



The Ecclesiastical Patrimony of the Romanian Church United with Rome from the Perspective of the Events of 1948¹

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Abstract. The author presents the historical process by which the Romanian Church United with Rome was suppressed and forcibly merged into the Romanian Orthodox Church beginning in the late 1940s at the behest of Communist authorities, leading to the loss of its assets. The precursors of this process are presented, especially the efforts by the Romanian People's Republic to modify the terms of its historic arrangements with the Catholic Church, the Concordat, and the withdrawal of the Romanian State from this arrangement. The study presents in detail, based on archival research conducted by the author in the archives of the former Securitate, and on legal norms (some of them classified at the time) the preparation and the pressure to which the Romanian Church United with Rome, its faithful and its clergy were subjected, in order to successfully force its so-called 'return' to the Orthodox Church. The author concludes the study by eliciting the fates of the remarkable clergymen who opposed the forced unification and were brutally punished by the Communist regime.

Keywords: Greek Catholic Church of Romania, Romanian Church United with Rome, communist persecution of Romanian Greek Catholics, communism, Romania

1. State Control over Religious Affairs in the Romanian People's Republic

It seems paradoxical but the signal for launching the battle initiated by the new communist leadership against the social and economic establishments of the tra-

¹ This study is an expanded 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. Unless otherwise specified in the body text or the footnotes, all quoted texts are translations by the author and are translated from Romanian.

ditional Romanian society apparently bears the endorsement of legality conferred by Mihai I of Romania's signature.

Communists did not have any illusions regarding the 'humanity and the full support of people' when ideologically implementing and applying their governmental programmes. Beyond subtleties and political gimmicks, something else was needed. A set of firm measures applied with strong hands was urgently required as this was the logistical support necessary for maintaining and consolidating the political power obtained in that well-known historical context. It was also notorious that part of the 'material well-being' necessary for communists came from the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and then, from 1946, from the MVD (Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs) funds, while 'generosity' varied according to Moscow's interests. Yet, once in power, 'brotherly aid' was not sufficient any more for the communists. Their desire increased in direct proportion to their immorally and unscrupulously obtained positions. The major disadvantage, however, continued to be generated by the fact that the economic means were not fully in their possession.

In order to remedy this situation, the Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the *Ministerial Committee for the Implementation of the Economic Recovery and Monetary Stabilization Programme* in its meeting held on 14 June 1947. This programme became reality on 12 July 1947, when, following this decision, Law no. 248 was promulgated. The first step towards the economic despoiling of the country was taken. Even in the context presented, the target was not reached. Barely liberated from the minimal hindrance that the king's person might have represented, the committee started its work. On 31 January 1948, Decision no. 202² was adopted, which – having the force of a law – stipulated the immediate transfer of certain categories of goods into the property of the state.³ Therefore, besides the legislative impact of the norms mentioned, it could be accepted that at the time they represented – together with the entire set of measures aimed at securing communists in power for the long term – the starting point of consolidating their government.

The arsenal of harshly restrictive-repressive legislative and administrative measures elaborated at that time pursued – as a matter of priority – the modifications that were about to operate in relation to the Penal Code.⁴ The publication of this new legal instrument during the phase of removing the former minister of

2 See in this respect Popescu 1999. 33.

3 Even if we ignore its formulation using a defective legislative technique, Decision no. 202/1948 made reference to a series of assets belonging to the ecclesiastic patrimony of all religious denominations aimed at being confiscated without discrimination. In the case of the Romanian Church United with Rome, recourse was also made to other special laws to despoil it for forty-two years.

4 The Penal Code, republished in the Official Journal of Romania, no. 48/27.02.1948.

justice, the communist Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu,⁵ marked the reconfiguration of the legislative basis. Then, by means of this apparently legal gimmick, the judiciary, assigned to and abandoned for party political and class interests, provided the people's militant arm, i.e. the Securitate, with an arsenal of means of action against the political opponents and the intimidation of the masses unsatisfied with their standard of living. Subsequent versions of the Penal Code were adapted according to the functional necessities of the repressive apparatus, ignoring the infringements of fundamental legal principles.

Evidently, there was a correlation between the moments preceding the arrest of the élite made up of high-ranking officers of previous regimes, political personalities of historical parties, even those previously used by communists, former police, gendarmerie, or secret service officers and the number of phases for the amendment of the Penal Code, granting the Securitate the opportunity to massively operate successive arrests with ease.

In reality, in this phase, this atheist, demolishing attack was first targeted against Roman Catholics, Romanian Greek Catholics, Adventists, and Zionists. The strained relationship between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the communist authorities, increasingly intense during 1948–1952, captured the attention of the Roman Curia. From a jurisdictional point of view, the sinuous evolution of the Latin Archdiocese of Bucharest was masking the intention of separating native Catholicism from its traditional bed, the Petrine Apostolic See. Thus, on 17 January 1949, Archbishop Aloysius Gerald Patrick O'Hara, Regent of the Apostolic Nunciature in Bucharest,⁶ accepted the resignation of Archbishop Alexandru Th. Cisar from the leadership of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Bucharest. Then, the Holy See entrusted him with the office of Apostolic Administrator of Bishop Anton Durcovici's archdiocese, the Roman Catholic diocese in Iași, starting with 14 April 1948.

The mandate of Bishop Durcovici lasted almost three and a half years, until his arrest on 26 June 1949. Under these circumstances, from 29 June 1949, Archbishop Cisar returned to lead the archdiocese as Apostolic Administrator. Unfortunately,

5 Controversial communist leader, born in Bacov on 4 November 1900 and executed in Jilava on 17 April 1954. For details, see Betea 2001.

6 Born in the USA in Green Ridge, Pennsylvania on 4 May 1895 and deceased on 16 July 1963 in the United Kingdom, he held different ecclesiastic offices (priest, bishop, archbishop) as well as a series of diplomatic functions such as the representative of the Holy See. He was involved in reconfiguring and re-establishing the Catholic hierarchy in Romania in our reference period. Thus, he was the principal consecrator of Roman Catholic bishops Anton Durcovici (5 April 1948) and, clandestinely, Ioan Duma (8 December 1948), Adalbert Boros (12 December 1948), Imre Alfréd Erőss (2 February 1949), Constantin Szilárd István Bogdánffy (14 February 1949), Iosif Schubert (30 June 1950) and of Romanian Greek Catholics: Ioan Ploscaru (30 November 1948), Ioan Dragomir (6 March 1949), Iuliu Hirțea (28 July 1949). Furthermore, priest Alexandru Todea was also clandestinely ordained in the sacristy (christening chapel) of Sfântul Iosif Cathedral by Roman Catholic Archbishop Iosif Schubert on 19 November 1950 according to his instructions given before his expulsion.

this new mission of Archbishop Cisar also came to an end as quickly as it started, in May 1950, when the communist authorities ordered him to take up compulsory residence in Orăștie, where he remained until 15 August 1953.⁷ Simultaneously, an attempt was made at the decapitation of the Roman Catholic Church in Romania by means of three trials instrumented by the communist justice system, in essence, legal farces, extensively commented on at the time.⁸ The isolation or the attempt to compromise the clerical leadership and the Catholic élites was aimed at dismantling Catholicism of both traditions from this area, whether Latin or Oriental.

These were followed by staging the ‘show’, similarly to the Ruthenian Greek Catholic scenario of the years 1946–1949. At the end of 1948, the Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek Catholic) was forcedly incorporated into the Romanian Orthodox Church for almost half a century. Under the frail motivation of preserving the artificial state of things, dictated by the political power favourable to Orthodoxy, the entire diocesan choir⁹ and hundreds of priests, the representative segment of the Romanian Greek Catholic denomination, those who had previously refused to convert, received various punishments. Initially intimidated and then removed from the pastoral mission, they were eventually imprisoned just like ordinary criminals. Unfortunately, they were not the only ones. They were joined by an emblematic figure of Romanian Orthodoxy, who – with his attitude towards the ‘dismounting’ of communists in this area – proved to be an anti-communist opponent typical of church hierarchy, especially of the Eastern tradition. Through his belonging to a certain denomination, the hierarch concerned represents a milestone in the resistance of the Romanian Orthodox Church. This attitude, anchored in the essence of his being, may be identified in most accounts of the Orthodox Bishop of Oradea, Dr Nicolae Popovici’s public appearances before his forced retirement.¹⁰

7 Doboș 2004. 164–175.

8 The most well-known show trial of the time, that of a ‘group of spies, traitors, and conspirators in the service of the Vatican and the Italian Intelligence Centre’, featured the priest of the Italian Church in Bucharest, father Clemente Gatti OFM. Together with him, Bishop Augustin Pacha, clandestine priest-bishops Aldalbert Boros and Iosif Schubert were co-defendants. Monsignor Vladimir Ghika, a representative figure of Romanian Catholic spirituality, was also a victim of the show trials of the time.

9 The semantic meaning of the term differs from its musical meaning. It was a term in use, and it referred to Romanian United bishops holding offices at the time.

10 Born in Biertan, Târnava-Mare County (today Sibiu) on 3 January 1903, to parents Ion and Ana. His intellectual formation was exceptional, attending renowned educational centres in the country and abroad. Famous theologian, priest, teacher, and bishop, he proved to be a personality of Orthodox education in the interwar period. He was promoted Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Oradea on 28 June 1936. He got into conflict with the communist authorities, which proved fatal to him. By order of the authorities and following the decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, he was forcedly retired, being ordered at the same time to take up compulsory residence, as a form of punishment, at the Cheia Monastery

The last phase, chronologically overlapping the authoritarian-totalitarian quarter of a century defining the cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu's personality, was that of subtle, indirect persecution. A lot tougher but also perversely disguised, it aimed to 'penetrate' clerical élites, and hence the Securitate attempted to infiltrate the church hierarchy all the way to its top.¹¹ In essence, it manifested itself through the application of the policy of the iron hand in velvet gloves. On the one hand, the communist regime tried to recruit and attract the majority of the representatives of all legally recognized religious denominations into an organization which proclaimed itself as largely representative: the *Front of Socialist Unity and Democracy* (FDSU). This was an annex, another 'appendix' to the Communist Party. Politically unregimented and multi-confessional in theory, it functioned between 1975 and 1989. On the other hand, however, it continued to use the apparently legal instrument of supervising and intimidating religious denominations, the famous *Department for Religious Denominations*. Through this body 'rebranded' in 1957, the 'pulse' of spiritual life within religious denominations recognized in communist Romania was taken, using territorial inspectors.¹²

in Prahova County. He died at the age of 57 in Biertan on 20 October 1960, while his rights of residence were still being restricted. See *Martiri pentru Hristos, din România, în perioada regimului comunist*. 565–580.

