

## ABSTRACT

This study of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Eastern Transylvania in the period following the Second World War considers the topic on several levels.

The first level of research has reference to the general situation of the Church after 23 August 1944, at a time when the Stalinist Communist regime was being installed in our country. In the last twenty years many studies have appeared which deal with the problems of different religious bodies, especially the Romanian Orthodox Church, in their relationship with the atheistic Communist State. A preoccupation with Church history has occupied an important place in Romanian historiography since 1989. It is natural that this should be so, since under the Communist regime such topics could not be treated, or only in a manner totally obedient to the directives of the State. These are the problems which we have confronted, namely those of the Orthodox Church in Eastern Transylvania in the period of the Communist regime.

The problem of the Orthodox Church under the Communist regime has enjoyed special attention from historians, whether lay or clerical, as also from the Church Hierarchy. Numerous works of synthesis have appeared, as also have studies on different aspects of the problem and of the period, and many documents have been edited by various historians.

The history of the Church today is enjoying an increased attention from many points of view. For our part, we consider firstly that it is necessary to fill a void in the historical record of this problem which spans half a century – from 1945 until the fall of the Communist regime. The Church represented and still represents an essential component of what makes up the daily life of Romanians; she is one of the

mainstays of society and one of its most trusted institutions. It is therefore natural that historians should pay her particular attention. Secondly, the Church is one of the institutions which had to suffer the most as a result of the Communist regime.

A matter which we consider important for our study is the problem of the suppression of the Greek Orthodox Uniate Church (or the Greek Catholic Church) and the attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church towards this event. The area investigated by us in this study comprises the position of the members of the Greek Catholic Church before 1948. Therefore the attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church towards the 1948 Act is also indispensable. Here also opinions range from the negation of the utility of the Greek Catholic Church after 1948 (even after 1918 in some cases), to considering this act as the most severe attack and act of oppression suffered by any religious sect after 1945. Just as with other problems we consider that this problem has its political and pragmatically patrimonial aspects (even if we were to refer only to the fate of the property, buildings etc. of the Greek Catholic Church).

The originality of our study consists, we believe, in our restricting it to a defined historical space, namely that which is usually, but in our opinion wrongly, called 'Secuime' (Sekler territory), i.e. the counties of Harghita and Covasna, or south-eastern Transylvania.

From many points of view this is the first treatment of the Romanian Orthodox Church under the Communist regime in this region. Moreover we consider that a more territorially restricted study of the Orthodox Church in the Communist period could provide a clearer picture and could later help towards the writing of objective syntheses about the Romanian Orthodox Church in general under Communism. The territory included in our study has a certain unity

based on the minority status of the Romanian population, on the process of Hungarianisation, which is still continuing, and on the 'postdecembrist' reorganisation of the regional Orthodox Church into being part of the bishopric of Harghita and Covasna – a fact which we deduce is a confirmation of our hypothesis. The Orthodox Church in the region has been treated in other studies, but they either stop at the Communist takeover or accord only cursory attention to this period.

We have considered it useful to include in our study the relationship between the national and the confessional aspects of the situation, because, just as before 1945 the Church played a prominent part in national problems, it is incontrovertible that even after that date the Church continued to live out its destined role.

Why was this topic chosen?

In the first place because we considered that the history of the Romanians of this part of the country is too little known, especially in studies of contemporary history. It might be useful here to give more precise details of how the area chosen for this study was limited to the two counties of Harghita and Covasna. Usually they are together called 'Sekler Territory' (*Tinut Secuime*), a nomenclature which is extremely controversial and debatable. Both counties have a majority Sekler population, Romanians representing a minority which is both confessional and ethnic. The number of Romanians has fallen mainly due to the phenomenon of denationalisation to which they have been subjected for centuries and more especially after 1867, but also to migration, often forced, since 1989. Nor should the possibility of assimilation be excluded, an observable fact natural under the circumstances. Under the Communist regime the Orthodox Church in these two counties belonged to the Orthodox Diocese of Alba-Iulia

(Harghita since 1975, as soon as the Diocese was formed) and the Archbishopric of Sibiu (Covasna), but in 1996 the Orthodox Diocese of Harghita and Covasna was created, under the pastoral care of the Very Reverend Ioan Selejan. Thus we considered that the study should restrict itself to a territorial entity which includes the area with a majority Sekler population, and therefore with a Romanian minority, which is something of an exception in the nation as a whole, but which has a certain regional cohesion, to which is added the present ecclesiastical configuration, drawn up we believe with the same considerations in mind. In fact it is a question of separate counties with a Romanian minority, making up one unit from this point of view.

As far as the period chosen is concerned, it should be made clear that a certain cohesion was sought after, this being provided by the Communist period, taken as a whole. It is inconvertible that this period went through numerous changes of position and attitude towards political factors, not to mention territorial reorganization. As the nature of the politics of the Communist regime changed from one level of severity to another (a period of Stalinism, then an ideological and political relaxation, followed by a return to Neostalinism, and lastly a Nationalist period), the situation of the Romanians of the region changed accordingly, and, implicitly, the Orthodox Church suffered changes too. We also considered it necessary to allocate space to researches regarding the role not only of the Romanian Orthodox churches of the area since 1945, but also of the Greek Catholic Church, which was of importance in the region until its suppression in 1948. Likewise, a picture of the region and of the Church at the time of the Treaty of Vienna is not without importance. These and related considerations will form the matter of the first part of Chapter One.

