

## **The Life and Activity of Bishop Ioan Bob**

### **Abstract**

Sometimes history makes intentional or unintentional wrongs due to the lack of sources and/ or superficial interpretation of those who are writing it. The historian is often summoned by his own vocation to proclaim his trust in the positive evolution of events, being in the meantime tempted by his inner doubts.

There are people who go through life searching only for their own interests, without thinking about the public good, and in spite of this, their small good actions are deeply studied, presented in detail and revealed for the future generations as acts of philanthropy. Other, live their lives in deep respect for the public good, work assiduous and strive for the best, and their merits are shadowed by oblivion, or accuses and defamation are casted upon their work and life.

The most impressive examples are of those who carried their sufferance with discretion and dignity, without intention of capitalizing their merits for the future.

One of these was Bishop **Ioan Bob** or **Babb** (as sometimes was transliterated by Hungarians) who **had the longest and heaviest pastoral activity of all bishops of the Romanian Church United with Rome from Transylvania**. As modesty characterized him, he always did the good with discretion, being a good manager and wise advisor, in the heaviest period of history of the Romanian people from old Transylvania.

Bishop Ioan Bob fulfilled his mission in the Romanian Church United with Rome until the end of his life, being aware of the internal and international realities of his time. He did it with lucidity and subtle political wisdom, searching always for clear and convincing proofs for his pleading. We might quote therefore governor Bruckenthal who said that **“honesty and sincerity are rare features which fully compensate the bending towards science and sociability”**.

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Ioan Bob was born at Orman in the Gherla domain, baptized on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1739. He was the late and long expected son of Andrei, son of Dănilă Bob, reserve soldier after the abolishment of the noble’s insurrection. His father lived as a tenant of the Fisk, on an inherited piece of land. The newborn baby came in a family after a long line of daughters, as

result of his father's ambition to have a male descendant to carry on **tradition of their noble family**. His godfather was the fusilier Nicolae Florian from Preluca, noble community descending of Chioar and Maramureș. His father Andrei, ex-“curuț” fighter, and his mother Candida, daughter of the vicar from Jucu de Jos, maintained that atmosphere of conviviality which allowed the formation of Ioan Bob as an enterprising and adaptable man, skillful and industrious, studious, with high ambitions, zealous performer of higher commands, keeping distance from the lower state and having in the same time strong fraternal links of “**frățietete**” (**brotherhood**) and “**nemeșug**” (**nobility**), specific to the soldiers' groups of Chioar.

Lived his childhood in his parents' home from Orman, primary grades being followed in his home village with a Hungarian reformed schoolteacher. Later, his father took him to Dej, to another reformed schoolteacher, the village Orman and Gherla district being under Armenian ruling. Then his father sold all his property and moved with his family to Giula. Until young Ioan Bob was 11 years old he continued studies at Ciumăfaia, then he was enrolled to the Jesuit Seminary “**St. Joseph**” from Cluj. According to Hungarian custom, during the seminary his name was transliterated from the Romanian “**Bob**” to “**Babb**”. The later Bishop used both names in his signature. When he signed a Romanian letter written with Cyrillic alphabet he used “**Vlădica Ioan Bob**”, and when he used Latin signed as “**Episcopus Ioannes Babb**”. Soon young Ioan Bob gained the sympathy of his teachers, and some Wolfgang Mackasi offered him free lodging and coverage of all his expenses.

Graduating Philosophy studies at 21-22 years old, he wanted to join the religious life in a monastery from Blaj, in order to continue his studies abroad. He was still in doubt, thinking about the austere life of the monks, with vegetables and diary. He confessed his inner doubts to the dean Alexandru Saroși. The Dean advised him: “The monks' life is the most perfect one, but you must be advised from the beginning that once the vows taken, nothing can change your way. Therefore you must think well, so you may not regret later. You are still young and you may stay here as a novice a year more, to decide which way you shall go to the theological studies.” With his deep **desire to become a priest**, with no other way to fulfill his ambition to continue theological studies, he entered the monastery from Blaj as a novice.

He began his novitiate in September 1764, at 25 years old. With him other young novice joined the religious life: Grigore Pop from Vidra who graduated studies at Târnăvia,

Nicolae Aron from Bistra, son of archpriest from Roșia Montană and Petru Iacob Turda, who graduated studies with the teacher Silvestru Caliani from Blaj. The novices' master was Gherontie Cotoră.

During the lent of 1765, Grigore Maior teacher of grammar and syntaxes was called to Sibiu and arrested because he opposed to the nomination of Atanasie Rednic as bishop in place of Petru Pavel Aron. Then his cathedra was temporary assigned to Ioan Bob, who completed his mission until the return of Iacob Aron from Rome. This temporary assignment needed a special permission, because novices were not allowed to have assignments outside the monastery. The year of novitiate was ending and young Ioan Bob was still not decided. The superiors from the monastery of Blaj informed the Bishop Atanasie Rednic from Vienna and the bishop commanded that no one should be admitted to the vows until he returns from Vienna. The bishop returned on September 1765 and started **training the novices for taking the vows**. He emphasized on the importance of obeying strictly the monastic rules with no hesitation.

