

**DENOMINATIONAL AND CULTURAL MODELS
AND A POSSIBLE ECUMENICAL STRATEGY
FROM A ROMANIAN CONTEXT**

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INTRODUCTION

The "Iron Curtain" separating Western and Eastern Europe came crashing down in 1989. After four decades of cold war, communism collapsed and the Eastern nations began laying the foundations of democracy. The enthusiasm was enormous. People suffering long under the domination of brutal totalitarian regimes felt free at last. Those who struggled long with economic difficulties now expected immediate improvement in living conditions and Western-style prosperity. Of course, the reality proved to be different. The economic transition from a state-directed, non-competitive economy to free-market structures demanded serious sacrifices from the population, and the expected fruit of this therapy are still far off. The problems which the autocratic communistic system attempted (but failed) to resolve erupted in full bloom, often violently. After the collapse of Marxist-Leninism, nationalism became the new creed for many people. Czechoslovakia became Czecho-Slovakia, and later the Czech and Slovak Republics which finally separated. The artificially created Yugoslavia exploded into numerous bloody wars. This is in addition to the horrendous situation in the former Soviet Union. After a short period of euphoria, Central and Eastern Europe experienced a "collective headache the morning after the Wall was breached."¹

¹J. Martin Bailey, *The Spring of Nations: Churches in the Rebirth of Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991), 119.

While the headache was experienced differently in every post-communist country, it was nonetheless experienced by all. Some of these countries were disappointed by the policies of the elected democratic parties, the mandated left-wing parties, or politicians during the second election after the change (e.g., Hungary, Poland). Others, especially those from the Eastern part of the bloc, retained political power in the hands of "socialist" political forces to the dismay of Westerners. Some ex-communist countries with better economic systems and more liberal policies during the Soviet era, made remarkable progress toward a free-market economy and pluralism. Others seemed to be stuck in continuous economic difficulties and a pseudo form of democracy. Most formerly Soviet countries felt (and still do) that integration into the European Union and NATO is the most important foreign policy goal. There is little doubt that Western economic and political structures must be adopted. Besides economic difficulties, the main obstacle to taking this step is the ideological vacuum. A good portion of traditional morality of these societies had been eliminated during the forty plus years of brainwashing. Along with the systematic liquidation of the middle-class, bourgeois ethical values were also minimized. The so-called *socialist ethic* and the *new human ideal* could not fill the gap.

In varying degrees each Eastern European society is currently experiencing an identity crisis. It is difficult to believe that without working out this particular crisis the numerous problems of these societies can be resolved. There are also signs that the feverish search for identity could lead to destructive solutions. The revival of nationalism, increasing anti-Semitism, the rehabilitation of some controversial leaders of the past (e.g., Stalin in Russia, Tiso in Slovakia, Antonescu in Romania), call our attention to the fact that what could be a healthy and natural search for identity might be expressed in rather explosive forms. These abnormalities are dangerous, not only for these societies themselves, but for European security as well.

There is no doubt that changes in thinking and renewal are extremely important for post-communist societies. But what are the possibilities? Which are the most important factors in this process? While the influence of the media is

considerably weaker than in developed Western countries, it is still a most effective means of shaping the public discourse. Still, there are ambiguities. The strengthening of Western popular culture is perceptible for certain segments of society, most particularly the young (and mostly urban) people. The "spirituality" coming through MTV, endless soap operas, and aggressive commercial advertizing can hardly be seen as positive. The really beneficial cultural influences, whose spheres of influence expand from day to day, presently reach quite a narrow stratum, mostly the intellectual elite. Yet, the end of state monopoly of the media, even in this relatively short time has proven to be extremely important and beneficial.

Aside from the longer-term impact of education, the churches have the next greatest impact. Although there are noticeable differences in the degrees of secularization taking place within Eastern bloc countries, the role of the churches has been increasing in each of them. Forced by the Communist regime to remain within the walls of their houses of worship, the churches received much publicity after the curtain came down. After decades of atheistic propaganda, the church can now proclaim the message of the Gospel using a large network. The previously denied public role of religious organizations is today more or less welcomed, and demanded. Religious education in the schools, legislated in one form or another in almost all of these countries, now offers new possibilities for addressing the message of the church to the new generation. The church's participation in charitable and social work is another important contribution for the rebuilding of functional societies.

This paper, by focusing on Romanian society, explores broad directions concerning social responsibilities and possibilities of the (Christian) churches in the former Eastern bloc. I have several reasons for choosing this society. First, this is the environment I am most familiar with. Second, all the main Eastern European religious traditions may be found in Romania: Protestant (Reformed, and Lutheran), Roman and Greek Catholic, Orthodox, the main neo-Protestant denominations, and the Jewish and Muslim religions. The cultural and political diversity is remarkable. The quasi-democratic tradition is mixed with surviving feudal habits, the Western orientation with the Byzantine and Balkan traditions, the monarchist past with a

republican-independent legacy, and the inheritance of the Christian world with the cultural influence of Islam. Although the coexistence of several cultures in Romania is far away from being harmonious, the situation is much better than in Yugoslavia. Third, although it is too early to draw conclusions, the latest political developments concerning European integration of countries with complex political, social, and economic institutions, can be instructive.

I strongly believe that the rebirth and reconstruction of societies are impossible without the contribution of the churches. Yet, the Eastern European churches bear the burden of their difficult past. Their state of being is determined to a certain degree by the historical development of the region, and by an experience without precedent: surviving communist regimes.

This paper begins with a short history of the different denominations in Romania., in connection to their social, cultural, and political roles and influence. The second part of the paper reviews how the different churches are dealing with nationalism, politics, social reconciliation, education and charity work. My goal is to search for a viable ecumenical strategy for churches to act together to fulfil their social vocation.

