

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE ROMANIAN REVOLUTION

by Earl A. Pope

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Before the revolution there were fourteen officially approved religious communities in the Socialist Republic of Romania regulated by the 1948 Law of Cults; the Roman Catholic Church had *de facto* recognition on the basis of a license, but it did not have its own statute because of a number of unresolved problems.

The Romanian Orthodox Church, obviously the most prominent of the sanctioned bodies, has claimed the allegiance of approximately seventy percent of the population of the country or sixteen million followers. This Church has been well organized and effectively administered with a highly trained clergy (a core of whom have studied in the West), distinguished theological scholars, an abundance of candidates for the priesthood, extensive ecumenical relationships, and some of the finest journals within the Orthodox world. Presumably it had no special privileges within the Romanian Socialist State; in practice, however, its position amounted virtually to an establishment *vis-a-vis* the other religious communities. The Orthodox Church was closely monitored by the State which was extremely sensitive to any evidence of internal dissent within this community. No member of the hierarchy of the Church was officially recognized without careful consultation with the State officials and without their prior approval. There was unquestionably restiveness within the Church regarding the *modus vivendi* with the State, but there was an obvious absence of the creative leadership (certainly on the part of the State as well as on the part of the Church), which was deemed necessary to bring about a far more constructive relationship.

The Latin Rite Catholic Church has had its stronghold in Transylvania and has claimed more than 1,000 churches. It is considered to have about 1,300,000 members, the majority of whom are Hungarians, but it also has strong German and Romanian constituencies. The relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church have been among the most complex and difficult in the millennial-old controversy between Catholicism and Orthodoxy; this has been due in large measure to the controversy related to the Romanian Uniate Church, whose union with Rome dated back to 1700 and profoundly divided the Transylvanian Romanian community. The Romanian Orthodox Church had tenaciously held the position that the "reintegration" of the Uniates into the Orthodox Church in 1948 was an historic moment of the profoundest significance and constituted the reparation of an ancient injustice. The Catholic Church

has maintained, however, that the whole "reunion" was brought about by sheer political power and that most of the Uniate clergy and many of the faithful were in radical opposition to it. Frequent discussions had taken place between the Communist authorities and representatives of the Vatican in an effort to improve the situation of the Catholic Church and to resolve the Uniate crisis. It appears that Vatican officials had previously given up any hope regarding the resurrection of this Church.

The Protestant communities constitute a very lively and formidable bloc of churches which have added their own unique challenge and tensions to the Romanian nation. They may be viewed in two major categories: (1) the traditional or historic churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Unitarian) emerging out of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation and largely concentrated in Transylvania and (2) the so-called Neo-Protestant bodies (Adventist, Baptist, Christians According to the Gospel--also called the Brethren, and Pentecostal) entering Transylvania and the Old Kingdom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Lutheran and the Reformed Churches represented the right wing of the Reformation and quickly became identified with the German and the Hungarian communities. The Unitarians were at one point regarded as heretics particularly because of their anti-trinitarianism. They still maintain serious doctrinal differences with the Lutherans and the Reformed although they have cooperated closely with them and in many ways may be identified with them in their cultural concerns. The Unitarian views found a deep response within the Szekler community, now regarded as a subgroup of the Hungarian people. Over the course of the centuries, the preservation of the cultural heritage has become a primary responsibility of these religious traditions. The Reformed faith is still regarded as a unique vessel for the preservation and transmission of "Magyar religion" in Transylvania. The Lutheran Church of the Transylvanian Saxons has perceived itself as the bearer of German culture. Attempts were once made to establish ethnic Romanian Lutheran and Reformed churches but with little success.

Two other Orthodox communities in Romania are related to ethnic minorities: the Armenian-Gregorians, connected with the Oriental Orthodox, and the Christians of the Old Rite (popularly called Lipovenians), descendants of the Old Believers schism in Russia. The Jewish community, with a long history that goes back to the Roman era, was radically decimated first by the Holocaust and then by massive emigrations to Israel, but the remnant (approximately 20,000) had reported a relatively active and free Jewish life before the revolution. There had been reports of antisemitic references, however, in officially sanctioned publications. The Muslim community, mostly to be found along the Black Sea coast, goes back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the Turkish armies invaded the country. It has about 50,000 members in ninety religious communities with its center in Constantza. These religious communities are relatively small and assumed a very low profile under the Communist regime *vis-a-vis* the other churches.

