

III. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE LATE 1940S AND 1950S, ACCORDING TO THE CIA ARCHIVES

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ABSTRACT. The history of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime is still far from being known and the historical circumstances are not yet fully understood. In addition to numerous historical sources that can shed light on this rather vast subject, an important resource proves to be the CIA archive. Recently declassified documents reflect a new set of information and describe circumstances that allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the position of Patriarch Justinian Marina in the 1940s and 1950s. This paper aims to explore the Information Reports and Staff notes prepared by the CIA analysts during this period.

Keywords: Romanian Orthodox Church, Justinian Marina, Communism in Romania, CIA Archives, Church and state relationship

The activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime has already been the subject of a vast and very interesting research that has approached either general topics, or, on the contrary, well-specified elements. However, the subject is not yet exhausted, the Security Archives still contain a lot of valuable information that helps us understand better a not-so-distant past, to contextualize certain theological directions, but especially to be grateful to those vertical clerics, who despite those conditions wore with dignity the banner of Christian faith.

A surprising source of information about the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime can be found also in the CIA archives, recently declassified. What is even more interesting is the fact that the information contained in the syntheses made across the Atlantic reflects unique aspects and a very realistic perspective on several problems related to the ecclesial life in

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Romania. Starting from these documents we will try through a chronological and thematic synthesis to see the perception of the specialized commissions of the Central Agency for Information on church life during Patriarch Justinian Marina (1948-1977).

The CIA analysts have attached great importance to the religious phenomenon in Romania and the Soviet bloc in general. They were interested especially in the social and political implications and internationally effects of the religious entities. Of particular interest were the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Catholic Church, as well as Protestant denominations. But there is also valuable information about the Romanian Orthodox Church, especially from the 1950s. In the confidential reports compiled by the analysts we find a very documented record of the changes that have affected the religious life in Romania.

Some reports in late 1940s

Some of these summaries are made up of official documents (laws, documents published in *Monitorul Oficial* [the Official Gazette], statements and articles in the official periodicals of the communist regime). But the “spiciest” part, full of unique elements is based on information gathered through unofficial channels.

A first report – very well documented – is distributed by the CIA analysts on 17 November 1949 regarding the “Persecution of Religion in Romania”. This document provides a detailed summary of the Romanian Government’s actions against the Catholic Church, insisting on the Marxist propaganda, the direct actions, and the legislative means, especially the “Law for the Reform of Schools and Teaching”, the “Law on Cults and its Application”, and the “Law for the Nationalization of Private Health Institutions”.

The interest in the Roman Catholic Church is justified by the political ramifications of the Vatican's influence in the Soviet bloc through its dioceses and its clergy, which were considered agents and “weapons of the Anglo-Saxon Imperialism”.

Significant for this context is the quote from the declarations of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej before the National Assembly on the occasion of the enactment of the new Constitution (April 13, 1948):

“The Pope will undoubtedly find occasion to assail our constitution because it does not tally with the Vatican’s tendencies, which are to interfere in the internal concerns of various countries under the pretext of evangelizing the Catholic faithful [...] Who knows, whether the Vatican will not consider

anathematizing us on the pretext that our constitution does not provide for the submission of our fellow countrymen of Catholic persuasion to the political directives of the Vatican, or because we not allow ourselves to be tempted by America's golden calf, at the feet of which the Vatican would bring its faithful."²

The next chapter concerns "The Government's policy for the Suppression of the Uniate Church", from the appeal of Blaj made by Nicolae Bălan (May 15, 1948) to the Congress of Cluj (October 1, 1948), insisting on the direct effects of this *de facto* and *de jure* suppression of the Uniate Church of Romania.