A detailed analysis of the Romanian Orthodox Church of these two counties has never been made, the interest of historians of Church history having been directed either towards general history or towards other periods in the region, or towards other regions during the Communist period. Valuable works have appeared which treat the problems of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Communist period, but many are tendentious, without scientific precision, and in fact have only other aims in view, not necessarily historical truth. The general image of the region as having a Sekler majority has probably deflected the interest of historians from the area and from the Orthodox Church there. We consider to be of great importance a study which is concerned with an area in which Romanians are in a minority, just as, naturally, are other works which deal with the various minorities of Romania. And the period chosen, in which at one stage the order of the day was the suppression of national differences, merely adds an extra degree of interest. Probably, in fact almost certainly, during the 50s it was far easier to be Orthodox in the rest of the country, even under the conditions created by an atheistic regime, than in a preponderately Hungarian district. Our research up to the present has enabled us to identify, at least for the duration of the Autonomous Hungarian Region of Mureş (AHR) a double persecution: one of an atheistic and political nature valid for the whole of Romania, and another, of a nationalistic or chauvinist nature. In point of fact, the attacks against the Church were attacks against the Romanian element in the region.

No doubt a more general theme, such as the history of the Orthodox Church in a certain period (it would have to be shorter than the one covered here) would arouse more interest. Such studies have been published, dealing with the Orthodox Church in the

first ten years of Communism and or in other periods. Also, the treatment of a particular problem, as for example the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church, might have had a higher degree of general interest. We, however, have restricted our study by another consideration, namely that of a certain territorial area, which, as we have demonstrated above, has a certain unity. We considered that the research might lead from the particular to the general, in other words, starting with the details of a limited area, it might ultimately be integrated into a wider study.

At the time of the promulgation of the Decree of Viena, in the 11 counties annexed by Hungary the Romanian population - along with other ethnic groups such as Hungarians and Germans - possessed a specific church organisation, the result of their struggle throughout the centuries to preserve their spiritual identity. In this territory there were 1,300,000 members of the Romanian Orthodox Church, distributed in 1,369 parishes, which belonged to the dioceses of Oradea, Cluj, Sighet and Baia Mare. This Church organization demonstrates the reality that the Romanian population was the most numerous of those existing in Transylvania. Along with the schools, the Church was a powerful factor among the Romanians of the region in the maintenance their spiritual and national unity and individuality and their determination to be reunited with their motherland.

It is certain that, in their confrontation with the Romanian Church the occupiers did not restrict themselves to the purely religious domain. Our journey into the heart of this matter has led us to conclude that, in the last resort, the Romanian Church, along with its flock, found itself face to face not only with the Hungarian speaking Church, but also with the Hungarian State under Horthy,

The liberation of the part of Transylvania which had been ceded to Horthy's Hungary brought high hopes to the Romanians, but they were quickly swept away. At first the liberated territory was run by a local Romanian administration (September – November 1944), then by the Soviet Union, but from 9 March 1945 onwards by the Romanian State. Those three months of local Romanian administration were too short a time for the normal Romanian life of the area to be reinstated. The installation of a Soviet administration was determined by the context of a fundamental discrediting of the Romanian authorities in northern Transylvania and was the result of the Moscow Armistice Convention of 12 September 1944.

The Allied (in fact Soviet) Control commission was dissatisfied with the way in which the Sanatescu and Radescu governments dealt with Transylvania's problems. Most of the accusations were caused by the 'anti-Soviet attitude and vengeful sentiments' displayed by the Iuliu Maniu Guard in northern Transylvania. In the counties of Covasna and Harghita those four months of Soviet administration, seconded by the concurrence of Hungarian elements, were the signal for the outbreak of new wave of terror against the Romanian population, carried out by perfidious methods of intimidation which culminated in beatings and arrests among both priests and the lay population. The whole set-up after November 1944, consisting of the People's Police and the People's Courts, constituted a real reign of terror for the Romanian population, undermining the whole religious life of the two counties.

After November 1944 the Romanian life of the region never recovered anything of what was gained in the period of renaissance after 1918, because those four years of occupation and also what followed after 1945 annihilated in great part the natural and justified

efforts of the Romanians to reestablish their institutions.

The 'Democratic Regime' meant the installation of a persecution against Romanians, who for any active manifestation were labeled as Fascists and Hitlerites by those who until only recently had been in the anti-Soviet camp. The documentation of the period abounds in accounts of Hungarian acts of subservience to the new Soviet masters, such as the opportunistic façade of a show of Communism and making declarations of fidelity, with an eye to the possible independence of the Northern Ardeal as a member of the USSR.

