



On the Patrimony of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Communist Regime. Some Aspects¹

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Abstract. The study examines the extension of state control over the assets of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist period of Romanian history. The author examines the topic by separately presenting norms and measures applied to immovable and then to movable assets which were nationalized or taken under state control based on various legislative measures and pretexts. In the study, the process by which the land and immovable assets, both of an ecclesiastical use and used for supporting educational and other church activities, is examined. The measures taken against the land and forestry assets held by the Romanian Orthodox Church by way of its institutions (parishes, monasteries, etc.) is presented as well as the fate of some church buildings. The author also examines the various measures aimed at bringing movable assets of the Romanian Orthodox Church under state control, including by confiscation and forced inclusion into museum collections.

Keywords: Orthodox Church of Romania, nationalization, communism in Romania, collectivization, confiscation

1. Introduction

The issue of church patrimony in the recent past is still much debated, but perhaps it is not that well-known. After 1989, interest in this patrimony focused on legal remedies, starting from the premise that numerous abuses were committed during the communist regime. However, the history of this topic seems much more difficult to understand and get to know as it has undergone several phases,

¹ This study is an extended version of the author's lecture presented at the conference with the title *The Change in Ownership of Church Property in Romania* organized by the Balassi Institute – Hungarian Institute Bucharest on 10 February 2020.

both from the point of view of its legal evolution and especially from that of the practices of communist authorities.

In our study, we aim to open the way for a discussion on the destiny of the patrimony that belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime from a historical perspective. We do not seek to exhaust this subject as, besides a general presentation of the legal framework and highlighting some particular situations, which is our aim, we consider that an immersion into the archives of the past is necessary.

We would also like to point out that in this paper we talk about ‘church patrimony’, i.e. the totality of assets belonging directly to the church, regardless of their religious or non-religious character.

Church patrimony is made up of immovable and movable assets, which both can be sacred in character (places of worship and liturgical instrumentation). The following are regarded as immovable property: firstly, places of worship, including monastic establishments, then administrative buildings (diocesan centres, deanery seats, and parochial houses), educational, cultural-spiritual, social-philanthropic locations as well as agricultural/forestry-related properties and possessions. Objects with a liturgical character, libraries, and archives are considered movable assets.

2. Conceptual Clarifications and Historical Contexts

When we discuss church patrimony during the communist regime, we shall briefly turn our attention to the Russian space during the Bolshevik and Stalinist revolutions. It is well known that during this period most church assets had been abusively confiscated by the representatives of the Bolshevik regime. The contemporary representations of Bolshevik revolutionaries tearing down and desecrating sacred spaces and objects in great fury have become infamous.

Many pieces of patrimony, especially those made of precious metals but also the bells were melted or sold, some even abroad. The buildings, in particular places of worship, were either demolished during the atheist campaign or transformed for purposes alien to their spiritual destination. Some were set up as warehouses, pubs, or they were assigned cultural-educational destination, i.e. museums, show venues, lecture rooms, etc. Furthermore, land holdings were confiscated by the Bolshevik regime, and, practically, the Russian Church had to retreat to the catacombs. Many icons of the defiled churches were hidden and kept with great devotion (some were even buried) by the believers.

However, things were very different when the communist regime established itself in Romania. In 1943, after Stalin had rediscovered the church and in the context of the ‘Great War for the Defence of the Country’, when icons were taken

on pilgrimage led by priests to the defensive Soviet lines to lift the spirits of the soldiers of the Red Army, it became clear for many that the political regime of Moscow adopted a different approach towards the church. We do not wish to insist upon the circumstances and the way in which these events, which had practically changed state–church relationships in the Soviet Union to a great extent, unfolded. However, we would like to underline that this was in fact an ingenious way, which would prove effective for instrumentalizing the institutional dimension of the church to the benefit of the Soviet political factor, which would also become a model for the states that were to form the Socialist Bloc. In other words, after 1945, Christian churches on the territories occupied by the Soviet army were allowed to function, but on a much diminished scale, without public manifestations and only in a strictly spiritual dimension. That is to say that the communist regime only allowed the church to possess sacred spaces, while its social, economic, and cultural-educational duties were eliminated as the patrimony designated for these functions was suitable for nationalization.