The Neo-Protestant churches in a sense are the left-wing descendants of the Protestant Reformation with less emphasis placed on the institution of the Church, its creeds, a professional ministry, or the sacraments and more on a Biblical orientation, personal religious experience, ethical living, lay leadership, a supportive community, an eschatological thrust, and a powerful awareness of mission. Related to them are a number

of unofficial religious bodies, such as the Reformed Adventists, the Nazarenes, the Pentecostal "Dissidents," and the Army of the Lord, which began as evangelically oriented lay movement within the Orthodox Church. The Neo-Protestant churches have had a phenomenal growth since 1948, particularly among the ethnic Romanians, much to the dismay of the Romanian Orthodox leaders. Their constituency was considered to be approximately one million at the end of 1990.

Prior to a direct focus on the Romanian revolution and the churches, it is important to explore in part some of the dimensions of the Transylvanian crisis which helped precipitate the uprising. This crisis has deep and complex historical roots, regarding which, objectivity is very difficult to discover. The union of Transylvania with Romania following World War I unquestionably represented the culmination of long-cherished Romanian hopes and dreams, but this union and its implications have continued to remain a focal point of serious controversy between the Hungarian and the Romanian peoples up to the present time. The central problem with the history of Transylvania is simply that there are radically different Romanian and Hungarian versions, both strongly expressed and neither acceptable to the other. The thesis has been suggested that a mythicized concept of Transylvania which may have little to do with existing realities plays a central role in the national consciousness of both nations, especially since Transylvania is seen as having ensured the survival of the nation in the most critical stage of its development.

The year 1948 was a critical one for all the Romanian churches. A Communist government with its Marxist-Leninist ideology was then in full control and a new Law of Religious Cults carefully delineated the relationships between Church and State. This law spelled out what were considered to be the constitutional rights of freedom of conscience and religious freedom under the Communist regime, and it established a comprehensive--and at times ruthless--system of State control over all the religious communities. The churches were under the direct jurisdiction of what was called the Department of Cults, a very important agency run by a nationwide network of highly skilled personnel. This agency had impressive resources at its command whereby it could be certain that the religious legislation and a variety of even more stringent oral interpretations, which often blatantly subverted the constitutional freedom of believers and their communities, were carefully followed. Indeed it has been considered little more than an agency of the dreaded Securitate or secret police.

In recent years there were incontrovertible reports of a growing crisis brought about by a constellation of pressures on the Hungarian religious institutions as well as those of other communities in Romania. As the economic situation deteriorated rapidly in Romania after 1980, the Hungarian community could envision only a very bleak future. Consequently, there was increasing despair about attempts at internal reform, leading to a series of appeals and protests to the West, especially to Hungary, which stirred up paranoias of irredentism among the Romanian leaders. The response of the Romanian State to the profound restiveness was with even more repressive measures. The result simply was that the Hungarians came to perceive the internal pressures as having reached intolerable levels.

The traditional policy of the Hungarian Communist State and the religious leaders, with difficulties in the neighboring Socialist country, was that of public silence with the emphasis on the exercise of quiet low-profile diplomacy. It was inevitable that there would be a radical change in this approach. This conspiracy of silence in Hungary was finally broken in the summer of 1986. An unofficial ecumenical group comprised of members of the major religious communities issued "A Call for Reconciliation to the Caring People of Hungary and Romania." It is of some significance that the Hungarian State would permit the churches to be the first to openly address this sensitive issue. The ecumenical group urged the Pope, the World Council of Churches, the Soviet Union, and Western human rights activists to work together to encourage the Romanian authorities to end their repressive policies against Transylvania's national and religious minorities. References were made to the use of police terror, to the extensive informant system, to the brutal beatings, to torture, and even to those who had become martyrs. The Romanians themselves were terrorized as well as their Hungarian neighbors.

While there was relaxation in other Socialist countries, life became even more brutalized in Romania. The ecumenical committee charged that Hungarian culture was being subverted systematically at every level of the society. The conviction was enunciated that the churches of Romania could play an important role in bringing about reconciliation. The ecumenical group admitted, however, that in the past the churches had often been manipulated "for the fermentation of extreme nationalism and racial hatred." The "Call for Reconciliation" included the vision of Transylvania as a "scene of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Baptist brotherhood." The inclusion of the Baptists here is of great interest in that this indicates the important role that they had begun to play within the Romanian context.

