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The Catastrophic Effects of Decree 410/1959 on Monasticism in Communist Romania

Bish. Nicodim Nicolăescu

Bish. Nicodim Nicolăescu
University of Craiova
E-mail: episcop_nicodim@yahoo.com

Abstract

During the communist period, the Romanian Orthodox Church especially monasticism suffered greatly. This was mainly due to issuance of Decree 410/1959 which decimated the number of monks and nuns throughout the country. Such evil decree had catastrophic effects among monks, the front line of the battlefield with the forces of darkness – communists, atheists. Thousands of monks and nuns of various ages were abusively removed from monasteries and forced to return to civilian life and to integrate into the life they left. This decree resulted in violation of civil rights, religious, spiritual and any rules of common sense, constituting an abuse, violence and a violation of personal freedom.

Keywords

Romanian Orthodox Church, communism, monks, monasteries, Decree 410/1959

Monasticism always had a special cultural and spiritual role in society as a “catalyst” of Christian spirituality in our country. Throughout history, monasticism passed both through periods of crisis and decay and through periods of ascension, effervescence and maximum spiritual experience. When monasticism reached the heights of living in Christ, first it gave a

lot of saints, and then it created works of mystical experience unparalleled to this day¹.

For the communist regime – this second largest holocaust in human history² – any religious expression whatsoever denominations belonged, represented hostile behaviour against the proletarian dictatorship regardless of the historical moment that we address in the Communist segment of the Romanian history. Both by the organs of repression and the administrative organs, represented by delegates of the denominations or the party local organs (the so-called “cults inspectors” from the Ministry of Religions, become in 1958 the Department of Cults and operating until March 1990), the party wished to subordinate the Church and to control any religious activity as deeply as possible. The party intensified the religious persecution aiming at any price the fast reduction of Christian spirituality influence among the masses. The communists considered themselves ready to suppress any action contrary to the atheist state³.

Thus the studies and researches of “the Romanian Red Holocaust” show that in the Romanian communist prisons there were about 4,000 priests and monks, of which 10% (400) were killed in prison⁴. Also many Romanians passed, suffered and died through the Romanian gulag, represented by the central prisons (Gherla, Aiud, Sighet, Jilava, Pitesti, Văcărești, etc.), by the forced labour camps that is “the communist construction sites” (hydropower, mines, railways) and especially the “death Channel” (Danube-Black Sea). Although there are a lot of writings and data sources from different researchers in this field, the global figures of the victims are not always converging. The number is 891,500 deaths and nearly 3,000,000 Romanian imprisoned in the communist prisons⁵.

During the communist period, the Romanian Orthodox Church especially monasticism suffered greatly. This was mainly due to issuance

¹ Ierom. Cosma Giosanu, *Răstignirea monahismului românesc la mijlocul secolului al XX-lea – Studiu de caz: Mănăstirile Sihăstria și Slatina*, Sfântul Mina Publishing House, Iași, 2009, p. 119.

² Radu Preda, *Rezistența anticomunistă. Procesul comunismului*, in “Renașterea” (R), year VI, 1995, no. 11, p. 5.

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Și-a făcut Biserica datoria?*, in “Vestitorul Ortodoxiei Românești” (VOR), year II, 1990, no. 7-8, p. 5.

⁴ Florin Matrescu, *Holocaustului roșu sau crimele în cifre ale comunismului internațional*, Editura și Tipografia Făt-Frumos, București, 1998, p. 81-82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83-86.

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of Decree 410/1959 which decimated the number of monks and nuns throughout the country. Such evil decree had catastrophic effects among monks, the front line of the battlefield with the forces of darkness – communists, atheists.

The head of the Church was Patriarch Justinian Marina who tried to resist as long as he could the measures taken by the communist regime. He was the third patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Born in village Suiiești, Valcea County, he served as parish priest and teacher in Băbeni, then as director of the Seminary in Ramnicu Valcea and later as parish priest at the Church of Saint George in the same city. After his wife's death, he entered the monastic and was elected bishop of the Diocese Râmnic in August 1947, and deputy of Metropolitan of Moldova and on February 29, 1948, he became Patriarch of Romania. He held his supreme leadership of the Church until his death, which occurred on March 26, 1977⁶.

