

INVENTING ECUMENISM? INTER--CONFESSIONAL DIALOGUE IN TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA IN THE 1960s.

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Communist countries in Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Europe followed closely the Soviet model and directives in dealing with religion, copying the institutions that were created in the Soviet Union for interaction with the Church, or applying the Soviet policies towards various religious denominations.¹ In many respects, in the early 1950s in Romania, the center designing the policy towards the religious denominations was less the Romanian Party State and more Moscow. Yet the more the Romanian Party state created the means and mechanism of control and developed an autonomous stance towards the Soviet Union the more it defined a separate and sometimes different relationship with the religious denominations in the country. At the surface this relationship, as it was initiated by the Romanian Party state, can be seen as a one-sided one. The state controlled the religious denomination economically, through state salaries; socially, enforcing regulations on church attendance and church services that influenced the number of practicing believers; culturally, controlling the discourse of the religious denominations through censorship; and politically by segregating these denominations from the public to the private sphere. Even when, forced by circumstances, the state drew one denomination or another into public debate, associating it in disseminating its policies, this type of relationship was constructed on the same principle: the state gave the directions and the church adopted and implemented them. Yet, following Talal Asad's argument² the simple cooptation of the Church in the public sphere changes this space, for the church adopted the state directives but at the same time reacted to them, adapted them to its vision, and even dismissed them. The religious denominations became partners in a dialogue rather than subject to the state's monologue.

¹ For instance regarding the Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

² See Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism" In Van Der Veer, Peter, Lehmann, Hartmut, eds. *Nation and Religion, Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

In the 1960s when the Soviet Union allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to join the World Council of Churches – less in order to join an arena for theological dialogues and more in order for the Soviet Union to propagate its international policies – the Romanian party state allowed the development of a so-called “local ecumenism,” that paralleled this international activity of the Churches using this ecumenical stance that Moscow initiated as one solution for its nationalist policy. This ecumenical movement brought together several religious denominations that administered various ethnic groups and was expressed in common religious services, published materials on the history and dogmatic differences between these denominations and inter-confessional conferences. This paper looks at these patterns of interrelation between the Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, and Protestant Churches in Transylvania in the 1960s. It focuses on the involvement of the state in orchestrating this ecumenical movement in order to transmit its policy towards the national minorities and the response of the churches to the state’s attempt to instrumentalize them. By ‘churches’, I understand the hierarchical governing bodies responsible for creating the social, political or religious policies of the religious denominations.

The General Context

The 1960s are regarded in historiography as a period of “liberalization” of the Romanian communist regime. Responding to the de-Stalinization campaign initiated by Moscow in the mid-1950s, the Romanian communists developed “a platform of anti-de-Stalinization [based] around autonomy, sovereignty and national pride”³ designed to preserve the communist elite from the purges that decimated most of the communist parties in the region. The Romanian response to the de-Stalinization pressures of Moscow went through various stages, as periods of a relaxed and more liberal domestic policy linked to an increase in tension between Moscow and Bucharest alternated with waves of repression when these relations were eased.⁴ Bucharest developed a national policy designed to win popular support, fuelled with various measures leading to an increase in living standards. This marks the

³ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 167.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-186.

transition from the coercive system of the 1950s to a symbolic ideological one in the late 1960s.⁵

The relationship between the state and the church corresponded to immediate political goals, national and international. The characteristics of this period influenced the way in which the church and state interrelated. Thus a perceived relaxation allowed the Romanian Orthodox Church to slowly increase the number of theology students, send them on study programs abroad, participate in international events, organise training programs and ecumenical conferences. Compared with the hectic situation of the 1950s with its severe repression, one might be tempted to argue that the situation of religious denominations in 1960s Romania had improved. This “improvement” might have been the result of the end of a learning process for the state and the church, the internalization by religious denominations of the rules, norms and idiosyncratic demands of the state, a *routinization* of the relationship. This can also be related to the quasi-complete success of the state in imposing an obedient hierarchy and infiltrating the church with supporters of the regime.

