

Rebuilding What Was Destroyed

The Romanian Greek Catholic Church – 15 Years after

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Introduction

'Ambiguity' characterises the developments in Romanian society over the last 15 years. In December 1989 the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was expelled from power, and Ion Illiescu, one of his former paladins who had previously fallen out of grace, took over the presidency. He held office until 1996 and then miraculously returned for yet another term in 2000. At the same time the seemingly directionless and indecipherable day-to-day politics raised questions about the nature of the Romanian revolution as well. Rethinking this recent past is not without importance, but, quite understandably, most Romanians seem more preoccupied with their still uncertain future. Changes often went in all different directions, except those many had hoped for. There remains a lot to be desired, and at various levels: the religious landscape, political culture, rule of law, devolution of central government power, economical development, social justice, security in life...

To rebuild what has been destroyed or to reconstruct what even today is in the process of destruction, and to do so while bridging 42 years of underground existence, this still is the key task of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church in the post-communist era. 15 years of freedom have gone by, but basic requirements have not been met yet. Therefore, dependency on foreign resources did not decrease. Throughout the last 10 years grants were approved by the foundation Communicantes to assist the Romanian Greek Catholic Church as well as its Roman Catholic sister Church. Among the recipients was the Greek Catholic Theological Faculty, which,

e.g., received funding for scholarships for students, who lack resources to participate in the theological program. Several members of the teaching staff took part in the 'Prospekt' exchange program of the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at the University of Nijmegen. Here Communicantes lend a helping hand too.

Early 2005 the staff of Communicantes received an invitation to take part in the 18 to 20 November international conference 'Greek-Catholic education, past, present and future'.

This symposium marked the rebirth of the Greek Catholic Theological Faculty in 1990. Naturally, the offer to participate in this joyful occasion was gladly accepted. On 19 November Frans Hoppenbrouwers presented the paper 'Exchange between East and West, a necessity of life?' (see Annex 1).



Teachers of the faculty Alin Tat and Sorin Martian on the left and Dan Ruscu on the far right. In between, guest speakers Yves Brachet o.p. and Frans Hoppenbrouwers in intense conversation.

Romanian Society, 15 Years after

Even though Cluj is one of the major cities of Romania, it is difficult to assess the changes in society on the basis of just a one week trip. At first sight things have altered significantly. Traffic jams, the quasi disappearance of the pre-1990 Dacia, streetlight at night, the many billboards along the motorway, renovated and new houses indeed give a different feel. The general atmosphere has changed quite considerably since 1995, when I last visited Transylvania. Furthermore, people seem less suspicious towards strangers, more open. Anyway, the local, more outgoing, more Southern mentality differs from that in countries like Ukraine, Lithuania or Latvia. These, however, are general observations.

A mere glance at the core economic data confirms this general impression. The Romanian economy is doing relatively well. It is the second largest in the region, after Poland, and the seventh largest in Europe. Moreover, Romania is one of Europe's leading agricultural producers, accounting for about one-sixth of all agricultural land, and the world's eleventh-largest agricultural producer and the sixth-largest agricultural exporter. Yet, the farming sector depends heavily on subsidies from the European Union, which total some € 1 billion a year. Romania

meanwhile is a popular tourist destination, and tourism accounts for an important part for the country's wealth. In the Fagat suburb of Cluj, for instance, there is a large camping site, where allegedly many Dutch spend their summer holidays. Economic growth is estimated at 6.5% and inflation at 7% for the year 2005. Unemployment in September 2005 was officially at an impressive 5.5%, but the labour market situation is still very much characterised by underemployment. While some 30% of the Romanian workforce labours in the agricultural sector, it generates just 13% of the gross domestic product (GDP). The Bucharest area is the main engine of the Romanian economy, while the Cluj region is the third strongest, after Timisoara. Yet, future budget cuts, domestic and foreign debts, high inflation and the persistence of large state subsidised economic sectors put serious constraints on future economic developments.

