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DOCTORAL THESIS

**Vladimirești Monastery. An analysis of its history: mystical,
doctrinal, canonical and liturgical aspects**

- SUMMARY -

PhD candidate:

Mihaela Luchian

Coordinator:

PhD Professor Archdeacon Ioan I. Ică jr

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Key words

Visionary experiences, charismatic monasticism, eucharistic revival, mysticism, canonical deviations, conflict with the hierarchy, spiritualism, sectarianism

Introduction. A synthetic presentation of the subject

The work *Vladimirești Monastery. An analysis of its history: mystical, doctrinal, canonical and liturgical aspects* proposes to present the birth, evolution and characteristics of what was called the „Vladimirești phenomenon”, a subject which, although it might sound familiar, in reality proved to have been incompletely, inexactly and scarcely studied. Vladimirești Monastery, the one that has triggered the analysed phenomenon, was established following a theophany: when she was harvesting corn, a young 17-year-old girl, Vasilica Barbu-Gurău (1920-2005), had a vision of the Mother of God, who asked her to build in that place a monastery for virgins. In 1939 the monastery was established and within a short time it became a large monastic community sought after by hundreds of believers. After one decade of blooming, around the year 1951, some deviations appear to be signalled in the community’s liturgical and sacramental life: the cult of the abbess’s visions, preached in sermons and catechisms, and collective confession and frequent communion – daily for the monastic community, and on each Sunday Liturgy and on Holy days for the believers. Father Ioan Iovan, the priest in charge of Vladimirești from 1948, who was also preoccupied with the mystical life, and with the role of the Eucharist as a supreme sacrament of union with Christ, and convinced that the abbess

Veronica was a „chosen vessel”, succeeded through these practices in transforming Vladimirești into a true phenomenon, a place towards which more and more pilgrims headed. This phenomenon of popular religiosity could hardly not have attracted the attention of the communist powers and in 1953 the first measures began to be felt. Patriarch Justinian sent delegates (monks, spiritual fathers, hierarchs) to analyse the situation and to form an opinion. The circumspect position of those appointed delegates, and the assessment of the situation (which takes the shape of a letter from the Slatina monks addressed to the Vladimirești community) were reasons for the ecclesiastic authorities, under pressure from the political powers, to try to restrain the number of those that were heading towards Vladimirești. The first measure concerned the withdrawal of Father Ioan from the community; his refusal to transfer to the Patriarchal Cathedral, and a *Memoir*, which he wrote in answer to the Slatina letter, led to his being defrocked by the Synod. Because the practices in Vladimirești did not cease, and Father Ioan did not stop giving services, the ecclesiastical authority decided to disperse some of the monastic community and stop the sacramental practices which were considered non-canonical. The monastery leadership's disobedience of these Synodal decisions attracted forced repression, this time on the part of the state authorities, so that on 30th March 1955 the monastery's governing body was arrested, being accused of offering support to the Legionary Movement. The mutiny of the monastic community continued in the same spirit of disobedience towards the ecclesiastical authorities, and was followed by the arrest of seven nuns for disturbing the public order, and then the radical decision was taken to dissolve the monastery by the Romanian Orthodox Church Synod, assembled in an extraordinary session on the 12th January 1956. On the night between the 14th and the 15th February 1956, 220 officers of the Ministry for Internal Affairs coordinated the monastery's evacuation operation and Vladimirești was dissolved, the inhabitants being sent back to their families.

Motivation for choosing the theme

When I first approached this subject within my dissertation, I was surprised to observe that, although there is a multitude of sources which document the birth, evolution and decomposition of the Vladimirești phenomenon, they have never been exploited, and there has never been an attempt to analyse and assess this unusual case of visionary experiences, and one which resulted in the establishment of a monastery which had a considerable impact in inter-war Romania and also in the first communist decade. The fact that the subject had not, until this moment, undergone a complete theological and historical analysis, and had not been subject to an

interpretation or a real assessment proposal, was one of the reasons that determined me to suggest it as a research theme within the doctoral programme.

Having visited the monastery more than 10 years previously, I asked myself what the connection was between what I had read in a few recent studies regarding the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the communist era, and what I could see then between the same walls that had offered cover, more than 50 years before, to a monastic community of 300 nuns and hundreds of pilgrims at the church's celebration and Holy days. Being preoccupied with the Romanian monastic spiritual history, I wanted to understand how a phenomenon of (real or imaginary) visions and the popular religiosity born spontaneously around it, could have resulted in the making of a clear eucharistic and mystical vocation which succeeded, in the last decade before the installation of communism and one more after it was instituted, in marking a true spiritual revival in the Romanian territory. And also how this revival came to be contested by other monastic groups and to be suffocated following the decision of the Romanian Orthodox Church Synod, under political pressure.

The research stages

The Vladimirești subject has, to begin with, primary sources: besides the unedited political or administrative documents that were in the CNSAS archives (National Council for Studying the Securitate Archives), there is also an autobiography of the abbess Veronica¹, an evocation of the monastery's history by one of the nuns that belonged to the monastic community in Vladimirești², literary writings of the era by some who were close to the monastery (writer Al. Lascarov-Moldoveanu and solicitor and journalist Petre Pandrea)³, the testimonies of Father Ioan Iovan⁴, writings from the spiritualist period of Mother Veronica⁵, an autobiography of George Văsâi⁶, husband of Veronicăi Gurău between 1964-1988, and, last but not least, two demonstrative theological letters of those who had opposing positions when the conflict started:

¹ Veronica Gurău, *Viața măicuței Veronica [Mother Veronica's life]*, Arhetip, Chișinău, 1992, 3 vol.

² Maica Christofora (Vladimirești Monastery), *Sfânta Cruce din porumb [The holy cross in the corn]*, Anca publishing house, Urziceni, 2011, 3 vol.

³ Al. Lascarov Moldovanu, *Fecioara de la Vladimirești [The Virgin of Vladimirești]*, f.e. 1948; Petre Pandrea, *Călugărul alb [The white monk]*, Vredea publishing house, Bucharest, 2003.

⁴ Ioan Iovan, *A fost frumos la Gherla [It was nice in Gherla]*, Patmos publishing house, Cluj-Napoca, 2009; Priest Remus Onișor (ed.), *Cuvinte împărtășite de părintele Ioan și maica stareță Cristina [Words shared by father Ioan and abbess Cristina]*. Reîntregirea publishing house, Alba Iulia, 2007.

⁵ George Văsâi, [Veronica Văsâi], *Cercetări din lumea nevăzută [Research in the unknown world]*, Solteris publishing house, Piatra Neamț, 2004.

