

THE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ROMANIA

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Although the number of believers has decreased by about one million since 1992, the principal religion of Romania is, without a shred of doubt, Orthodoxy. This has been substantiated by the census of March 2002, when no less than 18.8 million Romanians (87 percent) were recorded as members of this branch of Christianity. The second largest confession is Roman Catholicism (one million believers), then the Reformed Church (0.7 million), Pentecostals (320,000), the Greek Catholic Church (191,000) and Baptists (126,000). The number of Greek Catholics is being disputed, however, by the Church's hierarchs, who claim over half a million. Enquirers allegedly refused to take down the answers of Greek Catholic believers during the survey. According to the results of the 1992 census, which were called into question as well, the number of Greek Catholics was 223,000. Other Churches like the Unitarians and Lutherans are small minorities with 53,000 and 66,000 members, respectively. The so-called new religious movements have been active in Romania since 1990, but do not seem to be very successful.¹ Only 8,524 respondents explicitly stated themselves to be atheist, while 12,852 said to be without religion and 11,734 did not express their adherence to any religion at all.² By and large the figures here above follow the ethnic break-up of the population, especially where Orthodoxy

(Romanian) and traditional Protestant Churches are concerned (Hungarian). The Roman Catholic Church (RCC), though, is less mono-ethnic than one would expect. Only 58 percent of its members declared themselves to be Hungarian.

'Why are we on earth?' the opening question of the pre-aggiornamento *Roman Catechism* used to ask its attentive reader. Many Romanians, Catholics or not, still contemplate this sometimes tormenting matter. A survey conducted by the Gallup Organization in May 2005 brought to light that about 62 percent of Romanians often think about the meaning of life, and about 53 percent, to be more precise, about happiness as such. Interestingly, death and suicide are rather neglected subjects. Some 49 percent of all Romanians call themselves happy, 61 percent optimistic or courageous, while 15 percent see themselves as sad, pessimistic or fearful. Their chief worries do not come as a big surprise: health (34 percent), prices (18 percent), their children's future (15 percent), war (10 percent), unemployment (5 percent), crime (5 percent), terrorism (3 percent), and social unrest (2 percent). However, 4 percent of all

¹ For the statistical information in this and the following paragraph, see the National Institute of Statistics at www.insse.ro/index_eng.htm

² The numbers above are more or less in line with the recent Gallup poll 'Barometrul de opinie publica', 'Religiozitate și relația cu Dumnezeu' (Barometer of Public Opinion, Religiosity and the Relation with God) (October 2005), p. 2; www.osf.ro/bop/2005/Noiembrie/07-reli-giozitate.pdf

Romanians fear nothing! When asked about happiness, 6 percent of the respondents said that they were very happy and 7 percent very unhappy. About 49 percent considered themselves to be fairly happy and 37 percent not so much. Good health and life are important to the Romanians (23 percent), just as are money and peace in the family (16 percent). Only 10 percent attribute their happiness to internal peace and 3 percent to faith or belief in God. Lust for life, success, love, children, harmony of life, job satisfaction and a good future for the children score between 2 and 8 percent.³

Another 2005 poll shows that church attendance in Romania is relatively high. About 4 percent of all Romanians attend mass several times a week, 23 percent of the respondents visit church several times each week, and 19 percent claim to go there more than once each month. Some 31 percent participate in church service only at the main Christian feasts. About 16 percent rarely go to church.⁴ Traditional social practices, however, continue to be strong. At least 67 percent of the population are married, only 4 percent of all couples live out of wedlock and another 4 percent are divorced or living separately. Where religious beliefs are concerned, Romania offers quite a mosaic of convictions, which seems to lack coherency. Up to 51 percent of the population believes in life after death, 57 percent in the final judgement, 61 percent in the existence of paradise and some 81 percent of all Romanians believe in sinfulness. No less than 91 percent believe in the existence of God, but only 61 percent of them agree that this article of faith is essen-

tial.⁵ At over 60 percent, belief in telepathy and lucky charms is among the highest in Europe.⁶

