

The Adventist Children and Young People's Perception of the Sabbath Day in Communist Romania

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ABSTRACT: During the communist period, Romanian authorities faced a problem specific to the Adventist Church - the Adventist children did not attend school on Saturdays. Although they used the most varied methods of persuasion and coercion of children and parents to solve this problem, the authorities have not managed to fully defeat their resistance. This was the "big Adventist problem" that caused serious problems to the Department of Cults and to the Securitate bodies, the Ministry of Education, the County School Inspectorates, the organizations of pioneers and youth, and the schools.

KEYWORDS: church, Adventists, pupils, students, communism, repressive measures, Saturday

Introduction

This article represents a revised and added subchapter from the Graduate Thesis titled *The Religious Education of Neo-Protestant Children and Youngsters in the Communist Period*, unpublished, presented in front of the Evaluation Committee at the University of Bucharest, Baptist Theology Faculty, in June 2007, in Bucharest.

This study addresses the issue of Adventist pupils and students attending courses on Saturday during the communist era. It also captures the resistance and opposition of the Adventist parents to send their children to school on Saturday, despite the measures taken against them by both the Department of Cults and the religious leadership. The investigation is an unprecedented one in that the information provided derives, in particular, from the unpublished documents in the Archives of the State Secretariat for Cults (A. S. S. C.), as well as from the Archives of the National Council for the Study of the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 Scale of the Phenomenon

One of the sore points that constantly drew the attention of the Securitate bodies and of the Department of Cults was the absenteeism of students from adventist families on Saturdays, in fact, against the background of a tendency to increase their knowledge. Pastors guided their believers to direct their high school children to faculties, and children and young people were often directed to professions where the service hours provided them the possibility to have Saturdays free (photographers, health professionals, technicians, operators) (Popescu 1989, 23). In the area cooperatives Gherla and Mociu, the Adventists even took the initiative of setting up new sections to help the Adventist craftsmen. In this respect, the authorities put an end to this confessional momentum in the summer of 1974 (A.S.S.C., no. 9371/2119/2 May 1975, 9).

The absence from classes, one day every week, was, however, proof of great boldness, although in 1946, at the request of the Adventist Church, the Ministry of Cults had investigated its status of the organization and recognized Saturday as a day of rest (*Monitorul Oficial -Official Gazette*, no. 45/1946). Having that admitted, the Adventists were concerned to bring their children to church on Saturday (A. S. S. C., no. 93/1959, vol. 8, inv. 99, 1). The school also allowed to be four times absent per month on each subject, with no sanctions to be applied to

pupils and students than from eight absences per month upwards (A.S.S.C., no. 412/4 June 1973, 3; A.S.S.C., no. - /1971, 5). But this rule was not known by ordinary people, so it never applied. So, the Adventist pupils and students were not regarded, by any means, as having any rights in addition to others, the documents we studied even indicating the contrary.

In most of the Adventist churches in the country, there were students from Adventist families who were absent from school on Saturdays, with many localities reporting such situations. In an informative note from 7th April 1945 from the Merigoala (Teleorman) gendarmerie station, it was reported that the Adventists refused to send their children to school on Saturday, although they were "pressured by teachers to attend the courses on this day" (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 2672, vol. 30, 244). Applications submitted to school inspectorates could be identified, whereby parents asked that on Saturday their children be left free to participate in religious services, 'otherwise they would be removed from schools' (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 6899, volume 1, 327). The Bucharest Securitate department also reported in April 1949 that Adventists were expelled for absences on Saturdays (Modoran 2013, 144). And the representative of Bacău region reported in the course of November 1961 that some of the Adventist believers in Bacău did not send their children to school on Saturday (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1961, vol. 2, inv. 69, 3). During the school year 1971-1972, some counties across the country identified some 400 children who were not attending school on Saturdays. In Războieni, Iași County, 60 children were not attending school. Despite the measures taken to convince the parents, they remained uncompromising, "because of their excessive fanaticism". In Sic village, Cluj county, 36 children were absent from school on Saturdays. In Laslea, Sibiu County, at the beginning of 1972 – 1973, things were not different, 28 students not taking up school on Saturdays (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, vol. 1, 41 – 45). And in the Adventist Church of Curtișoara, Olt County, there were many young people skipping classes courses on Saturdays (A.S.S.C., no. - /1 February 1986, 8; A.S.S.C., no. 109/1962, vol. 1, inv. 85, 16-20). It was also reported that in Dumbrăveni commune, Suceava region, "because of the children's absences at school on Saturdays, the school situation of 35 pupils in primary school classes could not be completed in the first quarter of 1963". (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, vol. 3, inv. 100, 453; A.S.S.C., no. 109/1962, vol. 2, inv. 99, 21).

