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**THE SPIRITUAL PERSONALITY OF  
FATHER VASILE VASILACHE.  
BIOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES AND SPIRITUAL  
PERSPECTIVES**

SUMMARY

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In 2017, the Romanian Orthodox Church's Holy Synod designated "The Commemorative Year of Patriarch Justinian and the Defenders of Orthodoxy during Communism," and I launched a series of broadcasts on the radio station "Renaissance" dedicated to confessors in communist jails. Following my work with Father Grigorie Benea, I discovered Father Vasile Vasilache and his archive, which were waiting for a researcher.

My study is the first PhD thesis on the subject, thus I took a larger approach to his history.

I have always considered this approach a "restitutio," both personally, towards Father Vasile, and especially towards the family of priest Gheorghe Vasilache, "pater familiae," who had lost two boys on the front, and two others, Vasile and Haralambie, suffered political imprisonment, with Haralambie dying as a martyr in the Gherla prison. As if it wasn't enough, another Vasilache son died shortly after being liberated from the Soviet camp.

The first objective was outlined by the tutor, His Eminence Andrei, which was to be an academic work. In this sense, the research is based on hundreds of archival documents, manuscripts, memoirs and specialized articles, which can be followed in the critical apparatus and at the end, in the bibliography.

I believe that this study and the conclusion of Father Vasilache's spiritual biography are timely, and I want to provide a framework for the memoirs that we can grasp with this academic and chronological distance. Perhaps his work was not reprinted in Romania because

it necessitated a sedimentation of time and facts, especially because Vasile Vasilache was endowed by God with long life and health.

I also believe that an assumed monk like Vasile Vasilache deserves to place these contexts of life and work in a broader spiritual biography, which would divide his life into two main stages: formative, in the shadow of the spiritual father, and sedimentation and mission, after 1964.

Perhaps even from the carceral period, where he is seen as a teacher of the parochial, within some time periods, or at the so-called Gherla's "university" or forced labor.

As a result, the primary goal is to approach this biography from a spiritual standpoint, while being faithful to historical sources and archive materials.

The investigation of these sources and resources from a theological viewpoint, or in a spiritual key, will be innovative. This is not to say that the historical techniques used thus far are meaningless; rather, when combined, they provide a fresh viewpoint, as befits such a spiritual nature.

When I say spiritual personality, I am referring to his effect on the communities he pastored, as well as the living memory that they have kept. In this regard, I will use two instances.

The first is connected to Bobâlna, where the faithful of the parish created in 2004 a memorial marble cross in remembrance of the priest, and years before that they painted him in the church<sup>1</sup>.

In chronological order, the second example originates in America.

Ten years after his death, the father's disciples, with the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop and Metropolitan Nicolae, relocated Father Basil's remains to a new marble tomb at the Monastery of St. Demetrius the New in Mount Hope, New York, which is, in large part (he left the monastery \$180,000 in his will), the father's foundation.

These phases, which occurred years after parent Vasile's death, illustrate the spiritual relationship that exists between the disciple and the spiritual parent. Fatherhood and spiritual filiation in the subject's life are two major topics that will run throughout the essay.

In terms of the work's corpus, three major areas can be distinguished chronologically: the stage of formation within the family and in the shadow of the spiritual father, the decline

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<sup>1</sup> Details at: Dacian Dumitru Șanta, *Bobâlna-The Meaning of the Sanctified Walls*, Studia Print, Cluj-Napoca, 2012.

and prison period, and the decantation of these experiences, which are doubled by their transformation into true spiritual fuel.

Father Vasilache's life parallels Romania's post-World War I experience. He is a man who has lived for centuries. A individual who lived through multiple political regimes and survived them. How? What was the spark for this energy?

How did he deal with the agony of torture he endured throughout his five years of political detention? These are just a few of the questions I asked myself as I started reading these memoirs, and I attempted to answer them via my PhD study.

Thus, the initial issue was to determine whether Father Vasile Vasilache was a spiritual figure. What does spiritual personality imply? How did it express itself, and what proof exists? But how does this individual evolve into a spiritual personality?

To follow this progressive development, we've structured the work into seven discrete chapters that go into detail on Father Vasile's life and formation.

The first chapter, "Romania, a dream come true", depicts the country's dramatic upheavals and instability following World War I. In it, I described the lives of clerical families, particularly the Vasilaches. Vutcani, the cradle of infancy, has always been an important part of the lives of all the children born to priest Gheorghe and his wife, Aglaia. Even now, the home remains in the family's tangible possession, being cared for by one of the grandsons.

We also discussed Father Vasile's inner anguish. He was briefly married before being taken under the protection of the Metropolitan of Moldavia, Nicodim, his former professor at the Theological Seminary in Huși, with whom he had already formed a spiritual paternal relationship. The significant event in the young disciple's life is the nun at Neamt Monastery, when he prostrated and met his spiritual teacher on September 6, 1936.

