

# The Repressive Actions of the Communist System against the Romanian Neoprotestant Catechization System

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**ABSTRACT:** At a time when truth had become relative and politics had become only a game of dictatorial power, the church, left without any support, had to endure multiple constraints, leading an atypical, tacit and crisis "normality" to resist. In a society where comrade Elena Ceaușescu claimed to be the "mother of the people", the neo-Protestant cults had to endure repressive measures just because they had educated their children and young people in a Christian spirit.

**KEYWORDS:** church, neo-Protestant, religious education, communism, repressive actions

## Introduction

After the first years of religious freedom, the communist regime has intensified the actions taken against religious manifestations, clergy, religious services, church practices and doctrines. In this article, we intend to present specifically the measures taken by the communist regime against the neo-Protestant catechization system. The reader will find not only facts and events, but also elements of context, to help him understand the situation of the time as well as possible. The study can also be captivating, in that the information provided comes, in particular, from the unpublished documents in the files of the Archives of the State Secretariat for Cults (A. S. S. C.), as well as from the Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (A. C. N. S. A. S.).

## The political-religious situation

The changes imposed in Romania after August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944 also meant that the neo-Protestant churches were now legal, with the Soviet model being the basis of the anti-religious measures. The weak political representation meant that, the Communists in Romania had to obey Moscow's instructions rigorously. In order to impose this religious model, a special department was set up in Bucharest to solve religious problems. The famous "Vișinski Plan" contained several religion-related provisions in addition to numerous political, military, and economic provisions (Tobias 1956, 321). In addition to the general legal framework, which affected all churches in Romania, special measures were also adopted, which directly targeted only the neo-Protestant churches and were often identified with the name of "sect" (Modoran 2013, 39).

Aware that such a complex plan requires time and human resources, the communist state adopted a policy of duplicative and religious prudence, especially during the period of Communism (1944 – 1948), oscillating between full liberalization and coercion, which will go as far as the effective abolition of religious cults (Modoran 2013, 42). The year 1948 proposed intensive legal and administrative work, with the aim of strengthening the communist regime. Besides the creation of the Securitate (the party's instrument of repression), the penal code was amended, a new Constitution was adopted, the banking system and industrial enterprises nationalized, education restructured and a new religion law was adopted (Modoran 2013, 65). Very quickly Communism proved to be a "religion" of hatred and class, fanatical and intolerant struggle, which in Romania, after August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, fought to establish atheism and dictatorship of proletariat, using terror, bloody persecution, feared and extermination camps. Between 1958 and 1959, there was a last wave of terror

aimed at showing "who is the boss" in the country. After 1960, a gradual relaxation understood only from the perspective of Romania's foreign relations (especially the distance from Moscow) was felt. The peak of domestic relaxation was reached in 1964, when several political prisoners were released. However, after two decades of intense activity, almost all political opposition had been eliminated, the economic policy of the regime had been imposed and uncertainty, mistrust in people and fear of the repressive system, had already been planted in the hearts of citizens (Modoran 2013, 65 – 66)

### **The paradox of the neo-protestant cults flourishing**

Although many measures have been taken to limit the development of neo-Protestant churches, the statistics, however, indicated the opposite. Even if it tried to identify the causes of these steady increases (Modoran 2013, 84-89), it seems that the communist regime has never understood the phenomenon in his essence.

A first cause identified by the authorities concerned **the state of poverty and ignorance of the population**, mentioning that a large part of the believers converted to neo-Protestant cults were illiterate peasants. However, authorities forgot that there was still a considerable number of neo-Protestant believers in the big cities, where cultural and economic level were much higher.

A constant dissatisfaction of the Department of Cults was also linked to **the inefficiency of cultural-educational activities and the lack of participation of neo-Protestant believers in them**. Such activities should have provided the necessary education to convince people not to be influenced by "sectarians".

**Receiving aid from abroad** was seen as another cause of the development of neo-Protestant churches, especially for the Baptist and Adventist ones, who, at least during the first period of the communist regime, had been in contact with the superior bodies in the United States and Europe (A.S.S.C., no. 95/1952, volume 3, inv. 98, 43).