There were also situations in which the Securitate departments were putting pressure on school inspectorates to coerce and fine people who were skipping school on Saturdays. Sometimes these (the case of Ilfov County Inspectorate) were researching and could easily notice that, after the education reform of August 1948, no such restrictions were foreseen against those who were absent from the classes on Saturday, all of which was based on "clarification work". The inspectorates objected to the intervention of the Securitate and said they would not make decisions until they consulted with the party (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 2672, volume 6, 68). It is therefore easy to notice that the party was the one to impose measures of coercion by threats, fines, expulsion, prosecution etc.

In a report dated 22nd December 1972, by the Head of Service IV of Directorate I, lt. col. I. Banciu attested that about 4.000 children were identified whose parents did not allow them to go to school on Saturdays, "with all the attempts to clarify the competent bodies", the most important counties being Sibiu (90), Cluj (80), Iași (60), Bacău (50), Teleorman and Suceava (35), Vaslui (30) and Prahova (20) (A.C.N.S.A.S., no 141, vol. 14, 41 – 150).

The issue of students attending courses on Saturdays became the "great Adventist challenge" for both the religious Department and the Securitate bodies, the Ministry of Education, the District School Inspectorates, the organizations of pioneers and youth, schools, etc., because there were such students in every church in the country (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 628, 17). From the analysis of the absences, it was found that the younger pupils went to school on Saturdays, but as they grew up, absences increased in number. In response to this, the leaders of Adventist churches Vaidacămăraș and Sic said that "the little ones do not understand much" and that "they are not trapped in the structural organization of the choirs, orchestras and do not have an active role in the church, but as they grow, they become active members and their presence is mandatory in religious activities" (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, vol. 14, 5).

Causes of the Phenomenon and Analysis of Taking Measures

By studying the phenomenon, the Securitate bodies identified some causes for which Adventist children and young people did not regularly attend school (Modoran 2013, 147).

The strong influence of fanatical Adventist parents. The Braşov Securitate reported in April 1950 that the Adventists in Bicăzul Ardelean continued kept on not sending their children to school on Saturdays, preferring to pay fines. An informative note, dated two weeks later, said that, although they had been fined between 500 and 1.000 lei, "they still do not send them to school". Consequently, the Braşov Securitate Directorate was ordered to intervene in the Educational Sector 'in order to impose fines with a mark-up' (A.C.N.S.A.S., nr. 2672, vol. 6, 122. 267).

In general, the promoters of this attitude were **members of the boards of local churches**, and they refused to send their children to school on Saturdays, thus being a "negative" example for other believers. The elders were often approached by local inspectors, asking them not only to send their own children to school, but to make other believers do the same (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, volume 2, inv. 99, 19). The Neamţ county official reported that out of the six members of the committee, four had children of school age and did not even plan to send them to school on Saturdays (A.S.S.C., 000716/13 January 1975). Also, at the church in Comişani, Târgovişte district, the son of elder Petre Stanciu, did not attend classes on Saturdays (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1961, volume 1, inv. 103, 40). In Bătrâni and Gheorghişa communes, Dâmboviţa county, when some believers gave in to pressure and sent their children to school on Saturday, they were blamed by the local elders and accused of breaking the doctrine (A.S.S.C., Documentary Material on Sectarian Activity, no. - , 1).

Also, some **pastors** were among those who claimed it was a sin for parents to send their children to school on Saturday, many of them seriously suffering from this. The members of the Securitate mentioned that in Moldova fanaticism was so intense that almost the whole pastoral body refused to send their children to school on Saturday (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 628, 147). In Măluşteni commune, Vaslui county, pastor Liga Laurenţiu, besides not sending his three children to school on Saturdays, he also refused to send them on a school-organized trip on a Saturday, although he had paid for the cost of the excursion (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, vol. 14, 6). And Câmpulung pastor, Stoichici Dinu, kept his children from going to school on Saturday (A.S.S.C., no. 6436/1973, inv. 1783, 3). Pastor Iosafat Liga did the same thing for his own children (A.S.S.C., no. - /March 1, 1974, 6). The pastor in Făgăraş refused to let his daughter go to school on Saturday, being pressured to do so by the religious authority, he promised to allow her to go to school and requested that she stayed home one Saturday a month. The application was provisionally approved (Varadi 2002, 108; A.S.S.C., no. 1341/18 November 1957, 1). But mostly the pastors who were in the management, gave in, while some of the ordinary believers opposed resistance. And this has only weakened the lines of resistance.