*The Re-emergence of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, 1990-2005*⁷

In 1948 the Romanian Greek Catholic Church (RGCC) was dissolved by the communist government and fled to the catacombs, where it would survive 42 years of hardship. Especially the first decade of its hidden life was characterised by severe persecution, and many bishops, priests and laymen suffered or even died at the hands of the regime's henchmen. While the Church stayed underground and believers either stopped practising or continued their religious life in the RCC or the Roman-

³ 'Barometrul de opinie publica' (May 2005), pp. 5-23; www.gallup.ro/download/bop_mai-2005_caiet-presa.pdf

⁴ 'Barometrul de opinie publica' (October 2005), p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶ L. Halman, R. Luijckx and M. van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values* (Leiden, 2005), p. 68.

⁷ In November 2005 the author visited Romania. Written sources: Forum 18 News Service (www.forum18.org); *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, 30-33 (2002-2005); *Irenikon*, 75-78 (2002-2005); Keston Institute News Channels (www.keston.org); *Orthodoxie Aktuell. Informationen aus der orthodoxen Kirche* (2001-2005) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. For current news, see www.kidon.com/media-link/ro.php. The Greek and Roman Catholic Churches in Romania maintain a website which, unfortunately, is only available in Romanian and Hungarian language: www.catholic.ro and www.catholica.ro

ian Orthodox Church (RoOC), a new church structure took shape. Lay people, priests and bishops secretly kept the Greek Catholic faith alive, sometimes at great peril. Quite remarkable in this respect was the founding of the order of the Sisters of Saint Basil the Great, which nowadays counts more than 50 members. It was an initiative that came from Hungary.

Once the communist dictator had been removed from power the RGCC re-emerged from its underground existence. This was a more than happy event, but gradually the great expectations of the early days gave way to a more realistic view of things. First, only a limited number of Romanians started practising again or changed rites. Second, the economic basis of the RGCC was and still is rather slim, and dependency on state funding (e.g. for salaries), benevolent foreign contributors and project organisations continues. For example, 40 percent of the revenues of the Cluj-Gherla eparchy (diocese) originate from municipal or state sources and 35 percent from donations from abroad. Third, it proved to be extremely difficult to pursue claims on Church property, immovables and movables, which the communist authorities had confiscated or handed over to the RoOC after 1948. The issue of Church property restitution lingers on to this very day, and doesn't seem to attract much political interest or fervour, either on a national or on an international level.⁸

When looking for a more or less comprehensive explanation for this difficult transition from communism to post-communism, a comparison with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

(UGCC) could be useful. First of all, the UGCC had been involved in the nation-building process since World War I, and therefore opposed itself almost instinctively to foreign communist ideology and to the Russian Orthodox Church, which came as a pair to western Ukraine. Thus, the influence of Soviet ideology and of Russian Orthodoxy was often merely superficial. More importantly, the underground UGCC got involved in the national dissident movement and publicly asserted its right to exist in the second half of the 1980s. Where the RGCC is concerned, its contribution to the self-awareness of the Romanians as Romanians is the undeniable fruit of the union of Alba Julia in 1700,⁹ and the Church's participation in public life persisted until the end of the 1940s. The RoOC, however, took over the founding role of the RGCC and became the leading voice and main pillar of the nation in the 19th and 20th century. Therefore, to emphasise a new national identity after 1990 did not necessitate that believers return to the RGCC.

A second motive might be the relation between majority church and Romanian state. Because successive Ukrainian governments had to balance the interests of a preponderant ethnic Russian majority in the eastern provinces of the country with those of a large Ukrainian majority in the west, both the Ukrain-

⁸ See *Memorandum an den Rumänischen Staat der griechisch-katholischen Gläubigen aus Rumänien aus der ganzen Welt* (2002).

