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## **P**riest Confessor Alexandru Budai **Ștefan NEGREANU**

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<sup>1</sup> The photograph of Fr. Budai Alexandru from the arrest, 25.09.1958, located in the CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 5, f. 188.

**Abstract**

With the establishment of communism and the creation of the people's state, Romania became a great prison. Anyone who was dignified, anyone who tried to express an opinion, to have a different view, to not align exactly with the orders of the communist party and state, was considered an enemy and had to be eradicated, eliminated, reeducated. At the forefront among those who had to be arrested in order to decapitate any form of dignity, courage, and normal social and economic order were the priests. From among the priests of Arad, I have especially highlighted here the archpriest of Arad in 1958, Fr. Alexandru Budai, who was imprisoned for 6 years for the "crime" of serving God and His Church. In his life we read all the pains, all the traumas, all the struggles, all the running, all the toil and anxieties that tormented, like terrifying demons, the soul of the Romanian people—yet also the bearing of the cross as a lamb without voice, without revolt, without resistance.

**Keywords**

communism, Romania, Orthodox priest, prison, fr. Alexandru Budai

**I. Introduction**

During our life in these parts, our nation went through many trials and many invaders upset and tormented it. We ourselves, as a people, have had many infirmities among us. One of the great anti-communist fighters in the Făgăraș Mountains, Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu, says with pain that "we had too many Judas in our nation". Going through many trials, the Romanian nation came in the nineteenth century to begin to unite, to gather, to be more aware of its power, of its size, of its calling and, after the Union of the Principalities in 1859, after the taking of Independence in 1877 and the declaration of Romania as a kingdom, after the acquisition of the autocephaly of our Church, won in 1885, the great Union followed, long awaited and much desired, but which also came through the great trial of the First World War.

Caught between three great empires: the Austro-Hungarian, the Tsarist Empire and the German Empire, between their interests and in their vicinity, we also entered the First World War, but God worked wonderfully for the Romanian nation through the great opportunities He gave us and the bravery of the soldiers who filled the country's land with

their bones and blood, but also through the wisdom of great statesmen, such as King Ferdinand and the wonderful Queen Maria, the members of the Brătianu family, Iuliu Maniu, Vasile Goldiș and others. Through them we were gifted with the Great Union that gathered all the territories of separated centuries (Transylvania, Banat, Maramureș, Crișana, Bucovina and Bessarabia). This is how the great Romania was made, awaited by all our ancestors.

But this joy did not last long, for hard times came. The twentieth century was marked with blood and pagan and foreign ideologies, which struck in the Romanian country and in its ethos, in its heart and in its borders. Then God ordained an exceptional generation, which followed that of the Union, the interwar one, full of the will to manifest the Romanian spirit, the Romanian faith, to hold and animate Romania, to fulfill it in all forms, both spiritual, cultural, and material. It was a generation that wanted a dignified Romania, which the ancestors had been waiting for a long time.

But things did not go in favor of this great desire and these valiant fighters and lovers of the country, of the nation and of God because the Second World War came, which brought more pain, more suffering, more tears that were shed in our parts even after its end. Not only have the wounds and consequences of this war remained, but in the footsteps of the tracks of the Soviet tanks that entered our country as conquerors, those prepared to seize all the country's wealth, to subjugate us, came. They were people in the image and likeness of those in the Soviet Union, who belonged to the communist ideology, people who had no nation and no fear and faith in God. They installed themselves as rulers with the power of the Soviet army, putting aside the king and the democratic leadership of the country, in a Romania that was no longer whole, establishing a communist and atheistic state, alien to the Romanian national interests, to our culture and tradition, completely subjugated to the interests of the Soviet Union and which did nothing else, during tough and many years, than to rob Romania of all her goods, as war payment.

But the most serious aspect is not the robbery of Romania of the goods given by God to its people, but the fact that these cunning leaders, installed by the power of weapons and false ideology, have decimated the

Romanian nation by the best people, from all categories, cultural, spiritual, economic, from peasants and workers to intellectuals. This was really a decapitation of the nation. It meant arrests and executions without trial. Countless sons of the country have clogged up prisons, and millions more have suffered outside. Many died in prisons, traumatized, crushed bodily, some even spiritually. The others who remained alive were released in 1964 by general amnesty, under pressure from democratic states.

This does not mean that the terror has ceased. The whole country was filled with political police - the *Securitate* that terrorized the Romanian people, continuously pursued them and burdened them enormously through the fear that they permanently inoculated not only those who had gone through prison, but also those who did not go through the hell of prisons, but could have had courage, attitude, opinion, faith to manifest. This burden of the lack of freedom was huge, not only in terms of pressure, but also in terms of material effort, because all this huge repressive apparatus had to be supported by the money of those who were tormented.

