

# **Valeriu Gafencu – Confessor of the Love and Sacrifice for Christ**

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**Abstract:**

*This study, titled “Valeriu Gafencu – Confessor of the Love and Sacrifice for Christ” wishes to emphasize on the one hand the spirit of pure and sincere sacrifice for Christ and for the others of one of the confessors of the right faith in the Communist prisons, Valeriu Gafencu. On the other hand, the study wishes to underline the dignified attitude that left not room for compromise of this “saint of the prisons” as father N. Steinhardt calls him.*

**Keywords:** *Christ, confessor, love, sacrifice, dignity*

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## **Introduction**

To speak about the situation of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist era means to remember one of the darkest periods in the history of Romania, which left deep scars in the memory of the entire nation, whose wounds are not healed yet.

The Romanian Orthodox Church as a majority between 1945 and 1989, as it still is today, was, numerically the most affected. Both the church hierarchy and the members of the Church, intellectuals, men of culture, authentic Christians which inferred the direction of the Romanian society under the communist regime and took a trenchant or moderate position towards the state authority were put to silence.

The relationship between the communist State and the Romanian Orthodox Church started from the premise of the latter’s culpability as a mystical-religious institution, of the hierarchs, priests and monks who maintained amongst the simple people a mystical atmosphere full of superstitions and an encouragement of the subversive elements hidden under the monastic clothing (Visarion 2009: 10). If we were to give an

example to this respect, the thought goes right at the famous movement from Antim, also known as “The Burning Bush” (Jinga 2001: 48-58; Plămădeală 2002).

Glorifying the heroes is the material of an educative history, which is without a doubt fruitful. Its value may be reduced if it is wrongly practiced by falling into a pseudo-patriotic pride [For the communists such type of anamnesis was exclusively propagandistic and it reached the cynic performance to praise the communist manifestation of the one killed even by the “party” (the case of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu), or the performance to present the traitor as a person who sacrifices consciously for “the cause” (the case of Vasile Roaită)], and it can also be lost, nowadays, pray to the *demythologizing* trend. *Heroes* – other than martyrs – are not ignored by the Christian community to which they belong and they are mentioned at the Holy Liturgy during a special litany which has the formula “those who died to defend the country”. *Martyrs* can sometimes be identified, at a first glance, with heroes. The characteristics of martyrdom are: violent death, hate towards faith manifested by the persecutors and the conscious acceptance of the will of God (*Martiri pentru Hristos, din România, în perioada regimului comunist* 2007: 11) (obviously in the sense of accepting martyrdom).

The martyrs of the communist regime occupy in the history of the Universal Church the same position as, for example, the martyrs of the first centuries. Besides the historical ecclesiastical recognition, a possible consecration of some of them will eventually place them within the Synaxarium. From that moment on they will receive not only the characteristic of saints, which they already had before God, but the actual recognition by the living faithful, who will come into communion with them in private and liturgical prayers (Popescu 2007: [http://www.punctecardinale.ro/dec\\_2007/dec\\_2007\\_08.html](http://www.punctecardinale.ro/dec_2007/dec_2007_08.html)).

The prayer addressed to saints is one of intercession, of intermediation with God, and it operates to the extent of the relationship between the supplicant and the Saint, which is a relationship of love. The direct knowledge of a saint increases within the heart of a faithful the closeness to any other saint and to God Himself. Someone who has met one of the martyrs wrote:

From the moment I met Jimboiu, I stopped reading the *Lives of the Saints* as a common reading. Once I met him, any doubt, any suspicion that there have been and continue to be saints on earth was erased from my heart (Bordeianu 2001: 370-371).

We are confident that all these martyrs – the ones we know and the many others that we don't know – are blessed for eternity, for they have truly been poor in spirit, they mourned, they were meek, they hungered and thirsted for righteousness, they were merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted because of righteousness, insulted, and all kinds of evil was said against them. And they did some of these things in general, erasing from our hearts the idea that the *Sermon on the Mount* could not be lived completely and utterly, manly and at all times (Popescu 2007: [http://www.punctecardinale.ro/dec\\_2007/dec\\_2007\\_08.html](http://www.punctecardinale.ro/dec_2007/dec_2007_08.html)).