Another cause was **the lack of interest and morality of the clergy of the majority church**, the pastors of the neo-Protestant cults using this method for missionary purposes. "Their success is also due to priests who ask for too high fees for religious services, or are passionate and indifferent to the church's believers, not interested in their troubles and pains, and also take taxes from the poorest to perform religious services. The sectarians do what the priests must do and they are successful. The priest, in this case, is gossiped about and the church criticized for doing nothing for the people, and then they offer to do it, the sectarians." (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1958, vol. 1, inv. 122, 153).

Accused by the communist regime of the powerful development of neo-Protestant churches, the Orthodox clergy saw in **the lax provisions of the statutes of organization and functioning** of the neo-Protestant religious denominations the major cause of their development. The priests were unhappy that the neo-Protestants had the right to a pastor for a small number of believers, and churches could be organized and authorized for even 20 baptized persons. "But their success is not due so much to the fault of the priests, as it is often said, nor to the inactivity of the church, as it is also said, but to the too great liberty they have and take, without being controlled for what they do and how they do. Our priests are more supervised and controlled by the inspectors of the Department of Cults than they are. They open houses of worship, hold assemblies at other times and in other places than those imposed by the status of the cult, have baptisms, make processions not permitted by the law, but if they are not controlled, they do all at their will. Our priests do the services in the church, catechize, and keep the vespers only during the designated time, and days. Our parishes are well defined and our work is carried out in the same way, within a well-defined framework. They do anything at anytime, without any obstacles or control from anyone." (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1958, vol. 1, inv 122, 40 – 57).

But beyond any reason, the fundamental factor of their development was **the depth of the religious experiences and the sense of the mission**. The neo-Protestant believers took an active part in the religious life of the church (100% frequency), their missionary methods being frequently reported by the Orthodox clergy. "The sectarians are active and are not limited to an activity in their assembly houses. You find them always and everywhere around. They wander through the villages, disturbing and deluding Orthodox believers. They are often successful. They bring comfort to the houses of the Orthodox people. With boldness and insolence, they visit all houses, and even if they are not encouraged and received, they try again. They offer to say prayers for the sick, they exploit the troubles, the momentary pains and manage to attract them to themselves. There are known cases when they gave money to poor families." (A.S.S.C., no.103/1958, vol. 1, inv. 122, 180).

The Pentecostal Church was rapidly growing, with the authorities paying special attention to this phenomenon, with religious manifestations considered "a real danger to public health, because the religious exercises used, led to nervous excitement, convulsions, meaningless articulation of sounds and syllables, causing imbalances and alienations of believers" (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1951, vol. 3, inv. 97, 18). However, **ecstatic emotions and experiences and miraculous healings** have aroused the curiosity and interest of many believers. A major cause for this increase was also **the very high birth rate**, compared to other cults, with many families often having up to ten children. A statistic on the Pentecostal pastors in Romania shows that 121 pastors had 572 children, two thirds of them having over four children (A.S.S.C., Lungeanu 1974, 43 – 44).

### **Actions taken against the catechization system**

Considering the four neo-Protestant cults as a brake on the action of the culturalization of masses (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1957, vol. 1, inv. 122, 1), the moral-religious education they offer to children and young people as harmful (A.S.S.C., no. 224/3 July 1989, 5) and considering the creation of confessional interest groups as "undermining the unity of the Romanian people" (A.S.S.C., no. 273/26 June 1989, 7), it is no wonder that the Department of Cults has taken repressive measures to remove children and young neo-Protestants from the influence of the church (A.S.S.C., no. 55/22 July 1989, 1) by abolishing the methods of catechization (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1962, vol. 1, inv. 85, 68).

