At the 2002 Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) meetings in Toronto, I was interviewed as a young Adventist scholar. After talking about the situation of the Adventist Church in Romania during Communist times, one participant asked a straightforward question: How could Adventists, especially pastors and administrators, cooperate with the Communist authorities and still have a clear conscience; was it possible to cooperate with the Communists and still be a true Adventist? I offered him the shortest answer possible: it depends. Unfortunately, time did not allow me to unpack that answer. I realized that he, like many others, used a Free World mentality without realizing that people living under a Communist regime have a different worldview. I also understood that I needed more than words and stories to present a realistic and credible picture of the Adventist Church living under a totalitarian regime. I needed documents. However, the Adventist Church in Romania had only a small archive and most of the items were committee minutes. A few years later when the archives of the former secret police in Romania, Securitate, were open for public and academic research, I received accreditation as an external researcher. Browsing through some of the millions of folders and files, I discovered that Securitate had many more files and documents about the Adventist Church during Communist times than the Church did. I decided to spend as much time as I could to research the methods Communists used to influence the life and mission of the Church, and the advantages and disadvantages of the Church’s cooperation with a Communist totalitarian government. This survey may help create a profile of the mentality and strategies used by a Communist regime, a profile that could be helpful for Adventist leaders when having to make decisions regarding situations in totalitarian Communist countries today. This paper presents some of the preliminary results of my research in the Securitate archives in Romania.
Background

The Adventist Church in Romania was persecuted long before Communism by both the government and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The records indicate that different governments treated the Church differently. As long as the National Peasants party was in power they outlawed the Church, while the Liberal party tolerated and even recognized the Church. For example, in 1937 Vlad Mocanu, the Union president, and Mateescu Tanase, the secretary-treasurer, were arrested because the Church collected funds for the needy and the orphans following the war and the famine in Spain. This initiative was considered “illegal” with the result that the leaders were put on trial. The case was finally closed on August 29, 1939 (D6878:67-83; the cited documents follow to the Securitate filing system-file/volume:pages).

Over the years not only have leaders been persecuted but lay people also suffered. In a village, the local elder and several Adventist families were arrested because they did not attend the blessing and dedication of an open-air shrine. They were accused of antinationalism and of spying for foreign governments (D6878:276). The local Orthodox priest, in his report, insisted that the shrine should be considered a national symbol since Romania is a Christian country.

When the first Adventist primary school was opened at Fagaras, the national press commented negatively (D6876:326). Every initiative of the Church was seen as antinational, and an Adventist school was considered a dangerous place for young people to study. The Romanian Orthodox Church was behind many government initiatives against the Catholic or neo-Protestant churches. They pressured the government to restrict their activities and deny them the right to evangelize or speak publicly about their beliefs (D6878:322). Before the 1941 census, Orthodox priests accused the Adventists of telling their friends to declare themselves members of the Church so the total membership would justify official recognition as a religious minority (D6878:326-327).

An interesting document, dated 1941, is a post-card sent by an Adventist member to his church elder where the term “brother” was considered suspect and the secret police began an investigation (D6878:394). In 1941 the government had rejected the support of a violent ultra-nationalist group called “The Brotherhood” (also known as “The Legion” or “The Green Shirts”). The group went from being backed by the government as ultra-nationalists to being hunted with their leaders sentenced to death. It is not difficult to understand why the term brother, used on a postcard, was considered suspicious. The result was an unavoidable overlap between politics and religion.
A Profile of Communism in Romania

A Communist regime considers religion as “the opium of the people.” Their strategy is to reduce a church’s activities to cause it to weaken and die with the final goal to create an atheistic society. However, at the same time they want to be seen by the rest of the world as the promoters of democracy and religious liberty. This contradiction of seeking to destroy religion while at the same time pretending that there was no religious persecution, existed in Romania. The Communist government of Romania used two institutions to attain this goal: the State Department for Religious Affairs and the secret police called the Securitate. The first was supposed to promote religious freedom, while the second was the coercive arm of the state. After taking power, one of the main strategies of the Communists was to create a commission to study each religion and confession in order to understand how it functioned, its strength and weaknesses, so a plan could be devised to destroy each group from the inside. State representatives were sent to live with different Christian families and watch them for three months, after which they presented the conclusions to the State Department for Religious Affairs. The Securitate was supposed to break any resistance against the Communist government by offering only two options: prison, or cooperation. More than 4,000 priests and pastors, regardless of their religious confession, faced this choice during the first years of Communist power, and an estimated 10 percent died in prison. Many agreed to cooperate at the end of their prison time. After 1965, when President Ceausescu declared his independence from Moscow and the former USSR, the prison option became rare but recruiting clergy and lay people as informers for Securitate flourished.