PART I: ROLE OF ROMANIAN CHURCHES IN SOCIETY

Although the former communist bloc in Eastern Europe is often seen as a homogeneous entity, this is not the case. There are significant variations as to the degree of secularization which has taken place in former communist societies. Niko Toš, professor of sociology at the School of Social Science at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia,² analyzed this subject, drawing on a sociological survey carried out by a group of researchers at the Pastoral Forum in Vienna. These researchers surveyed Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, East Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia. All these countries had suffered under communist

²Niko Toš, "Comparative Analysis of Religiousness in Central and East Europe: Religiousness in Central and East Europe under the Conditions of Social Transformations," *Religion in Eastern Europe* XIV (December 1994), 1-25.

regimes in the past five decades, and in all of them Christianity (specifically the Roman Catholic Church) is the main religion. Their research examined the state of religion and the church on three dimensions: (1) religiosity (the importance of God in life, frequency of prayer, solace in faith, attitudes toward religious rites, religious self-evaluation, religiosity of the family of origin, and agreement with parents on religious questions); (2) orthodoxy (adherence to Christian religious teachings, attitudes toward the image of God and belief in resurrection), and (3) devotion (membership in religious groups, frequency of church attendance, confidence in the church, and view of domains in which the church can provide answers).

The answers given to the questions concerning the first two aspects of religious life (religiosity and orthodoxy), as well as the answers given to the first two questions in the third dimension (church membership and frequency of church attendance), allowed the researchers to divide the examined countries into three groups. In the first group, representing predominantly “high” religiosity, Poland stands by itself. The group with “average” religiosity, and with signs of growing non-religiosity, are Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The third group consists of countries with “low” religiosity, and a predominance of non-religiosity: Czech, East Germany, Estonia, and Latvia.³

Several conclusions may be drawn from these results. First, the degree of secularization seems to be considerably independent of the policies of the communist regimes in one or another country. The Czech Republic and Slovakia formed a confederate state under communism, yet their levels of religiosity differ substantially. In the case of the former Soviet Baltic republics, the differences are even more marked. The theory of economic determinism (the more economically developed a society, the more advanced the state of secularization) is, at least, deficient.⁴ It is more likely that a complex of factors influences secularization and religiosity.

³Ibid. 8-13.

⁴Ibid. 5-6.

Although economic factors undoubtedly influence religiosity, the phenomenon is more culturally determined.

Samuel Huntington states that we have entered a new age in which "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural."⁵ This assertion is supported by the facts surrounding war in former Yugoslavia, as well as by the increasingly observable division of Eastern Europe along the borders between western and eastern Christianity. Concerning the development of that extremely complicated organism which we call "culture," its character seems to be shaped mainly by religious-theological ideas. The blueprint of every culture is to be found in its religious beliefs, values, organizations, practices, and traditions. If one seeks to understand the forces moving a society, an analysis of the religious domain is a must.

The Orthodox Church

About 70% of Romania's total population of nearly 23 million are Orthodox. Although this includes ethnic Ukrainians, Serbs, Russians, and Bulgarians, at least 90% of all Orthodox Christians are ethnic Romanians.⁶ The ethnogenesis of the Romanian people is a controversial issue. According to the Daco-Romanian continuity theory, present-day Romanians have descended from a cross between the conquering Roman and indigenous Dacian people. This is the official explanation accepted and promoted in Romania. Another theory, sustained by the majority of Hungarian historians, argues that Romanians are descendants of the Vlachs, whose original homeland was in the Balkan Peninsula. These two theories have political implications, since the Romanians have used the continuity theory to support their territorial claims to Transylvania.

⁵Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993): 22.

⁶CIA *Factbook: Romania*. 1996. available from the Internet: <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/nsolo/factbook/ro.htm>; accessed 23 March 1997.

The state of Romania consists of three historical regions: Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania. The Romanian-speaking feudal principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia appeared south and east of the Carpathian Mountains in the fourteenth century, constituting a Latin island in a Slavic region. Although the Romanian language is predominantly Latin, the Romanians became affiliated with Eastern Christianity. During the fifteenth century, the principalities unsuccessfully tried to resist Turkish expansion. The Romanians escaped the fate of the other Balkan peoples, since in exchange for acknowledging Turkish suzerainty and paying an annual tribute, they were allowed to maintain relative autonomy. In any case, this “autonomy” was often nominal, especially in Wallachia.⁷ Turkish suzerainty persisted well into the nineteenth century, despite the 1821 and 1848 revolutions. In the long period of Ottoman rule, characterized by acute corruption and terrible exploitation of the serfs and the free peasants, Orthodoxy served as the main focus of national identity, as well as the only comfort of those living under the rule of a brutal regime. After the Russian defeat in the Crimean War (1853-56), Romanian nationalism grew, and in 1859, with French support, the two principalities were united under the rule of the same national ruler. In 1877 the Prussian prince Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was invited to the throne, and became King Charles I after the 1877-78 Russian-Turkish war (which ended the Ottoman supremacy). After the war Dobrogea became part of Romania though it had a considerable Muslim Turkish and Tatar population. National independence was followed by the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1885.⁸ It is significant that the national awakening was closely connected and strongly supported by the aspiration to establish an independent national church. The third major part of Romania, Transylvania, became part of the Romania after World War One, as a decision of the

⁷Trond Gilberg, "Religion and Nationalism in Romania," in *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham, N.C.: Duke Press Policy Studies, 1984), 171-174.

⁸Janice Broun and Grazyna Sikorska, *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1988), 199-202.

allied powers at the peace-treaty. This was confirmed with treaties following World War Two.

In the first two years after World War Two, the country was governed by a coalition in which the influence of the Communist Party continued to grow. In 1947 King Michael was forced to abdicate and power was monopolized by the Communists. In June 1948 the means of production, social, cultural, and educational institutions were nationalized, and a planned economy was implemented. Emphasis was placed on industrialization, and the formation of State controlled agricultural cooperatives. Nationalization included church properties. Thus, the estates of the parishes, monasteries, and dioceses become the property of the state or of the agricultural cooperatives. For a predominantly agrarian country this meant depriving the churches of their main source of income.