### **General Measures**

To counter neo-Protestant influence, measures were taken by intensifying mass educational work, by equipping community centers with radio, television, and projection equipment, as well as scientific films that publicize science. Scientific brigades, artistic agitation brigades and cultural artistic brigades have been established. In the localities where there were several neo-Protestant and more influential churches, there were conferences of a scientific and atheist nature, supported by highly trained staff, as well as evenings of experiences and symposiums, occasions in which the problems of young people related to natural phenomena, scientific and physical experiences were addressed. Articles have also been published to combat the mystique and obscurantism of people's conscience. It has been allocated funding for the procurement of musical instruments as equipment for the community centers, with choirs and orchestras to which were attracted children and young people in schools and community centers. Intercommunal and inter-county artistic contests were organized in the localities where the neo-Protestant churches had a larger number of believers. Such a contest, organized in honor of the centenary of the Romanian Communist Party, took place in Peretu commune, where there were two Adventist churches with more than 550 members, to this event participated the Adventists too, as spectators (A.S.S.C., no. 78/19 February 1974, 7).

### ***Actions against "the Sabbath school"***

Appreciating that the most rigorous and systematic form of catechization was achieved within the Adventist cult, "in the most complete form and strong discipline, manifesting itself from the top to the last believer", the authorities first acted to dismantle the Sabbath school. (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1960, vol. 13/2, inv. 99, 234). On November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1953, the trustee from the capital city visited the Adventist Church in Labirint Street, no. 116, taking note of the activity by age groups of the children's Sabbath School. Noting that it was carried out in such an attractive form, in his report to the Ministry of Cults, he proposed to remove this system, as "children raised in this spirit can hardly wake to reality" (A.S.S.C., no. 23/1953, vol. 8, inv. 120, 1 – 3).

As expected, since it had happened on other occasions, the Department of Cults acted through the leadership of the cult, the inspectors for religious denominations recognizing that the abolition of the Sabbath school could only be achieved with the support of the Union of Conferences. (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1959, vol. 8, inv. 99, 1). The Union's leadership intervened energetically to fulfill the Department's request. Constantin Alexe, President of Muntenia Conference, stated at the 1959 pastors meeting that "the decision taken by the religious management to permanently abolish the Sabbath school for children must be carried out without exception" (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1960, vol. 8, inv. 95, 22). In the report of the religious authority trustee in Prahova County, it was recognized that only through the interventions of the Union and the Conferences it was obtained the abolition of the separate catechization of children (A.S.S.C., no.1/1972, 86 – 97; A.S.S.C., no. 3/1960, 7).

The reasons given by the cult inspectors for the abolition of both the Sabbath and Sunday school were, if not childish, meaningless anyway. Especially as, for example, the Adventist Church, as is clearly specified in the status of organization and functioning, that it can do the catechization of all believers according to its norms and tradition, regardless of their age. In an attempt to prove the illegal operation of this system of catechization, the inspectors for cults tried to inoculate the idea that young people and children, not being members of the cult (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1960, vol. 8, inv. 95, 22; A.S.S.C., no. 3413/21 February 1961, 3), should not even attend divine services, especially Sabbath and Sunday schools (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1959, vol. 8, inv. 99, 3). It is also considered that the organization of Sabbath and Sunday schools was in contradiction with the provisions of Article 84 of the Constitution, which established that the school was separated from the church, and that no other cult could have schools other than for the training of serving staff (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1960, vol. 13, inv. 144, 48; A.S.S.C., no. 103/1960, 7).

It was forbidden to teach biblical lessons around the sand "table", by means of which instructors gave their biblical lessons to children in a practical way. At the same time, the Adventist cult was no longer allowed to organize quarterly celebrations with children (the thirteenth Sabbath) (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1959, vol. 8, inv. 99, 1). This process of dismantling the "school" system lasted until 1958, when the last few strongholds were conquered. A note from the Department of Cults in 1959 mentioned with satisfaction: "The problem of the abolition of the children's Sabbath school has been solved" (Modoran 2013, 178). As a result of the measures taken, for about 20 to 25 years, the formal systematic activity of catechization of children and young people has ceased in almost all neo-Protestant churches (A.S.S.C., no. 23/1953, vol. 10, inv. 122, 4).