Recruiting Securitate Informers

One of the common recruiting tactics was to send military draft notices or to summon a person to the local police station to check the address on the ID card or some other paper. Others, who submitted requests for a passport or visa to travel outside the country or who requested approval to use a typewriter, were summoned to the Securitate or Internal Affairs Ministry headquarters (D141/12:180). Notice how the process worked: “X is our agent from 1979, and demonstrated sincerity and interest in doing his assignments offering useful information. . . . Because he occupies an important position in the administrative structure of the Adventist Church, we recommend that he get a visa to visit Austria, Switzerland, and the German Federal Republic. . . . He should be checked for any intentions to not return or treason. . . . Instruct him to inform on another agent going on the same trip . . . and on people he will visit in Heidelberg (D141/12:188, 195-196, 251).
Some of those summoned did not even reach the local police station but were approached on the way and invited for talks at the Internal Affairs Ministry headquarters or at a secret location. Some pastors were reprimanded for writing letters to people or institutions outside Romania without first checking with the State Department for Religious Affairs and were threatened with losing their jobs if they did not cooperate. A recruiting session could last up to eight hours and during this time diverse psychological methods were used to apply pressure. However, there were informers eager to cooperate on their own initiative. “X considers his patriotic duty as a true Christian to cooperate in a sincere and loyal way. ...The informer signed the agreement without hesitation, indicating his conscience is at peace, without conflicting his religious beliefs” (R206674 at 04.23.1957).

Excerpts from a Recruiting Report

_The scope of the recruitment:_ An ‘invigoration’ of the Adventist activities has been noticed lately with a greater number of converts, strengthened networking between Adventist churches all around the country, and a number of illegal publications. This situation requires recruiting a good informer who would help us control the activities of the Adventists. We do not have enough informers among Adventists in this county. In the churches it has been noticed that there is an increase in the number of interests drawn by methods such as twisting the Scriptures, scaring people with the teaching about the Second Coming and the end of the world, and by making people distrustful of this life. Some propagate the teachings of the Adventist Reform Movement which is declared illegal in Romania.

_Description of the candidate:_ He is objective and knows the facts. The candidate is a good communicator, with a sharp instinct, very analytical, and one who can act calmly and prudently in difficult situations. He is well prepared professionally and socially.

_PLACE of recruitment:_ The office of the representative of the State Department for Religious Affairs. The candidate must be convinced that cooperating with us is a very important and noble assignment, which can be given only to serious and devoted people.

A Typical File of an Informer

Other people (especially pastors) cooperated because they sensed an opportunity to climb the hierarchical ladder of the Adventist Church. The following case study is of a pastor who was already part of the conference administration. Initially (1964), he declined the invitation to cooperate, but in 1976 he accepted and is described as sincere, honest, sociable, communicable, changed since 1964 and now encour-
aging parents to send their children to school on Saturday. His knowledge and character places him above his peer pastors, with the perspective to rise to a superior rank at the Union, especially due to the support of the Adventist believers in Teleorman County that represent one of the core groups of Adventist membership.

It was planned that the informer candidate was to be invited to the State Department for Religious Affairs for talks, and on his way back he would be “accosted by chance” and brought to the Securitate office in order to impress and gain advantage over him. “If he would refuse or have doubts, talk to him without strings attached letting him know that we could solve his personal or church problems.” Finally the pastor agreed to sign the contract, adding that he will “keep this a secret and inform regularly.”

In a later report, the contact officer mentions that the pastor reads literature and fiction novels expanding his mind, and is in complete agreement with the Government’s Communist policies. He is nice looking, trustful, and nicely dressed. He says he is tired, overstressed, but otherwise healthy. He is ‘concerned’ by some of his colleagues’ comments that it was better for him to stay as treasurer at the Conference than to move to the Union. Earlier he objected to our request to ‘challenge’ some people to talk about sensitive issues. We decided he was wrong and explained to him that, by the nature of his position, he is required by law to inform us about events that take place, in spite of his will.

The pastor informed freely, even enthusiastically, about colleagues, friends, and people in the Diaspora, often inserting additional information that was not requested by Securitate. Any time there was a chance, he denigrated his colleagues, especially the ones he saw as competitors for administrative positions or those who were better than he. In his reports, some names come up frequently. He makes them seem to say what he wishes or thinks. For example, he is frustrated that one of his colleagues visited the Romanian group at Marienhöhe College in Darmstadt, Germany more often than he did, and is also trusted while he is not. The pastor is incensed that some people consider him an informer and a traitor, and vehemently denies any connection with the secret police when someone asks him publicly and directly about other potential informers. On his way back to Romania he gathered information about the immigrants in the Romanian church in Vienna, Austria. In a report, he informed about the proceedings and talks at the conference constituency meeting (1989).

