



Priest Florea Mureșanu - man of prayer, anti-communist confessor and martyr of Christ

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Abstract

This article examines the life, pastoral and publicistic activity, and martyrial death of Father Florea Mureșanu, highlighting his spiritual, cultural, and confessional profile within the context of totalitarian repression in twentieth-century Romania. The study aims to demonstrate that his biography embodies a complex form of Christian and anti-communist resistance, articulated through pastoral ministry, catechesis, religious publicistics, and confessional witness. The methodology is interdisciplinary and rooted in historical-theological inquiry, combining biographical reconstruction, content analysis, and historical-political contextualization. The research draws on both primary sources (including CNSAS archival files, articles published in the contemporary press, memoir testimonies, and documents related to his arrest and imprisonment) and recent secondary scholarship in Church history, memory studies, and research on religious repression under communism. The findings indicate that his pastoral and publicistic activities were interpreted by the communist regime as forms of ideological opposition, leading to surveillance, arrest, conviction, and death in prison. The study's main contribution lies in offering a balanced historical-critical and theological interpretation that situates the case of Florea Mureșanu within the broader framework of Orthodox martyrology and post-communist religious memory.

Keywords: *Priest Florea Mureșanu; martyr; anti-communism; defense of the Christian faith*



INTRODUCTION

In times of grievous trial for both Church and nation, the priest and man of letters, Florea Mureșanu, stood as a pillar of Romanian resistance in Transylvania under Horthyite Hungarian occupation; thereafter, during the harsh years of the establishment of communism in Romania, he contended against communist atheism until the end of his life.

The present study seeks to delineate the moral, pastoral, catechetical, and homiletic profile of Father Florea Mureșanu, who devoted his entire life to the struggle against communism, a system intent upon uprooting the Christian faith from the souls of the people. He remained constantly engaged in the life of the faithful, striving to preserve their faith from the corrosive effects of the propaganda of the atheist communist regime, teaching them how to seek God through prayer, meditation, fasting, and purity of soul and body.

The search for God and for His ways constituted the fundamental principle of Father Florea's inner life. He teaches us that, in order to show others the straight path, we must first know it ourselves, understand it, and become inwardly conformed to it.

"God calls us to Himself, yet we do not hear this call because of our noisy outward preoccupations." To seek God, Father Florea Mureșanu further says, "first of all means to become silent within ourselves" [1, p. 148]. He believed that the first prayer was silence, and that in the presence of silence the Word revealed Himself to humankind. In order to know the Word, the Father prays and exhorts others to prayer; he ministers, meditates, and makes himself a chosen vessel and dwelling-place of the Word.

In the presence of the Word, and bearing the Word within himself, his own words acquire meaning, and through them he exhorts people to come to Christ, God the Word, who remains the same today, tomorrow, and for ever: "the only One who gives meaning not only to this earthly life, but also to death, for to die for Christ, for His Gospel, is not loss, but gain" [2, back cover]. In grievous times for the Church and for the Romanian nation, confronted by the terror of the accursed twentieth century (Legionarism, Nazism, Communism), he struggled against the adversities of his age to the very end, dying as a true martyr of Christ.

Accordingly, in seeking to reconstruct the moral and spiritual profile of Father Florea Mureșanu, this study highlights his love for his right-believing people, his cultural fervour and political resistance, his courageous confession of the faith, and finally his desire for monastic enrolment, together with his arrest, conviction, and martyr's death.

With regard to the current state of research, the specific contribution of this study is grounded in information drawn from the ACNSAS files and from articles published by Father Florea in the newspapers and journals of the time: *Tribuna Ardealului*, *Viața Ilustrată*, *Viața Creștină*, and others.

The research methods employed in the preparation of this study, dedicated to the work and life of the martyr-priest Florea Mureșanu, are as follows: a brief historical biography concerning his educational path and theological formation; the presentation and analysis of theological and cultural studies relevant to his pastoral, catechetical, and homiletic activity; and, finally, the discerning use of information contained in the ACNSAS files. In the present study, the analysis of Father Florea Mureșanu's files has been conducted with particular attention to his journalistic and cultural activity of religious significance, which the communist regime regarded as illegal.