The state nationalist strategy of trying to bridge the gap between the party elite and the population, accompanied by a growing interest in improving relations with the West,⁶ involved the religious denominations as transmitters of Party discourse and as creators of national policy. The religious denominations were used as spokespersons for the Party state from the early 1950s and thus the mechanism of control and enforcement for this activity was already implemented. Yet in this particular case the state played on a particular characteristic of the religious and ethnic map of Romania: the overlap between religious affiliation and ethnicity. This nationalist strategy is specific for Transylvania where it coexists with a politically correct discourse concerning the ethnic minorities where the state exploited the religious characteristics of the region in conducting its policy towards ethnic minorities. Once the Romanian Orthodox Church became the quasi-sole spiritual administrator of the ethnic Romanians in Transylvania⁷ and the traditional Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations with a base of ethnic Hungarian and German believers, the State could direct its policies towards a specific ethnic group through the religious denomination to whom that

⁵ Katherine Verdery argues for a periodization of the Romanian communist regime according to the modes of control used by the state (remunerative, coercive, and symbolic-ideological) and introduces the concept of symbolic ideological as a characteristic of the regime from the 1960s; Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 99.

⁶ Tismăneanu, p. 180.

⁷ This was accomplished by the forceful “unification” of the Romanian Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches orchestrated by the state with the support of parts of the Romanian Orthodox Church hierarchy.

group belonged. More so, by allowing and even organizing meetings between these churches it preserved control not only over the denominations but also over the ethnic group they administered.

What was Ecumenism?

The understanding of ecumenism was summarized by Professor Priest Spiridon Căndeia in 1966. He viewed this phenomenon as:

The preoccupation and activity of the Christian churches all over the world to reach an understanding, a mutual knowledge, a closeness and even a collaboration toward accomplishing the final goal *the union of all Christians in one "Holy, Universal [soborniceasca], and Apostolic Church.*⁸

The definition, as given by Căndeia, one of the key figures of the Orthodox Church intelligentsia during the communist period, comprises several important elements. First, one can notice the broad range of the ecumenical endeavour – it encompassed all Christians and all Churches. No particular denomination is mentioned and the final goal is utopian. Ecumenism encompassed dialogue based on knowing the other and “even” working together for becoming one – one Church, one community.

The religious journals of the Romanian Orthodox Church misused the term ecumenism throughout the 1960s and continued to use it extensively in the 1970s and 1980s. Over these decades, the meaning of ecumenism changed. Even in the 1960s one could distinguish between the period before and after 1964 in the construction of the terminology involved in ecumenical language. If in the 1950s there were some attempts to call the meetings under the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate’s supervision of all the religious denominations recognized by the state, “ecumenical” meetings⁹ thus implying the co-optation of the Muslim and Jewish communities in this Christian undertaking, later in the 1960s this concept changed. Ecumenism ceased to involve all religious denominations in the country and focused on the Christian communities, mainly the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. In the 1980s, in an article published in *Glăsu Bisericii* [The Church’s Voice] that characterized the Romanian Orthodox Church’s ecumenism, the author designed a plan to accomplish European unity through Church unity, possible through ecumenism. The

⁸Spiridon Căndeia, “Ecumenismul și viața cultelor în Republica Socialistă România” [Ecumenism and the Life of the Religious Denominations in the Socialist Republic of Romania], *Mitropolia Ardealului [the Ardeal Metropolitan See]*, Nos. 4-6, (April – June, 1966), p. 264.

⁹Ibid.

integration of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the European ecumenical structures was the Church's answer to European unification.¹⁰

The various interpretations that the term received in the journals and the lax and broad definition show that ecumenism was less a working concept at least for the Romanian Orthodox Church. There is a constant link with the diplomatic and political activities of the Church and less with concrete activities that would support the process of unification of the Churches. "Local ecumenism" preserved these general lines and was defined in terms of "knowing the other" through contact and dialogue. This was expressed in ecumenical conferences organized by the Orthodox and Protestant Theological Institutes, or in ecumenical encounters at religious services of various kinds. It was an ecumenism *from below* but designed, preached, and controlled from above.

Orthodox and Protestants – Dialectics of a Relationship

For various reasons, the ecumenical activity of the early 1960s was directed mostly towards the Protestant Churches. The position of the Orthodox Church towards the Protestant Churches in the period was more open than towards the Roman Catholic Church. In the late 1950s, at the initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church, dialogue between those Protestant Churches, which were organised in the World Council of Churches, and Orthodox Churches in the communist block, was allowed (or even enforced). As a result of this dialogue, four Orthodox Churches, including the Romanian Orthodox Church, entered the World Council of Churches in 1961. They participated at a World Ecumenical Conference for the first time in New Delhi in 1961, marking the beginning of an interesting collaboration between the Orthodox and Protestant Churches.¹¹ "Help[ing] the Protestant denominations in the Church Ecumenical Council to find the right way from which – for one reason or another - they got separated"¹² was one of the reasons the Romanian Orthodox Church offered for entering into ecumenical dialogue with the Protestant Churches.