Another cause of this phenomenon was seen in **the absence of disciplinary actions from the church leadership against Adventist pastors** who promoted such ideas. And last but not least, the lack of concern on the part of the teachers. The Education Ministry in a survey conducted in Cluj county by the Department of Cults trustee, and a county inspector in education found that in all the schools they controlled, the teachers had not asked for the reason why some students had the highest number of absences on Saturdays.

Solutions were proposed which showed how complex this phenomenon was. To begin with, proposals were made by the Department of Cults to **amend the Statute of the Organization** of the cult, especially Article 26 which regulated the issue of the worship day of the Adventists: "the divine services of the cult are public and take place on the seventh day, that is on Saturday, which, according to the confession of faith annexed to this Statute, is the weekly resting day of the Adventists" (*Monitorul Oficial* – Official Gazette, no. 45/1946). In particular, only the second

part of this Article was proposed for cancellation by the Presidium of the Great National Assembly, which had approved the Statute, ‘in order to cancel any pretentious claims by the Adventist to respect their resting day’ (A.S.S.C., no. 95/1958, volume 13, inv. 86, 14).

At the same time, it was intended **to impose abusive measures in close connection with persons attached to the management of the religious leadership**, in order not to lead to a reaction of the believers who disapproved the anti-religious policy of the communist regime (Petcu 2005, 365). **Educational measures** were also proposed **to attract children to school**, influence through **the information network** (many success stories are achieved by this method), as well as **a more operatively involvement of the county inspectors** of cults to expose and remove such situations (Petcu 2005, 385-386). During the years ‘70s and ‘80s, the authorities’ fight against those who continued to skip classes on Saturdays intensified.

1. Restrictive Measures

1.1. *The situation in Moldova Conference*

From the perspective of the cult inspectors, the most critical situation was found in Moldova at the Conference of Bacău (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, vol. 1, inv. 98, 21). Starting with the pastors and continuing with the ordinary believers, all refused to send their children to school on Saturday, to the despair of the local teachers, who had exhausted all means of conviction (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1963, vol. 7/1, 12). This was due both to the conservative attitude of the clergymen and to the calls for resistance preached by some believers. At Piatra Neamț, where Daniel Geantă was pastor, before the arrival of Stroescu Virgil, 60 – 70% of the children went to school on Saturday, managing to change people's mentality within months. Pastor Daniel was severely warned and urged to recover lost ground (A.S.S.C., no. 167/23 March 1982, 1).

Local authorities have tried to solve the situation in Moldova directly. With the help of the regional representative, the town party committee in Bacău contacted the secretary of Bacău Conference, Pintlie Baci, who was asked to take measures, first and foremost among the clergymen, to send their children to school on Saturday, and secondly to determine the other believers to do so (A.S.S.C., no 3413/21 February 1961, 1; A.S.S.C., no 818/2 February 1961). Not noticing any changes, the Department of Cults called upon the leadership of the Adventist Union and entrusted it with resolving this problem as soon as possible. In 1967, the leadership of the Union met with the leadership of the Conference of Bacău and the representatives of the Department of Cults in order to address this issue. During the discussions, Popescu Ioan, a minister in a district in Suceava county, took the floor. In a firm and authoritarian tone, he accused the Union leadership of not taking a firm stand to condemn those who sent their children to school on Saturday. He also spoke against the Department of Cults, claiming that "it had no right to put pressure on the church and parents to send their children to school on Saturday." In the end, he called for all those present, elders and pastors, to adopt a firm attitude towards this issue. The leadership of the cult was accused of not taking attitude against this pastor and it was proposed that the pastor's license card be withdrawn. This was done very soon. Shortly after, Ioan Popescu went to the head of the Department of Cults and retracted the action taken in Bacău, assuming responsibility for launching a program to persuade parents and pastors to send their children to school on Saturday. As a result of this attitude, it was proposed to be reactivated as a church pastor, even more so, to be appointed as an adviser to the Union Committee. He had even printed a material to be published in *Curierul Adventist*, but because he was not known among the Adventist members, the article was to be countersigned by Dumitru Popa, the editor of the magazine. The leadership of the Union only agreed to the first proposal, claiming that if he returns to churches, claiming the contrary to what was said earlier, he would cause more damage than gain. But they agreed to go to his previous district and do there what they had proposed to be done at a national level. Angered by the fact that he had not been promoted, he left the church working close to his retirement as a mechanic, then as a reformed pastor (Popa 1991, 12-14).

