

ANCA ȘINCAN

OF MIDDLEMEN AND INTERMEDIARIES

STATE AND CHURCH IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA

MINISTERUL CULTELOR
DIR. DE STUDII

Osar Nr 102
Vol. Nr 1

1954

CUPRINS:

Situație privind la
constinții de locasuri de
cult. Sămoș 1954 - octombrie 1955

Presa Universitară Clujeană

31 Dec 1954
11 Oct 1955
601 file

ANCA ȘINCAN

Of Middlemen and Intermediaries

State and Church in Communist Romania

PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

2025

Referenți științifici:

Dr. habil. Cristian Vasile (CS I – Institutul de Istorie
„N. Iorga”, București)

Dr. Novák Csaba Zoltán (Președinte Institutul pt. Studiarea
Minorităților Naționale, Cluj-Napoca)

ISBN 978-606-37-2514-2

© 2025 Autoarea volumului. Toate drepturile rezervate.
Reproducerea integrală sau parțială a textului, prin orice
mijloace, fără acordul autoarei, este interzisă și se pedepsește
conform legii.

Tehnoredactare computerizată: Cristian-Marius Nuna

Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai
Presa Universitară Clujeană
Director: Codruța Săcelean
Str. B.P. Hasdeu nr. 51
400371 Cluj-Napoca, România
Tel.: (+40)-264-597.401
E-mail: editura@ubbcluj.ro
<http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/>
<https://biblioteca.ubbcluj.ro/>

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
1. Research questions and hypotheses	10
2. The structure	16
3. Sources and methodology	19
 CHAPTER I	
Historiographical and theoretical overview	29
I.1. The use of the Russian case as base for asymmetric comparison	29
I.2. On the particularity of the Romanian case	34
I.3. On “Church” versus “churches”	49
I.4. Prior research on the subject	54
I.5. Conceptual base	63
 CHAPTER II	
Remnants of the past, problems of the present – a historical overview	67
II.1. From the 1848 revolutionary to the <i>associationist</i> model of state–church relationship	69
II.2. The Church and the Communist Regime	76
II.3. Conclusion	92
 CHAPTER III	
Administering authority: changing central policy from within the political administration	96
III.1. Overview of the Ministry for Religious Denominations	99

III.2. On hierarchs and hierarchies	104
III.2.1. Patriarch Justinian – a historiographical overview	106
III.2.2. The double hierarchy of the Orthodox Church	111
III.2.3. The new patriarchal administration	118
III.3. Church policies – different solutions to internal problems	126
III.3.1. The monastic life	126
III.3.2. The theological education system	127
III.3.3. The elephant in the room – the Greek Catholic problem	128
III.4. Conclusion	136

CHAPTER IV

Know thy enemy – changing central policy from outside the political administration 138

IV.1. Research methodologies – challenges and solutions	141
IV.2. The local inspector for religious denominations	145
IV.2.1. From administering control to owning control	151
IV.2.2. A new local inspector: selection and characteristics	160
IV.2.3. Attributes of supervision and control	166
IV.2.4. A typical working day of the local inspector	179
IV.3. The response of the religious denominations to the interferences of the local inspectors	191
IV.4. Guarding the guardians	198
IV.5. Conclusion: an interdependent system of control	201

CHAPTER V

Central policy into practice – building a Church in the 1980s Transylvania 203

V.1. The legislation regarding the construction of churches and places of worship	208
--	-----

V.2. Constructing process: the reasons and the methods	214
V.3. Cerghizel	229
V.4. Conclusion	241
Final remarks	243
Bibliography	251
Index of people, places and terms	266

