

## THE GREEK CATHOLICS AND THE ORTHODOXS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

Victor Neumann

The different religious identity of the Greek-Catholics is marked by the fact that they recognize the Pope as the supreme head of the Church. In contrast with the Orthodox they practice the Eucharist with yeasted and unyeasted bread; the Holy Spirit comes not only from the Father but also from the Son. Purgatory is the place of the pure like for the Roman Catholics. Their structure is the same as in the Roman Catholic Church, and it respects its discipline and dogmas; the hierarchy is established by papal rules. High functions are nominated through papal decrees. Messes, fasts and holidays are like those of the Orthodox Church. Therefore there are different names for the Church such as Greek-Catholic, Catholic of Byzantine rite or the Church united with Rome. Among the divergent elements the most provocative has always been the submission to the Pope.

Studies and articles that tackle the theme of the relations between the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Church in Romania are dominated by the confessional and sometimes even by the political partisanship. Many of the articles and studies are signed by the representatives of the clergy. Historians, for whom one or the other of the churches has become an important issue, write some. It must be added that the majority of them put into value the documentary information (excerpts from the diocesan archives, from the old books, from the press of the time) important for the knowledge of the past but they do not rise to the level of an objective analysis. Both Church hierarchies encouraged a propaganda literature, so that the reader is confronted with tendencies that sometimes do not respect the objectives of an academic study. There are titles which have to be mentioned as first hand bibliographic references for historians. These are the books of D. Prodan and Francisc Pall: *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. The Genesis of the modern Romanian nation and monography* - dedicated to the personality of Inochentie Micu-Klein. It deals with the situation of the two Churches during the XVIIIth century, mostly with that of the Greek-Catholic one, highlighting the national dimension of the religious phenomenon.

Little is known from the perspective of the history of cultural and political ideas, the convergencies and divergencies between these two cults have to be

studied with detachment. What we have in mind is a comparative presentation of the evolution of the two faiths during the post-war period, mostly in the years of the communist dictatorship and during the first post-communist decade. The strict suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church drew our attention upon some historical aspects insufficiently or not at all known up to now. We wanted to insist upon some facts and data that show why under the Soviet type totalitarian regime the survival of the Greek-Catholic community was impossible. Last but not least we tried to show which were and still are the aspirations of the Greek-Catholics and the reasons for conserving the dogmatic differences against the Orthodox. We tried to find out why the conflict between these two Churches continued even in the recent decade and why they did not come to terms. The history of the religious life is strongly linked to the history of ideas and political events of the Romanian nation. The groups that governed during the Old Kingdom period and the inter-war period of Romania had always been influenced by the idea of religious belonging. By virtue of a traditional dependence between the two spheres of activity, it happened that the Orthodox Church implied itself so much in policy, that its representatives wanted for themselves higher state ranks. Such was the case of the Patriarch Miron Cristea, who became member of the executive for several months during the regal dictatorship of Charles II.

While in the inter-war period the Orthodox Church took advantage of the material and moral support of the nation state, the Greek-Catholic Church survived through its own efforts. In the years immediately after Transylvania's integration to the Romanian state the Greek-Catholics were confronted with discriminatory attitudes on behalf of the spiritual leaders of the Orthodox Church, on behalf the media and some politicians<sup>1</sup>. The Transylvanian Orthodox bishops as well as the patriarchs of Bucharest have repeatedly minimized the role of the Greek-Catholics in the process of the Romanian emancipation. They have denigrated their dogmas and have granted them a minor position in the organizational problems of the religious and cultural life of the majority.