THE POLITICAL, LEGAL AND CONFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Specialist scholarship converges on the view that the communist regime in Romania combined the institutional subordination of the religious denominations with variable repertoires of repression and co-optation, thereby producing a religious field marked by oscillation between institutional accommodation and individual resistance among clergy and



monastics [3, 4]. In comparison with other Churches within the Eastern Bloc, the Romanian Orthodox Church followed a distinctive trajectory, in which a strategy of survival coexisted with episodes of explicit opposition, a fact evident both in the files of the security services and in recent regional studies on Banat [5], as well as in juridical-canonical analyses of the instruments of control [6]. At the same time, the state apparatus attempted an aggressive rationalisation of the religious sphere through the restriction of pilgrimages and processions and through the discrediting of “miraculous phenomena”. These measures formed part of a programme of demythologising the sacred, which was perceived as “superstition” and as a political risk [7].

Comparative analyses of the Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek Catholic) highlight a climax of persecution in its suppression in 1948, accompanied by confiscations and pressures towards “unification” with the Romanian Orthodox Church, followed, after 1989, by the rearticulation of synodality and by martyrological confirmations through beatifications and canonical recognition [8, 9]. This confessional contrast provides a useful interpretative framework for evaluating individual cases of confession of faith within the Romanian Orthodox Church, calibrating, in historico-canonical terms, the notion of a “martyr of Christ” and the boundary between confession, civic resistance, and political opposition [6, 4]. Such points of reference are pertinent for situating the biography and suffering of Father Florea Mureşanu, whose confrontation with the regime may be understood as the structural collision between a demanding public pastoral ministry, marked by a pronounced intellectual profile, and a state that explicitly criminalised spiritual capital and the public witness of faith; for the context of the repressive apparatus and the logic of the surveillance files [10, 6].

After 1989, the politics of memory in Romania unfolded between the traumatic recovery of the communist past—with memorial and museal investments, dominant anti-communist narratives, and forceful religious iconographies—and recurrent controversies concerning the status of certain former political prisoners, situated on a spectrum ranging from “martyrs” to figures whose ideological biographies remain contested [11, 12]. Within the same logic, studies on prison memoir literature describe a tension between testimony oriented towards dignity and justice and a martyrological rhetoric susceptible to political mythologisation, especially in texts associated with the Legionary Movement [13] or in more recent rhetorical recoveries within the public sphere [14]. These developments assist in a lucid reading of martyric memory, warning against the risks of an ideologising transfiguration of suffering and against the need for critical discernment within both the ecclesial and civic spheres [15, 16].

On the level of transitional justice, research shows that religious legacies influence both the patterns of lustration and the pace and outcomes of initiatives of condemnation, memory, and reparation, with effects that are often fragmented and delayed in the Romanian case [17, 18]. At the same time, museums and memorials have produced an “iconography of suffering” that has facilitated the visual sacralisation of the past, yet at times has also alienated historical experience by substituting critical integration with the symbolic “exorcising” of communism [11]. This double condition—juridico-political and cultural-memorial—constitutes the unavoidable framework within which the figure of a confessor such as Florea Mureşanu is received today, whose detention and death in prison are inscribed within a repressive dispositif explicitly aimed at eroding spiritual capital and neutralising pastoral voices possessing public influence [5, 6].

At the intersection of these scholarly literatures, an analytical reading of the Mureşanu case may mobilise three axes: religious repression, martyric memory, and confessional comparison. The first axis concerns the criminalisation of preaching, catechesis, and communal initiatives as “agitation against the regime”, a dynamic documented both in the surveillance



files and in studies on the “rationalisation” of the sacred [7, 6]. The second axis concerns the transposition of biographies into post-1989 memorial-liturgical repertoires, with the potential for communal cohesion, but also with the risk of generating controversy when biographical grey zones are involved [15, 13]. The third axis, confessional-comparative in nature, contrasts the Romanian Orthodox Church with the Greek Catholics, suggesting stricter criteria for the canonical and historical evaluation of martyrdom by reference to beatifications and synodal reconstructions after 1989 [8, 9]. Thus, Florea Mureșanu emerges as a pivotal case of Christian confession under totalitarianism, in which “resistance through faith” acquires theological and historical intelligibility only when articulated in relation to the critical apparatus of public memory and to canonical discernment. Such an articulation makes it possible to move beyond apologetic simplifications, without diluting the evidence of suffering and of the martyric intention attested through life and death [3, 4].

Finally, reflection upon the place of confessing clergy in the history of Romanian communism remains inseparable from the still active debate concerning canonisations within the Romanian Orthodox Church and their criteria, as well as from a public culture of memory capable of including, without ideological anaesthesia, both the luminous aspects of sanctity and the “biographical difficulties” of certain public figures [14, 19]. Read in such a key, the figure of Father Florea Mureșanu may be understood as an example of prayer transformed into public witness, of pastoral ministry transfigured into ethical resistance, and of a *theologia crucis* lived to the very end within the carceral regime—a narrative that demands, in equal measure, historical rigour, theological delicacy, and memorial responsibility [5, 6, 7].