¹⁰ Redacția, "Fapte și acțiuni în slujba Patriei și a Păcii, Înspre o Europă Unită," [Facts and Actions serving the Country and Peace, Towards a United Europe], *Glasul Bisericii* [The Church's Voice], No.-3, (January - March, 1982), p. 46.

¹¹ The Romanian Orthodox Church acknowledged the usefulness of these contacts that extended over four decades after 1990 since these were the training ground for several Orthodox scholars such as Ion Bria or Antonie Plamadeala. It also maintained the contact with the Western churches and theology for several decades during communism. See Ion Bria, "Condiția ecumenică a ortodoxiei" [The Ecumenical Characteristics of Orthodoxy], *Ortodoxia* [Orthodoxy], Nos. 3-4 (July - December, 1995).

¹² *Dare de seamă a administrației patriarhale 1961* [The 1961 Presentation of the Patriarchal Administration] Fond Administrație II/23, 1961, File number 25, 1961, p. 24, Arhiva Administrației Patriarhale Bucharest, Romania.

The timid beginnings of an international ecumenical activity designed and controlled by Moscow through the Russian Orthodox Church and infiltrated with state agents, were paralleled in the period by the enthusiastic ecumenical activities of most Christian churches. In the early 1960s, as a response to the Second Vatican Council, the Orthodox Church organised the Pan-Orthodox Conferences. The third Pan Orthodox Conference in Rhodes adopted a set of principles for ecumenical relations with the other Christian Churches and discussed the relationship of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world.¹³ It regulated future ecumenical relations with these Churches by classifying them with regard to their doctrinal closeness to Orthodoxy.¹⁴ Ecumenical activity towards the Protestants and especially towards the Anglican Church was thought easier to accomplish than that directed towards the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵

Applying the Rhodes principles was not the only reason why the Romanian Orthodox Church preferred ecumenical dialogue with the Protestant Churches. State regulation of the life of religious denominations and the close contacts between these churches throughout the 1950s made this dialogue and relationship possible in practice. The mere fact that such an ecumenical dialogue was possible could have been the reason for its practice.

Another “stimulus” for this ecumenical movement in the Romanian Orthodox Church in the 1960s was internal. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Romanian Communist Party launched a nationalist campaign. The first move was a re-direction of party discourse towards the involvement of ethnic Romanians in the Party. Therefore, at the beginning of the 1960s, the regime became more open towards Romanians but at the same time more concerned about national minorities. This was manifested in the adoption of a nationalist type of discourse carefully masked by politically correct language. Involving the churches in propagating this discourse, especially in Transylvania, was one of the ways in which the regime conducted its nationalist campaign.

The nationalist discourse penetrated the Romanian Orthodox and the Hungarian and German Protestant Churches at the beginning of the 1960s. The routinisation of this language is suggested by the ease with which it was used. In 1958, when the Orthodox Church was

¹³ *Cea de a III – a Conferință Panortodoxă 1964* [The Third Pan-Orthodox conference 1964] Fond Relații Externe IV E/115f, 1964, File number 322 a, 1964, p. 7, Arhiva Administrației Patriarhale Bucharest, Romania.

¹⁴ Ion Bria, “Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericilor creștine” (Dogmatic aspects of Church Union), *Studii Teologice* (Theological studies), issue 1-2, (January-February, 1968), p. 234. See also Ion Bria, *Romania, Orthodox Identity at a Crossroads*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994).

¹⁵ Bria, 1968, p. 240.

celebrating ten years since its “re-unification” with the Greek Catholic Church, Bishop Valerian of Oradea, one of the key actors in the local ecumenical movement of this period, delivered a sermon that spoke about possible tensions in Transylvania:

The accomplishment of the religious unity of the Transylvanian Romanians¹⁶ should not allow us, tempted by the devil, to mistake the citizens of various ethnic backgrounds and beliefs for the past oppressors of Transylvania. The Court in Vienna and Budapest and the curia in Rome were one thing, but the nations that live alongside Romanians: Hungarians, Germans and others, and their religious denominations: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and others, are another. The strength of our union demands that we live peacefully and honestly together with all the nationalities of our country as the Christian faith and the new constructive spirit inside our Country demands.¹⁷

The two ethnic groups that the sermon targeted were the Hungarians and the Germans, and the religious denominations named (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) served the vast majority of the Hungarian and German minority population in Transylvania. The *others* and their *other* religious denominations were not mentioned in the speech. Should one understand that the *devil* was actually tempting the Transylvanian Romanians and creating problems between the ethnic majority and these two particular minorities?