Of the many data that we have from the informative notes security organs, it appears that Father Justinian Marina

“was framed and intensely activates on the democratic line, currently being ranked as the only element of the Orthodox Church hierarchs who enjoys the confidence of the current regime. In Iasi he developed an intense organizational and cultural activity in the Church.”⁷

It can be said that rarely emerged a personality as strong as Patriarch Justinian Marina, especially in times of heavy storm that the Romanian Orthodoxy went through. Since the early years of his patriarchy he proved to be a tremendous force polarizing around him true values.

Enlightened by God, Patriarch Justinian Marina managed to be the right man at the right place for his Church. During the 29 years of patriarchy, he managed to justify the measures taken “as a social necessity which led, when we speak of monasticism, “the expansion and revival of monastic life”⁸, although the political context was difficult. This is emphasized

⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (following EdIBMBOR), București, 1994, p. 485.

⁷ Cristina Păiușan, Radu Ciucean, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română sub regimul comunist 1945-1958*, vol. I, Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, București, 2001, doc. 24, p. 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, doc. 169, p. 330.

by the writer and theologian Sergiu Grossu, who said that when Patriarch Justinian ascended the throne in 1948, everyone considered him a blind instrument of the new power that would have done nothing for the Church. But this judgment must be reviewed. Using his obvious social sensitivity and parish practice, he was able to lead the flock with skill and prudence and guaranteed a limit of independence and safety, which exceeded the state of the churches in other socialist countries⁹.

From the first year of ruling the Church, Patriarch Justinian developed “The Status of Organization and Functioning of the ROC” together with other legal specialists, by which he meant strengthening the basic structures of the Church.

In his “Memoirs”, Bartholomew Metropolitan of Cluj described the Patriarch:

“Justinian impressed me by force and vivacity, by a huge labour power, his prodigious memory and an almost perfect administrative spirit. Later I was to discover in him the diplomat, the very skilful man in dealing with the opponent seemingly from common positions.”¹⁰

However, «the measures taken by Patriarch Justinian had only a pragmatic sense, of obtaining income, as usually justified. Based on the thinking of the Church, they were a response to the challenge that the modern world throws to monasticism, modernity dominated by “activism” and secularity, which had an aberrant and excessive part – communism»¹¹.

The direct allegations regarding monasticism in Romania were not present, monasteries being considered as “counter-revolutionary activity nests under the legal guise of monasticism (...) and to escape the vigilance of the authorities, many hostile elements became monks”¹². In another Security note from 11 December 1948 the Orthodox monasteries and sketes were described as “centres of resistance and camouflage for Legionnaires”¹³.

⁹ Sergiu Grossu, *Cavalerul României creștine*, Editura Convorbiri Literare, Chișinău, 1992, p. 8.

¹⁰ Valeriu Anania, *Memorii*, Editura Polirom, 2008, p. 175.

¹¹ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Monahismul ortodox și puterea comunistă în România anilor 50*, Editura Partener, Galați. 2009, p. 7.

¹² Cristina Păiușan, Radu Ciucean, *op. cit.*, doc. 79, p. 148.

¹³ *Ibid.*, doc. 38, p. 101.

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Of course all the informative notes had a clear purpose, in line with the new communist-atheist ideology, to destroy the Church in all its structures. Thus

«Dudu Velicu followed the pre-war speech topics, while the new political power, using the atheist ideology, was able to use these arguments not to “cleanse” the monasticism of its various negative aspects, but to destroy it. In fact, being very skilful the Communists presented themselves as supporters of “renewal” of the Church, using its “purification” in order to subvert and gradually destroy it.»¹⁴

Since his enthronement in 1948, Patriarch Justinian stated that he will watch the good development of the monastic life. He could not imagine then that the atheist communist state will interfere in the life of the Church and monasteries. He was aware of the important role of ascetics in monasteries and sketes for the cultural and spiritual life of the people. From the earliest years of patriarchy, while communism was organizing and becoming strong, he managed to increase the number of sketes and monasteries. There he organized the so-called “monastic schools” to increase the level of training of the monastic staff. He understood the organization of monastic life needed a reform in he thought this can be done according to the Church interests without the interference of the authorities. Therefore even from his enthronement in 1948 he said that an important direction of his mission will be the organization of monasteries as centres of spirituality, in which prayer and work will harmoniously interweave. He managed to increase the number of sketes and monasteries, and their dwellers.¹⁵

In all monasteries work became not only a necessity but an obligation. In fact,

“the work was never separated from prayer, but it was a permanent task and occupation of the monks. The new organization is framing work in monasteries, according to the new spirit that reigns in the hearts of our people. Therefore, the new life of our monasteries will make work and prayer the new ideal to follow”¹⁶.