THE PERIOD OF FORMATION (SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY YEARS) – A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Born on 8 July 1907 in the village of Ciubanca, Someș County, to Gheorghe and Maria, poor peasant parents who were themselves illiterate, he nevertheless received from them steadfast support and encouragement throughout his educational journey.

He completed his six years of primary schooling in his native village, where he encountered an exceptional schoolmaster named Augustin Miclea. Recognising the outstanding qualities and abilities of the pupil Florea, Miclea urged him to continue his studies at the “Andrei Mureșanu” High School in Dej, which was in fact the first Romanian high school in that town.

After completing his secondary education and passing the baccalaureate with very good results, he enrolled at the Theological Academy in Cluj, an institution established after the Great Union, from which he graduated with the distinction *Magna cum laude*, while simultaneously attending the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in Cluj.

Owing to his academic results and exceptional abilities, he was awarded scholarships intended for the formation of the Romanian cultural and religious elite, pursuing studies in France at the University of Strasbourg as a scholarship holder of the Romanian Patriarchate (November 1930 – 31 July 1931). Thereafter, from 1 November 1938 to 31 July 1939, he also studied in Germany at the University of Berlin, as a scholarship holder of the Humboldt Foundation, likewise sent by the Romanian Patriarchate, where he prepared a doctoral thesis entitled *Moral Responsibility* [2, p. 12]. He never defended this thesis, owing to the grievous circumstances of the period in question, as the Second World War began and Northern Transylvania was annexed by Horthy’s Hungary following the Vienna Diktat.

In order to complete his theological studies, in 1935 he enrolled at the Faculty of Theology in Cernăuți, then located in Suceava, where on 4 April 1938 he obtained the Licentiate in Theology, defending a dissertation entitled *Moral Obligation* [2, p. 12]. At that time, the Theological Academy in Cluj did not have a licentiate examination.



Because of the events of the Horthyite period, it was only in 1945 that it became possible to resume his links with the Faculty of Theology and continue his studies, presenting a different thesis, Varlaam's *Cazania – A Presentation in Images – 1643–1943*, which he defended at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest. He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Theology on 6 November 1948 (cf. Certificate no. 160/7 November 1948) [2, p. 12]

FATHER FLOREA MUREȘANU – A MAN OF PRAYER

He acquired his love for prayer and for the Church within the family, having been born into a household of devout peasants who instilled in the child Florea the holy tremor of prayer and a love for the sacred services. He pursued theological studies, becoming a priest and later Protopope of Cluj, and eventually a professor at the Theological Academy in Cluj (in the field of Practical Theology).

Testimonies concerning the life and activity of Father Florea are found in various sources, both from contemporary intellectual elites and from the files of the Securitate.

In the “Foreword” to the volume *Romanian Speech and Soul (Grai și suflet românesc)*, Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania presents the personality of Father Florea in a compelling manner, drawing attention not only to his qualities as cleric, teacher, orator, and missionary, but also to his extensive humanistic culture acquired throughout his life. In his personal library, one could find not only the some ten volumes of the works of Saint John Chrysostom in a French edition, but also the writings of the great classics of Romanian and world literature [20, p. 3].

In the chapter entitled “Confessions” from the volume *Romanian Speech and Soul*, Father Ioan Iovan refers to several aspects of Father Florea's life, outlining the stages that characterised his ordinary working day. Thus, in the morning, upon leaving his home and before the midday meal, Father Florea devoted himself exclusively to the concerns of the Church and of religious journalism. First came the Divine Liturgy, then his lectures at the Theological Academy—after which he would go to the editorial office of the newspaper *Tribuna Ardealului*, where he oversaw the column “Romanian Speech and Soul”; after the meal he could be found exclusively in the library [21, p. 375].

Beginning in 1941, together with his wife Eugenia Mureșanu, he published a series of articles in *Tribuna Ardealului*. The first article was entitled “Small Words with Great Meaning”, in which he speaks of the importance and power of prayer in human life: “Whenever we touch heaven, we receive new strength, and by it we overcome our enemies. And prayer is that by which we may touch Heaven. Therefore Jesus said: Pray without ceasing!” [22, p. 2].