Several elements make this sermon important. One notices here the juxtaposition of ethnicity and confession in the language of church officials and in shaping their policies. The moment of the speech and the audience (Transylvanian Romanians) are the other two reasons for considering this type of discourse a key to interpreting the ecumenical policy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. If this policy was not politically, but religiously motivated, the call for peaceful coexistence with the national minorities would have made the Romanian Orthodox Church the bearer of principles of multiculturalism and religious tolerance.

The same type of discourse is noticeable in the Protestant Churches that joined the Romanian Orthodox Church in a *love thy neighbour no matter his/her ethnicity* type of campaign. Acknowledging chauvinism, fighting it and working against the nationalistic tendencies of their believers seemed to be what the Reformed Bishop of Oradea was teaching the hierarchy in the meeting of their Administrative Council: “I remind you, that in the near past some Hungarian believers had chauvinistic and nationalistic tendencies that spread hate

¹⁶ Valerian Zaharia refers to the 1948 act of forced *unification* between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church that has brought most of the ethnic Romanian population under the spiritual administration of the Orthodox Church.

¹⁷ Valerian, Bishop of Oradea, “Au împreună să trăim, au împreună să murim” (Either we live together or we die together), *Mitropolia Ardealului* (The Ardeal Metropolitan See), Issue 9-10, (September -October, 1958), p. 636.

between nationalities and it is necessary that mass opinion be raised against them and other negative social phenomena.”¹⁸

An important reason for the ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodox and Protestant Churches was their common stand towards the Roman Catholic Church, which in turn matched that of the state. The unresolved issues with the Roman Catholics regarding the Greek Catholic problem made the Romanian Orthodox Church extremely reticent towards any rapprochement between the two churches. On the other hand the Protestant Churches in Hungary might have influenced the Protestant position against the Roman Catholic Church. During the Second Vatican Council, various warnings came from Hungarian Protestant Church leaders urging the Transylvanian Protestant Churches to pay attention to the proselytising activities initiated by the Catholics in the name of what they called Vatican ecumenism.¹⁹ The number of reports on proselyte activities increased in this period and a vast majority of them were sent from Orthodox and Protestant Church leaders in Transylvania in complaint against the Roman Catholic Church.²⁰

Manifested Ecumenism

In 1964, with this in the background, the Orthodox Theological Institutes from Bucharest, Sibiu and the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj – Napoca began organizing inter-confessional conferences. The ecumenical conferences were structured on the model of the priest conferences. The priest conferences were organized by each deanery and supervised by the bishopric. They took place about four times a year and during the communist period were supervised by the local representative of the Department for Religious Denominations.

¹⁸Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Ședința Conciliului Dirigent* [The Meeting of the Administrative Council] file number 87, volume 4/1, 1964, p. 19 Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

¹⁹“The ecumenical problem of the Roman Catholics naturally preoccupies Protestant circles in the People’s Republic of Hungary, since most believers belong to the Roman Catholic Church. Professor Imre Kadar, the chief editor of the journal *Theologiai Szemle*, told the informer that the result of the [Second Vatican] Council is noticeable from the attitude of the Roman Catholic priests. News has spread, talking about a close Church union that for Roman Catholics would mean that they are willing to assimilate the Protestant minority. Many offers to share the use of some churches were made. On many occasions – led by illusions - the Reformed priests wanted to accept the dangerous offer. The Priest conferences seek now to inform the Reformed priests about the results and conclusions of the Council.” Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Darea de seamă asupra unor probleme bisericesti ecumenice romano-catolice* [Informative Situation on Several Ecumenical Problems of the Roman Catholic Church] file number 71, volume 3, 1966, p. 1, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

²⁰ For instance in a note the Department was informed that Marton Aron met the Greek Catholics from Ciogârla. Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă informativă* (Informative note) file number 86, volume 2, 1960, p. 12, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania. However a larger number of notes from informants protested at what was called marriage proselytism. ‘Concerned’ Protestant pastors complained that Catholic priests were marrying Hungarians into Roman Catholicism. Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă informativă* (Informative note) file number 86, volume 1, 1965, p. 26.