3. Immovable Church Property

The main legal modifications regarding church patrimony were adopted by the communist regime in 1948. Decree-Law no. 175 of 2 August 1948 on the educational reform promoted the principle of ‘state public education’, which practically abolished any type of private education. Otherwise, Article 35 stipulated that ‘all denominational or private schools shall become state schools’.² In other words, the assets owned by such schools had become the property of the state, a measure which foreshadowed the adoption of Decree-Law no. 176.

This measure of abolishing schools funded by religious denominations or with a religious character was correlated with the provisions of Decree-Law no. 176 of 3 August 1948 on the transfer into state ownership of assets serving the process of education, which in art. 1 provided that:

For the purposes of a good organization and functioning of state public education and for the purpose of widening and democratizing education, all movable and immovable property which belonged to churches, congregations, religious communities, for-profit or not-for-profit private associations, and, generally, to private persons or legal entities and which served for the functioning of schools that passed into state ownership according to Article 35 of the Law on public education shall be transferred into state property and allocated to the Ministry of Public Education, which is to use them for educational purposes (...) All properties which served for the functioning, maintenance, and support of the schools, dormitories, homes, or cafeterias on 1 January 1948, as well as those thereafter acquired for the same

2 Translation by the author. Official Journal of Romania, part I, no. 177, 3 August 1948, 6324.

purpose, shall be considered movable and immovable property falling within the scope of this Article.³

As far as the Orthodox Church is concerned, the law targeted, for example, the patrimony of the National Orthodox Women's Association in Romania, which owned schools, dormitories, and kindergartens, or the patrimony of the 'Nifon Mitropolitul' Establishments in Bucharest, with the seminary⁴ named after its founder.⁵ Primary denominational schools from Transylvania and Banat had already been nationalized by the Romanian State during 1919–1920. However, a problem concerning the ownership rights over the patrimony of these former denominational schools still persisted as after 1919, although transformed into state schools, they were functioning in the old building as of right belonging to parishes.⁶ After 1948, these were practically confiscated by the communist authorities for the sole reason that primary state schools were functioning there or for other purposes (community centres, farm seats, shops, or dispensaries).

As a preamble to this law, in a Decision of 31 July 1948 of the Council of Ministers, the 'Nifon' Establishment was disbanded as a foundation, and its entire patrimony was allocated to the State represented by the Ministry of Public Education. Since its foundation, the aim of the 'Nifon' Establishment was to support the theological seminary (founded in 1872 by decree of Carol I of Romania) situated on 11 Iunie Street 2 (today, the building is occupied by a commissariat of the Ministry of National Defence) and to offer scholarships using money arising from income offered by agricultural holdings and the 'Nifon' Palace (built in 1891) situated on Calea Victoriei (1 Doamnei Street) in Bucharest.

The Central Seminary in Bucharest, an imposing edifice situated on 39–49 George Coșbuc Boulevard in Bucharest, met the same fate. In 1948, the Seminary was closed down, and its building was in danger of being lost by the church. In the same fateful year, the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest was practically closed down and expelled from the University Palace. Beginning with January 1949, the new university-level theological school, i.e. the Theological Institute in Bucharest, functioned in the building of the Central Seminary, but after less than a year it was moved to its current location, into the building of the former Teacher Training Girls' School (2–4 Sf. Ecaterina Street). The reason for the last move:

3 Translation by the author. Official Journal of Romania, part I, no. 177, 3 August 1948, 6324.

4 Of the seminary's graduates, we name Stelian Popescu, Director of the *Universul* newspaper in Bucharest, or Eugen Cristescu, Director of the Special Intelligence Service during the Antonescu government. More than 1,600 students graduated this seminary.

5 Here we shall also mention charitable, medical, and educational private foundations managed by high-ranking servants of the Romanian Orthodox Church, such as 'Madona Dudu' in Craiova, 'Sf. Spiridon' in Iași, or the 'Brâncovenești Establishments' in Bucharest.

6 At the moment of nationalization, the heads of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania were opposed to this measure of the state. According to documents from the ecclesiastical archives to which we had access to, these buildings had been leased to the mayor's offices concerned, and priests were keeping strict records thereof.

the building of the former Central Seminary was confiscated by the communist authorities. Today, it hosts the Technical Military Academy.

Decree-Law no. 177 of 4 August 1948 on the general status of religious denominations was the third law of this normative package meant to restrict religious denominations in Romania in manifesting themselves, in a yet unprecedented manner. Article 29 provided for an inventory of all movable and immovable church assets, which was to be communicated to the Ministry of Culture. This explains the numerous inventories of different structures within religious denominations we have found in archives and which were periodically communicated to the Ministry/Department of Culture. In other words, state authorities were aware of every modification concerning the inventories of religious denominations.

