

Orthodoxy and the Cold War

**Religion and Political Power in Romania,
1947–65**

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Introduction

In May 1965, in the middle of the Cold War, the Committee of the Judiciary United States Senate held an unusual hearing. Senators listened to the testimony of a Romanian reverend who had managed to escape from behind the Iron Curtain. His name was Richard Wurmbrand. Born in a Jewish family he converted to Christianity in 1936 and was twice convicted for his religious belief; he spent nine years in Romanian prisons, three of which were in solitary confinement in an underground cell. A few years before his escape from Romania, a group of Norwegian Christians raised \$10,000 and, bribing communist officials, obtained a passport for the reverend and his wife. Wurmbrand spent a few years in Europe, but fearing the long arm of the Romanian Security Intelligence, the *Securitate*,¹ went to the US where he was now giving evidence of what he had experienced.² He shocked the audience when, as proof of his words, he unbuttoned his shirt and showed 18 deep wound marks inscribed on his body.³ His testimony was a personal account of his inhumane experiences in prisons and of the general attitude of the atheist regime against religion.

At the end of his statement Wurmbrand recalled a touching story witnessed by himself and his wife while they were held in a slave labour camp constructing the Danube Canal. The canal was one of the most dreadful places in Romania. Among the inmates there was a special religious group of around 400 prisoners composed of priests, bishops and simple peasants who believed 'too much' in their religion and were perceived as dangerous to the political system. Wurmbrand remembered an event which strengthened his religious conviction:

And now a Sunday morning the political officer of the prison comes, the whole brigade is gathered, and just at random he sees a young man. He calls him, 'What is your name?' He says his name. 'What are you by profession?' He said 'A priest'. And then mocking the Communist said 'Do you still believe in God?' The priest knew that if he says yes, this is the last day of his life. We all looked to him. For a few seconds he was silent.

Then his face began to shine and then he opened his mouth and with a very humble but with a very decided voice he said 'Mr Lieutenant, when I became a priest I knew that during church history thousands of Christians and priests have been killed for their faith, and notwithstanding I became a Christian and then I became a priest. I knew what I became. And as often as I entered the altar clad in this beautiful ornate which priests wear I promised to God, 'If I wear the uniform of a prisoner, then also I will serve Him. Mr Lieutenant, prison is not an argument against religion. I love Christ from all my heart.'

I am sad that I can't give the intonation with which he said these words. I think that Juliet when she spoke about Romeo, she spoke like that. We were ashamed because we – we believed in Christ. This man loved Christ as a bride loves the bridegroom. This man has been beaten and tortured to death. But this is Romania. Romania is a country which is mocked, which is oppressed, but deep in the hearts of the people is a great esteem and a great praise for those who have suffered. The love to God, the love to Christ, the love to the fatherland has never ceased. My country will live.⁴

Wurmbrand's passion and eloquence make his account stand out from the thousands of testimonies from people who survived the horrors of communist prisons. Religion was denigrated and seen as the means through which people managed to escape indoctrination and were not completely controlled. Officially, political leaders stated that communism was the only regime under which people acquired complete religious freedom, but in practice any reference to religion was considered as a retrograde, bourgeois and subversive activity. Christianity was seen as the forerunner of the true ideology, communism, and its progress inevitably replaced any form of religious belief. The construction of the new man meant that religion should lose its meaning and people should embrace the communist ideal at the core of their beliefs. The history of Christian churches during Romanian communism is a sad one. As the leader of the party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, officially recognised in 1961, from 1945 to 1952 more than 80,000 people were arrested of which 30,000 were imprisoned. Among them many priests and ordinary people were convicted for asserting their religious beliefs.

The installation of Romanian communism, under the military force of the Soviet Union, brought fears that the new authorities would follow a similar repressive attitude towards religion to that in Russia after the 1917 Revolution. Instead, Romania took a different trajectory and while the dominant religious institution, the Romanian Orthodox Church, suffered persecution, at times, its leadership benefited from its collaboration with the regime. Some church hierarchs praised the new leaders while others took a

more ambivalent position. Those who showed dissatisfaction with the new regime suffered and were removed from their positions, while those who did not show interest in the political transformation of the country were closely monitored.

This book investigates the subtle and complex ways in which the Romanian Orthodox Church collaborated with and adapted to the communist regime in the Romanian People's Republic from 1947 to 1965. It considers the contradictions and ambivalent position of the church during the early Cold War period and addresses the following questions: How did the Romanian Orthodox Church, which openly opposed communism in the interwar period, survive an atheist regime? How did it adapt to the installation of communism? Did it have a strategy? What was the relationship between the Orthodox Church and other religions in Romania and what was its relationship with the Orthodox commonwealth? Did the regime use the church internally and, if so, how? Why did the regime allow the church to develop foreign ecclesiastical contacts? Moreover, to what extent were the party and its leadership atheist?

This study draws on unpublished material from recently opened archives, to examine the main political decisions which affected the life of the church. Access to these unpublished sources offers a better understanding of the place of religion in society and the evolution of Romanian politics. Central to the relationship between church and state was the role played by individuals at the top of the religious and political organisations. By presenting the trajectory of religious and political leaders, this book offers insights into the importance of individuals in shaping the history of religion and the Romanian state during this period.

This is neither a theoretical analysis of Orthodoxy and nationalism nor a study of Orthodoxy and the modern state.⁵ It does not detail every historical event but focuses on those that influenced the evolution of church-state relations. It analyses the church as a political institution rather than Orthodoxy as a religious practice and community. By presenting the institutional dimension, it examines the means of survival of the church and the ways in which the church hierarchy sought collaboration with the regime. This study does not aim to accuse the church leaders of this period, some of whom are still alive and in hierarchical positions, but presents the ways in which the church survived one of the most contentious periods of Romanian history. This book offers a new understanding of this period in the light of new unpublished material.

The accommodation of the Romanian Orthodox Church within the communist regime sparked debates after the end of the Cold War period. On the one hand, some scholars argued that the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to survive by establishing an ideological pact with the communists. In this way, the attitude of the church during this period could be perceived as a form of Sergianism similar to the pact between the Moscow Patriarchate

and the Soviet Comintern;⁶ on the other hand, some scholars have pointed out that the church adapted to the communist regime, but this accommodation could be regarded as a form of resistance.⁷ According to the latter view, Patriarch Justinian, whose position was approved by the party, did not completely obey the regime but, in fact, did everything in his position to oppose communism. This research will investigate both sides and assess the trajectory of church-state relations.