⁶ George Văsâi, *În căutarea sensului vieții [In search for the purpose of life]*, Solteris publishing house, Piatra Neamț, f.a.

the letter of the Slatina monks⁷ and the memoir of Father Ioan Iovan addressed to the Synod⁸. All these open numerous interpretive perspectives on the case. However, with the exception of the studies of historians Cristian Vasile, George Enache and Adrian Nicolae Petcu, who have chapters dedicated to the Vladimirești Monastery in their synthetic works on the Church life in Romania during the years after the communist regime's installation, there are no other research works to investigate the case and to propose its interpretation or assessment.

The studies of the three historians are:

- Cristian Vasile, „Cazul Vladimirești” [The Vladimirești Case], in Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu comunist [The Romanian Orthodox Church in the first communist decade]*, Curtea veche publishing house, Bucharest, 2005.
- George Enache, „Religiozitate populară și rezistență anticomunistă în România” [Popular religiosity and anti-communist resistance in Romania], in George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană [Orthodoxy and political power in contemporary Romania]*, Nemira publishing house, Bucharest, 2005.
- George Enache, Adrian Petcu, „Fenomenul Vladimirești” [The Vladimirești phenomenon] in George Enache, Adrian Petcu, *Monahismul ortodox și puterea comunistă în România anilor 50 [Orthodox monasticism and communist power in Romania of the 50s]*, Partener publishing house, Galați, 2009.

Besides these synthetic works, there are also studies, dissertations or dictionary entries dedicated to some of the protagonists of this history, such as *Ioan Iovan*, in:

- Septimiu Fulgușor Raita, *Părintele Ioan Iovan, un model omiletic contemporan [Father Ioan Iovan, a contemporary homiletic model]*, dissertation presented in the Orthodox Theology Faculty of '1 decembrie 1918' University of Alba-Iulia in 2013 (coordinator. Pr. Jan Nicolae), in manuscript.
- Jan Nicolae, „«The Chalice is my Life» - Father Ioan Iovan, the Eucharist Martyr in the Communist Prison”, *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 2 (2015), 6, pp. 69-98.

⁷ Cleopa Ilie, Arsenie Papacioc, Ierod. Antonie Plămădeală, „Scrisoarea către Mănăstirea Vladimirești (14 octombrie 1954)” [Letter to Vladimirești Monastery (14th October 1954)], in Părintele Arsenie Papacioc, *Iată duhovnicul [Here is the spiritual father]*, Sofia publishing house, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 181-282.

⁸ Ioan Iovan, „Memoriul adresat membrilor Sinodului Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (25 ianuarie 1955)” [Memoir addressed to the Romanian Orthodox Church Synod members (25th January 1955)], in Pr. Ioan Iovan, *A fost frumos la Gherla [It was nice in Gherla]*, Patmos publishing house Cluj-Napoca, 2009, pp. 31-88.

- Marius Vasileanu, George Enache, Ion Marin Croitoru, *Părintele Ioan Iovan în oglinzi paralele [Father Ioan Iovan in parallel mirrors]*, Lumea Credenței, Bucharest, 2019.

and *Mihaela Iordache*, in:

- George Enache, „O martiră a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române din perioada comunistă: Maica Mihaela Iordache” [A martyr of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the communist period: Mother Mihaela Iordache], „*Dunărea de Jos*” *University Annals, Galați, Seria Istorie* (2005), 4, pp. 305-306.
- „Mihaela Iordache” in Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Dicționarul clericilor și mirenilor ortodocși români mărturisitori în detenția comunistă [Dictionary of Romanian Orthodox lay and clerical confessors in communist detention]*, Basilica, Bucharest, 2018, pp. 165-166.
- „Mihaela Iordache” entry in *** *Sfinții închisorilor [The prison’s saints]*, Paltin-Petru Vodă Monastery, f.e., 2019, pp. 418-429.

At the same time, Priest Professor Ioan Ică jr., in the chapter „Echoes and taking a stand in Romanian Orthodoxy” in his volume *Continuous communion with the Holy Sacraments. The file of a controversy. Tradition’s Testimony*, Deisis publishing house, Sibiu, 2006, recalls the eucharistic piety around Father Ioan Iovan and the deadlock reached back then due to the „canonical and charismatic characteristics” which eventually led to the polemic in the theological magazines.

There is also another category of studies, *engendered by* the Vladimirești case, rather than *dedicated to it*; it comprises a series of articles – polemical or apologetic – which were published in *Theological Studies* magazine in the 1950s when the conflict concerning the deviations of Vladimirești had infiltrated the theological disputes of the time. There are articles signed by professors in liturgical, apologetic, moral and religious history from theological faculties in Bucharest and Sibiu, and historical and theoretical approaches dedicated to some subjects like the monastic organisation, the frequency of communion, the false revelations, the phenomenon of visions and the criteria for specific revelations. But the first polemical position on the Vladimirești visions dates back to 1940 and is attributed to the architect Mihai Urzică. Chronologically, the studies mentioned are:

- Mihail Urzică, *Minuni și false minuni [Miracles and false miracles]*, Curentul, Bucharest, 1940.
- Hieromonk Cleopa Ilie, „Viața religioasă din unele mănăstiri ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. Constatările și îndemmurile unui smerit monah și iscusit duhovnic” [Religious

life in some monasteries of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Observations and advice from a humble monk and knowledgeable spiritual father], *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]*, V (1953), 5-6, pp. 429-443.

- Ioasaf Popa, „Pentru o mai bună orientare a unor mănăstiri de călugărițe” [For a better orientation of a nuns’ monastery], *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]* 5-6/1953, pp. 407-428.
- Petre Vintilescu, „Sfânta împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?” [Holy communion within Christian spirituality. Frequent or rare communion?] in *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]*, 5-6/1953, pp. 382-406.
- Priest Prof. Nicolae Mladin, „Combaterea falselor revelații” [Combatting false revelations], *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]* SN II (1950), 3-6, pp. 178-189.
- Priest prof. Liviu Stan, „Superstițiile și obscurantismul mistic. Lupta împotriva superstițiilor și a obscurantismului mistic, luptă pentru pace” [Superstitions and mystical obscurantism. The fight against superstitions and mystical obscurantism, fight for peace], *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]* SN XI (1959), 3-6, pp. 280-287.
- Priest prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Formele și cauzele falsului misticism” [Forms and causes of the false mysticism], *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]* SN IV (1952), 5-6, pp. 251-272.
- Prof. deacon Emilian Vasilescu, „Mistică și patologie” [Mysticism and pathology], în *Studii Teologice [Theological Studies]* VIII (1940), 1, pp. 163-184.