Paradoxically, the focus on Transylvania as such may help to explain some of the emotional nuances of the responses by the Romanian leaders. This vision of a Transylvanian way of life, which in a sense would be a fusion of all three main national cultures, was perceived as a dangerous concept in that it questioned the unity and integrity of the Romanian nation. The perceived echoes of Transylvanianism, with all of its implications, could only stir up additional dimensions of paranoia among an already confused and insecure Romanian leadership. The "Call" set into motion a veritable avalanche of appeals and protests, not only from the Hungarian churches followed by the State, but also from churches and international agencies around the world. The response from the Romanian State and religious leaders was that the picture presented was totally false, both constitutionally and in reality, and was prompted by sinister, self-serving motivations. The Romanian Orthodox leadership responded unequivocally that internal ecumenism in every way was "a living and indisputable reality." The Reformed bishops were appalled that such charges could be made. The growing controversy brought about a public confrontation between two of the foremost ecumenical leaders in Eastern Europe who were also the primary religious leaders in their respective countries. Orthodox Metropolitan Antonie of Transylvania unequivocally denied the reports of religious and cultural discrimination against the Hungarian minority, and Dr. Karoly Toth, bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary, took serious issue with Metropolitan Antonie. He claimed that he had no desire to reopen the wounds of the past but that he did consider

"one-sided and tendentious information to be dangerous because it makes reconciliation impossible."

The flight of thousands of refugees across the border into Hungary beginning in the summer of 1987, and escalating dramatically at the beginning of 1988, immeasurably compounded the tensions both within Romania and between Romania and Hungary. The refugees were primarily ethnic Hungarians, but there was an increasing number of ethnic Romanians. The seriousness with which the problems in Transylvania were perceived, concurrent with the radical erosion of the credibility of the religious leaders in Romania, was demonstrated by the public intervention of one of the major religious bodies, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The strategy of this ecumenical body in the past had also been the policy of quiet diplomacy, but now a public intervention appeared to be imperative. The tensions raised by the flood of refugees into Hungary with their tragic reports coupled with the plans announced by the Romanian State in the spring of 1988 to further its program of systematization of its agricultural land by destroying approximately half of its villages, many of them in Transylvania, and moving the people into new "urban agro-industrial centers" needed to be addressed. The World Alliance sent a public protest directly to Ceausescu and charged that systematization Ceausescu style could "only tear apart the fabric of society, violate human and civil rights, and deprive thousands of their traditions, cultural heritage, and language." It called upon the Romanian government to "respect the fundamental rights of all its citizens and, therefore, to rescind its decision to implement this destructive program." It also informed all its member churches regarding its action and requested that they indicate their support by writing or cabling Ceausescu. A worldwide response occurred, including a communique from the Presbyterian Church in the USA, which decried what it called the "devillagization" program.

The escalating human rights crisis in Romania also deeply concerned the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and very intense debates regarding the strategy to be followed took place at its meetings in Moscow in July of 1989. Attention was called to the human rights situation in Romania coupled with the hope that there would be a positive response to the international concerns expressed and that the situation would be normalized. The final decision by the Central Committee regarding Romania was to monitor and express concern about the reports regarding human rights violations and at the same time to maintain relationships with the churches and express sensitivity to their dilemma. This decision was perceived by an outspoken minority as little more than a modest revision of the quiet diplomacy strategy and has returned to trouble the committee.

On the eve of the revolution the religious situation in Romania was a very complex and volatile one involving both the registered and the unregistered religious communities. There were profound concerns for increased breathing space on the part of the churches, but there were no signs that the Communist State would begin to respect the civil and religious rights of its citizens. The religious communities were always carefully monitored by the Securitate because they were perceived as potentially destabilizing forces for the Socialist Society. They had remained the only social structures which had

not been fully integrated into the Romanian political system due to their basic ideological incompatibility. The astounding and exciting changes that suddenly took place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe inspired hope and expectation and brought about a new respect for human rights and religious freedom. Churches in the Communist countries now found thrust upon them possibilities for leadership, renewal, and social service that they had not experienced in many years. There were also new dangers: old problems could surface once again, and the process of transformation itself was bound to invite its own conflicts. In the light of the bankruptcy of Marxist-Leninist ideology, there began a search for new values, new economic models, and new systems of political and social justice.

Until the middle of December, 1989, Romania appeared to be immune to these monumental changes or so its President loudly proclaimed. Nicolae Ceausescu made it clear that as long as he was in charge, Romania would not follow the other Eastern European countries along the road toward democracy and radical social and political change. Ceausescu appeared to be in complete control of Romania. His large, well-armed security forces had an extensive informant system that penetrated every part of the society and seemed to be omnipresent if not invincible. A Romanian poet stated in March of 1989 that even "the judiciary and the press" had become "instruments of intimidation and terror against the population," thus the "silent revolt" in the streets. In addition to an abysmal human rights record, Romania had an economic crisis of catastrophic proportions. The crisis provoked by the Ceausescu regime had been developing gradually, and particularly since 1982, people seemed to be the last priority in what was called a "nightmare world." There

were two groups, however, that continued to resist his total control--the minorities, particularly the Hungarians and the increasingly restive religious communities. It was the convergence of these two that provided the spark that toppled him in a spasm of violence that was literally televised around the world despite the elaborate and costly security measures that he had taken.