### **I. Valeriu Gafencu – “The Saint of the prisons” – a general perspective**

Although he did not participate actively to the legionary rebellion, because of his affiliation to the “Brotherhoods of the Cross”, the student Valeriu Gafencu was arrested in the autumn of 1941 and sentenced politically to 25 years of hard work by the dictatorial regime of Ion Antonescu. “I have been, am and will be a legionary” these are the words spoken by Valeriu Gafencu during the trial that sentenced him as a political prisoner, thus assuming his political option beyond any type of pressure. He was 20 and he was a student in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year at the Faculty of Law and Philosophy from Iassy. The renowned professor of Civil Law, Constantin Angelescu, defended him during the trial, and he declared: “He is one of the best students I have ever had during my career as a professor”. His plea was useless because the dictatorship of Antonescu did not look with a friendly eye on the national-Christian activism of young Gafencu, who wanted more and more students to become members of the “Brotherhoods of the Cross” in order to prepare themselves to fight against the Bolshevik communism that threatened Romania at that time. And Ioan Ianolide said:

Life goes on between the thick walls of the prison. Valeriu prayed a lot. He often fell on his knees, with his head bowed to the ground and cried, asking for the divine mercy, help and illumination. At night he read the Supplicatory Canon to

the Mother of God, and during the day he read several akathists. He attended the services frequently, he confessed humbly, he communed with joy. He genuflected a lot, depending on his physical condition. Love made him offer himself to his friends in a deep and sincere spiritual level. He always looked for advice from those who were like him and they fought together to be pure. He cleaned his soul every day, he was changing, he learned to live in the spirit, according to the Christian teaching. His progress was natural, tending to create the new man. By the grace of God, he walked the path of the most authentic Orthodox spirituality (Ianolide 2006: 46-47).

Father Gheorghe Calciu speaks in the same manner about Valeriu Gafencu:

People received from him this message of love and prayer without him theorizing it. Valeriu was a man who lived the word of God in a very high level, I might even say at the level of the saints, of the great fathers and anachorettes. He didn't speak as much as he lived, for if he had done such thing, it would have meant for us not to understand anything. Valeriu was above understanding. His simple presence, his simple appearance – said the boys that lived in the same cell with him – brought spiritual peace, peace of mind and peace of heart and gave birth within the soul to the devotion to him. All those who lived in the same cell with him were devoted to him. He called your love for him through his love for you. I have no doubt he is a saint (Calciu-Dumitreasa 2007: 43).

## **II. Valeriu Gafencu – confessor of the love and sacrifice for Christ**

In the times between the two World Wars, the discussion regarding the relationship between Christianity and nationalism, between Orthodoxy and nationality will come to bring a new justification to the national principle of Church, but this time not on a historical basis, but on an ideological one. The “Gândirist” movement – on which the discussion was focused and which moved to and from, on an ideological level, between the Christian ecumenicity and the ethnical pluralism without managing to find the proper balance between the two – although it succeeded to stir some interest for religious problems within the cultural class, it also created confusion through the manner in which it tried to justify the national principle within the Church of Christ.

While the representatives of the Church maintain the previous position, a series of laic intellectuals and several theologians tried to find a more solid basis for the relationship between Orthodoxy and the

Romanian nation, other than that of the historical reality of their cohabitation for so many centuries. In their opinion there are two fundamentals for the intimate relationship between Orthodoxy and Romanianism; one of them is a particular exigency of the Romanian soul, the other a necessity of Orthodoxy as such.

Because of its intimate structure, some will say, the Romanian soul turned spontaneously towards Orthodoxy, just as a plant turns to light (Crainic 1936: 378-379; Ionescu 1941: 373).

The centre of gravity of Christianity is situated in the spiritual life of the people. And if we extend the sphere of the spiritual life, it fulfills in the spiritual sphere. Here, within the spirit and soul the Christian teaching functions. But culture is also located within spirit and soul. It is unimaginable a life in spirit and soul in conformity with the human dignity, that does not feel the need of a religious anchoring. And it is equally unimaginable that it pays minimum importance to culture. Thus, from a structural point of view that is of the constitutive elements of the human being, religion and culture have a sum of contingences which hinder a delimitation of their fields of manifestation (Ilaş 2006: *passim*).

“Because it does not have a geographical centre, the centre of each Orthodox Church is where the heart, the power and the vitality of the nation is!” said Dumitru Stăniloae (Stăniloae 1943: 242). And Nichifor Crainic (Stăniloae 1936: 404; 1935: 76-84) said: “In the East, at the beginning of the Christian era, nationality and faith appear in a harmonious co-operation, in organic fusion, similar to the soul and body of the same being” (Crainic 1935: 61), and father Stăniloae continues:

As opposed to Catholicity, which by being international and universal passes over the natural and organic borders between nations [...] Orthodoxy has the deep feeling of ethnicity of which it never separated during history.

