

**BABEŞ – BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY**

**COLLECTIVIZATION OF CHURCH LANDS IN THE PROTESTANT
PROTOPOPIAT OF ŞIMLEU SILVANIEI (1949-1962)**

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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Key words:

History of Romania in the communist period, church history, history of the Protestant Church of Transylvania, history of the Protestant Diocese close to Piatra Craiului, The Protestant Diocese of Oradea, The Protestant Protopopiat of Șimleu Silvaniei, Oradea region, Șimleu Silvaniei department, collectivization of church lands, The Permanent Council of Oradea Diocese, Oradea Protestant Episcopal Office, parish council, Parish General Assembly, Aladár Ardai, Sándor Búthi, Imre Kádár, Béla Fodor, Pál Sántha, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej.

Introduction: theme and aim of research

The position of the upper leadership of the church regarding the general research referring to its relationship with the totalitarian state regime is already known, on the whole. Several historical works have presented the relationship between the communist state and church in a detailed manner. The ecclesiastical historical works, as well as the speciality ones, are little concerned with the collectivization of the church lands. The latest, presenting the collectivization process generally, are not focused on the dispossession process which occurred in the church. The present paper is trying to bridge this gap.

The field of the research is at the level of parishes, more exactly the study of the collectivization process of a bishopric. The most important historical documents referring to this process have been found in the parish archives. We have tried to answer the questions based on the documents that have been found and used. Among other things, we desired to find out the circumstances of the church lands collectivization, how the parishes reacted to this process, by what methods their lands were expropriated. What were the attitudes of the parishes and of the church leadership towards the expropriation, namely what were the most convincing reasons for giving up these church properties? Were there incidents between the leaders of the parishes (priest, presbytery, parish council) and the local or state leadership because of the expropriation? What was the

attitude of the parishes and of the bishops regarding the expropriated lands? Finally: what happened with the support of the church after the expropriation of their lands?

Searching for answers to these questions, a special battle was revealed, manifesting itself mainly under the form of an inner resistance fight for survival, from the part of the church. In the „war” waged on the church, generally, and specially on the Protestant church, the most efficient weapon of the communist state was the rights discriminating frustration, and the weapon of the church, as a self-defence mechanism, was the Christian resignation of „bearing whatever trial God gives us”. We couldn't expect wonders. This fight had a single concrete result, they were able to survive. In reality, this period was nothing but a grim battle for survival.

Collectivization was just one of the „fronts of the battle” fought against the church, aiming at its subordination, and they did everything so that it should become materially dependent, thus eliminating one of the supports of the church. The process of collectivization of the church lands is a relevant example of adjustment of an ecclesiastical institution to poor material resources under the circumstances of a restricted space of movement. A new chapter begins in the life of the church, both materially and spiritually, as the previous form of existence disappears. We might presuppose that the communist state, following an obscure well thought out scenario, aimed first to subdue the church materially, through collectivization, and secondly to alienate its believers, in the hope that their „desertion” would lead to the disappearance of the church as an institution. But this was not realized.

General synthesis of the work and chapters

In the present work we are going to present the process of collectivization in the parishes of Șimleu Silvaniei Protestant Protopopiat. We approach the less investigated history of the Protestant church of Romania. The works on ecclesiastical history that have been issued so far have discussed this theme little and generally. We are going to follow the aspect of the collectivization process in the 1949-1962 period, using the data supplied by the church archives, beginning with the parishes and ending with the dioceses. In the

structure of the dissertation we are going to display the context of the life in the Protestant parishes of Șimleu Silvaniei Protopopiat. In a separate subchapter, we are going to outline the most important political events and those occurring in the church area. Besides presenting the general historical events and the events in the church history, we also had to approach the administrative changes of the epoch, so that we might spot them accurately in time and space and understand the events. While presenting the research site we have also dealt with the demographical data of the protopopiat. Follows a brief overview of the situation of the churches in the communist countries outside Romania. In the third chapter of the introduction, we give a brief presentation of the history of collectivization in Romania, referring also to its precursory period, to the reforms of 1921 and 1945, which unfavourably affected the Hungarians of Romania and the traditional churches. The economic-political dimension of collectivization is presented, as well as the consequences of the new production relationships. We outline the periods of the history of collectivization and the achievements within each period. Then we cannot omit talking about the oppressing methods from the period of collectivization, about the institutions which favoured this, about the persuasion methods enforced at the time and about the newly set up production units in the sphere of agriculture.

In the second part of the dissertation, reference is made concretely to the process of expropriation of the church lands. We can do this on the basis of the sources of church archives, firstly publishing the data of the diocesan archives, then of the protopopiat and, eventually, the data of the parishes. In the first subchapter we present, sequentially, the events occurring during the 14 years of dispossession of the church assets, Based on the archives of the Permanent Council of the Diocese, the Episcopal Office, the proceedings of the Diocesan General Assembly, and on the basis of the documents of bishop Aladár Ar dai fund. The documents, chronologically presented, offer an overview of the situation in the Protestant Diocese of Oradea, even if initially we tried to limit the theme at the protopopiat level. With their help we offer the possibility of casting a glance on the difficulties encountered by the parishes of several protopopiat of the diocese. The documents present the unbearable character of the system of compulsory contributions, of the farming taxes, of the obligations targeted by the sowing plans, the abuses of the