- 11 Two examples support this allegation. The first one, the confession of an Orthodox priest about his brother, also an Orthodox priest, unveiled as an informant of the Securitate in his file. The second example, that of a high-ranking hierarchy, Archbishop and Metropolitan Bishop of Sibiu, whose 'human weaknesses', condemned by canon law and Christian morality, were known to and exploited by the Securitate. This explains his rapid ascension in the ecclesiastical church hierarchy, contrary to the predictions of his contemporaries. The mediaeval Transylvanian town, where his priestly career and didactic activity had started and unfolded, was the scene of transition from his capacity as a trainer of entire generations of theologians to that of occupant of the bishop's seat. Simultaneously, he dedicated himself to collaboration with the bodies of the communist political police. See the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), External Intelligence Service (S.I.E.) fund, file no. 4896, sheets 10–11.
- 12 At the same time, consequently and firmly, with the guilty 'blessing' of the obedient FDSU hierarchy, the totalitarian regime demolished several places of worship in the capital. The aim was both the physical destruction of the edifices themselves and their erasure from collective memory in a desperate need to find an enemy to scapegoat. Churches that belonged to the Romanian Church United with Rome were treated in the same way. The Romanian Greek Catholic church Adormirea Maicii Domnului – Acvila in Bucharest was included in the systematization plan (a programme of orchestrated demolition disguised as urban development). The document of the I Deanery of Bucharest does not leave any room for interpretation.
 'I Deanery of Bucharest no. 375 of May 10, 1984 (to) Acvila parish.
 Following the order of the Holy Archdiocese of Bucharest no. 3956/1984, upon the note of the Department of Religious Denominations 3088/1984, we inform you that, in its meeting held on 13 April 1948, the Diocesan Council of the Holy Archdiocese of Bucharest has approved the demolition of the Acvila parish church – situated on 37 Sirenelor Street (Acvila no. 40) (...)' See Marcu 1997. 147.

2. Legal Means by Which Political Control Was Exerted

There was also an overt discrepancy between the festive declarations of the communist authorities concerning freedom in Romania and the generalized suffering of the populace.¹³ This argumentation is based on a simultaneous analysis of the *Report on the Draft Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic*, presented to the Great National Assembly by Gheorghe-Gheorghiu Dej, the leader of the Romanian Workers' Party and omnipotent political decision maker from the top leadership of the country (by which he argued, among others, that 'freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, etc. have an honourable place in the draft Constitution'),¹⁴ as well as on the texts of some final decisions issued by the Council of Ministers of the Romanian People's Republic on the administrative measures adopted, which remained secret by not being published. Without entering into details, this analysis highlights the discrepancy between the great masses and the political leaders of the moment as well as the gap between the ideology and the deeds of communist leaders.

2.1. The Constitution of 13 April 1948

The Constitution of 1948 sharply marked the transition to a brutal statist regime based on the rule of a single party and dictatorship, to a controlled and politically subordinated economy. It provided the premise for implementing the cult of personality characteristic to the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej Government and, later on, to that of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in an exacerbated form. The communists sensed the reactions to this new constitutional configuration at the level of society in general; but they had equally also anticipated the answer they were about to receive from ecclesiastical circles, of which especially Catholics proved to be reluctant:

Even the Pope in Rome will no doubt find reasons to criticize our Constitution because it is not in line with the tendency of the Vatican to mingle into the internal affairs of different countries under the pretence of guiding Catholic believers. Who knows if the Vatican, that has punished millions of Italian Catholics of the Popular Front with some sort of religious excommunication, shall not consider to also curse us because our constitution does not stipulate the obedience of our Catholic citizens to the political directives of the Vatican

13 From political insult to food shortages, to restricting the freedom of movement, poor employment rate and remuneration compared to party activists and to the political nomenclature.

14 Gheorghiu-Dej 1953. 527.

or because we have let ourselves tempted by the shining of the American golden calf to whose feet the Vatican wishes to lead its believers (...).¹⁵

2.2. The Unilateral Termination of the Concordat with the Holy See

It was not long before anti-Catholic hysteria produced the intended effects. In approximately one month after the communist leader held his speech, on 18 July 1948, the regime in Bucharest unilaterally terminated the Concordat with the Holy See in a statement of the Council of Ministers. The Romanian state was in serious breach of diplomatic conventions, showing lack of elegance towards the Vatican by ignoring the provisions of Article 23 of the Concordat, which stipulated that termination was possible upon six months' notice of the party initiating it.

Against the background of the cruel reality characterizing the ever-changing Romanian political scene, on 22 February 1948, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was having difficulty acknowledging a bothering truth for the government: 'The Catholic Church is one of the few forces capable of opposing communism in Romania.'¹⁶ Therefore, amid the process of absorbing the collaborationist wing of social democracy detached from Constantin-Titel Petrescu's party by the communists and establishing the Romanian Workers' Party, First Secretary Dej was raising the communists' 'awareness' of a potential enemy: Catholics living in the country.

The First Secretary was aware of the long-lasting independence of the Catholic Church in relation to the Romanian state. This reality was previously enshrined in the 1927–1929 Concordat. He was also aware of the significance of irenic-hierarchical subordination to Apostle Peter's successor in the See of Rome of all national Catholic administrative structures. And, last but not least, he realized the threat posed by the anti-communism of prelates and clergy, by the vast anti-socialist action of the Catholics, with deep ramifications among the afflicted masses, in relation to the government's intentions and interests as well as their possible international support, especially by the West behind the iron curtain. At the same time, Dej, who in the meanwhile had become the uncontested leader of the Worker-Communist party,¹⁷ was surely in possession of important data

15 Gheorghiu-Dej 1951. 174. See also *Raport asupra Proiectului de Constituție făcut în fața Marii Adunări Naționale 1948*.

16 See the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), 'D' documentary fund, file no. 8793, sheets 11–12, passages from informative surveillance notes dated on 2 March 1948: 'The passage from Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's speech regarding the relationships between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church completely indisposed Roman Catholic believers, who had the impression that those were their last peaceful days (...). The Catholic clergy was preparing for "tribulations". (...) Catholic priests became very circumspect for fear that the authorities would prohibit the celebration of the divine service'.

17 As responsible for the party, he was no doubt in charge of the Romanian secret services as well. Crowded with Soviet agents, subordinated to party interests, through infiltration and the elimi-

regarding the Catholic population in the country. There were 2.7 million Catholics at that time, of whom, contrary to the confused general opinion, the majority, i.e. 1.8 million, were of Romanian ethnic origin, either Romanian Greek Catholics or Roman Catholics. More precisely, over one and a half million of the total Romanian Catholics belonged to the Romanian Church United with Rome, while the others, approximately three hundred thousand inhabitants of counties in Moldova, were of Latin rite.¹⁸ There was also a small segment of the population that belonged to the Armenian Catholic confession.

3. The Catholic Church as the Enemy of the Communist State

Generally, the communist authorities were permanently preoccupied by restricting the sphere of influence of the Catholic Church in Romania. First, they strived to treat this 'return' as a national problem, a measure aimed against Anglo-American imperialism, deliberately ignoring the religious foundation of this issue. Then, under the impact of the reactions caused, they tried to put the burden of responsibility for the deterioration of relationships between Romania and the Vatican on the Catholic clergy. The question why so much hostility existed against the Catholic Church, and implicitly against the Catholic Church in Romania, may be answered by identifying the politically responsible persons practising this anti-Catholic discourse. It is well-known that Ana Pauker was always one of them. A sinister character of the time, becoming minister for external affairs, she represented the new leading political class coming from the Soviet environment 'purified' of the traumatizing experience of Stalinist purges; she was an assiduous promoter of the anti-Catholic attitude. As responsible for Romanian external affairs of the time, she promoted – up to the limit of identification with it – the trend in favour of terminating diplomatic relationships with the Vatican¹⁹ as early as 1949.

nation of any specialists still holding positions of power on 23 August 1944, this force served as an instrument for the application of measures to 'return' to Orthodoxy.

- 18 Information is to be found in the introductory study of Professor Stanciu Stoian, Minister of Religious Denominations, of the work with the title *Culte Religioase în Republica Populară Română* (Stoian 1949). Although this information was gathered before 23 August 1944, it refers to the proportion of population belonging to the Romanian Greek Catholic denomination, i.e. 8.41%, as long as the Orthodox denomination and those close to it represented 67.04%. For details, see Stoian 1949. 41–42.
- 19 In this regard, see the verbatim reports of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party from 16.05.1949 and 10.11.1949. 'Comrade Ana: she pointed out that it was required to provide elements for the termination of relationships with the Pope based on some ordinary crimes...'; 'the entire gang shall remain. We have to do something more serious. (...)

Unfortunately for the communist regime, Romanian society, preponderantly its elitist Transylvanian part sensitive to provocation and compelled to assist to the farce staged by the political class, perceived this attempt at liquidating the Romanian Church United with Rome as being aimed at eliminating a worthy and declared adversary of communism.²⁰ However, from a practical perspective, in its essence this measure did not bring about the expected consolidation of the Romanian nation, neither through the much acclaimed confessional standardization nor through 'return' to the pen where the herd of believers had scattered from after 1700.²¹

4. Decrees Governing Religious Denominations after the Constitution of 1948

The issue of amending the Romanian legal framework from democratic to fundamentally repressive also resides in the application of the so-called administrative measures proposed, implemented, and supervised by the component structures of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Essentially, these measures, used preponderantly in the first two decades of the existence of the communist regime, were legislative norms aimed at increasing the impact of repressive actions, justifying them at the same time through special laws, decrees with the effect of law, decisions issued by the Council of Ministers, and countless crimes committed under the pretence of enforcing the rule of law. To a considerable extent, these administrative measures were fully classified as 'state secrets'. The classification of repressive acts was generated by a contradiction between the pompous statements of the propaganda apparatus and the dramatic reality of everyday life. Even then, these were in serious breach of civic rights and

Comrade Gheorghiu: let's agree in principle to terminate relationships with the Vatican and let us initiate measures for carrying out such an action...' *Arhivele Naționale ale României*, Vol. II. 1949. 263, 550.

- 20 The inspiring sermons given by Dr Ioan Suci, a young auxiliary bishop in Oradea and later on the Apostolic Administrator of Blaj, during the period before his arrest, in the year before the abolishment of the Romanian Church United with Rome, are enlightening in this regard.
- 21 Around the celebration of 10 May 1946, Bishop Ioan Suci, at the time auxiliary of the Romanian Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea Mare, was sending a powerful protest to the prefect of Bihor County, exposing some evidently chauvinistic provocations addressed to the Romanian population. At the same time, he was taking attitude against these provocations, indirectly declaring himself the defender of 'the [Romanian] army, Romanian professors, students and peasants (beaten, arrested, wounded, and assassinated)'. In this regard, see the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), 'D' documentary fund, file no. 8792, sheets 53–58 and 79–84.

liberties formally stipulated in the constitutional framework,²² left unscrupulously ignored. As a result, in the course of the process of converting to Orthodoxy, the issues concerned the interpretation of articles 38 and 39 of Decree-Law no. 177/1948, the new law on religious denominations, which regulated the administrative formalities of this conversion. In order to sort out the situation, the Ministry of Religious Denominations, through its specialized department, issued an official statement concerning the application of the articles concerned. However, things did not seem sufficiently clear, not even to the authorities in charge of their implementation. For example, on 12 October 1948, the General Administrative Inspectorate in Cluj felt the need to request further information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs:

(...) whether it is in the spirit of the official statement:

1. To consider as non-existing the community of the Romanian Greek Catholic confession as a result of the act of unification with the Romanian Orthodox Church.
2. If the Mayor's Office receiving a declaration of leaving the Greek Catholic denomination is obliged to notify the declaration made by a community that is a component part of the Greek Catholic denomination or
3. If in the case of Greek Catholic parishioners who make declarations of conversion to another denomination, these declarations should be forwarded to the Ministry of Religious Denominations, considering that through the act of unification with the Orthodox denomination the Greek Catholic denomination has ceased to exist, both as of right and in fact.