Orthodox monasteries became the focus of anti-clerical communist policies, for the monastic movement was the core of Orthodox spirituality. Before the communist takeover the Romanian Orthodox Church had about 10,000 monks and nuns and there were 200 monasteries. Soon their numbers dwindled to 2,000 and to less than 100 respectively. Many monastics, priests and laypersons were imprisoned, while others were sent to psychiatric hospitals.⁹ Several bishops and metropolitans were removed from their offices and replaced by persons appointed by the Department of Cults, a newly established office designed to guarantee the state's supervision of the churches. In 1948, after the death of patriarch Nicodemus, metropolitan Justinian, a communist sympathizer, became the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In the beginning he was an obedient tool of the Communist regime.¹⁰ In 1948 the Romanian Greek Catholic (Eastern Rite) Church was liquidated legally, modeling Stalin's treatment of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The churches, buildings, and the estates of the Greek Catholics were automatically transferred to the Orthodox Church. After this, patriarch Justinian acted in complete

⁹Broun and Sikorska, 208.

¹⁰Alexander Ratiu and William Virtue, *Stolen Church: Martyrdom in Communist Romania*. (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1979), 118-119.

complicity with the Communist regime and proclaimed the "reunification with the mother-church as a day of great joy, the day of liberation from the hostile captivity of Rome."¹¹

In the mid-fifties Justinian realized the danger of collaborating with the atheistic state, and since that time he attempted to protect his church. Consequently, at his death in 1977, the Orthodox parishes were no longer confronting a shortage of priests. The theological seminaries functioned with a sufficient number of students and academically satisfactory faculty.¹² The characterization made by Broun and Sikorska of the patriarch is significant for the whole of the Romanian Orthodox Church:

¹¹Ratiu and Virtue, 121-122.

¹²Broun and Sikorska, 209.

Justinian was the epitome of the enigmatic and complex Romanian character, with its astonishing - and to outsiders, infuriating - capacity to ignore, even to transcend, contradictions, a characteristic typical of the church today. He was not, in the end, able to prevent the persecution of his own church between 1958 and 1963. Many Orthodox believers say that he led the church into a fatal subservience to the state and that he betrayed hundreds of thousands of his fellow Christians, some to unimaginable suffering and death. Such a man, they maintain, could hardly prevent the cancer of corruption that pervades the nation's life from spreading throughout the institutions of the church.¹³

This subservience of the Orthodox Church became more obvious after 1965, when Nicolae Ceausescu became the head of state. In April 1963 Romania proclaimed the concept of the "Romanian road", against the economic dominance of the Soviet Union within COMECON.¹⁴ Romanian leaders could do this, since the last Soviet troops were withdrawn from Romania in 1958. In 1964 through a general amnesty, about 12,000 political prisoners, including many church leaders, were set free.¹⁵ These two events virtually defined the home and the foreign policies of Ceausescu, who was elected the party's prime secretary in 1965. His external policy, at least in the beginning, was based on a relative opening toward the West, and similarly relative independence from the Soviet Union. To find internal, as well as external support against possible Soviet intervention and political pressure, Ceausescu was forced to make some concessions, especially after 1968, when he refused to participate with troops in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The need for internal stability and credibility in the eyes of the Western governments resulted in a mitigation of the oppression, and relative political pluralism.

¹³Ibid., 209.

¹⁴Gilberg, 116.

¹⁵Broun and Sikorska, 209.

Since 1970, when Ceausescu's position in the party apparatus became consolidated, he proceeded with the next step in his policy: absolute control over society. The ideology, which he propagated, was "an all-encompassing hybrid of Marxism-Leninism, traditional Romanian nationalism, and personal views held by the PCR (Romanian Communist Party) general secretary."¹⁶ Nationalism, contrary to the ideological structure of most communist regimes, had a very important role in this ideological system. Thus, even in the late eighties, when living conditions deteriorated incredibly, this characteristic guaranteed "ceausescuism" a certain level of acceptance. Although the Romanians realized that Ceausescu's leadership was highly destructive for the country, they valued the nationalistic character of his ideology ("we don't have enough bread, but at least we are masters in our own country"). This character of Romanian policy became more and more obvious in the 1980's. Along with worsening economic conditions and the rapid decrease of living standards, the communist power tried to legitimate itself with the notion of the "Hungarian danger." This nationalistic trend was, unfortunately, highly supported by the Orthodox Church, since the church considers Orthodoxy as a distinctive element of Romanian character, and itself as the leading force of the nation.

While there was no clash of interests between the state and the church concerning nationalism, the other distinctive element of Ceausescu's policy, the personality cult, affected the "national Church" itself. The "Conductor's megalomania" culminated in the realization of a grandiose administration quarter in the historical center of the capital city. More than twenty Orthodox churches and monasteries, some of great historical and architectural value, were demolished between 1984-1989. No official of the Orthodox Church protested.¹⁷

¹⁶Gilberg, 178.

¹⁷Broun and Sikorska, 239-240.

The 1989 "revolution" found the Romanian Orthodox Church in a complex situation: sometimes a victim, and other times an accomplice of the atheistic communist regime. Soon after the political changes, under the pressure of the church's public opinion, patriarch Teoctist acknowledged his guilt, and retired to a monastery. The Holy Synod recognized that it often lacked "the courage of the martyrs."¹⁸ However, these declarations, in genuine Orthodox fashion, were not to be taken seriously. The Synod declared the resignation irregular and re-elected the patriarch. There was a movement of a small group of Orthodox intellectuals, young priests, and seminary students for the renewal of the church and against the re-election of Teoctist, but the church nomenclature easily put them off.

When we talk about the Romanian Orthodox Church, special attention must be given to the Lord's Army (*Oastea Domnului*). Founded in the 1920s by Joseph Trifa, a Transylvanian Orthodox priest, as an evangelical renewal movement within the Church, it was not recognized either by the Church or the state. This essentially lay movement was formed by Orthodox Christians who were faithful to their church, and regularly attended church services, but also participated in Bible studies, prayer meetings, and evangelism organized by the movement. The Lord's Army continues to be strong in rural areas, and young people are well represented. Although there is no data about the membership of the Lord's Army, some estimates speak of half a million members.¹⁹

¹⁸Bailey, 107.

¹⁹Philip Walters, ed., *World Christianity: Eastern Europe*. Monrovia, California: Missions Advanced Research & Communication Center, 1988), 258-259., Broun and Sikorska, 206-207.

