacher at the theological academy at Blaj, a post he held from 1930 until 1946.

By nature he was mild, compliant, and tender. He was a most cultured man who maintained his dignity throughout the campaign of suppression of the Church. On October 29, 1948, Father Chinezu was arrested and imprisoned at the monasteries in Neamtul and Caldarusani. On December 3, 1949, he was secretly consecrated a bishop by Bishop Frentiu.

Because of his sensitive nature, Bishop Chinezu suffered much in prison. Yet he never complained. He gave spiritual retreats to those imprisoned at Caldarusani, thus strengthening the souls of the bishops and priests. His example in prison will remain forever in the hearts of those of us who were with him.

For almost four years some of us shared the same cell with Bishop Chinezu in Sighet Prison. Often the chief of security attempted to persuade us to join the Orthodox in the government reunification of Churches. On September 14, 1950, Bishop Chinezu said to the security chief: "Sir, we are amazed at the Communist government, which, publicly professing atheism, now comes here to evangelize for the Orthodox Church." The chief replied: "You, who are a prisoner, should watch what you say. You should have a different attitude. There are men in the government who know theology as well as you." Later in the day the prison commander came to Cell 44 and reprimanded us for being insolent — as if the zebra outfit we wore obliged us to accept all the insanities of the Communist regime. In their eyes our imprisonment itself was a conviction which deprived us of the right to defend ourselves.

In response to our resistance under the leadership of the bishops, the prison leaders took more excessive measures of reprisal, terror, hunger, and isolation. Bishop Chinezu fell sick under this regimen. He was deprived of any medical assistance and was separated from the rest of us. Although he implored us to prevent this separation, we were powerless to stop the prison authorities from isolating the bishop in another cell. He suffered cruelly that winter. The prison commander, Vasile Ciolpan, ordered the bishop's cell window to be kept open. In the awful frost, on January 15, 1955, Bishop Chinezu froze to death. He spent his last five days agonizing in atonement for the comfortable lives of priests and faithful who flee sacrifice.

Titus Chinezu was buried at night in the abandoned cemetery on the shore of the Iza. He lies near Bishop Suciú, his best friend. For twenty-four years now he has rested in the glory of heaven without a cross at his earthly grave. Yet he experiences the glorious justice and salvation which we, too, hope to share.

Alexander Rusu, bishop of Baia Mare (Maramures), was born on November 22, 1884, in the village of Saulea. After studies in Budapest, he was ordained a priest July 20, 1910. He taught dogmatic theology at the seminary in Blaj and was editor of the magazine *Unirea*. Later he became rector of the seminary. In 1930 he was consecrated titular bishop of the diocese of Baia Mare.

As a teacher he distinguished himself by his clear intelligence; as a journalist he was known for his force of argumentation; as a rector he had a reputation for authority and discipline. As a bishop he manifested much energy, resolution, and courage. He enjoyed the esteem of the former government, the politicians, and the educated class. But the Communists felt only hatred for him.

In 1946 he was elected metropolitan of the archdiocese of Blaj. This installation was opposed by the Communist prime minister, Peter Groza, who did not want Bishop Rusu to head the See of Blaj. The existing concordat required that the Holy See ask the consent of the government in the appointment of the metropolitan. In spite of Communist harassment, Bishop Alexander Rusu continued his episcopal activity until his arrest on October 29, 1948.

In his sermons at the cathedral in Baia Mare, Bishop Rusu scored the Communist persecution. His articles on Communism are precious historical documents. With the other bishops, he shared in the writing of the memorandum of 1956 which asked for the restoration of our rite. Bishop Rusu's incisive style is evident in this document, which was written at the monastery at Curtea de Arges.

After his time of imprisonment at Dragoslavele and Caldarusani, Bishop Rusu was taken to Bucharest for interrogation.

One by one, the Communists isolated the bishops in the hope of breaking their resistance. If even a single bishop could be "converted," the claims of legitimacy on behalf

of the unification program would be enhanced.

In May of 1957, after serving nine years, Bishop Rusu was sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labor for the crimes of treason and agitation — actually for his refusal to break with Rome. He was sent to the prison at Gherla, then to Dej, and back again in 1963 to Gherla. For over fifteen years he suffered much torture. We compare him to the fourth-century bishop, Athanasius of Alexandria, who was exiled from his diocese for many years. But Bishop Rusu was exiled in his own country.

At Gherla, Bishop Rusu was locked in Cell 10, a very cold cell on the ground floor. He became seriously ill with a kidney infection. On May 9, 1963, Bishop Rusu stood and blessed the other bishops and priests who were with him saying to them, "My brothers, I go to the Lord, who calls me to receive the reward for the life granted by Him and lived and sacrificed for Him and for the Church and the Romanian people." He then quietly lay on the cot, closed his eyes, and gave up his spirit. He was buried without ceremony in the prisoners' cemetery at Gherla. Post No. 133 was set over his grave. The entire Romanian people reverence this great shepherd.

Julius Hossu, bishop of Cluj (Gherla), was born on January 30, 1885, in Milasul Mare. A nephew of Bishop Basil Hossu, his predecessor in the diocese, he studied in Blaj and Rome, always ranking first in his class. He was ordained in 1910 by his uncle and appointed diocesan secretary, first at Lugoj and then at Gherla. He served as a military chaplain for Romanian soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I.

At the age of thirty-two, on December 4, 1917, he was consecrated bishop for the diocese of Gherla (later, Cluj). On December 1, 1918, he read the Proclamation of the Union of Transylvania with the Motherland (Romania).