In some recent works or textbooks on missiology and sectarianism Vladimirești is also mentioned as an anarchical group, schismatic movement or as a sectarian phenomenon, indicative of a superficial and precipitate approach based on an insufficient knowledge of the complexity of the problem, which leads to a series of discrepancies (sometimes taken from one work to another, without factual verification) in the reconstruction of the monastery’s history or of the protagonists’ biography. This is the case in the works of professors Petre David, David Pestroiu, and Gheorghe Istodor:

- Petre David, *Sectologie [Sectarianism]*, Episcopia Tomisului, Constanța, 1998.
- Pr. David Pestroiu, Suport de curs la disciplina Misiologie și ecumenism, an III [Missiology and ecumenism subject – course material, year III].
- Pr. Gheorghe Istodor, *Fenomenul sectar „creștin” [The „Christian” sectarian phenomenon]*, Domino, Galați, 2009.

and in a more nuanced and integrated way in the theoretical demonstration in

- Pr. Marius Cloșcă, *Ortodoxia și noile mișcări religioase [Orthodoxy and the new religious movements]*, Lumen, Iași, 2009.

With regards to the current state of research relating to the subject and the examined aspects, my conclusion was that whilst the historians were only concerned with the conflict that led to the monastery closing in the first communist decade, the theologians only dealt with the deviations of the liturgical and sacramental practices that took place there, or with the canonical deviations and false revelations (in the articles of the 1950s), specifically with the sectarian aspect of Vladimirești (in the textbooks from 2000), and done in a polemical manner; nevertheless both reading types remain incomplete and subsumed to a determined purpose. At the same time, the analysis only covered a limited time span, approximately between 1953-1956, following the conflict with the communist power and with the Romanian Orthodox Church hierarchy and the moment of the monastery's closure.

Research purpose and objectives

Reading the primary sources led me to the conclusion that my approach to the subject should look at different plans: on the one hand, to follow a few methodological aspects (revising the periodisation, expanding the researched chronological span, organising the primary sources to become relevant), and, on the other hand, to propose an interpretation, which would follow not only the reconstitution of the history of Vladimirești, but also aspects of theology, sociology, religious anthropology, spirituality and psychology. All these in order to demonstrate that the Vladimirești phenomenon offers diverse possibilities of interpretation, in accordance with the variety of sources (correspondence, political documents, memoiristic, autobiographies, literary evocations) and of the „voices” that produced them (protagonists, adepts, enemies, political and church authorities, other monks, writers). When I began the case analysis, I planned to follow:

1. to what extent the phenomenon of visions that was the basis for the monastery's foundation determined the impact that it had in the society, but also its contestation and decline,
2. how there came to be deviations from the liturgical and sacramental practices, breaches of monastic discipline, conflicts with ecclesiastic authority and, finally, under the pressure of the political factor, the monastery's closure;
3. how the monastic world/remarkable monastic figures of that time came to be polarised in their attitude towards Vladimirești,
4. to what extent the resolution was due to the intervention of politics in the life of the Church;
5. what the legacy of the Vladimirești phenomenon meant or the 34 years of clandestinity of a monastic community which was dispersed into the world, and what was the biographical path of those arrested on the 30th March 1955, both in prison and after release, and to what extent this affected the case's reception;
6. how we might regard the biography of a visionary abbess, with all her subsequent

downfalls and with the final victory when, in 1990, she managed to reopen the monastery and ensure its continuity until the present time, 7. what was the meaning of the sectarian manifestations surrounding the Vladimirești phenomenon, 8. to what extent the eucharistic piety that Father Ioan Iovan imprinted on Vladimirești's movement of visionary-mystical enthusiasm exacerbated the phenomenon and led, eventually, to its fall.

The work structure

I have organised the work in four chapters to be able to analyse the subject and to demonstrate all the desired aspects.

The first chapter, **Research, sources and methodological stages**, is dedicated to the methodological aspects, an essential component of the work due to the multitude of sources, their variety, and to the fact that they need to be organised correctly and framed chronologically to be useful to the demonstration.

I have shown in the sub-chapter I.1 *Suggested methodological instruments and research sources* that the complexity of the Vladimirești case is not only due to the history of the monastery itself, but, to some extent, also due to the multitude of documents that testify to this history, and also that the diversity of doctrinal positions and the typological variety of the sources were the necessary reasons for developing some methodological instruments appropriate to the analysis. The first of these instruments was *periodisation*; for the first time the subject was chronologically structured through a rigorous delimitation of five stages, which are: 1. Foundation of the monastery and the blooming period (1939-1950). 2. The conflict and the arrest of the monastery's governing body (1951-1955), 3. The detention of those involved (1955-1964), 4. The period from prison release to the fall of communism (1964-1989) and, to complete the history, but not analysed here, 5. The period from the reopening of the monastery to the death of the abbess Veronica Gurău (1990-2005). In order for the primary sources to be made relevant for each of the analysed aspects, all these sources – out of which some were written after the events mentioned took place, others cover longer time spans and overlap the proposed chronology, whilst others don't mention the date when they were produced – I have compiled a series of synoptic tables for the documentary sources, for which at least two indicators – „the evoked period” and „writing date” – required a nuanced analysis of the respective documentary source and a good knowledge of the phenomenon's history, in all its detail.

Because I worked with both documents of the political police and administrative papers of the Ministry for Cults and of Eparchial Chancelleries, but also with memoiristic and

autobiographical writings, I understood that two dangers can influence the objectivity of the research – ideologization as well as the source’s subjectivity. And I tried to show - in the following two sub-chapters, *I.2 Note on the political police documents*, as well as *I.3 Memoirism and its recuperative value* – after a theoretical introduction to the problem, how these traps of research operated in the particular case that I was investigating. I have shown that in any historic event several voices are present, and, even if they cannot be heard with the same intensity, everybody’s position has to be identified and interrogated, and the reading of them has to be done with different instruments, coming from different areas and methodological fields.