Despite the structural imbalances and danger zones of the Romanian economy, this data is quite remarkable. However, in day to day life things look different. Often the reality is pretty harsh and consequently life choices are fluid and provisional. On the one hand a middle class of more or less affluent citizens is emerging, which can afford itself to buy a house, an apartment or a new car. On the other hand the group of less well to do remains considerable. Some 6.5 million citizens (30% of the total population) now live below the poverty line, and about a third of them (2 million) suffer extreme conditions of deprivation. The minimum income of the typical Romanian worker is about € 95 euros per month, which would not be enough to sustain a family with the average size of about 3 persons. To be able to do so Romanians themselves consider a monthly income of € 430 as appropriate, while in fact the average family income in April 2005 reached a meagre € 230. Findings of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) show that compared to two decades ago the overall quality of life did not improve. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that about 66% of the population is dissatisfied with the life they lead. Life expectancy for men and women now hovers at around age 70.

With a population of almost 21.5 million Romania is the sixth largest country of Europe, but the number of inhabitants is falling due to significant labour emigration and a fairly low fertility rate. These last Romanian went some menial work, countries like Italy Furthermore, the experienced a so-of its own: the Romania of highly promising students minds to the West. led to women's



'Come to us! We have a solution' Publicity for the Romanian 'Praxis'.

years many a abroad to take up especially in Latin and Spain. country called 'brain drain' departure from educated citizens, and adventurous Labour migration trafficking too.

Religion and Orientation in Life

Even if the number of believers dropped by one million since 1992, the principal religion of Romania is Orthodoxy without a shred of doubt. This state of affairs has been substantiated by the census of March 2002, when no less than 18.8 million Romanians (87%) were recorded as members of this branch of Christianity. The second largest confession is Roman Catholicism (1 million believers), then the Reformed Church (0.7 million), Pentecostals (320,000), the Greek Catholic Church (191,000) and Baptists (126,000). However, the number of Greek Catholics is being disputed because of irregularities that were committed during the survey. Enquirers allegedly refused to take down the answers of Greek Catholic believers. According to the results of the 1992 census, which were called into question as well, this figure was 223,000. Meanwhile the Church's hierarchy claims over half a million, maybe 0.7 million adherents. Traditional Churches like the Unitarians and Lutherans are small minorities with each 53 and 66,000

believers. The so-called new religious movements have been active in Romania ever since 1990, but don't seem to be very successful.

Quite remarkable is the number of Protestants, which totals at 1.3 million. Another interesting outcome was the number of Chinese, Turk and Tartar Greek Catholics (1, 5 and 3). No more than 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. 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 though is less mono-ethnic as 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 2005 brought to light that about 62% of the Romanians often think about the meaning of life, and about 53%, to be more precisely, about happiness as such. Fortunately, death and suicide are rather neglected subjects. Some 49% of all Romanians call themselves happy, 61% optimistic or courageous, while 15% see themselves as sad, pessimistic or fearful. Their worries do not come as a big surprise: health (34%), prices (18%), their children's future (15%), war (10%), unemployment (5%), crime (5%), terrorism (3%), and social unrest (2%). However, 4% of all Romanians fear nothing! When asked about happiness, 6% of the respondents said that they were very happy and 7% very unhappy. About 49% considered themselves to be fairly happy and 37% not so much. Unconditioned health and life are important to the Romanians (23%), just as money and peace in the family (16%). Only 10% attribute their happiness to internal peace and 3% to faith, 8% to lust for life, 5% to success, 4% to love, children or harmony of life, 3% to job satisfaction and 2% to a good future for their children.

Another 2005 poll shows that church attendance in Romania is relatively high. About 1% of all Romanians attend mass on a daily basis, 3% do so several times a week, 19% of the respondents visit church every week, and 17% claim to go there two or three times per month. No more than 5% attend service once a month. Some 34% only participate in church service at the main Christian feasts. About 9% visit church just once a year and 11% do not go there at all. Traditional social practices continue to be strong. At least 67% of the inhabitants are married, while only 4% of all couples live out of wedlock and about 4% are divorced or living separately. Whereas faith is concerned, Romania offers a pretty mosaic picture of religious convictions, which seemingly lacks coherency. Up to 53% of the population believes in eternal life, 61% in the existence of paradise and 68% in the final judgement. Some 86% percent of all Romanians believe in the power of prayer. Belief in telepathy and lucky charms is among the highest in Europe at over 60%.