An overview of the situation of the Orthodox Church and Romanian life in the counties of Covasna and Harghita after August 1944 and in 1945 cannot be isolated from the context of the time, and from the political games and scenarios to which the northern Ardeal was submitted. On the basis of the archival deposit of the Orthodox Deanery of Sfântu Gheorghe, Prejmer and of several documents from the State Archives of Covasna and Harghita, we have researched on the one hand the general context of the period and on the other the repercussions and particularities specific to the counties of Covasna and Harghita, ranging from the anti-Romanian attitude revealed by the undermining and discrediting of the Romanian authorities during September-November 1944, to the measures against Romanians taken by the Soviet administration, supported by Hungarian elements. The withdrawal of the region's Romanian administration put an end to the hopes expressed by the Romanians of a possible return to the pre-1940 situation – this being their model for the reconstruction needed after those four years of Hungarian occupation, 'everything as it used to be before 1940', with the return home of Romanians who had left the district, with Romanian churches, the

Romanian language in schools, Romanian magazines: in short, with everything that gave a Romanian national character to the region. None of this ever materialized. On the contrary everything continued to happen at the whim of arbitrary decisions disadvantageous to Romanians.

The Romanian administration, which lasted only 3 months, was far too short and fragile to reinstate the normal functioning of Romanian institutions. A restoration of the Romanian administration did not take place after 6 March, 1945 either, for what happened after November, 1944 can be described as a true prelude to the administrative organization of the framework of the Autonomous Hungarian Region (AHR), which would be made up of four counties: Mureş , Odorhei, Ciuc and Trei Scaune (Covasna).

Several conclusions can be drawn from this state of affairs. The main one is that the Orthodox faithful disappeared almost completely in the following cases:

a) Where a parish or its dependency had members who had been Greek Catholics, who constituted a religious group prone to Catholicisation, which would often lead to subsequent Hungarianisation. Many indeed had converted to Catholicism directly after 1948. This applied especially in those parishes where there was a small number of Romanians, or where they were surrounded on all sides by Hungarians. From this point of view we can draw the conclusion that for the Romanianism of the Sekler region the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948 represented a loss at both the ethnic and the religious level.

b) When those who were forced into other religions did not have the courage to come back, although at heart they may have wished to do so.

c) Mixed marriages. These were a certain source of the loss of Romanian and Orthodox identity. Relevant to this is the information given in Chapter Two of our monograph by the priest Ioan Garcea concerning mixed marriages, which, although it can be accused of sentimentality, is very credible. In the parish of Ghelința for example the Dean sought guidance from the Metropolitan, because cases had arisen where Orthodox faithful, who had converted from the Greek Catholic Church, wished to marry Roman Catholics. Because Article 47 of the Rules of Procedure did not allow mixed marriages, the priest was asking for permission to allow him to marry them in the Orthodox Church. The situation was somewhat complicated, because if an Orthodox marriage were not approved, the young couple would proceed to marry in the Roman Catholic Church, thereby giving an example to other former Greek Catholics, now Orthodox, who might then little by little convert to the Roman Catholic religion, which would mean a great loss from both the religious and ethnic point of view. These are not isolated cases, others arising in Odjula, for example, and also elsewhere.

d) The lack of an Orthodox priest in a parish or a neighbourhood. As we have shown, very long distances, scattered dependencies, the small number of priests, their advanced age and their lack of material means, made it almost impossible for all the dependencies to be visited in a satisfactory way.

e) The lack of schools with lessons taught in Romanian. The existence of Romanian language schools was one of the most important aims of the districts. The lack of these schools facilitated the process of Hungarianisation, and it was not by chance that the Orthodox priests found themselves in the front line of the struggle to maintain or to create schools with the teaching in Romanian.

f) The rumours which were spread (as for example that the Ardeal would be reintegrated with Hungary), which were all proliferated in the interests of proselytism. Under these conditions who would want to return to Orthodoxy?

This being the situation, the Orthodox priests and Deaneries considered to be of prime importance, for the maintenance of the Romanian element in the area, the following measures:

- a) Mention to be made of the Orthodox parishes of the Sekler region in the State Budget, even if they did not have the number of members fixed by the rules of Procedure for the Romanian Orthodox Church.
- b) The sending of good priests to parishes in the Sekler region for a set length of time, possibly five years, after which they would be promoted to better parishes within the Archdiocese.
- c) Conversions from the Greek Catholic to the Roman Catholic Church should not be recognized.
- d) Mixed marriages should be approved by the Orthodox Church only under certain conditions.
- e) Hard work and the utmost dedication on the part of the priests living in this district.

The creation of the Autonomous Hungarian Region caused different reactions and expectations on that part of the population which was destined to make up part of the new territorial administrative structure. As was to be expected, the Hungarian population, who made up the overwhelming majority, adopted an on the whole favourable attitude, expressing the hope that with the implementation of the proposed Constitution Hungarians would obtain far greater rights of a nationalist nature, perhaps even the annexation of the new region to Hungary. The spectrum of their expectations ranged from grievous disappointment (caused by the absence of explicit recognition of the Hungarian character of the region, the non-recognition of Hungarian as the official language, and so on), to

undisguised jubilation and the hope that Romanians would be excluded from the new structure of government.