From five novices, three were admitted for taking the vows: Grigore Pop, Nicolae Aron and Ignatie Darabant who accompanied the bishop on his way home from Vienna. Petru Iacob was rejected being sickly and Ioan Bob because he **could not decide**.

Ioan Bob wrote to Alexandru Saroși his benefactor, who was in the meantime appointed superior of Jesuits from Odorhei, informing him about his situation. Saroși advised him not to think anymore about the monastic life if he does not have the proper determination. If he cannot stay any longer at Blaj, to come for one year at Odorhei and continue studying Law the next year, in Hungary. Bob thought that not being a monk he could not study any longer theology, in spite of his great desire to do so. He answered Saroși agreeing to continue the study of Law in Hungary, the next year. The benefactor Saroși sent immediately one of his servants with a horse, to bring Bob to Odorhei. On December 1765 in a terrible cold weather, Bob had left Blaj for Odorhei, where Saroși greeted him with great joy. Bob was assigned economist of the Jesuit institute, waiting for his departure for Hungary, having all the administration in his charge.

His plans of studying at the Law school and of being an attorney were not fulfilled, God having different plans for him. On May 1766 his friend Saroși died, and another superior was assigned, a person named Lestyan, who was the rector of the Jesuit Institute. Bob being a **good administrator**, as later was proved from his position of bishop, was asked by Lestyan

to stay much longer and continue his job, at least till the end of the year. Bob surrendered the request and stayed until April 1769.

In the meantime at Blaj Bob's novitiate colleague Grigore Pop was assigned as economist of the episcopate and monastery. The latter knowing well Bob's management ability, asked his superiors to call Bob to Blaj. The superiors accepted and called Bob on April the 4<sup>th</sup> 1769. Bob preferred the company of the Romanian Basilien monks the company of Hungarian Jesuits from Odorhei. At Blaj he was assigned as “**zeciutor**”, collector of the tenth part of the products of the domain. Very consciously he completed his mission, from the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1769 to the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1773. In the bishop seat was then Grigore Maior, because Atanasie Rednic had died in 1772.

Grigore Maior as result of the Emperor's ruling from Vienna, thought he may send abroad for theological studies young individuals who were not monks, such situation being unimaginable before. Then Bob asked the bishop to send him with other two clerics, Ladislau Gheți and Ioan Mădan, to theological studies at **Târnavia**. The bishop agreed. The trip from Blaj to Târnavia was extremely difficult, and took six weeks. They reached Târnavia on the New Years Eve 1774, and continuing their studies for four years.

At the end of May 1777 completing the theological studies, Ioan Bob and Ladislau Gheți returned, both with a very poor health condition (Bob having haemoptysis from the beginning of the year).

The Bishop Grigore Maior greeted them with parent warmth and advised them to return to their homes, and after their recovery he shall ordain them as priests. Ladislau Gheți remained for a while at Blaj, and Ioan Bob returned to Giula, to his step brother Avram Duca until the end of October 1777.

Ioan Bob's father died early, when Bob was still in his childhood, and his mother has remarried with Duca, whose son was Avram Duca. In his home Bob recovered quite quickly, after keeping a severe diet. Returned to Blaj at the end of October 1777, on Christmas he was ordained as deacon, the **next year 1778 on Easter being ordained priest** by the Bishop Grigore Maior.

He was sent as archpriest to Daia (near Sebeș, Alba district) on the feast of St. Peter and Paul, soon gaining the local clergy trust. He was elected inspector for the renovation of

the seminary and of the cathedral. He was also assigned with the collection of money, sent to Vienna as help for the war.

After less than one year he was **assigned archpriest at Târgu Mureș**. He was installed in March 1779 at Mădăraș, by the archpriest Dănilă from Cătina. Then he departed for Târgu Mureș to take his mission and examine the believers. Soon left for Blaj because the bishop Grigore Maior called to his proximity. Remained for few months and returned at his continuous request, to Târgu Mureș, continuing his pastoral mission for three years, until June 1782.

When Bishop Grigore Maior went for the last canonical visit, on his way back visited at Târgu Mureș the archpriest Bob, who accompanied him to Iernut. During this trip Maior told him that he sent his resignation from the bishop chair from Blaj. The emperor accepted it and in August new election was planned for the bishop chair. With sadness Bob commented about it:

**“That hurt me, because Bishop Maior was as a good parent for me. He enjoyed it and he went to Blaj and I returned to Târgu Mureș.”**

Bishop Grigore Maior understood it as results from his farewell speech to his clergy:

“a sailor, even being strong as Heracles and master as Columbus, may be sometimes in struggle with the waves and with his own crew, unable to take his ship to the safe shore”.

He was accused by the Basilitan monks for not respecting their administrative autonomy, by the governor Samuel Bruckenthal and the states that he takes decisions without the supervision of the government, by the Protestants near Sibiu that he attacks their religious privileges, by the Catholics and Bishop Batthyany for overriding their authority, by the Orthodox for practicing an abusive proselytism. Equally, the recruitment of voluntaries for the war between Austria and Prussia in 1778 triggered the protests of the Romanian bishop against what he considered a violation of his authority by the provincial administration, against the nobles' abuses who recruited forcibly the sons of the Greek-Catholic priests. There were cases when even the priests were persecuted. These are only few examples of the tensions which marked the last pastoral years of Bishop Grigore Maior.