Bishop Florentin of Cluj-Gherla taking notes at the opening session of the November 2005 conference.

The re-emergence of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church

In 1948 the Romanian Greek Catholic Church 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 many believers continued their religious practices in the Romanian Orthodox Church, 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 previously did not exist and nowadays counts more than 50 members. It was an initiative that came from Hungary.

Once the communist dictator had been removed from power the Romanian Greek Catholic Church 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 believers changed from Romanian Orthodoxy to Greek Catholicism. Second, the economic basis of the Greek Catholic Church was and still is rather slim, and dependency on state funding (e.g. for salaries), benevolent foreign contributors and project organisations like Church in Need, Communicantes or Renovabis continues. For example, 40% of the revenues of the Cluj-Gherla eparchy (diocese) originate from municipal or state sources and 35% 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 Romanian Orthodox Church 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, neither on a national nor on an international level.

When looking for a more or less comprehensive explanation for this difficult transition from communism to post-communism the comparison with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church could come in useful. First of all, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had been involved in the nation building process for almost a century (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 Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church got involved in the national dissident movement and publicly asserted its right to exist in the second half of the 1980s. Whereas the Romanian Greek Catholic Church 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, and the Church's participation in public life persisted until the end of the 1940s. It was the Romanian Orthodox Church, however, which took over the founding role of the Greek Catholic Church and became leading vocal and main pillar of the state in the 19th and 20th century. Therefore, to emphasise a new national identity after 1990 did not necessitate believers to return to the Greek Catholic Church.



The Assumption Orthodox cathedral at Avram Iancu square, Cluj – nation, nationalism, Church.

A second motive might be the relation between majority Church and 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 Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church received much state support. In the case of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church the state had to deal with a relatively small minority, so it could adopt a

more carefree attitude towards its interests, and lean heavily on the moral support of the Romanian Orthodox leadership. A third rationale is the absence of a large Diaspora abroad. While the Ukrainians can count on large and supportive communities in North and South America which continue to provide personnel and finances, the Greek Catholics in Romania are in a much less favourable position.

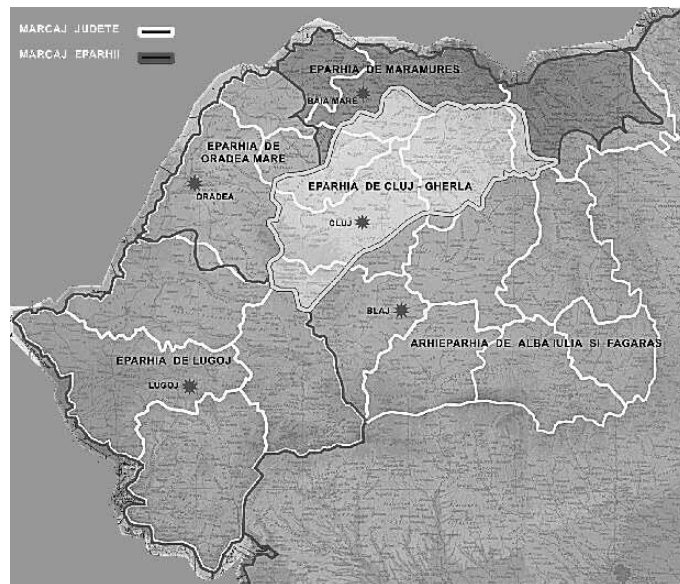
The fourth reason is the denial of the ecclesiastical reality of the Greek Catholic Church by the Orthodox. Because the Romanian Orthodox Church considers the Greek Catholic Church as an accident of history, and, consequently as a deficient church, its hierarchs adopted a deliberate and pragmatic attitude towards it. In 1999, for instance, when the State 'encouraged' the Orthodox Church to receive the Roman Pontiff, they temporarily intensified the 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 Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. By contrast, their common antipathy towards Moscow and the desire for autocephaly under the Ecumenical Patriarchate build a mutual understanding between Greek Catholics and the schismatic Orthodox.