We talk about this generation shattered in prisons, in investigations, presenting some elements about one of those who entered the mixer of persecutions, convictions, detention, sacrifice, continuous fear of persecution that they had to overcome day by day.

## II. A case study: Fr. Alexandru Budai

This study is about one of the priests of the Caceu-Felea lot, the archpriest of Arad Alexandru Budai. He was born on February 9, 1915, in the family of poor peasants from Cefa, Bihor County<sup>2</sup>. In the *Securitate* files, the locality is part of the Salonta district, Oradea region, as the country was divided in the first communist period.

### II.1. Formation and early activity

After obtaining the baccalaureate, the young Alexandru enrolled at the Theological Academy in Oradea, which he graduated in 1939, and in 1941

<sup>2</sup> Preot dr. Pavel VESA, *Clerici ortodocși arădeni și hunedoreni deținuți politici*, Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, Deva, 2014, p. 59.

he obtained his license at the Faculty of Theology in Chisinau-Iași<sup>3</sup>. In May 1941 he was hired as an official at the Diocesan Center in Arad, and on October 18, 1941 he was ordained a deacon from the hands of Bishop Andrei Magieru. On January 19, 1945, he was ordained a priest by the same worthy bishop, on behalf of the Arad-Grădiște parish<sup>4</sup>. In May 1949 he was appointed exarch of the monasteries in the Diocese of Arad, and in November of the same year he was appointed archpriest of Arad<sup>5</sup>.

Being one of those close and advisers of Bishop Andrei Magieru, he was targeted and followed by the *Securitate* from the beginning, because the bishop did not give in to the pressures coming from the communist authorities. Especially after 1949, for the position he received he was all the more pursued<sup>6</sup>.

In his file at the *Securitate* there is an informative note from 1949 – very elaborate – in which Fr. Budai is characterized: intelligent, honest, serious, without vices, with a penchant for the faithful. And below is a warning: “gather neighborhood reactionaries in his home, listen to Anglo-American radio stations, launch alarming rumors, etc.”<sup>7</sup>. From this we realize that Fr. Budai was already being watched very closely.

## II.2. The communist persecution against the national elites

In the mad rush of the communist hordes, of the atheist and anti-national state, of the destruction of the elites and of the moral, spiritual, cultural, economic and social decapitation of the country, there were two great waves of arrests. The first wave was that of the full establishment of communist power in 1948. The second wave, larger than the first, was 10 years later, in 1958-1959. Why was there a second wave? Because, during this period, after Stalin’s death in March 1953, the 1956 revolution had taken place in Hungary, through which the Hungarians tried to lift

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Nicolae PETCU, *Clerici și teologi din Eparhia Aradului, în închisorile comuniste (1945-1964)*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, 2017, p. 55-56.

<sup>4</sup> “Informațiuni”, in: *Biserica și Școala*, nr. 4/January 21 1945, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Nicolae PETCU, *Clerici și teologi din Eparhia Aradului...*, p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Nicolae PETCU, “Preotul arădean Alexandru Budai în temnița comunistă”, in: *Lumina*, <https://ziarullumina.ro/societate/historica/preotul-aradean-alexandru-budai-in-temnita-comunista-125561.html>

<sup>7</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 68.

the yoke of communism, but which was drowned in blood. The 1956 revolution reverberated in the student environments of Bucharest, Iași, Cluj, Timișoara and resulted in many arrests.

In addition to this, another event took place in Romania, in May 1958, which has never happened in any other communist state: the Soviet army left Romania, remaining the only state without an invading army on its territory. This withdrawal of the Soviet armies that had been in our country since 1944 had to be supported by proof that the communist power controlled the country well. To show this power, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej ordered this second wave of arrests to which many of the best sons of our nation and Church fell prey. Now the batch of seven priests from Arad is arrested, along with many others: Dumitru Stăniloae, Sofian Boghiu, Benedict Ghiuș, etc.

In all this terrible enterprise, through the work of the *Securitate* and the other repressive organs of the communist state, they wanted to come out with clean hands, bringing so-called evidence that would be dust in the eyes of any foreign person or institution, eager to investigate the files, and in the eyes of posterity to become immutable evidence of the guilt of those arrested. In this context, they wanted to open conviction trials not only for isolated people, but also for “criminal”, “legionary and fascist” groups as the *Securitate* called them, which would have wanted to “undermine the rule of law and popular democracy”, of the socialist order. Of course, such groups did not exist, since Romania had already been threshed by any kind of opposition, but the communists created a narrative to convince that they were very dangerous bandits, who gather in groups – if possible, paramilitary – with hostile intentions, to overthrow the state and undermine the social order.

