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PhD Thesis

**The Orthodox Church during the
communist regime. Case study:
Bishop Pavel Șerpe**

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ABSTRACT

The great personalities of ecclesiastical life are part of the History of the Universal Church and at the same time its object of study, often creating research passages, much too packed, to the detriment of focusing on novel contributions devoted to some actors in history, who, through their discretion, have passed unnoticed, but, by the importance of their work, they have made a considerable contribution to the life and history of the Church.

Such an overlooked personality is Bishop Pavel Șerpe – one of the least known bishops of the Romanian Orthodox Church – who, through his humble service, but, especially through the positions held at the Monastic Seminary in Neamț and the Pastoral-Missionary Guidance Center, had a particular impact on the clergy and built and maintained contacts with officials of the other Christian denominations who visited Curtea de Argeș Monastery.

This research aims to bring to the attention the personality of Bishop Pavel Șerpe, reconstituting his life and activity as they detach from the documents of the time, from the memories and testimonies of those who knew him, but also from the archives of the Securitate. This was the main purpose of this thesis, but during the elaboration of the paper new challenges emerged and, implicitly, secondary objectives, which had to be achieved in order to reach the most faithful reconstruction of the portrait of the one who was a great servant of the Church.

Among the second rank targets were the following:

- making a fuller picture of the impact the Bolshevik and Communist authorities have had on the Church in the states that have come to form the Soviet bloc, paying particular attention to the situation in Romania;
- the identification of credible testimonies of those who met Bishop Pavel Șerpe;
- confrontation of testimonies with specific documents;
- objectively analyzing the informative notes contained in the individual surveillance file of the hierarchy;
- the restoration of the documentary material to reason the assertions made, but also to facilitate the understanding of the conditions in which the bishop carried out his activity.

In trying to accomplish these goals, we had to resort to a range of research methods that are appropriate to each goal, less than quantitative methods, especially qualitative ones. In this regard, we have specifically referred to inductive – the actual analysis of historical events – and deductive inferring – synthesizing those events. In the case of the first chapter, descriptive and causal accents were imposed, and for the second chapter we used the interview method for collecting the data used and analyzing the content of the obtained information, while for studying the surveillance file it was necessary to analyze the content and comparative analysis of the texts contained in approximately 700 pages that make up the documentary material of the third chapter.

To be able to present the information in an organized and logical way, we divided the material into three chapters each dedicated to a major topic.

The first chapter, entitled *The Orthodox Church in Europe during the Communist Regime*, is dedicated to recreating the framework situation in which the Bishop Pavel Şerpe worked. In order to achieve a more complex and truthful picture, the ideological and political aspects that dominated Eastern Europe after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 were pursued.

The synthesis in the first chapter attempts to touch the main moments in the tumultuous history of the Romanian Orthodox Church, all the more so since they have a special impact on *the life and activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe*, elements discussed in the second chapter. In this particularly difficult context for the Romanian Orthodox Church a series of spiritual parents, teachers of theology, as well as hierarchs with a perfect moral state were distinguished, and in the following we will stop on the life and activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe, personality less known to the general public, but no less interesting. This chapter resumes and develops the research done during the Masters studies when we caught the biography of the bishop from a rather personal and emotional perspective, corroborating the texts and documents with information obtained from people who met Peter Şerpe in a way in which the papers could not describe. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to give as much as possible the dimension of the missionary activity of a clergyman who conscientiously performed his duty by serving God wherever he was called. The biographical details intertwine with the accomplishments of priest Peter Şerpe, who became then Bishop Pavel, and make up a realistic portrait and a pious evocation alike.

The third chapter, *The Activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe in the Light of the Securitate Files*, is meant to reflect the surveillance from the security organs of the communist regime at which Bishop Pavel Şerpe was exposed since his appointment as Vicar Bishop. The many offices he occupied involved not only responsibilities, but also the setting up of a thick file collecting informative notes and denunciations from the agents recruited from among his

acquaintances. Looking at these documents we have the chance to see Bishop Pavel Şerpe also from the perspective of the informative notes and the plans of measures, which through the exposed aspects succeed in completing the portrait of a hierarch considered incommensurable by the political order of that time. By its nature, the informative material itself had to be compromising, therefore the negative elements are preponderant, aiming to outline a few denigrating features, but which, as we shall see, either did not have a basis, or over-exaggerated an aspect, distorting it and turning it into an as worse accusation as possible, which would lead to the implementation of a concrete plan of measures against Bishop Pavel Şerpe to permanently isolate him in a space where his influence would have been reduced to zero.

The information material is contained in three volumes of the individual file (no. 1180 – around 530 pages) of Bishop Pavel Şerpe (code name “Sergiu Popescu”) drawn up by the Third Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Regional Directorate Argeş, through several “offices” between 1955-1967, making reference to documents gathered even during his period as a priest. To this are added 2 more volumes drawn up by the Directorate of Foreign Intelligence (file no. 9962 – around 200 pages). The over 700 pages include informative notes, data processing, observations and dispositions of the participating and surveillance cadres.

Chapter I

The Orthodox Church in Europe during the Communist Regime

By carrying out its existence in the world, the Church had yet to solve a series of issues concerning the political and social framework of each era it had undergone. From the very beginning of its institutionalization, the Christian community has had to respond to the needs of society and thus, in parallel with the service of the word, the deaconate, or the service of the neighbour, appeared. Summaries from the Acts of the Apostles (2:42-47 and 4:32-35) highlight the features of the first communities that focus around the Holy Apostles and highlight, among other things, the communion of goods (“had all things common” – 2:44 and “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” – 4:34-35).

The Protochristian phenomenon of communion of goods was subsequently given special attention especially for the practical features it contains, leaving room for exclusively social approaches, which reduced these episodes to the strict sphere of social¹. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the first half of the nineteenth century more and more Christian groups were born which claimed that the Holy Apostles founded a society based on voluntary communism, and it was natural to affirm communism as an ideal social system. From this Christian socialism, Marxism subsequently appeared, which abolished the religious motivation of this equity. Without being included among the sources and writings that make up the revolutionary literature of the critical-utopian Communism, the Scripture preaches a general asceticism and a primitive egalitarianism that has been identified and speculated by several authors, including Karl Marx, and Engels was interested in the Protochristian phenomenon, seeking strictly the social aspects he understood very superficially, without even looking at the true dimension of this experience of the primary Christian community². On the background of the development of workers’ movements, either reforming in the form of

¹ Ph.D. Constantin Preda, *Credința și viața bisericii primare. O analiză a Faptelor Apostolilor (Faith and Life of the Primary Church. An Analysis of the Acts of the Apostles)*, Publishing house of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2002, p. 119.

² *Ibidem*, p. 120.

social democracy or revolutionary in the form of communist parties, which were based on Lenin's Marxist-Leninist ideology, was formulated the concept of "communism of love" through which the Church organized itself as a renewed system of community life³.

But although they had a common social ideal, Christianity and Marxism-Leninism entered into a conflict that brought to light an elemental incompatibility.

However, as Alina Tudor-Pavelescu has pointed out, a unique model can not be achieved to flatten such a conflict to a series of elements by excluding the particularities of each individual case. Undoubtedly, there are major differences, from state to state, and from church to church, in terms of how to structure these relationships, "and the relations that take place in the states of popular democracy between the two institutions - the State and the Church - vary as type and content from confrontation to domination, from absolute control to the continuous negotiation of a *status quo*. The particularities that can be observed in the structure and functioning of these relations are justified by the historical, social and political context specific to each case, but also through the different political strategy choices made by the Soviet-type regimes present in each of the states of the socialist camp"⁴.