institutions overtaking the lands and products, the economic compulsion methods and the bad consequences of these measures from the material point of view. We can read, besides the desperate cry of the parishes, about the methods of remedy for the difficulties, about the bishop's intervention in order to help the priests in difficulty and, most importantly, about the position of the leadership of the diocese regarding the collectivization process. We may find parishes that were attached to their lands in spite of difficulties, but also parishes that were forced very soon to give up their lands. We know that compulsion process in which the „handing over” of the lands became inevitable. In the following subchapter we offer the possibility of casting a glance on the events of Șimleu Silvaniei protopopiat, on the circular letters, dispositions and indications of the bishop, destined to the parish offices. Among these documents were also farming instructions given by the superior bodies, referring to the handing over of the lands and supporting the farming works in places where there were Protestant parishes. In this part we are presented those new tasks that had to be fulfilled by the priests under the circumstances of the totalitarian policy: supporting the activities of fighting for peace, cooperation with the Popular Councils, supporting them in the collectivization propaganda, debating political issues at the conference of the priests from the protopopiat. In the third subchapter we are going to present, separately, the situation of the Protestant parishes from the Șimleu Silvaniei Protopopiat. We present, besides the process of collectivization of the lands the attitude, position and decisions of the local church leaders (priest, prezbytery, Parish General Assembly). In a parallel vein, we present as well the material difficulties which appeared due to the system of compulsory contributions, as a result of losing the source of income, namely the land. There are also presented other types of expropriation which affected the parishes – prayer halls, cellars, parish gardens – appropriated by the state under the pretext of “renting”. The fourth subchapter examines the common official publication of the two Protestant dioceses from Romania – of Cluj and Oradea. This publication offers information on the official point of view on collectivization of the leaders of the two dioceses. We find a variety of works (studies, declarations of the heads of the church, reports of the bishops of the two dioceses) referring to the issue of collectivization and not only: fighting for peace, the state-church relationship. One can notice the fact that these writings use a rhetorical

language, identical to that of the communist period. These materials, apart from conveying the official position of the Protestant dioceses regarding the process of expropriation led by the communist state, are a proof of the fact that the ecclesiastical press was an instrument for transmitting the totalitarian ideology.

In the third part we publish 21 reports, some of them entirely, others synthesized. Using the oral history means, we present the studied period through the point of view of some persons who lived in the examined period and know the situation of the parishes at the time. The statements of those interviewed – priests, ex-curators and prezbyteries – contribute precious information to the written sources.

In the fourth part, we present the way the parishes were managed in the period previous to collectivization, how they struggled to till the land. The information referring to this issue were gathered from the material of the parish archives. We discuss the ways of establishing the contribution, with special reference to the contribution in cereals. We added and outlined the the income obtained from using the lands. We refer then to the functioning and role of the barns and cellars. We paid a special attention to establishing the remuneration of the priest, with special reference to the lands given to him by the prezbytery, in order to be used as income. Further on, we investigated the financial situation of four parishes. Only four, because their documents supplied sufficient data required for a fairly complete statistic.

The fifth part in the structure of the dissertation is represented by the conclusions drawn on the basis of the researched documents.

An outstanding role in drawing up the dissertation was also that of the annexes. They contain maps of the administrative-territorial division, charts with the lands of the parishes, information about the demographic situation, copies of the proceedings of the diocesan assemblies and of the meetings of the episcopal office, bishop's circular letters, complaints made by priests to the higher church bodies, in short, primary documents which are representative for the theme under consideration. As primary texts, they offer the possibility of comparison with the analyses performed in each chapter. We have completed our work with a chronology, displaying the most outstanding events in the history of Șimleu Silvaniei protopopiat and of Oradea diocese, thus conducting to a bird's-eye view of the researched theme.

Sources

In the first part of the work – the introduction – in order to highlight the political, economic and social situation, to present the general situation of the church and of the collectivization, we have used the literature of speciality.

In the elaboration of the second and fourth parts we have used archive sources. Most of the processed data about the diocese are to be found in the Archives of the Protestant Diocese by the side of Piatra Craiului, Oradea. At the Sălaj County Department of the Public Record Office, we discovered, in the parishes founds, the record book for cereals, in the case of Crasna, and the books with the parish council proceedings, in the case of Vârșolț. A considerable number of bishop's orders can be found systematically arranged in the archives of the Ip parish, on the basis of which we succeeded to make a presentation of the events at the bishopric level. For the presentation of the situation in the parishes, the sources of information (except for Vârșolț) are to be found in the archives of each parish. The volumes of the magazine *Refomátus Szemle* are to be found at the library of the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj. Out of the 21 interviews, two were with priests and one with a teacher, the rest being with parishioners who had leading positions in the parishes under consideration. Apart from the priest József Püsök who lives in Cluj County, all the other interviewees are inhabitants of Sălaj County. The interviews were taken within three periods of time: 2004 – in the case of Crasna and Șimleu, 2010 – in the case of most of the parishes, 2012 – in the case of Șamșud (SJ) and Chereușa (SM).

The sources used for drawing up the dissertation, divided in different types, are the following:

Unpublished sources

I. Archive sources

I.1. Diocesan archive sources

1. Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Gyűjtőlevéltára (abbreviation used: EREL) [Central Archives of the Protestant Diocese of Transilvania], 6805/1927; 4932/1947

2. Nagyváradai Püspöki Szék (abbreviation used: NPSZ) ülésének jegyzőkönyvei [Proceedings of the Permanent Council of Oradea Diocese] in Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület Gyűjtőlevéltára [Central Archives of the Protestant Diocese by the side of Piatra Craiului] (abbreviation used: KREL)
3. Nagyváradai Egyházkerületi Közgyűlés iratanyaga [The Found of the General Assembly of Oradea Diocese] in KREL [Central Archives of the Protestant Diocese by the side of Piatra Craiului] (abbreviation used: NEK)
4. A Nagyváradai Püspöki Hivatal Iratai [The found of the Episcopal Office of Oradea] in KREL [Central Archives of the Protestant Diocese by the side of Piatra Craiului] (abbreviation used: NPHI)
5. Arдай Aladár püspök iratai [The found of bishop Aladár Arдай] in KREL [Central Archives of the Protestant Diocese by the side of Piatra Craiului] (abbreviation used: ARDAI)