Among the anti Greek-Catholic forms of propaganda that had an echo in inter-war society we mention the one initiated by the Orthodox bishop of Transylvania, Nicolae Bălan. His cooperation with the representatives of the extreme right, the Iron Guardists and with the fascist general Ion Antonescu indicate a continuation of the existing dependence between the state and the Orthodox Church as well as the lack of a culture based on the idea of a possible opposition against a dictatorial political system. In the years of extreme right regime, Orthodoxy was cooperative, some of its leaders offered their services to the benefit of the ideology and the political actions of Ion Antonescu<sup>2</sup>. During this period the Greek-Catholics kept their dignity, refusing to collaborate with the power. Their ideology was an ethnically oriented one, but the policy of the nation-state was differently perceived. It is important to highlight that – in

opposition with the Orthodox priests who in their majority had joined the fascist movement known under the name of Iron Guard – the Greek-Catholic priests served the church in their majority. As the situation of Transylvania was different from the point of view of linguistic communities, its regional culture and mentalities, the Greek-Catholic leaders have understood to adopt a position specific to the area without abandoning their aspirations for identity.

The contribution of Greek-Catholic bishoprics from Transylvania in the organization of anti-fascist resistance was underlined in a documentary study (Gh. Zaharie, L. Vajda, p. 123). During the war the bishop of Cluj, Dr. Iuliu Hossu, was one of the prelates who has constantly militated in favor of the Romanian-Hungarian dialogue and understanding. “We will accomplish our mission on Transylvanian soil... where our ancestors sleep their eternal sleep so that their sleep would be a source of blessed peace and a bridge of reconciliation between the two nations, who are doomed together in the middle of this word cataclysm.” This was his address to regent Horthy of Hungary when he visited Cluj on September 15, 1943. There were instances when the bishop tried to mediate between the two dictatorial governments of Budapest and Bucharest.

Dr. Hossu decisively interfered in helping with food the Jewish population of Cluj, concentrated in ghettos or favored their refuge in Romania during deportation to the concentration camps of Auschwitz (Prundus, Plăianu, 1995; Carmily-Weinberger, 1994).

The end of World War II and the establishing of a communist regime under the pressure of the Soviet army was the first tragic moment in the history of the two Romanian Churches. The unification of the two institutions was possible only by denouncing the Concordat with Vatican on July 17, 1948 and by elaborating the new law of cults on August 4, 1948 (Rațiu, 1994). Both acts were formulated by the authority of the Orthodox Church and that of the communist regime. The Greek-Catholics say that without the interference of the Orthodox their cult would not have been abolished. The survival of the Roman-Catholic Church of Romania and the resuming of their relations with Vatican, a few years after communism has settled, are testimonies for the above mentioned.

In 1948 the state and the new Orthodox hierarchy organized important activities in view of the unification. The anniversary of one hundred years since the 1848 revolution was an opportunity to defame the merits of the Greek-Catholics. Nicolae Bălan, who by a subtle personal policy and by cooperating with the communist regime had succeeded in keeping his position of bishop of Transylvania, was one of the most active propagandists<sup>4</sup>. He was the most proper person to attack the Romanian religious pluralism, as the communists knew about his pro-Iron Guard and pro-Antonescu activities. He was the man suited for the new political regime imposed by Moscow. This explains the fact that Nicolae Bălan was the one who addressed the keynote in Blaj on May 15, 1948.

In the presence of the members of the government and those of the Communist Party he declared that the unification of the Churches had to be accomplished. “The Habsburgs – the Orthodox representative said – cut in two our nation in Transylvania to weaken us and to rule easier. Today they have no power over us any more, and therefore can not hinder us in reuniting. Today, when the People’s Republic of Romania guarantees equal political, economic, cultural and religious rights, to maintain the spiritual gap caused by the severe situation around 1700 for the Transylvanian Romanian people, means to abandon the mission of our working class at the dawn of future. As a descendent of the ancient bishops of Belgrade (White city) who had under their protection the whole Romanian life in Transylvania I am addressing to you, whom the foreign interest had driven away from our good mother – the Orthodox Church, a warm fatherly call to come back home.” (Rădulescu, Sădeanu, 1948; Mircea Carnatiu, Todericiu, 1998).