To capture as real as possible the realities and atrocities in the field, but also the demagogic exposures that cosmetize the truth until its distortion and substitution with an egregious lie, we will resort to quoting *in extenso* some unusual texts, published in the pages of Romanian church periodicals, leaving the reader the opportunity to become acquainted with the evolution of the Church's position, but also with the ideological pressure reaching the peak in our country in the '50s and the '60s. This collage seems to be the most effective method of presenting with a dose of objectivity a subject that can not leave anyone indifferent and which by its simple statement invites to polarization.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware listed among the events that marked the life of the Church of the 20th century three moments closely related to communism: 1. The Bolshevik Revolution from 1917, 2. the expansion of Communism from the Soviet Union to the countries of Eastern Europe, starting in 1945, and 3. the unexpected, but definitive, collapse of Communism in 1988-1989⁵. Continuing the observation of the well-known Metropolitan is all the more sad: despite the sufferings suffered over the course of a century, there was still no

³ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

⁴ Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, *Studiu introductiv (Introductory Study)*, in Dudu Velicu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României însemnări zilnice. Vol. I. 1945-1947 (The Orthodox Church during the Soviet Period of Romania Daily Notes)*, edited by Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, Bucharest, 2004, p. vi.

⁵ Mitropolitul Kallistos Ware, Preface to *Biserica Ortodoxă din Europa de Est în secolul XX (The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century)*, coord. Christine Chaillot, translated by Liliana Donose Samuelsson, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 6-7.

way to end the disease that has always characterized the Body of Christ: the lack of inter-Orthodox collaboration at the level of the church administration and of the jurisdictions, a more and more acute deficit⁶.

If we were to hierarchize these three moments, it might be thought that the most difficult and bloody was the Bolshevik Revolution, while the others were just the side effects of this great tragedy.

So after 1917 in Russia, “the Orthodox Church, which was the most numerous and influential, was now under the rule of militant atheism, and during the next seventy years, was exposed to persecution, either direct and violent, as in the 1920s, 1930s and again in the 1960s, either indirect and concealed, like those of the post-World War II period. The establishment of communism in Russia has led many Orthodox Russians to emigrate to the West, which in turn has contributed to a profoundly constructive exchange between Orthodox and Western Christians”⁷.

The tightening of anti-religious measures took place regularly in the great feast days, when “the government took the most severe measures to force the people not to celebrate Christmas”⁸ or the Resurrection⁹, which even led to an ample demonstration in 1935, which took place in Leningrad on August 10, with the participation of about 30,000 people who protested against the closure of many churches, against the arrest and mass expulsion of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant priests and their families, against the oppressive taxes imposed on the remaining open churches¹⁰.

At the end of this initiative, following a census that found the failure of the five-year-old atheist (56.17% of the 98,412,000 people surveyed affirmed their faith in God), but also as a result of the assassination in December, 1934, of the First Secretary of the Leningrad Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, there was a massive campaign of repression and terror that has affected all the social strata, especially the clergy and believers.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁸ Dimitrie I. Balaur, *Cronica externă: Rusia sovietică (External Chronicle: Soviet Russia)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year LII (1934), p. 227.

⁹ *Idem*, *Cronica externă: Rusia sovietică (External Chronicle: Soviet Russia)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year LIII (1935), p. 283; V.D., *Cronica externă: Rusia sovietică (External Chronicle: Soviet Russia)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year LV (1937), p. 255.

¹⁰ D. Balaur, *Cronica externă: Rusia sovietică (External Chronicle: Soviet Russia)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year LIII (1935), p. 519.

Thus, only in 1937¹¹ were arrested 150,000 people, mostly clergy and monks, out of which 80,000 were shot¹². The hierarchy was also targeted by repression, the number of bishops killed or dying in prison exceeding 250¹³.

In 1938 about 105,000 members of the clergy were shot. According to research conducted after 1989, Anatoly Iakovlev, president of the presidential commission for the rehabilitation of the victims of repression, reported in November 1995 that during the Soviet regime in Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 200,000 members of the clergy were killed and half a million were subject to repression.

The situation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the late 1930s was a tragic paradox: was founded the Church of the Catacombs, which refused to acknowledge Metropolitan Sergius as the church's head and consequently began to operate underground, which in a way saved the official Church from complete destruction, whereas the Soviet authorities were afraid of forcing, through other reprisals, the relentless restrictions in the entire Russian Church, so as not to rally to this underground faction and thus to lose control of it¹⁴.

The changes imposed by the Second World War have improved the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Moreover, the new European geopolitical context before the end of the war on May 9, 1945 had convinced Stalin to give a special attribution to the Russian Orthodox Church, which had been highlighted in mobilizing the masses in the great defensive warfare of the homeland, realizing that for the application of his Pan Slavist plan he needed the church influence in the Orthodox world. Thus, "the Russian Church was to be found on the stage of Orthodoxy, for which it initiated an extensive ecclesiastical diplomatic project at the level of the Eastern Apostolic Patriarchates and the national autocephalies. And the most important Orthodox autocephaly was the Romanian Orthodox Church"¹⁵.

¹¹ One year before, a short note, *Sad Stat*, wrote: "According to the statistics of the Russian Interior Commissariat during the 18 years of Bolshevik Russia, 42,800 church faces died in the camps of Solovetsky, Naram and Turkestan. At present there are only 1,200 clergy left in Russia, of whom only too few remain in their parish places", cf. Dimitrie I. Balaur, *Cronica externă: Rusia sovietică (External Chronicle: Soviet Russia)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year LIV (1936), p. 364.

¹² The periodicals of the time abound with news stories about the arrests and killings of clergy.

¹³ Andrea Ricardi, *Secolul Martiriului. Creștinii în veacul XX (The Century of Martyrdom. Christians in the Twentieth Century)*, Enciclopedic Publishing, Bucharest, 2004, p. 39.

¹⁴ Wassilij Alexeev, *The Russian Orthodox Church 1927-1945. Repression and Revival*, in *Religion in Communist Lands* 7.1 (1979), p. 30.

¹⁵ George Enache, *Patriarhul Nicodim în anii instaurării «democrației populare» (1944-1948) (Patriarch Nicodim in the Years of Establishment of «Popular Democracy»)*, in *Ziarul Lumina*, no. 20, February, 2010, <http://ziarulumina.ro/patriarhul-nicodim-in-anii-instaurarii-democratiei-populare-1944-1948--33507.html>

However, this period of detente would end in 1948, when a new direction was inaugurated in the relationship between the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church, and anti-religious propaganda was intensified.

As the situation of the Orthodox Church in Russia changes according to the geopolitical and ideological context, the Stalinist relationship between the Church and the state becomes a model for the countries that would come under the influence of the USSR, with specific emphasis and priorities or ethnic communities in which the communist regime was implemented.

Information on church life in the Soviet Union territories is still incomplete, most often assimilated or shared with the situation in Russia. Hence the difficulty of discerning the information and the impossibility of advancing into a novel analysis, remaining tributary to the syntheses from the volume *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, coordinated by Christine Chaillot.

It is extremely interesting how the evolution of political events has influenced the situation of the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, the former Yugoslavia, Albania, where persecutions and oppressions are registered to reduce the Church to an institution deprived of authority. The situation of Orthodox Churches in the Catholic majority countries was quite different, where they were supported as elements that could counteract the capitalist imperialism whose principal agent is the papacy. Moreover, the Orthodox ecclesiastical activity was perceived by the communist regime as a means of infiltration and rusification of the respective territories. This was the case with Poland and Czechoslovakia.

One can roughly identify a pattern that follows the complicated relationship between the Church and the Soviet authorities in the "Stalinist" phase, a model that is applied in all countries:

- a) after the establishment of the communist regime, the separation between the Church and the state is unilaterally declared;
- b) the rights and financial aid from the state are suspended;
- c) the places of worship are closed;
- d) an excessive tax is being promoted which will lead to the failure of the remaining open parishes;
- e) the theological education units are closed down and totally or partially abolished;
- f) the Greek-Catholic Churches are abolished;
- g) monasticism is liquidated;

h) there is an intensive surveillance through the network of security service agents.

Some relaxation of the restrictions will only be noticed after the removal of Nikita Khrushchev from the political scene, when:

- a) the parishes are reopened;
- b) the theological education units are reactivated, but places are always insufficient to ensure the real needs of the Church;
- c) an increasing number of publications and ecclesiastical news agencies are approved;
- d) the prosecution through infiltrated agents continues in the theological education units and the church administrative apparatus;
- e) "recalcitrant" elements and incompatible with the "new man" doctrine are further isolated and removed from the system.