There are only a few studies of early Romanian communism.⁸ They analyse the trajectory of the communist party and argue for various dates when the country embarked on a 'semi-autonomous' form of politics in the Eastern bloc. Stephen Fischer-Galați suggests that the Romanian road to communism could be perceived in the mid-1950s, in particular around 1955 when the country began to mediate the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict,⁹ while David Floyd claims that it began in 1958–9 when the party changed its economic policy.¹⁰ Alexandru Bârlădeanu, a communist leader during this period, suggested in an interview in 1998 that Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian government began approaching the West in 1956 in an attempt to foster economic relations which would allow the country a more flexible and independent politics in the Eastern bloc.¹¹

This study of church-state relations in the Romanian People's Republic supports Fischer-Galați's and Bârlădeanu's views that in the 1950s the regime was interested in asserting a more autonomous politics in the Eastern bloc. However, a systematised politics of national communism only began to develop in the early 1960s and would reach its climax under Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship. Romania developed a special position behind the Iron Curtain, being the only country which did not participate in the military invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and, initially, national communism during the Ceaușescu period contributed towards improving relations with Western European governments.

Analysis of Romania as a case study is extremely valuable for comprehending the transformation of Orthodoxy in countries under communism. The regime used the institutional religious channels of the church in order to present a false image of religious freedom abroad and to foster the country's political interests. This book investigates the internal means through which the regime employed the church and the perceptions and activities of Western European religious leaders of the religious and political situation in Romania.

There are no detailed studies on Romanian Orthodoxy and communism in Romanian or English. The best-known study is Olivier Gillet's *Religion et Nationalisme: L'Ideologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le Regime Communiste*. Gillet offers a useful examination of how the church adapted to the regime by appropriating themes of the country's national past. However, Gillet does not carry out any significant archival research but instead refers only to the main journals of the church which were published

in English. This book takes Gillet's argument further and analyses the collaboration between church and regime highlighting those factors which helped the church maintain a strong position in society.

An important contribution to the field and somewhat unpublicised study is Kaisamari Hintikka's *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1961–1977*.¹² Hintikka deciphers many unknown details of the life of the church in the 1960s and 1970s but focuses only on relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches without exploring Romanian communism. In addition, although she conducted archival research on the Orthodox Church in Romania, Finland, Switzerland and England, her study presents official letters between institutions without analysing the ways in which the church was affected by political decisions. This book presents not only documents written by religious leaders but also reports of Radio Free Europe and the *Securitate*. While these reports need to be read cautiously, they articulate the perceptions of those who were close to top-level religious and political leaders and who witnessed the evolution of church-state relations inside the country.

In 2005, two studies were published in Romanian which were based on archival research: Cristian Vasile's *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu communist* (The Romanian Orthodox Church in the First Communist Decade) and George Enache's *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană* (Orthodoxy and Political Power in Contemporary Romania). Each book offers a fascinating introduction to the study of the Orthodox Church during communism, focusing especially on the personal histories of various church leaders, compiled from unpublished documents of the Romanian archives. However, neither author examines how church actions were connected to the political field and how the West perceived the Romanian Orthodox Church.

This book offers a detailed analysis of the role of the church during this period by drawing on newly accessible archival resources. In Bucharest, I have conducted research in the *Securitate*'s Archives and the Central National Historical Archives. Outside Romania I have conducted research in the Archives of Radio Free Europe, Budapest; the BBC Historical Written Archives, Reading; the Lambeth Palace Archives and the National Archives of the United Kingdom, London; the Archives of Keston Institute¹³ and the Archives of the Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius, Oxford; and the Archives of the World Council of Churches, Geneva.¹⁴

I contacted the Archive of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church; however, I have not been granted permission to see its documents and most scholars who have approached it have experienced a similar response. Hintikka is the only non-Romanian scholar who has been allowed access to documents. However, her research primarily focuses on the relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches and, as she mentions, 'it is obvious that some documents are not

included in the files but have either been destroyed or have disappeared. This seems to be the state of affairs especially in the case of the Patriarch's correspondence'.¹⁵ In addition, in 2005, Father Iustin Marchiș, a well known Romanian theologian, claimed he saw the vicar bishop of the Patriarchate destroying documents from this Archive.¹⁶ While the current leadership of the church continues to have deep connections with the communist past, it seems that, for the meantime, it will be difficult to have open access to the remaining archival material of the church. In addition, even when the archive is made completely available, researchers will face difficulties as most decisions during the early period of communism were transmitted by telephone between the Romanian Patriarchate and the communist authorities.¹⁷ For this reason it is difficult to have a clear image of exactly who took the initiative on various political and religious issues as they have not always been recorded.

The opening of communist archives in Romania in recent years has offered access to a broad range of reports from the *Securitate* which reveal how the communists sought to influence religious life and provide evocative descriptions of the private lives of public religious figures. While one has to bear in mind who wrote these notes and for whom, they provide valuable material for the contemporary researcher. Small gestures by members of the church hierarchy and by the communists might seem insignificant. However, combined with the communists' general attitude towards religion in the Eastern bloc and detailed investigation of particular events, they offer a greater understanding of the dynamics between leading public figures and of the atmosphere 'behind the scenes' at the time. Analysis of the close timing of a number of events indicates the ambivalent position of the church hierarchy, state control of the church, the nationalist resistance of the church and the church's relationship with the Soviet Union.

Three years after my first application, in the summer of 2007, I was granted access to the *Securitate* archives which contain 24,000 metres of dossiers.¹⁸ Although officially open to the public, the archive remains highly censored especially on those dossiers which contain sensitive information regarding the national security of Romania. In particular, material on the former Service of Foreign Affairs of the *Securitate* has been made only partially public. Top hierarchs travelled extensively outside Romania and it is highly likely that they had files in this archive, either due to being followed by *Securitate* agents or because they were working for it. This study does not aim to expose the clergy within the *Securitate*. Instead, it focuses on the ways in which the church collaborated and survived this period despite the personal trajectory of some of its members. The *Securitate* archives provide valuable material on the private lives of top hierarchs, seen through a political perspective.