¹⁴ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Justinian Patriarhul, *Apostolat Social*, vol. IV, București, 1952, p. 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Monasteries craft unions had the right to associate and to create, instead of backward workshops, a company placed under state protection using a high technique. According to the statutes and regulations of the time, any brother or sister could join the cooperative, with the aim of improving living conditions, together with the cultural and professional ones. Through these monasteries craft unions, monks and nuns were involved in work, managing the production of consumer articles¹⁷.

An intense concern of Patriarch Justinian was linked the monks and nuns theological training in the existing seminaries and theological institutions. For training and raising the cultural level of the clergy, the Patriarch established seven Seminars and maintained the theological institutes in Bucharest, Sibiu and Cluj, where nearly 600 youth graduated annually. This desire for enlightenment of Church servants is confessed by Patriarch Justinian himself: "I loved science and the people dedicated to it and I fought against ignorance and its defenders. I thought only science, united with true religious feeling, will raise the priests and our church to the due height and to the awareness of duty. I thought that without culture, clergy will continue to be ruled by prejudices and vices"¹⁸, and thus could impose their views to a large number of "backward elements, contriving to withdraw them in monasteries,"¹⁹ as it was often stated in the informative notes.

The Patriarch Justinian sent the same message about the cultural preparation of the monastic life representatives, at the opening of the monastic seminary from Agapia monastery:

"the monks must be in the service of light, culture and helping society, led by the evangelical spirit of self-sacrifice... thus restoring the Church a new and enlightened monasticism, combining spiritual, cultural and social life,... because I want an enlightened monasticism not an ignorant one... for only such monasticism can continue its mission and have nothing to lose".²⁰

His intention was surprised by Interior Minister Alexandru Draghici, which emphasize a detailed report that "monastic seminars aimed at pre-

¹⁷ Justinian Florea, *Organizarea muncii în mănăstiri. Cooperativele meșteșugărești*, în rev. *Glasul Bisericii*, XI (1952), nr. 8-10, p. 438.

¹⁸ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 24.

¹⁹ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁰ Justinian Patriarhul, *op. cit.*, vol. I., București, 1949, p. 177, 182.

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paring a religious elite and their organization, (written in the status of the Church), is part of a plan that tends to give monasteries their former role and purpose²¹. Therefore, the communist power saw the formation of a culturally well organized and trained in monasticism as a danger to influence the masses of believers who came in large numbers to monasteries, especially for patron days and major religious holidays.

We note that in this period several regulations for the organization of monastic life were developed. The motivation of these regulations is not difficult to understand. Church and monasticism implicitly had to face the challenges of the communist regime, thus adapting their life to the new requirements from an organizational perspective. Thus, beside the rules from the Status of Organization and Functioning of the ROC in 1950, approved in 1953, a few years later, in 1959, a new Regulation for the organization and functioning of the monasteries was drafted²². Worth noting that the last regulation (approved by the Department of Religious Affairs of the Council of Ministers, by the decision nr.11.525 of 1959), was extremely well developed into chapters and articles concerning: monastic establishments; entry into monastic life; steps and monastic ranks; leadership of monastic establishments; monastic life; library and museum of the monastery; sick-bay or infirmary; control bodies; hospitality in monasteries; general provisions; it was divided into 10 chapters and summarized 107 articles and it remained valid for the entire period of the communist regime²³.

The foundation of model – monasteries was another materialized desire of Patriarch Justinian, who sent Father Cleopa Ilie with a group of monks from Sihăstria Monastery to Slatina – Suceava Monastery to renew and organize the monastic life.

Once the things settled many spiritual personalities became monks who took part at the “Burning Bush” activities initiated at Antim Monastery in Bucharest.

²¹ Cristina Păiușan, Radu Ciuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

²² Timotei Seviciu, *Reorganizarea vieții monahale*, în rev. “Biserica Ortodoxă Română” (BOR), București, year 91, 1973, no. 6, p. 630 and in ***, *Regulamentul pentru organizarea vieții monahale și funcționarea administrativă și disciplinară a mănăstirilor*, în *Legiuirile Bisericii Ortodoxe Române sub Înalt Prea Sfințitul Patriarh Justinian*, București, 1953, art. 125, p. 423.