Together with two members of the National Council, he presented this document to King Ferdinand I in Bucharest. For this patriotic stand, Bishop Hossu was highly decorated by the government. For twenty-two years he was an *ex officio* senator in the Romanian parliament. He defended the rights of Romania over the territory of Transylvania; the right to life of the unborn in the abortion-law discussion of 1933, and the right of children of the Byzantine rite to study religion in the public schools.

In 1940, when Hitler ceded the northern part of Transylvania to Hungary, Bishop Hossu was the only individual officially recognized as a Romanian representative to speak out to the Hungarian government against the atrocities of the occupation. Because of this, Hungarian students spat at him and slapped him when they attacked his episcopal residence in 1944.

In 1929, he moved to Cluj, the cultural and national center of Transylvania, where he opened a theological academy and many private schools. He stressed correct formation of the clergy and supported vocations to the monastic life. He championed the Christian press, regularly visited all the parishes of his diocese, and was known by all for his care of the poor.

As a result of the persecution by the Communists, during which he was at the height of his episcopal vocation, he spent twenty-two years in exile, from 1948 until 1970. We who were his companions in prison saw how he suffered as he witnessed the scattering of his flock. One day in Caldarusani he said to us: "You do not know how painful is the suffering of a bishop for the sad destiny of his Church and his nation. It cannot be compared with anything except the torments of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross when He foresaw all the persecutions to be unleashed down through the centuries by the enemies of the Church."

On September 14, 1950, the security chief of Sighet Prison presented to Bishop Hossu an offer to create and organize a national Romanian Byzantine-rite Church which would be independent of the pope. This was a trap for the imprisoned clergy and the persecuted faithful. The chief told the bishop that the resistance of the bishops and priests was useless because the majority of the faithful, and even many of the clergy, had accepted the government's unification of the Churches. The chief said it would be better to find a middle way, a formula which would exclude the pope yet preserve the Byzantine-rite Catholic Church.

"Your flock is waiting for you," the agent said to Bishop Hossu, "because it is scattered without its shepherd." "Yes," the bishop replied, "the shepherd is attacked for his flock, which is indeed scattered. But the Supreme Shepherd will again gather it in. We were taken from the flock; we did not abandon it. We are not guilty. Therefore, the government has the duty to set us free. My liberty and that of my colleagues cannot be conditioned on the denial of our union with the pope — for that would mean a true abandoning of our flock.

"No matter how much we are tortured and suffer for the flock, we will never abandon the flock, never betray our faith in union with the whole Church. We suffer for the flock and are held through faith to the flock. We belong to the flock; it follows us and we are one with it. Our arrest and isolation cannot break this union. If the government wants the integrity of the flock as you now claim, then put us at liberty because we are one with our flock."

The astounded security agent could only say, "I did not believe, your excellency, that you would have such tremendous faith." At this the bishop answered, "I thank God because never in my life have I doubted my faith." This dialogue the bishop wrote on a scrap of paper he smuggled to him. For that reason, I know it is verbatim.

Bishop Hossu suffered for twenty-two years for his faith and his flock. He protested continually through memoranda to the government, repeatedly requesting freedom for the Church. Through his years of exile, Bishop Hossu maintained a rich correspondence both with Romanians and people in other countries, some of whom were able to visit him when he was under house arrest — though much to their peril. He sent word to America that there was great scandal being given to the faithful by so many priests who resign from the priesthood for futile, even trivial reasons.

On March 5, 1969, Pope Paul VI elevated Bishop Julius Hossu to the rank of cardinal in appreciation of his service to the Church and fidelity to the Holy Father. Bishop Hossu asked the Holy Father not to announce this until after his death, because he feared more persecution of the Church and a greater delay in its restoration. Thus, he was made cardinal *in pectore*. This means that, for reasons of prudence, the Pope kept it a secret until March 5, 1973, when Julius Hossu had been dead nearly three years. Archbishop John Beran, in exile from Prague, Czechoslovakia, was also named a cardinal *in pectore* at the same time. These honors were a consolation for the Church of the catacombs behind the iron curtain and a recognition of our fight for the faith.

Cardinal Julius Hossu died on May 28, 1970, in Colentina Hospital in Bucharest at the age of eighty-five. He was buried simply, in Belu Cemetery in Bucharest, without the honor due to a great bishop and patriot. In his memory, Alexander Silistreanu wrote a beautiful poem, part of which I share with you:

You carried the Cross
To Golgotha
High above the Carpathians. . . .

Through your martyrdom
Our nation received
The mystical yearning . . .
The immortal
Resurrection rose.

The Priests

The following priests who suffered for their faith represent many pastoral apostolates; they were parish priests, chancery administrators, high-school teachers, and chaplains. Some were friends or acquaintances of mine before the persecution; some I met in a prison cell or on the shores of the Danube in a forced-labor camp.

Father John Sabau, as a result of the interrogation he underwent, the prison regimen, and the lack of medical care, died in his prison cell at Baia Mare in May of 1949.

Father George Rosianu, pursued by government agents, hid in a cellar in the Orades vineyards. The faithful of my parish in Oradea — my brother among them — helped him with food, clothing, and medicine. He fell ill and died in December of 1949.

Father Emil Borz was arrested in 1949 and sent to the infamous Aiud Prison, where he died in August of 1952.

Father Augustin Maghiar was sent to Sighet Prison and put in isolation in Cell 36. Some months later I got near his cell and was able to talk with him for a few minutes. I shall never forget that encounter. When he looked up and

saw me at his cell door, he said, "O my Lord, Jesus Christ, I can see a human face!" Before that moment he had seen only the hostile, inhuman masks of the guards, who treated him brutally. He asked me about the bishops and said: "O Lord, my God, I thank You that I have come here, near my bishops, to suffer for Your name. Your will be done." He became gravely ill and was isolated and abandoned in Cell 8. We could not get near his cell to comfort him in his agony. He was ready for his hour of death, which came on August 16, 1951.