In 2001 Cristina Păușan and Radu Ciuceanu of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism in Bucharest published a book in Romanian of *Securitate* documents spanning from 1945 to 1958 which throws light on aspects of

the church's position during this period.¹⁹ The main task of the *Securitate* was to ensure that the regime controlled almost every aspect of social life. Some documents were fabricated and it is hard to confirm the authenticity of some information. The same approach has to be applied to documents which were written for Radio Free Europe. While inside Romania, informers sometimes created documents to further their own positions; outside the country reports were written in order to show how bad the communist regime was, presenting obviously invented facts or a distorted image of Romanian communism.

Most church activities have been recorded in ecclesiastical journals and they offer useful material on church policy, showing the official actions and speeches of the church hierarchy.²⁰ I have found many copies of these journal articles in *Securitate* files, showing that its agents read them carefully.

In addition to these sources, particular documents in the Lambeth Palace Archives offer unique perspectives on this period. The Romanian Orthodox Church had enjoyed good relations with the Church of England during the interwar period. The dossiers in these archives contain reports of official and private meetings between Western religious leaders and Romanian Orthodox hierarchs. Analysis of these documents fleshes out both the personalities of the Romanian hierarchs seen through the eyes of their Anglican counterparts and confirms the impact of political leaders on religious life in Romania. The detailed conversations of those who travelled to Romania and met clergymen, from mere priests to members of the leadership, offer valuable material on the place of religion in Romanian society.

Analysis of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the early Cold War period has to take into account its social and political role in previous periods, dating back to the establishment of the state in 1859. Close relations between the religious and political realms influenced the political evolution of the country. For this reason, the study is structured in chronological order, discussing the most relevant events concerning relations between the church and successive political regimes.

The first chapter analyses the theoretical framework of the relationship between church and state in Orthodoxy. It presents the concept of *symphonia* as the basis of collaboration between the Orthodox hierarchy and political regimes in a tradition which dates back to the Byzantine period. It examines the place of Romanian Orthodoxy within the Orthodox commonwealth, highlighting the similarities and differences with other countries in the Eastern bloc.

The second chapter examines the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state from the establishment of the Romanian state in 1859 to the end of the Second World War. In the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia the Orthodox Church became a state institution during the reign of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza who founded a Synod which reflected his political interests. In addition, with the declaration of independence of the

Romanian state from the Ottoman Empire in 1877, the Orthodox Church sought its own independence from the religious jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and declared its autocephaly. After the establishment of Greater Romania in 1918, the Orthodox Church asserted a nationalist discourse more vigorously and proclaimed the status of Patriarchate in 1923. Early church legislation, from the election of a hierarchy to the composition of local clerical assemblies, would set the conditions for political dominance of the church during the Cold War period. This historical background is important for analysing the evolution of church-state relations.

The third chapter investigates the installation of communism in Romania and the attitude of the church towards the new regime from 1944 to 1947. The government of Petru Groza, the son of a priest who was a lay member of the church, imposed control over the church hierarchy. Furthermore, the death of Patriarch Nicodim in 1948 led to the appointment of Patriarch Justinian, whose accession was supported by the communists.

The fourth chapter analyses the position of the Orthodox Church from the establishment of the Romanian People's Republic in 1947 to the climax of Sovietization as represented by the endorsement of the 1952 Constitution. Despite Orthodox churches in other communist countries facing public trials and mass persecutions, the Romanian church hierarchy officially enjoyed good relations with the authorities. The church had an important position in society mainly because the communists were able to use it in promoting their own political agenda. By strengthening its relations with Moscow and confirming its distance from capitalist Catholic and Protestant Western Europe, the church dominated the Romanian religious scene. Thus, the Greek Catholic Uniate Church was forcibly incorporated into the Orthodox Church and official relations with the Vatican were interrupted, while the Orthodox hierarchy praised the communist leaders for promoting 'religious freedom'. This study argues that during the 1950s the church reintroduced a nationalist discourse which would become more visible with the development of the regime's stance against Moscow. It investigates the impact of the new law of religious confessions and the propagandistic employment of the church in the battle for peace. In addition, it presents the personal experiences of an Arab priest who was a guest in the Patriarchal Palace for five months from 1952 to 1953, offering an eyewitness account of the church hierarchy and of the place of religion in Romania.

The fifth chapter focuses on the role of the Orthodox Church at the beginning of the Romanian road to communism from 1953 to 1955. As part of the communists' intention to distance the country from the Soviet Union and to create a more cohesive national agenda, the Orthodox Church was extensively used in propaganda. For the first time in church history, Romanian saints were canonised in October 1955.

The sixth chapter examines one of the most strained periods in church history from the Second Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party in 1955

to the issuing of the decree for the regulation of monasteries in 1959. The party leadership intensified its control of the church, culminating in restrictions on monastic life. If in the first years of communism Patriarch Justinian showed subservience towards the regime, after 1956 he faced difficulties. On the one hand, the regime nominated new members of the hierarchy as his ecclesiastical competitors; on the other hand, it began a campaign aimed at reducing the influence of the church in society. The ambivalent position of Justinian towards the regime led to rumours in the West in 1958 that he was under house arrest. Facing political pressure from the regime, the patriarch turned towards Western religious leaders as a means of protecting the church. The most important relations of the Romanian Orthodox Church were with the Church of England, in a tradition which dated back to the interwar period when a delegation of the Romanian hierarchy visited London in 1936. This research argues that fostering closer relations with the Anglican hierarchy became one of the most important issues on the patriarch's agenda. At the same time, Justinian's connections with the West were encouraged by the regime which wanted to expand its influence abroad and saw the value of engaging the church in its political mission.