I.2. The Sources of the Direction of the Public Record Office, Sălaj subsidiary

1. Zilahi Állami Levéltár (abbreviation used: ZÁL), Crasna Protestant Parish Found: 24/1949-1953 -A krasznai ref. egyhk. magtári főkönyve;
2. Zilahi Állami Levéltár, Vârşoş Protestant Parish Found: 1/1927-1946; 2/1947-1964; 6/1949;

I.3. Sources of the parish archives

A. Bilghez:

1. Proceedings of the parish General Assembly - 1933-1951
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1939-1950
3. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1962-1973

B. Ip (abbreviation used: IEL [Archives of the Protestant Parish Ip])

1. Files with documents of the parish administration, structured on calendar years. Inventory numbers: 16., 20., 23., 26., 30., 33., 36., 42., 45., 48., 51., 55.
2. Financial estimations, report for the period 1943-1960

C. Camăr

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1930-1962

D. Crasna

1. Historia domus, 1924-1984
2. Proceedings of the parish Council -1910-1954
3. Gold book with donations, 1910-1982

E. Horoatu Crasnei

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1946-1982 (for the period 1946-1952 it contains the Proceedings of the parish General Assembly)

F. Leșmir

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1933-1993

G. Ratin

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1924-1953
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1953-1963

H. Sărmășag

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1939-1956
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1957-1965

I. Ilișua

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1943-1954
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1960-1964
3. Proceedings of the parish General Assembly - 1928-1979
4. Historia domus - 1931-1959

J. Uileacu Șimleului

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1912-1959

K. Bozieș

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1952-1956

L. Lompirt

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1946-1952/ Proceedings of the parish General Assembly - 1924-1952
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1957-1963
3. Proceedings of the parish General Assembly - 1953-1962

M. Nușfalău

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1929-1995

N. Pericei

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1943-1957
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1958-1980
2. Proceedings of the parish General Assembly - 1912-1962

O. Șimleu Silvaniei

1. Historia domus beginning with the year 1914, volume II.
2. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1933-1948
3. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1948-1956
4. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1956-1963
5. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1913-1962
6. Extracts from the surveyor's register: C.F. nr. 321, 745, 2491, 2650, 2651, 2653, 3046, 3591, 3973, 4064-4075, 4143 – Șimleu Silvaniei

P. Zăuan

1. Proceedings of the parish Council - 1945-1979
2. Proceedings of the parish General Assembly - 1941-1987
3. Historia domus - 1949-1953

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3. Zsuzsanna Bögre - Társadalmi – politikai változások hatása a vallásos identitásalakulására Magyarországon (1948-1990) – különös tekintettel 1948-1964 közötti időszakra, Ph.D. értekezés, Budapesti Közgazdaságtudományi és Államigazgatási Egyetem Szociológiai és Szociálpolitikai Tanszék, Budapest, 2002, http://www.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/phd/bogre_zsuzsanna.pdf;

4. Dezső Buzogány – Csongor Jánosi: A református egyház Romániában a kommunista rendszer első felében. Tanulmányok és dokumentumok, L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 2011;
5. Carmen Chivu-Duță – The Cults of Romania between Persecution and Cooperation, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2007;
6. Dan Cătănuș, Octavian Roske – The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania – The Political Dimension, vol. I: 1949-1952, The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, București, 2000;
7. István Dobai – Múlándó Szilágyság, Művelődéstörténeti tárcadolgozatok., RegunPress Kiadó, Kolozsvár, 2007;
8. Dorin Dobrințu, Constantin Iordachi (ed.) – Peasantry and the Power – The Process of Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania (1949-1962), Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2005;
9. Béla Eszenyei, Mária Széles Eszenyeiné – A Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület in Erdélyi egyházaink évszázadai (a továbbiakban: Eszenyei), az R.M.SZ. szerkesztésében, Bukarest, 1992;
10. József Gagyi – Románia társadalomtörténete 1918-1989, kézirat, (<http://adatbank.transindex.ro/vendeg/htmlk/pdf5873.pdf>);
11. József Hajdú-Moharos (a továbbiakban: Hajdú – Moharos 1997) – Partium. A kapcsolt részek. A Királyhágómellék földrajzi leírása, Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület Kiadása, Nagyvárad, 1997;
12. Károly Kós, Judit Szentimrei, Jenő Nagy – Szilágysági magyar népművészet, Kriterion Könyvkiadó, Bukarest, 1974;
13. M. Bărbulescu, D. Deletant, K. Hitchins, Ș. Papacostea, T. Pompiliu: The History of Romania, Corint Publishing House, București, 2000;
14. János Molnár – A Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület története, 1920-1942, Nagyvárad, 1999;
15. János Molnár – A Nagyvárad (Királyhágómelléki) Református Egyházkerület története, 1944-1989, Nagyvárad, 2001;

16. Octavian Roske – Collectivization and the Collecting Mechanism: Parallel Histories in Dobrinu, Iordachi (ed.) – The Process of Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania (1949-1962), Polirom, Iași, 2005;
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19. Robert Levy: The Glory and Decay of Ana Pauker. București, Polirom, 2002
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21. Zoltán Szász (szerk.) – Erdély története, Harmadik kiadás, III. kötet, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1986;
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24. Vladimir Tismăneanu (president) - Final Report of the Prezidential Comission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship from Romania, București, 2006, http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf

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a.