In “The Word of Instruction for the Fourth Sunday of the Paschal Fast (Mark 9:17–30)” [23, p. 4], concerning the miracle of the healing of the boy possessed by a mute and deaf spirit, Father Florea speaks of the power of fasting and prayer: “For fasting is a censor that does not allow anything of the breath of evil spirits to slip into the desires of the heart, the lust of the eyes, the sharpness of the tongue, or the greed of the belly; and prayer is the ascent upon whose wings our soul touches heaven, and from there brings us new strength in patience and steadfastness, in hope” [2, pp. 75–76].

Accordingly, the Father emphasises the importance and value of prayer in human life, saying that it “is the ventilation of the soul and of the heart. Through prayer the window of our soul is opened towards heaven and allows the rays of light and grace from above to enter within” [2, p. 76].

He exhorts us to multiply our prayer, but not to let it be merely a prayer of the lips, which is of no avail if the heart remains unmoved: “The heart must be set ablaze by the fire of prayer, and we must offer it to God as a whole burnt offering. And if, while praying, you will



feel that something is being kindled in your soul, if you will feel your hands grow moist, then be assured that you are praying profitably for your soul and for its salvation” [2, p. 76].

With regard to the most beautiful prayer in Holy Scripture, apart from the prayers of the Saviour, Father Florea speaks to us of the prayer of the prodigal son when he returned to his father, saying: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. By the power of this prayer, one who was dead was brought back to life and one who was lost was found. He warns us how our own prayer ought to be: “That by its help we may rise from the death of sins and passions which cast us into fire and water, and that we may return from the paths of spiritual destruction” [23, p. 4].

In the journal *Christian Life* (Viața Creștină), the Father published the article “The Peace of the World and the Lord of Peace”, in which he condemned peace treaties concluded among the rulers of states and maintained that the peace of the world can come only from God, arguing by means of certain biblical citations that human beings are powerless to build peace for themselves. This article was accompanied by “a drawing representing the earthly globe as sick, and at its bedside doctors, civilisation, politics, atheism, science, and communism, while in the background an apostle approaches with the Bible, symbolising that only by this way of the Bible could there be salvation for the earthly globe, thus combating communism, atheism, science, politics, and civilisation” [24, f. 62].

The disciple of Father Florea Mureșanu, Protosyngellos Gavriil Burzo, describes the personality of his master and spiritual father as that of a man of distinguished humanity, possessed of remarkable authority, a man of prayer, labour, and sacrifice for Christ. While in detention, under critical conditions and witnessing daily the death of one of his fellow men, Father Florea Mureșanu vowed that, if he escaped with his life, he would raise an altar to the Lord. This he indeed did two years after his release from imprisonment, erecting that altar in the meadow on Breaza Hill [25].

In a statement dated 24 February 1952 by the Greek Catholic priest Vicențiu Poruțiu, who had returned to Orthodoxy and was parish priest of the “Bishop Bob” church in Cluj, we find the following affirmation concerning Father Dr Florea Mureșanu: “He is regarded by the clergy as the best Missionary, in the sense that he carries out a true apostolate, concerning himself with the Church more than any other priest in the locality and district; although, by superior orders, all associations of a religious character had been dissolved, he refuses to understand this, and on the contrary does more than is required of him: daily liturgy with sermon, vespers with sermon, akathist with sermon, he arranges religious concerts [...]. His church is too small for the great multitude of those who attend, and the Lord’s Army association flourishes more and more each day” [26, f. 190].

Father Florea drew close to the *Lord’s Army* from the year 1934 and coordinated its activity from 1946 onwards, continuing it unceasingly until his arrest in 1958 [27, p. 326], maintaining relations with the leaders of the *Lord’s Army*, especially with Traian Dorz. He desired a faith active in the lives of the faithful—one that would put moral teachings into practice—seeking to keep the “soldiers within the Church.”

FATHER FLOREA MUREȘANU – ANTI-COMMUNIST CONFESSOR: CULTURAL EFFERVESCENCE AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE

During his pastoral ministry at the Cathedral in Cluj, beginning on 1 January 1934, alongside his ecclesiastical activity Father Florea, together with his wife Eugenia Mureșanu, carried out an extensive journalistic enterprise, an activity which came under the scrutiny of the Siguranța and, later, of the Securitate, owing to its nationalist and anti-communist publications.



In the spring of 1934, at the request of the Legionary commanders Emil Șiancu and Ion Banea, the Father undertook steps for the establishment in Cluj of the weekly journal *Glasul Strămoșesc*, a periodical of education, culture, and nationalist information, whose editorial office and administration were located at 16 Bolintineanu Street; he directed this journal as editor-in-chief until 1935 [27, p. 315].