List of illustrations and tables

Illustration 1. Example of file cover from the Direction for Studies dealing with the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, (The Archive of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations)	22
Illustration 2. Example of file cover from the Direction for Studies dealing with the Romanian Orthodox Church catalogued in the archives (The Archive of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations)	23
Illustration 3. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the new Patriarch Justinian Marina and Archbishop Nicolae Bălan, 1948 (AGERPRESS historical archive)	112
Table 1. Evaluation for the construction of churches process, 1954 (The Archive of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations)	213
Illustration 5. The old church of Cerghizel and the foundation of the new Church (Photograph from the personal archives of Fr. Ioan Tutecean)	231
Illustration 6. Dedication ceremony. Bishop Emilian Bordaș surrounded by villagers and officials. On his left, Traian Hărșan, the Communist Party's First Secretary in Mureș County (Photograph from the personal archives of Fr. Ioan Tutecean)	235
Illustration 7. The ceremony of the consecration of the new church. Bishop Emilian Bordaș with archpriest Aurel Sămărghițan and other priests. On the left, behind the bishop, village official. (Photograph from the personal archives of Fr. Ioan Tutecean)	236
Illustration 8. The new Orthodox Church in Cerghizel, 1982. (Photograph from the personal archives of Fr. Ioan Tutecean)	237

Introduction

In the months after December 1989, the legend goes, the family of Tankó Árpád visited several churches to find a priest willing to perform the Christian burial for the recently deceased inspector for religious denominations in Tîrgu-Mureş. They were turned away from all. Unitarians, Roman Catholics, Protestants and even Orthodox, each refused the family on various grounds. The cautionary tale of the communist cadre who controlled and supervised religious life in the small Transylvanian town, this urban legend of the middleman compromising everything to be the intermediary between the communist administration and the religious denominations including his passage to the kingdom of heaven was among the first sermons I have heard when undertaking this research. The conclusions of the story were double folded depending on the audience. On the one hand this incident spoke of the difficulties met by clergymen during the communist period. Their response to the inspector's family was supposedly built upon resentment, the inspector having authority over the practicing of their religion. The incident spoke of the state's involvement and control over religious life. On the other hand, the story had a moral teaching, that of the victory of religion. The communist functionary returned to God by wanting to be buried with a Christian burial and this spoke of the resilience of religious beliefs in face of adversities, the victory of the good over the evil.

The middleman and the insider/outsider were the two characters that impacted and defined the construction of the relationship between state and church in communist Romania. They functioned as the conveyor belt of this complicated mechanism. Sometimes congruent, the middleman also the insider, the inspector/ communist functionary also a member of the church, paradoxically joining two seemingly incompatible positions to speak both for the communist state and for his religious institution, sometimes incongruent, two different positions in the state administration, one being endowed with authority over the religious life, one only administering authority, both go-betweens the church and the state administration. In defining the relationship between politics and religion in communist Romania these two positions that one finds at their intersection became the subject of the present research.

The influence that religion could exercise over the field of politics of communist Eastern Europe generally was discarded by scholarship and others as insignificant, with few exceptions to prove the point such as the case of the Catholic Church in the late 1970s Poland, Stalin's recuperation of the Orthodox Church during the Second World War, Cardinal Mindszenty's fight against communism with implications for Hungarian foreign policy, human rights activism of Neo Protestant groups especially after the 1975 signing of the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Romanian Orthodox Church influence on the politics of the communist regime is connected to the 1960s independence movement of the Romanian Communist Party from Moscow and their appeal to nationalist policies to win over public support.

It is in the 1960s that the Church's nationalist discourse is altered and adopted by the communist administration, when personalities of the Church were involved in carrying out this nationalist discourse to the Diaspora and the historical pantheon of the church, its history and tradition were gradually recuperated in the national canon. This book argues that this association between the Church and the State is inherited from the interwar period. It exists during the first years of the installation of the communist regime and is redesigned in the late 1950s to serve a new political goal of the Romanian communist administration.

This book is the rewrite of my doctoral thesis submitted at the History Department at Central European University in 2011. It looks at the meeting points between church and state during the communist regime. It intends to uncover the mechanism of the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the state with regards to the options that both parts had and took, to safeguard their own interests: for the Church to continue its functioning and for the new State to take advantage of its functioning and in the same time to force a diminishing of the role of religion and of the church in society. The focus is the interaction between the church of the hierarchy and various groups inside the church and the regime both at central and at local level. The research argues that the model negotiated by the church hierarchy and the state administration was an *associationist* one.