As the situation seemed out of control, the Ministry of Internal Affairs asked the Ministry of Religious Denominations, whose Minister, Stanciu Stoian, answered relatively late, on 28 October 1948, through note no. 39766/948:

Conversion from one denomination to another may happen both individually and in groups (family heads). At the moment, conversions from Greek Catholicism to Orthodoxy are carried out in groups. In many local Greek Catholic communities (parishes), these conversions reach 100%, and in most parts they exceed 75%. As a result, these parishes are virtually abolished,

22 The first two fundamental laws of the country, of communist inspiration, the Constitution of 13 April 1948 (Title II) and the Constitution of 27 September 1952 (Chapter VII), provided for human rights such as the inviolability of persons and residence, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. But the freedom of assembly was subdued to the duty to 'enrol in the building of Socialism'. As for the other liberties, Article 85 (II) of the Constitution of 1952 stipulated that they are to be exercised 'in accordance with the interest of those who are working and in order to consolidate the regime of popular democracy'. Focșeneanu 1992. 114–115, 130–131.

while their patrimony, together with the church and the surrounding buildings, shall return to the property of the local Orthodox communities (parishes) together with the congregation. Consequently, the conversions in question make the local Greek Catholic community disappear even if there were isolated believers. The act of unification itself, as a result of a mass movement, may constitute a *de facto* element for the finding that the Greek Catholic denomination has disappeared. In principle, mayor's offices have the obligation to communicate the declarations of leaving local communities of Greek Catholic confession. However, where these conversions to Orthodoxy represent at least 75%, which virtually renders the local Greek Catholic community non-existent, leaving only isolated believers of this denomination, the communication of declarations may not be carried out anymore, and they shall be forwarded according to the official statement issued by the Ministry, the Ministry of Religious Denominations.

Simultaneously, with the intention to amplify the phenomenon of lawful transfer to Orthodoxy, benefits and derogations from previously applied practices were introduced. It is the case of Decision no. 39.380 of 15 October 1948 of the Ministry of Religious Denominations. Among others, it stipulated that for the return of a community to operate only the signatures of family heads were necessary: '(...) in all cases of conversion from one religious denomination to another, when these conversions happen in groups, the number of family heads shall be taken into account in order to establish the proportion of those converted and those remaining'.²³

This antithetical positioning between the governing and the governed was also generated, throughout the entire duration of 1948, by a divergent approach to the issue of public education. Thus, dissatisfaction also started from Article 28 of the draft Constitution which prohibited religious denominations to operate and own educational institutions. This approach, which was contrary to the traditional, conservative spirit of the Romanian society, prompted the protest of the Apostolic Nunciature, of Romanian Greek Catholic bishops who edited an opposing statement, while Orthodox bishops from Transylvania, meeting within a regional working conference, protested in their turn.²⁴

Nevertheless, this provision was kept in the Constitution. Subsequently, as a complementary measure in the field, Decree-Law no. 175/1948 on educational reform only finalized the idea of unification, nationalization, and laicization of

23 Practically, in this context, a family could be converted to Orthodoxy through the signature of the head of that family. The authorities had repressive administrative measures at hand to compel heads of families to provide such a signature.

24 See the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), 'D' documentary fund, file no. 8792.

Romanian education. Thus, Article 35 stipulated that ‘All denominational or private schools of any kind shall become state schools’, while Decree-Law no. 176/1949 on the transfer of assets belonging to churches, congregations, or private persons that served for the functioning and maintenance of general, technical, or professional educational institutions into state ownership indicated the actual methodology of the transfer of these annexes into state property.²⁵ This ideological war started by the authorities was aimed at ‘religion’ as a school subject. Initially, it was brutally removed from the school curriculum, which strictly limited the study of faith-related issues to the ecclesiastical space. Then, it represented a way of completely freeing the public space of religion, strictly limiting its impact.

It is difficult to appreciate the perception of these moves at the time. Certainly, there were singular reactions at the level of the representatives of religious denominations. Furthermore, we know that the Catholic Church of all rites in Romania had a prompt institutional reaction, through the authorized voice of its hierarchs, to the restriction of the freedom of conscience that threatened human dignity. Undoubtedly, the other religious denominations, such as the Romanian Orthodox Church, were conscious of the danger of getting further from the sacred, of the threat of secularization. Yet, as the tradition of Byzantine East was one of ‘alignment’ to political requirements and not of resistance, there was no institutional reaction on behalf of the Orthodox Church. Certainly, the individual attitude of some Orthodox hierarchs removes the collaborationism label. For example, the perception of the new legislation on religious denominations by the Romanian Orthodox hierarch well-known for his anti-communist reactions may be appreciated as surprising: ‘they shall also be responsible for the law on religious denominations, the greatest weapon against the church’.²⁶ This singular voice uttering non-conformist statements was that of Bishop Nicolae Popovici, *persona non-grata* in the eyes of the communist authorities. The consequences of this positioning: he was silenced aided by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church,²⁷ without any opposing reaction on behalf of his synodal colleagues.

Decree-Law no. 177 of 4 August 1948 replaced the Law on the *general statute of religious denominations* from 1928.²⁸ Although they were similar in many ways, affiliations being often very clear, the structural philosophy of the new law from the summer of 1948 had undergone significant alterations. From an external perspective, Decree-Law no. 177 of 1948 represented a new phase in the process of modernizing Romanian society in the field of religion. Cultivating

25 Official Journal of Romania, no. 177/03.08.1948, 6322–6324.

26 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), ‘I’ informative fund, file no. 2669, vol. 1, sheet 113.

27 As a result of his attitude, he had to retire on 4 October 1950.

28 Published in the Official Journal of Romania of 30 August 1948.

a lay spirit that had not existed before, without compromises, proclaiming full freedom of conscience and treating church–state relationships in an eminently pragmatic way as practised in any other state institution represented innovative elements introduced by the cited legal norm.²⁹ Differences become visible if we make a *de profundis* analysis of the actual intention of the two legal norms. It is also important to note that the new Decree-Law no. 177 of 1948, as opposed to previous legislation, only operated with a single term all throughout its text, i.e. that of ‘religious denomination’. In essence, this gesture was a visible sign that no difference was made between denominations, that a ‘historical religious denomination’ could not *a priori* enjoy certain rights, but all religious denominations had to pass the test of loyalty to the state, a *captatio benevolentiae*, to be ‘re-accredited’.³⁰

Article 10 stipulated that: ‘Followers of all religious denominations have to obey the laws of the country, to take an oath under the form and in the cases provided for by law, and to register facts related to civil status at the office of vital records within the legal time limit.’ Specifically, as a Romanian citizen, a person had certain obligations to the state, but by means of the law Romanian citizens as believers were compelled by the political power, preoccupied with extorting as many such loyalty declarations as possible, not to waver from requirements imposed by the state. Through the text of the legal norm, cult leaders became implicitly accountable as they were compelled to watch over their followers in order to keep them in line. In the light of the provisions of Article 12, it may be observed that it stipulated the existence of ‘a central organization to represent the religious denomination concerned, irrespective of the number of its followers’ for all religious denominations.

There were similar attempts even in the period between the two world wars, but in certain cases, also due to historical conditionality, these had failed. Now, without getting lost in details, the political power forced religious denominations, such as the Jewish one or Neo-Protestant churches, to unify and create a central organization.

The law of 1948 placed the organization of churches in Romania under a common denominator by means of provisions of the type:

Religious denominations as diocesan organizations may have a number of dioceses relative to the total number of their followers. On average, 750,000 followers per diocese will be counted for the creation and functioning of dioceses (dioceses, superintendences). The statutory bodies of each religious denomination shall delimit its dioceses and distribute its followers between

29 See in this regard articles 1, 3, 4, and 5.

30 See also Article 6 – apparently similar to Article 22 of the Law of 1928, which referred to religious denominations that were about to be recognized.

dioceses, which shall be then confirmed by decree of the Presidency of the Great National Assembly, at the proposal of the culture minister. (Article 22)

These provisions were supposed to enter into force immediately, and they facilitated the operation of radical changes in the administrative organization of churches, first in the case of the Catholic Church and then in the case of the Orthodox Church as well, drastically limiting the number of bishops, irrespective of their ecclesiastical rank and thereby eliminating any potential danger.

Otherwise, given their competencies, the legislator was preoccupied with the issue of the leaders and hierarchs of religious denominations both in 1928 and in 1948. The approach, however, was visibly different. For example, the text of the oath that the representatives of religious denominations had to take at the end of March 1948 was modified by introducing a phrase which did not appear in the previous text: 'I swear that I shall not allow my subordinates to initiate or participate in [text added] and I shall myself not initiate or participate in any action that is liable to affect public order and the integrity of the Romanian People's Republic' (Article 21).

Provisions related to the patrimony of religious denominations, which were specifically designed to serve the purpose of abolishing the Romanian Church United with Rome, were among the essential points of the law of 1948. Thereby, the communist state 'solved' a problem of the past, a sticking point during the debates for the elaboration of the law of 1928.

Then, Romanian Greek Catholic Eparchial Bishop of Cluj-Gherla, Dr Iuliu Hossu, expressed his concern about Orthodox 'proselytizing' and requested that a specification be made that the patrimony should not be divided if a part of the church community opted for another denomination.³¹ The legal situation remained uncertain after 1928, and the assets remained tacitly in the possession of those who kept their old faith. The new law predominantly envisaged property transfers to the Romanian Orthodox Church, which took place in Transylvania during the interwar period and created an adequate legislative framework for assets to become the property of Orthodox communities simultaneously with the transfer of followers, hence contributing to the gradual dissolution of the Romanian Church United with Rome, the Church of Blaj.

As for the procedures of transfer from one denomination to another, it should be noted that they were simplified by Decree-Law of 1948. Specifically, some of the much-elaborated details contained in Chapter 3 of the Law of 1928 were eliminated (articles 41–50). Then, Article 38 provided that 'Conversion from one denomination to another or leaving a denomination is free', followed by further details related to the modality of leaving a religious denomination: 'Declarations for leaving a religious denomination shall be communicated to the local

31 Apud Schifirneț 2000. 157–192.

component of the denomination left, through the local communal authority. Upon request, the communal authority concerned has the obligation to issue a proof of this communication.' Finally, Article 39 provided that: 'Religious denominations shall be able to register new followers only if applicants prove that they have announced the leaving of the religious denomination they used to belong to'. These procedures were followed during the autumn of 1948. The procedure of forcefully transferring Romanian Greek Catholic followers to Orthodoxy being in progress, state authorities were veiling the attack against the Romanian Church United with Rome under the appearance of strict compliance with the law.