Surveying the condition of the Romanian Orthodox Church during communism, we can conclude that, although the regime tried to control every denomination as much as possible, the Orthodox Church had certain privileges. It was the only church able to maintain a kind of mission abroad. A certain number of religious leaders were permitted to be sent to the Mount Athos monastery, as well as to the Orthodox mission in Jerusalem. In addition, priests were sent to serve in several Romanian immigrant communities in Western Europe and America. It was the only church permitted to maintain monasteries while the monasteries of the other churches were liquidated. In the Orthodox parishes there was practically no shortage of pastors, since the seminaries maintained by the Orthodox Church were less affected by restrictions on the numbers of admitted students. The possibility of sending students to postgraduate studies abroad was facilitated, in contrast to other denominations. The same kinds of distinctions were applied to the publishing program of the Orthodox Church. The patriarchate had its own press for the publication of newspapers, theological literature, and even Bibles. Although the publishing activity of every denomination was censored, the restrictions applied to the Orthodox Church were less severe.²⁰ This does not mean that the Romanian Orthodox Church could develop in a free manner, with only moderate impediments on church life.

After the political changes, the contradictions present in the Orthodox Church did not disappear. In spite of the sporadic and rather opportunistic declarations of “repentance,” their subservience toward the political powers was evident. This was especially the case between 1990-1996 when Romania was governed, for the most part, by a political party composed of members of the communist nomenclature. The involvement of the church in social concerns was and is minimal, while the efforts made by other churches continue to be viewed with suspicion. The mission of the other denominations is not balanced by similar efforts, but is treated with intolerance, and often aggression. In spite of all this, the unquestionable merit of the Romanian

²⁰Walters, 266-269.

Orthodox Church is that it could preserve the traditional religiosity of the Romanian people, and maintain functioning structures in a hostile environment.

The Protestant Churches

In order to understand the different developments of the Protestant (and Catholic) churches, a short historical overview of Romania's third great historical region should be made. Transylvania is located in the northwestern part of present-day Romania. It is separated from the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia by the Carpathian Mountains. The Hungarians (Magyars) coming from the East conquered the Danubian plain and Transylvania in the late 9th century. In their new land they found a small Slavic population which was soon assimilated due to Hungarian numeric superiority. Since the time of St. Stephen, the first king of Hungary (1000-1038), Transylvania was part of the Kingdom of Hungary. For defense purposes Székelys (Szeklers) settled the eastern borders, a Hungarian ethnic group. In the early 12th century, German settlers, later called Transylvanian Saxons, were invited in to help defend the country against frequent incursions from the East. Romanians in Transylvanian territory are mentioned in documents dating from the beginning of the 13th century. They migrated from the South, from the area of the Balkan Mountains, and settled in the area between the Danube and the Carpathians, as well as some mountain regions of Transylvania.

Due to the Ottoman Turkish power in Central Europe, in 1541 the Hungarian kingdom separated into three parts. Between 1542 and 1688 Transylvania was a relatively independent principality, keeping its ties with Hungary. It paid tribute but was free from Turkish occupation. Being the keeper of the Hungarian statehood it could develop independently. In 1691, after defeating the Turks, the Habsburgs made Transylvania into an Austrian crown colony (1691-1867). The accumulated tension led to an armed revolution in 1848-1849. During this revolution the Saxons, who wanted to defend their rights, and the Romanians, who sought national recognition, supported the Habsburgs against the Hungarian revolutionaries. In 1849 the Hungarian revolutionary government seceded from Austria, and the Transylvanian

Diet declared the reunification of Transylvania with Hungary. With the help of Russian army units, the Habsburgs defeated this revolution.²¹

The historical opportunities, as well as the desire to reunite Transylvania with Hungary, led to a “reconciliation” in 1867, and to the creation of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a real union under one monarch. The Saxons, fearing the loss of national rights, and Romanians, desiring an independent state, were not happy with this union.

The Austro-Hungarian monarchy fell apart after World War One, and as a decision of the Allied Powers, Transylvania became part of Romania. The Second Vienna Award (August 30, 1940) divided Transylvania into Northern and Southern Transylvania. Northern Transylvania with 2.5 million people was given back to Hungary, and Southern Transylvania remained part of Romania. After World War Two, Transylvania was reunited and again given to Romania by the Paris Peace Treaties (February 10, 1947).²²

²¹László Görgényi: *Whirlwind in the Danube Valley* (Hunyadi Mátyás Munkaközösség: Virtual Library, accessed 6 January 1997); available from <http://www.net.hu/corvinus/whirlw/>; Internet.

²²*The Hungarians in Romania: A Historical Overview* (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, accessed 6 January 1997); available from http://www.hhrf.org/rmdsz/memo2_1.htm; Internet.

The Reformed Church

With its more than 700,000 members, the largest Protestant denomination in Romania is the Reformed, and is exclusively Hungarian. The Reformation had a strong impact in Transylvania since the early 1530's. In the next fifteen years the Saxons became Lutherans, while the majority of the Hungarians followed the Calvinist and the Unitarian (anti-trinitarian) way. This period of religious transformation coincided with the dismemberment of the Hungarian kingdom due to the advance of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Transylvania became an independent principality. These historical changes resulted in a kind of historical and religious self-criticism in the Hungarian culture. The early Hungarian reformers, like the prophets of the Old Testament, interpreted the dismemberment of the country as God's punishment for the faithlessness of the nation. This punishment could also be mitigated by spiritual renewal. However, many of the Hungarian Reformation's leading figures, coming from the lower classes of society, harshly criticized the high nobility. These roots resulted in a certain prophetic character within Hungarian Protestantism.

From the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries Reformed princes ruled Transylvania, and the Reformed Church was the largest denomination. Religious tolerance was much higher there than in the other European countries. It is not a well-known fact outside of Transylvania that the first law declaring religious freedom was explicated in the Transylvanian Diet in 1571--even if the mandates of the law were not always respected. When all over Europe Protestants and Catholics or Protestants and Diet declared the Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian and Roman Catholic churches as "acknowledged denominations" (*recepta religio*). The Orthodox Church, the Anabaptists, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Jews remained outside this agreement. The Orthodox Church had the status of the "tolerated religion," the Jews were never persecuted, and, in some periods, even the heretical sect of the Seventh-day Adventists were tolerated.