Some Data and Statistics

The Romanian Greek Catholic Church now consists of the archbishopric Alba Julia-Fagaras, and four bishoprics, Lugoj, Oradea Mares, Maramures and Cluj-Gherla. The Church is headed by Archbishop Lucian Muresan of Alba Julia-Fagaras. Mgr Alexandru Mesian leads the Lugoj bishopric, Mgr Virgil Bercea Oradea Mares, Mgr Ioan Sisesteanu Maramures, and Mgr Florentin Crihalmeanu Cluj-Gherla. The eparchy of Lugoj counts approximately 100,000 believers in 100 parishes, Oradea Mares 100,000/127, Maramures 132,000/184, Cluj-Gherla 60,000/158, and Alba Julia-Fagaras 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 priests, of which six are studying abroad and two more work in Italy and in Spain. Meanwhile there are some 59 men studying at the seminary of Saint John the Evangelist. The largest bishopric, Alba Julia-contrary has just up of the volume in the Cluj-Gherla shows the typical pattern of age 58% of the younger than 40 were 70 years old the younger in an early 1990s Consequently, education is lacking the consistency with generation of provided. In order they are invited summer courses. orders and



The Romanian Greek Catholic eparchies.

the archeparchy of Fagaras, on the 194 priests. A break of diocesan priests eparchy clearly post-communist groups: in 2004 priests were years old while 22% and above. Many of clerics participated crash course. their priestly rather patchy and increasing which the present students is to update their skills to participate in The members of congregations total

471 men and women. The most traditional (i.e. Orthodox) 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, while the Basilian sisters live of various activities, in the secular world and in the Church itself. In Cluj for example they maintain the Sfinta 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 member of the nation wide Conference of Mother Superiors (FCRSM).

There are two important lay organisations: the Asociatia Generala a Romanilor Uniti (AGRU) and the Asociatia Tineretului Roman 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 activities; free time activities; publications; and ecological activities. Membership is restricted to Greek Catholics between age 14 and 35.

Like in many Eastern rite Churches the *actual* participation of lay people is relatively well organised at the institutional level. Parishes as a rule have an elected pastoral and administrative council, 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 vs. Latinisation

On the scale of orientalism to latinisation the Romanian Greek Catholic Church seems fairly latinised. This is 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-Gherla, 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. 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 of 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.

Whereas 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 Romanian Greek Catholic Church serves its believers 'different wrappings of the same Christian faith', as a Cluj priest humbly referred to his Greek Catholicism.

Another particularity of the Greek Catholic Church 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 majority of them 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% mark. Meanwhile celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church remained a taboo issue and this has had a backlash on the appreciation of Greek Catholic married priests by Roman Catholics. Despite the fact that the Greek Catholic Church is an integral part of the Church of Rome the presence of married priests outside the heartlands of Greek Catholicism stayed 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 Zulehner in Vienna.

The task to renew the Romanian Greek Catholic Church as an Orthodoxy orientated Church is a matter of dispute too. When compared with the Ukrainian, Slovak or Hungarian Greek Catholic Churches, the Greek Catholics of Romania make 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



'Latin' objects of devotion in the basement of the Manastur parish church, Cluj.

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 Romanian Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches 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, anyone who takes a closer look at the real functioning of the Greek Catholic Churches as a 'bridge' between East and West, he or she will notice endogenous and exogenous constraints (see Annex 1). They seem to question *orientalisation as a project*. First, is it possible or even desirable to subject the Greek Catholic Church 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? For sure, the Romanian Greek Catholics themselves see danger looming in both 'latinising' and 'orientalising', and deem it unproductive asking the question of identity over and over again.