The Romanian Orthodox Church knew also the restrictions and strides imposed by the communist regime, and the confrontation with the "red demon" took place over four periods that can be formally delimited:

1. 1945-1947 – the interval of implementation of the communist structures in our country;
2. 1948-1964 – strengthening of Stalinist communism;
3. 1965-1974 – the internal relaxation interval;
4. 1974-1989 – Ceaușescu "era", of a neo-Stalinist nature.

The development of an indigenous proletarian movement can be noticed even from the interwar period, but without significant proportions. The social Creed and the revival of the ideals of early Christianity would attract more clergy at this stage, who would later become the sympathizers of communism and would find themselves in party structures immediately after the change on the front and the return of weapons against Nazi Germany.

An important step in the subordination of the ecclesiastical activities to the interests of the Communist government led by Dr. Petru Groza was the ministry of the priest Constantin Burducea (March 6, 1945 – March 9, 1946).

The reason why the Communists opted for Constantin Burducea becomes clear if we take into account that he could be blackmailed, knowing that he had directed to his parish unjustified funds¹⁶. In addition, his legionary past made him very vulnerable and explains the rush with which he embraced the new ideology and proved his zeal in serving the new power. What was intended to be a revolutionary moment turned out to be a true Trojan horse for the Church, and priest Constantin Burducea became the tool of this destructive policy of the communist authorities.

Constantin Burducea tried as much as possible to prioritize the eradication of fascism within the Church – as he had said in his speech of his installation as Ministry of Cults –, but through the actions that took place in this direction, many innocent people were arrested, sent to prison and in labor camps, although they had nothing to do with fascism or the past political regime.

By including Constantin Burducea in the government, the Romanian authorities, strongly infiltrated by the communist forces, tried to destabilize the Church from within by adopting a religious policy based on the principle divide et impera, with the ultimate goal of subjugating the cults by destroying their “reactionary” independence and influence, to secularize the society and its institutions, and by supporting a division into “reactionary” and “progressive”, the latter being a useful tool for widening the social basis of communist power¹⁷.

Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu tried as much as possible to counter the Stalinist maneuvers and to preserve the Church’s independence from the state, and even sought to impose a privileged position of the Church to the extent that such a thing could be achieved from the communist government. But the pressures exerted by the state soon convinced him that he could only resist a temporary resistance, efforts made until his death, which occurred on February 27, 1948.

Even before the death of Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu, several variants regarding his successor were mentioned, who should have collaborated more closely with the Communist leadership. On May 24, 1948, “the Great Electoral College chose Metropolitan Justinian in the vacant seat of the Archbishop of Bucharest, the Metropolitan of Ungrovlahia and patriarch

¹⁶ The most gaudy abuses are mentioned by Dudu Velicu: “1. He gave his church in village Progresul, Ilfov County, the sum of five million from the Ministry of Cults, which was to be divided among several churches. 2. He made a pectoral cross of over five hundred thousand lei from the same funds. 3. The servants at home are paid from the Ministry’s budget”, Dudu Velicu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României – Însemnări zilnice. Vol. I. 1945-1947 (The Orthodox Church during the Soviet Period of Romania Daily Notes)*, edited by Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, Bucharest, 2004, p. 29.

¹⁷ George Enache, *Strategii de infiltrare și atragere la colaborare a cultelor religioase elaborate de autoritățile procomuniste din România în perioada 1945-1947, cu o privire specială asupra cazului Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, in Caietele CNSAS (CNSAS Notebooks), 1/2008, p. 53.*

of the Romanian Orthodox Church, being invested on June 6, 1948”¹⁸. In spite of the numerous reproaches that have been brought to him, a closer analysis of the events and reactions of Patriarch Justinian points out, however, that he has shown an essential pragmatism for the survival of the Romanian Orthodoxy in an institutionalized form and, using the difficult political context, tried to offer the best possible life to the Romanian Orthodox Church, relieving it of major persecutions and raising it, as far as it was possible at that time, to the highest standards in terms of moral-spiritual life.

At the time when Patriarch Justinian was enthroned, the event was perceived as a great achievement of the communist power in taking control of the Romanian Orthodox Church, shortly after being approved the new Law on Cults (Decrees 177 and 178), which put an end to the religious freedom in Romania.

However, Patriarch Justinian would prove himself to be a visionary and has initiated effective measures to strengthen church life, including the formation of clergy and monastic staff through schools, seminars and specialized courses, as well as supporting the financial independence of ecclesial units, but even more than that he fought as much as possible readmission of the clergy released from the communist prisons.

Looking at the same situation of the Orthodox Churches in communist states in Eastern Europe, it can be noticed that a unique model can not be achieved to reduce the relations between the respective churches and the political regimes, each state presenting in one form or another such a conflict. After the establishment of the popular democracy and the constitution of a Soviet bloc that gathered as in a vise any form of spiritual resistance, between the state and the church takes shape a relationship ranging as type and content from confrontation to domination, from absolute control to the continuous negotiation of a *status quo*. The particularities seen in the structure and functioning of these relations are justified by the historical, social and political context specific to each case, but also by the different political strategy choices made by the Soviet-type regimes present in each of the states of the socialist camp.

Regarding the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church, its traditional docility has made this institution a tool in the hands of the communist authorities, and with regard to the lack of a tradition of resistance of the Church to the state, Daniel Barbu’s observation is conclusive: “The Romanian Church was not given to cross modernity in opposition to the

¹⁸ Fr. Prof. PhD. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (History of the Romanian Orthodox Church)*, 3rd volume, Publishing house of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1981, p. 463.

State, but it let itself mould by it. First, the Liberal State gave it its autocephaly, the unity through patriarchy and the domination over the other denominations. Later, the Totalitarian State relieved it of the competition – dangerous as it was on the ground of national merits – that of the Greek Catholic Church and guaranteed its security in exchange for a partial withdrawal from the public sphere”¹⁹.

Chapter II

The Life and Activity of Bishop Pavel Șerpe

In this particularly difficult context for the Romanian Orthodox Church, singled out a number of spiritual fathers, teachers of theology, as well as hierarchs with a perfect moral attitude, and in the following we will stop on the life and activity of Archbishop Pavel Șerpe, a person less known to the general public, but no less interesting.

Petru (Pavel) Șerpe was born on May 18, 1897 in the village Rădeni, commune Păstrăveni, Neamț County, from parents Nicolae and Safta (born Ciobanu), peasants, land workers and cattle breeders, receiving the name of Petru at Baptism. He was the tenth child of the twelve brothers and sisters and was noted for his work, his spiritual qualities, the seriousness, the sound, beautiful and eminent education he received in the family. Graduate of “Veniamin Costache” Theological Seminary in Iași and the Faculty of Theology of Cernăuți in 1924, Petru Șerpe married in Constanța the following year with Miss Maria Vasilescu, daughter of an elementary teacher from commune Herești, Ilfov County.²⁰

On September 14, 1925, on the day of the Ascension of the Holy Cross, was ordained deacon by Bishop Ilarie Teodorescu for the Episcopal Cathedral of Constanța, and on November 11, 1927, he was ordained priest in the Patriarchal Cathedral by Patriarch Miron Cristea for this Cathedral.²¹

On November 15, 1927, he was appointed missionary priest for the workers residing in C.A.M. “Belvedere” and C.F.R. “Grand”, where after long efforts he founded Belvedere parish, where he served as parish priest until August 31, 1947.²²

¹⁹ Daniel Barbu, *Șapte teme de politică românească (Seven Romanian Political Themes)*, Antet Publishing, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 121-122.

²⁰ Archives of the Holy Synod, *File No. 40/1947*, p. 3.

²¹ Archives of the Holy Synod, *File No. 40/1947*, p. 3.

²² Archives of the Holy Synod, *File No. 40/1947*, p. 3.