On September 14, 1936, the tenant received the priesthood, which was the next significant step. From here, the apprentice's biography will be entwined with that of the master, until the latter passes into the eternal. In Iași, he completed the duties of the director of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Suceava (March 1935–November 1939)<sup>2</sup>, editor-in-chief of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia's magazine, pastor at the Three Hierarchs

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<sup>2</sup> Archive of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bukovina, Personal Files Fund, Vasile Vasilache, Other mutations, taken from the control register, from the PC Arhim. Dr. Vasile Vasilache, from M-rea Neamțu; According to Order No. 7470/1936 of the Holy Metropolis of Moldavia.

Church (October 1936), and later preacher in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Iași<sup>3</sup>. It was also during this period that he defended his doctorate in Theology, with a thesis on "The Sermon in the Middle Ages"<sup>4</sup>, published in 1938.

We discussed the era of complete maturity in the second chapter, "Maturity: From Iasi to Bucharest." I will not refer to the material offered in this chapter, but will instead focus on the events that distinguished his spiritual maturation with his master. Nicodim Munteanu, the elected patriarch, traveled to Bucharest in 1939 with his apprentice.

Between 1939 and 1944, Vasile Vasilache became acquainted with the patriarchal administrative apparatus by serving as the patriarch's personal secretary, secretary general of the Archdiocese of Bucharest, editor-in-chief of the Romanian Orthodox Church Magazine, a member of the Biblical Institute's Steering Committee, and a preacher at the Patriarchal Cathedral. This is the skeleton upon which I wrote the second chapter, before moving on to another key era, the abbess in the Antim Monastery in Bucharest from 1944 to 1948.

There are eight years of life that are full of both obligations and delight. In Bucharest, he is always on the rise, and Patriarch Nicodim makes repeated attempts to see him as a bishop, either as his vicar or in Iași, but he is left alone. This endeavor is invariably met with denial by communist authorities.

Why was there such a long-standing refusal? Because, following August 23, 1944 and the movement of Sovietization of the nation, the Patriarch seeks to pursue a balanced strategy in order to avoid conflict with the state, but this does not work for him. The cautious and careful attitude of Patriarch Nicodemus, a devout royalist, irritated the political authority, which replied with different ruses and pressure.

A chronicler of the period, Dudu Velicu, describes the tense situation and the political-ecclesiastical environment, and I utilized his notes to comprehend the sociopolitical and ecclesiastical movements as well. I had to mention something here. Ducu Velicu had previously served as Patriarch Miron Cristea's secretary, with a more western-oriented, modern perspective and attitude than Patriarch Nicodim's traditionalism.

In this sense, when the Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church changed, so did the administrative machinery, and Dudu Velicu lost his post. Antipathy against the Vasilache

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<sup>3</sup> Vasile Vasilachi, *Under the Protection of Eternity*, p. 17; Mircea Păcurariu, *The Dictionary of Romanian Theologians*; Mihail-Simion Săsăujan, *Confessors of Orthodoxy during the communist regime. Studies and evocations*; Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *The Dictionary of Romanian Orthodox Clergy and Laity Confessors in Communist Detention (1945-1964)*.

<sup>4</sup> Vasile Vasilache, *Sermon in the Middle Ages*.



brothers is evident in his daily notes. As a result, the personal information they supply must be read with extreme caution because it cannot be verified.

All the more so since the stories follow a certain format that is peculiar to other receivers, such as "it is said about", "I found out that", "the X person told me about", etc. We already know that he worked for the Intelligence Services at one point, therefore his notes must be carefully examined in order to prevent bringing charges against persons who can no longer defend themselves.

Vasile Vasilache's mature phase carries the mark of a hardworking administrator who is dedicated to the Word. A joyful interaction between labor and prayer. Contact with "The Burning Pyre" converts him into a "burning pyre", in the sense that, in Bucharest, in the heart of the battle, he becomes the father of many, as we saw in the fourth subchapter of the second chapter. He is in charge of reorganizing the Antim Monastery, attends meetings of the "The Burning Pyre" association, oversees the repair of the place of worship, and creates social initiatives to assist people in need. As a result, he possesses the characteristics of a spiritual father even before his father's death.

At the end of the second chapter, I introduced the problem of "The Burning Pyre". In recent years, much has been written about "The Burning Pyre" and its members, but far less has been published on the implications of Abbot Vasile Vasilache, the spiritual movement's host. Thus, Father Vasile's article on these meetings and the formation of the Association must be interpreted through the lens of the abbot, the man in charge of directing all activities in the monastery.