Father Augustine Olah was imprisoned in 1952. In the fall of 1955, very sick and exhausted, he was released. He died at home in March of 1956.

Father Demetrius Man spent several months in Gherla Prison. In June of 1950, he was sent to Sighet and later to Aiud, where he died.

Father Demetrius Neda was arrested in 1950 and interrogated in Sighet Prison. As a result of his sufferings, he fell sick with a pulmonary abscess. From our cell we could hear him coughing loudly. In March of 1952 he was placed under house arrest in Craiova and died in 1956.

Fathers John Osian, Vasile Suta, and Michael Boca were all sent to the forced-labor camp of Ghencea, where they died and were buried in 1954.

Father Leon Manu, a member of the Basilian order, became superior of the Basilians in Romania in 1946. He died in Gherla in the cell next to mine on March 28, 1958.

Father Zenovie Paclisanu, a great historian of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite, was a Ro-

manian patriot who participated in the 1918 Assembly at Alba Julia, which promoted the union of Transylvania with greater Romania. In 1929 he had been a counselor for the diplomatic mission between the Vatican and Romania which resulted in a concordat. For his contribution to Church-State relations, Pope Pius XI elevated Father Paclisanu to the rank of papal prelate.

The Communists, by killing him, have raised Father Zenovie Paclisanu to an even more glorious status. After his arrest, he was tortured in the underground cells of the Department of Internal Affairs in Bucharest. At his trial he retracted the false confession he had been forced to sign and was again tortured, this time for his public assertion of the truth. He died at the hands of his torturers in November of 1958.

Father Victor Fanea was sent to the forced-labor camp near Stoenesti on the Danube River. The brutal regimen and the cold killed him. His wife and five children mourn a heroic priest.

Father Teofil Baliban was sent to the prison at Gherla and later to Aiud, where he died and was buried.

Fathers George Bob, Ludovic Vida, and Augustin Folea all spent time in the two monasteries in which the bishops and priests were interned. They were then sent to Sighet Prison. Shortly after completing their prison sentences, all three died at home.

Father Augustin Bacotiu was in the same cell with me at Gherla Prison. In May of 1959 he was transferred to the forced-labor camp at Grinzi, where he died in 1961. His wife and children and the faithful mourn him as a true martyr.

Father Virgil Maxim, the son of a teacher, was born in 1915. He studied mathematics at the University of Cluj, entering the seminary in 1935. He was educated in Rome at the Propaganda Fide. In 1943 he took his doctorate in theology, magna cum laude. He and I were classmates for seven years and were ordained together on July 20, 1941, in Rome, by an exiled Russian bishop, Alexander Evreinoff.

Back in Romania, Father Maxim was appointed pastor of the parish of Gradini and spiritual director of the students at the Catholic high school. In 1947 he was arrested during the Communist drive to downgrade the Church's influence on Romanian youth. Released in 1949 after the suppression of our Church, he was again arrested in 1958. He was released in 1964 at the time of the general amnesty in Romania. An excellent historian, he then worked as an archivist for the city of Oradea. The seven and a half years of prison had weakened his health, and he had to spend almost the entire year of 1977 in the hospital. On March 18, 1978, he died. His funeral, much to the chagrin of the Communists, was well attended by priests and faithful — the remnants of the Church. I myself, from a distance, mourned the death of a confessor of the faith and a personal friend.

Father Simeon Crisan was born in 1916, the son of peasants. An outstanding student, he too was sent to Rome to study theology. A poet and composer of religious and patriotic hymns, he was ordained a priest in 1940 and took his doctorate in 1941. In Romania he served as a teacher and spiritual director in a Catholic high school in Blaj. During the persecution he resisted the campaign for unification. He was arrested in 1949 and again in 1956. From 1961 to 1962, we worked in the same brigade in the forced-labor camp on the Danube. He maintained a good mood always

and often sang for the encouragement of his fellow workers. Because he was a frail man, I often helped him meet the norm of work we had to do. Otherwise he would have been punished. In the spring of 1962 he was transferred to prison. Some two years later he was sent home to his family. He finally got a civil job, but in 1973 he died suddenly of a heart attack on the way home from work.

Father Gavril Balan was born in 1916 near Baia Mare. He attended the theological academy in Blaj. After his ordination in 1939, he went to Rome and took a doctorate in theology. In Romania he was an associate pastor in a parish in Satu Mare and taught in the high schools. For six years during the persecution, he lived in hiding. In 1958 security officers arrested him and he was sent to prison. We met in the labor camps in 1960. I hardly recognized him at the time; he had aged from years of suffering and terror. His hair was white and his body bent. After the amnesty of 1966, he worked at a civil job. Years of hard labor had ruined his health and, in 1970, he died.

Father Alexander Sasaran, born in 1926, had attended only two years of theological studies when the suppression of the Church took place. Yet this seminarian persisted in his vocation and was ordained in 1952 by the clandestine bishop John Dragomir. Because of his work for the restoration of the Church, he was arrested on August 13, 1956, and sent to prison. We lived in the same cell at Gherla Prison until 1959, when we went to the forced-labor camps. He had an ulcer and the prison regimen aggravated his condition. After completing his five-year sentence, he worked at the library of Baia Mare. I never met him again, but I heard that he died in 1975. This young priest had sacrificed himself for the Church without taking any advantage of his position. Many other priests, including some who had lived

for forty years at the expense of the Church, betrayed her at the time of the Communist persecution. There are other priests like Father Sasaran, but I do not know them. We pray that through their intercession God will restore our Church. Perhaps, when Communism has passed away, the names of all these martyrs will be listed and honored.