The focus of the research concentrated on the initial phase of Romanian communism, from 1948 to the end of the 1960s since I argue that the specific characteristics of the relationship between the Romanian church and state developed during the

late 1940s and early 1950s. It is then that rules and norms were interiorised and the relationship between the two gained routine. During the 1960s the mechanism of relationship remained unchanged until the end of communism and, arguably, is preserved after 1989. I have selected the period since much of the negotiations, exchanges, compromises, regulations, practices, were defined in this first decade and a half of Romanian communism, the years that followed only replicating a routinized pattern of behaviour. Moreover, considering the methodology used, researching this period in the archives allowed for a clearer depiction of the relationship since the process was recorded vigilantly with painstaking attention for details and the self censorship for the person recording, observing, informing, creating the material was in early stages.¹

1. Research questions and hypotheses

At the installation of the communist regime in 1947 both state and the Orthodox Church had an array of options for their future cohabitation. The communist central administration in Romania had to manage the religious arena of the country based on a precedent: that of the Soviet model. However, the

¹ In a casual conversation with a former inspector for religious denominations I was warned about this process that I termed – the closing of the archives. He told me that most of his reports for the ministry were written before the priest conferences/ religious services/ meetings with hierarchs or religious communities and so on that he attended. He carefully selected what could and could not be sent to the centre and controlled the information flow closely. Yet he admitted that in the first years of his job his reports were written post factum and were more relevant to the case he reported.

result was very different from the Soviet one. Their attempt to impose a model of collaboration (associate the religious denominations with the regime) came simultaneously with the state's attempt to exert its control over the religious denominations with the expressed desire to downsize their influence in the public space. From this paradoxical situation where the state was forced into trying to associate the religious denominations and banish them at the same time, the Romanian Orthodox Church gained sufficient strength to negotiate its position both in the relationship with the state and in the relationship with the other religious denominations in the country.

The Orthodox Church could have followed three models of behaviour for designing its relationship with the state: opposition (the Catholic Church model), submission and retreat (the Russian Orthodox model), and the model of “compromise”² or “association.” Out of the three options one is completely excluded following the research materials I have seen. Contrary to the Russian Orthodox Church the Romanian Orthodox Church did not retreat from society in response to state pressures and demands. The church adopted the other two variants: association and opposition in constructing its relationship with the communist state.

Most researchers persist and insist on treating the Romanian Orthodox Church as a cohesive body, speaking in one voice thus entering in an either-or type of explanation of the Church–State

² Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme. L'idéologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le regime communiste*, (Brussels: Editions de l'Universite de Bruxelles, 1997).

relationship.³ The existence of more than one church inside the Orthodox Church is natural. First the Romanian Orthodox Church, as it functions in 1948, was established late thus there were at least two, if not three regional orthodox communities segregated and context dependent that functioned sometimes independent of each other, with different agendas, different interactions with the state and different positions in society. Then there is a church of the hierarchy different than the church of the community of believers. How much one influenced the other and how much their potential clashes influenced their position towards the state is yet to be determined. And finally, the “church of the hierarchy” was rarely, usually only when forced by external actors, acting as a cohesive group. There are factions, groups of influence, and various clans inside the hierarchy, played one against the other by the state administration (see the penetration in the decision-making body of the so-called “legionary group”).

Why was the Orthodox Church treated by researchers as a *cohesive* (monolithic) institution? The patriarchate of Justinian Marina (1948–1977) is a period of over centralization of the Romanian Orthodox Church – brought about by inner necessity or enforced by state. At first look one could argue that the chain of command functioned well, that the policy making body was strictly concentrated at the highest level of the hierarchy and that from that level the policy reached the humblest of the priests. The factors that contradict this theory are most of the time

³ See Pedro Ramet for a counterargument to treating churches as monoliths in *Cross and Commissar The politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 178.

explained through a state intervention like the creation of the double hierarchy.