Article 36 of the same law regulated the patrimony of religious denominations that had disappeared or had their recognition withdrawn by the Ministry of Culture. According to this Article, the patrimony of disappeared/unrecognized denominations became 'state property by *ope legis*'.⁷ This was not something new in the field, but this remark is important because the law also stipulated that all denominations in Romania had to initiate the process for regaining recognition by governmental authorities by drafting and submitting a new statute for their organization and functioning. The statute proposed by the Greek Catholic and the Roman Catholic churches was not endorsed by the Ministry of Culture, wherefore the patrimonies of these two churches were much more exposed to nationalization by the communist state.⁸

Article 37 of the law on denominations regulated the patrimony of denominations whose followers would move to another denomination. Thus, if at least 10% of the followers of a denomination were to switch to another denomination, a proportionate part of the patrimony of that denomination would also pass to the new denomination. If the majority of the followers were to move to another denomination, they would move with the place of worship and its annexes. If at least 75% of its followers were to move to another denomination, the entire estate of that denomination would pass to the new denomination.⁹

This provision envisaged the conversion of Romanian Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy, which was to commence one month later. We refer to assets taken over

7 Official Journal of Romania, part I, no. 178, 4 August 1948, 6394.

8 It should be mentioned that in the case of the Roman Catholic Church in Romania, unlike in the case of other denominations, communist authorities employed a different approach. Although during the entire course of the communist regime this church had never been recognized alongside the other denominations, its servants received their salaries (Article 33) and the patrimony which served directly the purposes of this denomination (except monasteries) remained in its possession. However, due to this exact legal provision, the Roman Catholic Church was permanently exposed to a fragile status, many times ensured through diplomatic channels between Romania and the Vatican, especially after 1973 (the visit of Nicolae Ceaușescu to Pope Paul VI).

9 Official Journal of Romania, part I, no. 178, 4 August 1948, 6394.

by the communist state as an effect of the process of converting Romanian Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy (September–November 1948) and abolishing the Romanian Greek Catholic Church (1 December 1948). Although the text of the law gave the impression that the Romanian Orthodox Church would take over the patrimony of the former church, this procedure was somewhat different. Consequently, it was the communist state that instrumented the handover/takeover process of the former Romanian Greek Catholic churches with their entire inventory to the new Orthodox communities or to the old pre-existing ones in the localities concerned, while assets without a sacred destination (schools/cultural, social, and economic institution buildings) were confiscated by the communist state. Some places of worship, such as the Prislop monastery in Hunedoara County or the churches of Vad and Feleac in Cluj County, had been Orthodox before the appearance of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania. At the same time, some cathedrals were not taken over by the representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church but by delegates of the Ministry of Culture, leaving the impression that the Romanian Orthodox Church was involved in the process of taking over former Romanian Greek Catholic assets. For example, the cathedral and schools in Blaj were taken over by Traian Belaşcu, metropolitan vicar (former Romanian Greek Catholic priest), because Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania refused to do so. The same happened in the case of the former Romanian Greek Catholic cathedral in Lugoj, which Bishop Veniamin Nistor of Caransebeş refused to take over, or in the case of the ‘Samuil Vulcan’ United Denominational School in Beiuş, which had already been confiscated before the process of converting Romanian Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy began and before the adoption of the law on state education, i.e. on 26 July 1948.¹⁰

Another normative framework affecting the activity of the church concerned agricultural-forestry holdings. Decree no. 83 of 2 March 1949 launched the agricultural collectivization process in Romania, following the Soviet model. According to those stated at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party held a few days after the adoption of this decree, among the social categories involved, priests were included in the *kulak* category because it was considered that they owned land.

The first measure taken by the communist authorities was to take over diocesan holdings in March 1949. Then, parochial holdings followed. In fact, priests owned parochial holdings in order to supplement the incomes they were entitled to as part of their salaries. At the same time, many of these priests from rural areas owned agricultural land inherited from their families; hence, they were added to church holdings so that they could be more easily included into the *kulak* category. Pursuant to the law on collectivization, this social categorization brought about financial and in-kind levies, which the priests were not able to bear. In most

10 For details, see: Mihoc 1996–1997. 168–169.

cases, priests did not produce as much as they had to hand over; therefore, they were purchasing from the black market in order to honour their obligations set in kind to the state. Many times, even crop seeds necessary for the following year were confiscated from them.