The last chapter presents the connections between the rise of Romanian national communism and the activity of the church from 1960 to 1965. At the Party Plenum in 1964, Gheorghiu-Dej officially claimed the right of every communist party 'to elaborate, choose or change the forms and methods of socialist construction',²¹ excluding the idea of a 'parent' and 'son' party and asserting national communism as state policy.²² While this was a political decision, the church followed the same line and strengthened its relations with other Orthodox countries which were also seen as promoting independent politics, especially Yugoslavia and Greece, and with Western countries, especially England. Increased contacts with the West reached a climax with the visit of the archbishop of Canterbury, Arthur Michael Ramsey, to Romania in 1965. The unexpected death of Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965 led to the rise of Nicolae Ceaușescu as his successor, who maintained the same attitude towards the church. The new position of Romania within international communism and the transformation of the party leadership set the country on a new political path, renamed as the Socialist Republic of Romania.

1

Orthodoxy, *Symphonia* and Political Power in East European Communism

Orthodoxy and *symphonia*

Orthodoxy is the dominant religion in south-eastern Europe and Russia. Alongside Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, it is one of the three major branches of Christianity. It numbers around 200 million faithful and largely spans from the Far East to Eastern Europe, while important diaspora communities are present in Western Europe, North America, Africa and Australia. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines Orthodoxy as

a family of Churches, situated mainly in Eastern Europe: each member Church is independent in its internal administration, but all share the same faith and are in communion with one another, acknowledging the honorary primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople.¹

The 'Orthodox' in Orthodox Christianity means 'correct belief' or 'right thinking', while the sometimes-used adjective 'Eastern' in the construction of the term 'Eastern Orthodoxy Christianity' refers to the eastern part of the Roman Empire and the Christian conversion of Eastern Europe under the political domination of Constantinople. In contrast with the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, Orthodox churches lack a systematised doctrine regarding their relationship with the state.

In Orthodoxy, the relationship between church and state is characterised by the concept of *symphonia* (συμφωνία) or the 'system of co-reciprocity' (Σύστημα συναλληλίας, lat. *consonantia*), a doctrine which developed in Byzantium. As John Meyendorff states, 'the great dream of Byzantine civilisation was a universal Christian society, administered by the emperor and spiritually guided by the Church'.² According to this vision, the empire was considered the kingdom which would last forever, whose political and religious domination would be without competitor on earth, as it was the reflection of Christ's kingdom. Both the church and the state should collaborate towards 'achieving a sublime destiny'³ of the people under their jurisdiction

and there is no conflict between the means employed by the church or the state in promoting the welfare of their subjects. While there is a separation between the completely laic character of the state and the religious status of the church, *symphonia* promotes equality and an intimate relationship between these institutions, however, with different priorities and methods of operating. The state is interested in its survival within a system of states and the projection of its power in international politics. The church operates with religious methods leading the community towards the best way of achieving spiritual progress and salvation.

According to *symphonia*, both church and state use their own laws in order to promote their purposes and there is no confusion between them. The state does not rule itself according to church law or vice versa. There is no interdependency nor is there a complete separation. In fact, the major problem of the concept of *symphonia* is that the demarcation line between church and state remains unclear. For this reason, religious leaders could achieve strong political roles in society and political leaders could influence the church's position. From this perspective, the ruler and the priest are the major political and, at the same time, religious figures on earth.

Both the church hierarchy and the emperor had special status in the Byzantine Empire. The emperor was considered the thirteenth apostle or equal with the apostles (*isapostolos*) who fought for the 'right' faith, while the patriarch was in charge of ensuring that the community was following the spiritual path towards salvation.⁴ The church–state relationship was influenced by the mutual cooperation between the emperor and the patriarch on their respective paths to achieving their individual and their subjects' salvation. According to Orthodoxy, the emperor had a special place in the material and spiritual worlds as the chosen leader, 'similar to God, who is over all, for he does not have anyone higher than himself anywhere on earth'.⁵ As Steven Runciman stated,

the Church was a democratic institution. It was possible for any Orthodox Christian, however humble his origin, to attain to the Patriarchal throne; merit was in theory the sole criterion. And in practice, except when an Emperor deliberately appointed a nonentity – an action that was always unpopular – the Patriarchs were of a very high level of ability.⁶

The patriarch's main attributions were related to the spiritual progress of his faithful while the emperor regulated the life of the clergy, appointing the highest hierarchical positions and mediating conflicts between its clergy. The history of Byzantium also offers examples of patriarchs who acted against imperial policy. Thus, Patriarchs Photius, Germanus and Arsenius were deposed for defying their emperors who attempted to interfere too much in ecclesiastical policy while John Chrysostom lost his patriarchal throne for censuring the morals of the Court.⁷ From the fifth century onwards,

religious heresy was considered a state crime. Byzantium supported only one religion, Orthodoxy, and condemned its opponents, especially when they were politically dangerous for the stability of the empire, such as in the case of the Bogomils sect which had its own concept of Christianity and preached disobedience to state order.⁸

The concept of *symphonia* acquired a stronger dimension during the reign of Emperor Justinian, who, in the systematisation of civil law, set out some aspects of the relationship between church and empire. Referring to the importance of Christianity, Justinian stated in his *Edict to the People of Constantinople Concerning the Faith* in 554:

We believe that the first and greatest blessing for all mankind is the confession of the Christian faith, true and beyond reproach, to the end that it may be universally established and that all the most holy priests of the whole globe may be joined together in unity and with one voice may confess and preach the ORTHODOX Christian faith, and that every plea devised by heretics may be rendered null and void.⁹

Furthermore, the classical text which indicates the boundaries of the priesthood and imperial offices is Justinian's *Sixth Novel* in which he writes:

There are two major gifts which God has given unto men of His supernal clemency, the priesthood and the imperial authority – *hierosyne* and *basileia*; *sacerdotium* and *imperium*. Of these, the former is concerned with things divine; the latter presides over the human affairs and takes care of them. Proceeding from the same source, both adorn human life. Nothing is of greater concern for the emperors as the dignity of the priesthood, so that priests may in their turn pray to God for them.¹⁰

Justinian's model was followed by his successors and became the tenet of the relationship between Orthodoxy and politics. His *Novels* were further developed in the ninth century in a document titled *Epanagoge*, most probably written by Patriarch Photius. Even if this document was only a draft and was not officially adopted by the state, it was widely circulated in Orthodox territories and influenced the development of further legislation outside Byzantium, through the Middle Ages, to the creation of nation-states. *Epanagoge* states that 'the temporal power and the priesthood relate to each other as body and soul; they are necessary for state order just as body and soul are necessary in a living man. It is in their linkage and harmony that the well-being of a state lies.'¹¹

In Orthodoxy the body of the church is understood differently from that in Western Europe, where it is perceived as merely an ecclesiastical organisation within the state. According to Orthodoxy, the church includes 'the whole body of the faithful, the "holy catholic Church" of the Creed, or at

least the faithful of his own persuasion'¹² and for this reason, the emperor was obliged to interfere in church life, as he was responsible for the salvation of his own subjects before God.