The basic facts regarding the Romanian revolution are well-known. On December 16, 1989, there was a confrontation between the local authorities, who were supported by the secret police and religious believers surrounding a Hungarian Reformed Church in Timisoara in the western part of Romania. László Tőkés, the minister of this church, was an outspoken critic of the oppression of the Hungarian minority and of the Ceausescu plan to destroy thousands of villages. Tőkés had been having serious difficulties with both the Church and the State authorities for several years. Tensions had been building up during 1989, particularly since July 24 when a videotape was shown on Hungarian television of Tőkés making his protests in his church. The videotape caused profound concern within the Hungarian nation and shocked the leadership of Romania.

The Reformed Bishop, László Papp, sent Tőkés a series of ultimatums ordering him to take a church in the remote village of Mineu in northern Transylvania. Tőkés and his church strongly protested this decision and accused Papp of

"violating the laws of the Church and the State." For his defiance TãfÅ¶kÃfÅ©s was put under surveillance by the Securitate, harassed, and beaten. His supporters were terrorized, and one died under very mysterious circumstances. It was nothing less than a miracle that TãfÅ¶kÃfÅ©s was able to survive this ordeal. The conviction that he was a spokesman for God in the midst of the "nightmare world" in which he found himself became his underlying theme. He had a burning passion for authentic religious freedom, a deep awareness of a threatened cultural heritage, and an unshakable dimension of hope grounded in his religious tradition and inspired by the dramatic changes brought about by *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. TãfÅ¶kÃfÅ©s declared that the revolution could not stop at the Romanian borders. His followers viewed him as a modern day prophet who had dared to tell the truth when everyone else was lying. He had the courage to challenge the corrupt, unjust system that tyrannized them.

The *Securitate's* persecution of TãfÅ¶kÃfÅ©s was to rally a small but dedicated parish to his defense and to evoke tremendous sympathy throughout the ecumenical religious community in Timisoara. This community seemed to come spontaneously to his assistance, and just as spontaneously freedom from tyranny became the common cause for the thousands who surrounded the Reformed Church, particularly after it was clear that the Securitate had abducted TãfÅ¶kÃfÅ©s. TãfÅ¶kÃfÅ©s was supported in a moment of euphoria by his own faithful parishioners and by an ecumenical community of believers (Adventists, Baptists, Catholics, Orthodox, and Pentecostals), who in turn inspired the community at large to take their destiny into their own hands. In that moment they transcended their ethnic divisions and their religious rivalries and united on the basis of their common human dignity in their desperate thrust against overwhelming odds for the freedom that most of them had never known. The citizens of Timisoara came to the conclusion that it was better to die with dignity than to continue to live in slavery. They found themselves ready to choose death over Ceausescuism. Their decision electrified their entire country and called the attention of the world to their dilemma. The fall of Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu and their alleged secret trial were followed by their execution on Christmas Day with the announcement, "Good news this Christmas Day: the Antichrist is dead." For reasons Ceausescu probably never fully understood, the apocalyptic mythology of the ancient books of Daniel and Revelation was very popular with the Romanian churches which had become profoundly disillusioned with his regime. What was perceived as the most powerful dictatorship in Europe collapsed in just a few days in the face of an aroused nation.

The international ecumenical agencies such as the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Conference of European Churches, greatly assisted by the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, responded quickly and in an unprecedented manner to help meet the shocking emergency needs of the Romanian people. They used their ecumenical networks to channel food, medicine, and relief supplies to the destitute Romanian communities. The Neo-Protestants were assisted by this ecumenical effort as well as by their own evangelical agencies in the West.

The revolution brought about dramatic changes within the Romanian society at large and for the religious communities in particular. The revolution made it possible for the first

time in more than forty years for the Churches to be really free, to begin to govern themselves, to set their own agendas, to revise their structures, and to live out their own lives and articulate their own mission in the fullest and most complete way. They had an unparalleled opportunity for their ministries and for their service, for which in large measure they were totally unprepared, although they had helped to pave the way for the revolution by keeping alive the spirit of democracy and the belief in the innate dignity of every human being.