Analysts' concern for the Greek Catholic Church must be understood through its importance because it played an essential role in the cultural, political, and religious development of Romanians in Transylvania. Its importance resides also in the great number of faithful, since they grew to exceed one and half million souls. In order to suppress "this important and venerated organism of the country's national life", the government undertook a vast program, which was criticized in a *Note of protest* handed by the Apostolic Nuncio on October 2, 1948 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Romanian People's Republic claiming that "the return" of the Greek-Catholics clerics "into the bosom of their mother, the Orthodox Church" was made under duress:

"The priests were in many instances brought by force to the local prefectures. In the offices of the Sigurantza (state security police) they were intimidated, threatened with imprisonment, with separation from their families, with deportation, and even with death. Those who resisted the initial acts of violence were thrown in underground cells, ill-treated, subject to exhausting questioning, and finally set free only when, broken down by the inhuman treatment of their jailors, they accepted to sign" the resolution of "re-entry to the bosom of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the definitive severance of the ties with Papal Rome".³

The Romanian Government denounced this *Note of protest* as "an interference in the domestic affairs of the Romanian Popular Republic and an attempt to attack freedom of religion" and stated that "these defamatory assertions are a new proof of the antagonistic attitude systematically adopted by the Apostolic Nunciature toward the Popular Republic of Romania and

² *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, p. 12, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83-00415r003800080002-9>, accessed March 15, 2021. I opted to render the texts exactly as they were written in the official reports, transcribing them exactly as they were published by the Agency.

³ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 24-26.

toward its reforms and realizations in democracy.” The protest of the Nuncio has been catalogued as a typical provocation of “the campaign carried on by the imperialist circles and their agents against the democratic achievements of the Romanian People’s Republic”⁴.

Of course, this line of actions must be seen in the broader context of the policies dictated by Moscow, where it started a concerted campaign against all Greek-Catholic Churches from the entire soviet bloc. For example, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was suppressed after the Lvov synod (March 1946) which proclaimed the “voluntary and canonical dissolution” of the union with the Vatican. Likewise, the Greek-Catholics from Lithuania were forced to renounce their bonds with the Vatican⁵. In Slovakia 400.000 Greek-Catholics were united by force with Orthodox Church⁶. This is why the situation from Romania was following the pattern executed by all Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Considering these events and pressures endured by the Churches connected with the Vatican, one might easily conclude that the Romanian Orthodox Church was privileged and supported by the state. Therefore, the third part of this report emphasizes the harsh conditions in which the Romanian Patriarchy tried to survive.

“Because the Bucharest government saw fit to start its fight against the various denominations – against religion itself – by oppressing the Roman Catholic Church and by striking down the Uniate Church, this action should not be understood to imply a persecution of certain denominations with the purpose of protecting or of favoring others. The action – and this cannot be sufficiently stressed – is aimed against religion as such. Its actual development is merely a matter of opportune tactics.”⁷

Despite all reassuring appearances and its reiterated benevolent declarations, the Petru Groza⁸ regime never ceased

⁴ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 27.

⁵ Francesco La Rocca, “At the Crossroads: The History of the Greek-Catholic Church in Lithuania”, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* Vol. 31: Iss. 1 (2012), Article 1, 15. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol31/iss1/1>, accessed February 2, 2021.

⁶ Nektarios Vafeiadis, „The presence of the Orthodox Church in the Czech Republic and Slovakia”, p. 3 https://www.academia.edu/8300748/The_presence_of_the_Orthodox_Church_in_the_Czech_Republic_and_Slovakia, accessed March 5, 2021.

⁷ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 30.

⁸ Petru Groza (1884-1958) was the first Prime Minister of the Communist Party-dominated government under Soviet occupation during the early stages of the Communist regime in Romania.