The Framework of Theological Education

At the opening session of the November 2005 conference Dr Alin Tat did some, what he called, 'theological arithmetic', thus characterising the field in which the Theological Faculty of Cluj operates. According to the late Pope John Paul II Europe breathes with *two* lungs. (...and the Greek Catholic Church should function in the middle. One could imagine of this Church as the bronchi, which connect the lungs, one Orthodox and one Catholic. The bronchi, after all, are vital parts of the respiratory system too.) Moreover, probably unique to academic Europe, the Cluj Babes-Bolyai University counts no less than *four* faculties of theology: a Greek Catholic, a Reformed, a Roman Catholic and a Romanian Orthodox one. The Greek Catholic Theological Faculty provides theological education at *three* different locations: at the metropolitan see of Blaj, in Oradea and in Cluj; and it does so for *two* groups: for future priests and for lay people.



Str. Motilor 26: Cluj Greek Catholic Theological Faculty.

In the latter two cities lay are being prepared. They have to study two subjects for *four* years: theology and didactics (preparing teachers of religion), language, social assistance, history or philosophy. At all three locations there is a so-called 'Pastoral Theology' course of four years for candidates for the priesthood, Tat pointed out to his audience.

In spite of all that the Cluj Greek Catholic Theological Faculty remains *in statu nascendi*, that is, in the birth process, its present Chancellor Professor Nicolae Gudea underlined. There are still many difficulties to surmount. 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, 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 sleep and have lessons in a separate environment: the seminary of Saint John the Evangelist, where much emphasis is put on ritual and sacraments. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church in most parts of Europe the Romanian Greek Catholic Church 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 at the countryside, but the number of Greek Catholics makes this impossible. Each new priest would have to serve many small and shattered communities of 10, 15 or 20 believers, because much needed finances, means of transportation, adequate housing and places of worship are missing. For this reason in 2003 and 2004 the number of first year students for the priesthood was limited to 10, but then, in 2005, this number grew to 32. For reasons of continuity, the eparchy does not want to decline new students. In 2005 there were in total 59 students for the priesthood, 17 of whom were studying in Italy, Belgium or France. The existence of three separate seminaries was mentioned as an obstacle to more Church unity.

At present some 210 students are doing their bachelor in theology and 10 more are earning their master's degree, seminarians excluded. Some 122 students passed their bachelor's exam in 2005. In Oradea about 200 men and women study theology; in Blaj there are 50 candidates for the priesthood. About 80% of the students, who finished their studies, found employment directly related to their field of study. Teachers of religion make 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 the vocations to the religious life.

Finally, when looking at the future of the Theological Faculty the bishop of Cluj mentioned the following points of attention. First, the repossession of buildings confiscated in 1948. Second, the education of future priests by priests. Third, the training of future teachers abroad. Forth, 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 Babes-Bolyai University. Some of the bishop's points of view 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 Vatican council had wanted to move away.

Church and Society

Because of the broad gap between Church and society the Greek Catholic Church too had to face the rather awkward and complicated task to position itself in post-communist Romania. Of course, this awkwardness and complexity is partly due to the specific history of the region. Until 1948 the Greek Catholic Church had been very much involved in the nation's life, but traditions, practical experiences and knowledge went lost thereafter. Nevertheless, the distance between Church and society 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 politics), the societal problems, communist themselves, and the Church's it difficult to comprehensive consistently put a practice. contact between flock remained that is, more or liturgy. Meanwhile non-sacramental needs much more short, continuity is



The ubiquitous soup kitchen, Manastur church.

science and in vastness of the fluidity of post-changes discussions about commitment make formulate a strategy, let alone vision into Furthermore, the Church and its fairly superficial, less restricted to it is being said that pastoral care refinement. In failing.

The Greek Catholic Church has engaged itself in a wide range of activities, which aim at forging a closer bond between society and Church. Many of these actions 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 at 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 disadvantaged. Often these activities seem to be located in urban areas, where the majority of Romanians (60%) 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 Greek Catholic Church teamed up 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 Str. Motilor, 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 Manastur neighbourhood in Cluj, where some 150 persons and 50 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 Catholics workers Kolping is active in the main cities and villages of the Alba Julia-Fagaras archeparchy, like Alba Julia, Blaj, Brasov and Tirgu Mures. 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 Roman 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 Roman Catholic bishop in the former Soviet Union once told me: 'Ecumenism is dead!' A Greek Catholic cleric in Cluj recently said: 'Ecumenism is practised over our backs!' Indeed, if we read the signs of the time carefully, these two propositions are unmistakably true for Romania. What other impression could encounters between hierarchs in Bucharest and at the Vatican, or between bishops and scholars in some secluded Romanian Orthodox monastery leave behind at the ground level of day-to-day church life? For sure, it is quite remarkable that the ecumenical discussion is often pursued