The consequences of these historical developments are wide-ranging. First, the coexistence of several nations, even if this coexistence had conflicts, resulted in a

certain degree of tolerance. If in politics the interests of different nations prove to be antagonistic, the interpersonal and social relations were mostly peaceful and cordial. The existence of the semi-republican institutions, the very strong autonomous structures, a certain degree of political and religious independence, as well as the spirit of tolerance, developed an accented sense of autonomy in many spheres of life. The organization of feudal society based on the concept of the "nation" (even if this concept was different from the modern notion) resulted in a certain separation of the denominations toward ethnicity. The members of the Roman Catholic Church were almost exclusively Hungarian; the Orthodox Church was Romanian; the Lutheran church was mostly Saxon; and the Hungarian character of the Calvinist (Reformed) church was so strong that Calvinism was called "the Hungarian religion." A harmful consequence of the nation-based social structure was the possibility of identifying a certain nation with a social class. Thus, the Hungarians (including the ethnic Hungarian Székelys), who played a leading role in political and social life, were often identified, especially by the Romanians, as "oppressors" and "exploiters."

The political and social situation significantly changed in 1691, when after defeating the Turks, the Habsburgs made Transylvania into an Austrian crown colony. The stridently Catholic Habsburgs viewed Catholicism as the binding power of their empire. Therefore, their major task was to defend Protestantism, and to propagate the Roman Catholic faith. The reduction of constitutional and religious rights led to the revolt of the *kuruces* under the leadership of Duke Ferenc Rákóczi II (1703-1711). The historian Béla Király states that "this war fused two movements into a single struggle: the nobility's resistance to the unconstitutional tyranny of the Habsburgs, and the popular *kuruc* insurrection." It was the first time in Hungarian history that the tradition and experience of opposition by the nobles joined forces with a popular struggle for the social and economic betterment of the masses."²³ Since the Protestants were *ex officio* against the Catholic Habsburg power, and most

²³Béla K. Király, "The Transylvanian Concept of Liberty and Its Impact on the Kingdom of Hungary in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Transylvania: The Roots of Ethnic Conflict*, ed. J.F.Cadzow, A. Ludanyi and L.J. Elteto (Corvinus Virtual Library, accessed 4 March 1997); available from the Internet: <http://www.net.hu/corvinus/transy/transy08.htm>.

of the insurgents were Protestants (mainly Reformed), Protestantism was in a certain measure identified with the fight for national independence and social justice. The oppositional character of Protestantism was thereby strengthened. This became even more obvious during the next one hundred years when the Catholics severely discriminated against the Protestant churches. During the 1848-49 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, the Reformed church strongly supported the new government in its struggle to achieve national independence and to abolish feudal privileges.

In 1867 Emperor Franz Iosef I made peace with Hungary, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was established. The new constitution declared the equality of all religions, and the subsequent period of general progress was beneficial for the life of the church. This is the period when most of the modern church organizations and institutions were crystallized. Unfortunately, this short period of relief for the church ended in 1914 when World War One erupted. In October 1918 the war ended, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy collapsed, and Romania invaded Transylvania. On June 20 1920 the peace treaty of Trianon sanctioned the *status quo*, and Transylvania was given to Romania. The following period was characterized by the forced Romanization of Transylvania. Among the main targets on the agenda were the Hungarian churches.

Beginning in 1921 the Romanian government executed a land reform that applied different prescriptions for Transylvania than for the other parts of the country. These special regulations were aimed against minorities, especially the Hungarians. The distribution favored the Romanian population and the Romanian churches, while the Hungarian churches lost 85 percent of their lands. Besides economic persecution, the Romanian government undertook an all-out offensive against Hungarian education. While the Hungarian public schools were abolished, the only schools where minorities could teach in their native tongue were the parochial schools. The Reformed church in particular had an extended parochial school system, supplemented by a dozen of excellent colleges. Many parochial schools, some established in the 15th and 16th centuries, were closed or denied rights to grant

degrees.²⁴ Rigid censorship was introduced. The previously autonomous minority churches were put under central supervision. The "name analysis" and the "religion analysis" systems were invented. If a Hungarian did not have a genuine Hungarian name, or if he was not a member of one of the "historic Hungarian churches," he was considered and registered as Romanian. Consequently, he was forced to pay tribute to the Romanian Orthodox Church, and his children were enrolled in Romanian schools.²⁵

In a paradoxical yet necessary way, this period of discrimination against the church was also one of spiritual renewal. As a counteraction to theological rationalism and liberalism, as well as an influence from dialectical theology, the so-called "internal mission movement" characterized the Reformed church from the early twenties. This is the period when Bible studies, woman guilds, and youth organizations become integral parts of church community life. In spite of the fact that the church became impoverished, charitable, educational, and mission organizations were founded. Confidence in the church increased in part because the minority churches had a leading role in the preservation of national values.

²⁴Görgényi.

²⁵Görgényi; Joó Rudolf, ed., *The Hungarian Minority's Situation in Ceausescu's Romania*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 112.

In the fall of 1944 at the end of World War Two, after four years of Hungarian reign in Northern Transylvania, Soviet troops, together with the Romanian army, occupied the country. After the communist takeover in 1948, pastors and lay leaders of the Reformed church were imprisoned or sent to forced labor camps. In the same year private and church education was abolished and all properties of church-owned educational institutions were nationalized. Out of 1593 nationalized schools in Romania, 531 had belonged to the Reformed church. In addition, the church lost 6 boarding schools, 7 hospitals and orphanages, 51 culture houses, 20 parsonages, and 20 teachers' homes.²⁶ As a result, the church was deprived of all rights to perform any form of institutionalized social work. Church education was limited to theological seminary, and even that was under severe state control. Church activity, however limited, could take place only in church buildings. Numerous pastors and lay leaders were imprisoned.

In 1957, following the 1956 uprising in Hungary, the Romanian government availed itself of the opportunity to order new arrests throughout Transylvania. Together with students, writers, and leading personalities of Hungarian cultural life, ministers and seminary students were arrested and sentenced for "activities against the socialist order."