“its policy subjugating the Romanian Orthodox Church to its own ends. In this field as in others, is proceeded systematically, in accordance with a well-laid plan. An initial phase was marked by mass purges of the Orthodox hierarchy and clergy – similar to the purges carried out in other bodies (army, magistrature, education, etc.). In this manner, the administration secured control of leadership, by the installation of sure and devoted elements in all key positions. It was only the second phase that was marked by the introducing of a new legal regime, which gave the Romanian Orthodox Church the modified standing that tallied with Communist interests. This new standing and organization could, obviously, not stop short of reducing the religious and educational role of the Orthodox Church to an absolute minimum. This, in turn, could lead only to a gradual transformation of that Church into an instrument of propaganda, and finally, into a mere tool of the administration’s basic policy: the ultimate communization of Romania. It is obvious, too, that the third phase must necessarily follow: the rulers of the Romanian People’s Republic, following the example available in the Soviet Union itself, must seek to assign to the Orthodox Church a place similar to that which it has in the U.S.S.R.”⁹

The report insists on the tactics adopted by the Groza government, in its action aimed at the subjection of the Romanian Orthodox Church, using available evidence, identifying a pattern of this antireligious policy.

According to the analysts the first concern of the Communist regime was to secure the compliance of the entire Orthodox clergy, from the highest prelates to the last priest.

“It was hoped that the prestige of the Church might be used on behalf of the government’s aims without resorting to spectacular legislative measures that could not fail to dismay public opinion. A first step in this direction was an appeal addressed to the clergy, inviting them to adhere politically to the new regime. The so-called ‘Union of Democratic Priests,’ however, failed to gain much of a following in spite of all high-sounding promises, and in spite of the presence of one of the principal promoters of that ‘Union,’ the Reverend Burducea¹⁰, as Minister of Cults in the Groza government.”¹¹

Regarding the purges operated by the communist regime against any form of resistance, the report underlines that the clergy which did not conform to the new situation were forced to resign their communities in sheer desperation.

⁹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 30.

¹⁰ Constantin Burducea was the Minister of Religions in the Government of Petru Groza between March 8, 1945 - November 1946.

¹¹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 30.

Such was the case of Bishop Irineu Mihălcescu, Archbishop of Iași and Suceava (July 22, 1947). Another form of purge was the draft law of the pensioning of priests and the redistribution of episcopal sees and set up new rules for episcopal assemblies, submitted to Parliament in March 1947, by the then Minister of Cults, Radu Rosculeț.

The retirement of clergy was sanctioned by a new law (No. 166/1947) that provided an age limit of seventy years for all clergy. “Clearly, this provision gave the government a free hand to rid itself, with a show of legality, of any resistance in high quarters. And indeed, the Metropolitan of Oltenia, Nifon Criveanu and Bishops Lucian Triteanu of Roman, Cosma Petrovici of the Lower Danube, and Gheronte of Constantza, were ousted almost immediately”¹².

The changes operated to the procedure of Episcopal and Metropolitan elections included from now on members of parliament, ministers of state, and state secretaries belonging to the diocese. Thus, to include both members of parliament and of the government, the regime obtained a dominant position dictating which candidate should be elected. The effects of this interference were felt first in the elections that took place in November 1947, when three bishops entered the synod. Among these prelates the Report dwells a moment upon the personality of Justinian Marina, elected Metropolitan of Moldavia:

“A simple priest in the Ramnic eparchy, Justinian Marina had been closely connected with the dissident “peasant” formation headed by Anton Alexandrescu, who had dropped out of the National Peasant party. He succeeded in becoming at one stroke Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia, without having shown the least prominence or especial merit as a churchman. On May 24, 1948, he was elected Patriarch of R.P.R. Orthodox Church, succeeding the late Patriarch Nicodemus. As Patriarch, Justinian Marina, who had by then asserted himself publicly as a devoted partisan of the regime, was certainly the right man in the right place, in the eyes of the Groza government. Already he had illustrated himself by the pastoral of March 14, 1948, in which he glorifies the draft constitution of the R.P.R. From his latest and most exalted throne, he has rendered yeoman services to the regime, both by his words and by his deeds. No more devoted tool could a Communist dispensation find anywhere.