On the other hand, it is easier to explain the Romanian Orthodox Church's relation to the state by treating it as an institution with one voice. It is more facile to argue either its collaboration or its opposition when looking at the church as a monolith. Few researchers in their attempt to prove the "Orthodox Church suffered as well" theory first came close to treating the church as made up of a multiplicity of voices but never finalized cohesive research on the topic. In this line of interpretation, one must place the ambiguity in treating the *Burning Bush movement* (Rugul aprins), the elimination of various subjects, persons, and situations from research because they did not fit the pattern – opposing when the rest collaborated and the other way around.

The book is structured into two major parts: one that looks at the state and its view on the Romanian Orthodox Church as an institution and on religious denominations altogether. Here I integrate an overview of the state apparatus, mechanism of interaction and the policies towards the religious denominations. This part of the analysis is based on the idea that the communist party state was "forced" to accept functional religious institutions in the public space either as legitimating institutions, because of its inability to do away with religion or simply because of implementing the soviet model of church state relations functional from 1943. Thus, the characteristics of the state policy were context dependent and revolved around limiting the force of religion by intervening in its activity, controlling it on three levels: organizational, economic and ideological instead of banning

the church altogether (though this was a viable option for some party policy makers until being confronted with the failure of the Greek Catholic solution). This was a solution that was based on the possibility to infiltrate the religious denomination, suffocating it with rules and regulations it had to obey, subordinating it economically to the state and brutally eliminating any opposition that might arise. This was accomplishable on a central level leaving aside “the masses.” This relationship of the state with the administrative and decisional centre of the religious denominations was one of the reasons why the Romanian Neo-Protestants were forced in early 1950s by the state to organize a central administration. And not foreseeing the failure of such demand for the Neo-Protestants was the reason most policies failed when applied to these denominations while succeeding in the denominations with a centralized organization. The state recognized two different churches functioning in the same time: a church of the hierarchy and one of the communities of believers but by making the hierarchy responsible for believers, clergy, and even oppositional groups the state created the appearance of one church. The exceptions demanded special policies.

In deciphering the make-up of the state apparatus involved in coordinating the religious organizations and activities in the country a special part is devoted to the recuperation of the so-called “legionary group” inside the Department for Religious Denominations. I argue under the label of “blackmail potential” that these personalities of the Orthodox and, probably, Greek Catholic Church were drawn up into collaboration with the regime and played an important role in defining the state policy towards religious denominations and if they did not construct the church

policy entirely, at least they provided the justifications for most of the actions. Finding for instance Rev. Professor Liviu Stan or Rev. Professor Spiridon Cârdea on the payroll of the Department during the 1950s Stan in charge with justifying canonically the relationship with the state, Cârdea in charge with the Greek Catholic problem and the nationalist discourse of the Church. All of them can be traced back to the legionary movement with more or less open adhesions. They have created a network that was preserved until late in the 1960s and 1970s that introduced various positions inside state policy like those had in the interwar.

Another part of the research was devoted to analysing the options and the solutions adopted by the Romanian Orthodox Church in its relationship with the state. This part will go between two attitudes adopted by the “church” – opposition and association. The research will focus on defining the characteristics of the networks inside the hierarchy, under the assumption that a fight for legitimating the new hierarchy between the new Patriarch and the old hierarchy created one of the first internal reasons for association with the state. The state preserved both actors tipping the balance for the newly appointed Patriarch but in the same time creating a core of oppositional voices inside the Department for Religious Denominations many of them penetrating the hierarchy at one time or the other ensuring the Patriarch’s cooperation (see the nomination of Iustin Moisescu as Metropolitan at Jassy).

State involvement in the activity and organization of the Church was made easier once they succeeded doubling the existing hierarchy with supporters of the regime and subordinating economically the church to the state. The way the Church

hierarchy fought against this subordination (economic and organizational) I consider a way of masked opposition inserted in the overall attitude of collaboration. The measures taken and the mechanisms developed allowed a preservation of a status quo expressed in the number of believers, clergy, or church buildings.