Thereafter, from 1935 he continued to collaborate with this weekly until 1938, personally publishing several articles, concerning which he himself testified in the record of interrogation dated 7 July 1958, at Baia Mare, namely that in these articles he combined religion with Legionary ideas, attacked communism, and extolled nationalism [24, f. 41].

Among the articles published in *Glasul Strămoșesc*, some were discovered by the Securitate in the Father's personal archive, such as the anti-communist and anti-Soviet article entitled "In the Face of Truth", which praised the deed of Moța and Marin in having fought in Spain against communism, published in *Glasul Strămoșesc*, Year IV, No. 2, 7 March 1937, p. 2 [24, f. 33]; these would later constitute counts of indictment against him, being assimilated to literature of a Legionary character.

With regard to Father Florea's association with the Legionary movement, this position must be understood in the light of the historical context and his personal profile as a man of action, endowed with an enthusiastic and active character, in relation to the powerful national stakes in Transylvania and, more particularly, in the city of Cluj. He did not assume Legionary ideology in a thoroughgoing sense, did not consent to the anti-Semitic pogroms, and was not involved in Legionary violence, especially that which took place after 1938.

In the informative file we find the Father's own testimony that there was always a discontinuity between the logic of his political thinking and that of the Legionaries. He neither shared their creed nor approved their deeds, with the exception of constructive initiatives. Owing to his profoundly democratic convictions, he was imprisoned by the fascist Hungarian regime for thirty-six hours and then held under house arrest for twenty-six days, between August and September 1944. In 1940 he did not choose to take refuge, nor to benefit in any way from the Legionary regime, but remained in Cluj. He likewise refused to accept appointment as professor at the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Budapest, for which reason, beginning on 1 January 1942, his state salary was suspended [26, f. 116].

Father Florea firmly distanced himself from all violent and anti-Semitic excesses, declaring during the investigation that he had always stood against chauvinism, racism, and anti-Semitic pogroms. On the contrary, in May 1944, when the fascist pogroms against the Jews began in Cluj, he evacuated to Iclod six Jewish children together with a Jewish woman. According to Gestapo orders, had he been discovered or denounced, he would have been executed immediately [26, ff. 113; 116–117].

The Vienna Diktat found Father Florea serving as priest at the Cathedral and as acting professor at the Theological Academy in Cluj, in the Chair of Practical Theology (from 1 September 1939 onwards). Thus, during the period of Horthyite occupation, the priest remained in the service of Church and nation in occupied Cluj, seeking the "maintenance of the morale of the Romanian element remaining under the rule of Horthy's Hungary", as indicated in the Securitate note of 18 January 1958 [27, p. 317]. He carried forward a veritable pro-Romanian and anti-communist struggle in his capacity as editor and publicist for *Tribuna Ardealului*, being responsible for the Church pages and, for a period, also for the pages entitled "Romanian Speech and Soul" and the village page. During this same period he also collaborated with the journals *Viața Ilustrată*, *Viața Creștină*, and others, in which he published, for the most part, anti-Soviet articles.

In *Viața Ilustrată*, no. 8, of October 1942, he published the anti-Soviet article "A Gift of the Führer", in which he calls communism "the red beast of the Apocalypse", and the



communists “the servants of Satan and the slaves of Stalin who tear down the superb cathedrals across the expanse of the former Orthodox Russia or transform them into cinemas, cabarets, or storehouses” [24, f. 61].

With regard to Father Florea’s collaboration with *Viața Ilustrată*, he himself mentions publishing and contributing to this journal from 1936 onward, where he wrote various articles and reviews, some of which bore an anti-Soviet character. He recalls, for example, the publication of a review of the book *L’homme 1936 en Russie Soviétique* by the writer Hélène Iswolsky, in which, on the basis of that work, he set forth the condition said to prevail in the Soviet Union in 1936, seeking to argue that Soviet power was not consolidated and that communism would not be successfully established [24, ff. 61–62].

In the record of interrogation dated 18 October 1958, at Aiud, the accused (witness) Teofil Băliban testified concerning Father Florea that he took part in the editing of the religious newspaper *Viața Creștină*, directed by Father Chindriș, in which there was propagated the idea of reconciliation between the Orthodox confession and the Greek Catholic confession [24, f. 133]. The same accused further declared that Father Florea maintained that the Greek Catholics would be persecuted and would have to pass over to Orthodoxy. In the article from *Viața Creștină*, entitled “In Place of a Reply to an Invitation”, Florea Mureșanu exhorts thus: “Beloved Catholic brother and my beloved Orthodox brother, love one another—for only thus shall the world know that you are Christ’s. Lay this foundation for the new year, the new age, and the new man” [28, p. 1].