The Union of Conferences had a great resistance from the Conference in Bacău, the only success materialized in the promise of the Conference's leadership to solve the problem in two to three months. For the Department of Cults, however, this period was too long, which is why the Union was given only one month to clarify its own believers, otherwise determined action was to be taken, first against the most resistant, then on a case-by-case basis, against the other leaders of the Conference.

According to this provision, it is no wonder that they immediately withdraw the right to be a pastor for Baciú Pintilie, secretary of Bacău Conference and for Herghelegiu Dumitru, who was the pastor of the Adventist Church in Bacău, considered as the generators of the issue (A.S.S.C., no. 3413/21 February 1961, 2).

1.2. The situation on national level

On national level, the Securitate bodies and the of Cults have put great pressure on the church leadership to solve, at the level of the Union, the problem of absenteeism at school courses on Saturday. Thus, in 1963, the President of the Church, Pavel Crişan, was asked to draw up a work plan, with concrete proposals and measures, to convince the faithful parents that sending children to school on Saturday is not a sin, "absolving" the ordinary people from keeping the Sabbath (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 628, 21).

Specifically, this plan meant the formation of delegations consisting of Union leaders and conference representatives who were to travel through churches in order to convince believers. Delegations were to hold biblical, doctrinaire arguments, based on a religious bibliography (Bible arguments and the writings of the church prophet – Ellen White). Even some "theories" appeared, claiming that the fourth commandment of the Decalogue should no longer be applied literally, because today we no longer have slaves, and the city dwellers no longer have animals. We can rent the houses, but we cannot force the tenants to observe Saturday.

It is also said that the Jews in Egypt did not respect the Sabbath as a day of resting, because they were slaves and had no school of their own. So, the Sabbath is no longer compulsory either, because at present they were under Russian bondage. Constantin Alexe, the representative of the Union, who had once provided children with material suitable for their religious training in every community in Bucharest and had raised the level of the tutors of the Sabbath school, promoted and officially supported, with great skill, the new guidance of children going to school on Saturday (Cojea 2008, 337). So, the new official message of the cult in the above-mentioned issue was that "we must send our children to school on Saturday" (A.S.S.C., no. 12/6/1975, volume 1, inv. 3, 2), because "this is the necessity of our time" (Cojea 2008, 337).

So-called "orientation assemblies" started to be organized, with the obvious aim of "disorienting" those willing to listen to it from fear, credulity, opportunism, temporary advantages, or cowardice. Very often, these guidelines loaded clean consciences, but they gave the appearance of liberation to those who fled suffering, hardship, and trouble. The clergymen called the article which was quoted at such meetings and asked for the children to be sent to school on Saturday "wrong book", but officially its name was "guidebook" (Gercos 1997, 115). If they were to face major resistance from ordinary believers, delegates had to take opt-out measures. In the case of clergymen or other responsible persons who would have opposed them, they would be dismissed from the clerical or administrative duties.

1.3. The practical enforcement of repressive measures

The measures taken by the Union leadership have succeeded in **withdrawing the authorization** of pastors whose children were not attending school on Saturday. There are many examples of pastors left without license to practice (A.S.S.C., 109/1963, vol 2, inv. 99, 255; Cojea 2003, 27). The leaders of the Conference of Bacău preferred to have their license withdrawn rather than to be taxed as "sold to the state" (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 628, 147). Pastor Vulvară Ion was summoned before the committee of Sibiu Conference in the presence of the Department of Cults representatives to be convinced to let

his children go to school on Saturday. Alexe Constantin and Petcu Constantin were present from the Union. The conclusion of the mandate was: "He is stubborn and refuses". He was then discussed in the meeting of the pastors from the Conference of Sibiu, in the presence of the Union president, Tachici Ioan. He did not answer anything, but when, in private, he was told that his card would be withdrawn, he stated he could not give up his position for which he would even be willing to give his life (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 73569, 4). An elder who was an informant, Nuță Dumitru, complained to the Securitate bodies about such pastors, that the parishioners accused him of being sold to the state, and they considered some of their leaders as real leaders (A.S.S.C., no. 12/6/1975, vol. 1, inv. 3).