Unofficially, however, the catechization of children and young people has never stopped completely. Alongside family education, a clandestine form of catechization continued in communities throughout the period of ban, which lasted until the 1980s. A Cults Department employee reported on a new method used by Adventists for teaching children: at the adult Sabbath school, the children were invited to the front seats or to stay next to their parents, the Sabbath school leader asked a series of special questions, focusing more on the children (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1960, vol. 8, inv. 95, 90).

In an inspection of the Department of Cults' representatives in the Adventist Church Grant, in Bucharest, to see if the prohibition to have catechization hours was observed, they discovered at the balcony of the church a group of 15 children who participated in the catechization under the leadership of an instructor. Only after the intervention of the Union of Conferences' leadership along the Department of Cults and the commitments taken, was the authorization to operate the church given back, only the permit for pastor Enache Marin being still revoked (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1960, vol. 8, inv. 95, 1 – 2). Also, in 1965, in Popa Tatu Adventist Church in Bucharest, local pastor Zăbavă Ion allowed the Sabbath school for children to be organized in the basement (cloakroom). Children from other communities in Bucharest came to this group, together with their parents, because "the pastors of those communities had no courage to organize activities with children" (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1959, vol. 8, inv. 99, 90). Dumitrescu Magdalena, the wife of the Union's chief accountant, who took up the religious training of children at the Sabbath school, had no approval for it and with significant obstacles, had also an important role in the continuation of the clandestine catechization (Cojea 1998, 330).

### ***Actions against the religious programs for children and youngsters***

At about the same time, even under the same directives banning catechization through Sabbath and Sunday schools, the Adventist Church disbanded the "Musical and Pastoral activity" Department at the Union and Conferences, which dealt with the ministry for young people. Then, the youth hour, in which programs for young people were carried out in the second and fourth Sabbath, was named "musical hour" (Cojea 1998, 337), fact which revealed that the Department of Cults did not simply just banned the separate catechization of children through the school system. All religious activities and events for children and young people were prohibited: Biblical competitions, poetry recitation, religious songs, celebrations and even the use of organs in churches (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1960, vol. 13/2, inv. 99, 162). In this respect, the Argeş County trustee accused pastor Burtescu Gheorghe of having turned the place of worship into a hall of cultural-religious manifestations, along with the development of the musical hours (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963 vol. 2, inv. 99, 450). The address of the Adventist Union No. 1159 of 17<sup>th</sup> December 1957, requesting an approval from the Ministry of Cults for the organization of musical services in the Adventist churches during that year's winter holidays is another proof of the banning of musical programs (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1957, vol. 13/1, vol. 99, 52).

Things have not been better at the other neo-Protestant religious denominations either. An "Address" of the Baptist Union to the Department of Cults reported the dismemberment of artistic events in churches. The address of the Union stated: "In view of avoiding errors in content made during the rehearsing of poems, screenings or biblical plays, the execution of vocal and instrumental songs in solo, duet, trio and quartet, we believe that such events should be abandoned in the future, in most cases, it does not contribute to the spiritual building of believers" (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, vol. 3, inv. 100, 306; A.S.S.C., no. 622560/25 October 1974).

### ***Actions against music orchestras***

Religious manifestation through music was one of the most effective missionary methods of neo-Protestant churches. Whether it was soloists, choirs, brass bands or orchestras, music was a determining factor. The method was intended, besides keeping the children and young people from neo-Protestant families in church, also to attract people from other denominations (especially from the Orthodox cult). Almost every church had a choral formation, even orchestras, instrument groups and brass bands in the larger churches. All religious services were accompanied by music, hundreds of volunteer instructors (teachers, students, intellectuals – with

various training, self-taught) organizing courses made up for children and young people (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 150, vol. 2, 38 – 39).

Thus, being considered to have a particularly important role in the religious experience of believers, artistic manifestations have become the target of religious representatives, who asked the Department for their abolition. During the meeting of the representatives of Timișoara region, they insistently asked for the prohibition of artistic programs (soloist moments, poems, choir, orchestra, brass bands) (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1963, vol. 7/1, inv. 72, 36).