²³ ***, *Regulament pentru organizarea vieții monahale*, in “BOR”, year. 78, 1960, no. 1-2.

“The Burning Bush was a meeting place of intellectuals and hesychastic spirituality, attended by famous personalities; the soul of the events was the writer Sandu Tudor. After years of searching and testing, Patriarch Justinian gives him the chance to create «a monastery of intellectuals» that he dreamt about, thus becoming Hieroschemamonk writer Daniel Sandu Tudor, abbot of Skete Rarău under obedience of Slatina Monastery. The fate of Slatina will combine with the “Burning Bush”, but also with another remarkable phenomenon of the 50s Romanian monasticism, namely Vladimirești Monastery from the present Galati county.”²⁴

The Burning Bush came into being at Antim Monastery and was formed by a group of intellectuals and scholars, of whom there were: monks, priests, teachers, doctors, writers, and many young people eager to have a nice and clean spiritual life. «The Burning Bush» is not a literary – politic invention: it comes from the original horizon of Revelation and complies with the scriptural text and tradition itself.

“The Burning Bush has the quality of an original sign and, as such, it is the one that opens this horizon. This bush is a symbol of the Theotokos. Although Jesus Christ is the heavenly fire, Theotokos remained unburnt, untouched, but deified by Holy Child. For us, who after 1945 chose this patron for the meetings at Antim Monastery, the Burning Bush was the symbol of unceasing prayer. Who prays continually resembles that burning and still not consumed bush. We are always united with the fire of God, this blaze of light and power, and the more we burn, the more we become brighter and closer to God. This is another meaning of the Burning Bush”.²⁵

Since many partisans against communism appeared a measure was proposed to move the monks from the monasteries in the mountains where access was difficult and could not be supervised and to larger monasteries, where follow-up was simple. This was due to the links of those from the resistance or the Legionnaires with dwellers in monasteries from whom they received shelter and food or where they could store ammunition.

²⁴ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22.

²⁵ ***, *Caietele Preacuviosului Părinte Daniil de la Rarău (Sandu Tudor): Sfințita rugăciune*, Editura Christiana, București, 2000, p. 89.

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This action could not be completed because “Patriarch did not answer such a project, and the next two years the most important outbreaks of armed resistance in the mountains were stopped which made the issue no longer of pressing actuality.”²⁶

A report of Security in March 1949 included seven categories of hostile action, representing a “balance sheet” about what was happening in our country monasteries. Thus were identified following: anticommunist or Legionary propaganda; sheltering some “Legionnaire elements”; concealment of weapons and armed elements or “Resistance; holding the illegal meeting” or “with Legionnaire elements”; omission of denunciation of “hidden Legionnaires” or Legionnaire manifestations; concealment of Legionnaire material; making collections for those arrested.”²⁷

In the period 1948-1953, Security did not focus very much on the imposition of strict measures for monasteries, but “it hold a massive campaign for the destruction of all enemies of the new regime in a systematic way and a hallucinatory size”.²⁸

The great battle of “re-education” aimed the former members of the Legionary Movement and everyone connected to the “Legionnaire plans”. For example Security closed Vladimirești Monastery for the assumption of Legionary “conspiracy”, which they tried to disguise considering it an isolated incident.

Later, from 1955, new wave of anti-religious struggle began, being spurred by Moscow example. Thus there were established “measures to remove masses of believers from the influence of the monasteries, and on the other hand to limit the monasteries possibilities to recruit new monks.”²⁹

Among the most representative rules we recall: progressive limitation of production in monastery workshops and cooperatives, entering into monasticism over 30 years, gradual closure of schools in the monasteries and sketes that have less than 5 nuns, and many other economic or administrative measures.

Despite measures taken by the authorities against monasticism, Patriarch Justinian proved to be extremely intransigent regarding the removal of monks from monasteries. A Security report from May 28, 1959, just months before issuing the decree, is eloquent.