The creation of such groups, tailored according to the narrative of the prosecutors’ plea, with serious accusations and “evidence”, allowed them to include numerous people, as the *Securitate* wanted, although they had not intended to do anything of what they were accused of. But it was enough for something not to suit the regime or for there to be an anonymous denunciation, which, in a free society, would have had no relevance, and they were immediately attached to such a group, being accused of the most serious crimes.

### II.3. The Caceu-Felea batch

This is how the Caceu-Felea lot was formed, in which the worthiest priests of Arad, who had the courage to do the worthiest priestly work, both among adults and among young people, that is, in the whole society, were caught in this lot. In reality, this lot and the action of undermining the state attributed to it did not exist, because they were Christians and only sought to serve Christ and the Romanian people in His holy Church.

As such, a narrative was created for this batch as well, with accusations deceived by the *Securitate*, without a drop of truth. What interested it was that those people undesirable for the “bright future of the country” would enter the mixer of re-education and death sentence through the regime of communist prisons. In the Caceu-Felea case, this narrative shines through in all the investigations, the concluded minutes and in all the convictions. Even if, initially, trying to defend themselves and keep the truth, those arrested opposed<sup>8</sup>, in the end, through torture, insistence and threats from the *Securitate*, in insane investigations, which lasted for days without stopping, the accused admitted the facts and, understanding that they had no chance, accepted the accusations<sup>9</sup>.

In the minutes, at first those under investigation use their own words, keeping the coherence of the facts, but then the language becomes the one imposed by the investigators, in which they call themselves subversives, declared enemies of the state, giving missions, getting in touch with their other colleagues called “legionaries” – although they had not been – and acknowledging the fact that they had created the legionary group in prison (those who had been imprisoned before), that they held legionary conferences there “to raise morale” (which was impossible in communist

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<sup>8</sup> See the Minutes of the interrogation of Fr. Cornel Caceu, dated March 26, 1958, in which he does not admit that he carried out “subversive legionary activity” nor did he discuss political problems with his friends (CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 32), compared to the Minutes of the interrogation of the same Fr. Cornel Caceu, of June 24, 1958 when he already spoke about the legionary activity carried out (financial aid to those in need or collegial discussions with Fr. Felea, Tudor and Gornic (CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 45).

<sup>9</sup> See the minutes of the interrogation of Fr. Cornel Caceu, starting with June 1958, when his words began to sound more and more as the *Securitate* wanted (CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 45 sq.).



prisons) and that they were going to get in touch with other legionnaires when they got out of prison “for the mutual material support or of other legionnaires and their families”<sup>10</sup>.

Let us now follow the narrative deceived by the *Securitate* for the arrest of the seven worthy priests of Arad and create the accusatory legal framework. It starts with Atanasiu Constantin, who had been part of the Legionary Movement and had been arrested in 1948, staying in prison until 1954. During his detention, the priest from Arad, Ioan Ageu, who had a certain sympathy for the Legionary Movement, was also imprisoned. He had been part of the theological teaching staff of Arad for a while. Ageu met Athanasius in detention, who would have initiated him into all the subversive legionary work, through consultations and conferences. Then they decided that the Legionary Movement should be reactivated upon release from prison, in 1954, a real “order” given to others, each in his place of activity. Ageu tells the Arad priest Cornel Caceu about this order that he executes and gets in touch with other “legionary” priests<sup>11</sup>: Tudor Demian, Ilarion Felea and indirectly with Dimitrie Gornic, Emilian Bența, Aurel Moise and Alexandru Budai.

#### II.4. Fr. Alexandru Budai under the *Securitate* investigation

A first mention of the priest Alexandru Budai in the interrogation minutes appears on April 4, 1958, when the priest Cornel Caceu (already arrested since February 1958) is investigated and declares that the archpriest of Arad was in his office when he (Fr. Caceu) was visited by another priest, asking him to send some cult books to another confrere from the USA (who had been a legionnaire in the pre-communist period)<sup>12</sup>. Even if this fact seems unimportant, the mention of a name was not at all accidental, because the *Securitate* kept in reserve other accusations and information that came to light later, after long investigations and months of detention.

A new mention of the priest Al. Budai in the initial investigations of the group (when only the priests Caceu and Gornic were arrested) appears

<sup>10</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 82.

<sup>11</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 40.

<sup>12</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 35.



on July 5, 1958, also in the interrogation of Fr. Caceu<sup>13</sup>. Now Fr. Caceu not only admits for the first time that he is a legionnaire, but also that other confreres, servants of the Altar, are of the same political color, nominating them. Among them is Fr. Al. Budai. The information about him is expanded, by mentioning the fact that at work (the Deanery Office) he commented with Fr. Budai the news from Western radio stations.