Even if the Byzantine Empire disappeared from Europe's map with the fall of Constantinople on 26 May 1453, its religious and political legacy for Orthodox regions has remained.¹³ As Henri Grégoire states, 'The Byzantine Church is the most important of Byzantine survivals. The Empire has disappeared, but the Church remains.'¹⁴ Through its religious ceremonies and jurisdictional organisation, the church has continued to remind the faithful of the Byzantium model regarding the relationship between church and state. Myths, religious and political symbols of liturgical ceremonials continued to bring together the Orthodox people even if they were now subjects of other regimes. The commonwealth survived through the transformation of Orthodox churches into national churches which shared the same religious faith.¹⁵

The construction of nation-states in the Balkans was closely connected with the support of Orthodox churches for their countries' political regimes. The historical evolution of most Balkan states shows that politicians used Orthodoxy because of its nationalist message in order to induce national cohesion and gain support for their political programmes.¹⁶ Looking back in history, Orthodoxy influenced the nation-building process as its hierarchy saw the possibility of reviving the Byzantine dream of a Christian state while political leaders sought to transform the religious identity of their communities into a national identity.¹⁷

The evolution of Orthodox nation-states in the Balkans showed direct connection between religious and political spheres. Thus, four years after obtaining independence from Turkish rule in 1829, Greece ruptured spiritually from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and proclaimed the Greek Autocephalous Church. Comparably, the proclamation of independence of the Romanian Principalities led to autocephaly for the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1885. The establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918 was followed by the rise of the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920, while that of Greater Romania in 1918 led to the Romanian Patriarchate in 1923.

Orthodoxy and East European communism

Orthodox churches faced a new challenge with the emergence of communist ideology. Political leaders not only had to take into account the religious background of their countries but also sought to use the church's influence in order to benefit their regimes. Because Orthodoxy was moulded on political power, the church hierarchy generally remained passive to the threat of atheism and acted on the belief that 'every regime is the will of God'. Communists sought to control Orthodox churches because religious symbols remained deep rooted in society and offered legitimacy to traditional

institutions. Collaboration between church and state remained on a public level while, at the same time, the regime implemented its atheist doctrine by systematically persecuting religion.

Political employment of religion remained the norm throughout the communist period. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church was raised to the rank of Patriarchate and the regime combined international ecclesiastical prestige with internal mass religious persecution. From 1917 to 1922, 28 Russian bishops and 1215 Orthodox priests were executed, while the clergy were deprived of civil rights.¹⁸ Stalin's intention to transform the church into a national museum failed mainly because it retained its authority in society. Despite persecutions, the beginning of the Second World War led to a higher level of cooperation between the Soviet communists and the church. The 1937 census in the USSR showed that 50 per cent of the urban and 70 per cent of the rural population considered themselves religious.¹⁹ The regime employed the church as a propaganda tool both internally in motivating the people to participate in the war and externally in propagating the superiority of communist ideology in other predominantly Orthodox countries.²⁰

Metropolitan Sergii, who was responsible for the Moscow See, sent a Pastoral Letter to the faithful on 22 June 1941 urging the people to fight against the enemies of the Soviet Union.²¹ For his subservience the regime allowed more than 17,000 churches to be reopened and the church began to recover rapidly.²² The main claim of the Russian Patriarchate was that it was the heir of the third Rome and that the other Orthodox countries should recognise the dominance of Moscow over Rome and Constantinople. This religious point went hand in hand with the suggestion that the other Orthodox countries might follow communism as the leading political ideology of the time. With the regime's support, the Russian Orthodox Church started a campaign sending delegations to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in April 1945, Romania in May 1945 and attending a Slavonic conference in Belgrade in 1946. Patriarch Alexius went even further and visited the ancient Orthodox Patriarchates (Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria) in Syria, Palestine and Egypt in 1945 attempting to bring Oriental Orthodoxy under Russian influence. Furthermore, Moscow sought to dominate the Russian diaspora; its delegation, led by Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutic, went to London in June, to Paris in August and to the US in September 1945 failing, however, to bring these communities under its control.²³ Soviet interest in employing the church in its foreign policy was evident through the fact that the Department of External Church Affairs, which was established in 1946, had the largest number of employees of all the Patriarchate's departments.²⁴

Another political method of Moscow was directed against the independent autocephalous Orthodox churches in its vicinity. The Latvian, Lithuanian and Georgian Orthodox churches were incorporated under Russian jurisdiction, while the small Orthodox Church in Poland was forced to declare

illegal its autocephaly offered by Constantinople on 13 November 1924, and to ask the Russian Patriarchate, as the third Rome, to issue a new *Thomos* of recognition.²⁵ A pattern of offering autocephaly to the Orthodox churches in the region extended after the Second World War. Church leaders who had not previously held prominent positions but who visited Moscow were suddenly elected as their countries' leading hierarchs.²⁶ Metropolitan Timothy of the Polish Orthodox Church visited Moscow in July 1948 and was made head of his church in November 1948. Metropolitan Justinian of the Romanian Orthodox Church had a similar visit in October 1946 and became patriarch in May 1948. Bishop Paisi from Albania went to Moscow in January 1948 and became head of the Albanian Orthodox Church in August 1949. Thus Moscow extended its religious authority to the Orthodox commonwealth and this was to be followed by the political ideology of the Soviet Union. The prime position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Orthodoxy was perceived as a thing of the past as the new political situation led to the rise of Moscow's religious and political authority.²⁷