²⁶ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

“Lately – shown in the document – Patriarch Justinian Marina is manifested more alarming about some events taking place in the Orthodox Church... acting against measures taken by the management of the State, trying to counteract these measures. His position to the exclusion of several categories of monks from monastery is conclusive... he showed that removal of the monks is an illegal measure... and he does not wish that in future, when this illegality will end, the bishops and metropolitans who contributed to this measure enter the jail”³⁰.

Despite these restrictive measures, Patriarch Justinian worked hard to maintain order and safety in monasteries within the Patriarchate, but “in the summer of 1958, both the Security and the Department of Religious Affairs, the latter having Dumitru Dogaru in chief, in 1957, began to propose different strategies to solve an issue that had become the greatest issue for the regime”³¹.

The communist regime had a well developed plan of destruction of the monasteries. On 28th of October 1959, the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly adopted the Decree no. 410, which had devastating effects on monastic life in Romania. Thus, were removed from the monasteries approximately 4750 monks and nuns and were abolished several monasteries and convents, of which we mention the most famous: Radu Vodă Monastery, Văcărești Monastery, Râmeț Monastery, Dragomirești Monastery, Monastery Logrești, Sfânta Ana Monastery, Brâncoveni Monastery, Prislop Monastery and others.³²

The General Secretary of the Department of Religious Affairs, Dumitru Dogaru was seeking to change the Regulation for the organization and functioning of the monasteries proposing different rules that limited the number of monks: interdiction for the minors to become monks, those who did not graduated elementary school, those immoral or convicted. Although were many pressures Archbishop Justinian did everything that was possible and oppose the application of this government.

³⁰ Ioan Dură, *Ierarhi ai Bisericii Ortodoxe Române îndepărtați din scaun și trimiși în recluziune monastică de către autoritățile comuniste în anii 1944-1981*, in “Altarul Banatului” (AB), year 13 (52), 2002, no. 10-12, p. 40.

³¹ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³² Ioan Vlăducă, *Pagini din istoria neamului românesc*, Fundația Iustin Pârnu, Suceava, 2012, p. 173-179.

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Department of Religious Affairs has compiled tables of the monks who had to leave the monasteries. For this ample action the Security requested assistance.

The written reports of the Security maintain that in our country were a disproportionate number of monasteries and monks, moreover that they have become antirevolutionary centers and places of immorality. Thus, on 15th of December 1958, in our country there were 224 monasteries with 6,214 monks and according to the decision there had to be expelled from the monastery 1,492 monks until by the end of 1959. However, this goal was not achieved, resulting in the removal of no more than 1,200 monks because the opposition of many bishops, headed by the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.³³

During the Council of 15th of December 1958, Patriarch Justinian opposed any measures to reduce the number of monks in monasteries, threatening that “he will not recognize this decision in the presence of other church leaders, describing it as a measure of the government, not of the Church, breaking the laws of the Church”.³⁴

Obviously, this thriving life of Romanian monasticism led to a strong and virulent reaction of the atheist totalitarian regime. Although, especially after 1954, began the restoration of historic monasteries, monastic life will get a strong hit that aimed the very possibility of its existence, trying to exclude monks and monasticism from the social and cultural life of our people.³⁵

The officials, who theoretically ensured religious freedom of Orthodox monasteries, considered dangerous the fact that they had certain autonomy, being endowed with industrial installations: mills, motors and dynamos employed to produce electricity, weaving workshops and ironmongery,³⁶ some of the monasteries had forests and other lands, and household schools, orphanages etc.³⁷

The development of monasticism has led to serious concerns for the Security. And as the “empowered” gathered enough materials and evi-

³³ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³⁴ Dennis Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România. Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc. 1948-1965*, Iași, 2001, p. 90.

³⁵ Ștefan Gușă, *Mănăstirile, vetre de cultură, oaze de spiritualitate, cetăți de apărare*, în *Telegraful Român*, an 139, 1991, nr. 21-24, p. 4.

³⁶ Cristian Vasile, *Mănăstirile în perioada comunistă*, în “AB” XI (2000), nr. 7-9, p. 165.