At the same time, the original ethnic Romanian population regarded the new regime with mistrust, fear and anguish, expecting only the worst from the Hungarian part of the population.

From the motives which were at the base of the acceptance by the Romanian Workers' Party (PMR)<sup>1</sup> of the creation of this region several conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) A first motive was the need to get rid of the dissatisfaction of the Hungarians and the Seklers caused by the loss of their supremacy and of the privileges they had had under the regimes first of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then of Horthy.
- 2) There was a desire to counterbalance the continual threat of denunciation in Moscow concerning the conduct of affairs in Hungary.
- 3) There was a slavish imitation of the Soviet model of administration and the solving of problems relating to nationalism.

The Romanian Orthodox Church of the Autonomous region also had to suffer in the period 1952-1968, and for many reasons. Not all the parishes had incardinated priests, and very often those priests who were incardinated in parishes were not able to fulfil all the requirements of the district. The Metropolitan of Sibiu tried to send priests into the region, but he came up against many problems. The majority of the priests in the region were of advanced age and managed only with great difficulty to meet the requirements of their flocks.

As has been mentioned, because of the lack of material support the overall number of priests in the parishes was reduced, with many dependencies spread

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<sup>1</sup> Partido Muncitoresc Român

over a wide area being amalgamated into a single parish. In these parishes the priests fulfilled their duties only with great difficulty, being obliged to administer parishes and dependencies sometimes stretching over a distance of up to 40 kilometres. Another difficulty was that many churches were old and in urgent need of repair. Aggravating the situation was the fact that many priests from poor parishes tried to be transferred to other parishes in the Archdiocese. Taking into account the historical development of the previous few decades, starting from 1940, we might add to the situation the fact that if there were to be no improvement in their material circumstances, in the course of a few years most of the parishes of the Sekler region would disappear. Added to all this, the fact that relations with the local authorities of the region were somewhat strained presented one more difficulty to be surmounted.

Several conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the situation of the Orthodox parishes:

- Firstly, the fact that in all the parishes Romanians were in the minority of the total population, being surrounded by large communities of Hungarians, mainly members of the Roman Catholic, Reformed or Unitarian Churches. Unlike the Deanery of Toplița, which groups together localities having a Romanian majority, from an ethnic point of view the Sekler region was more problematic. In many of the Deanery's parishes the Romanian Orthodox faithful were Hungarian speaking, this being a natural result of the intense process of Hungarianisation undergone by the whole region, especially between 1940 and 1944. Because of this one of the basic needs of the Deanery was to have Hungarian speaking priests. On the other hand the number of Romanian Orthodox parishioners in the region continued to fall, at first ethnically, but later also naturally and religiously.

- Another problem was the shortage of young priests who could be active in the preaching and other apostolic work necessary for a pastorate in the Sekler region. As a rule the priests led irreproachably moral lives and were dedicated to their calling, but they had to suffer great material hardship. Collaboration with State institutions was regarded favourably, even by those priests who had been imprisoned because of their former political ideals.

- Similarly, after 1948 part of the body of Romanian faithful of the suppressed Greek-Catholic Church preferred not to join the Orthodox Church but attended Roman Catholic services, even if they had not officially converted to Catholicism. This fact constituted a big loss for the Romanian element of the region, because, as reports we have studied make clear, the majority of those not converting to Orthodoxy were from among the more affluent or were intellectuals, in any case from a social stratum above that of the villages.

- It is noticeable that all the parishes were poor. Not one of them managed to pay the priest his salary in full, and very often they could contribute nothing towards the expenses of the repair work needed by church buildings.

- The Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches carried on an intense campaign of proselytism, especially among those Greek Catholics who had not converted to Orthodoxy. There were many cases of Romanian Orthodox priests having to complain to the Deanery about priests of these other churches meddling in the activities of Orthodox parishioners. But their need for the sacraments (baptism, marriage, burial etc.), together with the fact that the dependencies were in most cases at a great distance from the parish church, caused some former Greek Catholics to call on or accept the religious services of priests or pastors of Hungarian churches.

The position of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the AHR can be understood only in the wider context of the Romanian-Hungarian cohabitation of the region, and of the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the aforementioned minority religions. Romanians found themselves continually in a minority situation. This ethnic composition of the region led to a situation in which, although dominant at national level, the Orthodox Church was there in the minority.