The second chapter of the work, **The political, social and ecclesiastical context**, had the role of reconstituting – with the help of the historic bibliography – the political, economic, juridic-administrative life of inter-war Romania, and the Church’s relationship with the state and the cultic regime in Romania (both during this period, but also especially in the first communist decade when the most important moments in the history of Vladimirești Monastery took place). *From the creation of Greater Romania to the installation of the totalitarian regime* is the first sub-chapter of this part of the work, which includes sub-chapters dedicated to the peasant problem and to economic and social life in the rural world (*II.1.1 The peasant problem and the inter-war rural world*), to the economic crisis in 1930 and to the way in which this influenced the political, social and economic life of that world in which the monastery that is the object of the research came to life, (*II.1.2 The economic crisis and the decline of democracy in inter-war Romania*), to the role of the Legionary Movement in the political, but also spiritual and religious, life of inter-war Romania (*II.1.3 The Legionary Movement and its political and social impact*) in order to conclude, with a last sub-chapter, *II.1.4 Vladimirești Monastery in the inter-war socio-political context*, dedicated to the way in which the events, movements and political groups, or the social changes mentioned in the preceding sub-chapters, marked the history of Vladimirești Monastery. Even if it proved to be a section with an approach dominated by political and economic history, this sub-chapter had an essential role: to offer the general historical-theoretical framework which subsequently made possible the specific analysis of the problem and the formulation of some conclusions. That is why I have focussed on those aspects that influenced the monastery’s destiny, the protagonists’ biography, and the social or psychological profile of the believers that were around them. And I am thinking here of aspects that concerned the inter-war rural world and agricultural reform, the parliamentary system and the ascent of the Legionary Movement, the oscillation between the democratic regime and that of the authoritarian royal dictatorship, the violence and social conflicts which had as a

background these political affinities, and, last but not least, the role of the Church institution and of its people in the context of the political and social turbulence that characterised the Romanian inter-war period.

The second sub-chapter of the second chapter, *II.2 Church and state in the inter-war decades and in the years of the communist regime's installation*, focussed on the legislative aspects that regularized the Church life after the Great Union and the relation between the political rulers and the ecclesiastical structures in the inter-war period, but, mainly, in three different sub-chapters, the essential changes that took place at the institutional level, in the clerics and monks lives, and amongst religious practices, once the communist regime in Romania was installed. Sub-sub-chapter *II.2.1 Political changes after 1945 and their echo in Church life* follows the way in which the communist powers tried to use the Church and its people to sustain the newly-installed regime, either through legislative measures, or through constraints and manipulation, and the sub-sub-chapter *II.2.2 The new ideology and the institutional changes* follows the way in which communist control was imposed in two domains decisive for the church life: theological education, and the monasteries and monastic life. The last sub-sub-chapter *II.2.3 Repression and resistance* underlines the phenomenon of the arrest of clerics, accelerated when the Securitate was established in 1948, and of the anti-communist resistance, and the way in which it manifested on several levels: of the church hierarchy, of the priests and of the monks.

The conclusions that I formulated, after presenting this synthetic picture of the context in which I laid this case study, are:

1. The rural world in which the Vladimirești phenomenon came to life went through a series of changes in the inter-war period which led to a relative improvement of the peasants' conditions, to greater visibility of the peasant in society, and visionary experiences and different forms of popular religiosity of the inter-war period (all of which took place in the world of the village) are also attributable to this fact.

2. Inter-war Romanian political leaders cultivated relations with the Church and with Church authorities; for them, Orthodox belief was the foundation of national identity. The involvement of the priests in politics, however, was received with reservation, being considered a way of instrumentalising belief and of an abandonment of the priest's spiritual mission.

3. The Legionary Movement was the political group that managed to attract in itself, through the Christian values that it was promoting and the religious ceremonies that it was integrating in its political actions, a considerable section of the clergy. But this does not mean that an accusation like "Orthodox priest equals Legionary" would be justified; it was more likely an overlapping of some mutual values and interests. The Vladimirești monastery's leadership, for

instance, was arrested on the allegation of offering support to the Legionary Movement. In reality, the Monastery offered spiritual or material support to some former Legionaries, but it did so because these were close believers in the monastery or because they asked for this spiritual support; however, neither the abbess, nor the spiritual father, saw in this a political gesture.

4. Gradually, the communist state managed to transform the Church into a docile instrument of its will and strategy, through legislative measures, through different types of pressure, through apparently benevolent deeds, ambiguously playing the card of the collaboration between Church and state. The resistance to different forms of repression, that had varied consequences and pressures, was one of the most significant and heroic pages of the communist period and it was written by the Church's people.

5. In the vision of the totalitarian state leadership, monasteries were places where activities which were hostile to the regime took place. Starting in 1953, the political authorities became preoccupied with "the monasteries problem". The synthetic study on Romanian monasticism which was edited that year by the representatives of the Ministry for Cults is the document which initiated the destruction of monastic life in the first communist decade, an action that culminated with Decree 410, dated 28 October 1959, which imposed the dissolution of the monasteries. At that moment Vladimirești had already been closed, in 1956, as a precursor of what was to happen three years later in the monastic life of communist Romania.

With the third chapter of the work, **Monastery intra muros. From its foundation (1939) to the closure (1956) of Vladimirești Monastery**, the actual case study begins. Sub-chapter *III.1 The history of the monastery's foundation and blooming (1937-1950): visions, miracles, healings and the formation of a monastic community* shows how the monastery was founded and developed, analysing the visionary mysticism of the young Vasilica Gurău, but also of the girls in the village who followed her to live first in a hut and then to erect a monastery, subsequently being sought out by more and more believers, and at the same time it critically analyses and presents the literary sources (autobiographies, evocations, memoirs, literature, journals) which narrate these things. Sub-chapter *III.2 The conflict and the closure of the monastery (1951-1956): theological disputes and canonical aspects* accomplishes an exact chronology of the facts, moments and documents that led to the final resolution. Compiling tens of unedited documents, kept in the archives of CNSAS and in the State Archives – Section for the Ministry for Cults, pages of correspondence (private or public) and of memoiristic literature, the demonstration succeeds in reconstituting, moment by moment, the most tense period in the monastery's history, that between the signs of the first deviations (December 1951) and the

dispersion of the monastic community (February 1956), showing what the conflict was about, how it ignited, how it was maintained, and what led to its amplification. The dispute is a theological, doctrinal, liturgical, and canonical one, and I have attempted to encompass all its details to show that the decision regarding the monastery's dissolution was in essence a political one. Because, beyond the deviations, tensions between monastic groups, the canonical and disciplinary insubordination of the governing body and, later, of the monastic community, their conviction that they had to be confessors whilst the rest of the Church fell into apostasy, the large number of believers that were heading towards Vladimirești at the height of the communist regime, and the influence that the priest, the abbess and the whole community had on the spiritual lives of those people, were of the type to attract the repressive measures that had as its culmination the dispersion of the monastic community on the night between 14th and 15th February 1956, with the intervention of the troops of the Ministry for Internal Affairs.