The way in which the relationship between state and church functioned at local level is analyzed via a case study: the construction of a church in the late 1970s early 1980s Transylvania. The syncope in the implementation of the rules and regulations at a local level and the re-arrangements of the state religious policies were followed via this particular example.

2. The structure

The research is structured into five chapters and a conclusion. The book begins with a review of the main theoretical and historiographical approaches and hypotheses that are used to develop the argument. This is followed by an overview of the structural changes brought about by the installation of the new regime and traces the relationship between the state and the church back in the interwar period. Three case-studies show how the model is put to practice. The book ends with depicting the existing mechanism of state–church relations as different from the imported Soviet model or the model sought after by Party policy makers.

The second chapter: Remnants of the past, problems of the present (a historical overview) is an introductory chapter that

discusses the history of the relationship between state and church looking comparatively at the interwar and communist period. I argue that the communist mechanism of state–church relations does not severally disrupt the state–church relationship as set in the interwar period. Remains of the problems that the church was confronted with in the interwar period like the lack of administrative unification in the Orthodox Church, decentralisation, or weaknesses in its relationship with the state make the transition to the 1950s. All these problems were added to the chaotic first years of the communist regime with its hierarchical shifts, open terror and a steady increase in the state’s interference and control over religious life.

The following chapter on the administration of state authority by specialists coming from within the church environment argues for the changing of state central policy on religion and religious institutions from within the political administration. It looks at the paradox the communist administration was faced with when trying to apply the Soviet model of state–church relationship functional since 1943. While in the Soviet Union the complete subordination of the denominations to the state preceded their co-optation, in the Romanian case, the imposition of a model of collaboration with the regime occurred at the time with the state attempt to exert its control over the religious denominations. Understaffed, lacking specialists and acknowledging that the Soviet blueprint might not fit to the letter the Romanian situation the communists used right wing/ fascist ideologues *turned* communist policy makers to administer the political control over the church – trained in the interwar, insiders in the life of

the Church, part of the Church they were used to design and implement the state policy over religious life.

The fourth chapter discusses the response of the Church to the state attempts of control. The reactions to the state policies that go from various negotiation techniques, blackmail, bribes, isolating the collaborators, hiding behind Church regulations, using the believers and so on allow the church to maintain a certain *status quo* in the number of priests, believer and church places and less state interference in religious practice. How orthodox is the communist administration? How un-orthodox is the deal-making process?

The final chapter, *Central policy into practice – Building a Church in the 1980s Transylvania* verifies whether the top-down model of church state relations is working, and whether central policy is different when put into practice by local state administration. The chapter focuses on the analysis of a different layer of decision making by localising the relationship. I argue that, while the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the communist regime was negotiated at a central level, it was renegotiated at the level of the community of believers when put into practice with significant results in changing the policy altogether and influencing the relationship as negotiated at central level. How the legal framework was bypassed at a local level through negotiations between church members/ clergy and hierarchs and the local communist administration and how the results triggered a response at central level reflected in the modification of state policy when it came to building and renovating churches or parish houses.

3. Sources and methodology

The research is based on archival material from the State Secretary for Religious Affairs,⁴ the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarchal See⁵ and the Alba Iulia Orthodox Archbishopric archives⁶ to which the case study of Cerghizel belonged administratively. The image over the dynamics of the relationship with the state as surfacing from the documents in the archives of the State Secretary for Religious Affairs is one sided and corrupted. The reports, notes from informants and policy documents are to be taken with caution since the influence of the authors is present. A process of censorship and self censorship takes place from the author of the document, the influence the person the document is designed for has on the outcome of the document, in some cases the invented situations that the documents describe, not to mention the numerous hands in which these documents have been at one point or another they all impact the way in which the document has to be read by the researcher. In chapter four I offer a closer look into the creation of the document by the inspector for religious denominations and offer several ways to supplement the written document (oral interviews, diversifying the sources and the types of archives).