The bishop had adapted to the situation his previous hostility towards the religious diversity of the Transylvanian Romanians. In 1936 – on the occasion of a Congress of the Romanian Orthodox Fraternity – Nicolae Bălan spoke in the same way about the necessity to abolish the Greek-Catholic Church. He saw in the Catholic cult a real threat for the future of the “Romanian people”. In his way of thinking, that coped both with the ideology of the extreme right and extreme left wing, the idea of unity between the two religions was dictated by “our racial instinct itself” (“Union”, 1936). The availability to cooperate with any regime in order to keep its own power is not a unique case in Romania’s public life. The fascist and communist totalitarian regimes profited from such a behavior. The ideological content of Bălan’s discourse was taken over in other words by Iustinian Marina, the new patriarch of the Orthodox Church voted by Romania’s Parliament. Here it is what he declared on May 24, 1948. “If the first patriarch of the country Miron (Cristea n.n) approved the political and national policy, the duty of the third one is to unify the church under one hierarchy”<sup>5</sup>.

Iustinian Marina – who was in charge with the abolishing of the Greek-Catholic Church – spoke about the “painful” split of the two Romanian cult institutions “that has lasted for 250 years”. In his address of June 6, 1948 held in the St. Spiridon church on the occasion of his appointment as patriarch, he asked the Greek-Catholics to rejoin Orthodoxy. He vaguely evoked the history, mingled it with the national militantism of the previous centuries or political motifs of the moment. In his view the Greek-Catholic Church was a reminiscent of the Habsburg empire, a result of the “intrigues” of the Viennese House and a hope for the Pope’s propaganda in Romania. So the Romanian Orthodox patriarch appreciated that the return to a single church of all Romanians must mean their liberation from a humiliating “tyranny”.

“What separates us?” Iustinian Marina rhetorically asks. “Nothing else but the belief that still binds you to Rome. Return with your faith to the church of

your people, of your and our ancestors. All our energies that we have used up to now for the defensive battle to save the religious and national being must be put from now on in the service of our Romanian state. The People's Republic of Romania, in order to consolidate the independence and sovereignty of our democratic state" (Radulescu, Sădeanu, 1948). The discourse of the high representative of the Orthodox Church contained the obsession of the uniqueness of faith, the overlapping of the national ideas with that of religious faith, and also the recognition of the new state form, imposed by communists. It was a conviction that coincided with Moscow's intentions and with the ethno-nationalism of a part of the Romanian intelligentsia.

Practically, 1948 meant the abolishing of the Greek-Catholic Church, and passing into illegality of all its activities. That is how it all happened. Once the signal was given, the Greek-Catholic priests willing to compromise were recruited. They could not resist to the pressures and threats over them and their families. On the occasion of a meeting in the gym hall of the "George Barițiu" high school in Cluj on October 1, 1948 – where 36 representatives of the Greek-Catholic Church were present – the delegation that would go to Bucharest for the great reunion was established. The synodal act of October 3, signed by the participants, meant practically the legalization of the unification of the two cults and thus the status of illegality for the Transylvanian Church. One of the priests tells us about it. "We were taken from home to Cluj by the militia. The police guarded the Congress Hall. The debates were short. As the designation of the chairman (archpriest Traian Belășcu) was according to the orders, he did not know what he was to say. At that moment Pr. Zagrai handed him over a text and he read it with a trembling voice. Discussions began. The "witnesses" in the hall interrupted them. Everyone had to sign... From there we were taken to the residence of the Orthodox bishop Colan. And from there they went to the railway station. On the road we were given a lawn and the first meal of that day. At *Athené Palace* we were under surveillance. That day (October 3rd) we were free after having signed all papers and after having attended a *Te Deum* at the *St. Spiridon* church. We were treated with such a violence that one of us lost his mind. I do not know, why we have signed. I think that we were drugged"<sup>6</sup>.