Sub-chapter III.3 *Tendencies of spiritual renewal at the beginning of the XX century as a background to the Romanian inter-war visionary experiences* begins the analysis of some specific theological problems of this period in the monastery's history, showing how the phenomenon of visions characterised the whole of Europe in the first half of the last century as a symptom of a general tendency of spiritual renewal, as a reaction to the political and economic crises of a world shattered by wars, terrors and uncertainties, and, at the same time follows the way in which, in the context of the rediscovery of spiritual interest, mysticism also became in Romania a theme of debate, and, moreover, a subject to be studied in the theological faculties. Sub-chapter III.4, *Popular visionary experiences and religiosity in Romanian theologians' discourse. Types of manifestation and reception in the era*, reopens an abandoned discussion of the theological magazines in the 1950s – that of visions, mysticism, and of the criteria for judging specific revelations – and proposes a critical analysis of the theological discourse of the moment, demonstrating that the polemic-apologetic stake of some theology professors, authors of these articles, reveals them as being hostile to, or incapable of accepting, mystical-visionary manifestations, which they should have presented from a position of explaining to the readers the series of phenomena that the Church was facing during those years, and not allowed themselves to be influenced by the general political discourse of the era, which was discrediting spirituality, mysticism, religion in general, considering them “fantasist fabrications”, „obscurantism”, if not even „diversionism and sabotage” (Petru Rezuș). The most famous of these phenomena was Maglavit, and the presentation that I make for this case tries to show that that moment of mystical experience around the prophetic revelations of the shepherd Petrace Lupu, which Romanian society knew between 1935-1938, was one in which the press had a

decisive role in its propagation. However, both the publicists, psychiatrists and theologians that were called, or felt duty-bound, to give an opinion all missed the significance of the moment, even if they were not hostile to it, and, by significance I understand not the authenticity of that phenomenon, but only the possibility that it, or one like it, took place. They remained outsiders to a manifestation that took place in a rural world in the most natural way possible, because in that world – in which the miracle, the fantastic, the supranatural are integrated organically – these phenomena do not appear as something exceptional. In the economy of the work, the moment of „visions from Maglavit” represents a model of what constituted the reception and transmission of a phenomenon of popular religiosity, partly through the collective psychosis, fed by signs, miracles and healings, and partly through the transformation of the case via media into a sensational subject. A last sub-chapter of this part of the work, *III.5 The Vladimirești case: between visionary mysticism and charismatic monasticism* examines the Vladimirești phenomenon *as a type of monastic spirituality* showing that this was, in the monastic landscape of the fourth and fifth decades of the last century, the expression of what was called, in the Church’s history, charismatic monasticism – that model of monastic spirituality built around the authority of a leader, in this case of the visionary abbess and of the spiritual father, which was inclined towards a type of eschatological and prophetic radicalism. This type of spirituality came into conflict, quite quickly, with traditional Moldova, which had a spiritual orientation like that of Father Cleopa and of the monastic communities that he was advising, founded on the traditions of the Holy Fathers and on the coenobitic rule.

The conclusions that I formulate, after presenting the first two stages in the chronology of the Vladimirești case that I have proposed (foundation and development, as well as the conflict and dissolution) with the theme specific to each period, are:

1. The fact that the monastery had, as origin, a visionary phenomenon, maintained by the crowds of believers attracted by miracles, revelations and prophecies, generated a true movement of popular religiosity and made possible the unusual development of a monastic community; Vladimirești was the only case of Romanian female coenobitic monasticism in which the monastic community ended up counting 300 inhabitants.

2. Vladimirești quickly became a place where tens of thousands of pilgrims headed, some of them attracted by the signs, miracles and prophecies, others attracted by Father Ioan Iovan’s sermons, whilst others felt the spirit of renewal and of moral and spiritual rebirth of that place. The type of spirituality that characterised Vladimirești Monastery undoubtedly has its roots in the visions of mother Veronica. Father Ioan also added his personal eucharistic devotion, his own quests, and the two mutually completed and reinforced each other.

3. When the innovative practices in Vladimirești began to raise queries of the believers, and experienced priests and spiritual fathers from Moldova began looking in disbelief at what was happening there, the Patriarch Justinian requested a report on the situation. This is, in fact, the letter of the Slatina Monastery community (led by Father Cleopa) addressed to the Vladimirești Monastery, and in it there are systematically formulated – from a theological, canonical, liturgical and monastic spirituality perspective – all the deviations that occurred in Vladimirești. The intention of the Romanian Orthodox Church government was, at that time, to avoid a break of a schismatic type. The memoir in which Father Ioan answered the accusations, his insubordination (and that of the entire monastic community) to the Synod's decisions, led to the amplification of the conflict. Beginning as a dispute between two monastic groups, it ended up being a political one, utilised by the communist regime in such a way as to create tensions between the Romanian Orthodox Church hierarchy and the monastery's leadership. My thesis is that the political factor was responsible for aggravating the tensions that led to the known resolution: the arrest of the monastery's leadership (on the 30th March 1950) and then to the monastery's dissolution and the dispersion of the monastic community (14-15th February 1956).

4. The phenomenon of visions was central to the conflict. The visionary experiences that characterised the inter-war period in our country, but also in the whole of Europe, were regarded with reserve by a series of Romanian theologians who published, in the 1950s, studies and articles on the visions, on the false theophany, on the mystical obscurantism, throwing some doubt on mysticism and visionary experiences, and advising prudence in accepting specific revelations. Their approach – which was from an analytical, rational perspective on mysticism and on specific revelations, and which dominated at the level of the theological discourse at that time in our country – was a symptom of the communist censorship which was trying to discredit spirituality and religion in general.

5. The controversy of the Vladimirești case was initially linked to the authenticity of the visions but, once the monastery was founded and developed, the fact that it attracted an increasing number of believers meant that the controversy became one relating to the validity of a monastic spirituality legitimised exclusively by the messages sent through visions. Sought and loved by thousands of people, the abbess, the spiritual father and the monastic community in Vladimirești ended up believing that only they represented the Church and that all the others “betrayed Christ”, (and here there are already presented the characteristics of a sectarian movement, movements which start with a mutiny, a dislike for the hierarchy), and which continued with renewals and deviations from generally accepted practices, and ended up with the break and separation from the Church body.