At the beginning of autumn, most likely under pressure from the state bodies, Fr. Caceu enriched his statements with the fact that he had grouped around him for the purpose of carrying out a clandestine activity, several “legionnaire” priests of Arad, among whom Fr. Budai is mentioned<sup>14</sup>.

However, the surprise appears after only one day. The *Securitate* had established in the interrogation of Fr. Caceu that Fr. Budai was a legionnaire and that he had been co-opted by Fr. Caceu for clandestine activities. However, from the interrogation of September 2, 1958, regarding this recruitment of the priests from Arad by Father Caceu, it follows that Fr. Budai was not a legionnaire, as he would later be wrongly accused of, so Fr. Caceu did not recruit him. He repeats, in response to the question about the recruitment of the other legionnaire priests in Arad, asked by the investigator, that to the priests Budai Alexandru and Iancu Ion “we did not talk about the action of the legionnaires in prisons or about our action of the legionary priests in Arad”<sup>15</sup>. So here is a crack in the *Securitate* deception, because the statements contradict each other from one day to the next. But this will not be an obstacle in the development of events according to the scenario made by the Party.

From the same report of the investigation of Father Caceu it appears that he, as an employee of the Deanery of Arad, being an office colleague of Archpriest Budai, had with him “discussions of an inimical character against the popular democratic regime in the RPR, predicting its change to a capitalist one”. Later it is said that they also had discussions with other legionnaire priests who came to their office, respectively those who later formed the group organized by Caceu. Fr. Budai would also have had hostile discussions with the other priests, “manifesting his hatred

<sup>13</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 49.

<sup>14</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 61.

<sup>15</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 81.

towards the democratic regime”, informing them about the hostile news he was listening to on banned radio stations and saying that the regime would soon change. Also, Fr. Budai said that the standard of living of workers in communist countries is lower than in capitalist ones, that there is no freedom, writers cannot write what they think, underestimating the technique of communist states. It is also written that these priests did not like “literary works in which the heroes were communists, we showed about them that they did not present reality”<sup>16</sup>. From the same documents it follows that Fr. Budai would also have spoken out against the collectivization of agriculture, saying that it would be more profitable to maintain private property, he also showed his sympathy for imperialist policy, appreciating the colonialist wars waged by states such as the USA. Fr. Budai was also accused of supporting Fr. Caceu to bring the priest Dimitrie Gornic to Arad.

As can be seen from the interrogations, priests Gornic and Bențea do not even bring up the name of Father Budai, while, at the beginning, Fr. Moise Aurel only mentions that he was in close relations with him, but only on duty, being archpriest of Arad<sup>17</sup>. Fr. Moise repeats that the discussions held with Fr. Budai were strictly on duty, unlike those carried out with Fr. Caceu<sup>18</sup>. He also mentions the fact that he knows about Father Alexander that “he was not part of any bourgeois organization or party”<sup>19</sup>.

After several investigations (and probably pressures and beatings), Fr. Aurel names Father Alexandru as a reactionary priest, with whom he had hostile discussions against the regime in the office of the Deanery in Arad<sup>20</sup>: “the others (priests from the lot – *our observation*) used to come there and in this way, we gathered 3-4 of us and held such discussions”<sup>21</sup>. Of the seven priests arrested in the Caceu-Felea lot, at Father Moise and Bența, the whole process of re-education through threats, starvation and torture can be seen, obvious also from the content of the statements during the investigations: “yes, I decided to declare my counter-revolutionary

<sup>16</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 81.

<sup>17</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 334.

<sup>18</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 338.

<sup>19</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 351.

<sup>20</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 340.

<sup>21</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 340.

activity”<sup>22</sup>. An interesting thing confessed by the same priest Moses about these hostile discussions is the fact that

“we did not think of taking violent actions against the people’s democratic regime, because we did not see favorable results for us except for the fact that we were discovered and arrested, so we decided to wait for an intervention from the imperialist states, and as far as we are concerned, to maintain ties with each other in order to maintain a reactionary morality of hatred of the people’s democratic regime”<sup>23</sup>.

From the same interrogation of priest Moise it appears that after the arrest of priests Caceu and Gornic, in February 1958, Fr. Moise ceased any discussions with Budai, Tudor and Bența because “I was afraid of being followed by the state institutions”<sup>24</sup>.