⁹ K. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York, 1999), pp. 55-93.

ian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the UGCC received much financial support. In the case of the RGCC the state had to deal with a relatively small minority, so it could adopt a more carefree attitude towards its interests, while leaning heavily on the moral support of the Romanian Orthodox leadership. A third rationale is the absence of a large Diaspora abroad. Whereas the Ukrainians can count on large and supportive communities in North and South America that continue to provide personnel and finances, the Greek Catholics in Romania are in a much less favourable position.

The fourth reason is the denial of the ecclesiastical reality of the RGCC by the Orthodox. Equating Romanian Orthodox faith with Romanian ethnicity they view the RGCC as a threat to national unity. Furthermore, the RGCC is under the control of external and destructive forces, i.e. the Vatican, the West.¹⁰ Because it considers the existence of the RGCC as an accident of political history RoOC hierarchs have adopted a deliberate and pragmatic attitude towards it. In 1999, for instance, when the state 'encouraged' the Orthodox Church to receive the Roman Pontiff, they temporarily intensified the still unfruitful discussions about property issues. In Ukraine the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) holds a similar view. The opinion of the schismatic Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, however, is less outspoken, though individual hierarchs stress the hybrid ecclesiastical character of the UGCC. By contrast, their common antipathy towards Moscow and the desire for autocephaly under the Ecu-

menical Patriarchate build a mutual understanding between Greek Catholics and the schismatic Orthodox.

Some Data and Statistics

The RGCC now consists of the archbishopric Făgăraş and Alba Julia, and four bishoprics, Lugoj, Oradea Mares, Maramureş, and Cluj-Gherla. The Church is headed by Metropolitan Lucian Mureşan of Făgăraş and Alba Julia, who was named Major Archbishop by Pope Benedict XVI in December 2005. He now holds the highest rank below that of Patriarch. Mgr Alexandru Mesian leads the Lugoj bishopric, Mgr Virgil Bercea Oradea Mares, Mgr Ioan Şişeştean Maramureş, and Mgr Florentin Crihalmeanu Cluj-Gherla. The eparchy of Lugoj counts approximately 100,000 believers in one hundred parishes, Oradea Mares 100,000/127, Maramureş 132,000/184, Cluj-Gherla 60,000/158, and Făgăraş and Alba Julia 245,000/318. Therefore, the total number of believers is higher than 0.6 million. The faithful are spread out over 887 parishes. Together with the Roman Catholic bishops and the Armenian Apostolic Administrator in Gherla the Greek Catholics make up the Romanian Bishops Conference.

The number of diocesan priests is relatively high and levels off at about 700, but their distribution over the different eparchies seems to be uneven. The smallest eparchy, Cluj-Gherla, counts 150

¹⁰ This point of view mirrors, by the way, communist state ideology. See O. Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme. L'idéologie de l'Église orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Brussels, 1997).

priests, of which six are studying abroad and two others work in Italy and in Spain. Meanwhile there are some fifty-nine men studying at the seminary of Saint John the Evangelist. The largest bishopric, the major archeparchy of Făgăraş and Alba Julia, on the contrary, has just 194 priests. A break-down of the number of diocesan priests in the Cluj-Gherla eparchy clearly shows the typical post-communist pattern of age groups: in 2004 58 percent of the priests were younger than 40 years old while 22 percent were 70 years old and above. Many of the younger clerics were ordained after participating in an early 1990s 'crash course' in seminary education. Consequently, their priestly education is rather patchy and lacking the quality which the present generation of students is provided with increasing consistency. In order to update their skills these priests are invited to participate in summer courses. The members of orders and congregations total 471 men and women. The most traditional order is that of Saint Basil the Great (osbm) and there are two branches, one masculine, and one feminine. The men are mainly engaged in parochial service, whereas the Basilian sisters live of various activities, in the secular world and in the Church itself. In Cluj for example they maintain the Sfînta Ana prep school. Five sisters are now working there. There are bi-ritual Jesuits and various women's congregations, like the congregation of God's Mother, of the Christian Doctrine and of Saint Josef. Most of the women's orders and congregations are members of the nation wide Conference of Mother Superiors (FCRSM).