The fourth chapter of the work, **Monastery extra muros. From its closure (1956) to the reopening (1990) of Vladimirești Monastery** analyses the events and biographies of the protagonists after their arrest and the monastery's closure, but also the specific problematic of the two stages in the monastery's history, the one of detention and the one of post-detention clandestinity. Sub-chapter IV.1 *Years of detention, survival and compromise. The monastic community disperses, but stays united* shows – beginning with the 19 files *Gurău Veronica și alții [Veronica Gurău and others]*, kept in the CNSAS archives, from the memoiristic and autobiographical writings of Veronica Gurău and of Ioan Iovan – the way in which the investigation took place, their arrest, the years of detention of the two, but also that of the secretary Mihaela Iordache and of other nuns who were imprisoned for “illegally wearing uniform” because they refused to renounce the monastic apparel after the monastery's dissolution. But it mainly demonstrates the different behaviour of the abbess Veronica, who was the only one to collaborate with the Securitate, which began from the years of imprisonment, and who continued to give information until the fall of the communist regime, having signed a commitment and been given a code name.

Sub-chapter IV.2, *The years after the prison release: a period of moral uprightness or major compromises* continues with the reconstitution of the protagonists' biographies, done with the help of the surveillance files of Ioan Iovan (in which the largest part of the informers' notes are given by Veronica Gurău herself), of the abbess's autobiography, of the memoiristic writings that concern Ioan Iovan and Veronica Gurău, but also of the spiritualist works written by her together with the architect George Văsâi, a former attendant at Vladimirești, who would become her husband in 1964. The period is full of contradictory and controversial events and moments, many of which were superficially speculated upon in the media of the 90's, and so I have tried, with the help of cross-referenced and inter-related sources, which offered me a more complex perspective, to correctly and objectively reconstitute it. Whilst Veronica Văsâi, who was established in Bucharest, kept in touch with a part of the former monastic community, namely, with those nuns who didn't dispute her chosen path, and whom she initiated in the spiritualist practices, Ioan Iovan took on the mission to keep the former nuns united, following the monastic vocation in the outside world, in order to keep alive the Vladimirești spirit until the reopening of the monastery would be possible. Established in Bucharest, like a missionary priest, he travelled throughout the country and gave services in the houses where nuns and former disciples of his would gather, he would give them advice and direction, he would listen to their confessions and give them communion, keeping the flame of faith alive. Followed, and accused of performing services without any longer having the right to do so after his defrocking in 1955,

Father Ioan was detained twice, in 1966 and in 1970, for one year, being accused of abuse of position and of organising meetings with a religious purpose. The apparently friendly and respectful relationship that Veronica Văsâi was exhibiting to Ioan Iovan during these years, the trust that she was engendering in him, the way in which she provoked and listened to his confessions, the intrigues that she would spread amongst the nuns that were visiting her, contrast with the way that she would later reveal in the informers notes everything that her former confessor, the former nuns, and their close acquaintances were doing all that time, and makes this the ugliest page of this history, and the Securitate files demonstrate it brutally. But a bright part of this period exists and it was written, just as I have shown, by the former nuns who were living discretely and quietly in their villages, and who thereby, without even knowing it, provoked a true spiritual movement. Analysing the testimonials of the inhabitants of Vladimirești now, and of those who chose the monastic way in 1990 after the monastery's reopening and after all the controversies linked to the former visionary abbess, I understood that this was the true Vladimirești phenomenon: the fact that it survived in the souls and in the lives of hundreds of nuns spread in their families throughout the villages surrounding the monastery, and that it inspired the choices of some young girls, who chose the monastic way, profoundly impressed by the model of these former nuns and by the bright face of Father Ioan, who would sometimes arrive in their villages.

The sub-chapter IV.3, *Debates regarding the frequency of Communion: a short history and a controversial moment*, initiates the analysis of an aspect which dominated the history of Vladimirești Monastery – that of the frequency of communion – a theme that is recurrent in the history of eastern spirituality. The first sub-chapter dedicated to the subject takes a historic approach to the eucharist's centrality or on the taking of the Holy Sacraments as a rationale for attending the Holy Liturgy. There follows a chronological overview of the written testimonials (patristic, typiconal and of philocalical spirituality) that refer to this, which then pauses, to consider in greater detail, one controversial moment – that of the koliva controversy in Mount Athos, which took place around the middle of XVIII century and the beginning of the XIX. The following sub-chapter, IV.4. *Eucharistic mysticism and the eucharistic ecclesiological crisis in the XX century*, takes another step in defining the context (of liturgical practice and theory) in which the case of Ioan Iovan and the eucharistic movement of Vladimirești was introduced into the Romania of the second half of the last century. The overview that I produced on the European liturgical theological debates, and for the thinking of some “reformers” like Nikolai Afanasiev, Alexander Schmemmann and Ioannis Zizioulas – that is, of those who outline, through their writings, the *eucharistic ecclesiology* – has the role of contextualising the theoretical

debates in the liturgical theology at the time when the frequency of communion also became a subject of analysis in Romania. Sub-chapter *IV.5 The sources of Father Ioan Iovan's preoccupation with the Eucharistic sacrament* demonstrates what "the eucharistic creed" meant to the future spiritual father in Vladimirești by following, on the one hand, the content of the theology dissertation of the student Silviu Iovan, and, on the other hand, the context of his formation and the influences that he encountered (in his own family, through the model of other Transylvanian priests, and in the Greco-Catholic monastic environment of Basilian orientation).

Sub-chapter *IV.6 Monastic groups in the first communist decade in Romania in the dispute over the frequency of Communion* follows the way in which the Transylvanian Ioan Iovan managed to introduce, in traditional Moldova, the practice of frequent communion, and the reactions that it ignited in traditional monastic communities like Sihăstria, Slatina, and Neamț, where the focus was on the confession and on the ascetic canon, and communion was taken every 40 days. Sihăstria, Slatina, Sihla, Rarău were, in their turn, very prominent monasteries, which also experienced in the 40's and 50's of the last century a true revival. The monastic life in this area gravitated around the spiritual personality of Father Cleopa, who had settled the whole coenobitic organisation on traditional monastic principles, placing the accent on prayer, on the study of the Holy Fathers, on frequent confession, on the disclosure of thoughts, and on complete obedience. These were the positions that he held when he expressed reserve towards the way in which the priest and the abbess in Vladimirești planned the spiritual revival of the believers, and my demonstration shows that the tensions between the two orientations were unavoidable. However, Father Ioan's eucharistic spirituality failed to impose itself. It did not have a major impact in the liturgical and sacramental life of the monastic and parish communities of those times beyond that of its limited circle of followers. Moreover, it was repressed shortly afterwards, just as any other form of spiritual resistance of the time. But it proved its force precisely through this dimension of the spiritual movement of resistance against the atheism of the first communist decade.