The Clandestine Bishops

I have already told the story of one of the clandestine bishops, Titius Livius Chinezu, who died in Sighet Prison. Bishop John Chertes from Cluj was also consecrated on December 3, 1949, secretly at night by Bishop Frentiu, while the bishops and priests were in confinement in the Monastery at Caldarusani. In 1964, Bishop Chertes was released and is now living in retirement near Cluj.

Four clandestine bishops were consecrated by the apostolic nuncio to Romania, Bishop Gerald Patrick O'Hara, before he was expelled from the country by the Communists. They were Bishop Alexander Todea from Blaj, Bishop Julius Hirtea of Oradea, Bishop John Ploscariu of Lugoj, and Bishop John Dragomir of Baia Mare. As far as I know, none of these bishops was made an official ordinary to succeed any titular bishop of the Byzantine-rite Catholic Church. Bishops Hirtea, Ploscariu, and Dragomir were consecrated on March 28, 1949, at the nunciature in Bucharest; Bishop Todea was consecrated there on December 19, 1950. All four of these bishops were arrested and imprisoned in 1951. Released in 1964 at the time of the general amnesty in Romania, they were then forced to retire and forbidden by the civil government to exercise any pastoral activities. At the time of the writing of this book, only Bishops Chinezu and Hirtea are deceased.

Bishop Julius Hirtea was born in 1913 of a poor peasant family from Vintire. A bright student, he later attended the theological academy at Oradea and then the Propaganda Fide in Rome. He lived at Pio Romeno College, which Pope Pius XI had built for Romanian seminarians. Ordained a priest in 1937, he then studied Sacred Scripture at the Biblical Institute in Rome under famous Jesuit scholars, including Father Augustin Bea, who later became a cardinal.

In 1940, after taking his doctorate, he returned to Romania, where he was spiritual director at the theological academy. A very good teacher who also worked with the high-school students, he was arrested in 1947 and released in 1949. In 1949, he was secretly consecrated a bishop by Apostolic Nuncio O'Hara. Julius Hirtea continued his underground work for the Church until 1952, when he was again arrested. Upon his release from prison in 1964, he found work in a transport agency as a clerk. There his noble manner attracted the esteem and love of all the people around him.

Though his thirteen years of prison had irreparably undermined his health, he nevertheless worked secretly among the faithful and continually encouraged other Catholic priests who worked at secular jobs. He worked and prayed together in hope with the other four surviving clandestine bishops and never gave up hope for the restoration of the Church. In 1977, he fell sick, and died on June 28, 1978, at the age of sixty-four. His was a beautiful funeral attended by hundreds of priests and many faithful. In his last letter to me, he insisted that we must continue to resist Communism. "It is not we who keep silence here," he wrote. "It is not we who are the Church of Silence, but the members of the Church in the free world who are the real Church of Silence, for they do not speak out on our behalf."

The Church of the Catacombs: 1978

Despite thirty years of continuous suppression of the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite, hope for freedom of worship lives on. A Catholic priest who attended the outdoor funeral liturgy of Bishop Julius Hirtea in June of 1978 wrote me with enthusiasm:

Oradea has never known such an event in its whole history! Old people tell me this was the largest crowd they ever saw assembled in Rulikowski Cemetery. Thousands of faithful came, Catholic and Orthodox, from every corner of Transylvania. There were two hundred priests and the remaining four clandestine bishops in attendance . . . a tremendous manifestation of our presence — our religious and moral existence as a Church. The Communist officials were deeply impressed.

In 1948, there were some eighteen hundred Catholic priests of the Byzantine rite in Romania. By my estimate, there remain about three hundred of these priests still alive who lived through the persecution and remained Catholic. Even these have been prohibited from exercising any pastoral ministry in public. During the years of persecution, over a thousand Catholic priests have joined the Orthodox Church, remaining pastors by adding their signatures to the unification petition. There are at present about four hundred Catholic priests who minister to Catholics in private while fulfilling the duties of a civilian job or profession.

Those who have been ordained by the clandestine bishops are commonly called *in pectore* priests, a term that became popular after the Pope's announcement, following

the death of Bishop Julius Hossu, that he had been a cardinal *in pectore*. At the homes of the faithful, these priests perform baptisms, marriages, and funeral services. Often these ceremonies are performed first in public by the Orthodox pastor, then in private by the Catholic priest. Most of the underground priests function in the towns, where they minister to people who have been forced by industrialization to leave the rural areas.

The life of the Church of the catacombs fulfills the words of the martyred bishop John Suciu, who wrote in his last pastoral letter of October 5, 1948: "If they take our churches, for a time every one of us shall make a church in our own house and wait with confident hope for the deliverance, which will come."

Although all of the parishes which were formerly Byzantine Catholic are now officially Orthodox, there are about twenty churches which the parishioners still consider Catholic. In spite of the death or replacement of the original Catholic priest, and in spite of the recent government campaign to strip these churches of any remnants of Catholic identity (old icons, banners, etc.), the parishioners continue in their fidelity to the pope and the Catholic faith. They have not forgotten Article 37 of the 1948 Communist Law of Cults, which allows a church to change denomination if more than half of the parishioners choose to do so. They hope that the law is a sword that cuts two ways!

In 1977, a committee of anonymous Catholic citizens of Romania addressed a memorandum to the government. They appealed for recognition of the existence of our Church. They were officially ignored, as have been the bishops' many memorandums demanding freedom of worship. The only response was a new wave of interrogations and harassment of individuals suspected of leading this movement on behalf of our Church. In many nations behind the iron curtain, the Catholic Church is fighting for

the rights to use mass media and to teach religion to children. In Romania, the Byzantine-rite Catholics are fighting for acknowledgment of their very existence.