Given the accelerated secularization of education, details concerning religious education provided for in the law of 1948 strictly referred to the status of institutions for the training of denominational staff. Religious denominations were aided to organize this type of education under the supervision of the state, while schools were under the authority of churches and under the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Denominations, not under that of the Ministry of Education. Faculties of theology had become university-level theological institutes overnight, and their number was well-defined: two for the Orthodox denomination, one for the Catholic denomination,³² and one for the Protestant denomination.

Finally, the provisions of Law no. 68 of 19 March 1937 on the organization of military clergy were abolished. Military churches and chapels were transferred into the property of parishes of the same denomination from the district they belonged to, together with their entire inventory. For example, the episcopal cathedral of the military clergy in Alba Iulia became the property of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Cluj, Vad, and Feleacu, together with its entire patrimony (Article 59). At the same time, under the circumstances described, although keeping all his titles and personal rights, Bishop Partenie Ciopron, the last bishop of the army and inspector of the military clergy with the rank of brigadier general, was placed at the disposition of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Article 60).³³ Apparently, spiritual assistance within the army would not have been affected by these measures. The law stipulated that: 'members of the clergy of all religious denominations must offer assistance and religious services to soldiers each time they are so requested' (Article 58).

The provisions of the decree concerning religious denominations enshrined the unilateral termination of the Concordat – which was later on implemented by the Romanian state – and completely eliminated the 'privileged' system of relationships built by the Romanian Catholic Church with the Vatican in the course of time. This and other elements as well were signalled by the Apostolic

32 It was only for the Roman Catholic denomination as long as, simultaneously with the reorganization of religious education in Romania, the Romanian Church United with Rome was outlawed.

33 Bozgan 1998. 47. Furthermore, see Pinca 2007.

Nunciature in Romania by means of a verbal note addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 7 August 1948:

The Apostolic Nunciature acknowledged the new Law on Religious Denominations published in the Official Journal of Romania No. 178 of August, and it feels obliged to draw attention to some provisions therein which seem to blatantly contradict the principles of freedom and equality enshrined in the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic, which are otherwise reaffirmed in the new law.

The Apostolic Nunciature in particular must protest against those provisions of the new law that clearly violate the indefeasible rights of this Church, in the name of the Catholic Church and its leader represented in Romania by the Nunciature (...).³⁴

Romanian authorities ignored the above document, and they hesitated to formulate an answer for quite some time. It was only later, in the course of October, that – against the backdrop of struggles related to the accelerated process of the forced conversion of Romanian Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy – the draft answer was elaborated, but it was never sent because on 30 October 1948 this issue was closed under the signature of University Professor Stanciu Stoian,³⁵ Minister of Religious Denominations, as ‘overcome’.³⁶

The interpretation of the text of the above-mentioned document highlights the true state of affairs. By simply reading the text, some standpoints of the Romanian state adopted in relation to issues raised by the representatives of the Apostolic Nunciature in Bucharest become clear.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers that the new law on the general status of religious denominations in the Romanian People's Republic, published in the Official Journal of Romania No. 178 of 4 August current year, does not contain anything such as to contradict the principles of freedom and equality for religious denominations enshrined in the Constitution (...).

34 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania – Directorate of Diplomatic Archives 2003. 336–339.

35 Teacher and corresponding member of the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic (later the Socialist Republic of Romania), he was a university professor, doctor, and centre-right politician, who had been member of several political parties. He was born in Vârteju-Nefliu, Ilfov County, on 21 September 1900, to parents Nedelcu and Niculina and died in Bucharest on 7 August 1984. He was Minister of Religious Denominations in the government of Petru Groza, named on 7 November 1947 instead of Radu Roșculeț, who had resigned. He was responsible for the religious denominations in several governments. He was replaced as minister by Vasile Pogăceanu, former communist prefect of Cluj, on 23 January 1953. He rigorously applied the restrictive policies of the communist regime against the Catholic Church. However, he was removed without hesitation by the system he had so unwaveringly served right after fulfilling his mandate.

36 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania – Directorate of Diplomatic Archives 2003. 340.

Consequently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers that the objections raised by the Apostolic Nunciature are completely unfounded.³⁷

37 The arguments for supporting the assertion of the Romanian government are the following:

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs wishes to remind on this occasion the Apostolic Nunciature that it has been sent as diplomatic representation of what is called the Papal State or the Vatican City State by the Government of the Romanian People's Republic and in no way as representative of the Catholic Church, which has its own representatives in the Romanian People's Republic (...). As for the deliberate and forced interpretation of Articles: 13, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 37, 40, and 41 of the new Law on Religious Denominations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wishes to remind the Apostolic Nunciature that the authentic interpretation and the application of these legal provisions is the sole responsibility of the Government of the Romanian People's Republic, whose sovereignty may not admit such substitutions and interferences as those contained in the verbal note at issue.

1. as for means 13, 14, and 21, the uncontested right and the constant practices of sovereign states – known as 'placet regium' in the history of the relationships between the Vatican and these states. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is surprised to find that assertions such as those by means of which a foreign mission wishes to determine the competencies of the Presidency of the Great National Assembly of the Romanian People's Republic or it affirms a right over certain citizens and over a sector within the Romanian People's Republic can be made.

2. in its Note, the Apostolic Nunciature calls into question the provisions of Article 22 of the same law. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs specifies that this article of the new Law on Religious Denominations only stipulates one of the practical ways that is necessary exactly in order to put into practice the equality of treatment as far as religious denominations are concerned (...). Only a state that is not aware of its sovereign rights and that is not animated by sincere democratic convictions may tolerate privileges to the benefit of certain denominations and to the detriment of others (...).

3. Articles 24 and 25 of the same law are called into question although it is evident that these articles only naturally extend and ensure the legitimate right of supervision of the State over certain manifestations of religious denominations so as to protect them from committing acts that would compromise the good relationships between religious denominations and the state and would cause harmful conflicts in relationships between religious denominations.

4. as for Article 28, it should be noted that generally the 'public utility' character of an institution is acquired through the way this institution acts and may not be imposed by way of theories and assertions (...).

5. as for the provisions of Article 37 of the same law, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finds that the Apostolic Nunciature makes an attempt not only at a substitution of sovereignty but even at placing papal sovereignty above the sovereignty of the Romanian People's Republic by the offensive claim to oblige the Romanian People's Republic to subordinate its legislation to the Catholic Codex (...).

6. finally, as for Articles 40 and 41 of the same law, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to underline again that no other jurisdiction of any kind from outside its borders may be accepted within the Romanian People's Republic over its own citizens. The relationships of religious denominations with foreign countries may only be religious in nature. As for the special issue of state control over the external relationships of the Catholic denomination which have as their object what the Apostolic Nunciature calls 'secrets of conscience', the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers that submitting them to state control could give rise to discussions and discontent on behalf of those interested only if they were likely to damage the democratic order of the Romanian People's Republic (...). Faced with these, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Romanian People's Republic

At first sight, the analysis of the documents exposed highlights that the dispute between the Vatican and the Romanian state was essentially all about the previous general conflict broken out at the beginning of the modern era. It consisted of a different perception of the papacy's intentions to position itself above the political power and the tendency of the state to consolidate its authority over its citizens. This conflict, fuelled by each party with its own arguments, became almost irreducible. Fortunately, a positive side of this conflict facilitated the development of European debates in the field.

The dispute between the Romanian state and the Catholic Church in Romania that lasted until 1989 was actually generated by this reference episode. The state demanded that the Catholic Church adapt its Statute so as to harmonize it with the provisions of the new law on religious denominations. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church, both the legally recognized one and the clandestine one, was always in the position of systematically refusing this request. The Catholic élite had always considered the *Codex* the main element where the state–church relationships should start from. Practically, although there were ebbs and flows in the relationship between the Romanian state and the Vatican, the irreducible controversy on the status of the Catholic Church in Romania could not be definitively settled under those circumstances.

The totalitarian regime did not accept a statute based on the *Codex Juris Canonici*. Thus, although there were several proposals for a draft statute in the course of time, the Catholic Church remained the single religious denomination in Romania that had not institutionally regulated its relationships with the state, refusing to elaborate a statute that would be accepted and recognized. This situation was only remediated by legislation passed after 2000, in a way accepted by the Catholic Church.

The leadership of the Orthodox Church was also concerned about administrative problems. This fear generated an exchange of letters between Patriarch Justinian Marina and the Minister of Culture:

Dear Minister,

Article 38 of the Law on the General Status of Religious Denominations of 4 August 1948 provides that: 'Declarations for leaving a religious denomination shall be communicated to the local component of the denomination left, through the local communal authority. Upon request, the communal authority concerned has the obligation to issue a proof of this communication.' Being notified that some mayor's offices have not complied with these legal provisions, which gives rise to confusion, and the new

feels compelled to carefully examine the opportunity of maintaining its diplomatic relationships with the Papal State for the future.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania – Directorate of Diplomatic Archives 2003. 340.

followers of a religious denomination are not able to prove that they have left the religious denomination they used to belong to, we have the honour to ask you to intervene at the Ministry of Internal Affairs to take measures so that local mayor's offices apply exactly the provisions of Article 38 of the Law on the General Status of Religious Denominations.³⁸

As a result, on 20 November 1948, a circular letter was drafted and distributed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, hoping that this would put an end to problems related to interpretation: 'County prefects and mayor's offices of cities and municipalities, please take the necessary measures for compliance with the provisions of Article 38 of the law on the General Status of Religious Denominations of 4 August 1948.'

5. The Course of the Process of 'Returning' to Orthodoxy – Chronological Phases and Area-Specific Peculiarities

The intentions of the political authorities highlighted beyond any doubt the blatant interferences of the secular power in the everyday life of religious denominations and the censorship of ecclesiastical authority through administrative measures of a financial nature. At that moment, the church represented a potentially dangerous enemy, which – once escaped from the crosshairs – could give serious headaches to the new central and local administration.

Nonetheless, laicization and secularization represented the extremes between which the church had to choose in order to prove its survival skills, moving forward towards a 'surreal' reality increasingly anchored in the spiral of absurd.

Only the future of the Romanian Church United with Rome was fatally decided. Its motivation was not scientific or founded on solid arguments. It was enough to refer to the precedent offered by the Stalinist model of breaking the religious unity with Rome which had successfully been developed on the canonical territory of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union. Directing people towards Orthodoxy, the 'return' of Romanian Greek Catholics was one of the first aspirations of the government. The echoes of this assiduous preoccupation of the majority of state officials were registered and felt in the majority of Romanian Greek Catholic communities.