The last sub-chapter of this part of the work, *IV.7 Spiritual rebirth and sectarian deviation. From looking for a "Live Church" to the pathology of the "Secret Church"*, focuses attention on another facet of the Vladimirești phenomenon's legacy, which is the tendency of different groups or schismatic movements inspired by Vladimirești to be formed from some former inhabitants or followers of their practices. I demonstrate that this was a consequence of the fact that the inhabitants and followers of the Vladimirești practices dispersed after the monastery's dissolution, following different paths, and having different spiritual options. I have presented Sebastian Dediu, the Gherasim group and Nil Dorobanțu as cases and characters in the wake of

Vladimirești, and capitalised, for the first time in theological research, on their files in the CNSAS archives, and, in the case of Nil Dorobanțu, his numerous books, edited in recent years. All these were followers of a type of charismatic spirituality, founded on the supposed appointments made by Father Ioan or Mother Veronica in order to keep alive the spirit of Vladimirești, and they would resort to different practices like that of the sectarian type of Eucharist, eschatological prophecies, and the cult of abbess Veronica's visions.

The conclusions that I formulate at the end of the demonstration in the fourth chapter are:

1. The years of imprisonment were very difficult for each of those arrested, but moral uprightness was tested through a simple gesture: that of accepting or resisting the pressure of the Securitate agents to turn them into informers. Only the abbess Veronica failed this examination of conscience and, as a consequence, "benefited of the fruits" of her collaboration: she was the first to be released from prison (in 1960) and immediately after the fall of the communist regime, with the support of the newly-installed regime, she managed to reopen the monastery. There had been attempts of this nature from the end of the 80s, implicit evidence of her continuous links with the Securitate, and proven by the informers' notes in the CNSAS archives.

2. Abbess Veronica's choices and biographical path after her release from prison are most unusual and have remained, to date, a stumbling block in the comprehension of the Vladimirești case. The marriage, the mediumism, the initiations in spiritualism, including that of some former nuns, are aspects documented in several sources, and, even if the justifications and the mystical reading that Veronica Gurău proposes in her autobiography try to present an image of a visionary founder of a monastery at the order of the Mother of God, they remain undeniably true facts, which cannot be beautified by any pretention that the Divinity would have opened for her a "way of light" or that she would have required a Bucharest ID card to leave her native places and get rid of a (local) fame that she felt she didn't deserve. However, as I have shown, the light and shadow of such destiny cannot be understood other than in the context of the history that she lived, and they cannot be correctly judged without taking account of those times.

3. The spiritual options and sacramental practice of Father Ioan Iovan were sustained by his feeling of urgency in the face of the coming spiritual crisis in which the Church hierarchy itself wanted to level everything that was out of the ordinary, everything that was beyond a common measure. However, regarded in the context of his era, this moment of eucharistic revival in XX century Romania proved not to have had a major impact in the liturgical and sacramental life of that time. The Romanian monastic and theological environment was not at that time open to the type of eucharistic piety promoted by the group surrounding Vladimirești Monastery; the

Romanian liturgical tradition was not ready to receive this orientation, the official theological position being quite reserved. And that is why the spiritual revival of Vladimirești failed to impose the practice of frequent communion, and it was, like any other type of resistance of that time, repressed shortly afterwards. But, beyond the deviations that surrounded it, at that moment it had a confessional dimension, which Father Ioan Iovan was responsible for and imprinted on the whole monastic community.

4. The deviations from the liturgical practices established at that moment in the Moldavian monasteries were, in the Vladimirești case, only a pretext that the political authority utilised in its favour, and it is possible that, without the intervention of the political factor, it would have remained on the level of a controversy between different monastic groups. But the basis or justification of these practices through the visionary phenomenon specific to Vladimirești gave the eucharistic revival here a sectarian, schismatic aura, accentuated, in the decades that followed the monastery's closure and the dispersal of the monastic community, by a series of deviant, anarchic, pseudo-mystical manifestations, persons and groups. These manifestations affected Vladimirești's legacy, and, from initially being a place of rebirth, it became, in the collective memory, a place of schism and sectarian spirit.

Research conclusions, contributions, and perspectives

At the end of the research that I have accomplished, I was able to formulate a few general conclusions which could supplement or complete those at the end of each of the chapters mentioned above:

1. In the context of the spiritual movements of the first half of the last century which characterised the whole of Europe, the phenomenon of visions was one of the most difficult for the Romanian Orthodox Church to administer. The confusion of simple people lacking even minimal theological instruction, inevitable in these sorts of situations, the adherence, sometimes fanatical, of the masses, the justified reserve of the church hierarchy, followed by the mutiny and disobedience of the visionaries' followers, and, last but not least, the installation of the communist regime in our country, meant that manifestations like the one presented in this work were destined to fail. The political powers used the conflict between the charismatic visionaries and the canonical hierarchy to put an end to some popular movements which could no longer be controlled.

2. The Church does not explicitly reject the specific type of revelation like those presented in this work, but, rather, analyses them prudently. When they occur, any recognition takes place at the conclusion of an investigation that lasts several years. Public opinion and the mass media

in general appropriate the phenomenon because of their desire for the sensational, and have two possible attitudes: caricaturing it, by reducing it to a schema of positivist-rationalist analysis, or, on the contrary, promoting it as an extraordinary phenomenon, revealed only to some initiated people, by showing the miracles and healings, and arousing, in this way, the public interest and also of the authority which is called upon to give a verdict on its authenticity. Eventually, the polarisation of public opinion intensifies the phenomenon. However, in our country, there has never previously been a case where such phenomena have been assimilated, and the foundation of Vladimirești Monastery on a supposed theophany was one of the key reasons for it being contentious.

3. The fact that Father Ioan Iovan, after the defrocking was reversed, restarted the practice of frequent communion in the monasteries where he served (Plumbuita and Recea), again attracting around him crowds of believers, I would say constitutes an argument that the practices concerning the sacraments of Confession and Communion did not constitute the main problem. Rather, the main problem was the always-controversial aspect of individual revelations and the so-called charisma of the abbess, which had reached a point where the revelations were dictating and justifying everything that was happening in Vladimirești. This also imprinted a sectarian air onto the spiritual revival in Vladimirești, emphasised, in the years that followed the monastery's closure and the arrest of its leadership, by a series of anarchic movements grouped around some spiritual pseudo-leaders which claimed to be based on the practices in Vladimirești, but to which were also added a series of allegedly-revealed rituals and teachings.

4. On the other hand, in the eucharistic piety that he promoted (his interest dating from his student years, and possibly having also had, as I have shown, a Greco-Catholic influence besides the admitted model of the Russian proto-hierarch Ioan of Kronstadt), the Confessor-Father Ioan Iovan followed his own individual spiritual project in Vladimirești in which he involved the monastic community and the crowds of believers that were coming to the "Monastery of the Mother of God", mostly in search of signs, healings and miracles. He did this in a personal, accessible, popular manner, but also, at the same time, because the era was one of crisis for the Church's life. But communion given without catechism, or given after the interpretation of some specific revelations, without the conscientious participation in the sacramental-liturgic act, without spiritual effort and, eventually, without correct compliance with the sacrament of confession, did not prove to be a solution to avoiding the approaching spiritual crisis.