The ecclesiastical domination of Moscow was not only over broad Orthodoxy but also at the expense of other religions. In the confessional clash between the Orthodox Church and the Vatican, the Greek Catholic Uniate churches were forced to 'reunite' with the Orthodox churches and major religious confessions were forcibly abolished by the communists.²⁸ The climax of these combined political and religious methods was visible on 17 July 1948 when delegates of the most important Orthodox churches, which were already under Soviet influence, sent an 'appeal to all Christians' urging them to fight against the terror of the West while Stalin was portrayed as the 'genius peace-maker'.²⁹

The installation of communism in Eastern Europe revealed comparable religious patterns. In those countries where religion was perceived as indissolubly tied to national identity, political leaders had to ensure that their authority was drawn from both the political and the religious spheres. Across the region, communists appeared at mass rallies together with religious hierarchs mainly because their association with the church's representatives strengthened their own political legitimacy. This had a direct effect as by combining religion with politics the regime prevented opposition and ensured stronger control of the population. The communists took advantage of the ecclesiastical organisation of the church, which followed not only the civil law of the state but also its own canon law, parallel to state structures. Political leaders interfered in church matters and imposed their verdicts while the church presented itself as independent from politics, giving the false notion of religious freedom. Those members of the hierarchy who were seen as undesirable for the regime were tried by the church and expelled by their hierarchical fellows rather than by communist authorities. Religious trials were followed by civil trials suggesting that the church was active in supporting the establishment of a new society.

Moreover, the church became engaged in communist discourse and its prayers were invaded by communist slogans. By combining religious and communist language, communist regimes increased their authority. The portrayal of Stalin as a 'Saviour of the people' and the propagandistic construction of 'a new man and society' were slogans adopted by both the party and the church. This type of language influenced the ways in which the position of the church and the authority of the communist leadership were regarded, and ultimately the evolution of their political regimes.

Communists sought control not only through the subservience of church hierarchs but also through a systematic method of controlling opposition. Following the Soviet model of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, communist countries developed their own apparatus of surveillance and state security. By censoring every pastoral visit and sermon of the church hierarchy the regime ensured that religion was a method of controlling the people, and especially those who preached or showed public dissatisfaction. Even the space of the church confessional was no longer private and, in many cases, words uttered there led directly to political and religious persecution.

The church was effectively transformed into a state department, a process with a history as previous regimes had also used the church in their political designs. The employment of religion by the communists had a direct impact on the political evolution of the country and on the place of religion in society. Officially, in all communist countries, people were free to profess their faiths, but in practice the state sought to erase and destroy any form of religious belief. The regime's stance on religion was especially evident in education from primary to university levels where special courses on atheism were taught. Furthermore, atheism was an academic course even in church seminaries in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.³⁰ However, despite anti-religious propaganda, in some cases the regimes reserved a special attitude towards religion. It is still uncertain how deeply anti-religious some members of the party were during the Cold War period. For example, in Romania, Prime Minister Petru Groza was the son of a priest and a layman within the church's structures. Many Romanian communists continued to bring up their children in the Orthodox faith attending religious ceremonies outside their cities where the party could not easily control them.

Analysing religious factors which influenced the evolution of church-state relations in East European communism, Pedro Ramet proposed six main elements:

- 1 the size of a religious organisation,
- 2 its amenability to infiltration and control by the secret police,
- 3 its allegiance to any foreign authority,
- 4 its behaviour during World War Two,
- 5 the ethnic configuration of the country in question, and
- 6 the dominant political culture of the country.³¹

A large religious organisation represented a direct challenge to communist authorities. Orthodox churches were not only controlled through political infiltration of the secret police but also through the church's own perception of the concept of *symphonia* which argued for cooperation with political power. In addition, because Orthodox churches were not under the jurisdiction of any external ecclesiastical authority, the actions of regimes were seen as internal affairs. Most Orthodox churches supported the invasion of the Soviet Union during the Second World War, representing another reason for the communists to replace hostile hierarchs. Moreover, the ethnic structure of the state led to competition between churches which wanted to expand their influence at the expense of destroying others; for this reason, Orthodox churches were eager to 'unite' with the Greek Catholic churches. The communists took into account the previous political culture of the state, and their attitudes towards religion followed existing forms of collaboration between church and state.

In addition to these factors, a fundamental point in analysing Orthodoxy in post-war Europe had been the employment of religious channels for international purposes. Orthodox churches proved to be important vehicles through which the image of a regime could be perceived and often improved abroad. The Orthodox commonwealth provided the framework for political cooperation between countries, while interwar relations between Orthodox churches and clergymen in the West were reopened in an attempt to infiltrate the diaspora and propagate communism abroad. By preserving relations within the Orthodox commonwealth and with the West, Orthodox hierarchs asserted not only their religion but also reinforced the national identity of their countries. In Orthodoxy, international contacts led to an awareness of similarities and divisions between religions and political regimes and encouraged religious revival after the fall of communism. This book will explore the religious and political contacts between East and West and how Western religious leaders perceived the place of church–state relations during this period.³²

The religious and political authority of Romanian Orthodoxy

Although the first historical records mention the presence of Romanians as the dominant ethnic group in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, their evolution as a nation has been inextricably linked to Orthodoxy which was instrumental in preserving their cultural identity. Romanians spoke a language derived from Latin which distinguished them from the mass of Slavic neighbouring countries. Language and religion became major elements which unified the populations in these territories even when they were subject to different empires. In the Millet system, Turkish control of the region assigned the church the task of providing education while the first manuscripts in Romanian came from the Orthodox monasteries.³³

In Transylvania, Romanians had a comparable historical trajectory. During Habsburg rule, despite forming the major ethnic group, Romanians lacked political and religious rights being considered a 'tolerated' nation. At the end of the seventeenth century the Habsburg authorities sought to diminish the position of the Orthodox Church and established a rival church, the Greek Catholic Uniate Church, which accepted jurisdiction of Rome while maintaining most of its doctrinal corpus with Orthodoxy. The Uniate Church took further the task of protecting the Romanians in Transylvania, and Uniate leaders were the first to use a nationalist discourse in asserting political rights for their communities.³⁴

The evolution of Romanian nationalism was one of the most complex issues in the history of the Balkans. This was especially so since the construction of the Romanian state was itself the political product of various factors, such as the political interests of the European empires in the region, the political opportunism of the Romanian elite and historical chance. Unification of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 is considered to mark the start of the Romanian state-building process which reached its climax in 1918 when Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina united to form Greater Romania.