There are two important lay organisations: the Asociația Generală a Românilor Uniți (AGRU) and the Asociația Tineretului Român Unit (ASTRU). The latter, however, seems to be the most active of the two, and it is active in all eparchies. The scope of ASTRU is to contribute to the moral and spiritual renewal of the Church, to promote ecumenism and Christian charity, and foster a national sentiment according to Christian principles. Different means are at its disposal: spiritual exercises and pilgrimages; common activities with members of other confessions; charitable work; free time activities; publications; and ecological activities. Membership is restricted to Greek Catholics between the ages of 14 and 35.

As in many Eastern rite Churches the *actual* participation of lay people is relatively well organised at the institutional level. Parishes as a rule have elected pastoral and administrative councils, which, together with the parish priest, deal with the organisation of parish life. In addition, eparchial pastoral councils exist, in which mainly lay people participate. Still, the traditional reflex of employing priests to initiate, co-ordinate, or execute Church activities persists. Together with lack of experience – How to do things? – this traditionalism is considered to be the biggest hurdle to overcome when building the church of the future.

Orientalism versus Latinisation

On the scale of orientalism to latinisation the RGCC seems fairly latinised. This is quite visible, first of all. The members of the clergy dress themselves like Roman Catholics do. If it was not

for the wide sleeves of his cassock, Bishop Florentin of Cluj, for instance, could easily be mistaken for a Latin bishop. Priests wear the typical priest's collar or go about in civilian dress. The pews in church signal some Western influence as well. Furthermore, there are parishes where the believers prefer and are provided with a Roman style of liturgy. In one parish the introduction of an iconostas even met with overt hostility from the parishioners. Typical Roman Catholic devotions and practices are deeply enrooted in traditional church life: rosary, exposition of the Holy Sacrament, devotion to Saint Anthony of Padua, and so on. The existence of special services for children is, at first sight, yet another Latin accent. Where liturgy is concerned, Bishop Florentin underlines the reasonable and legitimate desires of the believers themselves, who, in the past, got accustomed to a certain atmosphere, a manner of doing liturgy, e.g. the shortening of the length of the Sunday service, specific songs, familiar prayers and so forth. An interesting example can be observed in Cluj, where Greek Catholics on a Sunday first visit a Roman Catholic liturgy and then attend a Greek Catholic service. In short, the RGCC serves its believers 'different wrappings of the same Christian faith', as a Cluj priest humbly referred to his Greek Catholicism.

Another particularity of the RGCC is the married clergy. In Romania celibate priests are the exception to the rule, and this is how the believers actually perceive them. In fact, the large majority of the celibates are either priests who belong to a religious order or widowers. In the Cluj-Gherla eparchy, for

example, the number of voluntarily celibate diocesan priests hardly exceeds the 10 percent mark. While celibacy in the RCC remains a taboo issue, this has produced a backlash in the appreciation of Greek Catholic married priests by Roman Catholics. Despite the fact that the RGCC is an integral part of the Church of Rome the presence of married priests outside the heartlands of Greek Catholicism remained a delicate matter. In the 1990s, for example, the Polish Roman Catholic hierarchy invoked a 1922 agreement prohibiting married priests to work outside the Ukrainian Greek Catholic ecclesiastical territories. In Cluj nowadays, studies abroad (that is, in the West) are exclusively limited to ordained celibate clerics, and to students for the priesthood, who previously make a formal promise not to marry. In the meantime married priests are not eligible for such scholarships. This policy was commented upon as a lack of ecclesial self-awareness. Still, a married deacon is now preparing his doctorate thesis with Professor Paul M. Zulehner in Vienna.