Thus, on the occasion of his enthronement, on June 6, 1948, Patriarch Justinian not only appealed to the Uniate (Greek Catholic) faithful, urging them to pass to the Orthodox Church; but he thundered against the Concordat, denouncing loudly the alleged inequality set up among denominations by that accord with the Holy See. The new Patriarch, it should be noted, has also shown himself to be a fanatic partisan of the closest possible ties with the Orthodox Church of the Soviet Union”¹³.

¹² *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 31.

¹³ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 31-32.

A similar portrait is depicted by another staff note which reported that:

“The newly elected Patriarch of Romania, in spite of the opposition of Prime Minister Groza, was elected following powerful pressure by Pauker¹⁴ on instructions from Russia. He is a rude country priest. As a result, most Romanians have ceased going to church and performing their religious duties. They are demanding priests ordained by the previous regime. Many of the priests and theologians have sought to resign, but they were given to understand that they would be prosecuted as reactionaries and opponents of the regime, and consequently changed their minds.”¹⁵

These passages give us a not too flattering portrait of Patriarch Justinian Marina, and these impressions will soon be refuted by the actions of the so-called Red Patriarch who was not a so submissive servant to the Communist Regime as it looked at the first sight. He tried actually to postpone and hinder the application of the new legislative regulation that accompanied the purges.

One of the most important laws as the “New Regulation of Cults” – the decree regulating the denominations anew, published in the Official Monitor of August 4, 1948. “That decree formally established a privileged the jure situation for the Orthodox Church, by comparison with the other – minority – denominations. In practice, however, the Orthodox Church was to be subjected to the same drastic limitations and controls as the other cults, in its organization and functions.”¹⁶

The CIA analysts point out most important changes imposed by this decree like Article 22, which provided that

“for the creation and functioning of eparchies (dioceses, superintendencies, etc.), an average of 750,000 faithful shall be reckoned for each such eparchy, provided thereby also a legal basis for a new incorporation of Orthodox eparchies. And, indeed, this new measure was carried out by the decree No. 244, published in the Official Monitor No. 217, of September 18, 1948. This decree abolished the Metropolitan See of stead: the Archbishopric of Suceava and Maramuresh. A second decree, published in the Official Monitor of February 5, 1949, set forth the new bases for the ‘economic-administrative organization of the Orthodox Cult,’ and at the same time

¹⁴ Ana Pauker (1893-1960) was the unofficial leader of the Romanian Communist Party immediately after World War II and served as the country's foreign minister in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

¹⁵ *Information Report*, February 7, 1949, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r002300430012-0>, accessed March 10, 2021.

¹⁶ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 32.

once again redistributed the Orthodox eparchies. As a result of these two decrees, through a reshuffling of eparchies, the Bishoprics of Husi (established as early as 1958), and of Maramuresh were in fact abolished”.

The Article 53 abolished theological seminaries of secondary grade, as well as certain schools of university rank (theological academies), allowing to subsist only two university theological institutes (Sibiu and Bucharest).

“Reduced from the point of view of the actual means of religious manifestation, by the suppression of component eparchies (four out of eighteen) and by the heavy blow struck at theological education, with its prestige gravely diminished by mass arrests of the clergy of all ranks and by their replacement with men devoted to the regime, the Romanian Orthodox Church was left in a sorry state, following the abusive reforms to which it was subjected by the government.

It is clear, under the circumstances described above, that the apparently privileged position of the Church in comparison with the Roman Catholic and Uniate Churches is but a mask for a very dismal reality”¹⁷.

The Article 58 abrogated “the provisions of the law No. 68, of March 19, 1937, for the organization of the army chaplains corps,” and abolished at the same time (Articles 59 and 60) the Orthodox Military Episcopate whose seat was at Alba Iulia.

“Aside from these dispositions of a general “organizational” character, this law set up in great detail a thoroughgoing control over the entire activity of the hierarchy and clergy. Its provisions were to be put into effect either directly by the Ministry of Cults or by the local authorities”¹⁸.