³⁷ Cristina Păiușan, Radu Ciucean, *op. cit.*, doc. 1, p. 40.

dences on the activity of the monasteries, they proposed the abolition of some of them. A major role in delaying these decisions had, for almost ten years, Patriarch Justinian, who, in different ways, tried to save the monasteries, which even some communists take to be true backbone of the Orthodox Church.³⁸

Monasteries became a force hostile to the communist regime, through which was spreading the Christian teaching, so they wanted to solve this thorny problem. And especially “the attempts of some bishops to block the actions of the regime to eject monks from the monasteries and the desire to legally remove several monks and were the causes that led to the adoption of the Decree no. 410 in 28th of October 1959.”³⁹

The text of the decree was as follows:

The Presidium of the Grand National Assembly of the Romanian People Republic decrees:

Article 1 – Decree 177 of 4th of August, 1948, regarding the general regime of religious cults shall be amended as follows:

After art . 7 is inserted Article 7¹ worded as follows:

7 – Monasticism can operate only in authorized monasteries of legally recognized religions. Authorization for functioning monasteries is given by the Department of Cults.

Training school graduates can enter the monastic clergy at any age, if their military service is completed.

Other persons may be admitted only if they have the age of 55 for men and 50 years for women, if they give up salary and state pension, if they are not married and do not have obligations already established on the basis of the Family Code.

If case it is needed, Religious Affairs Department will authorize some monks to occupy ministerial function and receive a salary.

The above provisions apply to existing monasteries and small convents.

President of the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, Ioan Gheorghe Maurer

Secretary of the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, Gheorghe Stoica,

³⁸ Cristian Vasile, *Mănăstirile în perioada comunistă...*, p. 169.

³⁹ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

*The Catastrophic Effects of Decree 410/1959 on Monasticism...**Bucharest, October 28th, 1959, no. 410.*⁴⁰

This act modified the Decree number 177 of 4th of August, 1948 regarding the general regime of religious cults and stated that it was mandatory the functioning monasteries only with the authorization from the Department of Cults. Into monasticism could enter only those with theological training. The others can be only men of the age of 55 and women of the age of 50. These provisions also applied to existing monks. These provisions would affect more than 1,450 monks who had to leave the monasteries. The Patriarch did everything possible to keep in monasteries as many monks as he could, interpreting subjectively the conditions of the studies. Also postponed without explanation, the application of the decree in the monasteries of the Archdiocese of Bucharest, which was under the direct guidance of the Patriarchate.

To be convinced to comply with the decree, the former Security has secured employment for monks and many were forced to marry quickly. But many continued to keep the monastic values even they were married, and to make the daily rule of prayer like in the monastery. These people were called “white monks” have shown great faith and steadfast love in the turbulent times that they lived in.⁴¹

Here’s what says on 3th of June 1960, General Lieutenant Alexandru Drăghici, Minister of the Internal Affairs, in his information addressed to Bodnăraș

“As a result of the publication of the Decree 177 of 4th of August, 1948, regarding the general regime of religious cults, among the monks and nuns from Orthodox monasteries occurred two distinct streams directions: those who want to leave the monasteries voluntarily, understanding the decree and another group that opposes leaving the monastery, who are and those who spread hostile rumors against provisions of the decree”.⁴²

⁴⁰ ***, *Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale al R.P.R.*, anul VIII, nr. 28, 19 noiembrie 1959, p. 287, apud. Ierom. Cosma Giosanu, *Răstignirea monahismului românesc la mijlocul secolului al XX-lea – Studiu de caz: Mănăstirile Sihăstria și Slatina*, Editura Sfântul Mina, Iași, 2009, p. 110; Pavel Caravia, Virgiliu Constantinescu și Flori Stănescu, *Biserica întemnițată. România 1944-1989*, Institutul Național pentru studiul totalitarismului, București, 1988, p. 29.

⁴¹ George Enache, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁴² C. Aioanei, Cr. Trancotă, *Contra “armatei negre a călugărilor și călugărițelor”*, în “Magazin Istoric”, an 30, 1996, nr. 2, p. 18.

Obviously part of this document should be regarded with suspicion, or at least the expression “some will voluntarily leave the monasteries”, especially since there had been many refusals to leave the monasteries.

All measures of repression and persecution of Orthodox monasticism took place because it “constituted a serious obstacle to the building of socialism in Romania. For communists, monks had to be compromised and monasteries abolished so that no longer exist «outbreaks of mysticism and pilgrimages with the accord of bishops»”⁴³.