After the late seventies a new offensive against the churches was launched after a short period of relative liberalization. One of the most harmful actions was the state-created shortage of pastors. In 1982 when I entered seminary, only 9 students out of 50 applicants had been admitted. Thus, in a short time, dozens of parishes remained without pastors. The same policy was applied to the faculty. The publishing activity of the church was drastically reduced. Construction of new churches was nearly impossible because of lack of official authorization.

Since the elected bishop had to be appointed by the Department of Cults, the state would promote "reliable" persons. After the death of the bishop of the

²⁶*Memorandum on Romania's Admission to the Council of Europe* (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, accessed 6 January 1997); available from http://www.hhrf.org/rmdsz/memo1_1.html; Internet.

Transylvanian diocese in 1960, the office was vacant for two years because of the refusal of the authorities to authorize the appointment of the newly elected bishop. Finally, in both districts the officials promoted bishops who were willing to collaborate with the state. Notwithstanding, most of the clergy remained faithful to their vocation and tried to do their best in the difficult situation. Confidence in the church was strengthened by the fact that, especially in the 1980's, the Hungarian churches were the only places where people could listen to uncensored speeches in their mother tongue.

It is highly significant that the 1989 Romanian demonstrations were ignited by the intransigence of László T_kés, a Reformed pastor who later became a Reformed bishop. After the regime collapsed both of the bishops resigned. General elections were announced for every church office on every level. This, however, did not mean that every compromised official would be eliminated. Although the problem of nationalized church properties was not resolved in the next seven years, the church tried to reconstruct the ruins. The Christian Youth Organization, the Scouts Organization, and the Women's Guild were reorganized. Several Reformed high schools and colleges were reestablished, and the seminary could serve the real needs of the church. Although finances were extremely limited (the church is highly dependent on external aid), Christian charity work began. Even though the spiritual and material ravages of the past are far from being overcome, the regenerative capacity of the Reformed church is determined to succeed under improved circumstances.

The Other Historical Protestant Churches

Martin Luther's ideas became known in the 1520's among the Germans who had settled in Southeastern Transylvania in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Thus, the first cities to adopt the Reformation were the Saxon cities of Kronstadt and Hermannstadt. The Saxon Reformation cannot be complete without a footnote: according to the special privileges guaranteed by royal decrees, the Saxons enjoyed strong autonomy as one of the parts constituting the medieval Transylvanian political

body (*unio trium nationum*). Since the sixteenth century, practically all Saxons were Lutherans, and they maintained the Lutheran form of Protestantism through the *Landeskirche*, the autonomous church body of the Transylvanian Saxons. The limited number of Hungarian Lutheran parishes was under the authority of the Saxon diocese until the eighteenth century.

The cultural influence of the Saxons through the ages was considerable and positive. Their simple presence tightened the connections with Western Europe. Some pioneers of the Hungarian reformation in Transylvania were of Saxon origin, and they played an important role not only in the religious reformation, but also in the development of the modern Hungarian language and culture. Although the coexistence of the Saxons, Hungarians, and Romanians was not always without tension, a polarization of national interests occurred during the 1848-49 Revolution. At that time the Hungarians were fighting against the Habsburg rule, while the Saxons and the Romanians were in the opposite camp.

Under Romanian rule the Saxons faced the same kind of hostility as other minority groups. Their role became controversial, and paralleled the ascension of Nazism in Europe. The *Volksbund*, (the cultural and representative association of the Germans), was overtaken by the local Nazi leaders and was transformed by Hitler's propaganda machine. With the retreat of the German army at the end of the war, many Germans left their homeland. After the communist takeover, a great number of German families were displaced and exiled to remote parts of Romania. During the communist era, the German Lutheran Church shared the same discrimination as other minority churches, although Germany was able to compel the government to make small concessions from time to time. In the Ceausescu era the German community, and thus the Lutheran church, was in continuous decline because of the emigration to Germany. Since the 1970's 11,000 Germans have been allowed to leave the country annually.²⁷ This was not due to the generosity of the government, but instead was an easy way to get rid of one of the country's nationalities. An equally important

²⁷Broun and Sikorska, 223.

motivation for the state was financial, since the German authorities had to pay 5-10,000 marks for each German to immigrate. In 1987 the number of German Lutherans was about 140,000, while today, as a consequence of continuing emigration, their number is around 30,000. The Hungarian Lutheran Church is roughly the same size as the German Lutheran Church.²⁸

²⁸*Religious Life in Romania: Essential Information* (Bucharest, 1987), 21.

An individual *couleur locale* on the Transylvanian denominational palette is the Unitarian church. Unitarianism appeared in Transylvania in the middle of the sixteenth century, and for a few decades was the main Protestant denomination. Although this role was taken over by Calvinism, the Unitarian church could develop in relative freedom in the era of the independent principality. The later decline of the church was a consequence of the persecution under the Habsburg rule. Although dogmatically different, the Unitarians played the same role as the Reformed church in the cultural progress and the preservation of the national identity. Their colleges offered high quality education, and some of the leading Unitarian ministers and laypersons were in the forefront of Hungarian cultural and scientific developments. The significance of the survival of the church as a minority status is attributed to traditional Transylvanian religious tolerance. The number of Unitarians is about 70,000.

The Sabbatarians were an individual Transylvanian denomination. Francis Dávid, the founder of the Unitarian church, in the last period of his life theologically shifted from antitrinitarianism to the rejection of the New Testament. These ideas were developed around the turn of the sixteenth century by a high-ranking nobleman who became the father of Sabbatarianism. The sect returned to the Old Testament without developing a systematic theology. Being severely persecuted through the centuries, the membership of the denomination decreased to a couple hundred in the nineteenth century when they joined the Jewish religion. In the period of World War Two, most of the remaining Sabbatarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz. Being ethnically Hungarian, the Hungarian government tried to save them by asking them to convert to the Christianity. It is to their honor that most of them rejected the compromise. Those few who survived the Holocaust later emigrated to Israel.