Thus, according to practices employed in the case of other agricultural landowners, priests were also compelled to hand over their agricultural land for the purpose of establishing agricultural fellowships, which were precursors to agricultural collectives. In this situation, in October 1949, Patriarch Justinian requested that the government reduce agricultural quotas and taxes for the 2–5 hectares on average or that priests should receive their entire salaries from the state. After many discussions between Patriarch Justinian and the communist government, the solution that priests from rural areas should hand over their agricultural holdings in exchange for their entire salaries and pensions being paid by the state and their children being accepted in state schools was only reached in 1954. In conjunction with the Patriarch's settlement with the communist authorities, priests were compelled to participate in the collectivization campaign through their involvement in committees for persuading people to join agricultural fellowships. Some priests became involved in this campaign, but many times the repressive communist structures discovered duplicity in their activity. They were compliant in front of the authorities, but in reality priests were urging citizens not to give in to intimidation and not to work on holidays, refused to make church agricultural holdings available or to help in other communal work. The authorities considered all of the above as impediments in the way of the socialization of agriculture. Therefore, beginning with 1958, a wide-ranging intimidation campaign was commenced through confiscations and arrests. Article 209 of the Penal Code stipulating the crime of 'plotting against the social order' was amended to this end, and sanctions were tightened to 25 years of imprisonment or forced labour for life.¹¹ Thus, hundreds of Orthodox priests were arrested and investigated under the accusation of undermining the process of collectivization and sentenced to many years of imprisonment. This way, local authorities confiscated their agricultural properties and also church properties under their administration (parochial houses, agricultural lands, etc.) as they were considered personal assets.

The solution adopted in the case of monasteries was different. Many Orthodox monastic establishments held agricultural and forestry holdings used to support themselves. A law of 1938 gave arable lands and forests to the biggest monasteries to support their monks and the historical monuments and charitable institutions they owned. After March 1949, the Church was compelled to transfer the majority of its agricultural holdings to the state. Each monastery kept 5 hectares for

11 Roske–Abraham–Cătănuș 2007. 46–47.

household needs plus one hectare for each tonsured monk. Tonsured monks were subject to the quota and tax regime provided for by governmental regulations.

Nevertheless, the communist state wanted to take over all agricultural holdings owned by monasteries and also their entire inventory. For this reason, monasteries were imposed agricultural quotas difficult to comply with. Then, in order to counter the development of Orthodox monasticism, which had expanded after 1945, Minister of Internal Affairs Alexandru Drăghici, in a memorandum submitted to the party and state leadership in 1955, proposed that more than half of the monasteries should disappear so that the state could take over their agricultural holdings and their immovable inventory. Al. Drăghici's plan was put into practice beginning with February 1958, when a campaign for the intimidation of monks (often resulting in arrests) was initiated by the representatives of the Department for Religious Denominations, the local authorities, and the Militia, closely aided by the Securitate in order to determine them to leave their monastic establishments and therefore to determine the dissolution of the monasteries concerned. By 1960, of the 204 monasteries in 1957, there were only 103. The land was taken over by farms (for ex. the case of Prislop Monastery), forests by forestry district, and many buildings belonging to the former monasteries became either the seats of agricultural units or medical institutions, most of them becoming asylums or TB sanatoriums (for ex. Guranda or Bârnova monasteries), as envisaged by Minister Al. Drăghici in 1955.¹²

Bukovina Church Forest Fund represented a particular case. It was established by the Austrian state in 1786 under the name 'Greek-Oriental Religious Fund' by adding up the holdings of Bukovina monasteries, owned ever since their foundation. The ownership of the Metropolitanate of Bukovina was recognized by the Romanian state even after 1918.

According to archival documents, Bukovina Church Fund held an area of approximately 192,000 hectares, mostly forest land, alongside industrial and commercial enterprises, a forestry school, the Vatra Dornei and Iacobenii baths with their mineral water springs, agricultural and forestry exploitations, forest railways with annexes and forest districts, etc.