In contrast to the inter-war years, during the first years of the Communist regime the Hungarians of Romania enjoyed to a certain extent privileged treatment, being one of the most favoured minorities. The creation of an autonomous region – i.e. the Autonomous Hungarian Region – for the communities of eastern Transylvania was an obvious imitation of the Stalinist model for territorial organisation and the ‘resolution’ of a national problem in an internationalist spirit. Even if the region functioned according to the same principle as other administrative bodies, its ethnic make-up was obvious, being emphasised even in its name. The creation of the AHR in 1952 by the provisions of the new constitution of the People’s Republic of Romania was the first instance of the ethno-national character playing a decisive role. The decision to create it was taken under pressure from the Soviet Union, without any initiative coming from the side of the Hungarian population. The administrative reorganisation of the territory from the beginning of the 50s did not, however, solve the problem of the Hungarian minority: there were quite a number of Hungarians living outside the Autonomous Hungarian Region, and what is more, its creation gave rise to dissatisfaction among many Romanians, who still harboured memories of humiliations suffered under

the Horthy occupation. This having been said, it is more than likely that the adoption of the measures abolishing the former districts might have contributed to the acceptance by many of Romania's Hungarians of the territorial *status quo* established by the Trianon agreement and reconfirmed by the Peace Treaty of February 1947, and also to the search for solutions to their own problems within the framework offered by the institutions of the Romanian State. In reality, however, matters seem to have been more complicated: Professor Dumitru Șandru maintains that a significant number of Ardeal Hungarians, at least from 1944 to 1946, were still under the spell of the revisionist dream.

The Autonomous Hungarian Region was a predominantly rural area, underdeveloped in both its economy and its infrastructure, as much in the time of Hungarian rule as after 1918; nor did this situation change during the 'autonomous' years. Between 1951 and 1959, although the AHR contained 4.5% of the population of Romania, it received only 2.4% of the State investment allotted in the national budget. This state of affairs led, in 1950, to the migration of a considerable part of the population towards the more industrialised regions of southern Transylvania (Brașov and the mining districts of Valea Jiului and Hunedoara).

With regard to the AHR one cannot speak of a true autonomy. Administrative methods in the AHR differed from those of other regions of Romania only because of its ethnic structure. This fact not unnaturally led to dissatisfaction among the Romanian population, who saw administrative division as a 'gift' made to the Hungarians because of their overwhelming support of Communism.

Like the Romanian villages, the Hungarian villages remained, at least in the first decade of the Communist regime, conservative and attached to their

old cultural and religious traditions. Hungarians had to endure the same totalitarian regime as the Romanians, and its atheist dimension caused some of them to look for points on which they could collaborate or even make a 'pact of non-aggression'.

On the other hand, in the rural communities of the Autonomous Hungarian Region misunderstandings between the Romanian faithful and members of Hungarian churches were fairly frequent. This fact came as a prologation of the previous years, when Romanians had had to suffer a series of annoyances from the Hungarians. The most important reason for this lack of collaboration is the reduced number of Romanians in many communes of the region, as a result of the intensive process of Hungarianisation carried out in the time of the Decree of Vienna. The lack of Orthodox priests in the area, the precarious material situation of the Orthodox parishes there, the huge number of State functionaries of Hungarian ethnic origin, all these things created the conditions for the inroads made by Hungarian clerics among the Romanian faithful, which were felt by Romanian priests to be attempts at religious proselytism which would later have the result of completing the process of Hungarianisation.

Not infrequently Romanian Orthodox faithful who had returned to Orthodoxy from the suppressed Greek Catholic Church preferred to call on a Catholic priest when they needed pastoral care. This practice was even encouraged by Bishop Áron Márton who urged Catholic priests to say Mass for ex-Greek Catholic Romanians. Due to orders from above the *Securitate* records also bear witness to their surveillance of the support given to the clandestine Greek Catholic religion by the Romanian Orthodox Church, especially in the diocese of Alba-Iulia, which was regarded as disloyal and pro-Irredentist. Moreover, their representatives also had contact

(permitted by the authorities) with the Holy See, the State which in the past 'had supported the Irredentist cause'. Bishop Áron Márton continued to play an important part in the moral and even material support of the Greek Catholics, reaffirming this position in the presence of representatives of the Holy See.

These facts have led to certain conclusions on our part concerning this period and its effects on the Romanian Orthodox Church of the region. In the first place the work of unification begun in 1948 through the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church was not always in the best interests of the Romanian nation. Some of those who refused to convert to Orthodoxy, usually either intellectuals or from the upper classes, preferred to convert to Roman Catholicism, or, even if they did not convert officially, attended Catholic services; and a change of religion is the most important step taken towards the loss of national identity. The situation was made all the more regrettable by the fact that many Greek Catholic Romanians lived in predominantly Hungarian communities. From our point of view the continued existence of the Greek Catholic Church would have been of much more benefit to the region because it would have been a great help towards preserving the Romanian element.

A second aspect, connected with the first, was a stepping up of the Catholic Church's campaign of proselytism in the region, which in these circumstances found a fertile terrain for conversions among Greek Catholics who were thoroughly disillusioned by the brutal suppression of their Church. Having to come to terms with their position of a minority Church in this area, not to mention the difficulties listed above, the Orthodox clergy and faithful of eastern Transylvania lived with the feeling that they were a people abandoned by the central political power in the preponderantly Hungarian

structures of the regional government. What is more, all the delegates of the religions of the region were Hungarians.