The subjects targeted ranged from theology to agriculture. At the beginning of each conference, three or four papers were delivered by selected priests and in the second half of the conference these papers were discussed. During the 1950s the conferences began referring to social, economic and political problems, like support for the 1952 Constitution or on the most appropriate harvest period. Priest conferences were under the double supervision of the church and of the state and their tripartite structure was fixed, involving social, economic and religious issues. In the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the priests received a detailed plan and the necessary bibliography prior to the organization of the meeting. This habit was implemented not only to ensure the “quality” of such a meeting but also to control the conference. For the same purpose of supervising the conferences, the Department for Religious Denominations requested that the topic of the conference be sent to the Direcția Împuternicitilor (The Direction of the Empowered) thirty days prior to the conference being held. They approved the conference, made corrections and suggestions, and advised the local state representative in religious matters [*Împuternicit - the Empowered*] which conference to monitor carefully so that no mistakes would appear.²¹

The inter-confessional meetings used this pre-existing network at a higher level. Since these ecumenical meetings involved five religious denominations and three theological institutes in their organization, their importance in shaping the relationship between the state and the religious denominations was greater and so were the potential problems that these meetings could generate. Thus, state control over these meetings was thoroughly enforced. The archives of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate still preserve the steps taken in organizing one such conference. In collaboration with the Department for Religious Denominations, the three theological institutes of Bucharest, Sibiu, and Cluj-Napoca, at the beginning of the year, set the program for the three conferences. The institutes decided the persons who were to deliver the papers and their names were sent to the Department. That same meeting also decided the dates and number of guests attending the conferences.²²

²¹ Considering that each administrative unit organized such meetings monthly and the Roman Catholics alone had 27 administrative units, this was an important undertaking for the department that received and centralized a great number of notes from informants in the territory. Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă Informativă* (Informative Note) file no. 90, vol. 4/1, 1960, p. 1, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

²² Usually at these conferences, the host institute invited all the members of the Departments, two or three delegates from the other two institutes, the rector or a delegate from the Roman Catholic Institute in Alba Iulia, hierarchs, councillors in the local Bishoprics, the directors of the seven theological seminaries, doctoral students and other students from the host institute. *Programul pentru conferințele teologice din anul 1972* [The Program for the Theological Conferences in 1972] Fond Învățământ, IV E 106/ 1972, File no. 322, 1972, p.49, Arhiva Administrației Patriarhale, Bucharest, Romania.

In the first years in which these ecumenical meetings took place, their declared purpose was to provide a forum of theological and ecumenical discussion for the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches that participated in the international ecumenical conferences organized by the World Council of Churches. This might have been why the structure of the priest conference was not adopted completely. Later, although in essence theology and church work were still the only topics of the conferences, the subjects were carefully selected so that they would allow the speaker to introduce aspects connected with the social and national issues of present day Romania.

A type of discourse concerned with national issues was present in the discussions that followed the presentations of the speakers. These “free” talks were recorded in their entirety and are preserved with the rest of the papers of the conferences in the Archives of the Romanian Patriarchal See and the Department for Religious Denominations. Starting from 1968, each Institute published four official volumes with the papers presented, the remarks of the guests, and the comments of the hierarchs and the department delegate, and sent them to the other institutes and to the Department. One can follow the changes that came up over time in the organization of these conferences.

The churches stressed the importance these inter-confessional conferences had in creating a framework where religious denominations in Romania would collaborate and work in good understanding. They preached the unity of ideas on a great number of problems, theoretical and practical, at a local level:

The religious denominations in our country have established good relations of collaboration with one another; ecumenical and irenic, this collaboration is in the spirit of peace and progress. The practical ecumenism in Romania is the result of a new social ethic that supports the moral and social unity of our entire country.²³

Serving God we also serve the people. This was the conclusion of all this ecumenical work that brought together the Romanian Orthodox and Protestant Churches. The presence of state representatives at these meetings gave a practical meaning to this phrase. By implementing this social and national discourse, these five churches transmitted the discourse of the state towards their believers. However this type of ecumenical activity remained quite distant from the average believer.

²³ Redacția, “Activitatea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în întrunirile intercreștine” (The activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the inter confessional meeting), *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, (The Romanian Orthodox Church), Issue 3-4 (March – April 1969), p. 278.