The report also records the new attributions of the Ministry/Department of Cults according to the decree No. 37 (February 5, 1949). Thus, was regulated the Ministry’s right of surveillance and control, guaranteeing the use and exercise of freedom of conscience and religion. To this effect

“It supervises and controls all religious cults and their institutions – communities, associations, orders, congregations, and foundations of a religious nature, whatever their kind may be; it supervises and controls the special religious education of the personnel of all religious denominations; it approves the founding of new religious communities, parishes, and administrative units, the creation of new personnel posts,

¹⁷ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 33.

¹⁸ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 33.

and the appointments, whether they are paid by the state or not, in the services of the various denominations; it supervises and controls all funds and possessions, whatever their origin and nature may be, of the religious cults; it assures the task of watching over the relations and correspondence between the cults of the country and those abroad; it has various other tasks in connection with religious cults.”¹⁹

Another modality to control the Orthodox Church mentioned in the CIA report is the so-called “recycling of clergy”. This process was announced at the opening of the courses of the University Theological Institute of Bucharest, on January 30, 1949, when the Department’s official addresses indicated that one of the Institute’s main tasks was given attention to a new training and orientation, pastoral and social, for the clergy, to guide the latter “in the service of the people and of the peace.” In consequence, special courses of missionary guidance were inaugurated, which all priests were invited to attend.

According to the analysts the significance of these new courses was stressed by the Communist press and they point out an article from *Universul* of February 26, 1949: “The need for these courses has been felt lately, in the first place, because a new and proper orientation of the clergy had become necessary in all directions in which popular democracy seeks to raise the masses of the people.” The same paper further indicated what was expected of the new priests: “Today the social order is different, and the outcasts of yesterday are now at the head of public affairs. We must not expect their compassion... It is entirely dependent on ourselves to remain in the responsible jobs we have.”²⁰

Patriarch Justinian Marina tried to calm the clergy claiming that the regime assures full freedom of organization and action, without interfering in the least in religious concerns of the Church.

“But the state of uneasiness among the Orthodox clergy was not allayed. There was even talk of certain high prelates who had been placed under enforced domicile. As in all epochs of religious persecution, in Romania, too, about this time, rumours concerning certain supernatural phenomena began to circulate. People spoke of divine signs and even of instances of miracles. These things may very well be taken to correspond to that ‘religious thirst of the people,’ which Patriarch Justinian himself acknowledged in his pastoral of February 27, 1949. In any event, there can be no doubt that a very real spiritual force still inspires the resistance of the Orthodox clergy as a whole. It is reflected in the very pastoral that we have just mentioned, and which was intended precisely to quench it”²¹.

¹⁹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 35.

²⁰ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 34.

²¹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 34.

In some different degrees the same measures targeted the other denominations represented in Romania. At the end of this report the CIA analyst draw the following conclusions

“It cannot, of course, be denied that in Romania, as elsewhere behind the Iron Curtain, religion was an effective, organized obstacle to the communization of the country. Unfortunately, it is no less undeniable at the present time that the communist government of Bucharest, like the rest of the Kremlin’s puppet formations, has to a large extent succeeded in eliminating – or at least in crushing – that obstacle. This deliberate and ruthless action of a government, imposed from without and repudiated by the people of Romania, has had and has, as we have amply shown, the undeniable character of a systematic suppression of religious freedom. Like all other fundamental liberties and human rights, freedom of religion is thing of the past in the so-called Romanian People’s Republic. This is a state of affairs that cannot conceivably be countenanced by the conscience of the civilized world. It is a problem that cannot fail to be of the deepest concern to the United Nations.”²²

These conclusions where anticipated by a short note published in the *Department of State Bulletin* of October 24, 1949, which described de situation from Romania:

“Finally, in its determination to bring all aspects of Romanian life into the totalitarian pattern, the Romanian Government has been employing many forms of pressure to compel subservience by religious groups. Religious worship, guaranteed by the peace treaties, means, in our view, more than a formal participation in religious ritual. It requires freedom to teach and express views based on religious precepts, freedom to associate with those of like belief, freedom to worship with clergy chosen without arbitrary governmental interference. The decree concerning the activities of cults in Romania, of February 11, 1949, vests in the Government an unprecedented degree of control over all religious groups and activities, and the Government has not hesitated to exercise it.