A more careful study needs to be made of the various roles that the Romanian churches and their leaders played in providing important centers of dissent, meaning, and values within the totalitarian state. Within the Romanian Orthodox Church there was widespread restiveness which culminated in an open and forceful challenge to the idolatry of Marxist atheism by Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa. The discontent within the Baptist Church was expressed by Joseph Tson who charged that there was radical, intolerable interference in the life of the Church by the Department of Cults, warned that "if faced with a conflict of loyalties," Baptists would be obliged to put their loyalty to God first," focussed on the destructive impact of atheism on morality, and announced that the "Christ Revolution" alone would meet the deepest needs of the Romanian society. The deep concerns of the Eastern-rite Catholic Church were personified in the courageous and eloquent protests of the French lecturer from Cluj, Doina Cornea, who sent open letters to Ceausescu charging that the entire country had become "a gigantic prison" and its citizens lived in "constant fear." She asked "on the basis of what law" the members of the "Greek Catholic religious community" were prevented from "hearing Mass on Sundays." She faced Ceausescu with these poignant questions: "Do I not have the right to pray and receive spiritual comfort according to the religion in which I was born? . . . Does not the Constitution guarantee freedom of conscience?" All three of these dissidents suffered serious forms of harassment. Calciu was imprisoned under appalling conditions; Tson was forced into exile, and Cornea was beaten and placed under house arrest. Their protests, however, made a lasting impact on many thousands of religiously oriented as well as secularized Romanians who anxiously awaited the day of liberation.

TăfĂ¶kĂfĂ©s emphasizes that despite the compromises of the hierarchies, "the churches became guardians of evangelical, historical, traditional, and human values. Struggling with internal and external circumstances and drawing strength from their faith, the churches kept alive in the people the hope of liberation, becoming in this way the repository of a better and more just future."

The churches have already begun to take steps to use their new freedom to revitalize their communities and transform their nation in the light of their own particular perspectives. Understandably some groups are using this freedom in a very cautious way given their historical experience and serious reservations that many have regarding the present State. There are those who maintain that the original revolution has been hijacked and that a second revolution is necessary.

The relationships between the churches and the State have been changed in important ways although not without problems. The nemesis of the religious communities, the old

Department of Cults, became the "Ministry of Cults" and finally the "State Secretariat for Religious affairs" and may in time be transformed into a more supportive structure after some initial blunders. Important leadership changes have taken place at both the local and national levels in many of the churches. László Takács, for example, was elected a bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church replacing an unrepentant Papp who had fled to France. Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church resigned on January 18 only to be reinstated on April 5, 1990. The Holy Synod was convinced that this decision would strengthen the unity of the "ancestral" church and the pastoral and missionary activity so deeply needed at that time.

New forms of ecumenical ventures have emerged concurrent with old tensions which had never been resolved and new ones brought about by the Ceausescu tyranny. The Hungarian Protestant Churches have united with the Latin Rite Catholic Church and adopted a document which calls for a free church in a free society. These same Protestant Churches along with the German Lutheran Church have held meetings with the Romanian Orthodox Church under the stimulus of the WCC and the CEC of which they are members to assess their needs and conduct their mission more effectively among the people of Romania. They recognized the critical importance of developing trust and confidence within the country so that "freedom and democracy" could be fully achieved through "non-violent and reconciliatory means." They took steps to set up a national ecumenical platform which would facilitate dialogue among the churches, provide an ecumenical instrument whereby the churches could speak publicly, and established priority areas for ecumenical cooperation and witness. One of the priorities was "national-ethnic reconciliation" whereby the churches would have a special responsibility for creating positive models for a "multi-racial, multi-cultural society." Other priorities included new religious legislation, religious education in the public schools, the reevangelization of the Romanian people, a joint ecumenical witness involving ecological concerns, and the transformation of life for those most underprivileged within the society. They also established a Bible Society, and they plan to issue ecumenical translations of the Bible in the languages of the churches. A committee from the Lutheran, Reformed, and Orthodox traditions was formed to implement the proposals. The hope was expressed that representatives of other churches such as the Baptists and the Pentecostals would accept an invitation to participate fully in the aid programs.