The churches had various methods of transmitting the conference talks and their discourse to the mass of believers. Publishing materials, comments, interviews and debates in religious journals²⁴ was one of the ways in which the churches delivered the message to the priests. Another, possibly ironic, suggestion by a representative of the Reformed Church in Oradea was to use personal example in spreading these ideas:

Our personal example should be used. Throughout history, many priests have shown patriotism and faithfulness towards the people. This faithfulness towards the people means for us being faithful to the great family of Socialist Romania, being faithful to the brotherly unity of the Romanian people in its way towards asserting its national being, and being faithful to the co-habiting nationalities.²⁵

A way of developing these ecumenical activities was training theological students in the “ecumenical spirit.” The young priests would then deliver the new discourse of the churches when appointed to their parishes.²⁶

In this period, the ecumenical topic was present at the priests’ conferences also. For instance in 1964 at the priests’ conferences of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the subjects were: *Ecumenism and the problems of the contemporary world* or *So all could be one - Christian unity regarded from an inter-confessional point of view and the ideals of contemporary humanity*.²⁷ The same can be noticed for the Protestant Churches. This ecumenical activity found at a local level was less strongly supported by the state. The remarks of the local state officials and of the Department for Religious Denominations show the potential problems such activities might create. Less controllable due to its extension, these attempts at local ecumenism in the priests’ conferences induced a hardening of state control.

²⁴ From personal experience of researching and working with this type of materials, I can say that they penetrated with difficulty to the ordinary countryside priest. From discussions with several priests I discovered that often these religious journals reached the provinces late or sometimes not at all. In the two collections of journals I had access to (that of father Nicolae Streza, a retired priest in Tîrgu-Mureş deanery, and that of the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Tîrgu-Mureş), the journals were published in the French style, requiring that pages be cut in order to read the articles. Both collections were only cut in selected parts, usually at examples of sermons.

²⁵ Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Patriotismul socialist /schiță/ pentru tema ședinței de îndrumare a preoților din episcopia reformată Oradea* (The Socialist patriotism /draft/ for the topic of the priests conference in the reformed Bishopric in Oradea) file number 89, volume 4, 1966, p. 18, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

²⁶ Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Programa analitică a Institutului Teologic Protestant de Grad Universitar din Cluj, an școlar 1964-1965* [the Curricula of the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj, School Year 1964 – 1965] file no. 89, vol. 4, 1966, p. 18, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

²⁷ *Darea de seamă pe 1964 a Administrației patriarhale*, [[the 1964 Presentation of the Patriarchal Administration] Fond Administrație, II 23/1964, File no. 35, 1964, p.15, Arhiva Administrației Patriarhale, Bucharest, Romania.

The Department started asking their local representatives to pay careful attention to the priest' conferences:

The plenipotentiaries [*Împuterniciții*] are asked:

To send the Department for Religious Denominations the program of the priests conferences at least 30 days prior to the conference ...

The Autonomous Hungarian Region plenipotentiaries [*Împuternicit*] should carefully study in advance the topics of the conferences of May 9th and 10th in Mureș so that no mistakes and confusions will appear.

The conference papers in Sibiu should be studied since they can easily lead to confusion and distortions (the conferences are annexed in the file).²⁸

The papers prepared for the conferences were carefully read and corrected and there were cases when the Department asked the Bishopric to abandon a subject altogether. One case in the archives, regarding the conference for priests of the Evangelical Church (Augustana Confession) in the Brașov region, not only indicates the level of state control over religious denominations but also reveals the special relationship between the state and the Romanian Orthodox Church. In an informative note sent to the department, the informant described the paper *The Religious Rite in the Romanian Orthodox Church*, which was about to be presented to the priests' conference, and suggested the Department should ask Bishop Muller to replace the paper. The paper, annexed to the file, compared the rites of the Lutheran Church to that of the Orthodox one and concluded:

We, the Deans, see here a ritual formation in which reason and the irrational unite in a mystical wholeness that we no longer understand and where we cannot think and feel the same. In one place, the Romanian Orthodox Church is superior to our church: its religious services achieve more expressiveness than ours.²⁹

The conclusion sent by the Department to the Bishop is surprising in tone and motivation. The Department asked Bishop Muller to abandon the subject because these types of subjects never existed in the conferences of other denominations and they felt this approach would have been prejudicial to the relationship between religious denominations and could offend the Romanian Orthodox Church.³⁰

²⁸Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă Informativă* (Informative Note) file number 90, volume 4/1, 1960, p. 18, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

²⁹Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă Informativă* (Informative Note) file number 88, volume 4, 1961, pp. 71-73, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

³⁰Ibid., p. 73.