The task to renew the RGCC as an Orthodoxy-orientated Church is a matter of dispute, too. When compared with the Ukrainian, Slovak or Hungarian Greek Catholic Churches, Romania makes no exception. On the one hand, there is the perceived risk of codifying the one single formula to which all should adhere. On the other hand, there is awareness of the fact that the Church is still evolving (towards its 'Omega Point') and that there is not yet a stable foundation on which to build a new and more comfortable house. Improvisation was used as a word to describe

the present situation. Furthermore, the existing antagonism between the RGCC and RoOC makes it difficult to conceive of the road ahead and to discuss it within its own ranks as well as within an ecumenical setting.

Indeed, a closer look at the real functioning of the Greek Catholic Churches as a 'bridge' between East and West reveals endogenous and exogenous constraints. They seem to question orientalising *as a project*. First, is it possible or even desirable to subject the RGCC to a kind of normative redevelopment program? Second, would such a restructuring soften the attitude on the Orthodox side and consequently foster a more practicable ecumenism? To put it more plainly: Would it not be better to overcome voluntarist and utilitarian considerations? The Romanian Greek Catholics themselves see danger looming in both 'latinising' and 'orientalising', and deem it unproductive to ask the question of identity over and over again.

The Framework of Theological Education
Theological Education is now provided at three different locations: at the metropolitan see of Blaj, in Oradea and in Cluj; and it aims at two different groups: future priests and lay people. At all three locations there is a four-year course of so-called 'Pastoral Theology' for candidates for the priesthood. In the latter two cities lay persons are being prepared. They have to study two subjects for four years: theology and didactics (preparing teachers of religion), theology and language, social assistance, history or philosophy.

The Cluj Greek Catholic Theological

Faculty is presently the Church's educational centre. Even after 15 years it remains *in statu nascendi*, that is, in the birth process, as its present Chancellor Professor Nicolae Gudea emphasizes. First, though capable and highly motivated, the academic staff did not always receive adequate training, therefore slowing down the process of attaining the highest scholastic and educational standards. Gudea gives himself as an example. He is an archaeologist, who, in the communist era, specialised in Christian archaeology. Next, the insertion of the faculty in the traditions and framework of the Church and the academic community tends to be fairly complex, and this at the local, national and international level. It is a huge and time-consuming task after living a life of 'non-existence' for 40-odd years. Then, too, teaching efforts are scattered over a wider geographic area. Finally, problems of finance and suitable accommodation could be added to the list. 'Good and fast', Bishop Florentin attenuated, 'do not get along well together.'

Priests of the Cluj eparchy are being educated at the premises of the Theological Faculty, where the seminarians live and follow courses in a separate environment: the seminary of Saint John the Evangelist where much emphasis is put on ritual and sacraments. Unlike the RCC in most parts of Europe, the RGCC does not suffer from a lack of priestly vocations. On the contrary, at present priests are not short in supply and soon the Church will have to deal with a surplus. Of course, more priests could be employed in remote areas of the countryside, yet the number of Greek Catholics makes this impossible.

Each new priest would have to serve many small and shattered communities of ten, fifteen or twenty believers, whereas much needed finances, means of transportation, adequate housing and places of worship are lacking. For this reason in 2003 and 2004 the number of first year students for the priesthood was reduced to ten, but then, in 2005, it grew to thirty-two. For reasons of continuity, the eparchy does not want to limit the number of new students. In 2005 there were in total fifty-nine students for the priesthood, seventeen of whom were studying in Italy, Belgium or France. The existence of three separate seminaries was mentioned as an obstacle to greater church unity. At present 210 students are doing their bachelor in theology and ten more are earning their master's degree, seminarians excluded. In Oradea about two hundred men and women study theology; in Blaj there are fifty candidates for the priesthood. About 80 percent of the students, who finished their studies, found employment directly related to their field of study. Teachers of religion, however, are the exception. They have great trouble getting access to the state-run schools. Between 1990 and 2005 the interest for one or the other trajectory, seminary or theology for lay people developed in a similar fashion: there was an increase until the mid-1990s, stabilisation until the year 2000, a period of decline until 2004, and a slight increase in the present academic year. By the way, this pattern is more or less comparable to that of vocations to the religious life. Some 122 students passed their bachelor's exam in 2005. Finally, when looking at the future of the