As opposed to the multitude of centres opposing the return to the Orthodox Church, the number of centres in favour of this return is much smaller, and most of the time the reasons that have led to this situation are less theological in nature than personal (disputes with diocesan bishops) or social (the

38 Kom 2000. 11.

peasant or worker social origin of some Romanian Greek Catholic priests). Therefore, only the following are indicated:

- Braşov, without actual data in favour but without overt displays against;
- Şercaia parish, Făgăraş County, under the influence of priest Crisan Valeriu;
- Găinari parish, Făgăraş County, under the influence of priest Comsa Gheorghe (...).³⁹

Resistant or indifferent, opportunist or altruist, careerists or timorous, Romanian Greek Catholic priests were meticulously classified according to the possibility of being approached and at the discretion of fora involved in their supervision. This is not about a simple painting anymore but a true social fresco stuck in the sphere of religion.

Although the indifference of some Greek Catholic priests as to the issue of returning to the Orthodox Church is simulated and not real, the following may be considered indifferent and hence impressionable: (...)

Florea Ion, from Braşov, without any influence over the masses.

Simu Gheorghe, Dean of Braşov, very popular among the masses.

Fulicea Octavian, from Copăcel parish, Făgăraş County, not popular.

Ilea Petre, from Hârseni parish, Făgăraş County, loved by the population.

Motoc Aurel, from Săsciori parish, Făgăraş County, very popular among the masses.⁴⁰

The perception of the Romanian Church United with Rome about these events and what was happening in reality at the level of ecclesiastical administrative structures are not known in detail. Subsequently, however, one can imagine the difficult state the majority of Romanian Greek Catholics had to endure in the nefarious year of 1948.

1 October 1948, the Friday of that week represents *de facto* the starting point of the simulacrum of legality intended for the abolition of the Romanian Church United with Rome. The meeting, ‘coven’ of approximately thirty-eight Greek Catholic

39 Central National Historical Archives (A. N. I. C.), Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party fund, Administrative-Political Department, file no. 50/1949, sheet 9. Some Greek Catholic priests listed in the document from the archives of the Romanian Communist Party, priests carrying out their pastoral mission within the territory of Sibiu, Făgăraş, or Braşov counties at that time were already considered back then: ‘(...) of those who agreed more or less honestly, the following may be indicated: (...)

– Priest Florea – Braşov.

– Crisan Valer, from Şercaia parish, Făgăraş County, loved by the masses.

– Comsa Gheorghe, from Găinari parish (correctly Grânari n.n.), Făgăraş County, known by the population as an interesting man (...).’

40 Central National Historical Archives (A. N. I. C.), Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party fund, Administrative-Political Department, file no. 50/1949, sheets 14, 15.

clergymen, 'aware' of the historical mission they had to 'accomplish', was held in the gymnasium of *George Barițiu High School* in Cluj,⁴¹ under the watchful eye of the Securitate.

Some of them had endured imprisonment in order to accept the office of 'delegate' of priests from the Greek Catholic diocesan province, their mandate not being explicitly presented. Supervised by the representatives of the executive, in the presence of Orthodox Metropolitan Dr Nicolae Bălan of Sibiu, they accomplished the task of liquidating the Church of Blaj.

Traian Belasçu, priest in Alțina and Dean of the Țichindeal District, was the first speaker. He was elected president of that assembly. Visibly intimidated, he struggled to express in some circumstantial sentences the desire of Greek Catholics to free themselves from 'the supervision of the Vatican, which, against evangelical principles, has engaged in the front of aggressive imperialism, stirring up new wars'. The reasoning of the speaker, as simple as it was forced, invoked the necessity not to desert 'from among our people, who are bravely fighting for peace, national independence, and freedom together with the other democratic powers of the world'.⁴²

Then priest Virgil Moldoveanu followed, who tried to highlight the political character of this act, asserting that by this return of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy the church would become a 'living and active factor within state life', and its priests would become 'the pillars the Government could lean on' in its work for the 'progress of our popular democracy and for the well-being of the working masses'.⁴³

Practically, the results of this ecclesiastical meeting were minor. With one or two participants less, two circumstantial documents were elaborated by the 'apostles of reunification'. The content of the materials drafted in a hurry was aimed at popularizing and justifying treason. They were a 'Proclamation' (probably prepared in advance, which is proven by the text of delegation forms from September) and an 'Appeal' addressed to all believers in the country, especially to Greek Catholics. Thirty-seven delegates, apostate priests from the united law, of a canonical representation between the third and fourth level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, represented the proof of treason committed in their own names in the two documents mentioned.

Then, trying to assign minimum legitimacy to the non-canonical act,⁴⁴ the participants descended on Bucharest. Overwhelmed by the responsibility induced

41 It was the first Romanian high school in Cluj which opened on 19 October 1919, pursuant to the order of the Ruling Council from Sibiu.

42 Rădulescu-Sădeanu 1948. 8.

43 Rădulescu-Sădeanu 1948. 11.

44 The participants at the Cluj assembly were ipso facto defrocked and anathematized. They were excluded from the clergy of the Romanian Church United with Rome by decree of Iuliu Hossu, Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Cluj-Gherla. Some of them fell afoul of the provisions of ecclesiastic legislation twice as, irrespective of the excommunication decree issued in Cluj,

by their participation in an act that they had probably not understood either *ante* or *post festum*, they found themselves in the capital of the country in order to pay their homage to Patriarch Justinian Marina and to the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The act of receiving the delegates – of whom, due to the diligent efforts of the Securitate, by then only 36⁴⁵ remained – in the ‘holy fold and on the spiritual (...) pastures of the Romanian Orthodox Church’ had been consummated in the patriarchal residence on Sunday, 3 October 1948. The second act took place at Sfântul Spiridon Nou Church, where the diocesan Holy Mass was held by the leaders of the Orthodox hierarchy with the participation of some Orthodox deans and defecting Greek Catholic priests.

Here, the Synodal act of reception in the Orthodox Church (ratified later on 18 October 1948) and the ‘Appeal [of the delegates] to all true believers in the country’ with the call to follow the example of those who had left the unification with Rome were read out. The ceremony ended with the ‘fatherly’ word of Patriarch Justinian Marina and the signing of the synodal register by all participants.

If at the central level the sequence of meetings of a manifestly anti-Catholic character took place according to the above scenario, committees of action for the return of followers and for exerting pressure on priests unwilling to sign were established at the local level. The main objective of sub-prefects, mayors, notaries, gendarmes, priests, and teachers from the mixed teams which were assembled was to explain the appropriateness of the act of ‘returning’ to ancestral Orthodoxy, decided in Cluj, and to obtain the majority of signatures for conversion to the Orthodox Church until 21 October 1948 (preferably until 15 October 1948).⁴⁶

Based on the confessions published after 1989, four great methodological categories were used to obtain signatures for justifying the ‘return’ of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy:

- conversion out of conviction,
- administrative or physical pressure,
- forgery, and
- deceit.

the Apostolic Administrator of Blaj, Ioan Suciu, imposed the serious punishment of canonical anathematization on them.

45 The intention of the authorities was to reunite the symbolic number of 38 participants (priests) at this pseudo-synod, which was identical to the number of participants at the synod for the declaration of unification with Rome from 1698. Some of the participants were lost on the way. This aspect may be found in several works on the topic, but we did not identify any official explanation.

46 Evidently, the authorities made use of the whole range of available administrative means for this ‘persuasion’. Thus, in a circular letter addressed to the deans of the Orthodox diocese of Oradea, Bishop Nicoale Popovici, citing the orders of the Ministry of Religious Denomination, requested the finalization of the ‘returning’ process until 15 October 1948. Urging the priests to fulfil this desire, the hierarch warned that failing this they would be considered to be of bad faith and treated accordingly. See: Kom 2000. 10.

Even in this sense the so-called religious unification was not by any means uniform. Facts followed a different course from one place to the other, and the denominational reconfiguration of different areas was carried out according to the interests of the actors involved and local characteristics. The desired effect was for the state to take over all the movable and immovable assets possessed by Greek Catholic communities up to that moment, including those of followers, and to share a significant part of these assets with the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Simultaneously with efforts to take over the assets of the Romanian Church United with Rome, the ‘path of ordeal’ for Greek Catholic priests and for the majority of vicars, clergymen, deans, and priests from Blaj as well as from other areas and cities that were diocesan seats had begun. Losses were immeasurable, both at the material and the spiritual level. These can now be estimated after summing up the years of detention and suffering that rewarded faithfulness, even to death, and as a result of the analysis of the feeble patrimonial reality that has precariously sustained the existence of the Greek Catholic community during the entire period of returning to legality, from 1989 up until today.

A possible explanation for the sinuosities registered in the course of the application of legal norms is represented by the fact that the process of dividing the assets and changing the status of properties had dragged on for long, until the 1960s. As we have already asserted, we cannot speak about a unitary methodology of changing ‘ownership’. The episcopal cathedrals were taken over by Orthodox hierarchs, who found it appropriate to re-consecrate the places of worship as if they had been defiled. In villages and cities from within the Greek Catholic archdiocese, the places of worship became Orthodox by means of Orthodox priests entering these places and holding divine services there, especially on Sundays following October and November 1948. Later on, modifications regarding the system of ownership were operated in land registers in several phases during the years. Paradoxically, however, in other areas, the status of church ownership had not been changed. Another important aspect of the process of conversion to Orthodoxy which has to be mentioned in this context is as follows: although the majority of Greek Catholic believers were reluctant and opposed the abolition of their denomination, major bloody events, such as those from centres of resistance in areas known and closely monitored by the Securitate – as, for example, the Greek Catholic monastery in Bixad,⁴⁷ Satu-Mare County, a renowned centre of pilgrimage for Basilian monks of the Order of Saint Basil the Great from the Romanian province –, were not numerous, and they were unlikely to happen

47 In Bixad, the patrimonial dispute is still on-going to this date. In 1948, state authorities, which had come with the intention to take over the monastery, were simply driven out by the revolted peasants who did not want to give up their place of worship. Today, in 2020, the authorities of the same state refuse to enforce a court decision on the restitution of the monastery belonging to the Greek Catholic denomination.

under the circumstances already presented in the geographic area of Greek Catholic communities.

Against this backdrop, on 21 October 1948, substituting even values of the historical heritage according to the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the 250th anniversary of the Unification with Rome of October 1698 became the occasion to celebrate in all due pomp and circumstance the ‘radiant’ religious unification.