1. Adrian Marino – Censorship in Romania in Korunk, 2001, 9. szám
2. Margit Balogh – Egyház és egyházpolitika a Kádár-korszakban in Eszmélet, 1997. (9. évf.) 34. sz
3. Margit Balogh, Jenő Gergely - Az egyházak "államosítása" in História, 1999. (21. évf.) 2. sz.
4. Gábor Györffy – Sajtócenzára a kommunista Romániában in REGIO, 18. évfolyam, 2007., 3. szám

5. Kémeri Falukönyv, Kémerért Alapítvány és Kémer község önkormányzatának kiadása, Szerk: Levente-György Szabó, h.n., 2009
6. Réka Kiss – A diktatúra szorításában, Ravasz László egyházpolitikai útkeresése a második világháborút követő esztendőben (1945–1948) In Századvég, 29.szám
7. Szilvia Köbel – A lelkiismereti és vallásszabadság jogi szabályozása néhány volt szocialista országban 1945-1989 között in Levéltári Szemle, A Magyar Levéltárosok Egyesülete, a Magyar Országos Levéltár és az Önkormányzati Levéltárak Tanácsa negyedéves folyóirata, Budapest, 2005
8. Márton László – A kollektivizálás modelljei és menetrendje Székelyföldön in Korall, Társadalomtörténeti Folyóirat, 36. szám (2009. július)
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32. János Vásárhelyi – Püspöki jelentés in R.SZ., 1953., 75-83.
33. János Vásárhelyi püspök megnyitóbeszéde és jelentése az 1952 június 7-én kezdődött közgyűlésen in R.SZ., 1952, 139-154.

IV. List of interviewees (name and surname, year of birth, residence)

1. György Antal, born in the year 1930, Valcău de Jos
2. Endre Bonczidai, born in the year 1942, Pericei
3. Bálint Borzási, born in the year 1932, Leşmir
4. Gyula Csorvási, born in the year 1935, Nuşfalău
5. András Dénes, born in the year 1937, Vârşoţ
6. László Fodor, born in the year 1916, Şimleu Silvaniei
7. Miklós Jakó, born in the year 1935, Ratin
8. Sz. Gyula Király, born in the year 1930, Zăuan
9. Ferenc Koszorús, born in the year 1920, Ip
10. János Krisztián, born in the year 1924, Uileacu Şimleului
11. András Major, born in the year 1933, Chieşd
12. József Molnár, born in the year 1933, Leşmir
13. Ferenc Papp, born in the year 1930, Valcău de Jos
14. József Püsök, born in the year 1927, Vlaha
15. Jánosné Sipos, born in the year 1925, Crasna
16. Bálint Somogyi, born in the year 1933, Lompirt
17. Ferenc Srankó, born in the year 1935, Nuşfalău
18. Árpád Szabó, born in the year 1919, Boghiş
19. József Szabó, born in the year 1927, Boghiş
20. János Szentkirályi, born in the year 1929, Ilişua
21. Sámuel Vincze, born in the year 1930, Crasna

Conclusions, theses

Being possessed of the knowledge acquired through the investigation of the sources, we wish, in the following, to give an answer to the question raised at the beginning of the research.

It may be noticed that the information from the proceedings, where the problems of the parish were outlined, were censored in many situations, being limited to just what

was allowed to be written in the political system of the time. Those who are drawing them up, most of the time allude to collectivization (which was in fact a series of aggressive events) through the expressions „handing over”, „giving up”, „offering”, instead of the expressions that suggest for real the nature of the process: „have confiscated”, „have expropriated”, „have dispossessed”. They acted in this way because otherwise they would have been exposed to the attacks of the censor, in the person of the commissioner for Cults. Fortunately for us, there are exceptions, in the positive sense: those objectively recording the events, for instance at Camăr and at Pericei. Some proceedings present the events in detail, giving information about the material difficulties caused by the process of collectivization. Others note the facts superficially, briefly, but there are also proceedings that only subsequently give information about collectivization and, finally there are those which do not even mention the series of events.

The sources of the diocese clearly highlights the position of the church leadership. It is difficult to establish exactly the attitude of the priests towards the process of expropriation. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the proceedings cannot be completed because of the previously mentioned reasons (because of censorship). No priest, parish council or parish general assembly can be blamed for the „handing over” of the lands, as numerous political, economic and social factors together influenced and forced them to decide in this direction. But raising the problem does not aim at condemning or at exonerating the church leaders. In this situation the guilty ones cannot be looked for. We cannot defame anyone, and neither can we praise them for their deeds. As regards the priests’ position towards collectivization, we think it necessary to distinguish between the person invested with an office, and the priest as a private person. This differentiation is operated on the basis of the interview given by the priest of Ip and Şamşud. In the same way, it is to be noticed, in the published information, that there was a solidarity among the priests, allowing priority to personal security and acting unitarily in their office as priests. As leaders of the parishes, they obeyed to the orders received from the higher bodies, but as private persons, they probably condemned the situation in which they were forced to exercise their profession. It is an issue of character and ethics, and the fact that some parish councils refused to „hand over” the lands, in spite of the warnings from their superiors, and let the parish general assembly, as a supreme decision-

making body, decide in this respect, may also be one of the methods of avoiding responsibility.

In the opinion of the historians, the collectivization of church lands was facilitated by that manoeuvre of the communist power in which they tried to „elect” in the parish councils people belonging to inferior social categories (peasants without or with only little land), who had no interest to defend the church assets. But this statement is not valid in the case of all parishes. There were numerous situations in the history of collectivization when peasants with little land fought to keep their property, their single source of living, and opposed the process of expropriation. The parish councils did not succeed to keep the church lands, as they had to obey the orders of the authority. A significant role in manipulating the process was that of a method of the communist state, through which the church was transformed from up downwards (from diocese to parish office), this way subordinating it. The communist state found „collaborators”, ambitious men who fulfilled the tasks they were entrusted with. They took advantage from some persons’ thirst for power, they resorted to methods of intimidation, profiting by people’s weaknesses, if the methods of persuasion did not give the expected result. Yet, their cases had an impact on the other colleagues.