Theological Faculty, Bishop Florentin of Cluj has formulated some priorities. First, the repossession of buildings confiscated in 1948. Second, the education of future priests by priests. Third, the training of future teachers abroad. Fourth, the continuation of the summer school program for parish priests. Fifth, finding financial resources for less well-off students and seminarians, because each year the eparchy has to step in with several tens of thousands of euros in order to cover deficits. Sixth, continuing cooperation with the Babeş-Bolyai University. Some of these priorities have met with criticism. For instance, the division between seminarians – priests educated by priests – and lay theologians, and the institutional separation of the seminary from the university have been commented upon as the expression of a ghetto mentality from which the Second Vatican Council wanted to move away.

Church and Society

Because of the broad gap between Church and society the RGCC too had to face the rather awkward and complicated task of positioning itself in post-communist Romania. Of course, this awkwardness and complexity is partly due to the specific history of the region. Until 1948 the RGCC had been very much involved in the nation's life, but traditions, practical experiences and knowledge were lost thereafter. Nevertheless, the distance between both spheres also derives from a present day lack of intellectual dialogue, which could be illustrated by the isolation of the world of theology from other academic domains. The fact that both Church

and the world interact on various levels (e.g. the practical and the theoretical; in daily life; in science and in politics), the vastness of societal problems, the fluidity of post-communist changes themselves, and discussions about the Church's commitment make it difficult to formulate a comprehensive strategy, let alone put a vision consistently into practice. Furthermore, contact between the Church and its flock often remained fairly superficial, that is, more or less restricted to liturgy. Meanwhile it is being said that non-sacramental pastoral care needs much more refinement. In short, continuity is failing.

The RGCC has engaged itself in a wide range of activities, which aim at forging a closer bond between society and Church. They are directed towards bettering the situation of disadvantaged persons, who in the ever-changing post-communist context had little or no chance to benefit from societal renewal. The Church wants to provide care, where others, e.g. state or municipality, often fail to do so. This ambition may differ with respect to form. At one end of the scale there is the advancement of agricultural development in the countryside, where small farmers still have a hard time coping with the change from collective to private farming, or the care for victims of women-trafficking. At the other end there are forms of basic care that some might consider unimaginative: the ubiquitous but necessary cantina, where meals are being distributed to the needy. Often these activities seem to be located in urban areas, where the majority of Romanians (60 percent) are living.

In fact many different groups and organisations are working within the cross-

section of Church and world: the different eparchies themselves, Greek Catholic parishes, Caritas, Kolping, individual orders and congregations, Church organisations like ASTRU, or Faith and Life which is concerned with the integration of mentally handicapped people in ordinary and church life. Some of these projects, like home care for the elderly, are being carried out as part of a nation wide effort in which the RGCC has teamed as a partner. For a small minority Church, the number of projects in Cluj is quite impressive. Some examples are: the Holy Mary Day Care Centre for mentally handicapped; the Holy Family Polyclinic at Moșilor street, where specialists of all medical disciplines give their free time away on behalf of the poor; the Providence Gynaecological Centre that is run by the Basilian sisters, some of whom work there as a nurse; the Saint Josef Social Centre in the Mănăștur neighbourhood in Cluj, where some 150 persons and fifty families are provided with basic needs; care for abandoned children; the Carpe Diem AA group; youth clubs; dispensaries for pharmaceuticals; and so forth. Some attention is given to the much needed agricultural development of the Transylvanian region. In the Oradea eparchy plans are underway for an agricultural school, which, in view of Romania's accession to the European Union, would give adequate and modern training in accordance with the required ISO standards. Traditionally aiming at young Catholic workers, Kolping is active in the main cities and villages of the Făgăraș and Alba Julia archeparchy, like Alba Julia, Blaj, Brașov and Tîrgu-Mureș. Among other things

it aims at free access of rural residents to sources of information and transparency at the level of local public administration, professional education, seminars – like Tolerance and Communication –, and the diffusion of Catholic social teaching. In the Cluj eparchy, a contribution to professional education is now being taken into consideration.