### **III. The Christian spiritual community**

The thought of a *Christian community* followed Gafencu in the last period of his life. As we have already seen, being aware of his sin and his repentance did not make him deep grouchy within himself, forgetting about the others, but with the grace that resided within his soul, he came to a *complete Christian conception*, capable of understanding in a very nuanced manner the role of Christianity in today’s world.

Valeriu Gafencu said about the role of Christianity:

Now and in the future we need two Christian processes: one of *re-christianization of the Christian* and the other of *christianization of the non-Christians*. By re-christianization we understand the strengthening of the Christian faith, the effort of authentic Christian living, steps of spiritual perfection, active Christian community, joint, brotherly and defining the forms of Christian life. But Christianity has lost its Messianic role and no longer has the historical necessary force to polarize, to deify the world. Thus, it lives an open space for the pagan, atheists and Jewish. The one who believes without being a missionary, that person hasn't found the beauty of faith yet. [...] Christianity is reality, it is Christ in reality. If life is unique and always new, how can we live in the past? And if life has come to the nowadays forms how can it deny its past? By tradition we do not live in the past, but we give continuity to the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. With discernment, with care, with wisdom we need to learn from tradition the things necessary both in reality and for the future. [...] Eternity starts now. Only if we live eternity now we have it eschatologically, otherwise we lose it. Hence, the Christians make history, but they do not confound with history, because only when we aspire continuously for eternity we have light and the power to make out of history new steps, higher and higher to the Kingdom of God. [...] It is a good idea to guide ourselves according to the classical example of the apostolic community: to know well the Christian teaching in order to see its applicability in reality; to unite in a solidary work, in the light and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to live in a community of love, according to the will of God; to pray, to officiate the Liturgy, to unite with Christ, so that by His grace and gift we find ourselves into His Kingdom. [...] Christians propose spirituality to the world, and the world needs to find the corresponding forms of life in reality. The foundation of the world on faith is an uninterrupted renewal of the Gospel. The apostolic and martyrial spirit must remain alive forever. The holy aspirations must vibrate permanently into the world. We aspire for a Christian world, burning in the flame of faith and love, following the passions and the martyrdom, glorifying the Resurrection, the Transfiguration and the Ascension (Moise de la Oasa 2007: 170-172).

This is how he tried to define, with the help of several principles, the fundamentals and the aspirations of a spiritual community according to the pattern from Târgu-Ocna. Written after liberation by father Voicescu, on a book confiscated at his arrest in 1959, these principles have come, with the help of the Security, to us nowadays. They express synthetically the thinking of Valeriu Gafencu, and they are trustworthy foundations both for the individual spiritual ascension and especially of any common spiritual work. These principles are:

### **1. To be a Christian elite**

To be a Christian elite means that for the love of God you kill every bad thing within and hate all evil thing outside you, and out of love for people to bear the cross of Christ every day and to give your life for the salvation of the world.

To be a Christian elite means to guide the world's ship towards Christ, following Him. Thus the world, seeing the example of such life, consents to follow Christ.

By the charismatic elite the world reconciles with God and finds peace and the blessed solving of all the problems that torment it. The charismatic elite comes into prominence by the good example in living and by the consent of the people. The bad example of living takes it out of the charismatic state and out of the consent of the people (Moise de la Oasa 2007: 175).

### **2. We aspire for Resurrection**

We want to bring the nation to Church in order to reconcile with God.

We want to create a school of Christian education and culture for the perfection of man, a school that will accumulate all the human creative energies.

We want to shape the new man, born again from God and from his personal effort.

We want to accomplish the Kingdom of God on earth with the help of the Holy Spirit, fighting against the forces of evil.

We want to live in a Christian community that gives unity in the diversity of the forms of life and pulls man out of moral and physical sufferance. By the new man we want to give a Christian expression, through form and content, to all human problems of all times (Moise de la Oasa 2007: 176).

### **3. Principles of Christian living**

*The principle of love:* we submit our love to the love of God and in it we love one another.

*The principle of the spiritual dignity:* we acknowledge the truth and our position in relation to it. We are impartial, acknowledging

everybody's right. Knowing all the conspiracy of the evil, we chose wisely a fair fight in which even those who fall are victorious.