In building the political architecture of the Romanian state, the Orthodox Church played a vital role as one of the major elements of political attention: politicians believed that controlling the church hierarchy would lead to control of the masses and to the development of a Romanian national identity. Following the unity of the principalities, the church contributed to the construction of the Romanian state by reinforcing the mythologisation of political figures from the Romanian past, thus making a connection between the newly-established state and previous rulers from the Middle Ages who fought for the sovereignty of their states.³⁵

The Orthodox Church acquired a new place in the institutional design of the state and the church's evolution ran parallel to the political trajectory of Romania. The state benefited by including religion in its national policy while Orthodoxy was used as a political tool because it confirmed the historical legitimacy of the state and enabled the construction of national myths. The Orthodox Church also benefited by collaborating with the state, aspiring to identify Orthodoxy with the Romanian nation. Close relations between Orthodoxy and Romanian nationalism reached an extreme in the interwar period when right-wing parties claimed the superiority of Orthodoxy over other religions and promoted the idea of an indissoluble relationship between Orthodoxy and nationality. The unification of the state and close relations between the monarchy and top religious hierarchs revealed a thin line between religion and politics. At times of political crises the monarchy looked to the church as the only stable institution. The patriarch became a member of the regency and led the government three times. The church supported the invasion of the Soviet Union, blessing its troops to fight against 'those without God'.

The gradual installation of communism after 6 March 1945 had to take into account both religious and political positions of the church and, for this reason, the regime spared it from violent religious purges and mass persecutions. The official attitude of the Romanian communist leadership towards religion followed the same principles as their Soviet counterparts in the 1940s indicating that collaboration was possible between the church and the regime. After 1947, having gained complete control of political power, the communists saw the church as part of the Orthodox commonwealth; it could foster the country's relationship with the Soviet Union and could help in imposing its domination over the people.

Romania remained a unique case in the Orthodox bloc during the communist period as the only state which did not have mass religious persecution on the scale of its neighbours. Being a dominantly agrarian society, the authority of the Orthodox Church remained strong and posed a serious threat to a sudden political change. For this reason, in the first years of communism, the regime was careful in organising anti-religious campaigns. By controlling the church hierarchy and employing the church in the propagandistic battle for the construction of a new society, the regime promoted the false idea of religious freedom. The general passive attitude of the church towards the regime did not lead to mass protests; on the contrary anti-clericalism remained low, as the main discourse of the church was that every regime is the will of God and people should not follow political disputes but rather focus on spiritual progress. While this type of discourse did not lead to public opposition, it indirectly retained the authority of the church throughout communism.

The security police in Romania was one of the harshest in the Eastern bloc and religion became one of its methods of eliminating political opposition.³⁶ The main charges against those condemned were that they propagated mysticism and were dangerous to society. In many cases the church hierarchs acted on the borderline between religious and police realms. The effectiveness of religious control was evident through the fact that the number of religious dissidents was reduced and not capable of mobilising the masses; in some cases they only denounced the regime and attracted the attention of mass media when in exile. The 'Lord's Army', a religious movement founded in the interwar period in Transylvania, which posed a challenge to traditional Orthodoxy, was banned by the communists in 1947. However, while the movement clandestinely continued its activity on a smaller scale, some of its members joined Protestant churches rather than becoming involved in political opposition to the collaboration between the Orthodox hierarchy and the regime.³⁷

The religious situation in Romania could be compared with that in Poland, where the Roman Catholic Church did not suffer mass religious persecutions. This was especially due to the prime role of Catholicism for Polish identity and the fact that one-fourth of its clergy was killed in the Second World War. Poland was the only country in which Catholic bishops were

sent to concentration camps and after the war the communists had to take into account the influence of religion.³⁸ Some Catholics were even members of parliament and supported the establishment of a Polish construction of socialism. The main difference between Romania and Poland lies at the core of church–state relations. Owing to the concept of *symphonia*, the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy did not hesitate to fully engage the church according to the regime policy. By contrast, in Poland the church remained independent and was not completely under the party control.³⁹ This fact later fostered the rise of the Solidarity Movement in the 1980s and public opposition to the regime.⁴⁰

Another comparable case was provided by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. After the fall of the Coburg regime on 9 September 1944, the Orthodox Church was incorporated into state structures, becoming highly dependent on its financial support. At the end of the Second World War, Bulgaria was one of the least religious countries in Europe and there was limited church opposition to the communist regime.⁴¹ Georgi Dimitrov, who fled to Moscow in 1923 and returned in 1946 as president of the Central Committee of the Fatherland Front, appeared at mass rallies with church hierarchs. He publicly presented his own vision of the church's place in Bulgarian society in a speech at the millennial commemoration of the death of Saint Ivan Rilsi on 26 May 1946.⁴² In his opinion, the church preserved the national sentiments of the people and had a significant contribution in Bulgaria's history. He followed the Soviet view that collaboration between church and state was possible for the reconstruction of the country and was beneficial to the regime.

Despite official good relations between communists and hierarchs, in order to impose its domination, the regime launched extensive campaigns of religious persecution, to the extent that Metropolitan Kiril, the future patriarch, was imprisoned and tortured. Many high-ranking clergy were executed and the church was transformed into a propaganda tool. The 1947 Constitution stated the freedom of religion and separation between church and state while the 1949 Law of Confessions named the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as 'the traditional Church of the people'.⁴³ The church had been in dispute since 1870 with the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding its autocephaly. However, in 1953 with the direct support of the Russian Orthodox Church, it re-established its Patriarchate, a sign of Soviet influence abroad.