In Alba Iulia, in the presence of many participants, a solemn *Te-Deum* was officiated in the Holy Trinity Cathedral, renamed after this event the *Orthodox Reunification Cathedral of Transylvania*. Then, the works of the Great Church Assembly (presided over by the defector Dean Traian Belaşcu)⁴⁸ took place under similarly inauthentic auspices. A number of speeches were held, revealing an odd mixture of political-nationalist language intended to justify the arbitrary and unjust so-called ‘return’ to Orthodoxy. The motion adopted by the Assembly is illustrative, recording that:

Today, 21 October 1948, on the anniversary of two and a half centuries since here in the Romanian Belgrade some of our ancestors (...) defeated the religious unity of Romanians from Transylvania, uniting with Papal Rome, we, clergy and people, representatives of all Greek Catholic Romanians from Transylvania, Crişana, and Maramureş (...) obeying the command of our ancestors from the Field of Liberty in 1848, following the forever exemplary exhortation of all good Romanians; moved by the call of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae of Transylvania of May 1948 and by the fatherly call of His Holiness Justinian, Primate of the Orthodox Church (...); understanding the deep meaning of the ‘Cluj Proclamation of 1 October 1948 of the 430 Greek Catholic clerical delegates as well as the meaning of the Appeal of the same servants from 3 October 1948 (...)’, we declare that we break off our relations of any kind with the Vatican and papal Rome forever, that we wholeheartedly incorporate ourselves into the Romanian Orthodox Church (...); that we shall comply with all the decisions of the Holy Synod

48 Father Belaşcu’s preparations for ‘returning’ to Orthodoxy began with the period of his detention in Aiud, between 1946 and 1947. In the prison at Aiud, among others, father Nicolae Lupea, Vice-Rector of the Greek Catholic Academy of Theology in Blaj, and Nicolae Grebenea (born in Răşinari on 25 October 1905, former legionary mayor of Slănic-Moldova, deceased on 2 July 2006), Orthodox priest – who otherwise provided the information –, were his colleagues. See Grebenea 2017. 469. It should be noted that other clerics were also subject to similar ‘preparation’ of their state of mind at that time. Clergymen Gheorghe Dănilă, Ioan Vultur, and other representatives of the Blaj elite, such as Augustin Folea, Rusu Traian, or Adrian Nyerges, were also detained in the prison of Aiud. The latter ones were detained pursuant to note 1377 of 25 July 1947 of the Regional Security Inspectorate of Blaj addressed to the Security Service in Blaj. See National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) ‘I’ Informative Fund, file no. 5157, sheet 15.

of our Orthodox Church with the love of a son. From today on, we, all Romanians are and shall remain forever ONE in our right-believing faith, ONE in steadfastly serving our people, and ONE in honestly listening to the new life commandments of our dear Romanian People's Republic. We would like to sincerely thank His Holiness Patriarch Justinian and the members of the Holy Synod for all the parental love they embraced our pure wants and desires with. To the members of the High Presidency of the Romanian People's Republic and of the Government, we express our gratitude for the freedoms granted for all sons of the people, freedoms that have made the reunification of the Romanian church possible. And for all this benevolence we bring 'glory' to God.

The de facto abolition of the Romanian Church United with Rome was enshrined in the provisions of Decree no. 358 of 1 December 1948, published on Thursday, 2 December 1948. The termination of the legal existence of the Romanian Church United with Rome as well as the division of its assets between the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church were stipulated in two paragraphs bearing the signatures of four persons responsible for generating this unjust and unfair administrative measure: C. I. Parhon and Marin Florea Ionescu from the Presidency of the Romanian People's Republic as well as Cultural Minister Stanciu Stoian and Justice Minister Avram Bunaciu. Communist political leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej⁴⁹ may also be included as a person responsible for this act. Of the several gestures that may be imputed to him, we would like to recall his already mentioned attitude manifested at the debates on voting the new Constitution in April 1948. Additionally, University Professor Stanciu Stoian's⁵⁰ burden of guilt as Minister of Religious Denominations may be considered even heavier.

Later on, on 27 December 1948, the Romanian State issued Council of Ministers Decision no. 1719/1948, containing the composition of the inter-parliamentary committee entrusted with dividing the material assets that belonged to the Greek Catholic denomination. It would be a mistake and even malicious to believe that this committee has never functioned. A number of sufficient archival sources unequivocally attest the meetings of the committee that started its activity

49 The new fundamental law of the state conferred upon Dej the quality of Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, a newly created position, undoubtedly dedicated to him. He also held the position of President of the Monetary Recovery and Stabilization Committee, President of the Superior Economic Council, and coordinator of the activities of the Ministry of Economy and Finances. Consequently, he was responsible, being one of the government heavyweights. See *Arhivele Naționale ale României*, Vol. I. 1948, VIII.

50 In his speech held at the enthronement of Justinian Marina as Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in June 1948, he resumed the public attack against the Vatican in an unacceptably virulent tone. As if inspired by Gheorghiu-Dej's speeches, Stoian labelled the papal state as 'a religious instrument in the service of world reactionaries'. As for the Ministry of Religious Denominations, see Footnote 44 supra.

immediately upon its establishment. Between 6 and 21 January 1949, for example, several minutes have been concluded with the intention to distribute the movable and immovable assets of 'former Greek Catholic' organizations to central bodies, 'in the general church interest'. Moreover, from the phrasing of some of those minutes, it may be deduced that the authorities started the formalities for distributing these assets well before October 1948, i.e. even before ordering the official liquidation of the Romanian Church United with Rome, which was abusively dispossessed of its entire material wealth, whether episcopal cathedrals, places of worship, monasteries, schools, seats of associations involved in charitable activities with a social impact, amenity areas, or forestry funds.

Aspects and moments from the fateful year of 1948, especially the start of persecutions⁵¹ in the metropolitan centre of Blaj, are to be found in the evocative lines of father Adrian Teodorescu. Former priest of *Holy Trinity Cathedral* in Blaj between 1949 and 1988, he was a Greek Catholic priest who converted to Orthodoxy but returned to Greek Catholicism shortly before his death around the events in 1989. Within the pages of Report no. 213 of 19 September 1986 registered at the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Alba Iulia, the former Greek Catholic priest, who had become an Orthodox dean after the events mentioned, made a radiography of the historical phenomena, which marked the beginning of his sacerdotal mission within the Orthodox Church:

The quiet cultural and religious centre from the confluence of the Târnava rivers was therefore in full swing. Churches were devastated, museums were robbed, libraries and archives were ravaged or burnt (sic!). The personal belongings of the clerical staff of the Metropolitan Centre in Blaj, which was swept out of the locality, got into the hands of plunderers. Even the alcoves from the basement of the Chapel of Bishops in Blaj were broken into by relentless treasure hunters, and the bone remains were desecrated.

It is worth noting that the Romanian Patriarchy was listed among those mentioned by the author as full beneficiaries of the legalized robbery, organized, patronized, or tolerated by the political authorities,⁵² during which the patrimony of the Romanian Church United with Rome was squandered both in Blaj and in the whole country. The management report of the said priest noted that: 'we handed over 6 bishop's garments, some of them in a very good state, of golden and silver thread, 5 bishop's mitres, one bishop's crutch, 14 portraits portraying

51 From the multitude of appellatives used in the literature to refer to 1 October 1948, I consider that the most expressive one for the Romanian Church United with Rome is Good Friday, referred to in the writings of his holiness Bishop Dr Ioan Suci. As a supplementary detail: the calendar of that year retains the reference date on the Friday of that week.

52 Regrettably, many of the wrongdoers have remained unknown, taking the burden of horrors into the darkness of tombs.

Greek Catholic bishops of Blaj, beginning with Atanasie Anghel and ending with Dr Valeriu Traian Frențiu’.

The analysis of the events should be carried out from a bidirectional perspective. The Greek Catholic hierarchy opposed the governmental measures that affected the existence of the Romanian Church United with Rome as its integrity could not be the object of negotiations. However, at the level of the priesthood, somehow differently structured administratively and scattered all over the metropolitan province, certain ‘defects’ appeared. All these sideslips meant nothing more to the moment of 1 October 1948. The unification synod in Cluj was but a parody. The delegates were mandated, as they themselves maintained, by ‘423 clergymen, teacher-deans, and Greek Catholic priests’⁵³ of an approximate number of two thousand Greek Catholic Romanian priests who shepherded more than one and a half million souls of Greek Catholic faithful. There are no doubt explanations for these compromises, and they could be revealed only by studying them on a case-by-case basis. It is sure, however, that, irrespective of their status – ‘returned’ or ‘not returned’ –, priests were obviously dissatisfied. So outraged were they that, without too much effort, the Securitate was aware of this reality in detail. This situation, for example, is reflected, among other things, in Note no. 13/36.503 of 21 December 1949 of the Regional Directorate for the People’s Security in Sibiu. Essentially, this document signalled the state of mind of the

53

We, the undersigned clergymen, responsible before God and the conscience of our people, assembled in a holy spiritual sobor on 1 October 1948, for all the blessed reasons shown, decided and accomplished our return to the bosom of our Mother Orthodox Church. With our endless brotherly love towards you, clergy and people of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, we ask you and urge you to follow our example with confidence, hence proving yourselves good servants of the people and worthy sons of God. Returning to the bosom of the Romanian Orthodox Church from which we temporarily separated approximately two and a half centuries ago, let us have a clear conscience that through this historical act we also serve the will of God who wishes us all to be one and the great interest of our people to be one.

By doing so, be convinced that we shall be rewarded by our Motherland, and we will be blessed by God.

Yours kindly: Traian Belășcu, dean; Nicolae Jangalău, dean; Aurel Brumboiu, dean; Petru Vancu, priest; Virgil Moldovan, priest; Zaharie Hentea, priest; Paul Madincea, priest; Laurențiu Pop, priest; Ion Onișor, priest; Ion Cisteian, priest; Petru Pop, priest; Zaharia Borzea, priest; Alexandru Stupariu, priest; Emil Colceriu, priest; Septimiu Sântoma, priest; Emil Mureșanu, junior, priest; Cornel Cernescu, priest; Teodor Ploscariu, priest; Ioan Vătu, priest; Constantin Pușcașiu, priest; Victor Traian Pop, priest; Mircea Filip, priest; Dr Cornel Pop, priest; Roman Nemeș, priest; Victor Lenciu, priest; Octavian Gherasim, priest; Sabin Truția, priest; Vincențiu Poruțiu, priest; Andrei Coman, priest; George Zagrai, priest; Ioan Florea [priest II in Brașov], priest; Ioan Andrașiu, priest; Victor Negrea, priest; Alexandru Fărăcașiu, priest; Ioan Pop, priest; Glodean Dumitru, priest. The above delegation is authorized by 423 clergymen, teacher-deans, and Greek Catholic priests.