During the years 1942–1943, Father Florea came under the scrutiny of the *Siguranța* for sheltering Legionary fugitives who were in transit between Romania and Germany and who also stopped in Cluj, in the house of the Mureșanu family. After 1944, anti-communist fighters were also sheltered there, some of them parachuted in from the West. For this reason, in the spring of 1945 he was arrested and detained for two months [27, p. 318]

COMMUNIST REPRESSION AND FATHER FLOREA MUREȘANU’S DESIRE FOR MONASTIC ENROLMENT

The surveillance of the Father reached a peak in 1949, when, following the order of 15 January 1949, which called for the “collection of material against priests” [27, p. 319], the *Securitate* “urgently ordered the gathering of compromising statements against the protopope Florea Mureșanu” [26, ff. 295–296]. Owing to the notes that then appeared concerning his links with the Legionary Movement during the interwar period, the Father came systematically under the scrutiny of the *Securitate*.

First, on 25 May 1950, his wife was arrested and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for the contacts she had maintained with the American Embassy.

Three weeks after his wife’s release from prison, the Father disclosed to her his desire to embrace the monastic life and proposed that they both should become monastics at Vladimirești Monastery, since he regarded his exclusion from teaching and her arrest as signs foretelling a great danger to their family, a danger which he wished to avert [29, p. 252].

Eugenia, however, warned her husband that matters would be in Romania as they had been in Russia: churches would be demolished, monasteries closed or turned into museums, and priests and monks imprisoned [29, pp. 252–253].

Following the discussion between the two spouses, Eugenia gave the Father her blessing to take the path of monasticism without her, preferring to remain beside their children, to contend with those troubled times as a laywoman, while at the same time renewing her warning to him that Romanian monasticism too would not escape the Bolshevik persecution [29, p. 253].



In 1952, the Father himself was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for the embezzlement of public funds [27, p. 319], an arrest insufficiently documented in the files, although it emerges indirectly from certain notes that this arrest, too, rested upon "reactionary" motives. Thus, in the address of 30 September 1952 issued by the Securitate in Cluj, we read: "On 4 September 1952 he was tried and sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment [...], on which occasion the mystical group organised by him was dispersed" [26, f. 280].

The Father was sent into detention at the Danube–Black Sea Canal, and this lasted until June 1953. After his release, owing to his influence, he was no longer permitted to remain in Cluj, but was transferred near Târgu Lăpuș, to the commune of Suciu de Sus, beginning in September 1953.

After his release from prison (June 1953), in the autumn of that same year, the Father went to Vladimirești together with his wife, remaining there for three days. Then, by agreement between them, they decided mutually to separate, so that Father Florea might remain at Vladimirești as a priest, collaborating closely with Father Silviu Iovan and Mother Superior Veronica Barbu in the activity carried on there [24, f. 109].

In the record of interrogation of 30 January 1959, at Baia Mare, Father Florea states that he was glad and fully willing to remain as priest at Vladimirești, and that he immediately submitted a request to the Bishopric of Galați to be received there as confessor; this request, however, was rejected, and thus he was compelled to return home, though he remained deeply attached to the mystical work that had arisen at Vladimirești and was resolved in the end to become a priest there. To this end, in January 1954, he was summoned, through the nun Maria Mihaela Iordache, to go to Vladimirești, since Father Silviu Iovan had fallen ill. He went there immediately and, for two months, served as priest, requesting from the Bishopric of Buzău his appointment as confessor to that monastery; yet after two months, that is, in March 1954, he received the answer that this would not be approved, and thus he was obliged to return to the parish of Suciu de Sus, to which he had been appointed [24, ff. 109–110]. With a view to his appointment as priest-confessor to the monastery, the Father submitted a request for enrolment in the monastic community at Rohia Monastery, in order to prove that he was a monk.

Upon returning to Suciu de Sus, however, he remained very closely bound to Vladimirești Monastery and took upon himself the task of spreading the "work of Vladimirești" there, in the Land of Lăpuș. He also brought to Vladimirești Father Archimandrite Justinian Chira of Rohia, urging him to follow the example of Vladimirești Monastery. In the language of the Securitate, the methods employed there were intended "to encompass as large masses as possible, to be educated in a spirit of sacrifice and mystical fanaticism, in a nationalist and anti-atheist spirit, therefore against communist ideology" [24, f. 111].