Here he carried out an intense cultural, social and charitable activity, taking care of the development of the popular library “A.G. Ioachimescu”, as well as the spiritual and intellectual formation of his parishioners, whom he tried to stimulate through social soires, celebrations, conferences, excursions, pilgrimages, parish magazines and together-singings in the choirs founded by Father Petru Șerpe. With the support of his wife, the parish priest dedicated himself to the charitable work, endowing with the necessary hundreds of children and establishing the first social canteen in the Patriarchate.

To this was added the actual pastoral or the religious-moral mission carried out with great dedication for two decades, as well as the construction of a place of worship unique in the country through its beauty.

After the death of his wife, the priest Peter Șerpe morally lived his widowhood as witnessed by a witness: “I knew Father Peter Șerpe well. He was profoundly marked by the death of his wife. Throughout the period of widowhood, he has shown a rare seriousness and an exemplary morality, being a model for all the widows from the parish. He led the parish further with the same love and zeal that he had until then.”²³

Given his vast experience gained in the rich pastoral activity carried out on so many plans in Belvedere parish, as well as the qualities proved as adviser to Bucharest Archdiocese in the cultural and administrative sector, Father Petru Șerpe was considered by the patriarch as a valuable future bishop.

That is why, from April, 1946, his name is found in the list of candidates for the bishop-vicar function of the Bucharest Archdiocese²⁴, enjoying the full support of Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu. In May, 1946, it is even attempted to place Father Șerpe as Vicar Bishop in Galați²⁵. In this respect, Patriarch Nicodim is launching a campaign to promote his protegee²⁶, so as in September, 1946, he would be on the list of candidates for the post in Galați²⁷, a situation that lasted until January, 1947, but unsuccessful²⁸.

The patriarch’s intention was partially blocked by the “representatives” of the people, as in June 1947, “in the Chamber of Deputies, started a campaign against the priest counselor of the Metropolitan of Ungro-Vlahia and the Patriarch’s man, Șerpe. The object of the campaign is represented by the irregularities and the illegalities that he does in the official quality he occupies. There are still to be attacked priests counselors, colleagues of the above:

²³ Information provided by witnesses.

²⁴ Dudu Velicu, *op.cit.*, 1st vol., p. 134.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 207.

Cosma, C. Coman, Dincescu, Maxim etc. The necessary material is provided to the deputies by some of the clergy who have suffered the injustice of the counselors (priest Banu, priest Octavian Mureșeanu-Ghencea)²⁹.

However, the appointment as Patriarchal Vicar occurs on June 29, 1947, with all the necessary steps. According to Dudu Velicu, the appointment of the nomination would have been the submission of the candidacy for the post of holder of the Romanian Episcopate of America³⁰.

Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu, by address No. 7553 of July 1, 1947, prayed the Holy Synod to grant the rank of bishop to priest Petru Șerpe from "Belvedere" parish in Bucharest, appointed Vicar Bishop of the Bucharest Archbishopric. The request was put on the agenda of the meeting of the Holy Synod from July 2, 1947³¹.

The request had the following contents: "His Holiness Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu as Metropolitan of Ungro-Vlahia, recommends Priest Petru Șerpe to the Holy Synod, administrative counselor, whom he called a vicar and prays that he would be given the rank of high priest with the name of *Ploieșteanul*", application approved by the Holy Synod at the meeting of July 3, 1947. Later, priest Petru Șerpe was tonsured in monasticism at Neamț Monastery on July 22, 1947, receiving the name Pavel. He had as godfathers in monasticism Archimandrite Demostene Tebeica and Father Ilie Cleopa³².

Patriarch Nicodim delegated, for the proposal for bishopric and ordination into high priest of Petru Șerpe, Metropolitan Efreim Enăcescu and Archbishops Veniamin Pocitan-Sinaitul, Patriarchal Vicar and Athanasie Dincă-Bârlădeanul, Patriarchal Vicar and Lieutenant-Bishop of Râmnic Episcopate.

The proposal for bishopric took place on Saturday, August 30, 1947, after the celebration of the Vespers. The next day he was ordained during the Holy Liturgy into high priest. From mid-September 1947 he would move into the patriarchal palace, taking over a series of duties from Patriarch Nicodim, whose health has become increasingly precarious. As Vicar Bishop, he would chair the meetings of counselors and deacons, thus representing the Patriarch.

After the death of Patriarch Nicodim on February 27, 1948, to Vicar Bishop Pavel Șerpe are renewed all delegations by Metropolitan Justinian Marina, who provided the patriarchal lieutenantcy, but after two months (May 13, 1948) he is appointed abbot at Antim

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 256.

³¹ Archives of the Holy Synod, *File No. 40/1947*, p. 13.

³² Information provided by witnesses.

Monastery³³. However, this office was ephemeral, because after only a week, on May 22, 1948, he was replaced from this function³⁴.

In the autumn of 1948, Vicar Bishop Pavel Șerpe received, from the patriarch's vouch, the supervision of the monasteries in the Archdiocese of Bucharest as an exarch³⁵.

Vicar Bishop Pavel Șerpe was elected a member of the Commission for theological and religious education. He worked in these committee until January, 1949³⁶.

While he was a Vicar Bishop, he performed the duties of Patriarch Nicodim, namely: sanctification of churches, ordinations, chaired the diocesan deanery conferences. He served in this office until December 31, 1948, when, following the abolition of the post of vicar bishop in the communist regime, he ceased his activity. In January, 1949, he was appointed professor and, then, director of the Monastic Seminary at Neamț Monastery, and in the following year is also entrusted with the priorship of the foundation of Stephen the Great, until October 9, 1951.³⁷

During the meeting from June 18, 1952, the Holy Synod decided to retirement of Bishop Pavel Șerpe beginning with September 1, 1952 under the terms of the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 187 from February 17, 1950. In the summer of 1952, the Monastic Seminary was closed, a new seminary for the preparation of the priests of myrrh being established. Bishop Pavel Șerpe ceased as the director of the seminar on August 31, 1952, when he handed over the Archives of the Seminary to the Deacon Professor Ioan Ivan.³⁸

At the beginning of September, 1952, Bishop Pavel Șerpe addressed Patriarch Justinian and Metropolitan Sebastian Rusan of Moldova, asking them to approve his request for establishment at Bistrița Monastery - Neamț County. His request was approved.³⁹

Bishop Pavel Șerpe moved to Bistrița Monastery on September 26, where he stayed until the beginning of November, 1954, when he left for Curtea de Argeș Monastery, "his last place of detention established by the authorities".

After arriving at Curtea de Argeș Monastery, Bishop Pavel was appointed by Patriarch Justinian, abbot of the monastery. In this capacity, but also as the leader of the pastoral-missionary training and training courses (since 1957), the bishop carried out a beautiful and

³³ Dudu Velicu, *op.cit.*, 2nd vol., p. 62.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

³⁵ ASRI, fond "D", file no. 2488, 1st vol., f. 159-160.

³⁶ *Ședința Sf. Sinod din 19 noiembrie 1947 (Session of the Holy Synod of November 19, 1947)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year LXV (1947), No. 10-12, p. 424.

³⁷ Archive of Neamț Monastery, The Procès-verbals File from year 1951, Process Verbal No. 24/ 9.10.1951, page 40.

³⁸ Archives of the Holy Synod, *File No. 40/1947*, p. 15.

³⁹ Patriarchal Administration Archive, *File No. 9/1952*, p. 4.

ample activity that did not enjoy the appreciation of his contemporaries, as evidenced by the documents contained in the surveillance file of the hierarch.

On April 30, 1959, Bishop Pavel Șerpe resigned from the position of abbot of Curtea de Argeș Monastery, for reasons of illness.

After so many achievements and toils, Bishop Pavel Șerpe passed to the eternal life on May 18, 1978, at the age of 81, exactly on his birthday, "in his modest cell from Curtea de Argeș Monastery".⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Deac. Prof. Emilian Vasilescu, *Arhiepiscopul Pavel Șerpe (Bishop Pavel Șerpe)*, in *BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, year XCVI (1978), No. 7-8, p. 712.