In the beginning, the leaders of the four religious denominations were summoned to the Department of Supervision and Control, and with them were discussed the most appropriate measures to be taken in order to give up this type of activity (A.S.S.C., no. - /1971).

As a first step, they were asked to ban the trips of choirs and brass bands outside the community (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1958, vol. 8/1, inv. 122, 59). The leadership of the Baptist and Pentecostal cult issued "Memos" forbidding any trips taken by believers outside the church, and the choirs, brass bands and orchestras were to be used only in church (Pentecostal cult Memo no. 1044/1957; Memo of Baptist cult no. 38/1958). In cases of funerals, they could also be used outside the churches, but only in those localities and only with approval (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1958, volume 1, inv. 122, 59).

It was also wanted to have control over the days when the choir rehearsed. Thus, the Adventist Union Committee considered and regulated this issue, deciding that choir rehearsals should take place in all churches in Romania on Wednesday afternoons, at a time to be determined by each church, depending on the season (Decision no. 10, See Minute no. 40/21 December 1978). These works were to begin with a spiritual meditation, prayer, and a good spirit was maintained all the time. For this Decision, the Committee of the Union had the approval of the Department of Cults no. 21397, 1978, which stated that: "The choir rehearsals should be held on Wednesday afternoons, for two hours" (A.S.S.C., no. 538/A/17 October 1979, 1).

At the same time, the Department of Cults asked the territorial representatives to submit lists of artistic band members from all over the country, in order to detect the pupils and students involved in such activities (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1960, vol. 13, inv. 144). The conductors were also to present a self-biography together with these lists. The lists had to include all personal data, including studies, profession, and place of work, so that they could be punished also in the establishments where they were working (A.S.S.C., no. 94/1961, vol. 7, inv. 80). The archives of the Adventist Union keep innumerable tables of 60 choir members from the churches from the 1960s, as well as the autobiographies of the conductors.

Not long after this, the choirs were dismantled because of the bans imposed on official conductors (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1960, vol. 5, inv. 142, 3 – 13; A.S.S.C., no. 103/1960, vol. 13, inv. 144, 2; A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, vol. 2, 1). The choirs survived only because of amateur volunteers and young people from these musical bands, who resumed activity and assumed the risks (A.S.S.C., no. 52/29 January 1973, 2).

There have been deviations, of course, from these rules, which resulted in the disciplinary removal of some pastors, as well as the resignation of some members of the church management committees. Dumitrașcu Dumitru, a pastor at the Adventist Church in Iași, was transferred, because he tried to organize the choir, especially with Adventist students. Then, because the choir conductor, N. Antonesei continued to receive students in some of the choir's rehearsals, the new pastor, Diaconescu Eduard, was notified to take measures against this member of the community. He did not receive students anymore and, as a result, five members of the management committee, led by the choir conductor, resigned. Also, Baptist pastor Marco Nechifor, managed to persuade the children of the church believers he was serving, to buy balalaikas to form an orchestra. In addition, he has carried out an intense work to attract several students to the church choir. For this reason, he was

moved to another church. The new pastor, Radu Cruceru, managed to remove the students from the choir, thus demolishing what his colleague had built (A.S.S.C., no. 132/3 March 1973, 1; A.S.S.C., no. 122/15 March 1974, 1).

It was reached a point where, in order to use the brass bands on special occasions (weddings, baptisms and funerals), it required the approval of local authorities, confiscating musical instruments because they were used outside churches for missionary purposes, without approval. The Baptists of Oradea were confiscated three brass bands because they had used them outside the church (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1959, vol. 1, inv. 122). The return of the seized musical instruments was asked in an address of the Baptist Union no. 175 of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1973 to the Department of Cults. The address mentioned that, in 1960 the brass band (20 instruments) of the Baptist Church in Rădești, Almaș commune, Arad County was seized on the pretext that on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1959 it was used to the funeral of a Baptist believer without the necessary approval. The same happened with the brass band of the Almaș parish. With the seized instruments, a communal brass band was formed within the community center. The refusal of the Department was motivated by the fact that the restitution would lead to the dismantling of the community brass band and would intensify the religious life of the Baptists. In addition, if the instruments of the church in Rădești were returned, the Orthodox Church and the Baptist Church of Tăuț would ask for their instruments to be returned too (the instruments of Tăuț church had been given to several community centers) (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1958, vol. 1, inv. 122).