His last note is dated October 1989, shortly before Communism fell in Romania. This was during the time when mass movements and social and political tensions were occurring in neighboring Communist countries. He indicates that some Adventist believers make “inappropriate” comments regarding the social movements in Hungary, and that he is “deeply
concerned, even indignant,” about such people who manifest an unfit character. He suggests that the government should take action against them [the union constituency meeting was coming soon, and an obedient and supportive attitude toward the government was explainable]. At the end of the report, the contact officer “suggests” that he should nominate those making “inappropriate” comments (R80505:1-19).

**Attempts to Control the Diaspora**

Some pastors informed about their trips to Western countries and also about Adventists in the Diaspora. Some informers received assignments to infiltrate Romanian Adventist churches in Vienna, Austria, and Darmstadt, Germany. The immigrants were encouraged to meet separately from the host church in order to “better preserve their national identity, to educate and keep them from taking any illegal steps, or publish any type of samizdat or unauthorized publications in order to smuggle it inside Romania.” Plans were made that an informer pastor would try to convince the Diaspora members to invite him and somebody else (probably another person trusted by Securitate) to hold Bible studies and evangelistic meetings inside the United Nations Center for Immigration in Treiskirchen, Austria, so he could have access to and inform about illegal immigration to control it (D141/12:198). The Communist government tried to find out the various ways illegal immigrants used to exit the country (D141/12:200). The Securitate intended to keep Romanian Adventists in the Diaspora dependent on the pastors coming from Romania, and thus maintain control over these groups. The immigrants were supposed to fully trust the Romanian pastors, and were to be convinced that they could not solve their own problems without the help from Romania.

Frequently, such informer pastors would get into trouble because the Diaspora members would recognize their connection with the secret police. Such a case was reported in New York where an informer pastor raised suspicions when he refused to remain in the US when invited by several members of the Romanian community. Even the Securitate officer wrote on the margin: “Should we believe that everybody encouraged him to stay, or is he trying to convince us how devoted he is and how many temptations he overcame in order to return to Romania?” (D141/12:224-225). Recognized and identified as an informer, he had to move to another host family because the initial one did not want to have anything to do with him anymore (D141/12:153).

When people from the Diaspora wanted to send charity gifts to Romania, the informer pastors refused to accept the goods in order to demonstrate that people in Romania had everything they needed at home (D141/12:151).
Any pastor (or lay person) who decided to immigrate would be carefully monitored, and his public image tainted. Such an example is Nicusor Ghitescu, a seminary professor who left the country for a health problem but decided not to return. The Union president himself told the pastors in a meeting that Ghitescu was a liar, and no one should trust him because he had cheated the members, the Conference, the Union, and the Division (D141/2:238). In a letter to the General Conference (GC), the Union president asked them not to employ Ghitescu because he was a traitor. Unfortunately, for a couple of years, the GC followed the Union president’s advice, but in the meantime Ghitescu organized a Romanian group and the local conference finally employed him as a pastor. Another seminary professor, Aristide Doroftei, found himself in a similar situation when the North American Division refused to employ him after receiving letters from the Romanian Union President. Even Jeremiah Florea, the first Romanian pastor called by the GC to organize the Romanian Adventist Diaspora, is described in a very negative way to Robert Pierson, the GC president because he criticized the personality cult of the Union president. Other immigrant pastors were described as “leftovers,” “useless,” “false heroes,” and “cannot be trusted.” However, the same Union president sent positive recommendations for Victor Diaconescu, his friend, who had no problem being employed as a pastor. He even suggested that “trusted” pastors from Romania could be sent, if really needed.

Another case involved George Mateescu, a conference finance controller, who requested permission to immigrate legally. The Securitate ordered the conference to fire him, and also to disfellowship him, in order to discourage others from following his “negative” example. When the conference fired him and he could not find another job because of his official request to immigrate, Mateescu went on a public strike without food, and wrote letters that were aired by radio Free Europe. Finally, he was allowed to leave the country. Even after he immigrated, Securitate made sure he was perceived negatively: “No one talked about him any longer, no one regrets him,” was written in a later report (D141/2:289). Anyone who sent letters to either radio Free Europe, Voice of America, or Deutsche Welle, was included on a list of “undesirable” people in the Ether plan to discredit them in front of their peers.