*The principle of education:* every day I recant more and more the old man to perfect in the new one. It is not I who lives, but Christ lives within me.

*The principle of prayer:* we accompany all our life of prayer, alone and in community. Prayer is the first spiritual weapon.

*The principle of unity:* where there are three, or any number of people, we are one. Through Christ and the Christian martyrs, whose victory we also continue against the forces of evil, as fighters of the chosen people in order to achieve the Kingdom of God on earth. One enemy among us is more dangerous than a thousand from outside. Love between us is stronger than anything that might separate us.

*The principle of obedience:* we submit our will in all respect to our superiors, becoming obedient to death. Where there are two, one of them is obedient. Obedience leads the Church to victory.

*The principle of liberty:* in Christ we know the spiritual liberty and that of pure action, full of wisdom and courage. Liberty truly respects obedience, garnishes unity, increases responsibility.

*The principle of the ecumenical advice:* each of us persists in deciphering the truth, but we all have a single decision made in ecumenical advice. Thus we reconcile liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy and innovation and tradition, all under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

*The principle of community:* one completes what is missing from another, so that nobody possesses in excess and nobody misses anything. The ideal form is reached by those who offer everything, in humbleness. Thus, including the individual interest within the general one, we aspire to universal harmony.

*The principle of the permanent sacrifice:* we work and sacrifice until death, having in front of us the joy of salvation.

*The principle of knowledge:* we know everything that can be known and we master everything that can be mastered to the use, ascension and salvation of man. We test all so that we can hold on to what is good (Moise de la Oasa 2007: 173-174).



During his detention, Valeriu Gafencu was not alone in the line of an intense Christian living, but he was part of a group that shared the same spiritual orientation, formed of souls chosen and gifted by God with the act of intuition and understanding of the future: doctor Traian Trifan, student Ioan Ianolide (who will become his brother-in-law), Anghel Papacion (that will later on become Arsenie Papacioc from Techirghiol), Marin Naidim, Virgil Maxim, Aurel Dragodan, Constantin Țoțea, Marian Traian, priest Vasilie Serghie, Ion Schiau, Costică Pascu and many others, young legionaries imprisoned for the same reason. They established a line of Christian and Romanian behavior for all the political prisoners, as a model of attitude, despite of the form of oppression of the regime. This attitude of confessing the divine truth both in the personal and communitarian life determined the transformation of the torture of detention into a spiritual method of purification of the soul.

Valeriu was the heart of the group of mystics, and he managed to give a philokalic living to faith through the fight against passions and evil thoughts, according to the unseen battle of the ascetic fathers. The more the terror of detention increased the more the spiritual life of the young men imprisoned grew on the way to perfection. Marin Naidim, one of the brothers in sufferance said about Valeriu's efforts: "He told me that even if we can't change the world, the least we can do is kindle its interest, make it feel uncomfortable when it acts bad, to create problems, to make it ask questions, to change its ways" (Cherhat 2003: 10). Valeriu was deeply preoccupied with the awareness of sin, that he considered elementary in the life of a Christian. He tried to put to order his inner world, and one day, in the summer of 1943, as he himself confessed, he had a shocking revelation of the reality of sin in his own person: "A huge day! I confessed and communed. I live great moments, the greatest of my life! A turning point in my life! I let myself wholly and completely into the will of God" (Ianolide 2006: 225).

Valeriu Gafencu is one of the young men that died for Christ, fighting to defend the Orthodox faith and the Romanian nation from Satan's attacks. Many call him *Saint of the prisons*.

In 1942 I found him in Aiud. Handsome, tall, with blue lively eyes, he drew my attention when I met him. Humble, with exceptional spiritual preoccupations. Exquisite readings, the best of friends, he wanted to remain and managed to remain honorable at all times. Wherever there was something special and

beautiful to do, he was present. He was a young man who stirred everyone's attention with each day. In prison there were also bad attitudes that were worthy to be criticized. He knew them. He kept an open eye, but never judged anybody. He read only the Bible and religious books. He was very intelligent and understood quickly the right meaning of the holy texts. It was a real pleasure to discuss with him. I advised him to remain in contact with our literature and some of the valuable scientific works that is to read also other type of literature than religious. But he refused. "If I have the finest dishes, why should I resort to surrogates?" he said. «If I find complete satisfaction in what I read, I wish for nothing else. God can be found anywhere, but especially in His written revelation, in the Bible. Here we have the privilege to look for Him. Outside, if we ever get out, we will see». And he walked ahead on his way. We worked together in the same team at the destruction of the canal from inside the prison. During breaks, when we were resting, I was delighted to see this handsome young man, tall like a fir, with his wide forehead, clear eyes and such beautiful pursuits (Grebenea 1996: 213).