Also, in the minutes of the interrogation of Fr. Tudor Demian, reference is made for the first time to Fr. Budai only on December 15, 1958<sup>25</sup>, when Father Tudor admits that he had had hostile discussions against the communist regime in the office of the Deanery of Arad, where Budai Al., Caceu C. and Gornic D. were present, but he does not admit that he would have discussed with Fr. Budai alone against the regime. The investigator also asks him what was the position of Fr. Budai towards the regime in the RPR, but Fr. Tudor says he doesn’t know it, since he hadn’t had discussions with him alone.

## II.5. Arrest, trial and imprisonment

The conclusion of the group’s accusation<sup>26</sup> makes all these leading priests of Arad participate in organizing subversive activities and holding hostile discussions. The deanery office as a place for discussions was a

<sup>22</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 342.

<sup>23</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 340.

<sup>24</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 341.

<sup>25</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 149.

<sup>26</sup> Conclusion of accusation CNSAS Archive, file no. P 14157, vol. 1, f. 387 sq.

solid accusation against Fr. Budai in particular. The conclusion is that they are guilty of the crime of plotting against the social order<sup>27</sup>. Of course, all these facts are natural things in a normal society, but for the communist regime they were particularly serious, proven by the statements extracted from the co-defendants Caceu Cornel, Bența Emilian and Moise Aurel and from the witnesses Mișu Viorel, Lițiu Gheorghe (the vicar of Arad) and Mișu Zoe<sup>28</sup>.

Father Alexandru's arrest took place on September 25, 1958, along with four other members of the group. They are immediately taken to Jilava prison where investigations begin<sup>29</sup>. The search report mentions that his home consisted of 3 rooms and a library<sup>30</sup>. The highly elaborated signature of Father Budai, an intellectual priest, appears at the end of this document, strikingly different from the handwriting left to posterity by the semi-educated of the communist regime.

What differentiates Archpriest Al. Budai from the other members of the squad, who accept this narrative of the *Securitate*, with unfounded and invented accusations, is that he does not admit anything throughout the investigations. In all the interrogation reports (such as those of October 1, 1958<sup>31</sup>, October 9, 1958<sup>32</sup>, October 10, 1958<sup>33</sup>, October 24, 1958<sup>34</sup>, November 22, 1958<sup>35</sup>, December 10, 1958<sup>36</sup>), including those of confrontation with the other priests (from December 30, 1958<sup>37</sup> with Caceu Cornel, when he was confronted and contradicted, but did not give in)<sup>38</sup>, in all the statements that are taken from him, he does not admit anything. Faced with facts, faced with witnesses who bring all kinds of accusations

<sup>27</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 406.

<sup>28</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 405-406.

<sup>29</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 360.

<sup>30</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 362.

<sup>31</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 365 sq.

<sup>32</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 367 sq.

<sup>33</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 370 sq.

<sup>34</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 371 sq.

<sup>35</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 373 sq.

<sup>36</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 375 sq.

<sup>37</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 378 sq.

<sup>38</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 365-379.

(Lițiu, Mihuț, Brădeanu, Mihiț), he does not admit anything, but the investigators consider that there is enough evidence to prove his guilt<sup>39</sup>.

He is always pressured to admit the hostile discussions against the regime carried out or heard by him in the office of the Deanery, but Fr. Budai remains consistent in his statements: he did not discuss or hear discussions of this kind because there was no possibility of such dialogues. When asked by the Securitate why, he replies that if he had started such discussions, he would have invited them to leave the office<sup>40</sup>. Statements about hostile discussions by Fr. Caceu are brought before him. Even then he does not admit anything, admitting that he has no way of proving what he says, but that he does not change his statements<sup>41</sup>.

The next step of the *Securitate* is confrontation. The priests Caceu and Budai are brought into the same investigation to make them recognize the hostile actions towards the communist regime. If Fr. Caceu repeats what he has already stated about the discussions that were held at the Deanery of Arad, statements given in detail and stretched over a few pages, the unchanged answer of Father Alexandru is that he does not admit anything and that no political discussions were held<sup>42</sup>.

In order to fill the case with accusations, the *Securitate* brings heavy witnesses to the trial<sup>43</sup>. One of them is the vicar at the time, Lițiu Gheorghe, brought to trial as an accusing witness. He will have this quality for the entire Caceu-Felea squad. Lițiu talks about the help that these priests gave to other “legionnaire” confreres, about the fact that both Fr. Tudor Demian and Fr. Alexandru Budai would have intervened with him to receive priest Dimitrie Gornic in Arad, through a competition. Only for these accusations, the two were considered guilty. In the continuation of the testimony, Lițiu says that he heard that the accused priests are legionnaires and that discussions against the regime would have taken place in the deanery office<sup>44</sup>. Initially, however, Fr. Lițiu does not mention Fr. Budai among the

<sup>39</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 358.

<sup>40</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 373.

<sup>41</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 374.

<sup>42</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 378 sq.