Chapter III

The Activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe in the Light of the Securitate Files

The many offices occupied by Bishop Pavel Şerpe exposed him over time to continuous surveillance by the security organs of the communist regime, which led to the formation of a thick file in which informative notes and denunciations were collected from the agents recruited from among his acquaintances.

For us there is an unusual chance to see the Bishop Pavel Şerpe also from the perspective of these informative notes and reports, which, through the exposed aspects, succeed in completing the portrait of a hierarch considered uncomfortable by the political order of that time.

Before dealing with the informative material itself, it must be stated that its nature was to be compromising, therefore the negative elements are preponderant, aiming to outline some denigrating features, but which, as we shall see, either did not have a basis, or over-exaggerated an aspect, distorting it and turning it into an as worse accusation as possible, which would lead to the implementation of a concrete plan of measures against Bishop Pavel Şerpe to permanently isolate him in a space where his influence would have been reduced to zero.

The information material is contained in three volumes of the individual file (no. 1180 – around 530 pages) of Bishop Pavel Şerpe (code name “Sergiu Popescu”) drawn up by the Third Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Regional Directorate Argeş, through several “offices” between 1955-1967, making reference to documents gathered even during his period as a priest. To this are added 2 more volumes drawn up by the Directorate of Foreign Intelligence (file no. 9962 – around 200 pages). The over 700 pages include informative notes, data processing, observations and dispositions of the participating and surveillance cadres

The reading of texts is a difficult challenge given that they are written by unprepared staff, “Securitate” cadres who have massive deficiencies in the knowledge of the Romanian language, and very often sentences or phrases are difficult to understand because of the corrupted forms of words and the proper nouns, disagreements and chaotic punctuation. Distortion of information also occurs as a result of the shorter or longer time passed between

collecting the note and recording it, often the security officer writing approximatively the facts. In addition to these, there are frequent mistakes in writing the text on the typewriter, or the writing not at all understandable in the case of handwritten notes.

In order to overcome all of these difficulties, we proceeded to a text editing process, facilitating the access to the information they contain. In this sense, we have uniformized the proper nouns, which appear in different forms in the documents. We also tacitly corrected, as far as possible, the writing errors, disagreements and archaic forms of expression.

Regarding the use of documents, we chose to appeal to the widest possible paragraphs to avoid fragmenting the information and removing uncomfortable statements just to capture as accurately as possible the tone and role of agents' notes about Bishop Pavel Şerpe. In this sense, we chose not to avoid the aspects that may seem at first sight defamatory, putting the hierarch's personality in a negative light, but at the same time we tried to see beyond the appearances and to check the documents against them. Where appropriate, in addition to the relevant informative notes, the responsible officers' notes as well as the measures requested in the respective documents were quoted. We believe that direct quoting as much informative material as possible will reflect realistically and impartially the problems whose importance or gravity could have been diluted or distorted by the simple paraphrase.

Therefore, it can be said that the research method in this study of the individual file is the content analysis and comparative analysis of the texts contained in the approximately 700 pages that make up the documentary material of this chapter.

Disparate information makes up a mosaic, sometimes difficult to track, so systematization of the material and its thematic organization is needed to capture those moments in the venerable hierarch's life that got the attention of the authorities.

The synthesis notes, contained in the three volumes of documents, briefly describe the main reasons for Bishop Pavel Şerpe being surveilled by the security organs. From here, we retain a "hostile" activity under the religious mask, carrying out a sustained work of conversion and fanaticism of the youth, through their indoctrination with exaggerated mysticism and bourgeois education, occasion with which is mentioned the episode with the youth library from the monastery yard.

Participation to great celebrations is also considered an attempt to propagate mysticism but also to obtain large sums of money, which adds to other significant revenues that he stole, not being controlled by the higher forums.

By far, the most thorny issue is the visit from T.B. from the Valley of Iaşi on April 7, 1962, when he tried to impress the T.B. patients with the attention given to them by the Orthodox Church.

Of course, about an informative surveillance of the former patriarchal vicar undertaken by the authorities we can talk shortly before his election in this position, a fact that is easily explained if we take into account the frictions between Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu and the government of Dr. Petru Groza.

Thus, shortly after his election as Vicar Bishop and awaiting for the Royal Confirmation Decree, priest Petru Șerpe became the subject of state security research, designed to synthesize personal data and possible compromising information, which could have served as points of pressure for the future bishop. It is very important for this research the content of the first personal record drawn up on August 8, 1947, which is a reference for the way in which his activity was subsequently misinterpreted and tendentiously presented. The content of this first note is as clear as possible and in accordance with the information found in the sources used for the previous chapter. However, immediately after the death of Patriarch Nicodim, the first personal notes of Vicar Bishop Pavel Șerpe appear, indicating his hostility to the regime, as well as the lack of morality. Indeed, from the beginning of 1948 it was known that “D. Veștemean[u], general manager at the Ministry of Cults is interested in the «sins» of Bishop Pavel Șerpe, to whom he draws up a file”⁴¹.

Such a record is made after ordination in the summer of 1948⁴², where we find the anticommunist manifestations during his pastoral activity in Belvedere parish, but also during his activity as bishop, when he opposed the anarchy created in the Archdiocese on the background of the absence of the patriarch and the “trade union movement”. Similarly, his appeals to calm the spirits from Manufacturing, instigated by the events during the strike at CFR Grivita Workshops in February, 1933, are here considered “an anti-communist propaganda”. These mentions will be the basis for future accusations of “hostile actions against the democratic popular regime” which we will encounter very often in the following documents, such as the personal file drafted by the Security Department of the Capital on October 12, 1948⁴³.

The files would be supplemented by informative notes, which will give rise to the resentment of his trenchant attitude in running the Archdiocese (September 1947 - March 1948), as we can see from the information provided by the conspiracy source “Viator”, who can be identified with Dudu Velicu, the secretary of Patriarch Miron Cristea, existing an “obvious similarity between the text of some of the daily notes drafted by Dudu Velicu and

⁴¹ Dudu Velicu, *op.cit.*, 2nd vol., p. 8.

⁴² A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 18.

⁴³ Archive of the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives (A.C.N.S.A.S.), background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 21-22.

that of some informative notes addressed to the political police bodies, drawn up by the conspiracy source called «Viator»⁴⁴.

The emphasis of these notes falls on the “greed” of the hierarch, which became a leitmotif in the pursuit of clergy, considered to be the exploiters of the naivety of believers from whom they gather considerable sums of money under various pretexts, that the “people” could have used for the development of the “democratic republic”.

The reason for trying to discredit Bishop Pavel Șerpe in the second half of 1948 is his “subversive” activity as an exarch of the monasteries in the Archdiocese of Bucharest, as it is indicated to us by the “Synthesis of important events in the question of the Orthodox cult during September 1948”, carried out by the General Directorate of People’s Security.

The intention to protect the monastic communities from possible outward instigations that could have compromised the entire monastery was interpreted as undermining the new regime. The warning to the nuns meant to protect them arrived too late, for this informative note is evidence that the community had already been infiltrated, some monks collaborating with the surveillance organs.

In connection with this interval, myths would be created in an attempt to compromise him and to antagonize him with the patriarch Justinian Marina, as can be seen from the informative note of the agent “Cantor” from December 22, 1958. Unfortunately, it is only the beginning of the calumniations formulated against the hierarch with the aim of raising suspicions about him and exposing him to the reprisals coming from the church forums and the repressive bodies of the state.

The detachment of Bishop Pavel Șerpe at Neamț Monastery in the teaching staff of the Monastic Seminary at the beginning of 1949 did not mean the termination of the informative surveillance, but on the contrary, because it was considered that the former patriarchal vicar organizes a nest of reactionaries with the bishops Athanasie Dincă, Eugen Laiu, Emilian Antal and the rest of the clergy who were instructed to train the seminarians.