The Neo-Protestant communities under the leadership of Joseph Tson have organized an Evangelical Alliance to protect their freedom and communicate their message to the nation by establishing publishing facilities, distributing Bibles, planning an extensive radio and television ministry, founding their own schools, and conducting major crusades and meetings throughout the country. They held their first national congress in October, 1990, with an attendance of 5,000 in Bucharest in the Palace Hall where Ceausescu used to exhort the party leaders and the nation. They expressed their concerns to President Iliescu regarding their perception of the "official bias" shown to the Orthodox Church, the importance of religious education, their right to equal access to the media, their support of the Bible in the taking of oaths, and the need for more restrictions on abortion. In many ways it is obvious that Neo-Protestantism has come of age. There is good reason to believe that the Billy Graham crusade in Romania in September, 1985, may have been

an important factor in the emergence of the Evangelical Alliance. His meetings attracted thousands of Neo-Protestants even though there appeared to be a deliberate plan to keep Graham's itinerary a secret. This was the first time in their history when they had the opportunity of officially coming together in such large numbers. This unquestionably raised their morale, made them much more visible, and enabled them to develop a deeper sense of solidarity with one another and with like minded believers in the traditional churches.

There are many common concerns which ought to encourage cooperation among all the religious communities in Romania. There is a complex of factors, however, which have kept them apart in the past: sociological, political, cultural, theological, and psychological, including distrust and antagonisms which have deep historical roots. The old tensions between the right and the left wings of the Protestant Reformation are still significant issues. There are serious problems which have surfaced between the Neo-Protestant Churches and the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding the issue of proselytism and the Neo-Protestant version of the Bible in which idols are translated as icons, reminiscent of their struggles in the interwar period. Also the Neo-Protestant success may be perceived as a serious threat to the self identification of the Orthodox as the Church of the Romanian People. The Neo-Protestants in particular are almost paranoid regarding the possibility of Orthodoxy once again becoming the privileged church and frequently make very critical and caustic comments regarding its spiritual condition. There is a deep feeling within the minority churches, articulated most clearly by Lăzărescu and Tăbăc, that the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church has been all too willingly a "tool in the hands of the dictator." Also the property issue between the Orthodox and the Uniate Church which was given full legal recognition in April, 1990, apparently remains unresolved. Two of the best statements from the Orthodox perspective defending the role of its church under the Communist regime are by Professor Dumitru Staniloae and Dr. Anca Monolache.

In the spring of 1990 the religious communities were invited by the "state secretariat for religion" to appoint representatives to work on a new law to grant the churches self-determination and freedom of religion replacing the 1948 Law of Cults, which had given the State the right of intervening in and controlling their internal affairs. The discussion among the representatives of the religious communities proved to be very difficult even though on many issues those present shared similar positions. The major controversy was between the Romanian Orthodox and the Neo-Protestant churches. The Orthodox argued vigorously for a more restrictive law, whereas the Neo-Protestants, joined by other churches, supported a version reflecting more religious freedom. At one point the Evangelical Alliance withdrew from the committee in protest against what it regarded as regulations that were too restrictive. Apparently there were at least three proposed regulations which troubled the Neo-Protestants: (1) the "organization and function of religious communities must be carried out in agreement with the constitution of all other religious communities" (which could be implemented so as to limit their evangelistic activity), (2) church activity should not "contradict public order, state security or public morals" (which reminded them of comparable legislation in the past that had been used to deny them their freedom), and (3) the Secretary of State for Religious Affairs would

"authorize the churches to buy and sell land and buildings" (which was a very sensitive point because the Department of Cults under the Ceausescu regime had made it very difficult, if not impossible, for many Neo-Protestant communities to acquire their own houses of worship). Gheorghe Vladutescu, the new Secretary of State for Religious Affairs, has reported that the most important point on which all the churches agree is that all the religious communities are equal before the law and that the Romanian Orthodox Church would not legally be declared as the State Church. Tensions have emerged, however, between the secretariat for religious affairs and the churches, the secretariat preferring a much more restrictive law than the one which the churches approved. A compromise statement was finally reached; the representatives of the churches decided to present it to the Romanian parliament with an accompanying letter stating that they were willing to support the proposed legislation but that they would object to "a more restrictive final version." It has been reported that the secretariat for religious affairs submitted the draft to the parliament but without the letter from the churches. Apparently substantive progress has been made by the religious communities in the legislation which they recommended; it is clearly evident, however, that the level of religious freedom experienced in the western democracies will be a goal toward which they will need to continue to strive.