Of the incomes of this Fund, the Orthodox Church in Bukovina supported the salaries of the clergy, of the entire administrative apparatus, including those of its theological schools, offered scholarships, renovated/repared places of worship (parish churches and monasteries), built primary denominational schools, supported educational and health institutions in Cernăuți, Suceava, Rădăuți, and Câmpulung, supported the editing of the first Romanian-language textbooks, subsidized the cultural and educational activities of the Cernăuți university centre, etc.

In order to take possession of this patrimony, communist authorities made recourse to the solution applied a year before to private or church foundations. Bukovina Church Fund was abolished as an institution by Decree no. 273 of 24

12 Luchian 2010. 159–160.

June 1949 (unpublished),¹³ and its patrimony was nationalized by the communist state pursuant to Law no. 119 of 11 June 1948.¹⁴ This Fund has not been returned to the church to this day.

There were also exceptions which we could consider fortunate. We are talking about the small wooden churches which were practically saved by Patriarch Justinian from disappearance. The wooden church in Stâna de Vale, place of worship in the Mureş region dating from the 17th century, which was brought by Carol II of Romania to the vicinity of the Royal Palace in Sinaia in 1934, is one such example. Then, in the context of taking over the former royal patrimony by the communist authorities, in order to avoid its falling into disrepair, Patriarch Justinian obtained this church in 1951 and moved it to the priests' sanatorium in Techirgiol, establishing a nuns' hermitage around it, which exists even today.

The wooden church by Castle Bran (dating from the 18th century), brought by Queen Mary in 1932, fell into disrepair after the abolition of the monarchy. In 1956, Patriarch Justinian moved it to Jercălăi, Prahova County, on the ruins of a monastic establishment, and he established a hermitage around it, which exists even today.

The wooden church from the dissolved 'N. Filipescu' College in Predeal, place of worship from the 17th century, originating in Maramureş, was brought by Patriarch Justinian to the retirement home in Dragoslovele, and a hermitage was established around it.

Horea Church in Albac, Alba County, shared the same fate. It was saved in 1907 by historian Nicolae Iorga by bringing it to the Brătianu Courtyard in Florica, Argeş County. After the confiscation of the former liberal leaders' property by the communist authorities, the small wooden church was closed. In 1954, Patriarch Justinian obtained it, and moved it to the centre of Băile Olăneşti, Vâlcea County, where it still stands today.

It is interesting, however, that, except Horea Church, these churches figured in a Securitate record from 1980 as being 'in the administration of the Romanian Patriarchate', and not at all as church property.¹⁵

Another patrimonial aspect concerning the Romanian Orthodox Church is related to demolished churches, especially in Bucharest in the 80s. Here it is worth mentioning that in the case of the 20 churches demolished in or moved from Bucharest the communist state committed a series of abuses. According to canon law, recognized by the communist state, if a parochial church was in danger of being demolished, the statutory body deciding in this matter was the parochial

13 It was a common practice of the communist authorities not to publish certain decrees, such as this one or those related to the expropriation of private property, for reasons of 'public utility'.

14 Valenciuc 2010. 233–241.

15 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), Documentary fund, file 13367, vol. 1, sheet 268.

council of the church concerned, a decision which was then communicated by the Diocesan Centre to the Department for Religious Denominations. According to archival documents, in most cases, the parochial councils concerned decided against the demolition of places of worship, employing the solution of moving. Although the Department was notified of parochial council decisions, churches were demolished either by way of adopting a decree by Nicolae Ceaușescu on the application of the systematic plan or by adopting such a decree subsequent to the demolition.¹⁶

4. Movable Church Property

Evidently, this patrimony concerns assets that are sacred in nature, i.e. the liturgical instrumentation as well as religious/theological printed materials and church archives. The mobility of these assets from religious denominations to the communist state was influenced by two main aspects: (1) the verification of ecclesiastical libraries and archives by the representatives of the state, especially those from the State Archives and the Department for Religious Denominations, and sometimes by Securitate officers, and (2) the sacred assets taken over or confiscated, or even taken in custody for an undeclared period for the purposes of museum collections.

In the extra-Carpathian Romanian space, the appropriation of patrimony constituted of movable assets, even of sacred ones, for museum collections had already been a standard practice since the 19th century. This custom has its origins in the initiative of some men of culture, former 1848 revolutionaries (supporters of the idea of secularizing Romanian society, after the French model), such as Alexandru Odobescu, Dumitru Papazoglu, or Cezar Bolliac. In the context of the secularization policy affecting monastic properties, visits were paid to monasteries, and numerous religious objects and artefacts were taken into custody (i.e. confiscated), hence forming the basis of the Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest.