In 1959, with the disposition of the atheistic communist, two monastic seminaries for nuns were abolished – from Agapia Monastery and Horezu Monastery, being expelled from higher theological school all students and were no longer accepted in institutes of theology, and the monks and nuns had access only sporadically in recent years of dictatorship.⁴⁴

The Patriarch protested against this abusive decree, which triggered an exile of him to Dragoslavele small convent, where he was in house arrest for six months.⁴⁵ Certainly, Patriarch Justinian was under de Security surveillance even before his protest, there were two attempts of poisoning him orchestrated by the authorities, as it was stated by the great Romanian Orthodox clergyman, Father Cleopa Ilie.⁴⁶

In the face of adversity that has undergone the Church, Patriarch Justinian proved to be a skillful and wise diplomat; he was able to withstand the attacks against the Church. He maintained a closely united clergy, supported the political convicts,⁴⁷ and “during his leadership, Justinian proved to be a true champion and reformer of the life of the Church and by diplomacy was able to breathe life into the Romanian Orthodoxy, just in a period of prohibition and religious persecution.”⁴⁸

Impact of Decree no. 410, the Romanian monasticism was catastrophic. That’s because he practically emptied the monasteries of monks and

⁴³ ***, *Martirii pentru Hristos din România, în perioada regimului comunist*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2007, p. 32.

⁴⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. III, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 484.

⁴⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Și-a făcut Biserica datorită?...*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Nicolae Grebenea, *Întâlnire cu distinsul arhimandrit Ilie Cleopa*, în “Telegraful Român”, an CXL, nr. 25-26, iulie 1992, p. 3-4.

⁴⁷ Mihai Urzică, *Biserica și viermii cei neadormiți sau cum lucrează în lume “taina fărădelegii”*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1998, p. 110.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

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nuns, beginning with the Patriarch, who was to be weakened, first, of what built in this plan before and then to become vulnerable.⁴⁹

Disastrous consequences of this decree were more serious than those of the decree of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, bishop Gherasim Cucoșel – former Bishop of Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuților, spoke as eyewitnesses. He said without exaggeration that the Decree 410 was to monasticism “more devastating than a war”.⁵⁰ Worthy of remembrance hierarch remember how much grief was for the poor souls when they were expelled. For example at Agapia Monastery, where were driven away 300 nuns “some had nowhere to go back. They had nothing of their goods in the world, which they already had abandoned. They sheltered nearby the monastery, at the workshops, and came secretly at night to their old nuns, and receive comfort and advice”.⁵¹

Another unfortunate result of Decree 410 was also for the faithful people who were attending the monasteries and receive support, prayer and spiritual guidance. By depriving them of all these things the whole Church suffered.⁵²

The most significant spiritually loss was

“the thinning of the spiritual birth from Fathers to disciples for while Fathers were sill, there were no disciples to be taught. The situation has changed in the last decade of the twentieth century, when the disciples came, several thousand young people entered in monasteries in the first decade after the Revolution, but were lacking the Fathers because they passed away. So the decree of 1959 affected the monastic life, still living full consequences of it even now, in recent years.”⁵³

Following the Decree, 62 monasteries were abolished all across the country. On March 31st, 1960, 132 monasteries functioned compared to

⁴⁹ Bartolomeu Anania, *Amintiri despre patriarhul Justinian*, în “Renașterea”, an 8, 1988, nr. 10 (106), p. 6, nr. 11 (107), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Gherasim Cucoșel, *Tămâie și exil*, Editura Gee, Botoșani, 2003, p. 68.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵² Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Vicovan, *Decretul lui Al. I. Cuza din 1864 și Decretul nr. 410 din 1959– privire comparativă, context, conținut, consecințe*. În vol. *Răstignirea Monahismului românesc: Decretul 410/1959*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2009, p. 65.

⁵³ Arhim. Melchisedec Velnic, *Ce s-a urmărit prin decretul 410/1959*, în vol. *Răstignirea Monahismului românesc: Decretul 410/1959*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2009, p. 128.