Second, at the same time as the first measure, the territorial inspectors had to take actions at the county level on the restrictions of training hours, the reduction of music hours and in time, the dismantling of the bands (A.S.S.C., no. - /1971). The organization of orchestras with children and young people had also been completely prohibited (A.S.S.C., no. 441/16 March 1967, 6). Those who had instruments would learn in particular, at home or at school, with the music teacher, not in a church-organized setting (A.S.S.C., no. 147/29 March 1980, 2).

Third, the financial control bodies had to take a closer look at the funds from which the musical instruments were acquired, as well as at the way in which the persons who were in charge of training the bands were paid (A.S.S.C., no. - /1971). It was decided not to approve the budgets of the churches that would have had provisions for the acquisition of musical instruments (A.S.S.C., no. 170/30 June 1989, 9). However, the Baptist Church in Bucharest, N. Titulescu street, bought a harmonium from the Czechoslovak exhibition, without consent from the Department of Cults, though they had asked for the approval. In addition to the order of the organs from the "Ligna" company, 100 harmoniums and some other organs were ordered for the future, also from Czechoslovakia. However, the company's representative gave the instruments only in custody, the Baptist Church offering as security the amount of 10.000 lei. Immediately after that, C. Bălgrădeanu, secretary general of the Baptist Union and Jan Staneschi, the main pastor of this church, were summoned to the Department. As a punishment, Staneschi was proposed for dismissal from the position as main pastor of the Baptist Church in Titulescu street, leaving him only as director and professor at the seminary. Bolea Ion, the secretary of the church and Ioachim Tunea, the other pastor, were also proposed to be left without their positions within the cult. "As far as the organ is concerned, we believe that there is no question of its restitution, because it is not political. We are faced with an accomplished fact and we must accept it" (A.S.S.C., no. - /22 June 1957, 1 – 3).

Fourth, the state authorities and youth organizations had to be notified about this situation, in order to take political and organizational measures, which would lead to the training of young people in cultural, sports and artistic activities (A.S.S.C., no. - /1971). It was desired to prepare some accepted programs, that is, programs with patriotic content and not fun or dance. It was also intended to organize musical bands, including all children with musical talent, to organize weekly rehearsals and performances, especially during the days

and hours when they used to have religious services, but not in a provocative manner (A.S.S.C., no. 653/4 September 1973, 1 – 2).

Fifth, it was prohibited to record religious services and songs on a tape recorder, as this was known to be safe sources for missionary activities (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, vol. 3, inv. 100, 452; A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, vol. 2, inv. 99, 125; A.S.S.C., no. 1/1974).

These interdictions for musical groups must also be understood against the background of disagreements between believers, especially in the Adventist cult, something immediately speculated by cult inspectors, who have argued to some believers that they had received complaints from other believers that their silence in church was disturbed by the introduction of instruments (A.S.S.C., no. - /March 1, 1974, 3).

In order to stop the artistic groups, the territorial arrangement and the different groups belonging to different cults, coming from different counties had to be taken into account. The dismantling of artistic groups was to start with the counties with a higher share of them, starting with the Baptist and Adventist Cults (A.S.S.C., no. - /1971). Although intensive efforts were made, the measure of dismantling the choirs and other artistic bands could not be generalized or permanent (Modoran 2013, 171).

### ***Actions against "the friends' hour"***

Known as the indoctrination time or the "friends' hour", this activity referred to a form of catechization of the candidates for baptism (Modoran 2018, 41). Almost ten years after the abolition of the Sabbath school instructors and the deployment of age-based catechizations, measures have also been imposed to dismantle the catechization of young people and adults (sympathizers) within the "friends' hour". In the statement of reasons for the abolition, the Department of Cults established that this training class for baptism was "harmful, promoted desolated proselytizing, contrary to the regulations of the divine services of worship and, from a statutory point of view, illegal" (A.S.S.C., no. 4320/13 June 1972).