Unquestionably there is a serious moral void within the Romanian society at large. This is the tragic legacy of the Ceausescu era which needs to be addressed. More than forty years of oppression, corruption, paranoia, and social atomization have taken their tragic toll. In an interview Aurel Dragos Munteanu, the Romanian ambassador to the UN, called attention to the "inherent destruction and mistrust" that pervaded the nation. He recognized that the fundamental problem was not political but moral. The religious communities as a whole are keenly aware of this problem, and they are anxious to make their respective contributions. The Neo-Protestant Churches in particular are deeply sensitive to what they perceive to be an historic opportunity to lay the moral foundations of a new society; this helps to explain their tremendous missionary zeal. The churches have emerged from the nightmare of the Ceausescu era with a high level of credibility, and they have a special responsibility to provide positive models for a society which is still struggling to find its way towards reconciliation, justice, and truth at many different levels. There is a crying need for dynamic religious as well as political leaders with unimpeachable credentials and with a vision of what the nation ought to become.

Members of an interfaith delegation from the United States visited Yugoslavia, Romania, and Hungary in the fall of 1990. Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, reported that in all three countries the delegation found "strained relations, inter-ethnic friction and interreligious strife." He felt that there was "an alarming absence of any feeling for religious or ethnic pluralism, and this bodes ill for the new societies there." Father Leonid Kishkovsky, president of the National Council of Churches, reported that this delegation met with religious leaders in Romania and stressed that they should call for "religious tolerance and respect." The leaders agreed that these issues were important but felt that in order to accomplish these goals they "must educate their parishioners to the values of a pluralistic society, and this requires a long educational process for which there is little if any precedent in Romanian society." The

people, however, may be far more prepared than commonly realized, but it may well be that the leadership is more than a small part of the problem.

The key in many ways to the problems confronting the religious communities is still the Romanian Orthodox Church, so inextricably related to the national culture and the church with which most Romanians identify themselves. There is the hope that Orthodox leaders will emerge, tap the tremendous power of this church, and transform it into a creative reconciling agent. The appointment of Bishop Daniel Ciobotea as the new Metropolitan of Moldavia is an important step in this direction. President Ion Iliescu has reportedly called upon the Romanian Orthodox Church to "contribute to the moral and spiritual rebirth of a new Romania in harmony with its mission and vocation." This ought to involve a profound sensitivity to its internal ecumenical, social, and prophetic responsibilities in addition to its spiritual mission and would go a long way toward challenging and inspiring the other religious communities to do their part. There is, however, a long history of theoretical rather than practical ecumenism in Romania. The churches have yet to demonstrate fully that they have transcended the ethnic and religious tensions that have plagued them in the past. They now could play an important role toward the goal of peace, justice, and harmony within the society at large if they would vigorously promote an authentic pluralism, whereby the integrity of the various cultures and faiths is preserved, respected, and recognized as enriching rather than impoverishing.

Tökés is the prophet in these areas as well. He has stated, "The church in Romania must 'convert and . . . be cleansed' so as to be the instrument of God to transform society, promote universal reconciliation, and create a 'new dignified and just world order.'" Tökés, however, is also very much of a realist. "In all likelihood," he added, "this task will be at least as difficult as it was to stand in opposition to the dictatorship." In the light of this statement it is interesting to note that Bishop Tökés is involved in a serious conflict with the present Romanian State. He has charged the government with continuing the "dictatorial methods" of the old regime and has claimed that the "spirit of Ceausescu lives on." The "hero of the Revolution" now finds that the Romanian parliament has launched "criminal investigations" into his activities for "insulting" the Romanian State by allegedly encouraging anti-government demonstrations. Tökés may have realized how painful and costly the process of societal transformation would be, but he may not have anticipated how difficult the burden of trying to be a prophet would be in the "new era."

NOTES

1. An official statement on contemporary Church-State relations in Socialist Romania was written by Metropolitan Antonie of Transylvania, "Church and State in Romania," Church and State/Opening a New Ecumenical Discussion, ed. Lukas Vischer (Geneva: WCC, 1978), p. 102.

2. Earl A. Pope, "The Orthodox Church in Romania," Ostkirchliche Studien, XXXI (December, 1982), pp. 297-310.

3. The Romanian Orthodox Church (Bucharest: Bible and Orthodox Missionary Institute, 1968), p. 17; Mircea Pacurariu, Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane (Sibiu: Metropolitanate, 1972), pp. 359-60. This is an Orthodox account by Romanian Orthodoxy's leading church historian.

4. P. Delroy, "The Church in Romania," Pro Mundi Vita Dossiers (November-December, 1978), p. 23.

5. This is the official designation for this group in Romania to distinguish it from the Reformation churches. They have also been referred to as evangelicals, free churches, fundamentalists, and sectarians.

6. John Butosi, "The Reformed Church in Romania - In a Historical Perspective," Reformed Review, LX (Winter, 1987), p. 19.