All Christians in Romania are persecuted to this day by the Communists. It is very difficult to get a copy of the Bible: In 1969, the Orthodox were finally able, with great difficulty, to get permission to print 100,000 Bibles. These were sold out in two weeks; the government forbade a second printing. So severely do the Communists restrict communication that every typewriter must be registered with the government — like a dangerous weapon! How great is the hunger for the Word of God, the true liberator of mankind!

Each Monday, local pastors must present a report to a government office on Sunday's church attendance. Lest their homework be done carelessly, spies in the congregation are assigned the duty of keeping track of any new worshippers who may show up. While the Communists are fairly tolerant of the religious practice of elderly people, it would not do for the new face in the pew to belong to a professor, a factory superintendent, or to some other influential person in the community. Nonetheless, one should not "confuse the Romanian people and the true Orthodox Church with the Communist regime and those Orthodox who have become their instruments." (See Peter Gherman's "The Romanian Byzantine-Rite Catholic Church: Thirty Years of Persecution in Romania, 1948-1978," East Chicago, Ind.: Association of Romanian Catholics in America, 1978.) During the height of the persecution many Orthodox priests and religious were at the side of their Catholic brethren, suffering in prisons and labor camps for their faith.

Unfortunately, the persecution of the Orthodox Church has not been limited to the boundaries of Romania. The Communists promote the ordination of their puppets

and spies within the Orthodox seminaries and then send these clergy abroad to the Orthodox Church in diaspora — especially to the United States and Canada — with the result that the Orthodox Church here is divided into two branches, one favoring accommodation with Communism and another which is determined to resist atheism completely. Alexander Solzhenitsyn has pleaded with the Orthodox Church in the free world to overcome this division and present a united Christian witness.

Among Catholics there is greater hope for realistic dialogue resulting in greater religious freedom behind the iron curtain. The new pope, John Paul II, has lived under Communism in Poland and knows just what all the talk amounts to: He is not naive and will demand concessions rather than always make concessions. In January of 1979, Pope John Paul II addressed the diplomats accredited to the Vatican. He stated that the Holy See works for religious freedom for the Catholic Church around the world: "These initiatives have favorable results, for the most part, but it is difficult not to mention certain local Churches, certain rites, whose situation with regard to religious freedom leaves so much to be desired, when it is not completely deplorable. There are even poignant cries asking for help or relief, which the Apostolic See cannot fail to hear."

Communist authorities in Romania may ignore grassroots enthusiasm for the Church and local leaders of the Church, but they are subject to the pressures of politics and world opinion, which might lead them to negotiate with the spokesman of the universal Church.

With that possibility in mind, and with the hope that the Communist states may evolve into more humane systems — for people change and new generations arise — papal diplomacy keeps open channels of communication with these states, refusing to burn any bridges and seeking to promote religious freedom and world peace. Who is in a

position to evaluate papal initiatives which must maintain the privacy essential to diplomatic action? I abide in confidence in the vicar of Christ. In May of 1929, Pope Pius XI boldly declared: "Where there is a question of saving souls, or of preventing greater harm to souls, we feel the courage to treat with the devil in person."

The Vatican has always been aware of our plight. In 1949, the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, made this comment on the suppression of our Church: "No similar story of moral violence, of persecution, of the *Via Crucis* of liberty, of personality, and of human dignity can be read in all the pages of history."

The Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite is justly proud of its leaders who have received the crown of martyrdom. The Communists sometimes tried to offer a traitor's hat — as they tried to persuade a Catholic priest from Lugoj to apostatize in return for the reward of being made an Orthodox bishop. He answered them: "I have not a head for such a miter." No one can truly possess that which he has stolen. Neither our churches nor the living Church can be integrated with atheism. Our sentiments were fervently expressed by a Byzantine-rite Catholic priest who made a sad yet inspired visit to the holy and beloved cathedral at Blaj:

Seen from any side, the cathedral is simple and modest. Facing it, one notices her gentle, welcome appearance. Overall, she is luminous, glowing at midnight as brightly as at midday. Her demeanor is staunch and unwavering, standing upright like a sentry, as she has always stood from the moment the first stone of the foundation was set.

In the past many storms and tempests have raged against the cathedral. Yet she endures. Blows and

profanities have battered her, yet she stands pure. She remains the symbol of a harassed and suffering people, a beacon of faith and heroism. Her steeples, like two sentinels, stand watchful over the destiny of our Church and our nation. The spires, like two fervent hands raised in supplication, invite us to lift our thoughts to the heavens, from whence come all our blessings.

Now let us enter this holy cathedral. Say not a word, let her speak for herself. She gives forth a feeling of gloom and sadness. Look around. There is no one to be seen. No one in the nave and pews, no one in the sanctuary, no one at the altar. All have abandoned her.

In this mute and brooding solitude, one asks: Where are the bishops, the renowned preachers, the famous scholars and teachers, the young priests at vespers, the multitudes of students, the swarms of young boys and girls? Where are the generations of Romanian peasants, the people who walked to the foot of the altar to pledge an oath or shed a tear, receiving in return hope and peace? There is not even the sound of an old mother who wipes the warm tears from her face as she mourns for her departed children who do not return.

All of these faithful, from the vicinity or from far away, from this side and from beyond the grave, from the past and the present — all cherish you in their memories, but they do not enter here. They revere you as body of our body, soul of our soul, O holy and beloved Cathedral of Blaj! They await the day and the hour when your great bells will again

ring, calling all the faithful — the bishops, the priests, the people, young and old — to enter triumphantly and join in the solemn *Te Deum* of victory for truth and justice.