Not everybody agreed to cooperate with Securitate. Some people refused to become informers. Two Adventist pastors are on record for refusing to provide lists with the names of people attending church services or the names of those who would not send their children to school on Saturday. They also refused to provide their daily pastoral schedule. The pastors replied they would do it only at the union’s request. The State Department for Religious Affairs representative threatened to withdraw
their ministerial licenses. He asked them to request the union to send their salaries by postal money order (so the government could control their wages, and use that control as a leverage). One of the pastors, the treasurer of the conference, refused saying the union did not instruct them accordingly. Later, another pastor, who agreed to cooperate with Securitate, informed the state that when he tried to get the requested lists directly from the churches, he encountered strong resistance from the local members. The members told him he had no right to do this, that this was not his job. The informer started to preach from the Bible about the duty to obey the government. After the sermon, a member of the church told him he would not provide the information even if he would have to die.

Sometimes informers who initially agreed to provide information decided to step back or openly disobey orders. The records prove that several people were abandoned or excluded from the network of informers. Some continued to send and receive mail from people outside the country. Others deliberately did not communicate information about funds used in the church or in the underground networks. Some people gave only vague information, with no details, so their reports were considered useless. Others avoided the Securitate officers completely, running from them in the street or hiding in stores so they would not be spotted. Most of these people were harassed and threatened, but did not give in.

**Securitate’s Strategic Plan for 1982-1983**

One of the key documents for understanding how the Securitate worked and their strategy was the annual planning document. The Securitate yearly evaluated their activities and made specific suggestions for the future. For 1982-1983 they suggested that the following items be accomplished:

- Operation Horizon (designed by Ceausescu to use foreigners for presenting a positive picture of Romania) was to be strengthened, since it resulted in a better image of the country in the West. A visit by Bert B. Beach and an article in the *Adventist Review*, where Romanian Adventists were declared “old-time Adventists,” was quoted as an excellent result of influencing Western entities to present a positive picture of Communist Romania. Plans were made to positively influence future visits in 1983 of C. L. Wilson, B. B. Beach, Maurice Battle, R. Nixon, and R. Neals—from the U.S.A., Burbank Howard—from England, and Edwin Ludescher, Gianfranco Rossi, Pierre Lanares, and Jean Zürcher—from Switzerland. The church had to inform the State Department for Religious Affairs regarding any visit by a foreign representative from the West. The invitation to visit the country had to be issued by the State Department.
In the spring of 1983 there was another specific plan to influence people from Western Europe to indirectly work for them. Jean Zürcher’s visit is detailed, and the plans to tell him what to say after getting back home are clearly spelled out. The delegation to the annual division meeting was also to be instructed along the same lines. Besides the economic, immigration, and religious topics to be addressed, the delegation was supposed to contact Costica Balota, an outspoken Adventist supporting religious freedom in Romania, who was considered hostile by the Communist government because of his letters aired by short-wave radio station Free Europe or sent to the U.S. Congress. The delegates were supposed to encourage him to stop denigrating Romania because of the government may impose restrictions on the free exercise of religion for the Adventist Church.

The strategy included techniques for influencing people, by compromising, misinforming, or discouraging them. Several people considered reactionary and hostile (most of them immigrated later), were to be neutralized and their activity stopped: Octavian Cureteu, Nicușor Ghîtescu, Gabriel Isaia, Titu Cazan, E. Burgheldea, Costică Balotă, Ene Gheorghe, Geo Caraivan, etc.

Informers with good prospects were to be trained and upgraded for more efficient work. Several pastors from Cluj, Mures, Sibiu, Dolj, and Bacau were listed.

Foreign Adventist students who studied at Romanian Universities were to be contacted and recruited as informers. They were usually well received by Adventist churches and were not suspected of any involvement with Securitate (no one knows for sure if this strategy succeeded).

People who were involved in underground or illegal activities were to be closely monitored. Coconcea Octavian, Grigorescu Cornel, Sima Constantin, and Neacșu Ion were suspected for producing, multiplying, storing, and distributing “mystical and hostile” (religious) literature.

The recruiting activity was to be accelerated in order to cover all churches and hot spots, and the situation of the 28 Adventists and 29 Reform Movement Adventists spied on was also to be decided. During 1983 22 new Adventists and 12 new Reform Movement Adventists were to be recruited in order to cover the entire network. When the recruiters were not able to find willing people, the officers made up reports and files in order to meet their quotas. People who never collaborated with Securitate are surprised today to find in the archives documents supposedly written by them.