There is an ongoing war over the archives and the access I was granted in some of them came after numerous interventions, personal favours and recommendation letters. Most of these

⁴ I have researched in the Archives of the State Secretary for Religious Affairs in April 2003, January 2005–February 2006

⁵ I have researched in the Archives of the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarchal See in April 2003, February–April 2005

⁶ I have researched in the Archives of the Alba Iulia Romanian Orthodox Archbishopric in May 2005

archives remained closed today to the researcher. My access in some was limited and controlled. In the archives of the Romanian Patriarchate where I had access because of personal relations and several reference letters I was allowed only to collections that the archivist thought that presented no danger. The decision rested with Mr. Vasilescu, the archivist, after an initial discussion he had with the personnel at the secretary of the Patriarchate that most probably laid the initial grounds on what I was about to see. I have seen archival materials from the church foreign affairs collection, economic collection and the briefs of the Holy Synod meetings. I was allowed copies and for some time these copies I made were read through when I left the archives. After a while the control loosened and becoming a familiar, I had casual conversations that turned into interviews with some of the Patriarchate Secretary personnel. They helped me with various details that the archival materials did not preserve (hierarchical politics, the feuds in the central administration of the church, personal habits of the hierarchs, their likes and dislikes, personal relationships of all sorts, the policy of employment and so on). My research in the Patriarchal Archives was done over a period of several weeks. It stopped after I was granted access to the State Secretary for Religious Affairs Archives and was able to round up my research. Most of the materials preserved in the Patriarchate Archives can be found in the State Secretary ones.

My access into the State Secretary Archives was granted on similar conditions. The key factor was having someone to vouch for what I was to use the archival materials for (or against). It took in this case as well a period of time until I was allowed a less controlled access. The archives have been tempered with.

The materials from the year 1948 and the forced union of the Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are no longer in archives. The files on the hierarchs and leadership of the religious denominations are either missing or tampered with. Large parts of the archive materials are not processed in the archive and can be found in piles in the basement of the State Secretary. All these created extensive problems in research. Currently this archive was transferred to the National Archive where it was re-catalogued with a different organizational system and titles than those of the Ministry for Religious Denominations.

Access was then granted by the minister or the secretary for religious affairs only to a selected number of researchers and their direct request and their ability to prove the need to study in these archives.⁷ A important part of the archival materials is not organized and cannot be cited properly, entire periods are missing and the sections that are not currently used by the present ministry personnel is still placed in piles in the building's basement. This is the case with the files on the foreign affairs of the religious institutions during the communist period, the files that the inspectors sent to the ministry and were considered by the ministry personnel as unimportant.

The organized files belong to the economic section, to the section that dealt with religious patrimony, secretarial section that dealt with internal paperwork in the ministry and correspondence and the sections of studies (Direcția Studii) that

⁷ My access in the Archives of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations was granted by Minister Mona Muscă as response to my request for access sent to the Ministry via the senator Eugen Nicolăescu, then senator of Mureș Electoral College.

has the policies, documents on which the policies were based, historical, cultural, social religious studies on various problems the ministry was confronted with (examples go from the study on the Orthodox monastic life compared with the Roman Catholic monastic life, the study on the Orthodox saints, the study on the characteristic of Neo Protestant denominations, evaluations of the number of members, tables with the number of priests, monks, nuns and so on).