224 which were functioning on 1st January 1959. It follows that from 28th of October 1959, in only 10 months, were abolished 30 other monastic settlements. And the number of the nuns and monks has decreased dramatically from 6014 in 1st of January 1959, to 1456. A note of the Security stated that a number of 1,775 monks left the monastery voluntarily.⁵⁴ Thus, the monasticism, the avant-garde in defending the Church was abolished. “The Army of God”, which served as a buffer in the resistance between the years 1948-1959, the defending shield of the Church, which strengthened Christian faith and piety, was thrown into the wind as something useless.⁵⁵

Therefore, we conclude that

«Orthodox monasteries constantly represented throughout the sixth decade an opponent of the communist authorities. Considered by the atheist regime ”places of ideological resistance of religion” monasteries were under the careful supervision of Security, many monks were sentenced to years in prison for their opposition to the brutal interference of the authorities in the monastic life».⁵⁶

Despite so many restrictions and supervision, hierarchy, monks and parish priests strove to be always on duty in the midst of believers, cultivating ancient Christian traditions, contributing to the cultural and artistic heritage and national restoration or building of places of worship, but, above all, preaching the eternal truths of the Gospel of Christ. In fact, the Church was the only institution that has propagated a doctrine different than the official «materialist-atheist» one.⁵⁷

State Decree 410 was a premeditated act of the authorities and can be placed in the typology of religious repression, as the content and destination, aiming the restriction of purely religious activities affecting way the hierarchy and organizational structure of the Church.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ C. Aioanei, Cr. Trancotă, *Contra “armatei negre a călugărilor și călugărițelor”*, în “Magazin Istoric”, an 30, 1996, nr. 1 (346), p. 8.

⁵⁵ Ioan Dură, *Monahismul românesc în anii 1948-1989. Mărturii ale românilor și considerații privitoare la acestea*, Editura Harisma, București, 1994, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Analele Sighet 8, *Anii 1954-1960: Fluxurile și refluxurile stalinismului*, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 2000, p. 189.

⁵⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 3, p. 484.

⁵⁸ George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană*, Editura Nemira, București, 2005, p. 400.

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Monasteries became places of monastic seclusion or where Security had its informants.⁵⁹ Communist authorities used only for monastic seclusion of Orthodox hierarchs, 13 monasteries and three small convents, which were part of the Romanian concentration area and were therefore under strict and direct supervision of the Security.⁶⁰

In conclusion, we can say that

“by Decree no. 410, thousands of monks and nuns of various ages were abusively removed from monasteries and forced to return to civilian life and to integrate into the life they left. This decree resulted in violation of civil rights, religious, spiritual and any rules of common sense, constituting an abuse, violence and a violation of personal freedom. On the other side it was a humiliation, defamation and violation of fundamental rights of the Church by the communist atheist state, which turned out to be a terrorist”⁶¹.

After 1964, state authorities have eased the persecution of monks as had achieved a primary goal to demoralize and mislead “the enemy” and the Security vision it was not to completely vanish, because it legitimated its existence.⁶²

Some of the expelled monks returned discreetly into monasteries. This is not surprising, as monasteries were monuments of art, so it had to be visited by foreign tourists. But they were rarely tonsured and ordinate as monks. A statistic of 1973 presents the following situation of Romanian monasticism: 2,068 people, including 575 monks and 1493 nuns living in 114 settlements, i.e. 57 monasteries, 37 small convents and 20 succursal monasteries. Instead, these monks and nuns had completed elementary school, and following the various courses and monastic schools, have ac-

⁵⁹ Ioan Dură, *Ierarhi ai Bisericii Ortodoxe Române îndepărtați din scaun și trimiși în reclusiune monastică de către autoritățile comuniste în anii 1944-1981*, în *AB XIII* (2002), nr. 10-12, p. 35.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55. Este vorba de mănăstirile: Căldărușani, Cernica, Neamț, Agapia, Cheia, Cozia, Curtea de Argeș, Ciorogârla, Toplița, Sfinții Apostoli Petru și Pavel din Huși, Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul din Alba Iulia, Horaița, Sâmbăta de Sus, precum și schiturile Darvari, Dragoslavele și Schitul Maicilor din București.

⁶¹ Ierom. Cosma Giosanu, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁶² Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, Editura Fundația Pro, București, 2003, p. 13.

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quired a solid theological training, thus living a genuine Christian spirit, in life in common.⁶³

With the passage of time, the situation has improved, and in 1985, Romanian monasteries doubled the number of its inhabitants compared to 1961 when it was visible the catastrophic effect of the Decree no. 410.

⁶³ Ioan G. Coman, *Importanța și sensul desăvârșirii în monahism*, în “Studii Teologice” (ST), an. 7, 1955, nr. 3-4, p. 217.