outside Romania and without those, who are primarily concerned, the Romanian Greek and Roman Catholics. An outlook on things that does more justice to the perception of all parties concerned, very much depends on where someone wants to take his or her proof. Then often, the appreciation of ecumenical contacts compares to the *perfectum futurum* in classical Hebrew.



Iconostas of the former Greek Catholic church, Nicula monastery.

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 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 deeds that the Romanian Orthodox Church was more than unwilling 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 profit from Pope John Paul's eagerness to reconcile with Orthodoxy and obtain concessions from the Romanian government simultaneously. 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, but mostly Orthodox believers.' However, popular enthusiasm should be distinguished from ecumenical rapprochement between the Roman and Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Of course, on 12 October 2002 at the Vatican, Patriarch Teoctist I and the late Pope John Paul II signed a common declaration that called on all Christian faiths to take an example from the good relations between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. 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 Metropolitan Daniel Ciobotea of Moldova in May 2005 that under Pope Benedict XVI 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 Romanian Orthodox Church 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'. Even so, contacts exist, but only at the grass root level, and they are of an informal or personal nature.



*Choir of the former Greek Catholic church,
Nicula monastery.*

Inter-Church Antagonism

Hostility between the Romanian Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches 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, the almost overall unwillingness of the Romanian Orthodox Church to accommodate the Greek Catholics. Second, the sheer lack of determination of consecutive Romanian governments to meet the fairly modest Greek Catholic claims and to enforce the rule of law. In fact, the Romanian Orthodox Church, local and state authorities blatantly ignore current legislation or refuse to enforce

decisions of the court, which upheld claims by the Greek Catholic Church. 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% 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 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. Archbishop Nicolae Corneanu was responsible for the restitution of some 160 churches to the Greek Catholic Church, including the cathedral in Lugoj. In 1999 he publicly pronounced himself in favour of restitution, but he was ostracised by the Orthodox Holy Synod. However, if the 'Timisoara churches' are excluded from the equation, the percentage mentioned here above drops to 2%. 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 11 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 15 church buildings are under threat of being wrecked or demolished. The wanton destruction of the Greek Catholic patrimony by members of the Romanian Orthodox Church occurs with the explicit approval or, at least, the acquiescence of the Church's hierarchy. It questions 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 build, 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 Tariceanu came on a visit and met with the local Orthodox Archbishop, Bartolomeu Anania of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, who according to the Romanian media waves 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 old church building.

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, when the supreme head of the Romanian Orthodox Church briefly retired to atone for the errors made under communist rule. 'A silent resistance existed. We did not make any compromises, only concessions', he explained. It remains to be seen what this growing self-consciousness will entail for the Greek Catholic Church. Might it be: Neither compromises nor concessions?

Word of Thanks

The staff of Greek Catholic Theological Faculty in Cluj in particular made my stay in Romania a very pleasant one. As discussion partner, city guide, companion, or organiser they gave me a better insight in the Romanian Greek Catholic Church. Therefore special thanks to Simona Zetea, I used quite a lot of her written information and a photograph, then Alin Tat, Dan Ruscu, Father Marius Furtuna, who is an excellent driver too, and, last but not least, Professor Nicolae Gudea, the flying wheel of the faculty. Until we meet again in 2007, in Sibiu!



Cluj at a glance.

Annex 1. Presentation at the Conference 'Greek-Catholic Education, Past, Present and Future': *Exchange between East and West, a Necessity of Life?*

As a representative of our Netherlands relief organisation 'Communicantes' I am very happy to address you on this happy and festive occasion. Let me start with wishing you well. *Alma Mater floreat* – may the Alma Mater flourish! The theme I wish to present to you today is the exchange between East and West as a necessity of life.