The Catholic Church

With its 1,300,000 members (6% of the population), the Roman Catholic Church is the second largest denomination in Romania.²⁹ The history of the Church goes back to the ninth and tenth centuries. Subsequent to the Hungarian occupation of the Carpathian Basin, and a short period of Byzantine influence, Western Christianity gained ground. After the coronation of the first Hungarian king (Saint Stephen, a Christian convert), Christianity became the established religion. The great majority of the Hungarians thus became Roman Catholic. In the early middle ages, the Hungarians (who at that time formed the overwhelming majority of the population of Transylvania), and the German settlers were under separate ecclesiastical authority, though they belonged to the same church. The Saxons were directly under the authority of the archbishop, while Transylvania had his own bishop.³⁰

After the Reformation, the Catholic Church was so weakened that only a handful of priests remained by the seventeenth century. The situation changed with the Habsburg domination when re-Catholization was one of the main political purposes of the Empire. The status of the appointed religion was fully exploited by the church. Once strengthened, the church became an important political player. Although the higher-ranking clergy were often rather servile, the lower level clergy played an important role in the preservation of the national consciousness. The schools maintained by the Catholic Church (especially the *Jesuit* and the *Piarist* colleges) played a very important role in the training of the (not exclusively Catholic) intelligentsia.

As a consequence of Romanian land reform after World War One, the Roman Catholic Church lost 95% of its estates. In spite of this, it was able to maintain the educational system as well as various social and charity missions. In May 1944, after the German occupation of Hungary, Hungarian Jews were deported. Bishop Aaron Márton was the only church official who publicly condemned the deportation.

²⁹*CIA Factbook.*

³⁰*World Christianity: Eastern Europe, 259-260.*

In 1948 the concordat between Romania and the Vatican, which outlined the status of the Catholic Church, was denounced by the communist government. Thus, the Catholic Church was the only denomination without legal status. Although the church consistently refused to make an agreement with the state without the approval of the Holy See, it was *de facto* recognized.³¹ At the same time, the number of the Catholic dioceses was reduced from five to two. Later, each of the five bishops was arrested, and four of them died in prison.³² The only one who survived was Bishop Márton. A man of great integrity and moral courage, he had a decisive role in the preservation of the Church's canonical order. After his death in 1980, his successor led the church in an equally bold manner. Unlike the Orthodox monasteries, the Catholic orders were dissolved. It was particularly damaging since they had a great role in sustaining the Church's social mission. Institutions like schools, hospitals, and orphanages were nationalized. The Catholic Church was the only one whose religious publications were completely halted. In spite of severe state control, the Catholic seminary maintained high academic standards. In the mid-eighties when the number of candidates to be accepted was limited by the Department of Cults, Bishop Louis Bálint had the courage to ignore orders and admit the necessary number of students.

After the changes the Church showed remarkable vitality in the process of restoration. The religious orders, as well as Catholic lay-organizations, were reorganized. Although their number is still limited by the state, a few colleges have reopened. Due to the considerable aid of the Western Catholic churches, the social mission is vigorous--on both central and local levels.

The Roman Catholic Church is not ethnically homogenous. Around 800,000 are Hungarian, 300,000 Romanian, and 200,000 German.³³ German Catholics are concentrated in the Banat region, and are the descendants of the colonists who were

³¹*Ibid.*, 260.C

³²Ratiu and Virtue, 138.

³³Broun and Sikorska, 226.

settled after the defeat of the Turks in the early eighteenth century. Their number is rapidly increasing due to immigration. The diocese where German speaking Catholics are the majority has a German bishop. Romanian speaking Catholics have two dioceses. In one of them the overwhelming majority of believers are the so-called Changos. They are the descendants of the Transylvanian Hungarians, who over the centuries moved to the Romanian principality of Moldavia. Some speak Romanian, while others have preserved an ancestral Hungarian language. The communist government's efforts to assimilate them were supported by their own Romanian Catholic diocese. No religious service is held in Hungarian, and their priests preach that the Hungarian language is "the language of the Devil."

The Greek Catholic Church

The Greek Catholic (Eastern Rite, Uniate) Church is Romania's "martyr" church. The church was created for political reasons. After the Austrian Empire defeated the Turks and occupied Transylvania, the Habsburgs wanted to reestablish Catholicism. The stridently Catholic Habsburgs viewed Catholicism as the binding power of their Empire. Therefore, a priority was to defeat Protestantism and to propagate the Roman Catholic faith. While among the Hungarians and the Saxons the Jesuit missionaries' work was less successful, most Romanians converted to Catholicism. As a result of the negotiations between the emperor, the pope and the main leaders of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic Church was established. They were permitted to use the Eastern liturgy, and their priests could continue to marry. They acknowledged the priority of the pope, and the dogma of the *filioque*. In exchange, the Church received the status of the "accepted religion." The cultural impact of the Uniate church's establishment was significant. The Romanians could have highly qualified leaders since their priests were now able to study in Rome

and Vienna. The clergy of the church played a leading role in the national revival of the Transylvanian Romanians.³⁴

In 1948 the Communist government abolished the Greek Catholic Church. The congregations and estates of the parishes were automatically transferred to the Romanian Orthodox Church. In doing this, a church with 1.5 million members and 1,800 parishes legally evaporated. All six bishops of the church and 600 of the 1,800 priests were arrested. The rest of the clergy, with few exceptions, and most of the believers, joined the Orthodox Church.³⁵ The church could not be destroyed, however, it was just forced underground. The only bishop to survive prison was made cardinal; new bishops were appointed by the Vatican; and priests were ordained clandestinely. About 600 Greek Catholic priests practiced in secret during the communist era.³⁶

³⁴Ibid., 202.

³⁵Ibid., 206.

³⁶Ibid., 221.

Immediately following the collapse of communism, the new government abolished the decree outlawing the Uniate church. This act was not followed by the restitution of the church properties to the Orthodox Church. By government decree, a few churches were returned to the Greek Catholic Church. Mostly because of the pressures coming from the Orthodox Church, the necessary statutes to rectify the injustices are still slow in coming.

The Neo-Protestant Denominations

The Baptists appeared in Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the Baptist Union was established in 1919. Baptist activity was viewed with suspicion and aversion by the Orthodox Church and the state to such an extent that in 1942 the activity of the Baptist denomination was banned.³⁷ Although the new government recognized the Baptist denomination, after 1944 its activity was severely impeded by official acts. The main reason was the simple fact that the Romanian Baptist Union was "the most militant and fastest growing Baptist church in all Europe."³⁸ In the beginning most Baptists were ethnic Hungarians, but the church quickly reached the Romanians, causing many of the Orthodox to convert. In ethnically mixed areas the church either had separate Romanian and Hungarian communities, or the worship service was bilingual.