Then we will once again find ourselves overflowing your interior. Then our weeping will be turned to joy, our silence to a glad song; our crosses will be changed to a resurrection and our hopes fulfilled.

APPEN
-DIX:
THE
HISTOR
-ICAL
BACK-
GROUND

T. CASALETTO

The Union of 1700 and Church-State Relations

"I have come to light a fire on the earth.

How I wish the blaze were ignited!"

— *Luke 12:49*

Ideally, the relation between Church and State is one in which government tends to civil matters and leaves the Church free to permeate and inspire the social order. The principles of Church-State relations are based on Jesus' teaching that we should render to Caesar the things which are his and to God the things which are God's. Church and State have their own proper spheres, although in practice their activities overlap. Today the Church is faced with modern States whose governments seek to usurp the place of religion altogether. Lacking any commitment to the Supreme Being, such States find no higher reality than man. In actual practice, however, individuals are easily sacrificed to the demands of an impersonal State. Government becomes an absolute authority, a secular god.

Individual freedom and the autonomy of the Church are threatened, sometimes obliterated, by governments that refuse to recognize the inviolate nature of the God-given rights of the individual. The secular society may, in theory, provide for religious freedom; in practice it strives to exclude the Church's influence from public legislation and education. Mass propaganda is used to manipulate the emotions and shape the values of the people. Lacking true religion, secular society becomes increasingly antihuman. Legalized killing of millions of unborn babies is only one example of the progressive dehumanization of social values. This deepening inhumanity is the crisis of secularism both in the West and in Communist States.

Sincere Christians may yearn to withdraw from the

secular community, regarding it as a wholly external and alien world. Christians, however, must resist this temptation to leave to the devil the world in its present form. The irony of this approach is that it makes it easy for government to exploit worldly clergymen. I saw this happen in Romania; Alexander Solzhenitsyn saw it in Russia, where some clergy became, as he put it, "the yoke for the cart of Communism." The clergy, like all men, can be weak, can desire to please and to enjoy the rewards of accommodation and compromise. This historical tendency in the East began with the emperor Constantine: Close ties of Church and State led to a civil domination of the Church that was exploited later in Russia by both the Czars and the Communists.

On the other hand, the events of history have repeatedly proven the wisdom of the popes, who struggled to maintain a temporal as well as a spiritual independence. As sovereign of the Vatican State, the pope is not subject to any other government. The independence of the Roman pontiff enables him to cooperate with various States through the use of diplomacy, which often results in concordats. In this way, the Catholic Church has often been able to exert an influence on world affairs. Today it is the hope of millions of Catholics behind the iron curtain that Pope John Paul II will use his influence to win greater religious freedom for the Church.

One of the chief factors in the secularization of European culture was the weakening of religion because of the scandalous divisions of the Church. At work here was the denial of the papacy and the introduction of numerous new Church authorities. This policy contains within it a self-defeating justification for schism. The patriarchs of Constantinople have seen their ancient claim to be a second head of the Church — "the Pope of the East" — repudiated as each national Orthodox Church declared itself inde-

pendent of the jurisdiction of Constantinople. As in the case of Romania, hostile States have seized the opportunity to take a divide-and-conquer approach toward the Church.

Because of the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, the seeds of possible discord were planted long before by the two great sources of European tradition: Greece and Rome. Greek city-states were independent units which contributed to civilization the practice of variety in unity — a league. This heritage is seen in the Eastern Christian Churches, among which there is great respect for the uniqueness of individual local Churches and their customs.

The Romans, on the other hand, contributed to Europe a heritage of law and centralization. The result has been that in the Western Church there is an emphasis on uniformity of code and custom. The essential unity of the Church embraces elements of both East and West. The unity of the Church under the pope is not an accidental quality resulting from the Roman tradition of centralization. At the Last Supper, Jesus did not pray that the members of the Church would be united by a merely human bond. He prayed "that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (John 17:21).

The historical separations from the pope's authority have produced a "divisible unity" of Christians, which has weakened religion and made society vulnerable to secularism. In the face of continued aggressive secularization by totalitarian States, it is vital that members of the Church remain in union with the pope. The historic union of 1700 in Romania was a return to organic Church unity. Because of this union with Rome, the Romanian Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite was preserved from becoming a puppet of the Communists; instead it was raised to the dignity of martyrdom. The divine life perfected the human; the human did not corrupt the Church. In *The Kingdom of*

Jesus (St. Louis, Confraternity Home Study Service, 1966)
Father Daniel W. Martin writes:

"I give them eternal life," says our Lord; *"and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand"* (John 10:28). No one has his faith stolen from him; he freely surrenders it for some immediate advantage that appeals to him now more than the distant goal of God. (p. 172)

Two Principles of Church Order

When Constantine created a second capital at Constantinople, he divided the Roman Empire into East and West. This act had repercussions in the Church. At the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 450 A.D., the bishops of the East declared that Constantinople should "receive the same privileges of primacy as . . . Rome and be exalted equally with Rome" (Canon 28). Pope Leo approved the teachings of this council, but he rejected Canon 28 — that any city could be the equal of Rome in the Church. It was not so much the city of Rome or Constantinople which was at stake. He was concerned, rather, about the primacy of the bishop of Rome, who succeeds St. Peter as the head of the Church. The supremacy of the bishop of Rome is not founded on Rome's status as the capital of the empire.