Although the Autonomous Hungarian Region was not created at the request of the Hungarian population (there existed among the Hungarian community the opinion that it was a means of dividing the Hungarian population), and it can be considered a success neither from the point of view of autonomy nor as regards the economic or cultural aspects, this chapter of Communism in Romania is assessed differently by Romanians and Hungarians. While Romanians consider that the creation of the AHR was an abuse of power on the part of the Communists, Hungarians think the same thing regarding its dissolution.

We should perhaps mention here that for the Orthodox Church of the Eastern Carpathian region this period was the most beneficial of the whole Communist period.

Starting in 1968 with the new administrative organisation of the territory, this period was to see even more changes of direction in what concerned the relations between the Church and the State or with other religions or with national minorities. On the other hand, there is no doubt but that in this period the Hungarian minority were in a situation inferior to the one they had during the existence of the Autonomous Hungarian Region.

Only more detailed researches about this phenomenon will make possible a complete elucidation these aspects of the status of national minorities in the final phase of Communism, researches which should extend right down to the level of small human communities, in order to establish the real relationship between the ethnic groups. Our researches into the specific area where the Hungarian national minority was the regional

majority have led us to the conclusion that in fact, at the level of small communities the Hungarians kept their former rights and privileges. The change that was introduced consisted of the fact that the Romanian State paid greater attention to the Romanians of the region, perhaps out of a desire to modify the interethnic relations there.

Certainly, from a Hungarian point of view the relations between the two ethnic groups could not be regarded favourably, but in the light of the documents there is no foundation for their stance of allegedly being everywhere oppressed. Here, as always, they made their usual accusation against the Romanians: i.e. their chauvinistic attitude towards Hungarians. The catalogue of each and every action on the part of the Romanians which infringed Hungarian privileges was immediately drawn up on the pretext of chauvinism. For instance, during the discussions which preceded the planned power-sharing, according to the Hungarians only the Romanians were guilty of chauvinism.

The Diocese of Alba-Iulia was created in 1975, and from that date until 1994 the Dean of Miercurea-Ciuc was its suffragan Bishop.

In the context described above, the Orthodox spiritual life of the Harghitan region also began to pick-up, moving slowly forward along the road to normality. In parishes with priests released from Communist prisons and in those to which priests and monks had been sent from elsewhere, thereby becoming dependencies of monasteries or other parishes, religious services were reinstated, churches damaged during the Horthy occupation were repaired, presbyteries were cared for once again, as also were such cemeteries as were still in existence. Special emphasis was put on the catechesis of the faithful and on bringing back to their ancestral Church as many as possible of those who had left it for other religions.

The plight of the rural parishes was to be worsened both by the policy of industrialisation and by the economic development of the region. This was aimed especially at urban centres, to which the inhabitants of the villages gradually migrated, especially after 1970, and in a steady stream after 1975, when the factories built in Miercurea Ciuc, Gheorgheni, Odorhei, Cristuru-Secuiesc, Bălan, Vlăhița and Toplița were to destined to absorb the youth (and not only the youth) of the surrounding villages, as well as Romanians from other parts of the country. Under these conditions many rural parishes were impoverished and urban parishes received a different sort of parishioners. In the villages, imperceptibly but inexorably, the process of Hungarianisation continued. This was aided by the insufficient provision of State schools in these districts and by the Hungarian churches, which, receiving material help from outside, continued their campaign of proselytism.

One conclusion can be drawn about the entirety of the period we have researched, namely that the difficult life of the Orthodox Church of the region was due to the hostile attitude of the local authorities.

This conclusion holds good whether we are referring to the period after 1944 when the waters were somewhat muddied, or to the following period when the local authorities remained in the hands of ethnic Hungarians, or to the following period under the regime of the Autonomous Hungarian Region, or even to the time after 1968 when the new administrative division of the territory led to the abolition of the AHR.

We can conclude that the relations between the churches of the region and the authorities can be divided into two levels: the national and the local.

The first level is the relationship with the State authorities. Here we can on the whole say that, in comparison with previous years, progress was made, not necessarily however, because the Communist State had suddenly discovered overnight the values of Christianity. The explanation lies in the fact that the emphasis now put on nationalism was turning the State's attention in another direction and the Romanian Orthodox Church was a factor of Romanian nationalism which could only help the new orientation. It is true that in most cases State support was expressed in words not actions, and even where support was offered, when other functionaries arrived in the region it was discontinued. It was on this basis that the Hungarian minority accused the Orthodox Church of collaboration with the State.

The second level is that of the relations with the local authorities, and here the problem was the opposite. These authorities did all they could to hinder the Church in its activity, repeatedly cavilling at the representatives of the Orthodox religion. Both those studies which deal with the ethnic element and those which are on Church history, should take the two aspects into account and should extend their researches right down to the level of the small communities. Here too there can be some big surprises. Right up to end, the difficulties experienced in the day to day life of those years were shared in equal measure by Romanians and Hungarians. The regulations and the shortages were the same for everybody, but as regards the collective privileges at small community level, it is evident that the Hungarians in the region were not disadvantaged – the opposite was rather the case. It is true that the nationalistic character of the last years of Communism did not create a comfortable intellectual ambience for the Hungarians, but, on balance, the local authorities and even the local

communities themselves, did all that they could to take revenge at local level.