On the other hand, among the measures taken by the Union's leadership, was **to move the pastors who were inefficient in convincing their parishioners**, to send children to school on Saturday. The Galați district's representative supported the proposal to transfer pastor Marinică to another district, on the basis that he was unable to determine the faithful parents send their children to school on Saturday, and to bring another minister to solve this problem (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1962, volume 1, inv. 89, 36). In Gherla commune, parents also replied to teachers that "the pastor left us free choice to decide whether to send or not our children to school". The pastor accused of lack of firmness was Borbath Zoltan (A.S.S.C., no. 12/6/1975, vol. 1, inv. 3, 1).

Along with them, there were also pastors willing to give up their leadership rather than to break their principles. Pastor Nicușor Ghițescu was summoned by the Union president to a discussion on how bad it is for the Adventists to send their children to school on Saturday. The talks did not yield any results. A week later, Nicușor Ghițescu came to the Union, claiming it is a sin for parents to send their children to school on Saturday, saying: "I am fully aware of what is expected of me, but at the same time I am happy, and if necessary, I will even give my life for my religious beliefs. I sit here and cannot say otherwise; so help me God!" As a result of his position, he was dismissed from the position of teacher and transferred to the Conference, to a certain service, which the president of the Conference, told him, in tears, was "dirty work" (compared to the position of teacher). Another disciplinary measure taken against pastor Nicușor Ghițescu was that "he was not even allowed to pray from the pulpit in church, so that he would not influence others to adopt his views." After these events, Nicușor Ghițescu met with the Union President who congratulated him "for your respectful but determined attitude to the observance of the Sabbath by our church children and young people in schools. This is the Bible doctrine, as well as the General Conference recommendation, but we had orders from the Department of Cults to act as such in your case" (Varadi 2002, 108-109).

Also, the **churches** in which such believers existed were threatened with the withdrawal of **the operating license** (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, volume 2, inv. 29, 225), and those believers who continued to refuse to send their children to school on Saturday were even excluded (A.S.S.C., no. 12/6/1975, vol. 1, inv. 3, 1).

On the other hand, through local authorities, school inspectorates, and school leadership, **strong pressure has been put on parents, pupils, and students**. Parents who refused to send their children to school on Saturday were fined almost weekly (A.S.S.C., no. - /March 1, 1974, 6). As for pupils and students who were systematically absent, it was decided to be expelled (A.S.S.C., no. 103/1958, vol. 1, inv. 122, 4). A first step in this direction was the refusal of teachers or schools to further motivate the absences accumulated on Saturdays, although in the past there had been no problem in their motivation (Cojea 1998, 345). Then threats and expulsion began. Matei Magdalena, a second-year student at the "Ciprian Porumbescu" Music Conservatory in Bucharest, the Faculty of Pedagogy, Conducting and Composition, presented her case to the rector for a solution. On 15th April 1964, she was notified by the rector that she would no longer attend the courses. This was the result of another harmful incident, namely in the first half of the term, the psychology teacher had refused to allow her to participate in class because of her unmotivated absences on Saturdays. Oblivious of the rector's notice, she continued to attend the classes, after a while, even called out and noted her presence. The student also specified that the reasons for not taking part in classes were well known to the teachers. As a result, she was expelled by verbal notice. The student expressed indignation at the fact that on May 22nd, 1964, at

the school noticeboard, she had seen a list of three people expelled on grounds of lack of interest in education, proved by unmotivated absences in the second half of 1964. Although she had the right to re-apply in the next year, with the amendment that at the first absences she would be expelled without the right to re-enroll, the student had to specify the already known reason for her absence from classes, that is, because of religion and conscience. In the application, the student calls for a reconsideration of the expulsion decision and of the notice from the board, on the grounds that it affected her reputation and honor. Also, the daughter of Cazan Gheorghe, president of Oltenia-Banat Conference, was expelled because she was absent from school on Saturdays. In class she was called “fascist and enemy of the people” (A.S.S.C., 105/1961, volume 11/4, inv. 144, 1; A.S.S.C., no. 93/1957, vol. 13/2, inv. 100). Bighescu, from Bacău and Săndulache Sorin, from Grigoreni, were also expelled from the Health Technical School in Bacău in January 1973 because on Saturday they did not attend the courses (A.S.S.C., no. 52/29 January 1973, 3). Also, on March 20th, 1969, Ioan Hughas, from Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, Bacău county, asked for a reconsideration of the decision to expel his son from the 10th grade of High School no.1, on the grounds of his absences from school on Saturdays. He showed indignation because the expulsion was not based on accumulated absences on Saturdays, neither on low grades nor on indiscipline. And, as a counterargument, he specified that his son had received the first prize twice, twice the second prize and his 9th grade grades were between 7 and 10. Besides these things, the father also specified that for the class of Russian, he had been graded ranging from 2 to 5, so that he would no longer be first in class. The father requested the re-admission of his son in the ninth grade, the third semester, from 1969, the re-examination for the Russian language, in order to correct the wrong grades and to allow him to take the tests he had missed, in the second semester following his expulsion (Cojea 1998, 393-396). Although very isolated, there were also cases of Adventist students who managed to graduate from university without going to classes or exams on Saturday. For example, the children of pastor Ștefan Demetrescu graduated from university without going to school on Saturday (Cojea 2004, 51).