This practice was resumed during the communist regime. Patrimony assets made of precious metals were targeted first, and their possession became a misdemeanour if they were not declared to state authorities, and punished accordingly. Furthermore, if such goods were not conserved and capitalized according to law, they could be taken into custody for state museum collections. For example, in April 1959, when arresting Dimitrie Balaur at Cașin Church in Bucharest, the Securitate carried out a search in this church and found several gold coins. These gold coins were donated before 1948 for supporting the finalization of the church that was under construction, in times when gold had

16 We shall return to this topic in an extensive study based on archival documents.

already become a prohibited metal. The gold was confiscated by the Securitate, and priest Balaur was convicted for many years of imprisonment. At the time, this case gained notoriety in Bucharest.

Probably something was learned from this case. Around 1962, at Boteanu Church in Bucharest, in order to legalize such a donation, the gold was directly introduced into the collection box from where the priest registered it and sold directly to the National Bank of Romania.

In 1949, state authorities moved to the purging of libraries and church archives, an action that was repeated after 1968, after the scandal stirred by the Spiridon Cădea case.¹⁷ This scandal also generated a major Securitate action, launched in 1972 under the name 'Antidote', by which all ecclesiastical printed materials and archives underwent verification in order to detect aspects of a Fascist-Legionary character. Such actions, though of a smaller scale, were also carried out at the level of some Orthodox diocesan centres, such as in 1971, when the Securitate seized the 'documents with a legionary character' from the archives of the Archdiocese of Râmnic. Besides the Securitate, the persons authorized for religious denominations (împuterniciții de culte in Romanian) – as territorial representatives of the Department for Religious Denominations – were also responsible for the 'supervision and control' of church archives.

As for sacred goods, it must be stated that the first legal regulation to this end was adopted by means of Council of Ministers Decision no. 661/1995 on the establishment of museums and museum collections. Later on, by Decree no. 724 of 23 October 1969 on the protection and preservation of assets of national interest that represent artistic, historical, or documentary values, as well as of certain objects that contain precious metals and precious stones, specific of religious objects, the Communist authorities turned to making a rigorous inventory of all the assets owned by religious denominations in Romania. During this activity, the representatives of state authorities confiscated or expropriated many religious printed materials, manuscripts, and religious objects, especially iconography found at parishes on the ground that they were not adequately conserved and capitalized, a problem also dealt with by the Securitate.

The inventory process lasted approximately until 1974, when a law on the protection of the national patrimony was adopted. Besides its provisions concerning the definition of the term 'national patrimony object' and the registration of such objects, Article 81 provided for the conservation of objects from private collections as follows: 'Protected cultural assets belonging to the owners provided for in this Article who degrade them in bad faith or do not conserve them according to the obligation of conservation shall be expropriated or confiscated, as the case

17 In 1967, the Securitate had accidentally stumbled upon a large amount of legionary literature in a niche of the bell tower built by priest Spiridon Cădea in his native village, which generated the entire re-purging action of church cultural patrimony from Romania at the time.

may be.’¹⁸ Pursuant to this provision, the representatives of museums and of the National Archives could take into custody, at times even without minutes, and even confiscate patrimony objects from religious denominations on grounds of inadequate conservation or capitalization. Moreover, in most of the reactions expressed upon the adoption of the law – as they were recorded in Securitate documents –, the ideas persist that ‘through this law, the state has created the premises for taking possession of certain values’, that ‘through these measures, the state seeks to strip churches of the ornaments and values they own’, or that ‘this is about the expropriation of church assets’.¹⁹

5. Instead of Conclusions

The issue of church patrimony proves to be extremely complicated from the legal framework through communist jurisprudence and historical context to the practices of state authorities in relation to the representatives of religious denominations. For this reason, we consider that our present approach is only the beginning of a debate that shall be channelled especially through documentation in the archives of the recent past.

Furthermore, we shall not overlook how communist authorities related to this issue by virtue of an already established practice in Romanian society. Basically, after 1948, the communist authorities only revived this custom of liberal origin, intensified it in line with the communist experience and thinking in the field, and applied it during a period when conservation and capitalization in museums had become something normal in Western Europe.

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¹⁸ Translation by the author.

¹⁹ Translations in this paragraph are by the author. National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), Documentary fund, file 13367, vol. 1, sheets 220–220v.