5. In the large scheme of history, Vladimirești will probably be interpreted as a case of the visionary experiences of a simple country girl who succeeded, through her own force, to found

a monastery, to gather a powerful monastic community, and to attract thousands of believers. She subsequently managed to make it be reborn from its own ashes, after it had been dissolved by the communist regime, and to again attract an extensive monastic community and thousands of pilgrims. This simple girl remains, despite her controversial biography, a person through whom God showed Himself to people, healed their wounds, and comforted their sufferings. Her mission in history was more important than her passing presence on earth, and this is because people always need to believe in miracles, healings, revelations and theophanies, which are possible anytime. With regards to her, and to the monastery that she founded out of nothing in a corn field in Câmpia Covurluiului, the definitive sentence will be given in Heaven, as Father Ioan said in his memoir.

At the end of the investigation that I proposed, I feel that I have brought the following contributions to the Vladimirești case study:

- I have identified, organised and exploited all the documentary sources known to this moment – archive documents (most of them unedited), protagonists' autobiographies, memoiristic writings, literary evocations – and I structured these in such a manner as to be able to use them for the appropriate stages of the chronology that I have suggested. I also tried to do this for those situations in which the dating of the sources was approximate. Knowing the case in detail, I have managed to correct erroneous dating in the existing bibliography or to establish dating in those situations in which the document or the narrated event had no chronological framework.
- I have exactly reconstituted the history of the monastery's events, from its foundation to its brutal closure after 18 years of blooming existence, without limiting myself to a chronological presentation of the events, but I also advanced a plan of interpretation and analysis of some doctrinal aspects, liturgical practices, and spirituality, which I identified as being those that give sense and significance to the succession of events. From a methodological point of view, I have not compiled a simple monography of Vladimirești Monastery, but a hermeneutics of the case, through the proposed thematic design.
- I have analysed for the first time, by following the Vladimirești case, aspects like visionary experiences, canonical and liturgical deviations, eucharistic mysticism, and the sectarian phenomenon. Depending on their content, I read these aspects from different perspectives – theological, sociological, psychological, anthropological, and of Church history – and I tried to formulate relevant conclusions not only for the case itself, but also for Romanian monastic history and even for the Romanian Orthodox Church in the first half of the last century.

- I have extended the research period that was dedicated to the case (1939-1956, the year of dissolution) and this was because: 1. I understood that the history of the 300 nuns dispersed after the monastery's closure in the villages and towns of communist Romania could not be limited by the closure of some walls, and that the monastery continued in a non-institutionalised form for over 30 years through their vocations, and 2. I identified in over 45 files of political, juridical and administrative documents from the CNSAS archives a very complex thematic, previously unstudied, relating to the years after the monastery's closure.
- I have read the eucharistic revival of Vladimirești and Father Ioan Iovan's formation and sources of interest in eucharistic spirituality in relation to other models belonging to the so-called "Transylvanian paradigm" (Jan Nicolae), but also by exploiting, for the first time in the case's research, the content of the young theologian Silviu Iovan's dissertation paper.
- I have investigated, exploiting unedited documents from the CNSAS archives, that which I have called sectarian deviations in the wake of Vladimirești – a series of deviant anarchic groups formed around some spiritual pseudo-leaders who themselves claimed the visionary spirituality of mother Veronica and/or the eucharistic mysticism of Father Ioan – and I corrected a series of discrepancies that I had encountered in some courses or sectology textbooks by professors of apologetics and missiology, currently used in theology faculties, and which were demonstrating a superficial knowledge of the case.

At the end of the proposed analysis, I believe that the research could continue in several directions, opening new interpretative perspectives and enriching the conclusions that I have reached here, in that:

- It could contextualise in greater depth the Romanian case by identifying and analysing some possible visionary phenomena in the rest of the Orthodox area, phenomena that led, just as in the Romanian case, to the foundation of monasteries or to the birth of spiritual movements that were similar to Vladimirești. I have not come across this being mentioned in the Slavic, Greek or other Balkan Churches, and I have not developed the research in this matter, but I believe that such a comparative analysis would take the conclusions that I have reached at the end of this work even further.
- It could analyse the case of Nil Dorobanțu, a mystic „mad for Christ” who gravitated around Vladimirești, to whom I dedicated a short portrait, but whose biography and spirituality can be investigated critically, starting from his books, and this way it would bring an extra dimension to the research on Romanian monastic spirituality.

- Research could continue into one controversial moment in the recent history of Vladimirești, which I only mentioned briefly in my work. It concerns a short period of time after the reopening of the monastery in 1990 when, around it, and borrowing from its popularity, a group of pseudo-nuns led by George Văsâi gravitated, and who contested the leadership of the Romanian Orthodox Church at that time and requested that Ioan Iovan become patriarch. This was a case of spiritual pathology, of sectarianism, with esoteric nuances, which affected the way in which Vladimirești Monastery was perceived after the reopening, both in the Church environment but also amongst the believers, and which throws, until today, a shadow of doubt on the manner in which Vladimirești was reborn after its dissolution in 1956.
- It could follow a certain possible lineage from Vladimirești in a case of schismatic, sectarian coloratura: the New Jerusalem phenomenon from Pucioasa. There, Virginia Tudorache, an exalted visionary who led, in the 50s – that is, in the blooming period of Vladimirești – a so-called group of illuminatus who “lived” in a direct link to God through the messages that Virginia received and relayed. Her discourse comprises the open revelation, the cult of the chosen one, and has some prophetic, moral and penitential accents which reveal similarities with those of Vasilica Gurău. In fact, Virginia Tudorache talks about Veronica and Vladimirești as a place of revelation in her “prophecies”. I can see a possible direct influence, a case of contamination – just like those historians and theologians who deal with the millenarist groups, individual revelations, and the charismatic and prophetic dimension of some religious leaders demonstrate as being encountered in these cases – and I believe it could be a research direction which would enrich the field of study for sectology and missionarism.

The Vladimirești case remains – through its complex history, through the whole problematic that was born around it, through the fact that it was the first monastery to be closed by the communist regime and, at the same time, the only case of the inter-war Romanian visionary experiences which resulted in the foundation of a monastery and a blooming monastic life – one that is still provocative, and open to other reading perspectives.