As expected, this catechization activity was also disbanded by the religious leadership. At the Adventist Church, first of all discussions were held at the Department of Cults between the director Rodeanu Ion and the leaders of the cult, Ioan Tachici (president) and Dumitru Popa (secretary), who were assigned the task of coming up with a final decision to dismantle the "friends' hour" (A.S.S.C., no. 4320/13 June 1972). The request of the Department of Cults was discussed during the meeting of the Committee of the Adventist Union on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1971 in the presence of the representatives of the Department (Niță Pascu and Nicolae Alexandru Saica). The discussions were extremely tense, Ioan Tachici affirming that the committee must take the decision to abolish the "friends' hour", a position which he even argued with biblical references. Despite Dumitru Popa's opposition, the committee decided to abolish the indoctrination time (Archives of the Adventist Union, no. 8/IV/1972 – 1973, notification to the Department of Cults, 16 February 1972). The communication of the "own" decision to abolish the "friends' hour" was communicated to the pastors at the course of the orientation conference in June 1972. The decision caused dissatisfaction, protests and even the threat of some pastors that they would give up being the religious cult's employees (A.S.S.C., June 4320/13, 1972).

Shortly after, an address from the Department of Cults sent to Prahova County inspector, Dănescu Mihai, announced the abolition of the "friends' hour". Address no. 15058/28 June 1972 stated: "We inform you that recently the management of the Adventist cult decided to abolish the friends' hour in all communities. It shall be for you to monitor that it is not replaced by other activities" (A.S.S.C., no. 1/1972, 95).

After 1972, the date when the indoctrination hours were abolished, the religious indoctrination of children and young people continued in various forms. Although the separate indoctrination of children and young people was no longer practiced, it was practiced



in the family and in churches during the divine services (A.S.S.C., no. 78/19 February 1974, 1).

### ***Actions against "missionary trips"***

Excursions, often referred to as "missionaries", have been a powerful means of attracting and retaining young people in neo-Protestant churches. In order to be able to prevent such recreational activities on the basis of confessional practice, it was acted both on the line of religious management (as expected) and on the lines of travel agencies, which could provide the young people with means of transportation. Thus, the Tourism County offices (OJT), as well as the Youth Tourism offices (BTT), no longer offered means of transportation to those who wanted to organize trips on the basis of confessional arrangements. However, neo-Protestant religious groups have also adapted to this situation, encouraging trips in smaller groups with public transportation (A.S.S.C., no. 273/26 June 1989, 6).

There have also been situations in which various children's camps were effectively canceled while active. The Baptist Church in Lugoj had organized a camp for Christian children in the house of a believer in Ohaba Romana, Timiș County during the holiday. Children were supervised and taught the Bible, having a varied and pleasant daily schedule. Ioan Trif, president of the Baptist Church in Timișoara, and the cult inspector Teperdel, came to the camp in Ohaba Romana and canceled the event, forcing the children to return home. A boy was taken the Bible, and in Lugoj a search was performed at the house of a student (Grossu 2006, 173). Although most of the organized trips remained only at plan level, others have materialized thanks to the narrower framework in which they were organized, as well as the trips of young people with the public means of transportation.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the restrictive actions taken by the communist regime to limit any religious manifestations, authorities understood that they could not abolish religion by coercive administrative measures. The restrictive measures have been constantly intensified, in a variety of forms: the abolition of the catechization of children and young people through the Sabbath and Sunday school, the abolition of religious programs for children and young people, the abolition of musical bands (choirs, orchestras, fanfare), the abolition of the friends' hour (preparation for baptism hour) and the ban on tourism trips. Despite these repressive actions, children and young neo-Protestants have shown a moral cleanliness to be envied, enjoying exceptional moral-religious education, taken with enormous sacrifices, under illegitimate conditions.

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