Other children were simply dropouts, humiliated and mocked for their faith. It is to be noted that all these injustices happened even if the pupil was allowed to skip four times a month from school without being fined in any way. Pastor Pițurlea Gheorghe submitted a Memorandum to the Ministry of Education and the Bacău Education Section to approve a Commission to reexamine his son who had been flunking because of his absences. The school approved, but the school also decided to reexamine him on Saturday. His son was declared dropout (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 131545, 36). In addition, Pescuț Gheorghe, residing in Vlădești village, Argeș county, presented the case of his daughter, who was a dropout, before the school inspector. He presented her headteacher’s refusal (a professor of anatomy) to examine her on a different day than Saturday, when, for reasons of conscience, she could not attend school. The father was extremely annoyed that his daughter was put together with the other students who were absent for various reasons and he argued that on Saturday all his family went to church for religious education. He was also very surprised that during the first years of education, his daughter had been promoted with the same number of absences on Saturdays (Cojea 1998, 389-391). In the village of Gheorghe Doja, there were cases of pupils who were repeatedly dropouts because of the systematic absences in school on Saturday (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1981, vol. 1, inv. 103, 28).

The teachers who did not attend the courses on Saturday had to suffer. Professor of music Orban Adalbert from the General School of Arts in Miercurea Ciuc, Harghita County, had arranged with the school leadership to be free on Saturday. As soon as it was reported, his case was submitted to the Department of Cults in order to establish the penalty to be assigned to him (A.C.N.S.A.S, no 141, vol. 14, 9). Exemplary cases in this respect are also those of teachers Titu Ghejan, professor of mathematics and Ioan Gabriel, professor of music, both dismissed from education and regarded as retrograde and socially harmful elements because of their religious belief (Cojea 2004, 18). Among other Adventist teachers who were cut off their employment contract can be mentioned: Mândoianu Lidia, Russian language teacher, Goicea Dan and Neagu

David, physics and chemistry teachers and, last but not least, Modoran Gheorghe, history professor (A.S.S.C., no. 132/3 March 1973, 1).

1.4. Resistance

As it was normal to happen, there were reactions, objections, disputes against the compulsory attendance of children and young Adventists on Saturday, which is true, most of the times these were anonymous. Anko Arpad, the territorial inspector of Mureș County, filed the text of an anonymous "Complaint" against the compulsory attendance of Adventist children on Saturdays. The objectors qualified this obligation as prejudice of freedom of conscience, discrimination in the application of international conventions in the field of education, to which our country had also joined. At the same time, they did not regard the absence of children from school on Saturday as a violation of the law, on the contrary, it was a materialization of religious freedom. The authors requested that the Saturday timetable provide only for subjects which are also taught on the other days, so that those who were absent on this day could recover the information on other days (A.S.S.C., no. 12/6/1975, volume 1, inv. 3, 1).

However, despite any opposition attempts, the oppression and the measures taken have reduced the phenomenon significantly. An overwhelming majority of Adventists began attending school even on Saturdays but did not participate in agricultural or manual work (Petcu 2005, 385-386; A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, vol. 14, 3), in this regard the success rate being even more than 90%. In the church of Matca in a community of more than 300 members, only four or five families kept their initial decision. Out of about 120 school-age children, only these families alone, about 20 children, remained firm on their grounds. There were clarification arguments with the remaining ones, considering that they would finally join the majority (A.S.S.C., no. 12/6/1975, volume 1, inv. 3, 1). Even in the Conference of Bacău, where the greatest resistance had been, it was shown that the number of students who did not attend school on Saturday was reduced to 80% (A.S.S.C., no. 23/November 1975, 1). We also mention here that in an information note from the Union, it was established that in the Adventist churches Peretu I and II in Teleorman County, out of the 134 children of school age, 108 went to school on Saturday. In one community there were 16 children left, while in the other ten children in four families who had not sent their children to school on Saturday (A.S.S.C., no. 117/A, 1). Another category included children who started to attend school on Saturday, but definitely refused to do any school activity. Szogyor Veronica, a student at a post-secondary course for the training of the educators at High School no. 1, in Miercurea Ciuc, Harghita County, became an Adventist in the summer of 1972. As a result, she did not go to school on Saturday. Being approached by the high school leadership in this matter, she began to attend school on Saturday, but she did not do anything, she did not touch any books, she did not write, or answer to lessons (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, vol. 14, 2-3). Pupils and students began attending churches only on Saturdays in the after-afternoon or in the morning, when they had no classes. But even in such situations, they were hunted by the inspectors of cults to take measures against them (A.S.S.C., no. 22/18 February 1973, 2).