Of great interest were people who had access to the underground...
networks. A quarterly evaluation was to be done, with special emphasis on those who had information about “illegal” or “clandestine” activities. For this reason, the pastors (or future pastors) were targeted, and people with authority and influence among church members as well. Special attention was to be given to seminary students, or the potential candidates for administrative positions at the union and conference levels. Every semester the list of seminary students and teachers was requested by Securitate, including the distance education students. Special instructions were given for recruiting every seminary student as an informer (D141/2:112, 118, 119, 126, 127, 130, 131, 138).

- An atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion, dissension, was to be created and maintained among church leaders so they would not work together. *Divide et Impera* was Securitate’s dictum.
- Very active people (or some they considered “fanatical” but who were evangelistically active), who would decline to cooperate with Securitate, would be contacted openly so church members would become suspicious and distrust them and so they would be isolated and their influence destroyed.
- Articles would be published in the national media describing the “true” intentions of the “fanatical” and “active” Adventists, so they would be discredited, compromised, and rejected by society. The factors that determined church growth were to be studied and strategies and methods devised to “unmask” and annihilate the effects of religious activities. People in factories, social organizations, schools, and institutions had to be informed periodically about these “antisocial” elements.
- For those who would not cooperate, special strategies—like being caught in illegal meetings or activities—would be employed. Special search warrants were issued in order to discover groups meeting on Sabbath in their own homes. Such people would be fined, and even arrested and convicted for petty crimes or felonies.
- Dissident movements were not encouraged to develop because they were difficult to control. The Baptist, Pentecostal, and Brethren churches had a congregational structure, so was much more difficult to control than the pyramidal structure of the Adventist church. A pyramidal structure does not help the church survive under totalitarian regimes or in times of trouble. The documents indicate many suspicious youth activities in other Congregationalist neo-Protestant churches, but none in the Adventist church. The Securitate’s control was efficient, helped by the Adventist church’s structure (D150/5:88). When the “Dew of the Morning,” “TKW,” dissident, or underground Adventist movements appeared, Secu-
ritate made sure all levels of the church were informed and warned, so no new members would be attracted by such groups. The pastors involved were to be kept in public view and were blacklisted so they would not have any influence in the church.

**Control of Church Administrators**

The Communist government tried to control the constituency meetings at all levels of the church. Periodically, lists containing the names of the church boards and the number of members in each church were requested by the State Department and verified by the Securitate. The names, addresses, and phone numbers of pastors (including retirees) were also requested, including who else lived there or who may answer the phone (D141/2:122, 125).

The documents also contain lists with names of candidates for administrative positions. Where two names for a certain position were suggested by the church, one was crossed out by the State Department for Religious Affairs or the Securitate and was never presented to the constituency (D141/1:175-178). Every time the constituency meeting took place, a representative from the State Department was present to make sure the “directions” were followed. At the Bucharest Conference in 1988, the delegates to the constituency meeting did not agree with the proposed name offered by the State Department and protested vehemently. The proceedings continued until late at night, and when the name of the new conference president was announced and voted, the State Department representative, George Carstoiu, hurriedly and nervously left and slammed the door (D141/2:120). It was the first time in a long time that a constituency meeting opposed a suggested candidate, although the records indicate that both candidates cooperated with the Securitate (R80496:9).

**Control of Church Finances**

The most effective means of control targeted the Church finances. By law, all the money received by any church had to be deposited in bank accounts. However, the money could not be used without special permission from the State Department for Religious Affairs. The approved budgets did not even cover the expenses to pay a decent salary for the pastors, and barely covered administrative costs. Many requests for funds to repair church buildings or to build new ones were turned down, in many cases leading to the deterioration of the buildings to the point that they could no longer be used. The pastors’ salaries were very low, forcing some to look for additional sources of food and money. Some church workers raised honey bees and sold the honey, others functioned as photographers at weddings, baptisms, and funerals, while others worked part-time as farm-
ers. This situation did not allow them to work full-time for the church, which was exactly what the Communists wanted. The Adventist Church could not employ or train new pastors without the State Department for Religious Affairs’ approval.

Although a religious minority, the Adventist Church had 20-30 times more money in tithe and offerings than the Orthodox Church. The Communists tried to annul the tithing system, but finally realized it was one of the basic Adventist doctrines. Instead, they tried to suffocate the Church financially. Faced with such restrictions, the leadership of the Church decided to create a parallel financial system. Only part of the tithe and offerings would be recorded, while the rest entered a secret circuit (called the secret pocket) designed to help the Church survive and fulfill its mission. At a ministerial meeting, a conference president publicly suggested that each church should retain funds for their local needs because the National Bank would not give cash for repairs, heating, or other local expenses. One informer added his interpretation to the communiqué (which the government was happy to hear): “The proposal suggests churches should avoid the state audit and control at any cost, so they could use the funds as they wish. The conference president wanted to be seen as a hero, having the courage to challenge the government” (D141/12:164).