Lajos Bibó was in detention for half a year, starting with the October of 1950. The story of his incrimination was the following: he was much preoccupied with the youth of

The documents of Șimleu Silvaniei protopopiat prove as well the use of the methods of intimidation from the communist authorities. In the `50s three priests were persecuted and brought before the authorities. One of them was protopope Imre Kádár, the second was priest Lajos Bibó from Pericei, and the third was Sándor Antal, the priest from Zăuan. But they – as resulting from investigations – were not victims of the parish, who grew very fond of him. In the mid-`40s the priest happened to go sowing in a place inaccessible to animals. The young parisioners offered to draw the harrow, instead of the animals, on a part of the road to the place of destination, and he accepted. In the changed political context, some ill-disposed fellow villagers accused him of profiting from the youth and exploiting them as slaves.

Imre Kádár, although 71 years old in 1952, was summoned and persecuted by the communist authorities for three months, his political past being investigated.

Sándor Antal was arrested in 1958. Productive work was disturbing the authorities of the totalitarian state. He was accused, on the one hand, of being a member of the religious group of the betanists (banned by the communists) and, on the other hand, of hindering the cultural work of the village through the activities performed in the church community.

Imre Kádár and Lajos Bibó regained their liberty in a relatively short time, after their situation had been clarified. Sándor Antal, after being proved that he had no relation with the betanists' group, was accused (on the basis of groundless witnesses with malicious intent from the villagers) of plotting against social order, and on these grounds he was sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment and 5 years' deprivation of civil rights

Lajos Mezei, the priest of Ilișua, is the victim of forced collectivization. In 1952 he was twice summoned by the People's Tribunal. The first time he was accused of sabotage as he had not ploughed his stubble field in due course. The second time he had problems because of a former prezbytery, who meanwhile had become the Council leader. This person denounced the priest for keeping a servant (in fact the priest was ill and needed a person to help in the household, this being the reason for his hiring a hand). Each time he was let off with a fine.

In the case of most of the parishes of Șimleu Silvaniei protopopiat „the socialist transformation of agriculture” was completed in 1953, that is in the first period of collectivization. The courageous ones were defeated giving a frightening example to the others. The efficient method of the summons sent by the protopopes to the parishes for giving up the lands was used under the compulsion of the communist authorities. The compulsory contributions, the farming taxes, the interdiction of cultivating the land by granting it on lease or for share cropping were all helpful tools, playing an attenuating role in the process of privation of the church lands. In order to be able to answer all the questions formulated at the beginning of the research we have to establish the following:

I. Expropriated church resources

These are material resources which can be classified according to several points of view. The directly privated assets can fall in two subgroups: real estate and movables.

In the category of real estate resources outside built-up areas we may include: ploughlands, pastures, meadows, vineyards and forests. The real estates within the built-up area are represented by parish gardens used by the priests or gardens used by the psalm readers of the church, household outbuildings (cellars, grain stores), churchyards, other buildings: cereal storehouses¹, the sexton's or the psalm reader's house, halls for the church council.

The real estates within the built-up area are extremely varied. The psalm reader's garden was taken in the year 1949 at Camăr², and in the year 1959 at Horoatu Crasnei³. The council hall of the parish of Camăr⁴ was taken in 1960, churchyards: at Crasna⁵ in the year 1954 and at Horoatu Crasnei⁶ in the year 1961, the church cultural centre and bowling ground of Șimleu Silvaniei⁷ in the year 1948.

In the category of movables we include the confiscated tools: ploughs, harrows and others.

The aforementioned goods belong to the direct form of expropriation. The literature of speciality establishes forms of indirect expropriation, as well. Through the sowing plans and through the compulsory contributions, the parishes were deprived of considerable amounts of cereals and time resources, while through the high farming taxes they have lost important sums of money. The literature of speciality identifies public work as one of the forms of expropriation of labour. We find out from the interviews that the priests have also fulfilled their obligations of public work for the benefit of the community. Ferenc Koszorús, the former priest of Ip told us that he had been assigned to work at a forestry operation and then for building spaces for public toilets, together with other intellectuals of the locality: doctors, teachers. Lajos Mezei, the priest of Ilișua ploughed the land together with his colleague of Catholic confession, also for community purposes.

¹ Proceedings of Parish Council (further: PrParCoun)-Pericei, 16/1953

² PrParCoun-Camăr, 4/1949

³ PrParCoun-Horoatu Crasnei, 16/1959

⁴ PrParCoun-Camăr, 13/1960

⁵ PrParCoun-Crasna, 13/1954

⁶ PrParCoun-Horoatu Crasnei, 12/1961

⁷ PrParCoun-Șimleu Silvaniei, 59/1948 and Historia Domus – information for the year 1948

II. Expropriation methods

During the research we have identified several methods that we are going to enumerate:

1. Imposing high farming taxes;
2. Compulsory contributions – the quantities of agricultural products imposed for handing over were not in agreement with the quantity of the crop, for instance, for cereals there was a fixed quota per hectar.
3. High fines were stipulated, and even imprisonment, in the case of sabotaging the sowing or collecting plans (the case of priest Lajos Mezei from Ilișua⁸).
4. Prohibition of tilling the land by granting it on lease or for share cropping, ever since 1947.
5. The priests were invested with administrative responsibility, they were responsible for the financial management of the parish since 1948.
6. The parishes were summoned, through the bishops, to „hand over” the lands and strictly obey the orders coming from the higher church bodies.
7. The fusion of lands in order to organize agricultural associations or collective farms – at Horoatu Crasnei⁹ in the year 1952, at Tășnad¹⁰ (SM) in the year 1953. In the case of Tășnad parish, their vineyard was taken over and given to Becheni (SM), locality situated 18 km away.
8. The priests were not allowed to return the plots of land used as remuneration in the administration of the parish councils; they had to „offer” them directly to the state (Camăr¹¹ – 1952).
9. Avoiding the parish General Assembly concerning the issue of „offering” the lands.
10. Harassing the priests along the process of collectivization (the previously presented examples, especially the case of Mezei from Ilișua¹²).