After 1948 he was taken from Aiud.

I don't know where they took him. He passed through Jilava. He enchanted all those who have met him. The strangers that met him, meaning those that were not legionaries, the Jewish or other people, spoke about him as if he were a saint. He died, but I don't know where. Maybe in Pitești, in the great passions and flames of the re-education that criminal Nicolai applied to our students. He remains a name that those who have met him will always mention with veneration. Even now the wonderful perfume of the meetings with this young man still lingers in my heart. I also remember two of Gafencu's friends from Aiud: Marin Naidin and Nicolae Mazăre, both of them eminent, admirable, impressive, exceptional. I don't know if they ever got out of the great "fire" in which they burnt in 1949 and at the beginning of 1950, when thousands of prisoners from Aiud and other prisons and camps from our country perished (Grebenea 1996: 213-214).

Ioan Muntean said:

After so many years during which he never had contact with his family (Valeriu Gafencu) he received a pack from his sister in Bucharest. And we all found him one day when he was passing with the bucket, sneaking away from the guard, that he opened the visor (the little opening made in the door to serve food was also called visor) and threw us a little pack, a small bait from his three kilos he had received. Before we even got the time to give it back to him, he whispered like an excuse: - *It's more like a brotherly thought*, and then he left in a hurry to take something to those from the other rooms he passed by, his gift of mind and heart. This was Valeriu Gafencu. In the exposures that followed what did he have to say from outside, for it had been so many years since he was in prison and he no longer presented interest, but he had to be humiliated by this exposure, to destroy

in the eyes of those around him the image of role model we all had about him. What did a saint have to say to a thief? Maybe if he was a spiritual father, maybe he had an evil thought to confess, but no deed. However, gestures such as the one with the sharing of his food could be politicized as “legionary help”. *And Valeriu, who was a confessor of the Christian love among us, was about to be humiliated for his good deed (Muntean 1997: 53-54).*

God had poured unto him the *gift of beauty*:

Physically, he seemed an archangel, wearing either the fiery sword of the divine word, or the pure lily full of mysterious perfume. Morally, one could not reproach him a thing, for humbleness was combined with the tenacity of his decisions. Spiritually he was transfigured all the time, in an ecstatic almost continuous state; you could not tell if what he says he also sees in spirit or if the Spirit speaks through him. His life was a flight to high altitudes that could hardly be followed. When I was together with father Serghie Vasile, under whose guidance we learned the hesychast prayer, Valeriu was irradiating, at the level of the sensorial perceptions, an interior warmth with and intensity hard to understand and to express, the words being useless in the attempt to express. There was over him a divine gift that situated him beyond my understanding. I was young, novice in the acts of spiritual effort scheduled consciously, and many times I was on the brink of falling away. Father Vasile Serghie loved me very much and he felt me like a barometer, he brought me to a spiritual sailing line and he created, with an exceptional pedagogical tact, a connection between the two stages of spiritual life, mine and Valreiu’s, and he knew how to lower the sight to the level of my possibilities of interior and exterior living. In common prayer I felt like a chicken fallen out of his nest, shaking with my wings barely powdered with the puff of faith, and I felt Valeriu like an eagle that poises up high, pulling me up to him. Valeriu was nonconformist. He was breaking the norms with the courage of the spirit, without scarifying truth in personal illusions, guilty of trespassing the canons. In the liberty of his spirit everything was included naturally into the archetype of Christ, Man and God. This direct ascension to Christ, as the entrance into your own home, where the laws and rules of behavior and self-manifestations spare you of any formalism, it seemed a contempt against divinity. That is why only a few of those who met him managed to understand him. Later, when God gave me the joy to be able to go deeper into the spiritual life, I understood that great spirits through which and in which the special gifts act cannot be judged at a worldly or religious level. Only after, with the thirst of unconditional integration into Christ, you can commune to a certain extent with the understanding of other spirits, for Christ takes you down the same road, but on your own feet. This liberty in the spirit, of which Saint Apostle Paul speaks amazingly, of not judging all alone in what you do, but leaving Christ to judge you, - a state in which you do not work, but the grace works through you, - is something Valeriu had (Maxim 2002: 185).