Resolved to fulfil the promise he had made to the Lord at the Canal, in 1952, during his first imprisonment, he began the foundation of the skete at Breaza as a sacrificial offering of thanksgiving to God for his release. After finding and purchasing a suitable site in the autumn of 1954, in the hamlet of Breaza, Father Florea went to Vladimirești to seek the help of Father Ioan Iovan and Mother Veronica, from whom he received material assistance, guidance, and encouragement. In 1954, Pop Ludovica and Marchiș Ioana—two young women from the Land of Lăpuș—resolved to enter the monastic life, their enrolment taking place at Vladimirești [27, p. 333]. Father Florea's intention was that they should be formed there in the monastery and then return to Breaza for the establishment of a new community.

In February 1955, Father Florea paid a new visit to Vladimirești Monastery, at the time when Father Ioan Iovan had composed a memorandum addressed to the Holy Synod, and to each member of the Synod, a memorandum which amounted to a kind of indictment against them, accusing them of having betrayed the Church and sold themselves to the communists [24, f. 112]. Father Florea also took part in this action, contributing to the drafting and



dissemination of the memorandum, and himself bringing to Cluj the copy intended for Bishop Nicolae Colan.

The result of this démarche was the arrest of Father Ioan Iovan and of the governing committee of Vladimirești Monastery (30 March 1955) [30, p. 71]. After the arrest of Father Ioan and the scattering of the community, Father Florea Mureșanu remained almost the sole supporter and defender of the Vladimirești community.

Concerning his role within the community of Vladimirești Monastery, he declared to the Securitate that he had been at Vladimirești Monastery, where he had celebrated the Divine Liturgies, establishing himself as a spiritual father to the personnel there and, given that he had been a university professor, also to the said Silviu Iovan. He was regarded by those hostile to the regime in that monastery as a spiritual father, something in fact demonstrated by the letters they repeatedly sent to him from there, in which he was addressed as “Our Father”, letters sent both before, and especially after, the closure of the monastery. Many of the former nuns from that place sought from him, both verbally and through letters, moral support, guidance, counsel, and words of encouragement, considering him a true moral leader on the basis of the ties he had maintained with Vladimirești Monastery. In this regard, he met their requests, encouraging them to maintain their stance of opposition towards the state authorities [24, ff. 112–113].

THE ARREST, CONVICTION, AND MARTYR’S DEATH OF FATHER FLOREA MUREȘANU

After the suppression of Vladimirești Monastery in 1955, the two young women sent from Suciul returned as members of the skete at Breaza. The raising of the skete, with the help of the villagers, lasted one month, until 13 June 1955. The entire project of founding the skete during that period greatly irritated the Securitate, the Father being accused of having diverted people from collective labour (“members of the G.A.C.”, “members of the agricultural association”), thereby “causing damage and hindrance to the work of agricultural collectivisation” [24, f. 94]. We believe that it was precisely the founding of the skete at Breaza that led to the Father’s arrest and conviction.

Accordingly, the surveillance of Father Florea by the Securitate continued in the Land of Lăpuș as well, and the substantial informative notes led to the opening of an individual surveillance file, beginning on 9 March 1956 [27, p. 320]. The materials gathered through an organised and systematic surveillance would lead to his arrest on the night of 26 June 1958 and, ultimately, to his conviction by the sentence pronounced on 17 April 1959. The Father was sentenced to twenty years of hard labour for the “crime of conspiracy against the social order through agitation” [27, p. 337].

Father Ioan Iovan recalls the terrible moments of the night of Father Florea’s final arrest, within the precincts of the Skete at Breaza: “That night he was beaten mercilessly until he bled, and his mystical books, deemed to be reactionary propaganda, were confiscated. They compelled him to carry these books, as material evidence, upon his back, and as he passed through Târgu Lăpuș before a devout elderly woman who knew him, she, seeing him, cried out loudly: I kiss your hand, Reverend Father; you go bearing the truth upon your back!” [21, p. 376].

The investigation of the Father lasted eleven months and caused great disturbance among his parishioners. Thus, guided by the faithful, on the evening of 17 August 1958, the seminarian pupil Gavril Burzo, Father Florea’s disciple, drafted a memorandum to be sent to the Bishopric, requesting that Father Florea be returned to the parish. In the memorandum, the faithful expressed their joy at their passage to Orthodoxy, their gratitude for the diligence and sacrifice of their shepherd, and his innocence. This memorandum was signed by 454 people and written in the house of Ioan Chindriș (Burzo’s grandfather) [31, p. 252].