⁸ Historia domus-Ilișua, 76-77

⁹ PrParCoun-Horoatu Crasnei, 37/1952

¹⁰ Letter of the priest from Tășnad addressed to the Episcopal Office of Oradea on 15th December 1952 in bishop Aladár Ar dai's Found (further: ARDAI) from the Central Archives of the Protestant Diocese by the side of Piatra Craiului (further: KREL)

¹¹ PrParCoun-Camăr, 15/1952

11. The process of purification of the parish Council, removing the „elements hostile” to the communist state from this ecclesiastical body.
12. Watching the ecclesiastical personnel by the locals.

During the process of expropriation, the church personnel and the parishes had to undergo numerous abuses from the different institutions subordinated to the communist state. We will present a few of the obvious cases, witnesses of the repression in the process of collectivization of the church lands. There were situations in which the parishes „offered” the lands without being compensated for their work (cultivation, sowing), but paying the taxes was imposed as a clause for their „taking over”¹³. Another category of cases represents the the situation of those churches which had to resort to petitions addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture in order to ensure for themselves the quantity of flour necessary for baking the bread for the eucharist. The parishes from this category had remained without cereals after handing over the compulsory contributions to the state.¹⁴ In 1948 at Oșorhei (BH) was attempted, besides the church lands, the expropriation of the vicarage.¹⁵ In the same parish were sequestered all the movables of the priest because of the debts accumulated for the farming taxes.¹⁶ In the month of December of the year 1948, at Șișterea (BH),¹⁷ just before Christmas, the tax collector took the priest’s cloak, also because of the debts for farming taxes. The parish from Mărtinești – Bihor was asked to pay the farming taxes and hand over the compulsory contributions even after „offering” the plots to the state.¹⁸ The drought was not an excuse for handing over the compulsory contributions. The priest of Viile, Satu Mare (SM) encountered great difficulties in the month of January of the year 1952, as he could not

¹² Historia Domus-Ilișua, 76-77

¹³ Proceedings of the Permanent Council of Oradea Diocese (further: NPSZ) in KREL, 2/16 July 1949

¹⁴ KREL - NPSZ, 12/26 October 1949

¹⁵ KREL - NPSZ, 2/16 July 1949

¹⁶ KREL - ARDAI/Bishop’s order sent to the parish of Livada Mică on 13th September 1948

¹⁷ KREL - ARDAI/Bishop’s letter sent to the Direction of Financial Administration of Oradea on 20th December 1948

¹⁸ KREL - ARDAI/ Letter of the priest of Mărtinești addressed to the leaders of the diocese on 25th April 1949

find cereals to be able to hand over the compulsory contribution.¹⁹ In the month of December 1952 at Valea lui Mihai²⁰(BH) and in 1954 at Vârșolț²¹ they merged the plots of the church personnel, thus placing them in a category with higher taxes. In the year 1953 the vineyard of the parish of Tășnad (SM) was taken over by fusion of lands, in order to set up an agricultural association. They received instead another plot, in another locality, at 18 km's distance.²² At Uileacu Șimleului²³ the parish lands were expropriated without application for transfer in state property and without informing the church authorities. At Camăr²⁴ the priest was not allowed to return the plot of land used as remuneration to the parish council administration; he had to „offer” it directly to the state by application. At Șimleu Silvaniei in 1960, the People's Council, under the pretext of „donation”, „applied” for a surface of 2214m² of parish garden for building blocks of flats for the workers.²⁵

III. Forms of resistance, reaction of parishes

Those who achieved collectivization were not confronted with any special opposition in either Șimleul Silvaniei protopopiat or in Oradea diocese. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that some parishes have tried to keep the lands within the limits permitted by the law, contrary to the directives coming from the higher bodies of the church, who summoned them to „offer” the lands to the state. The fact that a priest or the parish Council decided to transfer the decision-making power to the parish General Assembly (which they did not have to do, as the circular letters coming from the diocese leaders had empowered them) regarding the issue of „offering” or keeping the lands is a positive

¹⁹ KREL - ARDAI/ Letter of the bishop addressed to the Collecting Centre Baia Mare on 12th January 1952

²⁰ KREL - ARDAI/ Letter of the priest from Valea lui Mihai addressed to the bishop on 10th December 1952

²¹ PrParCoun-Vârșolț in DJAN-Sălaj, found: Protestant parish Vârșolț, 2/1947-1964, 2/5 July 1954

²² KREL - ARDAI/ Letter of the priest from Tășnad addressed to the Episcopal Office Oradea on 15th December 1952

²³ Order of the protopope of Șimleu addressed to the parishes - 330/1949 in the Archives of the Protestant parish Ip (further: IEL)

²⁴ PrParCoun-Camăr, 15/1952

²⁵ PrParCoun-Șimleu Silvaniei, 3/1960

example of hindering the process of church assets dispossession. In the following we are grouping the forms of reaction noticed during the research:

1. The priest returned the plot of land used as remuneration to the parish, the latter continuing to use it , paying the farming taxes and handing over the compulsory contributions (year 1952, at Camăr²⁶ and Ilișua²⁷).
2. The parish councils decided, by vote, not to hand over their lands, but to use them for share cropping or by granting them on lease. In 1953 this was the decision made by the parish councils of Crestur (BH), Negreni (BH), Mineu (SJ), Cacuciu Nou (BH), Cehu Silvaniei (SJ), Șamșud (SJ)²⁸
3. The parish councils „offered” only part of the lands. This occurred with the priests’ plots in 1949 at Bilghez²⁹ (SJ), Berea³⁰ (SM), Curtuișeni³¹ (BH), Craidorolț³² (SM) and Crasna³³ (SJ); in 1953 at Târcaia (BH), Verveghiu (SJ), Tămășeu (BH)³⁴.
4. The Parish Council made the „handing over” depend on the decision of the Parish General Assembly (in the year 1952 at Pericei³⁵ and Zăuan³⁶).
5. The Parish Council brought the issue of giving up the lands before the Parish general Assembly, where they decided to keep and cultivate the lands (in the year 1952 at Camăr³⁷, in 1953 at Ratin³⁸ and Vârșolț³⁹).
6. The Parish General Assembly voted against the request of the People’s Council of giving up the vicarage and its land for an exchange, in order to set up a library (in the year 1955 at Șimleu Silvaniei⁴⁰).

²⁶ PrParCoun-Camăr, 12/1952

²⁷ Historia Domus-Ilișua, 76

²⁸ Found of the Episcopal Office Oradea (further: PHI) in KREL, card no. 39, 1953, Proceedings of the parish councils with petition for transfer of lands in state possession

²⁹ PrParCoun-Bilghez, 2/1949

³⁰ KREL - ARDAI/ Address of the priest of Berea to the protopope of Carei on 20th April 1949

³¹ KREL - ARDAI/ Situation of lands handed over to the state in 1949 by the parish of Curtuișeni – 15th April 1949

³² KREL - ARDAI/ Extract of the proceedings of the parish Council of Craidorolț on 28th March 1949

³³ IEL – Circular letter of the Protestant protopope of Șimleu on 25th March 1949

³⁴ KREL – PHI/39, extracts of proceedings of the mentioned parish councils

³⁵ Proceedings of the Parish general Assembly (further: PrAG)-Pericei, 2/1952

³⁶ PrAG-Zăuan, 1/17 August 1952

³⁷ PrParCoun-Camăr, 12/1952

³⁸ PrParCoun-Ratin, 6/1953

³⁹ PrParCoun-Vârșolț, 2/19 February 1953

7. The priest, based on documents, brings arguments for the legitimacy of keeping the church assets (in the month of March of the year 1949, the priest of Căărășeu⁴¹ (SM).
8. Negligences in the field of parish accountancy (for this reason in 1960 the protopope of Șimleu reprimands several priests without nominating any of them⁴²).
9. The priest refuses the request of the People's Council to sign the petition of „handing out” the lands to the state, leaving this to be decided by the Parish Council (the case of Ilișua⁴³ parish in 1952).
10. Individual solidary attitude of the priests.

IV. Priest, protopope and bishop in the relationship between the outskirts and the centre

We are going to discuss further about the system of relationship suggested by the title above, namely between the leading bodies of the church - parishes (as outskirts), protopopats (as intermediate bodies), diocese (center) – only in the context of the process of collectivization. While processing the archive sources, we could notice the fact that the priests had obeyed the orders of their superiors according to the prescriptions of the Church Statute. As the decisions related to handing over the lands were delicate issues of the parishes, they wished to find out the opinions of the parishioners. This is why in some places they also convoked the parish general Assembly in view of discussing the problem. Most of the parishes, obeying the orders of the higher bodies, „offered” their lands with the agreement of the Parish Council. The most desperate situations were those of the priests with small parishes, where it was very difficult for them to bear the burdens imposed on them by the communist state. The priests wanted to solve the question of the lands in a unitary way at the level of the diocese. They did not have to wait for a long time, as the conception had been formed – at the level of diocese – according to which

⁴⁰ PrParCoun-Șimleu Silvaniei, 1/1955

⁴¹ KREL - ARDAI/ Letter of the protopope of Baia Mare addressed to the bishop on 22nd March 1949

⁴² IEL – Address of the protopope of Șimleu sent to the parishes, 322/1960

⁴³ The interview with János Szentkirályi of Ilișua in the year 2012, year of birth: 1929, occupation: farmer, office in the church: curate, presbyter.

the priest cannot be a farmer and a priest in the parish, at the same time, and consequently they had to get rid of the plots of land they had as remuneration and also of those used by the parishioners⁴⁴. In the cases where the parish Council did not accept to use the lands further by granting them on lease or for share cropping, they handed them over to the state. In the period 1949-1952 the higher bodies of the authorities gave directives in a relatively permissive tone, but beginning with 1953 they urged the priests in a quite alert manner to draw up immediately the petitions for the transfer of lands in the possession of the state. Following these summons, the priests, in their turn, convey further to the parish councils the message addressed by the higher bodies, in a more aggressive way, making obvious the tension oppressing their shoulders, as in the declarations according to which they do not accept to undertake any responsibility for the land any further. The same steadfast tone is used in 1959 when asking for the urgent transfer of lands, not accepting any delays or pretexts.