His presence, anywhere, in any type of meeting between us, those who were close spiritually – called by some decently, and by other ironically “mystics” – as well as among those who were less initiated in the spiritual life, generated joy and respect and sometimes concern or fear: *joy*, for what you were about to hear from him, beyond the barren daily problems. His word took you out of time and made you ignore the human poverty, sublimating sufferance and accepting it as a redeeming gift; *respect*, for the beauty of the truths expressed at your own level of understanding. Each of us could taste from Christ’s being the sweetest part, the one that fitted him; *holy fear* or concern, for the thought of your misachievement, that the personal involvement in those witnessed as truths that condition life itself and the God given existence will require a break, tearing and death, sacrifice and continuous self-devotion. Valeriu personified the Christian fighter that is in the same time on top of the mountain of sufferance (abdication of passions, stage of purgation) and in the forest with wild beasts (the fight with the spirits, the stage of illumination) and in the swamp of despair (tearing it with the weapon of the Cross, carried consciously, subjectively and accepted “not as I will, but as You will”, the uniting stage, perfection). His presence gave trust to every soul, perceiving his will for spiritual ascension to perfection (Maxim 2002: 185-186).

#### **IV. Valeriu Gafencu – an example of high Christian life**

When the student Valeriu Gafencu was sentenced as a political prisoner, the holy land of Bessarabia and North Bukovina was freed from under the red yoke of Bolsheviks, after the eastern war against the Soviet Union. Because the situation of the war was worsening, Valeriu’s mother, together with his other three sisters, Valentina, Eleonora and Elisabeta, still pupils, fled to safety in March 1943 and settled in Făgăraș. Valeriu was imprisoned in Aiud, the toughest prison of the country and he sent regular encouragement letters to his family, and in the same time offering a Christian education to his sisters. Here’s what Eleonora Gafencu-Colgiu, Valeriu’s sister confessed later on:

Our father was deported in Siberia, and our brother, a student, was a political prisoner in Aiud, from where he wrote to us taking care of the education of his younger sisters. We became very attached to the people from Ardeal, they helped

us a lot, we connected spiritually, and we spent the beautiful years of our adolescence especially going to Sâmbăta Monastery, where we met father Arsenie Boca (...) We now have a beautiful united family, with husbands and children, grandchildren, accomplished as Valeriu and father Arsenie taught us (Gafencu 2006: 49-50).

To a refugee from Bessarabia and separated from your family, to be sentenced on political reasons to 25 years at the age of 20, to see the end of your earthly life approaching after 11 years of prison and to be able to state that you are a happy man, seems highly impossible to most of us.

This is possible through faith. Through faith sufferance transforms into joy. The life of Valeriu Gafencu shows us just that (Stoica in Gafencu 2006: 4-6).

The fact that Valeriu found the way to happiness is obvious in his letters to his dear. The revelation of happiness lived by Valeriu in the inferno of the prisons is a lesson of which we, those who enjoy liberty, must learn the thing that we do not have the right to complain of anything when happiness is ready at hand for everyone – Jesus Christ, the faith in His word, listening to His commandments, following His virtues. This is a happy life. The rest is just vanity.

The letters sent from Valeriu also represent “a guide to confession” to clean the conscience of passions and sins, this being the first condition to achieve happiness. The happiest day of our life is the day when God forgives our sins through a sincere confession and when we commune with the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who sacrificed His life for our sins.

Valeriu shares with everybody the advice he offered to his mother and his three younger sisters, because he loved everybody and everything that is created by God. Valeriu gave his accept that all his intimate confessions are read by all those he cared for, meaning by everybody. The fact that he opens himself before us, the sins with which he fought his entire life as a man who didn't have sins, urge us to proceed to a very thorough exam of the conscience, to listen to our mind: “let us live in truth, let us tear from sin, let us sacrifice everything for Christ, for the truth. This is the only way we can be saved, the only way we can achieve happiness”.

Happiness is so close to us! We who live in liberty cannot see it. Valeriu urges us:

look for happiness within your souls. Do not look for it outside yourselves. Do not expect happiness to come from another place but from within, from your soul, where the Lord of Love, Christ lives. If you wait for happiness to come from outside yourselves, you will live from one deception to the other and you will never reach happiness (Moise de la Oasa 2007: 200).