7. George Schopflin, The Hungarians of Rumania, Report No. 37 (London: Minority Rights Group, 1978), p. 7.

8. Legea Si Statulele Cultelor Religioase Din Republica Populara Romana (Bucuresti: Ministerului Cultelor, 1951), pp. 393-444. This law was frequently referred to very seriously, particularly by the Baptist dissidents.

9. For an early official interpretation of the attitude of the Romanian State towards the religious bodies, see Stanciu Stoian, "Attitudinea regimului de democratie populara fata de culte religioase" in Culte Religioase in Republica Populara Romana (Bucuresti: Ministerului Cultelor, 1949), pp. 69-103.

10. Trond Gilberg, "Religion and Nationalism in Romania," Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics, revised and expanded edition, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 336-351.

11. George Schopflin, "National Minorities in Eastern Europe," The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, ed. George Schopflin (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), pp. 309-12.

12. "Hungarian Plea for Religious Liberty in Transylvania," Keston News Service, no. 263 (November 13, 1986), pp. 9-10.

13. Schopflin, Hungarians of Rumania, p. 16.

14. "Romania, Bishop Takes Issue with Charges about Minorities," Ecumenical Press Service, 87.02.84. Nifon Ploiesteanu, assistant bishop to Patriarch Teoctist and the person in charge of the office of ecumenical affairs of the Romanian Orthodox Church, claimed that the minorities both legally and actually enjoyed all the rights and freedoms as both citizens and believers.

15. "Romania, Bishop Takes Issue," EPS, 87.07.12. Gyula Nagy and László Papp, the two bishops of the Reformed Church in Romania, affirmed with a "clear conscience" that their religious activities were subject to no restrictions.
16. Metropolitan Antonie of Transylvania, "Minorities in Romania," EPS, 87.04.116.
17. Karoly Toth, "Ethnic Minorities in Romania," EPS, 87.06.45.
18. "Transylvanian Refugees in Hungary," Religion in Communist Lands, XVI (Winter, 1986), p. 360.
19. Letter from Edmond Perret, WARC General Secretary, to President Nicolae Ceausescu, Geneva, June 14, 1988; EPS, 88.06.110.
20. Letter of Edmond Perret to WARC Member Churches, Geneva, June 14, 1988.
21. Presbyterian Survey, November, 1988, p. 33.
22. "Romania: WCC Body Receives Report and Proposed Actions," EPS, 89.07.40 (July 26-31, 1989).
23. Mary Dejevsky, "Romanian Leader Scorns Reforms," London Times, November 21, 1989, p. 24; "In Romania, the Old Order Won't Budge," The New York Times, November 25, 1989, p. 17; U. S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Revolt Against Silence: The State of Human Rights in Romania (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 26.
24. U. S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Revolt Against Silence, pp. v-vi.
25. Revolt Against Silence, p. iii.
26. Revolt, p. 1.
27. "Renewed Pressure on Transylvanian Pastor," Keston News Service no. 337 (November 2, 1989), p. 2.
28. "Renewed Pressure," p. 2.
29. "Securitate Threaten to Put Tökés in Prison," KNS, no. 339 (November 30, 1989), p. 3.
30. Oivind Ostang, "Romanian Pastor László Tökés Says He Was Let Down By International Church Organizations," Lutheran World Information, no. 11/90 (March 15, 1990), pp. 12-13.

31. William Echikson, "Father of Romania's Revolution," The Christian Science Monitor, January 25, 1990, p. 14.
32. "Countdown to the Collapse of a Dynasty," London Times, December 23, 1989, p. 6.
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35. Radek Sikorski, "Christmas Day in Romania," National Review, January 22, 1990, pp. 22-24.
36. "Ecumenical Aid Team Visits Churches in Romania," LWI, no. 1/90 (January 11, 1990), p. 3; "Report of the Second Ecumenical Team Visit to Romania" (Representing WCC, LWF, WARC, and CEC), February 2-8, 1990, pp. 18-24; "Ecumenical Appeal of One Million U. S. Dollars for Romania," EPS, 90.03.77 (March 21-25, 1990).
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46. "Romanian Churches Meet to Set Ecumenical Priorities," LWI, no. 26/90 (July 12, 1990), p. 16; Robert C. Lodwick, "Romanian Trip Report and Romanian Roundtable Meeting," June 18-25, 1990; National Ecumenical Platform Set Up in Romania," KNS, no. 356 (August 9, 1990), p. 11; "Romania: Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Reformed Plan Cooperation," EPS, 90.11.04.
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