The works of the Synod opened official in the morning of the 12<sup>nd</sup> of August, respecting the established order. On the first place was Ignatie Darabant as expected, then

Filotei Laszlo the “prepozit” of the “**Holy Trinity**” monastery and 11 monks. Followed by the diocesan clergy: 4 deans, 52 archpriests, 3 inspectors, 3 notaries, 2 jurors each accompanied by two deputies. Professor Mihai Timar from Blaj and Mihai Pop vicar of Blaj were also present. There were also present according the report sent to the nuncio Garampi by Grigore Maior, two commissioners of the king, Bishop Batthyany and some lay people. Ioan Bob was confirmed as notary of the clergy, having the same assignment at the Synod from 1781 convened for taking the fidelity oath to the emperor Joseph II.

Subsequent the ballot there were three major orientations in the Greek-Catholic clergy, as the candidates qualified for the “**ternarium**” were: Ignatie Darabant with 63 ballots, Iacob Aron 57 and Ioan Bob 37.

Ignatie Darabant represented the nationalist wing for the emancipation of the Romanians from Transylvania, continuing the way traced by Inochentie Micu and resumed with conviction by Grigore Maior.

Iacob Aron was supported by the spiritual sons of Petru Aron and Atanasie Rednic, representing the ascetic current of renewal of the religious life. This current was not agreed by the bishop Grigore Maior, using it just as a missionary, and during the time spent in Vienna at the seminary “Santa Barbara” he was accustomed with the main reforms of the ecclesiastical policy of Joseph II.

Ioan Bob represented a part of the lay clergy, which tried for the first time to assert itself.

Indeed, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1782 Joseph II appointed Ioan Bob as Bishop of Fagăraș, under the condition of keeping fidelity to the Roman Pontiff, emperor and to the religious union, and by asking the Catholic governor agreement for the taxes. The same day Joseph II asked the Pope Pius VI for the confirmation of his designation and for the acceptance of Grigore Maior’s resignation. The emperor’s option was motivated by the “**remarkable virtues, scholarship and perfect manners of the candidate**”. This decision could not be influenced by the opinion of the apostolic nuncio, well known adversary of the emperor’s ecclesiastical policy. Very likely Garampi remained only an observer, Joseph II refusing his intervention in an issue regarding the emperor’s authority. Ioan Bob’s supporters sensitized by Stefan Salciai “ephemerius” of “Santa Barbara” seminary of Vienna, might have been the Aulic chancellor Ferencz Eszterhazy and the vice-chancellor György Banffy, mentioned by the bishop in his thank you note on the 12<sup>nd</sup> of March 1783. It may be supposed that the

emperor decided subsequent the fight between the first two candidates who used reciprocal disparagement, creating therefore the appearance of a conflict, as settled by his decree from the 12<sup>nd</sup> of December 1781. The fight of the lay clergy for a better position in the dioceses' ruling as mentioned by contemporary sources, might have had an important role, on the background of the anti-monastic policy of the emperor.

This victory of Ioan Bob was quite a surprise for himself, because he won before an adversary supported by the emperor, Iacob Aron. This is the proof of Stefan Saliciai's receptivity to the ideological climate of Vienna. According to Petru Maior's testimony, Stefan Saliciai was the main supporter from Vienna of Ioan Bob, initiator of the campaign for the archpriest from Mureș, as **“the oldest from the new theologians from abroad”**. The domestic campaign was carried by the archpriests Ioan Para and Alexandru Fiscuti, supported by part of the clergy.

Hearing about the emperor's decision, Darabant complained in a letter to Bishop Batthyany on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1782, for the disciplinary rule violation by electing a bishop who had not taken the monastic vows. He also regretted the overlooking of his meritorious activity, including the work for the lay clergy, hoping that the new-elected bishop will keep him in his position as a general vicar, assigned to the Basilitan monks according the emperor's decree from the 12<sup>nd</sup> of December 1781. The commendation to the Basilitan monks is quite strange compared to the late critiques, when Ioan Darabant shared Grigore Maior's opinion regarding the Basilitan monks. Apparently obscure in the moment of the election, **Ioan Bob's personality was yet a “cogwheel in the emperor's political mechanism”**. From the three priests elected, he was the only having a practical background as an economist of the diocese. The emperor's expectation was not betrayed, and in few years the supremacy of the monks from Blaj was turned to ground. During his 48 years of pastoral activity, despite the controversy aroused by the beginning, the bishop was the only one who had a **great efficiency**, after Inochentie “The Founder” who **prevailed by his great vision**.

He developed an extensive editorial work, to the benefit of Romanian churches of the diocese. All books of ritual and holy mass were printed under his supervision or authorship. He was also a good administrator, founded several foundations for helping the young students, his main concern being always the material welfare of the clergy.

The Bishop Ioan Bob was gentle, peaceful and quite forgiving where they could easily implement these virtues without affecting justice and canonical discipline.