The authorities show a special interest in the “subversive” activity of the four bishops and especially of Pavel Șerpe, who becomes abbot of Neamț Monastery on October 22, 1950, when Patriarch Justinian Marina visits the monastic assembly and orders the seminary and the monastery to have the same management “spre a nu se mai ivi anumite divergențe și neînțelegeri ca până acum”⁴⁵, replacing the former abbot Melchisedec Dumitriu.

The interest and the care of the surveillance bodies is very clear from the order of March 15, 1951 addressed to Târgu Neamț District Security Bureau, which requests the

⁴⁴ Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, *Studiu introductiv (Introductory Study)*, in Dudu Velicu, *op.cit.*, 1st vol., p. XII.

⁴⁵ A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 249

evaluation of the situation at the monastery as soon as possible. The urgency with which information material was to be collected indicates an increasing pressure due to uncertainty about the evolution of the “reactionary nest”.

Arriving at Curtea de Argeș at the end of 1954, Bishop Pavel Șerpe had, as abbot, to take care of strengthening the congregation of this monastery-museum, which starting next year would serve as house arrest for the Greek-Catholic bishops who survived the detention from Sighetu Marmăției.

Immediately after arriving in Curtea de Argeș, the building restoration process began⁴⁶ and reopened the church founded by Neagoe Basarab. The most significant success in this section of his activity was the return of the tabernacle with the relics of Saint Philofteia, succeeding, with the support of Patriarch Justinian Marina, to obtain the approval for the return of the relics in a festive setting on October 14, 1955, occasion with which was performed the official canonization decided by the Holy Synod since 1950.

But the care of Bishop Pavel Șerpe was not only aimed at preserving the walls and monuments, but also at building the soul and the elevation of clean altars in the hearts of young people and children in the locality by organizing a catechetical program, an activity that immediately attracted the attention of the surveillance organs, being documented by checking the correspondence and numerous informative notes.

One of these concerns is surprised by the letter sent by the Bishop to Petroniu Tănase, the great confessor and venerable abbot of Prodromu Hermitage, then living at Slatina Monastery (Suceava County). The document was intercepted by the Communist authorities and transcribed in the note of April 18, 1955. The letter shows that Bishop Pavel Șerpe found at Curtea de Argeș Monastery a weak and disorganized community, lacking the attachment to the monastic rigor, with which the hierarch was accustomed as a child in Moldavia. The pastoral coldness or absenteeism of the few monks there, which must be seen more as a self-preservation attitude in front of the omnipresent surveillance of the securitate organs, have greatly contributed to the removal of the faithful. That is why he asks Father Petroniu to send some brothers to teach the monks at Curtea de Argeș the customs of the Moldavian monasteries.

The reopening of Neagoe Basarab’s foundation and the repeated appeals to the worshippers resulted in the large number of children and young people coming to the church and the organized catechesis. This concern for the future generations, which he believed they

⁴⁶ George Enache, *De veghe lângă racla Sfintei Filofteia: arhiereul Pavel Șerpe (Watching the Tabernacle of Saint Filofteia: Bishop Pavel Șerpe)*, in *Ziarul Lumina*, December 12, 2009, <http://ziarullumina.ro/de-veghe-langa-racla-sfintei-filofteia-arhiereul-pavel-erpe-36173.html> (January 20, 2018)

would know the thaw after that winter of socialist attempt on the Romanian people, would remain one of the coordinates of the activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe along his presence in Curtea de Argeş.

Although he was forced by circumstances to deal more with the administrative problems than with inner buiding, however, Bishop Pavel Şerpe did not abandon this project by appointing the task of educating young people to other members of the community, as shown in the Report which proposed “the end of individual action no. 1180, by investigating and warning the retired bishop Şerpe Pavel” from March, 1964.⁴⁷

The agents and informants systematically indicate significant amounts of money from “exploitation” of relics, fiscal tricks when registering the sums received, and selling of recycled candles. The sums amount from several hundreds to several tens of thousands of lei, but as noted in “Alexe Anton”’s note, the actual damage amounted, in 1962, to 10,000 lei.

These gaps in management have contributed to the shaping of a not at all flattering portrait of Bishop Pavel Şerpe, described as avid after money, businessman and author of unhappy investments. What the notes do not tell us directly, but let it be deduced, is that the old princely ensemble, and also the former royal palace, as well as the rest of the dependencies, required a vast restoration process, and the efforts to start these works had to be sustained with considerable sums. Similarly, staff costs were also treated, which were not included in the scheme approved by the Patriarchate and the Department of Cults.

And here are some financial tricks, namely the calls to the worshipers to support the restoration works to Neagoe Basarab’s foundation and to the complex.

To the restoration works, Bishop Pavel Şerpe added the facilities in the courtyard of the complex, as was the case with the library, for which were spent about 5,000 lei. At the same time, the hierarch made an extremely important acquisition, taking advantage of a moment when the park in front of the complex was put up for sale and bought it for the monastery.

Taking into account the nature of these investments, it becomes clear that Bishop Paul Serpé did not take for himself the respective sums and did not use them for personal purposes but made considerable efforts to increase the monastery's dowry in order to ensure its financial independence.

The absence of this amount will become a recurrent reason or a common point of the libels on the issue of financial irregularities, weaving more elaborate legends about the origin of the money and its destination, as well as the consequences of the detection of that fraud. The informative notes distort the situation, as it was sought to compromise the hierarch who

⁴⁷ A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 342; 2nd vol., f. 11.

fought for the financial independence of the complex from Curtea de Argeş. The reason why Bishop Pavel Şerpe emphasized this aspect was that the so-called state funds for the rehabilitation of the historical monument either lacked or were very few, and so the bishop had to find all sorts of solutions to contract designers, to purchase the necessary building materials and to pay the workers, who were not covered by the staff plan, and the payment of these debts invited to “accounting tricks” and “illegality”, a way of survival that some employees embraced, while others refused to practice it or to be associated, protesting.

Another aspect not to be neglected was the quality of Curtea de Argeş Monastery as a protocol objective, often visited by clerical and political officials from Romania and abroad, which implied additional efforts to supply and organize those moments of “traditional hospitality”. The costs involved by the frequent visits of the patriarch and other guests, the accommodation and maintenance of teachers for a few weeks a year, during the several series of pastoral-missionary guidance courses, are omitted in all the informative notes, which take into account the embezzlement of monastery funds, ie the registration of much smaller amounts than the real ones.

Despite these administrative pressures, Bishop Pavel Şerpe did not forget any moment the spiritual dimension of his mission. As it can be seen from the letter addressed to Petroniu Tanase in the spring of 1955, the bishop intended to reform the community he considered not too caught up in serving the community. He himself was a missionary who proved to be very active in his pastoral work and attempted to impose a natural rhythm to the status of each institution in which he worked, either the parish or the cultural sector, or the administration of the Bucharest Archdiocese or Neamţ Monastery and the Superior Monastic Seminary. The natural requirements imposed by the very structure of these institutions was not always shared, leading to complaints and conflicts, which were presented from the perspective of “agents” and informants as illegal, unacceptable situations in which the bishop exceeded his mandate by forcing people to “unnatural” or inappropriate behaviour. In this key the information notes must be read.

A turning point in the life of the community from Curtea de Argeş, with implications on the attributions and responsibilities of Bishop Pavel Şerpe was represented by Decree 410 of October 28, 1959. The abolition of the Monastery implied a profound change in the structure of the complex, the monks voluntarily or forced leaving the covenant, being replaced by civilian personnel who had to administer the voivodal church and the palace of the former Patriarchal Stavropighy, now transformed into a resting house under the control of the House of Pensions of the Archdiocese of Bucharest.

However, according to the disposition of Patriarch Justinian Marina, the new positions included also clergy or “former” monks who had to leave their monasteries, maintaining or re-admitting the monks willing to accept the new statute.

Among the challenges faced by the bishop was the uncertainty of the institution he was leading: a monastery-museum, a relict exhibited during official visits, which had to reflect a reality, now forbidden, but at the same time testify to the Westerner visitors about the freedom of conscience and the practice of religion without any constraint. At its size of internationally renowned tourist destination and protocol objective was added the function of resting house for the employees of the Archdiocese of Bucharest.