This system functioned between 1950 and 1958 when the Securitate arrested all the leaders of the union and conferences and tried them publicly for stealing the money of the believers. This was a clear attempt to give the Adventist Church negative publicity. However, the trial concluded that the funds were not stolen, so the Communist government accused them of mishandling the money and using it for other purposes (since an important part of the money went to the local representatives of the State Department for Religious Affairs as “gifts,” the Securitate did not crack down on the parallel system for almost eight years). The new Adventist leadership was forced to accuse their brothers in court and make efforts to “recover” the money. Stefan Nailescu and Arthur Vacareanu, the former president and treasurer were sentenced to 10 and 8 years in prison, while the other 23 leaders were released. It was a clear attempt of the Communist government to decapitate the Church and give it bad press. Later, the secret system was applied on a local basis, so that financial committees could cover local church expenses.

The Intellectuals Seen as a Threat

Securitate paid a special attention to educated church people. Intellectuals were particularly targeted and spied on. Church elders in this category are mentioned from all neo-Protestant churches and the following Adventists are named: Paul Gheorghe, Sandu Stroescu, Paul Bu-
Some of them are listed because of their evangelistic abilities (Paulina Arcuş from Roman, and Aron Mureşan from Tulcea), others for their musical talents (Vasile and Doina Cazan at Cluj and Chinari), while others taught children in the various churches (Cornelia Orban at Craiova) (D150/5:85-87). A 1985 statistic made by the State Department of Religious Affairs shows that from a total of 4,445 neo-Protestant intellectuals, 2,583 were Baptists, 864 were Adventists (325 in Bucharest), 536 were Pentecostals, and 462 belonged to the Brethren (D150/5:92-93).

Sermons as Coded Language

During the 1950s and 1960s the State Department for Religious Liberty had inspectors present at worship services to take notes and control what was said. Many times they would summon the pastor and ask for explanations regarding certain terms used in the sermon. For example, if the sermon focused on the parable of the talents, the inspector would accuse the pastor of using coded language by which he meant U.S. dollars, and the members understood the message about capitalism being God’s favorite economic system. Poets were also a target for Communist authorities because they could easily use metaphors and symbols with a double meaning.

Controlled Education

Adventist professors and children in state schools (no private schools were allowed during Communism) were harassed and humiliated. The case of school no. 25 in Galati is relevant. Ilie Ranghiloț was the executive director and was also an Adventist. Together with Stefan Ouatu and Maria Ciuplea, two other Adventist teachers, the three were accused of propagating Christian doctrines among the students and also of registering too many Adventist students in the school, such as Preda Marius, Felea Gheorghe, Olteanu Leonard, Zotoiu Aida, Olteanu Lorina, Graur Sigilda. The officials were concerned because on Sabbath the students would be in church and sang in the choir. They accused director Ranghiloț of taking bribes from these students and their parents because he had been spotted traveling in their cars or borrowing their cars, was frequently called at home by them, or receiving “gifts” from them (the students and the director participated in literature distribution or church activities). The parents of the other children were suspicious and envious. The Securitate decided to scatter the Adventist students among several other schools (D141/12:41). Adventists children were frequently harassed because they did not attend school on Saturday. Their citizenship grades were lowered, as well as the other grades in order to force them to repeat the school year.
and not finish their education.

In order to control children’s education, the Communist government declared children’s Sabbath School and youth programs illegal. For more than thirty years the Adventist Church was faced with the impossibility of educating their children in religious matters. Therefore, the religious education in the family became of paramount importance. In the 1980s, when Magdalena Dumitrescu, the wife of the Union treasurer, began unofficially reorganizing the children’s Sabbath School, she was threatened, and her house was often searched for translated, typed, or photocopied material. This happened because her husband would bring Sabbath School material from the Euro-Africa Division, which was translated and circulated among the churches. While the children would learn in their Sabbath school classes, some parents watched at the doors for intruders or informers. Every time such an uninvited guest arrived, teaching materials disappeared and the topic was changed or the kids started singing.

The Youth Hour was changed into a music meeting, but similar programs took place under a different umbrella. The Securitate archives contain hundreds of musical programs from churches in Bucharest, with the names of the people involved and every song and word that was uttered. Similarly, there are notes on many sermons preached in various churches in the large cities (some were even recorded on tape).