It was common for some children to attend both school and church alternatively. But the children who chose the path of resistance were guided by parents to learn very well, in order to make this "guilt" easier in some way (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1959, volume 8, inv. 99, 1). Some parents went so far that they paid out of their own funds for teachers to teach their children on Sunday. The Iași district's representative reported such a case in the village of Războieni, Țibănești commune (A.S.S.C., no. 109/1963, vol. 2, inv. 99, 16).

There were even reported cases when non-adventist students defended their Adventist colleagues. At Calistrat Hogaș high school, the son of an engineer in the 9th grade was a pupil there and he would absent from school on Saturday. When the test on mathematics was fixed on a Saturday, the whole class reacted, asking for the day to be changed, because the student „Prisecaru does not come to school on Saturday” (A.S.S.C., 13/612/1976, vol. 2, inv. 4).

There were situations when, as a result of monitoring, were found teachers who had not asked for the reason why some of the students had the largest number of absences on Saturdays (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, volume 14, 8). Sometimes, some directors even modified the school schedule to facilitate attendance for Adventist children on Saturday, excluding from the schedule objects which would require practical activity (A.S.S.C., no. 2509/2 February 1973, 5). Other directors went as far as they tried to hide the cases of pupils who did not attend the courses on Saturday (A.S.S.C., no. 2509/2 February 1973, 5). By virtue of some relations with the Adventists, the management of some schools facilitated the motivated absenteeism of several Adventists from school, which frustrated those Adventists who sent their children to school (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, volume 14, 9). It went so far that some compromises were made between school leaders and local churches, in the sense that, during the student practice in agricultural work, instead of Saturday, the students had to catch up with the work on Sundays (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 141, volume 14, 4). During this period, many parents and children, even pastors, had chosen the path of resistance, despite the efforts of the cult leadership and the numerous pressures and measures taken by the authorities to make them give up their position.

In parallel with the work of the “specialized” church management advisers on the issue of “clarification” of parents to send their children to school on Saturday, there were still people who encouraged and supported those employed in resistance. One of the most prominent figures who stood up against violations of religious provisions and persecution of observing the day of resting was pastor Ștefan Demetrescu, an adviser on the Union committee. In 1957, he wrote an Article entitled "Religious freedom in Romania", which shows that religious freedom has long been ensured to Adventists in schools, youngsters in the military and working believers. The article then came to the point that many Adventists suffered because of their religious beliefs. Also, in 1957, on 16th December, during the sermon, after presenting a number of cases of Adventists persecuted for their faith, he invited the worshippers of the Labirint community to pray for them. However, the protest and condemnation of such acts of violation of religious freedoms were very bold acts at the time, thus shaking quite strongly the relationship between the leadership of the Adventist Union and the Department of Cults. The entire committee of the Union, together with the conference presidents, was called upon to the Department to present its position on the article and, in particular, on the preaching. However, having no support from the leaders of the cult (A.C.N.S.A.S., no. 137608, 22), Ștefan Demetrescu was sentenced for the harm caused to the relationship of the cult with the Department, removed from the leadership of the Union and retired, with total ban on carrying out any religious activity within the cult. The reason for the removal referred to by the authorities was that ‘the so-called minister used religious freedom to stir against the State and incite pastors to attitudes of disloyalty’ (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1958, volume 13, inv. 86, 14). Victor Diaconescu, another adviser at the Union, was sent to be a pastor in Pucioasa, because he had not condemned the attitude of pastor Demetrescu.