Mystification had already started at the time. Circular Letter no. 7367/1948, dated 7 October 1948, Sibiu, by which Archbishop and Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan greeted the act of ‘returning’, speaks of 38 synodal priests and 433 authorizations. There are two possible explanations: either the events did not follow their predefined course, or the evolution of events ignored the planning.

clergy in Târnava-Mică County, a region that – even overwhelmed by rage – had remained the fiefdom of the Greek Catholic Church. The text of the document, drafted by the famous torturer Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe Crăciun,⁵⁴ presented – in his unmistakable manner and style – ample passages from the statements of several former or unconverted Greek Catholic priests and their attitudes, caught by surveillance or with the aid of informants' reports collected in different circumstances. In a manner characteristic of drafting such materials, some names are also mentioned here. Among them, we find those of the above-mentioned Dean of Blaj, the 'returned' priest Adrian Teodorescu, and that of Dumitru Neda, a recalcitrant clergyman.⁵⁵

54 I would like to mention here that the well-known torturer was born in Mintiul Gherlii parish, Cluj County, on 24 July 1913, to Greek Catholic parents Nicolae and Floarea, and he died in Bucharest in 2001. Until the surrender of Northern Transylvania (30 August 1940), he was a boiler maker at the Romanian Railways (CFR) in Cluj. He then became Securitate officer with the following professional career: 1948–1951 at the Securitate in Sibiu County, 1951–1952 at the Securitate in Craiova County, 1952–15 July 1953 at the Securitate in Constanța County, 15 July 1953–31 August 1954 at the Securitate of Bucharest municipality, 31 August 1954–1 September 1958 at the Securitate in Brașov County; from 1 September 1958 to 1 December 1964, he was in command of the Aiud Penitentiary; between 1 December 1964 and 1 September 1967, he was active within the framework of Directorate III of the Securitate and at the end of his career as an officer within Directorate I of the Securitate between 1 September 1967 and 31 October 1969. He was reassigned to the reserve forces with the rank of colonel on 31 October 1969. As chief of the Regional Directorate of the Securitate in Sibiu at the time, he was responsible for numerous atrocities and infringements against human rights and fundamental freedoms. At the same time, he was the only one taken to court for his deeds after the fall of communism. As a relief, both for him and for those who strived to mimic that they were judging him, he died before truly answering for his crimes before human justice.

55 The Regional Directorate for the People's Security in Sibiu – to the General Directorate for the People's Security (...) it is also determined that the Orthodox and Catholic clergy [sic!] in Târnava-Mică County commented Metropolitan Bălan's dictatorial and brutal behaviour against priests in an unfavourable manner, sustaining that it was due to him that the unification of the 2 churches could not be accomplished in good conditions because the priests did not appreciate the metropolitan. Most priests from the county comment in the same way, and they see the metropolitan as a dictator lacking morality and who is only pursuing material interests for the satisfaction of his pleasures, surrounding himself with servile elements and removing capable and honest elements, not as a spiritual leader of the Church who sets an example with his behaviour. Comparing Metropolitan Bălan's behaviour with that of other bishops, Orthodox Dean Teodorescu Adrian of Blaj, former Greek Catholic, and the resistant clergyman Neda Dumitru from Blaj commented that if metropolitan Bălan would also treat priests as Bishop Herineanu from Roman, who is said to be popular and to help priests, the unification would have been more successful. (...) In this regard, Greek Catholic clergyman Neda Dumitru asserted that archimandrite Ghiuș [Benedict] from the Patriarchy, who seemed to behave in a similar manner to Bishop Herineanu from Roman, would be most indicated for the position of metropolitan, and he would succeed to determine a change in the attitude of resistant Greek Catholic priests.

See National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 5331, sheets 253–254.

6. The Arrest of the Episcopal Choir and of the Representative Clergy

Generally, the impact triggered by the 1 December 1948 moment is perceived differently, from three perspectives. The first one, which comes to the fore, is undoubtedly the harsh and repressive attitude of the political leadership. The second view of the event, as already foreseen back then, was the duplicitous one, characteristic to most of the hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. However, for the hierarchy and clergymen of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church United with Rome, the events which occurred during the entire course of 1948 and which irremediably affected the normal existence of this denomination were defined beyond doubt as religious harassment or persecution.

His holiness Bishop Dr Ioan Sucișu had concisely, clearly, and solemnly stated it on numerous occasions, orally in his sermons held until the moment of his arrest and evidently in writing, that '(...) the only word we can use to term the action initiated against the Romanian Church United with Rome, against its priests and followers is: persecution. (...) a number of priest-deans are locked up by the Securitate organs together with many priests, whose number is increasing each day, for the same religious reason (...)'.⁵⁶

Obviously, the entire episcopal Greek Catholic choir subscribed itself to this perception both in attitude and at the level of statements. This is proven by the decisions taken at the episcopal conferences and reunions which took place during that long timeframe of almost ten months.

Arrest and actual detention followed. In spite of our efforts, we could not eliminate all the white spots related to the arrest of bishops. As to substance, such a judiciary-administrative measure presumed at least a hint of legality, even under the precarious conditions of respecting people's rights at that time. Then, it may be assumed that the movements of a potential resistance had also been anticipated. Until now, several variants regarding the moment of and the procedures used for arresting the Greek Catholic episcopal choir have been in circulation. Most of them converged on the variant of the arrest of the bishops on the same date but at different hours. There were also statements in which the date of the arrest of Greek Catholic bishops did not coincide. I tend to subscribe to this last alternative for several reasons. First, the arrests were carried out in several locations. Practically, at the time, the technical means for the transmission of orders and dispositions were in their early days. Therefore, we could not talk about a synchronization of arrests in the current sense of the term. And, last but not least, we should not overestimate the quality of the human factor with which the Securitate operated at that time.

56 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.), Informative Fund, file no. 5331, sheet 202.

Table 1. Timeline of the arrests of senior Greek Catholic clergymen by the communist regime

No.	Ecclesiastic rank and name of the person arrested	Date of the arrest	Day of the arrest	Place of the arrest	Hour of the arrest
1	His Holiness Dr Valeriu Traian Frențiu	29.10.1948	Friday	Oradea	01:00
2	His Holiness Dr Iuliu Hossu ⁵⁷	29.10.1948	Friday	Bucharest	01:30
3	His Holiness Dr Ioan Bălan	29.10.1948	Friday	Lugoj	in the afternoon
4	His Holiness Dr Alexandru Rusu ⁵⁸	29.10.1948	Friday	Baia Mare	unknown
5	His Holiness Dr Ioan Suci ⁵⁹	26-27.10.1948	Wednesday	Blaj	01:00 (uncertain)
6	His Holiness Dr Vasile Aftenie	29.10.1948	Friday	Bucharest	unknown
7	Priest-Dean Dr Tit-Liviu Chinezu ⁶⁰	29.10.1948	Friday	Bucharest	unknown

57 Arrested pursuant to the mission and search order issued by Service III within the General Directorate for the People's Security (DGSP), no. 6700 of 28 October 1948 by team no. II, made up of Iavorschi Gh., Baroncia Victor, and Dragomir Nelu. National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 736, vol. IV, part II, sheet 307.

58 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) Criminal Fund, file 'P', no. 13277, vol. 2, sheet 38. 'Left Baia Mare knowing that I will make a simple Declaration to the Securitate there, I did not take anything with me, and I got here [to the camp in Dragoslavele] via Satu Mare, Oradea, and Bucharest'. Handwritten memories of Bishop Dr Alexandru Rusu addressed to Minister Teohari Georgescu.

59 The first Greek Catholic bishop arrested, the apostolic administrator of Blaj, Dr Ioan Suci was detained pursuant to Note no. 3544-1948 of the Romanian Metropolitanate United with Rome – Blaj. This was drafted and sent to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. It was a note of protest against measures applied to the priests and followers of the Romanian Church United with Rome. The arrest order was already issued on 26 October 1948. The resolution of Marin Jianu, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, should be mentioned as edifying: 'Comrade Pintilie. 1. This Suci is removed from the office of bishop, but still, in defiance of this measure, he signs himself with this title. 2. He agitates the population against the regime and makes false statements. 3. He gathers people and agitates them against the laws in order to disturb peace and order in the state. He shall be arrested and investigated as enemy of the regime.' His arrest was carried out pursuant to Order 5 S/55496 of 26.10.1948: 'To the contact group Regional Directorate for Security in Sibiu "Take action for arresting Bishop Suci. Col. M. Dulgheru".' A day later, '5 S/55496 of 27.10.1948 (...) communicate urgently, within 12 hours, the results of our order 5 S/55496 of 26.10.1948, encrypted (...) Col. M. Dulgheru'. See National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 5331, sheets 203, 204, and 205.

60 Both Bishop Dr Vasile Aftenie and father Dean Dr Tit-Liviu Chinezu were arrested by team no. I made up of Petrache Petre, Marin Vasile, Enache Ioan, and Dâmbu Vasile – National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 736, vol. IV, part II, sheet 304. In the case of Bishop Hossu and of the last two bishops, the mission order expressly specified that a search for 'firearms, explosives, and documents that are of interest for

As a conclusion, although we have identified new items of information which do not render the first hypothesis sustainable as there are sufficient reasons to doubt their accuracy, these new references do not offer a strict delimitation of arrest phases. Without getting into a detailed analysis of the phases, including the chronological ones, in the following I will try to present a sequential summary of these arrests.

Administrative detention in different locations which have become ad-hoc prison camps represents the second phase of suffering. In turn, this may obviously be deduced from two or three corroborated documentary sources as well.⁶¹

a) the period between 29 October 1948 and 31 October 1949 spent in the cellars/cells of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (which functioned in the building between 1946 and 1958; then, between 1958 and 1989, the building hosted the Central Committee of the Communist Party and between 1990 and 27 March 2006 the Senate of Romania);

b) between 31 October 1948 and 26 February 1949 – detainees in the camp⁶² organized on an ad-hoc basis in the patriarchal villa from Dragoslavele, former Muscel County, today Argeş. Here, Greek Catholic hierarchs were searched by Patriarch Justinian Marina. He paid the first visit alone on 14/15 October 1948, and then he paid his second visit on 3/4 December 1948, accompanied by Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop Teoctist Arăpaşu.⁶³ As a result of these visits, given that in their context Greek Catholic bishops found out details about Decree no. 358/1948,⁶⁴ the Romanian Greek Catholic episcopal choir sent its first memorandum of protest against the serious attempt against religious life in Romania to the communist authorities.

order and security in the state, paying special attention to notes, notebooks, and pocket books that these individuals might have on them', should be conducted. At the same time, it is also mentioned that they were taken into the arrest of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 736, vol. IV, part II, sheet 306.

61 One of these sources: the informative surveillance file opened for the Regent of the Apostolic Nunciature, Archbishop Aloysius Gerald Patrick O'Hara. National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 235880, holder O'Hara Gerald Patrice (according to the writing style and terminology of the time used by Securitate agents, it was one and the same person), vols. I. and II.

62 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 736, vol. IV, part II, sheet 219. Protection provided by 36 armed soldiers led by Second Lieutenant Ionică. See National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 5595, vol. 1, sheet 93, Emilia Sbiera and National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'P' Criminal Fund, file no. 13277, vol. 1, sheet 35: '13/22 March 1949 – Strictly Confidential – Report – Concerning the former Greek Catholic Bishop Rusu Alexandru, who is detained in the villa of the Patriarchy from Dragoslavele parish, Muscel County (...).'