This type of research nevertheless continued. The Romanian Orthodox Church published studies in its religious journals that focused on the history, dogma, traditions and religious services of the Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations.³¹

The Position of the Roman Catholic Church

The Romanian Orthodox Church opposed the initiation of an ecumenical dialogue with Roman Catholics,³² due to the Vatican's refusal to acknowledge that Greek Catholicism was not a valid method of uniting the two churches. During this decade, the Roman Catholic Church had *guest* status in the local ecumenical activities that the Romanian Orthodox and Protestant Churches organized in Transylvania. The Roman Catholic Theological Institute was invited to send representatives to all the inter-confessional conferences organised by the Protestant and Orthodox Churches. Their position in these conferences was awkward at times since the conveners and the personalities present were not shy in expressing their opinions about the Roman Catholic stand in the ecumenical movement, usually in a formal environment. The Roman Catholic representatives were often scolded for standing aside from ecumenical activities. For instance an entire conference was devoted to this topic in 1965 at the Bucharest Theological Institute: "The Attitude of the Roman Catholic Church Towards the Other Denominations and Churches."

The ecumenical conferences were not the only places where the activities of the Roman Catholic Church were scrutinized by the other denominations. The Second Vatican Council stimulated the publication of a number of articles and papers on the Catholic interpretation of ecumenism as seen in the special decree *De Oecumenismo* of 1964. In an article, Professor Fr. Nicolae Nicolaescu, the rector of the Theological Institute in Bucharest, asked whether "this decree constitutes a support or a hindrance in building Christian unity? Was this decree a real change ... or does it represent just a change in tactics? ... What

³¹ See for instance Redacția, "Considerații asupra teologiei protestante după 450 de ani de la Reformă" (Considerations on Protestant theology 450 years after the Reformation), *Studii Teologice* (Theological Studies), Issue 9-10, (November – December 1968); Petru I. David, "Curenți noi în teologia Anglicană" (New currents in Anglican Theology), *Ortodoxia* (The orthodoxy), Issue 3, (July – September, 1966); Ene Braniște, "Cultul Bisericii Vechi Catolice în comparație cu cel ortodox și cu cel catolic" (The religious rite of the Old Catholic Church compared to those of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches), *Ortodoxia* (The Orthodoxy), Issue 1, (January – March, 1968).

³² Rejection of plans to begin a dialogue with the Roman Catholics was not so surprising if regarded in a larger context. The Romanian Orthodox Church together with the Russian Orthodox Church opposed the attempt of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to honor the invitation of the Pope and send Orthodox observers to the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. *Conferința Panortodoxă Rhodos 1963* [The Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes 1963], Fond Relații Externe IV E/115, 1964, File no. 211, 1963, p. 1, Arhiva Administrației Patriarhale București, România.

position should the Orthodox theologians have towards it?”³³ Disturbed by the Vatican refusal to reconsider the Greek Catholic problem, the article concluded that the decree was nothing more than an invitation addressed to non-Catholics to enter under papal jurisdiction.³⁴

Still, the Roman Catholic Church undertook several attempts towards participation in ecumenical activities at the local level. The Department for Religious Denominations received a request from the Oradea Roman Catholic diocese to approve the organization of priests’ conferences for Roman Catholic priests. The Department’s comment on the request was preserved:

Although the administration unit calls these “priests’ conferences” we consider it necessary to begin an activity of guidance of the Roman Catholic priests, guidance that should be accomplished under our direct control [underlined in the original text]. Also, these conferences could offer some Roman Catholic priests the opportunity to express their views openly.... This simultaneously offers the Department the opportunity to point out and correct some negative aspects they present.³⁵

This attempt at organization at a local level was paralleled by the adoption of the nationalist type of discourse so familiar in the language of the other denominations in Transylvania.