³⁷*World Christianity: Eastern Europe*, 262.

³⁸Broun and Sikorska, 227.

In the 1950's and 1960's the Department of Cults rather successfully controlled the Baptist Union. From the early 1970's younger Baptist leaders challenged this state of affairs. In 1978 a religious-rights group, ALRC, was founded. Although the founders were mostly Baptist, it focused on the situation of the churches in general. A few Orthodox priests joined the group. ALRC drafted several documents about religious human rights in Romania, which called into question Ceausescu's "liberal" reputation. The authorities' response was to suppress the movement by imprisonment, harassment, and intimidation. Finally, under state pressure ALRC members were expelled from the Baptist Union.³⁹ As in the case of other denominations, the authorities successfully corrupted many of the church's leaders and used them to control the leadership, as well as the local Baptist communities. Nevertheless, even in these hostile circumstances, the church continued to grow. This fast growth of the Baptists is easy to understand from the characterization made by Broun and Sikorska:

The enthusiasm, warmth, and practical generosity of its members - even outside their own denomination - and the challenge of their demands on personal behavior, act as a magnet in a society where standards are declining in every sphere of life. Their sermons focus on the Gospel, and their relief network shields them to some extent from economic hardship.⁴⁰

Indeed, the personal character of the Baptist mission, manifested in intense community life and social concern, was very attractive. It should be noted also, that, although the Baptist mission reached every class and age group of society, it had remarkable success among the intelligentsia and youth as well.

After the political changes, "the Baptists experienced a fresh start in evangelism, discipleship, social involvement, and church life."⁴¹ Special emphasis was placed on developing a Christian education system. Several high schools, two

³⁹Ibid., 211-14.

⁴⁰Ibid., 227-28.

⁴¹A *Romanian Protestant Christian Homepage* (accessed 7 April 1997); available from the Internet: <http://private.fuller.edu/~ematei>.

theological faculties, and a Bible institute were established. We may conclude that the impact and the importance of Baptist Christianity in Romania were more considerable than the size of the denomination, which numbered approximately 200,000.⁴²

⁴²*World Christianity: Eastern Europe*, 263.

It is important to mention here two other influential Romanian neo-Protestant denominations: the Pentecostal and the Adventists. From the 1920's until 1950, neither was legally recognized; they both shared hostile treatment and harassment from the Communist authorities. The membership of the Pentecostal denomination is about 380,000, while the Adventists denominational numbers are more than 50,000.⁴³ Most members come from the lower, less educated classes. It should be noted, however, that they have a vital mission among the Gypsies.

The Jewish Community

The roots of the Romanian Jewish community were found during the inquisition in Spain, which caused large groups of Jewish immigrants to move to the Central and the Eastern parts of Europe. In Transylvania, and in the Romanian principalities, they found relative tolerance, and quickly became an important economic power. The Jewish community increased later as those who escaped the pogroms in Russia and Galitzia joined them. Especially in the territories of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, by the nineteenth century, many Jews acquired key positions in industry, commerce, and finance. The cultural and religious assimilation was much higher among educated and rich Jews.

During World War Two, the holocaust reached both the Jews in Romania, and in Northern Transylvania, so that 75% of the Jewish population was exterminated. It is shameful that, beside the singular protest of the Hungarian Catholic bishop, Aaron Márton, none of the churches protested against the persecution of the Jews. Moreover, many priests of the Romanian Orthodox Church were members of the "Iron Guard," the Romanian fascist organization responsible for the bloody pogroms in 1941.

⁴³A *Romanian Protestant Christian Homepage*, Broun and Sikorska, 233.

Beginning in the 1950's in the communist era, about 300,000 Jews emigrated to Israel.⁴⁴ Contrary to the policy of other Warsaw Pact countries, Romania maintained diplomatic relations with Israel as part of its "independent" policy. This situation was fully exploited by Romania's chief rabbi, Moses Rosen. The "red rabbi," as he was nicknamed, was the leader of the Jewish community during the entire Communist era. This very controversial religious leader maintained extremely good relations with the communist leaders, and as a result, obtained singular concessions for the Jewish community. Besides the possibility of emigration, this meant the authorization for international Jewish organizations to be active in Romania. Consequently, the maintenance of several Jewish religious and social organizations was possible. The price of these privileges was collaboration with the authorities. Even in the last years of Ceausescu's regime, when the dictator was staunchly criticized by both the Western and Eastern governments, Rabbi Rosen sustained his "democratic" policy. This was all the more controversial because in its last period, the Romanian communist internal policy was marked by a pragmatic anti-Semitism.⁴⁵

The anti-Semitism of some extremist parties (two of them members of the governing coalition between 1992-96) was tolerated after the changes in 1989. Although the number of Jews hardly exceeded 20,000⁴⁶, anti-Semitism was used to divert the attention from real economic and political problems.

The Muslims

Ethnic Turks, or Tartar Muslims, inhabit a region south from the Danube delta, and they are the vestiges of the extended Turkish suzerainty over the

⁴⁴Ibid., 233.

⁴⁵Leon Volovici, "National-Communism si politica evreiasca: 'Miracolele' si dilemele rabinului Moses Rosen" (National Communism and Jewish policy: The 'miracles' and dilemmas of Rabbi Moses Rosen) *Revista* 22 (16-23 January 1997).

⁴⁶*Religious Life in Romania: Essential Information*, 45.

principality of Wallachia. Muslims have 82 mosques and about 40 imams.⁴⁷ Being a small community of about 45,000, they were not the focus of atheistic communist policies. What is noticeable regarding Romania's Muslims is the simple fact that they live in harmony with Christians. Although they are descendants of the conquerors under whom the Romanians suffered so much, there seems to be no hostility toward them. The reconciliation of these two former enemies, the Romanians and the Turks and Tartars, is a promising token.

Continued in next issue (Dec.1998): THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*