Two principles of Church order should be noted here. First, the principle of *apostolicity*: Sees founded by an Apostle have primacy in the Church. This applies especially to the See of Rome, which was founded by St. Peter. Second, the principle of *adaptation*: See cities of the Church,

whenever practical, should be located at civil capitals. These principles have a wider application in Church-State relations. Adaptation requires the Church to try, wherever possible, to cooperate with the civil order. Apostolicity means that the divinely appointed authority in the Church is the pope.

Apostolicity must always take priority over adaptation. Those Christian Churches which have cut themselves off from the Apostolic See are left with only the more human criterion of action: adaptation. In this kind of situation, a Church can easily slip into a condition of servile compromise with the State. St. Ambrose summed up apostolicity: "*Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*" — "Where Peter is there is the Church."

The Church in the East

Christianity first came to Romania during the colonization after the Roman conquest under Trajan in 103 A.D. Gradually Roman culture and Christianity spread northward to Transylvania. The Romanian people sprang from the intermarriage of native Dacian tribes and Roman colonists. The Church in Dacia had been governed from the first by Latin bishops appointed by the pope.

After the Goths disrupted society and Church order in Dacia, St. Nicetas of Remisiana (336-414) evangelized the people and reestablished the Church. Known as "the Apostle of Romania," St. Nicetas used the Latin rite in a form similar to that of the ancient Ambrosian rite, which was in use at Milan, Italy. Many of the Romanian language terms which express fundamental notions of Christian religion have a Latin origin. The expression "Lord God," for example, is *Domnezeu*. The Latin root is *Dominus Deus*.

To maintain the Latin Church authority over this re-

gion, the popes established the vicariate of Thessalonica. Bishop John Balan and Monsignor Aloisiu Tautu have conducted important research on papal correspondence of the Church's early centuries. There are numerous letters written by the popes from the time of Damasus to that of Gregory the Great, in which they address advice, encouragement, and instruction to the bishops of the regions then known as Dacia, Illyricum, Macedonia, and Pannonia (now Hungary). What the popes had tried to prevent eventually did happen: The Eastern emperor, after taking control of these regions, forced the Western bishops out and installed Greek bishops. From that point on, the influence of the Eastern Church began to predominate in the region.

The Balkan territory (modern Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Romania) was important to the Eastern empire on two counts: It was the place for the absorption of the Slavic tribes into the empire, and it was an overland route linking the empires of East and West at a time when the avenue of the Mediterranean Sea was being cut off by the Moslem advance. In 860 A.D., the patriarch of Constantinople sent two missionary brothers to preach Christianity to the Slavs. The fruitful labors of "the Apostles to the Slavs," St. Cyril and St. Methodius, whose mission was approved by Pope John VIII, led to the conversion of the Bulgars, who then ruled the Balkans. The Bulgars adopted an Eastern form of Christianity and imposed on the Romanians a Slavized form of the Byzantine rite. The Byzantine Church was definitely separated from the Catholic Church in 1054 A.D. The Romanian Church was included among the Churches in the East which called themselves *Orthodox*.

Although Romania's Latin Christian origin has ever reasserted itself in the direction of union with the West, for geographic and historical reasons her ties with the East have proven stronger. The geographic division of Romania into two parts, one on either side of the Carpathian moun-

tain range, makes Romania vulnerable on two fronts, permitting the division of political allegiance which prevented Romania from attaining national unity until 1918. On the northwest, Romania is open to Germanic and Hungarian domination; in the east and south to Byzantine, Slavic, and Turkish domination.

The estrangement of the Orthodox Churches from the West became most bitter at the time of the Fourth Crusade. The Latin crusaders were so abusive towards the Byzantine Christians that the Easterners reacted with: "Better the Turkish turban than the papal tiara." When the Turks finally took Constantinople in 1453, they tolerated the Byzantine Church but exercised rigid control over the hierarchy, bestowing the patriarchate on those bishops who showed no desire for union with Rome. To insure that there would be no united Christendom to oppose the Moslem advance, the Turks exploited the divisions and animosities between East and West, a tactic that would later be used by the Communists, especially in Romania. Byzantine Christians, trapped in the Ottoman Empire, adapted as best they could to the situation. Balkan Christians, cut off from European culture, took refuge in the solidarity of the Orthodox Church.

New light and strength for the Byzantine Church came from the north, in Galicia (the Western Ukraine), where the fruit of Christian missions had matured since the tenth century, when Queen Olha and her grandson Vladimir of Kiev led the people of the Kievan Rus in conversion to Christ.

The Byzantine Church expanded farther north in Russia, and a new patriarchate was eventually established in Moscow. Constantinople had taken the place of Rome as the capital of the Roman Empire. Now, after the fall of Constantinople, the Orthodox patriarchs of Moscow claimed that their city was "the Third Rome."

The Union with Rome

The Moscow patriarchs for a time remained in communication with Rome as well as with Constantinople. Their identity as a Byzantine-rite Church did not exclude relations with the pope. But the Tartar invasion of Russia cut off these Christians from the rest of Europe. In the Kievan Empire to the south, there was still some contact with Rome. In 1596, the archbishop of Kiev, who had jurisdiction over the Byzantine Church in the Ukraine and Byelorussia, led his faithful in the formation of a union with Rome, which was celebrated at the city of Brest-Litovsk in 1596. This step toward Church unity was followed in the Carpatho-Ukraine by a union with Rome celebrated by the bishop and the people at the castle of Uzhorod in 1646. Through these two unions with Rome, members of the Byzantine rite declared their fidelity to the pope but also continued in their own customs and rite. They did not become Latin Christians but asserted their Byzantine Catholic identity. These two unions with Rome became models for the historic union with Rome which occurred in 1700 in Transylvania.