The Romanian Government has purged large numbers of priests of the Orthodox Church and seen to it that persons devoted to the Communist Party are appointed to high church offices. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church in Romania has been subjected to such persecution that, at present, none of its bishops is in a position to exercise his rightful religious functions. The Catholic Church in Romania today has been reduced to

²² *Information Report*, November 17, 1949, p. 37 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83-00415r003800080001-0>, accessed March 12, 2021.

virtual inactivity by a variety of measures calculated to cripple its organization, such as the arrests of priests, dissolution of religious orders, and prohibition of normal activities in the field of welfare and education. The most glaring example of the Government's infringement of religious freedom has been the official dissolution and absorption by the Romanian Orthodox Church of the Greek Catholic or Uniate Church. This dissolution was accomplished by a governmental decree following a virulent campaign and a sham procedure designed to show a voluntary change of allegiance. What has become of the freedom of more than one million communicants of the Greek Catholic Church to worship God as they please?"²³

Some reports in the 1950s

Parallel with the disguised restrictions provided by the new legislative regulations, the Government encouraged the antireligious attitude of the "democratic people". For example, an Information Report of May 31, 1951 recorded that

"In January 1951 the Education Corps of Romania received the orders from the Ministry of Education to start a more intensive anti-religion campaign, and to put themselves at the disposal of the 'Company for spreading Culture and Science.' At the same time it was decided that so-called 'Centers of General Education' be opened in every village to counter the peasants' devotion to religion. Soviet propaganda material was sent to the schools and the teachers were ordered to use it. The 'Company for spreading Culture and Science' had playing cards printed with caricatures of priests of various religions. Anti-religious games were also manufactured for children and sold in children's stores".²⁴

Further antireligious behaviour is recorded in another Information Report of November 15, 1951. The incident appears to have been also encouraged by the Communist regime:

"At the beginning of June 1951, six or seven boys between the ages of eight and nineteen broke into seven churches in Bucharest. One of the churches was the Greek Orthodox church Saint Eleftherios, in which the images were destroyed, the vestments torn, and the baptismal font desecrated.

²³ *Department of State Bulletin*, October 24, 1949, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp57-00384r001300070003-0>, accessed March 20, 2021.

²⁴ *Information Report*, May 31, 1951, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r007700430002-5>, accessed April 2, 2021.

It is generally believed in Bucharest that these delinquents acted in Communist instructions. The boys were later arrested and detained at Militia headquarters at 25 Calea Victoriei. Most persons, however, believed that this was done merely to pacify public opinion".²⁵

A highly complex *Information Report* regarding the Resistance activities in Romania distributed in January 17, 1955, recorded an interesting event that shows the true dimensions of the antireligious measures took by the Communist regime and the reaction of the people that refused to comply to these dispositions:

"Church attendance had increased despite the Communist pressure to destroy the people's religious beliefs. During Easter 1951 a few soldiers were posted in front of many churches to keep the people from attending services. However, the people pushed their way past the soldiers to attend services. Since then, the Communist Party had not made any other attempt to discourage the people from attending religious services."²⁶

Despite those initiative and the risk of compromising their carriers even some of the military continued to show their allegiance to the Orthodox Church, as we find in the *Information Report* of June 7, 1955:

"Churches in Romania, especially during religious holidays, are crowded. People from all classes of society, including many young people and soldiers in uniforms, take an active part in the church services".²⁷

At the beginning of the 1950s it was already clear that the apparent benevolence shown to the Orthodox Church and its bishops came to an end. That is why the *Information Report* of May 28, 1952 presents the worrying news regarding the situation of the Patriarch Justinian Marina:

"It is reported in Bucharest that Patriarch Justinian, head of the Romanian Orthodox Church and hitherto an ardent supporter of the present regime, has fallen out of favour with the regime. His liquidation is expected from hour to hour. Teohari Gheorghescu²⁸, the Minister of the Interior, in charge

²⁵ *Information Report*, November 15, 1951, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r009200100010-2>, accessed March 12, 2021.