The subject of my short lecture is first of all the question of the necessity of intellectual, theological exchange between East and West. This is a topic that could, and should, be extended to other types of exchange too, to other domains, like philosophy and more practice orientated disciplines, such as pastoral theology and social work. One could also think of meetings between parishes in Eastern and Western Europe. East and West, by the way, are used here to denote two neighbouring geographic areas, which were formerly separated by the so-called Iron Curtain.

The title of this short lecture may sound quite dramatic to your ears: 'Exchange between East and West, *a necessity of life?*' If we look at it with the eyes of the psychologist Abraham Maslov, exchange is definitely not the most fundamental need in life. According to his paradigm necessities are, first and foremost, basic needs of a material and psychological nature. They are located at the base of Maslov's pyramidal hierarchy, while theological studies are to be situated on the top of the pyramid and relate, for example, to self-realisation...Therefore, one could allege that theological exchange between East and West is not a major priority. Moreover, if the Greek Catholic Church could survive the gloomy catacombs of Georgiu-Dej's and Ceaucescu's socialist utopia, why couldn't it live today in splendid isolation?

This argument however seems to be false. In Maslov's paradigm exchange would be positioned at the top of the pyramid, thus, one could argue equally well that it is the cream in the coffee. And indeed it is, exchange could mean a better and more vigorous self...But then again, as you all well know, too much coffee with fatty cream may create health problems also.

Updating a (Greek Catholic) Church

The upheaval of 1989, 1990 and 1991 put an end to many years of what I call, with euphemism, 'stagnation'. These days are over. Only if we look back with nostalgia, and leave out the darkest hour at the foot of Calvary, we might, just might long back to that era. For sure, role and significance of Christian faith stood out brightly during that period, while, in fact, the fullness of Church itself was truncated. Further, if we take the *aggiornamento* of the second Vatican council into consideration, there were deficiencies. One may disagree on these last sentences, but it is clear that self-realisation was a concept limited by many constraints.

These constraints were lifted some 15 years ago, yet the process of updating the Church remains complicated. There are several questions that need answering. Is it necessary at all? Once this question is met with a clear 'yes', new ones arise. Which priorities need to be set? How far reaching should this renewal be? Which tools are at our disposal? And, which of those instruments serve the specific purpose? Does exchange of personnel, ideas and so forth contribute to the aspired *aggiornamento*? Some answers you may extract from what follows.

The Greek Catholic Church, to my opinion, finds itself in a somewhat complex situation which may influence the scope of exchange. Some of the problems are simply of a basic, material nature: lack of money, infrastructure, and personnel. Others are of a more ideological kind: the understanding of the modern Western world; the appreciation of the contemporary theological landscape; and finally the theological interpretation of life under communism, or maybe, rather the lack thereof. Furthermore, the want for exchange might be moderated by regulative ideas like 'ideological contamination' by the evil world outside, something which, according to me, somehow implies a lack of Christian conviction. In all this the Greek Catholic Church does not differ from the Roman Catholic Church throughout the region. The specific nature of the Greek Catholic Church however, Orthodox in its tradition, yet Roman in its juridical allegiance, is a unique characteristic, and it adds a special flavour to the issue. It influences the way in which exchange between East and West may be conceived of.

Problems of Exchange

First, the Greek Catholic Church should function as a 'lever' or a 'tool' in the tensed relationship between Orthodoxy and Rome, but difficulties arise, because, in the same time, this very functioning is one of the main causes of the various ruptures dividing both strands of Christianity. The word 'bridge' between Orthodoxy and Rome in this respect sounds more sympathetic than lever or tool, although it may be asked, whether this bridge meets both ends of the divide. And of course, others would argue that the Greek Catholic Church is more of a stumbling block than a stepping stone, and that the divide is more a bottomless pit, or, to put it biblically: a *χάσμα μέγα* (Luke 16,26). Besides, might it be that this bridge is of the kind military engineers deploy? Once it served its purpose, it is driven back to the barracks for later use, if there is a later use. Or perhaps the Greek Catholic Church is merely a ferryboat alternately mooring on either side of the river?