<sup>43</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 79-80.

<sup>44</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 88.

priests designated as legionaries. About him, Lițiu says that immediately after the arrest of Caceu and Gornic in February 1958, Fr. Budai pasted a poster on the door of the Deanery of Arad announcing that the Deanery is only allowed to discuss official matters<sup>45</sup>. He also has nothing to declare about Father Budai's activity, not being in close relations.

Another witness for the prosecution is Oros Cornel, a counselor at the Diocese at that time. He has no first-hand information about Fr. Budai, but only by hearsay, unconfirmed rumors, but all will be recorded in the file as true<sup>46</sup>.

Finally, by attacking him through his past, the *Securitate* puts an old issue in front of him, as Bălan Cornelia, the one he was supposed to marry, is brought as a witness and declares the so-called legionary membership of Fr. Budai as a student<sup>47</sup>. She is joined with the same type of statement, by her sister, Zoe Mihiț<sup>48</sup>. All the depositions of the others, but also the statements of Father Budai are identically repeated in front of the Cluj Military Tribunal, as it results from the file related to the case<sup>49</sup>.

As witnesses of the defense for Fr. Budai, seven people are brought in, residents of the Grădiște neighborhood. They are "working people", that is, credible to the communist system<sup>50</sup>.

In the batch file there is also the decision of the minutes of the Military Tribunal 3 Cluj region, dated March 14, 1959<sup>51</sup>, which contains the sentences, between 15-25 years. Fr. Budai receives the lowest sentence, 15 years of hard labor and 5 years of civic degradation.

On March 16, 1959, the Cluj Tribunal issued an address<sup>52</sup> to the Gherla Penitentiary, to take over the convicts. They are sent, in the first phase, for the execution of the sentence, to the Gherla penitentiary. At the same time, the convicts appeal, scheduled and postponed in May<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 277.

<sup>46</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 164 sq.

<sup>47</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 381.

<sup>48</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 1, f. 380.

<sup>49</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 79 sq.

<sup>50</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 103.

<sup>51</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 120.

<sup>52</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 144.

<sup>53</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 220.

The file is completed with other statements in favor of the convicts. To be remembered in the case of fr. Budai is the statement of fr. Archpriest Bogdan Petru, archpriest in Timișoara<sup>54</sup>. Also, presbytera Silvia Budai sends to the Court for appeal a memorandum containing the testimonies of 8 railway workers, led by the head of the CFR Arad Workshops station and the secretary of the organization there, as well as that of the former secretary of the Diocese of Arad<sup>55</sup>. Prebytera Silvia's memoir ends with these words: "I know that the Party thoroughly analyzes a man's shortcomings. If he is guilty, he sanctions him, and if not, he defends him"<sup>56</sup>. These are words full of hope. The memorandum has attached, as a postscriptum, before the signature, the slogan written in large letters: "WE FIGHT FOR PEACE", signed: Budai Silvia. What hard times!

On May 12, 1959, the date of the appeal of the seven priests, including Fr. Alexandru Budai, the Supreme Court implacably rejected the appeal<sup>57</sup>.

The warrant for the execution of the sentence of May 19, 1959 shows us that the Cluj Military Tribunal sends the convict Alexandru Budai to serve the sentence in the Jilava penitentiary<sup>58</sup>. On the same day that the warrant for the execution of Father Budai's sentence was handed over, the Cluj Military Tribunal sent a decision to the Arad Tribunal requesting the urgent confirmation of the execution of the confiscation of the property of the convicted Al. Budai. We notice how quickly this address is made, so that his wealth – little and insignificant – is confiscated<sup>59</sup>.

On July 15, 1959, Father Budai was moved back to Gherla, as shown by the registration report, which specified that the punishment had begun on 25.09.1958 and expired on 25.09.1973<sup>60</sup>.

## II.6. Family's sufferings

If those arrested, tortured, tormented, threatened, starved, subjected to a regime of extermination, bore all this with great difficulty, being in

<sup>54</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 210.

<sup>55</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 212-219.

<sup>56</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 219.

<sup>57</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 223.

<sup>58</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 93.

<sup>59</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 91.

<sup>60</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 3, f. 101.



continuous danger of extinction, the condition of those in their families, who remained outside, was not easy either. Especially the wives and children of those imprisoned suffered enormously, being threatened with exclusion from society or even taken out on the road, left to die of hunger. Children could not enroll in high schools and colleges, being proscribed. One of the solutions that the *Securitate* put in front of the wives of those imprisoned was that of divorce. This is in order to disavow, in front of society, their husbands who were guilty of death against the social order, who were bandits, and thus their image would be further blackened. And after the divorce was pronounced, of course in the absence of those imprisoned, the *Securitate* rushed to make known to them the divorce and the fact that they had been abandoned by their spouses and lost their children, in order to bring those imprisoned into a state of deep despair, if they could even have lost their minds. It should be noted that of these women who divorced, many did so only formally.