²⁶ *Information Report*, January 17, 1955, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a005700830005-6>, accessed April 10, 2021.

²⁷ *Information Report*, June 7, 1955, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a007100140004-7>, accessed April 10, 2021.

²⁸ Teohari Georgescu (1908-1976) was a Romanian statesman and a high-ranking member of the Romanian Communist Party, appointed Minister of Interior between 1945 and 1952.

of all religious affairs of the country, has sentenced and liquidated a large number of Romanian Orthodox clergymen. The present move of the Ministry is significant in view of the fact that Patriarch Justinian has been one of the strongest followers of the Soviet regime, having made several trips to Moscow, there he conferred with the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church.”²⁹

Similar news are reported by a CIA memo of September 11, 1952:

“Religious persecution, confined until now to the Catholic Church, is being extended into Romania’s state church, the Romanian Orthodox. Patriarch Justinian, the head of this Church in Romania, is now the subject of attack, and his adherents fear he may soon be arrested”.³⁰

These notes and reports do not shed light on the motive of this change of attitude regarding Patriarch Justinian, but we can find a clue in the measures dictated by the Communist regime in the year 1952. These included **de** suppression of the Monastic Seminaries, established by Justinian Marina to consolidate the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the monks and nuns. The Patriarch was aware that without a strong monastic element the Church could not withstand the interferences of the Communist authorities³¹. To compensate the restrictions imposed by the regime to decrease the number of monks and to obstruct the monastic life, Justinian Marina initiated his personal “recycling” of monastic staff and encouraged them to develop economic activities to ensure those monasteries a financial independence. The consequence was finally the closing of the Monastic Seminaries and the preparations for new regulations meant to destroy the monastic life and the “mysticism”, considered by the authorities as source of insubordination and device of the anti-communist resistance.

Among the recently disclosed CIA staff notes and weekly reviews, we can find some other measures took by the Communist regime against the Orthodox Church and the religious phenomena in Romania. A summary of the daily newspapers records the article from *Le Messager d’Athenes* of November 10, 1953 regarding the situation of Islam in Romania and the suppression of almost all parochial schools in Romania:

²⁹ *Information from foreign documents or radio broadcasts*, May 28, 1952, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00809a000700060519-8>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³⁰ *Information Report*, September 11, 1952, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r013900030010-8>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³¹ Adrian Gabor, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română și regimul comunist (1945-1964). O imagine a relațiilor Stat-Biserică*, (București, 2006-2007) 61.

“The Romanian government has issued orders to close all mosques. [...] Up to the present, 2.300 parochial primary schools of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 24 Orthodox secondary schools, 13 Orthodox seminaries, 3 Orthodox theological faculties, 8 Orthodox cantors’ schools, and an academy of religious music have been suppressed in Romania.”³²

Although the presence of religion in the public space is theoretically allowed, in fact the clergy is excluded from the public life and their presence is not tolerated by the enthusiastic supporters of Marxism, as the *Information Report* of February 10, 1955 records:

“Religious teaching in the schools has been suppressed, although priests still, theoretically, have the right to go to hospitals to see the sick who express the desire to see them. At an emergency hospital in Bucharest, however, a scene was witnessed in which a Communist hospital attendant ordered a priest to leave because he was called to the bedside of a patient. On the other hand, a requiem mass was celebrated for Stalin in a Bucharest church”.³³