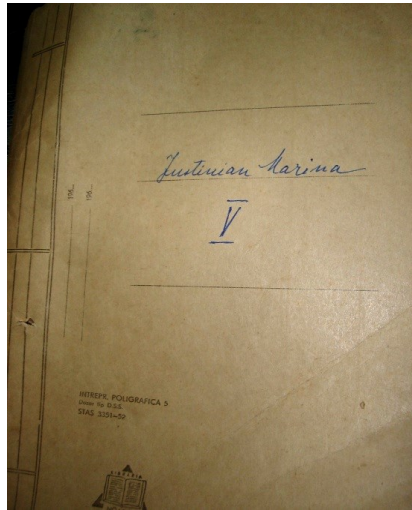


Illustration 1. Example of file cover from the Direction for Studies dealing with the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church – not processed in the archives⁸

When I started my research at the State Secretary for Religious Denominations there was no official estimation on number of files in the ministry archives. These files have been archived in

⁸ Departament Culte, Direcția Studii, File Patriarch Justinian, vol. 5, 1962–1965, 579 pp., Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat Culte, Bucharest, Romania (not processed in the archives)

the communist period and that was preserved in the early 2000s. Nothing was computerized and thus research meant flipping through entire files (tens to hundreds of pages per file). There was a guiding title of the file, the year the documents were produced in and a number. The numbers are indicative of the denomination (83–87 – the Romanian Orthodox Church, over 100 the Neo Protestant Communities, 90–97 Traditional Protestant communities). The numbers can also indicate specific problems – the number 70 is where one can find issues related to proselyte activities.⁹

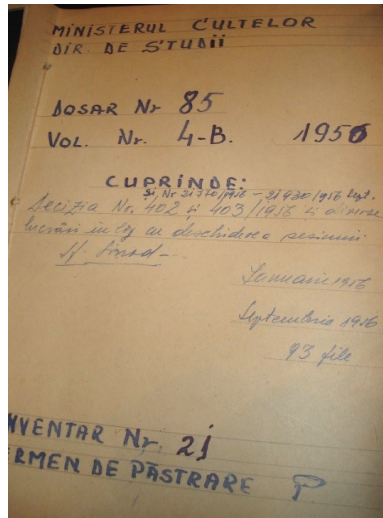


Illustration 2. Example of file cover from the Direction for Studies dealing with the Romanian Orthodox Church – catalogued¹⁰

⁹ For a more thorough and applied discussion see the article: Anca Șincan, “Silencing the Archive – a Methodological Insight into the Research for the Study “A Day in the Life of an Inspector for Religious Denomination” in *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio Umane*, vol XV, 2012, pp. 144–156.

¹⁰ Departamentul Culte, Direcția Studii, Documents related with the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, file 85, vol. 4b,

When I first entered these archives most of the files were never read by researchers but there was hardly any way in which to find out who were the previous readers of the file. Because of the problematic and temporary nature of the documents I have made photocopies to most of the documents I use in my research, and I have only cited those I have photocopied. I have given extensive information in my citation about the source also because of this organisational problem these archives have. Mainly because I was one of the few researchers to use these archives I have published/offered for publication in specialised journals and collections of documents several documents I considered seminal for my research.¹¹ Since currently these documents have been moved to the National Archives where they immediately were processed with new codes that were applicable to the National Archives it is currently impossible to check whether all documents reached from one institution to the other. Therefore, I preserved the documents used in my research with their original organization that belonged to the Ministry for Religious Denominations, Department for Religious Denominations and later State Secretary for Religious Denominations.

The Archives of the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarchal See and Alba Iulia Orthodox Archbishopric comprise the adminis-

1956, 73ff, The Archives of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations, Bucharest, Romania.

¹¹ Several documents were published in the collection of documents Mihnea Berindei, Armand Goșu, Dorin Dobrințu eds., *Istoria comunismului din Romania Documente + Perioada Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1945–1965)* (The History of Communism in Romania Documents of the Gheorghe Gheorghiu – Dej period (1945–1965), (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009).

trative and sociological data I needed to contextualize the case studies chosen. The archives held documents comprising the number of the churches built, the characterizations of the priests, archpriests and bishops building them, the sums of money spent and the sources for the financing (state, central Church administration, community of believers). The Church archives while not open to the lay researcher are more organized than those of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations, the documents were processed and catalogued, and special personnel is hired. Together with the archives of the Department for Religious Denominations these archives are an extremely valuable source for the researchers.