The events of 1989, taken in the broader context of the counties of Covasna, Harghita, and in large measure Mureș, had a dual character: anti-Communist, as in the whole of Romania, and anti-Romanian. This latter aspect was accentuated during the following months, until the coming-into-force of the new constitutional organisation in the Republic of Romania. It was, however, prolonged in disguised political forms even afterwards.

In the spring of 1991, at a meeting of the Deans of Sfânt Gheorghe and Brașov, in the presence of the Dean Professor Dr. Ioan Floca (representing the Diocese of Sibiu) this matter was discussed anew (i.e. the need of a Diocesan Unity for the district of Harghita and Covasna).

The deciding role in the creation of the new Diocese was played by the Report of the State Secretariat for Religions, which on 11 June, 1991 was addressed to the Central Committee for the Study of Conflicts between Certain Religions. The report was drawn up on the basis of observations of the terrain with regard to the situation of the existing parishes, and also of the discussions held by Gheorghe E. Angelescu, Special Advisor and future Secretary of State for Religions, with organs of the State, with priests and with lay members of the Church.

On 11 January, 1994 the National Assemblies of the Church agreed to the creation of this new Diocese of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and on 22-23 March, at the proposal of the Episcopal Assemblies of the Archdiocese of Sibiu and the diocese of Alba Iulia, the Holy Synod approved the organisation and territorial delimitation of the Diocese of Covasna and Harghita, with the episcopal residence at Miercurea Ciuc.

On 12 July, 1994, The Ecclesial Electoral College proceeded to the election of the first incumbent of the newly created Diocese of Harghita and Covasna, Suffragan of the Metropolitan of the Ardeal. The Reverend Archimandrite Ioan Selejan, Superior of the Romanian Orthodox Centre of Jerusalem and Jordan, was elected. On 20 July 1994, on the Feast of the Holy Prophet Elijah at the Monastery dedicated to this Saint in Toplița , the Reverend Archmandrite Ioan Selejan was consecrated Bishop of the Diocese of Harghita and Covasna.

The election of the Reverend Archimandrite Ioan as Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Harghita and Covasna marked the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the faithful, the priests and the monks of these two counties. There were 99 parishes, 61 priests, and 24 monks in three monasteries and one hermitage (the Monastery of the Holy Prophet Elijah, Toplița; the Doamnei-Moglănești Monastery, Toplița; the Mărcuș Monastery; and the Dumbrăvioara Hermitage).

The first step to be taken was the training of young men from the two counties at the Seminary and Faculty of Theology, followed by their ordination, thus providing the parishes with priests. When the Diocese was founded there were only 5 priests who were from the district, but in 2007 locals made up 90% of the Diocesan clergy. In the first 15 years of the existence of the Diocese, Bishop Ioan ordained 78 priests. Of the 120 priests of the Diocese in 2009, 85 had university degrees and 35 had graduated from High School. Among those with higher studies, 10 had a Masters in Theology, 5 were preparing their Doctorates and one was a Doctor of Theology.

The number of parishes increased from 99 in 1994 to 132 in 2009. Through the intervention of Bishop Ioan at the Patriarchate 250 posts for non-clerical personnel were created in the Diocese.

All the above-mentioned achievements and many more were the result of much hard work and many sacrifices. Unfortunately there are many instances of lack of support for, or even worse, hindrance to, these Romanian Orthodox initiatives, on the part of the local authorities. Part of the Hungarian clergy, and the Hungarian language mass media of this region and of Hungary, made accusations about the building of churches with ‘onion-shaped domes’ on ‘Sekler territory’. Everything was taken to be abusive action taken in order to alter the ‘ethnic purity’ of the region.

The creation of this Diocese represents the most substantial manifestation of the Romanian element in these two counties and the most significant support for the Orthodox churches and their parishioners.

One of the conclusions reached by our study is that the Romanian Orthodox Church of eastern Transylvania was among the most important elements – if not the most important - of Romanian identity in this part of the country. Connected with this a second conclusion can be drawn, namely, that because of this the Church had to bear the brunt of the attacks from the part of the Hungarian minority, which identified the Church, along with its clergy and faithful as their main adversary. In any historical period ‘the adversary’ can be defined as the occupier, the one who denationalises, the alien, etc.

Another important conclusion, proved by archival records, is that at every stage of the historical period under consideration, the process of Hungarianisation continued and the number of Romanians went on falling, either by gradual assimilation, a so-called ‘melting pot’, or because of abusive means used to force them to join the Hungarian community.