**Social and Private Life Spied On**

Many Romanian Adventists used to gather once a year in the country for a week-end, something similar to a camp meeting. They would go to a traditional place, such as a clearing in the woods where fields of white narcissus grew. The Securitate archives reveal that informers were present even there. Pastor Cornel Constantinescu, the organizer, is mentioned, as are pastors from other districts (i.e., Dan Popovici Basarab), as well as the members and visitors from other parts of the country. The plate numbers of the buses and cars of those who came were listed (for example, in 1982 buses and cars from Dambovita, Arges, Prahova, and Ialomita counties were present, as well as from Bucharest). During the summer, church youth from different parts of the country used to meet and organize summer camps. Such meetings were considered suspect and illegal, and many times the young people had to move to another area or to go home early due to reports filed with the local police and authorities who enforced the orders.

**From Bibles to Toilet Paper**

Religious literature was drastically controlled, especially Bibles. Bibles could not be printed in Romania during the Communist era. However,
they were printed in the West and smuggled into the country using different venues. Bibles had to be stored in inconspicuous places, sometimes even under building materials out in the courtyard. Although they would sometimes get wet or moldy, people were extremely happy to own a Bible. Most Bibles came hidden in the cargo barges on the Danube River, wrapped in plastic tarps, and abandoned at night at predetermined unpopulated areas where people were waiting in the bushes to collect them. Traian Aldea wrote his memories about those dangerous but rewarding trips to the Danube shores (Aldea 2002). However, later Securitate had informers who provided information on the whole operation. The last known shipment of Bibles on the Danube was seized, people arrested, and the Bibles sent to a paper factory and reprocessed into toilet paper. However, Bibles continued to come in cars and trucks with double walls or compartments.

People like Alexandru Sima, Gheorghe Alexandru, Cornel Grigorescu, Neacșu Ion, Octavian Coconcea, Radu Grigorescu, and many others risked their lives in order to provide, print, and distribute religious literature. Others were contact persons, or simply covering for those who were risking their lives. Many times the Communist printing presses were the very places where religious literature was printed or copied. The State Department for Religious Affairs would approve 3,000 Sabbath School Quarterlies to be printed for all 65,000 Adventist members. With great risks (and usually great sums of additional money), the editor Octavian Coconcea would persuade the printers to run 30,000 more (D141/2:345). Even the Church administrators were scared because of the risks posed by such high numbers of printed copies. The disproportion soon became evident for Securitate, who followed the leads of the network. The same story happened again and again. The inside informers filed reports, but local representatives of the State Department were bribed, in order not to report what was happening to higher levels. There were instances when Securitate became suspicious and cracked down on the whole network. Some people were arrested, the printers lost their jobs, and the church representative had to be moved or demoted.

When the church needed more than Sabbath School Quarterlies, or daily devotionals, an underground network stepped in. People who knew English or French would get hold of a book and start translating it into Romanian. Others would type the manuscript on old manual typewriters, with up to 15 copies at a time on special thin paper. Then others would bind the books and distribute them. During the 1980s, when photocopiers became available in Romania at certain state institutions, the underground network would pay the person who was supposed to guard the photocopiers in order to allow them to make more copies from one of
the typed manuscripts. Usually such persons were the Securitate agents themselves, for they were human, too. It is also true that religious literature was unknowingly produced by the Securitate itself. Some books and brochures were printed at the Casa Scanteii (the Spark House) where Communist propaganda materials were printed (D141/3:218). Many times informers would write reports about people who were seen visiting the house where a printer at Casa Scanteii lived. A good number of visitors were Adventists from the underground network. However, the informers indicated exactly where the copying machines were located and suggested that these should be tightly controlled.

**Demolition of Church Buildings**

The government ordered that church buildings be demolished in spite of the member’s fierce opposition or the presence of representatives from the U.S. Embassy. The story of the Grant Church in Bucharest is typical. Letters to Nicolae Ceausescu, the then President of Romania, and to the government had no effect. Suggestions from high ranking architects to move the buildings on rails were rejected. Members barricaded themselves inside the building, although electricity, water, and sewage had been cut off. Women and children formed a human chain around the building so bulldozers could not push forward. Church members threatened to meet and worship in the ruins if the building was demolished. The tension reached its peak when authorities brought a crane in order to tear the roof off the building, but the members together with children and women stood on the roof. President Ceausescu himself had to come and assess the situation from a distance. He ordered the building demolished at any cost, even if the people would be harmed. The strategy was to place a trusted person among the members who would report on a time when vigilance would be low and who would open the gates of the compound so the soldiers and prison inmates surrounding the building could enter. Unfortunately, the pastor himself was the one to convince the members to allow an engineer to stay with them under the promise to help them better resist. Less than 48 hours later, the “engineer” opened the gates and the crowds flowed inside, crushing the resistance, hurting people, breaking doors and windows, and making the building unusable. The pastor was “rewarded” by being allowed to travel outside the country and meet his brother who lived in the West. His name is not even mentioned in the reports regarding the events. The church moved and functioned in a tent for the following ten years, because no building permit was given to rebuild.