The terms of the unions were best expressed by Manuel Michael Olshavsky, bishop of Mukachev (1743-1767) of the Ruthenian Church. *Ruthenian*, from the Latin word for Russia, is the adjective used today for the Byzantine-rite Catholic Church of the Carpatho-Ukraine (which extends from the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic westward into Czechoslovakia). In his classic essay *Sermo de Unione*, Bishop Olshavsky asserted that to be Catholic it is not necessary to be of the Roman rite. He discussed the major theological issues under question in the Eastern Church, affirming belief in the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son in the Trinity, the use of un-

leavened bread in the Divine Liturgy, and the existence of purgatory. The most crucial doctrine Bishop Olshavsky taught was the primacy of the pope and the pope's universal jurisdiction over the Church.

In a study of the *Sermo de Unione (Ecumenism and Manuel Michael Olshavsky, University of Montreal, 1967)*, Father Basil Boysak has provided a history of the prudent and practical way in which Bishop Olshavsky shows Christians of East and West how to go about the dialogue between Orthodox and Catholic. In the classic Petrine text of Matthew 16:18, Christ does not say, "I will build my Churches," but "my Church." Jesus asks:

"But who do you say that I am?" It is neither the multitude of the faithful nor the apostolic council but Simon Bar-Jona alone who answers Jesus. He replies for all the Apostles. But he speaks in his own responsibility without consulting them or waiting for their consent: "Thou art Christ the Son of the living God."

If Simon had wished only to voice the opinions of the Apostles, he would possibly not have reached the pure and simple truth. But he followed his own spiritual impulse, the voice of his own conscience. (Boysak, p. 58)

Bishop Olshavsky points out that to Peter alone Jesus says, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). The primacy of the pope is not merely one of honor but of authority in teaching and ruling.

The unity of the Church under the primacy of the pope was pursued and temporarily achieved at various times in the history of the Byzantine Church in Romania. At the Council of Lyons in 1274 and at Florence in 1438,

the Orthodox faithful of Romania were officially represented in acts of union with Rome. But until the Turkish domination diminished and the influence of the Austro-Hungarian rule over Transylvania led the Romanians into the sphere of Western Europe, the hope of union with Rome remained unfulfilled.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the influence of Protestant sects from Hungary threatened to extinguish the traditional faith of the Romanians. Furthermore, the Romanians, who were under foreign domination, sought to obtain the civil and religious status enjoyed by the Catholic Church in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A dialogue with Catholics was promoted by the Austrians, who sent Jesuit missionaries to establish a school and to preach to the Romanians. In the years 1697 and 1700, under the Orthodox bishops Theophilus and Athanasius of Alba Julia, the clergy and people of Transylvania met in free and spontaneous synods in which they spoke openly of their doctrinal agreement with the Catholic Church. On September 5, 1700, in the name of 1,548 priests and 400,000 faithful, Bishop Athanasius declared the union with Rome. Although there may have been political and social influences at work, the union of 1700 was not forced.

The union gave Transylvanians religious rights, awakening a consciousness of their Daco-Roman origins and stirring a sense of national identity. It prevented the Magyarization and Calvinization of the Romanians; and it was the cause of a true religious and cultural renaissance. The idea of political liberation sprang up at Blaj and bore fruit at Liberty Field in 1848, when Romanian national independence was first proclaimed. At Blaj, a library and printing press fostered the first Romanian-language school. Catholic Blaj became a center for famous Romanian scholars, including Bishop Samuel Micu-Clain and Fathers George Sincai, Peter Maior, and Timothy Ciparu. The

scholarly tradition at Blaj was known as "the Transylvanian School."

There is no doubt that the union of 1700 involved Church adaptation to the State. Romanians of the Byzantine rite sought to improve their temporal and spiritual situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but in this case *adaptation to the State favored the restoration of apostolicity*. Through the union with Rome, the Transylvanians gave their loyalty to the Holy Father. The city of Blaj came to be called "Little Rome."

From the start, this union was opposed by the Orthodox leaders from Bucharest. They considered the union a division of the Orthodox Church. But the existence of Byzantine-rite Churches in communion with Rome does not destroy the integrity of Eastern Christianity. Instead, it preserves and nourishes the identity of the Eastern Churches. When the unions were formed, the Eastern Catholics kept their Byzantine rite, their free election of bishops (confirmed by the Apostolic See), and their privileges and customs. The Byzantine-rite Catholics continue to enrich the whole Church with treasures that keep alive the spirit of variety within unity.

Conclusion



The Second Vatican Council offered great hope for Christian unity. What remains to be accepted by all Christians is the divinely instituted authority of the pope and the bishops. The Church is strong because she is well organized under a central authority. In every nation on earth, the Communists encounter this universal Church, whose spiritual strength they cannot divide and conquer as

they have done with so many political powers. This is why atheistic Communism has launched its fiercest attacks on the Catholic Church. It is a mystery why God permits the spirit of the world at times to persecute the Church through the agency of specific civil governments; and why God at other times permits the Church to infuse the cultures of men with a Christian spirit.

Never must the Church compromise her identity in Christ and her fidelity to Him in order to find favor with the society in which she is situated. The Church must be brave in times of persecution, but even in times of suffering the Church knows a peace which transcends the violence she endures.

In prison I felt moments of indescribable joy. I knew all my heart was with God, whom I loved above all. This grace renewed my courage and perseverance that I might follow Christ.

“For the sake of the joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame” (Hebrews 12:2).



"Only one who has lived through the tortures inflicted by the Communist regime can adequately tell the story. May this story inspire all the faithful."

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Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.
Huntington, Indiana 46750

ISBN 0-87973-730-1