The clergy learned to survive in these conditions and limited their activity to the ecclesiastic space, coping with the hostile environment imposed by the Communist administration and with the provocations and the antireligious manifestations:

“The churches in Romania are open and anyone may worship in them, however, members of the Workers Party are forbidden to enter any church. The religious celebrations are usually interfered with by any means available, such as organizing popular manifestations, open-air dances and meetings, near the churches. The priests are not annoyed in any manner provided that they do not interfere with the policies of the Government. Their religious activities must take place within the confines of the churches. Any outdoor procession or manifestation is forbidden unless prior authorization has been obtained. These authorizations are very rarely granted”.³⁴

³² *Information from foreign documents or radio broadcasts*, April 2, 1954, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00809a000700170161-3>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³³ *Information Report*, February 10, 1955, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a005900710003-9>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³⁴ *Information Report*, June 28, 1955 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a007200620013-3>, accessed April 10, 2021.

The conditions became even harsher at the end of 1950s when the presence of the inspectors or representatives of the Ministry of Cults was felt like a continuous pressure. These special delegates were not just any functionaries; they were directly subordinated to the Central Comity of Communist Party and their role was to inform the party of every situation present in churches and to obstruct the religious manifestations. They were the link that connected the Communist regime and the religious cults. But their presence was not easy to bear as it results from a synthesis put together by the CIA analysts in the *Periodic Requirements List for Eastern Europe* (1 September – 31 December 1959)

“Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Justinian Marina is reportedly pessimistic over the future of the church in Romania. The Patriarch reportedly has an ‘assistant’ assigned to him by the regime as his ‘boss’ on many church matters as is said merely to sign church decrees issued by his aide. Justinian has voiced concern over property belonging to the monasteries, which he claimed the regime has been working to nationalize since 1958. There have been reports that a large number of clergymen of all denominations were arrested in the latter half of 1958 and that the head of the Lutheran Church in Oraşul Stalin (Braşov) was allegedly executed at that time for treason. Other reports stated that Justinian himself was under house arrest and that his personal secretary and physician were apprehended. A show trial of two Catholic priests was held around the end of 1958 and rabbis have been reportedly arrested in Bucharest during the past spring”³⁵.

This report underlines the danger that lurked in the activity of these inspectors. The interferences of the Communist regime at the end of 1950s were burdening and to make the situation even worse, they pressed continuously Patriarch Justinian to accept all the new dispositions decided by the Party. His reluctance to sign the new series of obstructions lead to his “mysterious disappearing for 3 weeks” in autumn 1958³⁶. When that measure did not have the expected result, began the arrest of the prominent figures of clerics and laymen, the elite professors, and intellectuals – members of the ‘Burning Bush’ group from the Antim Monastery in Bucharest (June-July 1958). Affected by this blow to Orthodox Church in Romania, Justinian Marina had to

³⁵ *Periodic Requirements List*, September-December 1959, 64, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp62-00328a000200200002-1>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³⁶ George Enache, “Arestul’ patriarhului Justinian la Dragoslavele, în 1958. Legendă și adevăr”, *Ziarul Lumina*, September 29, 2009, <https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/documentar/arestul-patriarhului-justinian-la-dragoslavele-in-1958-legendasi-adevar-39063.html>, accessed April 20, 2021.

reconsider and to accept the lesser evil and stopped to resist the regime's campaign against the monastic life, which was made official through the Decree 410 of November 28, 1959.

Instead of conclusions

The disclosure of these CIA documents allows us to see how the religious phenomena in Romania was perceived and sheds light on the situation of mostly all religious denominations, offering new details and nuances. From the information presented above it is clear that in the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church was made no particular concession. Its existence was tolerated mainly to simulate before the western countries the freedom of conscience and religious freedom in general, and to coerce its clergy and faithful to remain in a state of fear and misery until they will totally renounce their religious convictions.