The resistance faced by the hierarch is simply demotivating, and the obstinacy with which the clergy cling to Decree 410/1959 demonstrates both a deep cooling of faith, but especially a great fear of the communist authorities. However, Bishop Paul Șerpe would not be discouraged, continuing his efforts to renew spiritual life and create a core for the future community. In this sense, he will try to attract even in this extremely unfavorable period for monasticism, people who would be willing to embrace monachism.

Another aspect of the efforts made by Bishop Pavel Șerpe to rebuild the community from Curtea de Argeș is the support given to some monks removed from monasticism on the basis of Decree 410, but whom Patriarch Justinian Marina tried to protect by sending them under the protection of the former vicar.

An example in this respect is Father Petroniu Tanase, whom Bishop Paul Șerpe had known while he was working in Bucharest as secretary of Patriarch Nicodim. Returned to Slatina Monastery, he maintained an occasional correspondence with the archbishop, as it can be seen from the above-mentioned letter, Father Petroniu was removed from the monastery most probably in the early 1960s, following the application of Decree 410, being suspected of legionary sympathies. However, at the end of 1961 he was registred as a gatekeeper of the complex Curtea de Argeș, but he did administrative tasks⁴⁸.

The case of Petroniu Tanase is not singular, and similar support is given to Archimandrite Teofil Niculescu, an exceptional spiritual personality, who has left his strong influence on the ecclesial life of the Metropolitan of Oltenia. Forced to leave the post of ecclesiarch at the Cathedral “St. Demetrius” in Craiova following the application of Decree 410 and served for several years at Lupu parish, commune Cergău, Alba County⁴⁹. Receiving

⁴⁸ A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 115.

⁴⁹ Deac. Ioniță Apostolache *Personalități de seamă din istoria Mitropoliei Olteniei: Teofil S. Niculescu, primul director al Seminarului din Craiova*, <http://www.revistaortodoxa.ro/?p=429>

the appointment from Patriarch Justinian as administrator of the resting house, he came to Curtea de Argeş on November 4, 1964.

Here too, one can observe the protection that Bishop Pavel Şerpe grants to the former monks, but above all one can understand his intention to achieve a monastic life-nucleus made up of improved monks who understood and practiced the exigencies of the "angelic face".

Although the monastery-museum had to be an oasis of spirituality in the wilderness of the restrictions that had deviated from the Orthodox Church in Romania, any spiritual activity was regarded as illegal and supposed its fulfillment in clandestinity, as they were regarded as forms of corrupting and deceiving citizens, as were the private services made at the request of the faithful.

What agents try to minimize and even condemn is the involvement of Bishop Pavel Şerpe in the initiation of believers in the treasures of Orthodoxy and their guidance as close as possible to the ideals of Christian life. If malicious informants deny any benefit of this activity, instead, the notes gathered around the country, from simple travelers who exchanged impressions on the train on various routes, weave a miraculous aura around the bishop.

Since the fall of 1957, Bishop Pavel Şerpe took over the office of rector of the Center for Priests Guidance from Curtea de Argeş, ensuring the good pastoral guidance courses attended by several series of 80-90 priests during a period of four weeks. The responsibilities of the hierarch surpassed the administrative aspect of initiating liturgical service in the presence of the archbishop, as well as addressing missionary-pastoral missionary themes.

Unfortunately, the contribution of Bishop Pavel Şerpe to the training of the priests participating in these courses can only be reconstituted from the messages and speeches made during these events, noted in the second chapter, or from the informative notes delivered by "agents" infiltrated among the staff serving the guidance center and the settlements from Curtea de Argeş Monastery complex or occasionally among the participants in the courses.

The same hostile environment would be maintained throughout the whole activity, each gesture being taken out of context and interpreted negatively, after which it was presented as an affront to the democratic principles of the regime, seeking its antagonism with the state organs. The missionary tact, the presence of spirit, the pastoral preoccupations are perceived and presented as vulnerabilities, while they were only the signs of a normal behavior expected from any spiritual shepherd. And it is more regrettable that this aspect of Bishop Paul Şerpe's activity was misinterpreted and exploited by other clergy who used distorted information in reprehensible deeds, following the rise in their career, as was the case with the source called "Cantor".

It would seem that only Bishop Pavel Şerpe gave importance to the training role of the pastoral-missionary guidance, diverted rather towards the indoctrination of the clergy with socialist elements and to their understanding of socio-economic and communication concerns, to the detriment of theological and liturgical aspects, and his tenacity in promoting adequate content for these courses becomes an obstacle for the authorities, as is also apparent from the information made on April 14, 1962 by the representative for cults, I. Bărbulescu, who asks for the cessation of the bishop's teaching contributions:

We propose that in these courses Bishop Pavel Şerpe should no longer have attributions, especially since he sought to pay special attention to the church side⁵⁰.

In spite of this state of desolation, Bishop Pavel Şerpe continues his activity at the Guidance Center, completing the theoretical knowledge shared by the teachers of Bucharest and Sibiu with the practical experience of the liturgical celebration and the advice he shared with the students. In time, however, he convinced himself that the moral quality of some participating priests fell short, but this did not stop him from conducting his mentoring activity alongside those who relied on spiritual challenges.

The multitude of texts approached reflect only a few fragments of the pressure created around Bishop Pavel Şerpe, who tried to carry out his pastoral mission by directing the clergy in a spirit deeply attached to Christian values, remaining faithful to the teachings of the Church, and not to the democratic ideological directions, which can be so easily captured by these documents, written either misinformed or deliberately.

A turning point in the activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe, with unfortunate consequences, is the missionary visit that the hierarch leads to the sanatorium from Valea Iaşului on April 1, 1962.

The notes made on this occasion emphasize the priest's reserve to participate in this action by trying not to emerge too much. There are some who "objected and refused to sing". It is also noteworthy that the bishop was also surveilled for relations he would have maintained with "The Army of the Lord sect". Along with these lines, we find numerous notes dedicated to that moment, which together carry a series of allegations aimed at incriminating the bishop as much as possible, while revealing interesting details.

The assignment of an intention to compromise the communist regime by fulfilling a Christian duty to take care of those in sufferings illustrates very clearly how much the clergy appropriated logics and the mentality of the time. Texts betray not only the prudence of the citizen under the pressure of the society, but the abandon of Christian values in the name of a

⁵⁰ A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 153.

comfortable relationship with the state. These observations are necessary to understand the spirit of the epoch in which Bishop Paul Șerpe persisted in his beliefs, trying to shape the consciences of a generation more and more inclined to leave the weapons of faith and to give up “the good fight”, action for which he also criticizes the priests who refused to sing and delineated themselves away from the group of singing clerics. The gap between mentalities can also be seen from the ironic references to the “bourgeoisie time” and the denunciation of the practices from before 1948, as well as the rejection of the hierarch's parental and sacerdotal authority.

The consequence of the visit to T.B. sanatorium was the temporary loss of any support from Bucharest for bishop Pavel Șerpe, being announced that Patriarch Justinian distanced himself from his actions in organizing the courses and limited his duties strictly to the management of the Patriarchate's resting house, but there also only on paper. The severity of the situation is also suggested by a possible transfer of the hierarch that the Patriarch had taken into account in order to pacify the spirits⁵¹. The decisions taken in Bucharest strongly affected the hierarch and altered his state of health.

Returning to the consequences of the visit organized by Bishop Pavel Șerpe at the sanatorium in Valea Iașului, apart from the separation from patriarch Justinian and the limitations of his responsibilities, he became the subject of a very comprehensive “plan of measures” drawn up by the surveillance agents of “Service III” on August 10, 1962, “in order to organize and carry out informative-operative work in the informative activity on bishop Șerpe Pavel”⁵². On the basis of this document on August 17, 1962 the surveillance service started individual action to surveill the hierarch.