The real abolishment of the Greek-Catholicism took place on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948, by the decree of the "high presidium of the People's Republic of Romania, No. 358" (Bota, 1994). First rank personalities of the Greek-Catholic world did not sign the documents of joining to Orthodoxy, although among the signers there were many of the archpriests of authority. The personalities behaved in accordance with the dogmas of the cult and proved to have remarkable strong characters. Archpriests Iuliu Hossu and Ioan Suci were among the most active opponents and they did not recognize the act of unification. Iuliu Hossu excommunicated by decree the chairman of the "congress" framed up in Cluj on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948. He asked – by means of a letter addressed to all dioceses

under his jurisdiction – that both his position as defender and continued of the catholic faith and the above mentioned excommunication decree had to be brought to the knowledge of all Greek-Catholics. A defense reaction has also had apostolic Nuncio of Bucharest, the archbishop Gerard Patrick O’Hara of Savannah. In a letter addressed to the Ministry of foreign affairs on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1948, he spoke about the outrageous attitude of the Romanian government that did not respect the religious liberties. In spite of its declarations the civil power committed itself to religious persecutions. Its commitments were violated by facts “carefully prepared and very subtle coordinated, in various parts of Transylvania against the Greek-Catholic Church. “Gerald O’Hara said that this attitude was unworthy of a civilized state<sup>7</sup>. The protests of the Greek-Catholic and those of the Roman-Catholic bishop addressed to the Petru Groza government had no effect. All rural communities in Tîrgu-Lăpus, Boiereni, Vadu-Crişului, Sopteriu-Mureş protested against the act of October 3rd. The peasants were defeated. They have been abused, imprisoned for many years and their goods have been confiscated. The Greek-Catholic Church has been dispossessed of its goods. They were partly taken by the state and partly by the Orthodox Church (Ploscaru, 1994). At the time when it was declared outlaw, the Greek-Catholic Church had an organisational structure called *The Metropolitan Province of Alba Iulia and Făgăraş* with the seat in Blaj. It was made up of the archdiocese of Blaj, coordinated by bishop Dr. Ioan Suciu, apostolic administrator, the diocese of Cluj-Gherla with bishop Iuliu Hossu as its head, the diocese of Oradea-Mare lead by bishop Dr. Valeriu Traian Frenţiu, the diocese of Lugoj, lead by bishop Dr. Ioan Nălan, the diocese of Maramureş lead by bishop Dr. Alexandru Rusu, the metropolitan office of *locum tenens* in Bucharest directed by Dr. Vasile Aftenie. The metropolitan province had around 2 million members, 1900 parishes 1900 churches and 1832 priests. Part of the province were 9 monastic orders with 28 houses, 424 monks and nuns, 20 high schools for boys and girls with a total of 3352 (pupils), 4 orphanages and asylums for senior people, 6 publishing houses that printed 20 weekly and monthly revues in approximately 250,000 copies. (Ploscaru, 1994).

All above mentioned data show that the Greek-Catholic Church was a complex institution, well organized comprising an important part of Transylvania’s Romanian population. As one can see from the enumeration of the dioceses, with the exception of the Bucharest office of *locum tenens* all the others were in Transylvania. Statistics of the inter-war period show that the share of the Greek-Catholics in comparison with the Orthodox was of 64.3% in Maramureş, 42.7% in Cluj and its suburbs, 60% in the region of Satu-Mare, 60% in Năsăud and the neighboring zones, 52.5% in Sălaj county, 32.4% in Mureş<sup>8</sup>.

Once again it has been demonstrated that the reasons for abolishing the Greek-Catholic Church were political. In order to show the political meaning of the anti Greek-Catholic attitude, we must underline that the pro-western

orientation of the church played an important role in the formation of the Romanian population of Transylvania, that is, in the adoption and cultivation of high social and material standards in comparison with the Orthodox population. The same church had stimulated the intellectual aspirations of its parishioners and had educated them in the west European spirit for work. This also explains why the cohabitation of the Greek-Catholic population with the Magyar and German minorities was better in zones with mix linguistic population. The idea of belonging to the same Catholic Church was often a link between the ethnic groups, which have lived together for centuries.