The concern also prompted with a "Memorandum" of protest written by a believer in Ploiești, in which he incriminated the violation of the freedom to choose one's day of rest, reinforcing the idea that the Adventists will go to the International Criminal Court in Hague to protest (A.S.S.C., no. 93/1958, volume 6, inv. 83, 2). Also, the president of the Conference Dunărea (Danube), Pompiliu Sersea, in his message of July 23rd, 1969, said that ‘Moses did not give in to Pharaoh. He took the children with all the people to worship in the wilderness and we are asked not to come with our children to church. We will not leave our children at home.' The information had been provided by informant Mocanu Gabriel, former Secretary of the Conference Dunărea (A.S.S.C., no. 695/14 September 1969, 1). Of course, it was proposed for dismissal from his office, for the state of agitation produced.

When it appeared that things were going into normality, a new earthquake was also triggered at the largest Adventist Church in the country, Labirint church. Two days before the start of the new school year, namely Friday evening, on 13th September 1968, two young people (who were also brothers) reported a real story entitled "A sad harvest", which occurred in the old church Grant, which the youngest had seen in person. The two reported that a mother kept urging

her child to leave the divine service and go to school, to get there on time, but then she was very puzzled why, several years after leaving school, the now teenager, left the bored and indifferent church. This story was read in all five Adventist churches in Bucharest the next day, on September 14th, 1968, at the music hour.

In the same church, on September 14th, 1968, during the musical time, a group of young people, made up of Stroescu Virgil, student at the Cyber Economy, Turlea Lucian, student at the University of Medicine and Stoica Napoleon, student at the Adventist Theological Seminary, they presented a material in which they argued that sending the children to school on Saturday was a sin, thus presenting an opposite position to the one expressed by the cult leadership. The material they presented came from pastor Nicușor Ghițescu and consisted of a material gathered from Ellen White's writings. To these was added a material in which Virgil Stroescu fought against the "theories and directives" that were circulating in the church under the protection of the religious leadership, contrary to the 4th commandment. The musical program entitled "Children going to school on Sabbath" culminated with the hymn "Ești pe calea mântuirii, dar copiii unde-ți sunt?" (You are heading to heaven, but where are your children?) and with the chorus singing "Voia Ta, Doamne!" (Your will, my God). As soon as the program was finished, the three young people were invited to a committee meeting. Then, for six months, they attended other committee meetings to make statements and to be reprimanded that they had not announced the subject of the music program. Subsequently, the Department of Cults intervened by asking the Union committee to deal with the problem in front of Labirint church. Finally, there was an administrative hour where, although the three young people were to be excluded, they were defended by the entire community. But the measures taken by the religious leadership were in line with the earthquake that occurred among the church. The young people have been imposed a total ban on speaking in church, and they were frequently asked whether they were still preparing some surprise elements. Also, pastor Pascu Ion was disciplinary transferred, and the community committee was disbanded, and new elections were held immediately (A.S.S.C., no. 2249/16 October 1968).

On 14th June 1990, together with the first free elections, the new committee of the Adventist Union issued a 'Memo' to 812 churches that existed at the time in Romania, by which it expressed its "deep regret for all the confusing attitudes towards the principles of the Church of God, such as guarding the Sabbath for us and our children." It was also recognized that "all the hesitations among the cult's leadership caused occasions of unfaithfulness toward God by many of the people" (Cojea 2004, 37). Despite the repressive measures taken by the authorities, despite the loyalty to the state position of most Adventist leaders and most clergymen, authorities have never been able to declare that the issue of students attending courses on Saturday was fully and definitively resolved. The significant number of those who chose the path of resistance added to the number of students who, after passing the repressive waves, returned to the practice of not taking classes.

Conclusions

History must not be beautified, but must always be based on truth, even if it sometimes hurts. The history of the Adventist Church during the communist period is a history of heroes and criminals, failures and vanities, lights and shadows, a history carried out on two fronts. On the one hand, it is a history characterized by numerous compromises in relation to the communist regime (leadership, pastors, laymen), and on the other hand it is a history of courage and resistance of church members and some pastors, who refused to be bowed down by the regime. Although the Communists achieved temporary success, the implementation of atheistic vision among Adventist children and young people was a complete failure, because they were willing to bear consequences, to be dropouts, to be expelled, to have low grades on behavior, to be beaten and humiliated, they were even willing to stop going to college.

We must also recognize that there has been a limit in understanding the need for education among the Adventists, a barrier that has held back the momentum of children and young people in terms of education. The doctrine of Christ's return and the fact that the end of the world is close was promoted very strongly. Thus, many young people have remained only with secondary education, and were only focused on schools where learning crafts would have given them free Saturdays once employed. Also, in order to be exempted from future complications on Sabbath, Adventists were sent to music high schools, health high schools, then to the Conservatory and Faculties of Medicine.

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