This time, after summing up the bishop's political past, the document systematizes a series of faults of which the bishop would have been guilty (employing dubious collaborators, organizing pompous services to raise money, organizing a library for young people, visiting the sanitarium, candle business) in *his hostile activity* – a cliché used by the surveillance organs, which we meet 16 times only in here – the members of the Service III constitute this detailed pursuit, with well defined stages, with clear tasks and carefully set objectives, seeking to compromise the bishop by hearing an impressive number of witnesses, by mobilizing the two “agents”, employees of the Curtea de Argeș Monastery, as well as by initiating investigations to provide undisputable evidence of the illegal and immoral actions of

⁵¹ A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 111.

⁵² A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 29-33.

the bishop. In short, we are in a phase of intensification, acceleration and concentration of operational resources for the final discrediting of Pavel Şerpe.

The debauchery, mistrust, suspicion and freezing of relations with Patriarch Justinian Marina have so strongly influenced the life of Bishop Pavel Şerpe that he closed himself and surrendered to a kind of social pessimism, emphasizing his belief that his generation would not know peace and quiet, which was even more troubling when balancing the “democratic regime” with the interwar period.

It is certain that this time - after 1962 - the hierarch was increasingly isolated, giving up speaking publicly on political issues, which made him harmless even in the eyes of the informers. Indeed, the diabetes of which the bishop suffered had an aggressive evolution that probably he was not even concerned anymore with resistance towards the communist regime.

The benevolence shown, the neutral discourse, the exhortation of harmony and peace are all signs of a *taedium vitae* that the hierarch embraced, limiting his contacts to the strictly necessary ones, convinced that he can no longer share with anyone the dissatisfaction or the objections towards the political regime. In this context, the presence of the hierarch becomes more and more blurred, and he himself contributes to this through his reserve, so that the surveillance agents hardly have what to report, as evidenced by one of the last notes offered by “Alexe Anton” on January 21, 1964, just before closing the surveillance action and classifying the materials (21.04.1964).

The moral resistance of the bishop to the increasing pressure would become minimal, but not non-existent, due to the fact that he soon managed to identify many of the securitate agents, forewarning also the superior ecclesiastical authorities.

The next step for the closing of the case was the drawing up on March 31, 1964⁵³, of the report that emphasized the lack of importance of the activity of the hierarch.

However, this decision did not represent the definitive cessation of the surveillance, Bishop Pavel Şerpe being suspected of espionage along with his housekeeper. It is the suspicion on the bishop because of the many contacts he had made with foreign visitors visiting the princely church and the complex from Curtea de Argeş. Speaking several foreign languages, the bishop talked easily with the guests explaining to them the history and legendary origins of Neagoe Basarab’s establishment or presenting to them “Manole” Hall. As a host, he met several officials of the Reformed and Evangelical Churches, with significant positions in the Ecumenical Council of Churches and other international ecclesiastical bodies.

⁵³ A.C.N.S.A.S., background information, file no. 005107, 3rd vol., f. 356.

The very presence of Karla Winkler aroused suspicion because of the links and correspondence she maintained with people from the former German Federal Republic. Assisting Bishop Pavel from the first worsening of diabetes in March, 1959, Karla proved to be a helpful support over time, devoting herself to the hierarch. Being most of the time in the vicinity of the bishop she has attracted the attention of the agents who occasionally offered information about her.

The groundlessness of the suspicion of espionage was soon proven, so that the informative notes on this subject also ceased to be written.

One last aspect that can not be omitted is the frequency with which the bishop was supposed to have played an important role in supporting and even directing the "Army of the Lord" religious movement after 1948, when it is outlawed, its members continuing to act illegally, associated in a so-called "Church of silence", which undermined the new social order. That is why the Communist authorities have done their best to identify them, supervise them, and constrain their manifestations.

Indeed it seems that at the complex in Curtea de Argeş there was a small nucleus of the Army of the Lord, but the most notorious member was not the bishop Pavel Şerpe, but the hierodiaton Gavril Stoica. Bishop Pavel Şerpe would remain with this stigma of association with the "Army of the Lord", which will accompany him in later characterizations, along with hostile activity against the popular democratic regime, with the fanaticism of the youth and bourgeois extravagances. However, despite the research on this issue, the agents have failed to discover or prove other concrete contacts with "soldiers" or actions of the Army of the Lord in which Bishop Paul Şerpe was directly involved, refuting the suspicions of the surveillance bodies.

Reading the 700 pages of the files that have "Sergiu Popescu" as "object" it can be said that these are the most important aspects of the activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe from the prism of the notes provided by the agents and informants, respectively of the reports and the syntheses made by Securitate officers.

Once these texts being read through, some general observations are required. First of all, one is impressed by the accuracy with which the people of interest are "surveyed", the mobilization of the human resource to extract the information being overwhelming. However, the quality and nature of the actual information is corrupted by the biased attitude of sources that interpret or tendentiously present the deeds and words of the bishop, trying to antagonize it with the principles of the popular democratic regime. In this sense, the notes attempt to highlight the conflict from an ideological, political and moral point of view, discrediting Bishop Pavel Şerpe, and at the same time to diminish the human side of his

actions in the situations and reactions presented. About what is behind this omnipresent dehumanisation in everything that represents informative material Smaranda Vultur says:

“If you read the individual or problem information tracking files and go through the informants’ notes or the officers’ reports, beyond this world born from the power of the ideological language to redefine reality and intervene in it, the living world comes to light, the world as it should have been, a daily lifestyle that goes beyond stereotypical and incriminating formulas, with the lives that pass, destroy or distort themselves, with feelings and illusions that are born or gone, with a human typology that does not exactly overlap that definable through «sources» (informants, collaborators), «objectives» (the person being surveilled) and officers of varying ranks who perform various missions.”⁵⁴

The contents of the files that concern Bishop Pavel Şerpe reflect a spirit of a tense epoch, in which the pastoral enthusiasm of some Church members is interwoven with the justified fear of not being prosecuted and sanctioned for their deep attachment to Christian values. The informative notes bring to our attention rather suspicions than facts, stemming from a suspicion and obsessive desire to have control over the most intimate aspects of human life, control obtained by directing the agency to derive opinions on political, economic, spiritual and cultural issues.

In this jar of information, we are witnessing an incredible transformation made by socialist oppression and tyranny, hijacking the destinies from their vocation. Evolution characterizes all the participants in these “operative games”: during the two decades covered by the documentary material the agents change their attitude, some discovering in Bishop Pavel Şerpe a refined person with honorable intentions, which is why they are limited to the provision of neutral information, irrelevant in the individual surveillance action. In turn, the hierarch evolves from the voluntary optimism of the one who is held by hope in God to the circumspection of the one who was betrayed by the closest collaborators, rarely exteriorizing his real states. The security officers, who classify the file on the grounds that the collected material is of minor importance, come to easily select between the libels of some informants – often punished and ridiculed on the note imprint – and the much more nuanced reality of the disinterested work carried out by Bishop Pavel Şerpe.

All these fragments complete the image of the man, seen this time not from the perspective of positive or eloquent sources, but from the point of view of documents meant to

⁵⁴ Smaranda Vultur, «Anturajul», o obsesie a Securităţii («The Entourage», an Obsession of the Securitate), in *Revista 22*, year XV, no. 929 (December 24, 2007 - January 7, 2008), <https://revista22.ro/4224/.html> (April 28, 2018).

discredit and compromise him, by suppressing his “hostile” activity against the communist regime; but even so the informative notes only confirm the love for God and for the Church of one of the few known Romanian hierarchs of the twentieth century.

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This investigation aims to make a real contribution to the knowledge of the life and activity of Bishop Pavel Şerpe, care was a visionary and often a pioneer of social actions organized through the Church, and by virtue of his practical sense he had a great potential to strengthen the church units and to redeem their lost glory during the years of heavy communist rule. We want this research to validate and, by academic means, use the value and stature of an overlooked hierarch, emphasizing as faithfully as possible his work and character.

Keywords: Orthodox Church in Europe, Romanian Orthodox Church, Communism, Securitate files, Pavel Şerpe

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