Ecumenism

Discussing ecumenical contacts at the local and national level, a Catholic bishop in the former Soviet Union once told an interviewer that ‘Ecumenism is dead!’. A Greek Catholic cleric in Cluj recently said: ‘Ecumenism is practised over our backs!’. If we read the signs of the times carefully, these two propositions are unmistakably true for Romania. What other impression could encounters between hierarchs in Bucharest or at the Vatican, and between foreign bishops and scholars in some secluded Romanian Orthodox monastery leave behind at the ground level of day-to-day church life? It is quite remarkable that ecumenical reconciliation is mainly pursued outside Romania and without those who are primarily concerned, the Greek and Roman Catholics. Commentators, so it seems, proclaim a state of affairs that still has to come into being, but which is wanted so intensely that it is presented as real today.

The visit of the late Pope John Paul II to Romania in 1999, for example, only bore the resemblance of ecumenical rapprochement. It became clear in word as well as in deed that the RoOC was less than willing to receive the Roman Pontiff, and it was first of all the pressure

from the Romanian government that persuaded the Orthodox hierarchs to invite the Pope. Yet, once the Orthodox Church consented, they were in a position to dictate the conditions under which the visit to Romania would take shape. Now they could obtain concessions from the Romanian government and simultaneously profit from Pope John Paul’s eagerness to reconcile with Orthodoxy. For example, the Vicar of Christ was not allowed to travel to Transylvania or even leave Bucharest, and a Mass with Greek Catholic believers could not take place under the open sky. The Vatican press secretary Joaquín Navarro-Valls called the papal visit to Romania the second most complicated ever. Until then only the visit to communist Cuba had met with more difficulties.

According to the Greek Catholic Bishop Florentin of Cluj the significance of this visit was therefore above all the comfort which the Roman Pontiff brought to so many. ‘Things would have been different if the Pope had been a much younger and stronger man. In 1999 it was not as if someone had come to conquer Romania. Now this old and fragile man touched the hearts of whoever saw him. And, of course, the millions of spectators in the streets of Bucharest were not just Greek or Roman Catholics. On the contrary, they were mostly Orthodox believers.’ However, popular enthusiasm should be distinguished from ecumenical rapprochement between RCC, RGCC and RoOC.

Of course, on 12 October 2002 at the Vatican, Patriarch Teoctist I and Pope John Paul II signed a common declaration that called on all Christian faiths to take an example from the good relations

between the RCC and RoOC. Yet, it may be asked which relations they exactly meant. One thing is certain, not those in Transylvania. The Patriarch's promise one day later to 'continue the dialogue and cooperation with our Greek and Roman-Catholic brothers and sisters' was left without consequences. Anyway, there was nothing much left to go on with. Utterances by the Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina Archbishop Daniel Ciobotea of Iași on 25 May 2005 that under Pope Benedict significant steps towards unity could be achieved, e.g. the recognition of papal primacy, incur similar criticism. One may ponder on what exactly changed in the inter-Church relationship in Romania, or within the 'black box' of the RoOC itself. What's more, Ciobotea raised some well-known yet worn out clichés: Roman Catholic proselytism and the existence of the Uniate Church, which he labelled 'existential issues'. Furthermore, both Churches should act 'more spiritual and less diplomatic' than before.¹¹ Even so, contacts exist, yet only at the grass roots level, and they are of an informal or personal nature.