Father Budai did not escape this torture either, this iron stuck in his heart, because his wife Silvia, desperate for the fate of their two teenage children – Corina-Hortensia (born in 1942) and Mihail-Radu (born in 1943) – decided, under pressure from the *Securitate*, in August 1959 to divorce, changing her name. The *Securitate* rushed to inform Father Budai of the divorce, who signed the acknowledgement. He was imprisoned in Gherla when he received, on September 11, 1959, this notification<sup>61</sup>.

After this date we also find in the file the transfer of Father Budai to the Giurgeni labor colony in 1960, where he stays from June to September<sup>62</sup>. He then arrived at the Ostrov-Salcia camp on May 1, 1961<sup>63</sup>. From there he was moved to the labor colony in Strâmba, starting with May 30, 1962<sup>64</sup>. He did not stay here for two months, because since July 6, 1962 he has been in the records of the Gherla prison<sup>65</sup>. His journey did not end, as he was sent to the Periprava labor colony, as it results from the medical record in the file dated 21.07.1962 where he stayed until 1963<sup>66</sup>. He would return

<sup>61</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 96.

<sup>62</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 216.

<sup>63</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 207.

<sup>64</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 218.

<sup>65</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 219.

<sup>66</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 206.

on April 1, 1964 to the Giurgeni camp, and then to Ostrov-Salcia in July 1964<sup>67</sup>, the last place of detention before his liberation of the same year.

Between pages 214-226 of volume 4 of the batch file we discover that starting from the summer of 1962 until 1963 Father Budai tries to gather references both from the outside, from people at large, and certificates of characterization from the leaders of the camps he passed through (Ostrov, Giurgeni, Periprava – the commander Fecioru from here even submits the convict's appeal request). Thus, the priest tried to find a legal solution to get out of a universe that seemed closed for years and years. He did not know then that in less than two years things would change radically, because in July-August 1964 all political prisoners in Romania were released.

## II.7. Release, subsequent activity and death

He himself was released on August 2, 1964 from the Ostrov-Salcia camp<sup>68</sup> through a general amnesty, being obliged to sign a declaration by which he became aware of the fact that he was not allowed to divulge to anyone anything he saw and heard in the places of detention, nor about the incarcerated persons. He also undertakes not to communicate anything to the relatives of those still imprisoned about their fate. The priest is released, but he enters the country's largest prison, which meant the persecution of him and his family by the *Securitate*.

After his release from prison<sup>69</sup>, Father Budai applied for rehabilitation, but by Sentence no. 10/25.09.1964 of the Arad Consistory Commission, he received the punishment of not being allowed to service the Holy Altar for the duration of the period of detention, that is for 6 years. The decision had no power, because on October 1, 1964 he was appointed priest at the parish of Sântămăria Orlea, Hunedoara County, an unbudgeted parish.

Three years later, on August 1, 1967, he was transferred to the parish of Petrila-Poieni, Hunedoara County, and a year later, in 1968, he received the distinction of treasurer for his fruitful activity as a priest. People who knew him then testify to the extremely degraded state of the church when

<sup>67</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 208.

<sup>68</sup> CNSAS Archive, file P 14157, vol. 4, f. 189.

<sup>69</sup> Adrian Nicolae PETCU, *Clerici și teologi din Eparhia Aradului, în închisorile comuniste (1945-1964)*, p. 57-58.

Father Budai was installed in Petrila, even saying that he was sent there “in mockery”.<sup>70</sup> But he proved to be a worthy servant, redoing the painting and erecting a fence around the church.

From the testimonies of the parishioners who knew him and are still alive today, we learn that Father Budai made catechesis with them even before the 1989 Revolution, every Sunday afternoon, interpreting the Holy Scripture<sup>71</sup>. The people of Petrila knew that he had been in political prison, for the reason that he did not want to renounce his faith. Sometimes he told them how difficult it had taken him to the camps. He remained divorced from his wife who remarried.

They keep the memory of a very zealous priest and a very severe and punctual man, almost never wavering. He cared a lot about the communion of the faithful at the Liturgy and organized celebrations with the children. His sermon was listened to with great attention, for he had the gift of speaking and singing. During Great Lent he made masses for the faithful, and from the flour brought by the people he asked them to make “pogace” (a little bun) for Holy Week and only that they could eat all week, and he waited for everyone to confess and then he received communion. Of all the sins, the harshest was towards gossip<sup>72</sup>. If he stopped someone from Communion, he would call him after communion and give him a drink from a glass of holy water, this being a true lesson in humility in the sight of all for the canonized<sup>73</sup>.