The advice Valeriu gave to his dear ones for them to follow and find happiness are universally true, and if most of the people followed them there would be more kindness and understanding in the world and God would not let so many disasters to happen. It would be so good if these advice are understood by as many people as possible; they could be so useful: the faithful could strengthen their faith, and those who haven't found God and His Son Jesus Christ yet, and do not know the true happiness could discover the meaning of life, they could resurrect from spiritual death which is worse than the death of the body.

This man "full of faith" (Baciu 2004: 122), was imprisoned at the age of 19 (Trifoiu 1998: 5). "He was locked up and passed through several prisons [...] He was imprisoned for 11 years in Iași, Aiud, Alba Iulia, Târgu Ocna, Galda de Jos, Pitești" (Bujoreanu 2007: 146-147).

He lived for three years locked in a cell. [...] He turned his eyes to one direction only that is towards the sky. Meanwhile he prayed continuously, he read a lot and he meditated on himself. He rarely spoke to anybody. Valeriu "had a pair of blue eyes that seemed to smile: they smiled at all times" (Rădulescu 2002: 56).

I have read many books of Christian teaching and I have listened to many sermons that have illuminated my mind to discover the truth, but I have never met such a convincing manner to show the way to happiness as in Valeriu Gafencu's letters. Maybe this conviction is generated by the thought that these letters are sent from another world, from a world full of suffering of the body and of the soul, from the hell of the worst prisons, where the soul is purified of all sins, of those that he did and of those that you imagine you could have done (Stoica in Gafencu 2006: 5).

The ways Valeriu shows with persuasion to obtain happiness and spiritual peace, that were lived with intensity and he did not learn it from books or of what he heard, are numerous: preserving the purity of the heart, knowing the evangelical truth, the proximity of the hearts to the

word of our Savior Jesus Christ, permanent prayer, fasting, mercy, love for everybody, following God's will, accepting the sufferance, humbleness, sincerity before God, before our neighbor and before ourselves, reading holy books (Stoica in Gafencu 2006: 5).

Sincere faith and the protection of God made Valeriu to no longer need the compassion and the cheer of those around him, but he started to cheer and help those who were still free. Valeriu was not concerned for the fate of his beloved ones because he knew their hearts were pure, having faith in God and love for everyone. Oh!... if only we could say the same about the young men of our days. There would be so many happy parents and they would no longer be concerned for their fate because they'd know they are on the right path protected by God (Stoica in Gafencu 2006: 5).

Regarding his social life, he was always considered an example of unique and pure behavior. The character of his personality was made up of the purity of his life, his virtuous soul and the intuition of the fact that only by becoming a soldier of Christ man can fulfill his earthly duty. He had a dignified attitude to fight for the cause of Christianity and our nation (Bujoreanu 2007: 147).

In prison he became a character whose name was spoken with admiration by all his fellows. Here is where he lived his biggest torments, where, he says: "I read a lot, I meditated a great deal [...] I prayed" (Muntean 1997: 54).

He had suffered terribly. Alone, away from the noise of the world, similar to the hesychasts of the *Patericon*, he started to look within his soul. In those moments he saw his soul full of sins, just as the holy monks, and he felt the need to detach from them (Bujoreanu 2007: 147-148).

At the sanatorium from Târgu Ocna, because of his spiritual life, he became the central figure although he was sick. He was the centre of the spiritual life. Here there was a trend of continuous prayer. "We never had political repugnance between us there" said Mihai Rădulescu (Rădulescu 2002: 56). "Everybody agreed on the fact that Valeriu Gafencu knew extremely well the Orthodox doctrine. On the other hand, he knew very well the technique for the prayer of the heart, which he applied and taught

to the others. Almost everybody who came into contact with him was illuminated by this light he spread around him”.

Here are some fragments from the letter Valeriu Gafencu sent from prison:

*I write to you now with my soul at peace with the light of the truth. I ask you with all my heart, full of love for you, to follow with your heart and mind, step by step, word by word, everything I write to you now. Life is other than what people imagine in general. The Man himself is other than what he thinks he is. The Truth is other than what the human mind imagines. I've been writing to you from prison for many years (Aiud, 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1946) (Moise de la Oasa 2007: 177-178; Ianolide 2006: 231-233).*

*Keep your soul pure, act with great dignity and elegance, suffer this hard trials for they have their purpose, from God, and pray unceasingly. Pure girls, from a good family, with a dignified attitude, with spiritual value in general, will always be precious (Aiud, 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1943).*