According to the logic of the Securitate, Burzo's memorandum was interpreted thus: "By this memorandum, in an unjust and wrongful manner, we defended the arrested Mureșanu Florian, maintaining that he was innocent and requesting his release, and thereby implicitly calumniating the authorities who had arrested him" [31, p. 253]. The consequences of the memorandum were the arrest, on 23 September, of the following accused: Gavril Burzo, Gavrilă Ciceu (the church chanter of the village), and Ioan Chindriș [27, p. 336].

The trial—a mere parody—was held on 8 April 1959, and the sentence was delivered on 17 April. Father Florea received twenty years of hard labour, Gavril Burzo six years, Gavrilă Ciceu four years, and Ioan Chindriș three years of imprisonment, all for the same charge: the "crime of conspiracy against the social order through agitation" [27, p. 337].

In 1959, the Father passed through the prisons of Baia Mare, Satu Mare, Cluj, Gherla, and Aiud, where he fell asleep in the Lord on 4 January 1963; the date of his death is attested by the documents in the file (the death certificate, the medical report, and the burial record). The medical report indicates that the priest had fallen ill in January 1962 with liver cirrhosis and had been admitted to the prison hospital in March 1962. An operation was even proposed, but his weakened condition did not permit it. The treatment bore no fruit, and on the morning of 4 January 1963 his general condition suddenly collapsed, and he succumbed at 8.00 a.m. The Father was fifty-five years old [27, p. 337]. The martyr's death of Father Florea places him among the thousands of martyrs who, for the confession of the true faith, endured long years of imprisonment and in the end met a tragic death in prison.

The Father's boldness in speaking the truth in defence of the true faith, of social justice, and of the moral health of the human person, is a general characteristic of Christian preaching, visible not only at the level of uttered words, but also in the confessional dimension of preaching: "the boldness of the preacher stands in direct relation to his capacity for self-giving, for self-sacrifice for the truth of the proclamation, something which the great hierarch John Chrysostom demonstrated by all his deeds and especially by those performed during his exile (...). Thus, the Christian martyrologies, the lives of the saints, the synaxaria, and the hymns of the Church all bring to light the distinctive character of this confessing courage, to which the preacher-priest of today has great need to attend" [32, p. 136].

CONCLUSIONS

The story of Father Florea Mureșanu's life recapitulates the history of Orthodox Christianity in Cluj during the first half of the twentieth century: institutional development and Christian apostolate in the interwar period, national and ecclesial survival during the time of the Vienna Diktat, the hopes of renewal in the transitional period, and, finally, resistance and martyrdom under communism.

He opposed the atheist communist ideology, which sought to destroy the foundations of Romanian Christian society and to uproot faith in God from the souls of Christians, a faith which by its very nature stood in opposition to communism [27, p. 338].

His anti-communist stance and struggle, undertaken in the name of religion and faith in God, led to his martyr's death in the prison of Aiud. For this reason, we regard the Father's sacrifice as a "confession of the true faith in Christ, against atheist and communist materialism", and we consider Father Florea Mureșanu, without hesitation, to be a true martyr of the Romanian nation and of our ancestral Church.

The principal findings of this study show that Father Florea Mureșanu embodied a complex figure within Transylvanian Orthodoxy: a professor of theology, preacher, publicist, organiser of religious life, and advocate of an active spirituality centred upon prayer, fasting, catechesis, and moral responsibility. The research demonstrates that his pastoral and journalistic activism was perceived by the communist authorities as a form of ideological



opposition, which led to systematic surveillance, successive detentions, ecclesial marginalisation, and, ultimately, to his condemnation to hard labour. The study also reveals that his biography must be read with critical discernment, since it intersects with sensitive areas of historical memory, including his contextual relationship with certain interwar nationalist milieus, without these thereby nullifying his character as a Christian confessor and victim of communist repression.

The principal contribution of the present research consists in articulating a balanced historical-theological and memorial reading of the case of Florea Mureşanu, one that moves beyond both hagiographical idealisation and politico-ideological reductionism. The study proposes the integration of this biography into a broader framework of religious resistance under communism, of contemporary Orthodox martyrology, and of the debates concerning the canonisation of confessing clergy. In this respect, the article offers a significant contribution to the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century, to the study of religious repression, and to critical reflection upon martyric memory within the post-communist Romanian context.

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