A year later (1987), another Adventist church in Bucharest was scheduled to be demolished, together with the union headquarters, the seminary, and the publishing house, but because of other social protest move-
ments in the country, Ceausescu’s attention was diverted. However, reports indicate that members threatened to meet in their own houses and apartments if the church was demolished, which the government feared. U.S. Embassy counsels frequently visited the union headquarters, and this, too, delayed the demolition. The names of Mrs. Susan Sutton, secretary of the U.S. Embassy, and Martin Wernic, from the U.S. State Department, and other diplomats from the political section of the Embassy are mentioned.

Other churches did not benefit from the visits of Western diplomats. The Communist government refused to authorize building permits for churches or delayed them as long as they could. Until 1990, only 525 Adventist churches existed officially, but the number doubled overnight after Communism fell. That shows how many churches and people met “illegally” until they had the chance to have their own building. Usually the members met in private houses and sometimes even in high rise apartments. This worked well for house churches, but members fought hard to have a building they could call “church” because of the mentality of Eastern Orthodox people who would never feel comfortable worshiping in an apartment or private house.

The records show only a few situations in which the members built their churches without permits, only to be fined and to face the prospect of having the church demolished, but there were many such instances. The situation at Sepreus, Arad, became very tense when the Communist authorities ordered the church to vacate the building which was almost finished, and brought bulldozers to raze it. The mothers with their children stood in the way of the bulldozers and, in the end, the bulldozer drivers refused to hurt anyone and left. The authorities had no alternative but to give a building permit and allow the members to finish construction. The same situation happened at Oinacu, Giurgiu (D141/12:80, 141, 239).

Conclusions

This short survey of documents in the Securitate archives illustrates some of the methods the Communist government used in an attempt to destroy the structure of the Adventist Church in Romania and the religious faith of Adventist Christians. Although pretending to guarantee religious freedom, the government used the Securitate forces to restrict religious activities, demolish church buildings, reduce the number of worship services, confiscate and destroy religious literature, control church finances, infiltrate the Diaspora, manipulate church leadership selection, and recruit informers in order to control and finally destroy the Church from the inside. By God’s grace, the Romanian Adventist Church not only survived but grew in spite of such tactics and Communist persecution.
The survey also indicates advantages and disadvantages of cooperating with an oppressive regime. Every political and social system has its weaknesses that can be used in order to pursue the mission of the Church. The question regarding the morality of such cooperation must be judged against the prospect of the Church’s survival under Satan’s relentless attacks. The understanding of the Great Controversy offers the correct perspective. In my opinion the issue should not be “if” but “how far” the Church should go to shake hands with an oppressive regime. The biblical stories of Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, and Joseph offer valuable help.

Finally, the research demonstrates that the pyramidal structure of the Adventist Church is very vulnerable when a dictatorial or oppressive regime infiltrates it and compromises its leadership. Communists have sought to divide the church in order to destroy it. Romanian history, as well as of other Communist countries, shows that cutting contact with world leadership and isolating a national or local church is one way governments use to gain control over a church structure. The separation and mistrust between the official church and the underground movement is part of the same strategy. The Adventist Church should create a strategy that will help its members survive by allowing flexibility in its present structure and focusing on the autonomy and self-sustaining power of the local church rather than building an administrative hierarchy. In the future, additional research may contribute to help design such a master plan or a list of guidelines to be used when dealing with Communist regimes in countries that presently control 25 percent of the world’s population. I believe that God is in control and that he will never let his church down. But it is our human responsibility to learn from the lessons of the past in order to be prepared and ready for unexpected events in the future.

Works cited

Cristian Dumitrescu, a native of Romania, is an associate editor of JAMS. He grew up during the Ceausescu’s dictatorial regime and experienced Communism first-hand. Cristian is accredited with CNSAS, the Romanian institution that hosts the former Securitate documents, for research on how the communist regime tried to influence and control the life and mission of the church.