*It is essential that you live a pure life. Entrust yourselves to the will of God, for he cares best for us. I tell you these things because I myself have lived them and observed them in my life full of love... full of torment (Aiud, 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1945).*

*There is no true happiness but in Jesus Christ. That's the one you should look for and achieve. Do not pay attention on how the world understands and lives life. You have a guide in life, the Christian path, so guide your steps according to this guide (Aiud, 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1945) (Gafencu 2006: 12-28).*

## Conclusions

The religious life of Valeriu Gafencu has several characteristics: steady faith and interest for the influence of Orthodoxy in the world (Guță in Trifoiu 1998: 81); love for the people, even in harsh conditions and in sufferance; a personal life of hesychast prayer (Trifoiu 1998: 81; Lungranu in Trifoiu 1998: 100) and intermediation for the world for its renewal in Christ (Ianolide 2006: 28); transfiguration, after a strong concentration in prayer and ravishment to heavenly happiness (Ioanide in Trifoiu 1998: 90); complete dedication to God, uniting the spiritual preoccupations with the social ones; confession of the Christian faith “in time and beyond time”, without offending other religious beliefs; patience with Christian faith of different pains, illnesses, but also of the offenses



and tortures during the investigations; self-abandonment pushed to sacrificing his life (Trifoiu 1998: 90); the joy that overwhelmed the trials he went through (Gafencu 1997: 188); foretelling of his death (Trifoiu 1998: 23); serenity of his death: “I am happy, I’m going to God! Pray with me for my soul and for yours!” (Popescu 2005: 116).

Valeriu, although prisoner, he was truly free in his fight against sin and passions. He soon understood that only through the mystery of Holy Confession instituted by the Church, the soul purifies at times of all the dirt that accumulates even in the toughest fighter. He embraced the weapon of the prayer of Jesus and on his fiery way of his meeting with God in his heart he was in the Kingdom of God with the Spirit. Valeriu Gafencu loved his neighbor just as Christ did, to sacrifice. He suffered and worked until Christ became image in those close to him, through his word, prayer and the example of his life. Everybody loved Valeriu. When they looked into his eyes even the most grim criminals shuddered at the sight of his holy purity and natural love. Those who have met him could never be the same, they transfigured under the power of the grace that resided in Valeriu especially at the end of his life, when he spent more time within with Christ, than in the ward from Târgu Ocna with his brothers in sufferance (“Cuvânt despre Noul Mărturisitor Valeriu Gafencu” in *Koinonia* 2010).

“Life is Christ” – and Valeriu accepted to prolong this life of bodily sufferance just to be able to speak to the others about our Lord Jesus Christ.

Among the last words of the Martyr Valeriu he said: “Do not forget to pray to God for us to meet all there. Lord give me the slavery that frees the spirit and take from me the liberty that thralls my soul”. Valeriu Gafencu left this life purified through prayer, high spiritual living, overcoming all physical sufferance without any sign of revolt.

These martyrs served to the supreme sacrifice. Death for them was not death, but a passing to a life that is infinitely superior. For those who believe in God, death is not a failure, it does not represent a final point. It is the threshold that surpasses the two worlds, the gate through which we enter to heaven. For a Christian, to die for Christ is a great happiness. The one who truly wishes to die for Christ must die for passions first. “Man has naturally this fear of death, of the destruction of the body. That is why

it is a wonderful thing that clothing in the faith of the Cross, he despises the earthly things and is not afraid of death for Christ” (Radu Gyr, *Rost* 2004: 44).

Valeriu Gafencu was the man of the complete sacrifice, for he sacrificed willingly and consciously, without hesitation, his youth, profession, family, liberty and life for Christ and for the Romanian nation. Mircea Eliade called these young men, who confronted the terror of prisons with their extraordinary courage, thinking they could achieve a Romania “*as the holy sun on the sky*”, using an inspired expression “*the monks of the love for the nation*” (Alupei 2003: 6). Valeriu, martyred when he was 30, after 11 years of terrible prison, fully deserves this title of Romanian greatness. He even promised God that after his liberation from prison he will chose to live his faith in the monastic world. But the divine grace had chosen otherwise: the cell of his prison was his “sanctum” where he met and went through the stages of purification and perfection characteristic to the mystic experience of the faith, which made from Orthodoxy a certain way to redemption.

As a *representative saint of our nation in the past century, we have to believe and confess about Valeriu Gafencu, without any doubt, what father Calciu-Dumitreasa said: “We have no greater saint than Valeriu Gafencu”.*

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