A further conclusion, of particular importance from our point of view, is that the Communist regime, even if not openly declaring its atheism (as in Albania for example), in this part of the country struck first at the Romanian Orthodox Church. Perhaps it is a tautology to demonstrate that under conditions of pressure it is the weakest who goes under first, but in the so-called Sekler region the weakest was the ethnic Romanian element, and on the religious side of course the Orthodox Church. This being the case, the Romanian churches suffered the most from the attacks of the Communist regime, at least in its first phase. Although the Catholic Church was placed in a position of inferiority because it was considered to be an agent of Western imperialism, in the area covered by our research its traditions, its wealth and the numerical superiority of its members meant that it did not for one moment lose its supremacy. From this point of view the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church was a bitter blow for Romanianism. No matter how this action is regarded – as a ‘return’ to the bosom of the Mother Church, or as an abusive and illegal act of the Communist State, in itself the deed meant not a strengthening but on the contrary a weakening of the Romanian element in the region. Many of the Greek Catholic faithful and their priests, especially those from the more affluent or better educated strata of society, joined the Roman Catholic Church. This can be partly explained by their belonging to the Hungarian linguistic community. Many Greek Catholic Romanians had been Hungarianised, their only connection with their Romanian roots being religious, i.e. their membership of Romanian churches, whether Orthodox or Greek Catholic. Once this link was broken it was obvious that the other link, their belonging to a linguistic group, together with their religious needs, made it natural, even necessary, for them to join the nearest church. If we add to this

firstly the official Roman Catholic policy of offering religious assistance to former Greek Catholics, even free of charge, then the lack of Orthodox priests, the precarious material situation of the faithful and a certain feeling of fidelity owed to the Holy See, we have the ingredients for the confessional and national losses suffered after the October 1948 Act.

The first years of the Communist Regime were the hardest for the Orthodox Church. They were years when in the name of Socialist internationalism it was better to be in the minority, when you could always label as 'chauvinist' any Romanian who did not agree with you. The Socialist solution to the problem of nationalities led to a situation in which it was allowed to call only Romanians 'chauvinists.' Although at that time the concept of 'positive discrimination' for minorities had not been given a name, it was already being successfully applied.

In our researches we have tried to find examples of those aspects of the problem which have reference more particularly to small communities, those in which official State policies were less stringently enforced and sometimes not enforced at all. This is another important conclusion that we reached: namely that we cannot form a clear picture of what happened in the area, and, implicitly, in the Orthodox Church, if we do not turn our attention to the small communities, not neglecting policies at the national level but allowing them to take second place. The results can be very easily expressed:

If at the national level the Hungarian minority claimed, for example, that there was a restriction of the right to study in the Hungarian language, supporting their claim with pertinent arguments, at the level of small communities matters were quite the reverse. It was impossible for Romanians to create classes with Romanian as the language of instruction. It is true that the suppression of Bolyai University for

example, or the teaching of the more attractive subjects in Romanian in the region's High Schools were arguments in favour of the Hungarian minority's claims of discrimination. But if we go further into the realities of the situation we can easily confirm that the same thing was happening to Romanians in villages where they were in the minority. We wished to get rid of the idea that in the 70s and 80s only Hungarians had to suffer, and on the basis of archival documents we have tried to demonstrate that Romanians suffered as much from Hungarians as Hungarians did from Romanians. Our opinion is that the problem has a certain symmetry: if at the national level Hungarians were in the minority, this minority status consequently bringing them some cases of discrimination and harrassment, the situation of the Romanians in Sekler country was exactly the same. There, because they were in the minority, the same rule applied to them. It is true that the Romanians felt this discrimination more keenly: after all they were ethnic Romanians, citizens of a Romanian national State and their feelings about the situation breathe eloquently out of the memos, complaints and situational accounts sent to the higher authorities. How could it be that a Romanian in his own Romanian land should have fewer rights than minorities? It is perhaps out of this that there grew a nationalism which increased in strength in proportion to their increase of distress at the lack on the part of the higher command to take any action to resolve this situation.

By using this method of including in our study the region's small communities of Orthodox Christians we believe that we have been able to offer a more realistic picture.

The greater attention paid to this region by the Communist State in its last years and the modicum of support received by the Romanian Orthodox churches have caused these years to be considered the best for

the Orthodox Church of the whole Communist period. It is true that the support came in a measure to be expected from a Communist State but in whatever way we regard things it was a better time. Of course, the Hungarian minority saw all this as being liable to affect their own interests, and from this one of many myths was born: namely, the myth of the collaboration of some Orthodox priests with the State Security. Leaving aside the aims of this institution, which in those years acted under nationalist orders, for the Romanian priests it was irrelevant that the Communist regime wanted a weak Hungarian minority, as long as they themselves could resolve the problems which for decades they had not been able to solve.

We are likewise of the opinion that events need to be seen in a broader context and impartially, and they should be judged only in the light of the historical period in which they took place. To take events out of their historical context leads to distortion and to a false understanding of the historical phenomenon. Precisely for this reason we consider that reports dealing with the Communist dictatorship are guilty of the faults of other generalist works, namely, that they do not take into account the different human communities but trace out broad conclusions about this region as a whole. It being an almost solidly Hungarian zone with a nationalistic type of politics (at least in the last years of Communism) the most convenient conclusion is that the Hungarians there were discriminated against. If we examine the situation more closely we can assert that in fact the discriminated against - by a headmaster, or a Secretary of the Party, or by the Inspectors of Religion (all Hungarians) - were the Romanians.