However, the Roman Catholic Church integrated itself in a different type of ecumenical activity. Practiced for some time by the Romanian Orthodox and Protestant Churches, the common religious service could be characterised as one of the most effective ways of propagating the idea of ecumenism and also the national discourse of the Churches to the mass of believers. The Department preserves notes from informants about such common services:

Some religious services with ecumenical features were held in some churches in the country when they had as guests, foreign personalities, or in some special cases the presence of a Hungarian Bishop (for instance Buthi³⁶ in Arad, where he spoke in Romanian in the Orthodox Cathedral) among the Romanian believers and the other way around. In this last case, this action could be useful to the good relations between cohabiting nations.³⁷

³³ Nicolae I. Nicolaescu, Decretul Romano – Catolic asupra ecumenismului si problema unității creștine, [The Roman Catholic Decree on Ecumenism and the Problem of Christian Unity], *Ortodoxia*, No. 2, (April – June, 1967), p. 296.

³⁴ Nicolaescu, 1967, p. 301.

³⁵ Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă Informativă* (Informative Note) file number 86, volume 4, 1966, p. 1, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

³⁶ Sandor Buthi was the Reformed Bishop of Oradea.

³⁷ Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă Informativă* (note from informant) file number 86, volume 1, 1965, p. 4, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

The Department, in their meetings with the Roman Catholic delegations, tested them with regards to their availability to participate at such common, *ecumenical* services. Their agreement to participate in such services is strongly connected, in my opinion, with the local context where these were organised. For instance, in the Banat Metropolitan See of the Romanian Orthodox Church the atmosphere created by Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu favored such expressions of ecumenism. The Roman Catholic Dean³⁸ in Timișoara appreciated the initiative of Metropolitan Corneanu to hold a common religious service on January 1, 1965, where they participated alongside representatives of the Protestant denominations. The Catholics continued this collaboration with the Metropolitan See and participated in services on several other occasions.³⁹ The Department had reservations about this type of ecumenical activity. It was extremely difficult to control since it escaped their organization. Although they appreciated the positive results this activity might have on the mass of believers, they were reticent in accepting this open forum for transmitting state discourse to the nationalities in Transylvania.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The Romanian Orthodox Church opted in the 1960s and later in the 1970s for local ecumenism as a solution to its relationship with the state and the other religious denominations. One official context in which this local ecumenism was practiced was the inter-confessional conference organized by the theological institutes of different Christian denominations in Transylvania under the coordination of the “national” Church and the strict supervision of the Department for Religious Denominations administration on a local level. The published material and the *get to know the other churches* campaign in the priests’ conferences may also be included in this ecumenical activity. An unofficial way of promoting ecumenical activity was the common services of the Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches in Transylvania. The 1970s witnessed the release of two religious journals for an international audience, edited by the Department of International Relations of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in which these conferences were reported on and analysed, in an

³⁸ I use the term dean to translate the word *protopop* used in the official terminology of the Department of Religious Denominations for all denominations.

³⁹ Departamentul Culte, Direcția de Studii: *Notă Informativă* (note from informant) file number 86, volume 1, 1965, p. 4, Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, Bucharest, Romania.

⁴⁰ “The promoting of the common religious service method, especially in the way it is practiced in Timișoara, is not at all suitable. It only represents what the Vatican really wants. We think this is an unsuitable initiative by Metropolitan Corneanu and it is necessary for the Department to talk to him.” Ibid., p. 5.

attempt to demonstrate the tolerance and multicultural policies of the Romanian state, with regard to ethnic and religious minorities.

Where was the Romanian Orthodox Church situated in the relationship between the political and the religious? Was this ecumenism or a state policy towards minorities implemented through the Church? Were the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches in Transylvania answering to a state policy or to church directives in matters of ecumenism?

One could consider this policy an ecumenical one only with reticence. It was directed towards selected ethnic groups and religious denominations.⁴¹ It came after a rather brutal settlement of the Greek Catholic matter at the end of the 1940s that hardly allows one to think of ecumenism with ease. Borrowing from the official language of the state in Church discourse would also lead one to believe that local ecumenism was just a response to state policy. With few exceptions, the discourse of the Orthodox, Protestant and even Roman Catholic Churches was imbued with nationalist traits matching the discourse of the state in this period. The strict control exercised by the Department for Religious Denominations over the ecumenical activities of these churches, as revealed by the archival materials, leads one to regard this ecumenical movement with scepticism. The way in which the subject was decided, the influence the Department had in nominating the speakers, the control over the presentation and in some cases the direct official involvement in allowing a presentation or not and even the way in which several attempts to involve the believer in ways different than those controlled by the state were quickly discouraged, are sufficient reasons to be reticent in categorizing this movement as an ecumenical one.

⁴¹For instance the Romanian Orthodox Church excluded Neo-Protestants and the Romanian Roman Catholic Church from the talks.