To round up my research and verify the information preserved in the archives I have conducted several interviews with priests and hierarchs, believers, religious community representatives, communist representatives in the region, inspectors both regional and central of the department for religious denomination in territory, and other local state representatives. The passage of time, a tendency of the interviewee to portray him/herself as a central character in the story, an aura of resistance to the communist regime, and on the other hand a tendency from the part of the official local representatives of the communist regime to minimize or maximize their role in mechanism of the relationship with institutional religion characterizes these interviews. These testimonies represent bits and pieces of a puzzle, each with its own truth and each with its own interpretation and were compared to and contrasted with archival documents and party policy.

Being co-opted into the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania in 2005 to write, together with historians Cristian Vasile and Dorin Dobrinu the chapter on the church state relationship under the communist regime I had the chance to complete my archival research. Our access to the State Secretary for Religious Denominations Archives, the National Archives and the National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archives was opened by presidential decree and extended for the duration of the existence of the Commission. The conclusions of our chapter¹² that talked about a tacit collaboration between the communist administration and most religious denominations and various compromises that the denominations made during that period stirred a stiff debate online and in the media. They were followed by articles defending the Orthodox Church, by articles defending the conclusion of the commission, by attempts, direct or indirect to change the conclusions of the chapter and even by slander or menacing articles.

The politics of remembrance in present day Romania and the lingering communist behaviour make a strong argument for the hide behind documents of fellow researchers when writing about the state–church relationship. Writing contemporary history is a complicate undertaking. The researchers must distance themselves from a past that most of them had firsthand experience

¹² See Cristian Vasile, Anca Șincan, Dorin Dobrinu, “Regimul comunist și cultele religioase,” (The communist regime and the religious denominations) in *Raportul Final al Comisiei prezidențiale pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România* (The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for Analysing the Communist Dictatorship in Romania), (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006).

of. Their position towards the research subject must account themselves and the inner reflection about the subject and thus is complicated by what the researcher knows or thinks he/ she knows what they remember or think they remember.¹³ Even more complicated is this positioning towards subjects that still create a fierce public debate in post communist Romania. We lack the necessary distance from not just one past but two (communist and fascist) and are faced with the constant return to a golden age of the interwar and the transformation the communist experience in the negative counterpart for that idealized period that it replaced. This complicates even further the researcher's rapport with the subject he/she investigates. The nuances that the research brings forth, the alterations in the public perception over the two near pasts that the research might bring are frowned upon by a public that still has not come to terms with its own pasts.

Finally, writing the history of the church in its encounters with the communist or fascist regimes raises ethical questions for the researcher that is placed in the position of High Inquisitor by his or her background. Policing the institution that should be the depository of the *universal truth* in an effort to reform it is not uncommon. The demands of verticality that the public and researcher ask from the men of God leads either to the idealization of the institution and its behaviour during the communist period or to the demonization of the very behaviour. Navigating this complex web of entanglements that constantly

¹³ Richard Ned Lebow, Wolf Kansteiner, Claudio Fogu, eds., *The politics of memory in postwar Europe*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 1–16.

transforms the researcher in an actor in his/her research is confusing and complicated, and most researchers respond by transforming themselves into archivists or data collectors.¹⁴

¹⁴ Anca Şincan, “If sex were a factor... The Securitate Archives and issues of morality in documents related to religious life” in James Kapalo, Kinga Povedák (Eds.), *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 302–315.

[...] writing the history of the church in its encounters with the communist or fascist regimes raises ethical questions for the researcher that is placed in the position of *High Inquisitor* by his or her background. Policing the institution that should be the depositary of the *universal truth* in an effort to reform it is not uncommon. The demands of verticality that the public and researcher ask from the men of God lead either to the idealization of the institution and its behaviour during the communist period or to the demonization of the very behaviour. Navigating this complex web of entanglements that constantly transforms the researcher in an actor in his or her research is confusing and complicated, and most researchers respond by transforming themselves into archivists or data collectors.



ISBN: 978-606-37-2514-2