The religious situation in Bulgaria was similar to that in Romania. The Orthodox clergy were incorporated into the Priests' Union and the church's educational and social settlements were confiscated. Metropolitan Kiril enjoyed good relations with top Bulgarian communists and other foreign clergymen. He attended the enthronement of Patriarch Justinian in Bucharest in 1948 and developed a close relationship with him. They visited each other and travelled together to Moscow; in 1953 Kiril was raised to the rank of patriarch (1953–71) and Justinian was the first to congratulate

him during his enthronement. However, the church witnessed a constant decrease in the number of clergy from 2446 in 1948 to 2263 in 1951 and around 1700 in 1977.⁴⁴ After the international détente between the great powers, the church supported the Bulgarian version of national communism, manifested by the bicentenary celebration of the writing of the *Slavic-Bulgarian History* by monk Paisii of Khilendar in 1962, the centenary of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1970 and the 130th anniversary celebration of the Bulgarian state in 1981.

The trajectory of Orthodoxy in Romania differed from that in Bulgaria in the ways in which the church hierarchy retained an autonomous religious discourse. Bulgaria suffered significant religious persecutions and the church was more dependent on their regime, while Romanian hierarchs were more eager to follow the party line. The Bulgarian church had a limited voice in political and social affairs and remained a weak institution without large popular support. This difference had a direct impact on the evolution of their churches after the fall of communism. In 1992 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was split when some members of the hierarchy accused the patriarch for collaborating with the communists. In Romania, there was a brief crisis when the patriarch resigned in December 1989, however, he returned to his position in April 1990 and the church preserved its structure intact.

The Romanian Orthodox Church could also be compared with that of its Serbian counterpart. The Serbian Orthodox Church suffered extreme losses during the Second World War. Many hierarchs were imprisoned in German concentration camps, around 25 per cent of its buildings were destroyed and a fifth of the clergy were killed. The communist regime imposed its authority over the church by accusing many clergy of collaborating with the fascist regime, confiscating its properties in the 1945 Law on Agrarian Reform and Colonization and removing education from religious affairs.

The church's influence in society remained strong and the communists used its legitimacy in order to consolidate their position. Rather than appoint a new spiritual leader, Marshall Josip Broz Tito ensured that Patriarch Gavrilo returned to his hierarchical position, following his liberation from Dachau. He attended the 1948 Moscow meeting of religious leaders in the newly established communist countries. However, while other Orthodox hierarchs praised the new international situation, Gavrilo developed tense relations with the Russian Patriarch. In particular, he was critical of extending Russian jurisdiction over the Serbian communities in Hungary.⁴⁵ Serbian relations with Moscow remained difficult and followed Yugoslavia's political position in the Eastern bloc.

The Serbian Orthodox Church was challenged by the establishment of new religious structures such as the Croatian Orthodox Church in 1942, the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church in 1951, the autonomous American-Canadian diocese in 1963 and the autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox

Church in 1967. These divisions had a direct impact on the position of the church in Yugoslavia as, for example, the Macedonian clergy largely cooperated with the communists in order to obtain independence.

The main concern of the communist regime was that the use of nationalism by the Serbian Orthodox Church would diminish its influence. In order to control the church, the regime carried out extensive religious persecutions and, as in other countries in the region, set up priests' associations. Church–state relations improved under Patriarch Vikentije (1954–8). After Tito established independence within the Comintern, the hierarchs were able to restore relations with other churches behind the Iron Curtain.

In 1958 Tito imposed German, his own candidate, in the position of patriarch (1958–90), who would be compared to Justinian and also labelled as a 'Red Patriarch'. The Serbian Orthodox Church retained relative independence from political interference, focusing on the reconstruction of its destroyed churches and increasing its involvement in social issues.⁴⁶

In the 1980s the Serbian Orthodox Church began to extend its authority by extensively employing a nationalist discourse.⁴⁷ The position of Serbian Orthodoxy during this period differed from that in Romania as it combined Orthodoxy and extreme nationalism while maintaining autonomy from direct political interference. In 1988 the church exhumed Prince Lazar's remains and toured them around the country promoting the idea of a heavenly Serbia. The combination of extreme nationalism and Serbian Orthodoxy would have an impact on Yugoslavia's future shape. The church's discourse developed alongside that of Slobodan Milošević's regime which used references to Orthodoxy in its political actions.⁴⁸

After the fall of communism, despite half a century of atheist rule, the Romanian Orthodox Church retained its dominant position and authority in society. The country remains one of the most religious in Europe having one of the highest figures of believers in the existence of God.⁴⁹ In recent years more than 80 per cent of Romanians consider the church the most trusted institution, followed closely by the Army with 70 per cent while democratic institutions such as the Parliament and the Presidency gained less than 40 per cent.⁵⁰ The law of religious confessions of 1948 was in use until 2006 and many of the religious hierarchs of the late communist period remained in their ecclesiastical offices.⁵¹

At a time of increasing secularisation in Western Europe, shiny new churches were erected in Romania in contrast with derelict and bankrupt factories.⁵² National communism began as official state policy in the early 1960s and was perpetuated during the Ceaușescu period. After the fall of communism in 1989, the nationalist elements of this policy were reiterated in a new light as the church and the democratic regime continued to make strong references to the national past. The current religious revival has to take into account the complexity of Romanian nationalism which considers the church as a major political institution. During the first years of communism the

church showed the ways in which it could adapt to the new political regime. It is the task of this study to examine this transformation.

Conclusion

The relationship between church and state in Orthodoxy is characterised by the concept of *symphonia*. With the emergence of nation-states in the Balkans, political leaders used the powerful force of religion in order to gain authority and legitimacy. Orthodoxy, as the traditional institution which fostered religious identity in the region, was incorporated by political leaders in their institutional designs.

The spread of communism from the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe revealed a comparable pattern in which churches were employed for the regimes' benefits. Maintaining close relations between church and state, the regimes took advantage of the authority of the church and sought their own legitimacy. Analysis of the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the communist regime has to take into account both the status of religion in the Orthodox world and the role of the church in fostering national cohesion. For this reason, the historical trajectory of Romanian Orthodoxy, from the establishment of the state in 1859 to the first government with a communist presence in 1944, is essential for comprehending the development of Orthodoxy during communism and in contemporary Romanian politics. The concept of *symphonia* would become clearly visible in the attitude of religious leaders who stated that 'every regime is a will of God'. The church would continue to collaborate with the political powers, thereby imposing its authority in both the material and spiritual worlds.