The question at stake is to determine where the bridge ends rest: Orthodoxy, Rome or both? Each answer will have its consequences. The *aggiornamento* after all is directed in one or in two different directions. Meanwhile the example of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church shows how difficult it is to renew itself as an Orthodoxy orientated Church and to keep up unity at the same time. Even the schismatic 'Society of Saint Pius X' got a foothold in the heartland of Ukrainian Greek Catholicism.

Second, our world is rapidly changing, and in a fundamental way. Dramatic changes were bestowed upon the Eastern European region, and, with its particular history of 45 or more years of communist rule, this was a rather overwhelming experience. The Greek Catholic Church too has to come to some understanding of this new world and position itself in this new, still fluid context. Yet, periods of rapid and radical change do not only produce chances, but insecurity and fears too. How do we discern opportunities and when is fear justified?

Third, if we speak about *aggiornamento*, theological exchange is a way to bring the Church up-to-date, but there are complications. The pace of renewal is one for sure. The choice to be made among a variety of approaches and schools is yet another. Add to this the difficult understanding of theological orthodoxy, which often is limited by stereotype. What seemed heterodox, even heretical at first, isn't all together that – compare the recent visit of theologian Hans Küng to Pope Benedict XVI. The question here is more or less the same as in the previous paragraph. What ought to be feared and which chances are there?

A mere glimpse at these problems shows that exchange is not something straightforward. It remains, nonetheless, a necessity in the post-communist context. Hence, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Necessity of Exchange

Whether the Greek Catholic Church is a stumbling block or a stepping stone is not a question of principle. Even if this Church came about by a twist of historical fate, that does not limit its *sui generis* character. The reason for that is simple: because it is alive today! And because it is alive, we need to look for the deeper meaning of this historical fate. Meanwhile, and rather awkwardly, it seems virtually impossible to bypass criticism from whatever side. A staunchly traditionalist Roman Catholic as well as a Russian Orthodox will feel uncomfortable with the Greek Catholic association with Rome. Probably they would both agree to the fact that this Church is neither flesh nor fish, and, at most, the kind of military purpose bridge or ferryboat described here above. This however, how painful it may be, should by no means diminish Greek Catholic self-esteem. Variety is a value in itself to which all of creation renders testimony.

And whether the Greek Catholic Church is in fact more orientated towards the Orthodox tradition or towards Rome, seems of lesser importance. There is still a lot to be learned, on both sides, also for the Church of Rome. Theological systematisation is a strong point of Western tradition, while the Eastern tradition offers an alternative spirituality, which may enrich others. In the domain of moral theology, the West, with its increasingly legalistic approach, could definitely learn from Orthodoxy, where the concept of human growth is prevailing. A certain approach to social action, organisational strength and knowledge of 'best practices' are other points of common interest. Among best practices we might include the experience of married priests within the Greek Catholic Church.

But, this entire problematic, sensitive it may be, is quite irrelevant, when compared to the question how Christian faith will deal with the many challenges of modern society. Here it seems paramount to grasp the signs of the time and to establish a genuine dialogue with modernity. There are different fields in which dialogue could take place, for example the confrontation of theology with modern 20th century philosophy, the incorporation of the main insights of contemporary social and human sciences, professional training for Christian social workers and so forth. Angrily firing run down clichés at the evil world outside will not produce the desired effect, and, for what it is worth, only provides an illustration to the fact that nowadays Christian teachings somehow lack persuasion. Furthermore, it runs the danger of merely producing a closed and therefore inadequate in-group identity.

Time is running out, if it is not flying. I must end. I will do so with a quote of the English philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead: 'No static maintenance of perfection is possible...Advance or Decadence are the only choices offered to mankind. The pure conservative is fighting against the essence of the Universe' (*Adventures of Ideas*, page 354).

19-11-2005

Annex 2. WWW References

Links to news stories from Romania in English, French, German, Hungarian and Romanian:
www.kidon.com/media-link/ro.php

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www.hermannstaedter.ro

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www.patriarhia.ro/eng/index.php

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