Inter-Church Antagonism

Hostility between the RoOC and RGCC reveals itself most strikingly in the still unresolved question of property restitution and the protection of the Greek Catholic heritage. There are two explanatory reasons. First, there is the almost overall unwillingness of the RoOC to accommodate the Greek Catholics. Second, consecutive Romanian governments lack any determination to meet the fairly modest Greek

Catholic claims and to enforce the rule of law. In fact, the RoOC, local and state authorities blatantly ignore current legislation or refuse to enforce decisions of the court. But legal complications may soon become a thing of the past. A project of religious law is now being discussed by the lower house, which specifically states that places of worship and other religious objects will not be subject to court rulings. The bill has been criticised by human rights activists and minority churches as unconstitutional and in violation of international law and constitutes a significant setback for the RGCC.¹² Meanwhile Greek Catholics only formally insist on complete restitution. They centre their demands on former cathedrals and on churches and parish houses that are no longer in use.

In June 2004, only 4 percent of the former Greek Catholic churches, monasteries, vicarages and other premises had been restored to their previous owners, and about 350 communities still held improvised religious services. Three of

¹¹ For an extensive excerpt from this news item at www.eni.ch, see http://merecomments.typepad.com/merecomments/2005/06/wehave_a_chance.html

¹² F. Corley, 'Romania: Controversial religion bill goes to Chamber of Deputies' (www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=721). This law proposal, which is set to replace the 1948 law, is being criticised because of its vague wording, lack of legal guarantees (the judiciary is unfriendly to minority churches) and the devolution of discretionary power to local authorities. On 31 January 2006 a spokesperson declared that the RoOC agrees with the proposed law.

them had to celebrate mass in the open air. The eparchy of Lugoj, which shares some borders with the Romanian Orthodox archbishopric of Timisoara, is the atypical exception to the rule. Metropolitan of Banat Archbishop Nicolae Corneanu was responsible for the restitution of some 160 churches to the RGCC, including the cathedral in Lugoj. In 1999 he publicly pronounced himself in favour of restitution and subsequently he was fiercely criticised by the Orthodox Holy Synod, where he is just a marginal player now. Nonetheless, if the 'Timisoara churches' are excluded from the equation, the percentage mentioned above drops to 2 percent.

The numerous cases of deliberate destruction of formerly Greek Catholic churches by Romanian Orthodox since 1990 are even more disconcerting. Over the last 15 years eleven church buildings were destroyed: five stone and six wooden churches, one of them dating back as far as 1695. In September 2001 the Saint Nicholas church in Vadu-Izei was the last building to be torn down. Presently some fifteen churches are under threat of being wrecked or demolished. The wanton destruction of the Greek Catholic patrimony by members of the RoOC occurs with the explicit approval or, at least, the acquiescence of the Church's hierarchy. It calls into question the measure of Orthodox charity.

An interesting example is the Ascension church at the former Greek Catholic Nicula monastery near Gherla, a site of national heritage and a well known place of pilgrimage. There the visitors worship a famous weeping icon of the Virgin, who allegedly sheds tears over the Greek Catholic union with Rome

(1700). In order to better accommodate the many pilgrims, a new, much larger church is now being built, but due to possible damage to the nearby old church the project remains shrouded in controversy. Despite a court order halting construction work, it continued as before and the state even provided funding. On 16 August 2005 Premier Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu came on a visit and met with the local Orthodox Archbishop, Bartolomeu Anania of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, who according to the Romanian media wields an 'iron fist' in his archdiocese. He frequently resides in Nicula. More recently, a considerable part of the plastered outside wall of the choir of the former Greek Catholic church building has been removed in an untidy manner. Up to one layer of bricks was carved out, leaving some 20 sq m. of brickwork open to the elements. Seemingly the purpose is to undermine the structural integrity of the edifice.

Interviewed one day before his last anniversary on 8 February 2005 the now 91 year old Patriarch Teoctist I spoke proudly about earlier achievements. He was less modest than in 1990. Following the Romanian revolution the supreme head of the RoOC briefly retired to atone for the sins of the past, yet returned to power because his flock did not accept this unprecedented step. 'A silent resistance existed. We did not make any compromises, only concessions', he explained.¹³ It remains to be seen what this growing self-consciousness will entail for the RGCC. Might it be: Neither compromises nor concessions?

¹³ 'Chronique des Églises. Roumanie', *Irénikon*, 78 (2005), pp. 256-257.