This subchapter serves as an introduction to the third chapter, which I see as a "prehistory" and a brief account of the manifestations. I thought this explanation was vital since, in the father's spiritual history, the experience of "The Burning Pyre" is formative and cumulative to his spiritual nature.

The third chapter concludes with a subchapter titled "Comparative Perspectives," in which I highlight that Father Vasile's perspective on the development and operation of "The Burning Pyre" is complimentary to that commonly acknowledged by scholars. I utilized proof from the other members' testimonials, as well as the father's work, which validates Sandu Tudor's merit.

I highlighted, in particular, the decline of the priest from the abbess of Antim Monastery, in parallel with the prohibition of the spiritual movement "The Burning Pyre" and the departure of the Vasilache brothers from Bucharest, persecuted by the communist power, for whom they were undesirable.

I also attempted to understand the refractory attitude toward Patriarch Justinian, to whom he attributes this decay, and after reading these texts and memoirs, I believe that the atheistic communist regime could no longer tolerate them in the country's capital, as evidenced by the events that occurred in their lives. If they had not been compelled to flee at the time, their arrest would have occurred considerably sooner, particularly given the large wave of arrests in 1948-1949, which is noted in history for the ferocity with which they behaved.

The fourth chapter follows the journeys of the brothers Vasile and Haralambie, who after leaving Bucharest were unable to locate a place of their own. The period of settling into the Pocrov Hermitage is critical for developing one's own spiritual perspective. The stage of formation in obedience is now completed, and the stage of becoming begins. If the time spent in the Antim Monastery remains formative, at Pocrov, Father Vasile develops a spiritual personality and establishes a functional community around the hermitage, which attracts Christians thirsting for truth and spirituality like a magnetic force.

This spiritual movement does not go unnoticed by the Securitate, who will shortly follow the two brothers. Follow-up files will be opened on their names, along with informants from their inner circle who were forced to cooperate. We might claim that all of the evidence used to support the accusations made in the trial or criminal inquiry is falsified.

In the fifth chapter, I discussed the criminal investigation and trial. I've revealed how the Securitate works, including how the criminal investigation file was created, who the informants were, and what they pursued from the beginning. Today, it is clear that the Vasilache brothers did not have unique culpability and did not conduct crimes, like other detained priests or members of "The Burning Pyre" who were convicted before them.

I used Father Vasile's recollections as well as other historical sources to outline the jail experience. I explain that these memorial messages were written some years after his release from jail, in America, when he was already in a shelter.

He could not have such evidence since he had signed an agreement upon release that he would not reveal any information concerning his prison time. This also explains Father Vasile's disappearance from the Romanian theological landscape after he left for America in 1969.

Father Vasile did not return to Romania until 1990, which is understandable given his memoirs released in America throughout the 1980s.

His brother, Archimandrite Haralambie, a spiritual man with a patrician countenance who had suffered greatly during his imprisonment, died in the Gherla Penitentiary in 1962. Father Nicolae Steinhardt describes his aristocratic nature in "The Diary of Happiness".

We have also dedicated a subchapter to Father Haralambie Vasilache, as their lives cannot be presented separately. He arrives in Iasi and Bucharest thanks to the help of his brother. The same applies to Pocrov. He dies as a martyr, despite being innocent. Reading his work, rebuilt in the collection "The Altar of Romanian Spirituality", released in a little different form than the original, at the Eikon publishing company in Bucharest, struck me with a profound spiritual impact.

The fifth chapter concludes with Father Vasile's wanderings following his release from the Gherla Penitentiary. These emotions, together with the death of his sibling, put a lot of strain on him. We are in the identical circumstance described by the Savior Jesus Christ when he says, "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). A tough circumstance from which he emerged with the assistance of Bishop Teofil Herineanu of Cluj.

„Only Bishop Theophilus was the good Samaritan, he welcomed me into his diocese, gave me a parish and took care of me. And so I became a priest in Bobâlna, where former Prime Minister Alexandru Vaida-Voievod lived. Bobâlna was also the birthplace of the inspector from Iași, whom I met in prison before I was released. His name was Zăpârțan. He often came to visit his family in Bobâlna”.<sup>5</sup>

I discovered a declaration in Father Vasile Vasilache's file from the Archdiocese of Cluj's Archive renouncing his position in Iași. She arrived on October 27, 1964, for the Poeni-Chilișeni Parish, despite having been appointed at Cluj on October 8. However, I simply mention the priest's highlighted point at the end of the statement "I would like to mention that on October 6, 1964, the Chancellery of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia returned the documents to me, refusing the appointment”.<sup>6</sup>

Because the book is structured chronologically, I envisioned the sixth chapter as a journey through two key aspects of his spiritual biography: his mission as a parish priest in Bobâlna and his emigration to America.