The protopopes, doing their duty, conveyed the directives received from the diocese to the parishes. Their hurried tone reaches the maximum tension in 1953. According to the directions coming from the bishopric, they were supposed to do „persuasion work” among the priests in order to point out „their right way of action concerning the lands.”⁴⁵

The priests showing a hesitant behaviour regarding this issue were summoned by the protopope of Șimleu to strictly obey the instructions of the superiors⁴⁶, and he even dispatched them a telegram in this respect.⁴⁷ The protopope would inform the leaders of the diocese on the problems existent under his jurisdiction. In 1953 he even made a suggestion in view of solving the „landed” issue, as things had taken a worse turning, there was no decisional consensus among the priests, the peace of the protopopiat being thus troubled. At the meeting of the Permanent Council of the diocese, the protopope of Șimleu proposed that the bishop should send a circular letter in which he should inform

⁴⁴ PrParCoun-Camăr, 8/1953

⁴⁵ KREL - NPSZ, e/22 April 1953

⁴⁶ PrParCoun-Camăr, 8/1953

⁴⁷ PrParCoun-Bozieș, 10/1953

the Parish Councils that the priests cannot use land and it is not their duty to take care of the lands that have not been handed over.⁴⁸

Some parishes, so that they might signal their problems and ask for help, addressed the Episcopal Office directly. Some of them addressed through letters, others went personally to discuss with the leaders of the diocese, especially with bishop Ar dai.⁴⁹ We can notice the fact that the leadership of the diocese, starting with bishop Ar dai, tried hard to help the priests and parishes situated in difficulty. What they obtained was the same „advantage” that the communist state supplied to the orthodox church: they were given the „possibility” of „offering” their lands through a petition addressed to the Executive Committees of the Communal and Town People’s Councils in the area where their lands were situated, if they could not fulfil the criteria imposed by the state through the compulsory contributions and sowing plans.

The position of the leadership of the diocese ever since the beginning of 1949 was in favour of the „handing over”. The directives sent to the parishes along the years 1949-1950 revealed the optional character of the decision. Meanwhile, the necessity of implementing the financial support of the church on the basis of the voluntary contribution of the parishioners increased more and more (this was introduced as a principle through Decree no.177/1948 regarding the general regime of the religious cults⁵⁰, the obligation of the parishioners to pay contributions imposed by the Parish Councils – mostly in cereals – ceasing). Both the diocesan primecurate⁵¹ and the bishop⁵² exposed their univocal opinion regarding the obsolete character of the way in which the church was financially sustained – namely the one based on compulsion and cereal collecting. They considered the lands, the lodgings and buildings to be let out as unprofitable means of support, on the contrary, burdensome, which every parish had to get rid of, as soon as possible, in order to improve church service.

In the year 1953, Decree 308/1953 issued by the Council of Ministers cast a second lifebuoy to the parishes that could not bear the financial burdens caused by land

⁴⁸ KREL - NPSZ, e./22 April 1953

⁴⁹ PrParCoun-Camăr, 12/1952

⁵⁰ Decree no. 177/1948 regarding the general regime of the religious cults from 4th August 1948, art. 31. in Református Szemle, 1948, 484.

⁵¹ KREL - NEK, 10a./ 10-11 December 1952

⁵² KREL - NEK, 7/ 9 December 1954

ownership. Orders of an unprecedented firmness were sent to the parishes. The bishop ordered the protopopes – as they had reported disorientations regarding the handing over of lands – to do persuasion work with the priests about the single correct approach of this issue and to firmly warn those parish councils which still administered lands that they would answer for the illegal cultivation of the land, they would have to undergo the consequences in question.⁵³ In the year 1954 they had already embarked upon elaborating, at the diocese level, the church strategy in view of intensifying the process of collectivization in the countryside.⁵⁴ In the year 1956, presenting his report, the bishop stated that „in most of the places the priests have got rid of the burdens of farming, dedicating their life entirely to the fulfillment of their vocation.”⁵⁵

Decree 115/1959 closed the last legal loop hole for the parishes which were still working their lands. According to this decree, the owners who cultivated their lands using alien labour, or by granting them on lease or share cropping, were forced to give them out by „petitions of transfer” in state possession. The orders sent out at the time from the church decision-making centre, i.e. the diocese, were extremely firm: „to necessarily hand out the lands, with no delay and with decision brought by the Parish Council, not by the General Assembly”⁵⁶.

In the parishes where they had been deprived of lands, their councils – in view of rectifying the budgets – resorted to keeping the supplementary taxation of the parishioners. This happened just in the period when they gave an ever increasing importance to the popularization and application of the contribution based on consent, period that was extended to 1960. In this period of transition – regarding the financial support of the church – the contribution in cereals was gradually replaced with that in money. The most precarious conditions were those of the small parishes. Beginning with 1960, the new wage system for church personnel came into force, i.e. the one imposed by the state, based on employment.

Each priest was included, according to the work performed and length of service, in a certain wage class. From the wages thus established was deducted, among others, the

⁵³ KREL - NPSZ, e./ 22 April 1953

⁵⁴ KREL - NPSZ, 1/ 18 March 1954

⁵⁵ KREL - NPSZ, 7/ 9 December 1954

⁵⁶ IEL – Addressed to the protopope of Şimleu sent to parishes, 625/1959

subvention from the state budget, the remaining difference needing to be supplied by the parish councils from their own budgets. The new wage system has led to the priests being invested with the office of sole responsible for the assets and financial management of the parish.

The parishes continued to work subservient to the interests of the communist state. In many places, on the expropriated plots within the built-up area, different buildings of public interest have been built. The Parish Council, as a decision-making body, has been entirely marginalized. The centralized leadership of the church has been subordinated to the interests of Bucharest. The inspectors and the commissioners for cults have supervised the good functioning of the church.

Finally we may establish the fact that the process of expropriation of church lands from the Protestant Diocese of Oradea represents a rather short but important segment of time in the history of the 20th century church. It bears the stamp of the signs of general collectivization and it must be regarded in the light of the changes that occurred in the process of the state and church policy. In this period, the communist state took important steps targeting the pauperization of the Protestant church, this one being forced to adjust to the new conditions of existence, eventually successfully changing – even if constrained by the communist totalitarian state – the form of support that has been used for centuries.