63 Central National Historical Archives (A.N.I.C.), Ministry of Internal Affairs/Police General Directorate (M.A.I./D.G.P.) fund, file 75/1946, sheet 407.

64 The decree of the Presidency of the Great National Assembly which declared the Romanian Church United with Rome illegal was published on 2 December 1948.

This memorandum did not move the authorities to revise their measures already taken. On the contrary, it caused an enhancement in the intensity of repressive acts employed by the state. The action of demolishing the administrative structures of the Greek Catholic denomination continued. This measure was applied all over the country, especially in areas where resistance was anticipated.⁶⁵ The protest was ignored, the authors did not receive any answers, but the authorities maintained the measure of administrative detention. Greek Catholic bishops were sent to the Orthodox monastery in Căldărușani, together with the leaders of the Greek Catholic denomination: clergymen, theology teachers, and deans arrested simultaneously with the bishops. Until then, they were detained in the camp improvised by the government in the neighbourhood of the Neamț monastery.

c) between 26/27 February 1949 and 24 May 1950, forced 'housing' (compulsory domicile) in Căldărușani monastery for 'one year and three months'.⁶⁶ Here, besides the fact that they were detained against their will, Greek Catholic clergymen were prohibited from following their previous daily routine, according to their personal needs and usual habits, especially inasmuch as their spiritual life was concerned.

Here, given the exceptional circumstances, new bishops were ordained, closely observing the norms issued by the Holy See and previously made available by the Regent of the Apostolic Nunciature, Archbishop O'Hara.⁶⁷ The senior of the episcopal choir, his eminence Dr Valeriu-Traian Frențiu, raised priests Ioan

65 The informative surveillance file identified as that of his holiness Bishop Dr Vasile Aftenie, 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 154136, contains detailed information about the last period of the bishop's life. Most data and references this file contains are consistent with the details that the diocesan bishop of Cluj-Gherla, who, forced by circumstances, has become the memorialist of Romanian concentration camps, presents in his book. Thus, I cite from report no. 73579 of 22 February 1949:

Concerning the memorandum of bishops Iuliu Hossu, Alexandru Rusu, Vasile Aftenie, Ioan Bălan, and Ioan Suci, written on 11 December 1948 and approved by Traian Frențiu, forwarded to this General Directorate for People's Security Pitești under no. 73579 of 17 December 1948 (...), we have the honour to report the following:

As the presence of these bishops in one place only makes them more fierce and reiterates their decision not to follow the example of the majority of the Greek Catholic population returning to Orthodoxy, we are of the opinion to separate them from one another (...).

National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheet 29.

66 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheet 200. In this respect, see also National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'P' Criminal Fund, file no. 13277, vol. 2, sheet 54: 'General Directorate for People's Security No. 523/157.691 28. Dec. 1949/29 Dec. 1949 (stamp). Take measures for taking Bishop Alexandru Rusu, presently detained at Căldărușani Monastery – Ilfov, to the arrest of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.' In all these cases and situations presented, there is a perfect resemblance between the data contained in the indicated memorial source and those coming from the Securitate Archives, practically confirming one another if put together.

67 See National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (A.C.N.S.A.S.) 'P' Criminal Fund, file no. 13278, vol. 11, sheet 34.

Chertes and Dr Tit–Liviu Chinezu, Greek Catholic Dean of Bucharest, to the rank of bishops.

Two diocesan bishops were taken from Căldărușani monastery to be investigated for alleged faults. The first one to leave his mandatory residence with the destination Bucharest – the seat of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – was Bishop Dr Ioan Suci, the apostolic administrator of Blaj, on 10 May 1949.⁶⁸ He was suspected of having tight relationships with individuals from the American military mission. From American soldiers to armed resistance in the mountains, there was only one missing link, which officials strived to attribute to Bishop Dr Suci among others. Furthermore, he was suspected of elaborating and disseminating manifestos against the measures promoted by the government against religious denominations. The reason was that a series of documents were found at his resting place in Dragoslavele, in the lining of the sofa Suci was sleeping on, after the bishops had left.

Then, a few days later, on 25 May 1949, Auxiliary Bishop Dr Vasile Aftenie⁶⁹ followed, with the same destination, the seat of the sinister Ministry of Internal Affairs. The vicar of Bucharest was under scrutiny of Directorate V of the Securitate for alleged previous adherence to the National Resistance Movement.⁷⁰

Dr Alexandru Rusu, Greek Catholic Bishop of Maramureș, was also exposed to a mock trial, already initiated before his administrative detention. He was also

68 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheet 29: 'Ioan Bălan and Ioan Suci, irreducible opponents of the regime, shall be isolated in an inaccessible hermitage each and make it impossible for them to keep contact with their former residencies in Lugoj and Blaj, where compact groups opposing unification are still reported.'

69 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheet 29: 'there is information that he must have been linked to subversive organizations'.

70 As for Bishop Aftenie's journey through captivity, we should mention the content of a 'personal file', the last one the Securitate drafted about him. Registered under no. 523 on 10 May 1950, the date of the bishop's death, this document clarifies the last moments of his life, which are to be found in the above-mentioned file.

Bishop Aftenie Vasile stayed in Căldărușani until May 1949, when he was transferred to a monastery in Sinaia – Prahova, where he was held for approximately 10 days and then taken to the General Directorate for People's Security. The investigations related to Bishop Aftenie Vasile yielded the following results: In the spring of 1947, Attorney-at-Law Aurel Mărgineanu informed him of the subversive organization 'National Resistance Movement', indicating to him that the organization was made up of elements unsatisfied with the regime (...). In the spring of 1947, the same Mărgineanu gave Bishop Aftenie Vasile a memorandum in order to submit it to the Papal Nunciature and then the Nunciature to forward it to the Vatican. (...) It follows therefore from his statements that are on file that he was part of the subversive organization 'National Resistance Movement' by receiving manifestos from this organization and accepting to send the memorandum to the Nunciature. The aforesaid was under investigation.

National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) 'I' Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheets 136–138.

taken from Căldărușani in order to be investigated in the same sinister location of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the ground that he was ‘already involved in a lawsuit for trafficking foreign currency (...), his guilt as to economic laws being precisely established’.⁷¹

All three bishops resisted the harsh investigations and not one of them betrayed his faith. Only two of the Greek Catholic bishops would survive these so-called investigations. Dr Vasile Aftenie, General Vicar of the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș, with his seat in Bucharest, 48 Polonă Street until his arrest, died within the walls of the Văcărești prison on 10 May 1950.⁷²

d) between 25 May 1950 and 4 January 1955, for ‘four years, seven months, and 11 days’,⁷³ ‘36 Catholic clergymen and an Orthodox priest’,⁷⁴ together with the political and military élite of the interwar period, the representatives of the Romanian ‘intellectuals’, the five surviving Romanian Greek Catholic bishops were held at the county prison reserved for political detainees in Sighet.⁷⁵ Their only fault was to dedicate their lives to the centuries-long desire of Romanians, the creation of a unitary Romanian state, while, in the same context, they could be blamed of having the joy to contribute to and participate in its realization. Thus, these true heroes had become simple statistical numbers, only sporadically to be calculated with, in order to express the degree of respect for liberties and civil rights in communist Romania.

The Greek Catholic bishops were stripped of sacerdotal and diocesan distinctions, bearing the unjust dishonour with dignity and serenity. They were deprived of elementary external attributes that differentiate humans from animals, their clothing and underwear. Equipped with the outfit specific to feared evildoers, they had to perform activities beneath their dignity, some of which exceeded by far their remaining physical potential. This whole time they were also subjected

71 National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) ‘I’ Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheet 29.

72 ‘On 25 March of the current year, he had one of his hands and one of his legs paralysed. On 27 March of the current year, he was hospitalized in the Hospital of the Văcărești penitentiary, with the observation that he should receive medical care. On the night of 9/10 May of the current year, the said Aftenie Vasile succumbed.’ National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (C.N.S.A.S.) ‘I’ Informative Fund, file no. 154136, sheets 136–138. Under those circumstances, he became the first victim among the Greek Catholic bishops who died for their faith. At the level of his conscience, there was not even a shred of doubt. He stood unflinching in spite of a comprehensive arsenal of temptations the authorities used to tarnish his image and defeat his will. If internally he was not affected at all, his body was crushed by torture because it was scarred by the marks left on him by savagely applied instruments of pain. Death under those harsh conditions came as his salvation. It occurred against the background of a generalized paralysis, which by miracle the bishop survived for almost ten days.

73 Hossu 2003. 218.

74 Hossu 2003. 228.

75 This would become one of the prisons for the extermination of the political and intellectual élite, such as those in Râmnicu-Sărat, Galați, Aiud, Craiova, Brașov, Oradea, and Pitești.

to a strict regime meant to exterminate them through starvation, exposure to the elements, and traumatizing corporal punishments.⁷⁶

7. Brief Conclusions

Consequently, the dramatic character of the existence of religious denominations during the atheist materialist regime characterized by a manifest tendency of state authorities to despoil the ecclesiastical patrimony is remarkable and worthy of being honoured.

However, summing up the information presented, if the other religious denominations managed to survive at the limit of normality, with their patrimony affected in different ways, there is no ecclesiastical patrimony of the Romanian Church United with Rome that we could speak of during the time gap of the more than forty-two years of catacombs and illegality from the period of communist persecution.

The Church of Blaj had, by the end of this persecution, officially ceased to exist.

76 The statistical data contained in the criminal complaint of 22 May 2007, submitted to the Prosecutor's Office by the High Court of Cassation and Justice, Military Prosecutor's Offices Section concerning the abuses and crimes committed, ordered or inspired by 210 former commanders and officers in charge in the Romanian penitentiary system, identified by the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes is suggestive in this regard. These cadres of the repressive-penitentiary system are accused of having used the detention system as the main instrument for carrying out the social extermination policy for the physical liquidation of certain social categories (bourgeoisie, landowners, peasants, intellectuals, students, clergymen) by means of assassination, deportation, imprisonment, forced labour and for the scheduled extermination of political detainees between March 1945 and December 1989. Upon documentation in different archives and based on the testimonies of the very few survivors, a considerable number of victims of the detention regime, coming from the different categories above, had been identified by the experts of the above mentioned institute according to the following:

- members of the Romanian military élite (106 people dead and arrested in prisons);
- members of the religious élite (586 Orthodox priests, 84 Greek Catholic priests, and 52 Roman Catholic priests);
- members of the Romanian political élite (836 prominent personalities);
- members of the economic and business élite (672 economists, smallholders, and businessmen);
- members of the Romanian intellectual élite (221 intellectuals: historians, professors, writers, lawyers, journalists, engineers, doctors, actors, etc.);
- political activists (1,022 persons).

Furthermore, we should note the calculation of the total detention period for Greek Catholic bishops and priests, which – according to Viorica Lascu (see Lascu 2009. 67), distinguished professor in Cluj, daughter of academy member and priest Alexandru Borza – sums up to a total of 153 years of imprisonment for bishops and, together with the priests, a total of over seven hundred years.

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