Vasile Vasilache was reborn in Bobâlna. The traumas gathered from his separation from the Abbess of Anthimos until his release from imprisonment were converted into great missionary zeal, fueled by prayer and the translation of the Holy Scripture. In 1968, he

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<sup>5</sup> Vasile Vasilache, 'În temniță cu Iisus Hristos', p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Archive of the Archdiocese of Cluj, Files Fund and Priests' Files Fund, Archbishop File. Dr. Vasile Vasilache, Statement dated October 30, 1964, FN.

finished translating the Bible in Bobâlna, a ten-year biblical undertaking that, sadly, is still housed at the Romanian Academy Library today.

During this time, Vasile Vasilache is visited by some Securitate employees. Furthermore, a new prosecution case was established against him under the code name "Verdi". Thus, it is simple to comprehend the time of departure, which is possibly one of the only ways to escape the oppressive body.

His benefactor had been the Archbishop Victorin of America, whom he had saved from the oppressor years previously by sending him to the Holy Places as a servant. Father Basil's personality includes a strong sense of thankfulness.

This man knew how to appreciate his donors and honor them with his devotion and solidarity. Thus, in America, Vasile Vasilache does what he does best: he serves and preaches. He visited several parishes and left behind traces of his efforts, both pastoral and municipal: parish buildings, churches, monasteries, and a publishing house.

Vasile Vasilache was a godsend to the Missionary Archdiocese of America and Archbishop Victorin. He dedicated his life to the institution. The father's most significant legacy at this point is the "Saint Nicholas" Parish in New York, where he has served since 1984, and the "Saint Demetrius" Monastery in Mount Hope, New York, of which he is the creator.

Father Vasile is a well-known spiritual figure in New York. The priest, a monk by profession, attempted to impose the spirit of Romanian Orthodoxy on the big metropolis, even being accused at one point of caring too much about Romanian Orthodoxy. Not only that, but he was interested with the restoration of the "The Old Saint Spyridon" Church in Bucharest, for which he personally gave \$12,000. Furthermore, we discovered a communication in the father's archive with Father Petroniu Tanase, the abbot of the Prodromu Skete on Holy Mount Athos, who had requested him assistance in reconstructing the town. Vasile Vasilache is also contributing generously to our project.

The final chapter reconstructs or aggregates the nature of Father Vasile's spiritual personality. Thus, in the first few paragraphs of the seventh chapter, I introduced the topic of paternity and spiritual filiation, highlighting the father, abba or abbot's vital position in the Eastern tradition. In this regard, I have used the apophthegms of the Egyptian desert fathers, as well as specialist bibliographies, to identify certain landmarks in the connection between spiritual father and student.

I identified the obligations of both the father and the disciple, and I will next apply them to Father Vasile's work. Thus, we were able to discern that, in terms of the meeting with the spiritual teacher, the zero point in Vasilache corresponds to the era of seminary study.

Vasile Vasilache, for his part, emerged as a spiritual figure and the father of his own students. How can we confirm this fact? The disciples express themselves both during and after death. I am now referring to a few occurrences that served as the foundation for my argument and documentation of my personality restoration.

First and foremost, it must be determined if Father Vasile loved his disciples. The author's remarks, in which he hails his close friends and emphasizes their spiritual traits, reflect this sentiment. Then, because of his proclivity for prayer, he was constantly in church, encouraging people to pray for a brother in the liturgical community who was going through a difficulty or affliction.

Charity, on the other hand, is the most blatant manifestation of Christian love in practice. He did not collect anything for himself, but rather donated everything to the Church of Christ. He resided in a little chamber behind the altar at St. Nicholas Church in New York. It consisted of a basic bed, a table, a chair, and writing instruments. The room lacked direct sunshine. He was here from 1984 to 2003, when he died.

Now, in terms of his effect on his pupils and his character as a spiritual father, it is necessary to recall that following his death, the father was buried at St. Michael's Cemetery in New York since the St. Demetrius Monastery was not yet finished.

Subsequently, in 2006, the disciples established a memorial room at the monastery, where the priest's books and few personal belongings are displayed, and in 2013, his earthly remains were transferred to a new marble tomb at the monastery during a large ceremony attended by both Hierarchs of the Archdiocese. The founder is in his foundation, with the father giving more than \$180,000 in his will for the church's building and monastery administration.

His love for the Romanian Orthodox Church was also passed on to his followers, with whom he co-founded major objectives on the Romanian Orthodox map. The most significant is the "Saint Demetrius" Monastery in New York, which keeps the priest alive in the life of the Romanian Church in America.

From an academic standpoint, I attempted and hope to have succeeded in rebuilding the spiritual portrait of Father Vasile, archimandrite and doctor of theology, a great spiritual personality of an entire age characterized by love for God, the Church, and humanity. This

approach also extends to the presentation of his work, as the work itself represents the creator. This could not be missed, especially as the work opens up new avenues of investigation.