What I was able to find out from the priests in Hunedoara is that Fr. Budai worked hard to rebuild the two churches in Petrila, both the roof and the interior (painting). This was a brave thing to do during the communist period, when the state put all the stops for such works. The special relationship with his parishioners is also recorded, although they kept him in the memory of a very rigorous priest, especially in terms of services, silence and cleanliness in the church<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> The oral testimony of Dochia Chirvase, parishioner during the ministry of Fr. Budai to Petrila.

<sup>71</sup> The oral testimony of Dochia Chirvase.

<sup>72</sup> The oral testimony of Dochia Chirvase.

<sup>73</sup> The oral testimony of Gheorghe Chirvase, parishioner during the ministry of Fr. Budai to Petrila.

<sup>74</sup> The oral testimony of Dochia Chirvase.

It seems that he had to carry the heavy cross to the end, being sick and oppressed by some people whom he forgave, praying for their correction<sup>75</sup>. But he did not want to retire, being very attached to the church and the priestly ministry. In the year of his death he went to bless the houses on Theophany feast for the last time and he fell, injuring his leg. People urged him to stay at home to be treated, but he asked them: but who serves in church?<sup>76</sup>

In the last few days, he felt his end and asked a priest from nearby to come and confess and receive communion. After the soul exit service, he fell asleep easily. It was October 5, 2000. Father Budai asked to be buried near the wall of his beloved church, in a set of bright but very old vestments, which he cared about very much<sup>77</sup>.

### III. Conclusions

The twentieth century, with the two world wars, the Cold War, the establishment of communism in a large part of the European world, in addition to the one that had already been done in Russia, China, Vietnam and other parts of the world, represented a huge trauma, a great wound. Especially for Eastern and Central Europe, the establishment of communism meant a crucifixion in which the old ordinances in which the world had lived and received Christ wanted to be overthrown.

As far as Romania is concerned, it was completely against this atheistic ideological system, this proletarian dictatorship, which was introduced in our country by force of arms and by suffocating ideological propaganda and, of course, by the terror that engulfed the entire country. With the establishment of communism and the creation of the people's state, Romania became a large prison. Anyone with dignity, anyone who tried to express his opinion, to have a different opinion, not to align himself exactly with the orders of the communist party and state, was considered an enemy and had to be extirpated, eliminated, had to be re-educated. That

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<sup>75</sup> The oral testimony of Dochia Chirvase.

<sup>76</sup> The oral testimony of Gheorghe Chirvase.

<sup>77</sup> The oral testimony of Gheorghe Chirvase.

is why the ditches, the roads, the forests were filled with the corpses of those who did not correspond to the new order, the country was filled with prisons that were supposed to swallow all the so-called enemies of the people and this popular order.

At the forefront of those who had to be arrested for the decapitation of any dignity, any courage and any normal social and economic order were the priests. The Romanian Orthodox Church has given from its ranks many priests and monks who suffered in communist prisons, some to the point of martyric death, which is evidenced this year by the canonization of several great confessors and priests who went through or even died in communist prisons, showing themselves to be confessors and martyrs.

Among the priests of Arad, we mention St. Hilarion Felea, but also the martyr father Sinesie Ioja and other fathers. Here, from the Caceu-Felea priestly group, we have particularly highlighted the archpriest of Arad since 1958, Fr. Alexandru Budai.

From the information gathered from the Securitate files, but also from other information of historians or those who knew him, we have seen how much he suffered and how much he went through in life, because his life is nothing more than the small expression of what Romania experienced on a much larger scale.

In the life of the confessing father Al. Budai, we read all the pains, all the traumas, all the struggles, all the flight, all the effort and anxieties that tormented like frightening demons, the soul of the Romanian nation. He also went through all this, but he carried his cross with dignity, he was patient. Although his wife was forced to leave him in order to save her children and find work, Father Budai remained celibate after his release from prison. He carried his cross unnoticed even after the years of freedom, but not of justice, after the 1989 Revolution, because he remained in the shadows, without asking for justice, without asking for revenge, without accusing, with the conscience that he carried his cross, that he did what he had to do, that he served Christ and, like a lamb, in the image of the divine Lamb that St. John the Baptist shows us, he suffered everything in silence, without rebellion, without resistance.

Thus, we have tried to highlight, among the many flowers of the Orthodox priestly confession, which have been brought as a gift to Christ, a flower that has its fragrance, its wonderful colors, its unique beauty, and which is in a special way the flower of confession, faith and carrying of the cross of the confessor Father Alexandru Budai.