An attentive analysis of facts reveals the tendency to simplify the explanation or the intention to reduce it to conflicting ideologies does not convey a real understanding of the phenomenon. So it is desirable to formulate a point of view that is a result of geographic history and of history of cultural and political thinking. According to it, the difficulty in the case of Romania does not lie in the absence of an unique religious discourse, as the leaders of Orthodoxy tried to demonstrate, and as the communist forces wanted to believe, but in the contradictory religious and cultural orientations: one of Slavic-Byzantine-oriental type and the other of Roman-western type. The confrontation of two sets of values – the European and the oriental or semi-oriental –, confrontation that was not desired by the post-war political division was brought forward for discussion (and it still is). Probably we can thus understand easier why the Greek-Catholic Church had become one of the most detested opponents of the Soviet-communist regime; why on the other hand the Romanian Orthodox Church had accepted immediately the new regime and had cooperated with it.

The systematic persecution of the Greek-Catholics began in 1948 and lasted for a long period of time. The bishops Valeriu Traian Frențiu, Alexandru Rusu, Ioan Bălan, Iuliu Hossu, Ioan Suci, Anton Durcovici, the priests Ludovic Vida, Gheorghe Bob, Ioan Moldovan, Augustin Felea, Tit Liviu Chinezu were imprisoned. The same happened to the papal prelates Zenovie Paclișanu and Augustin Maghiaru and the Timișoara bishop Augustin Pacha<sup>9</sup>.

Bishop Vasile Aftenie was murdered on May 10, 1950 by the communist authorities, today being considered one of the martyrs of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (Bota, 1994). Many of the ordinary priests which refused to convert to Orthodoxy were condemned to prison, being treated as political prisoners: hard labor for the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the construction of the Bicaz hydro power station, tortures, isolation in barren villages of the Bărăgan steppe, which had no modern means of transportation and which were backwards in comparison with the Transylvanian villages. Their goods had been confiscated and the family members were fired. The majority of the children of the Greek-Catholic priests were expelled from high schools and universities. They were not allowed to attend universities. The evacuation from the parish houses was done by menacing them with prison. In case of opposition

the priests and parishes had to face a trial in a Court-Martial. This was the situation of 19 people sentenced in Târgu Mureș on April 18, 1952 (Bota, 1994), of some important representatives of the clergy of Maramureș<sup>10</sup> and of Archbishop Dr. Ioan Deliman.

Despite persecutions, the activity of the Greek-Catholic Church was not stopped. Priests in liberty organized messes at their homes for example: Ioan Ploscaru in Lugoj, Nicolae Pura in Cluj or Alexandru Todea in Reghin. Therefore they became the targets of a new wave of imprisonment. Even in such special conditions the faithful did everything to preserve their conviction. Important contributions had the nuns of the *Mother of God* congregation and the priests Nicolae Pura, Augustin Silvestru Prundus and Ioan Bejan in Cluj. The cooperation of the Piarist church of Cluj was exemplary.

Literary clubs and societies of Romanian writers of Transylvania cultivated – as much as possible – Greek Catholic values. Of great importance was the translation into Romanian of religious meditation works done by priest Gheorghe Neamțiu. An important role in maintaining the Catholic denomination among the Romanians played the “Vatican” and “Free Europe” radio stations that regularly broadcast Messes held by priests Vasile Cristea, Ovidiu Bejan and Alexandru Mircea.

In the years of communist regime the resistance activities were carried on in the centers with previous Greek-Catholic tradition, such as Reghin, Cluj, Lugoj and Baia-Mare and sometimes even in Bucharest. It must be said that the relations between the two churches were strained throughout the communist dictatorship. The Orthodox Church showed itself indifferent for the given severe situation of the Greek-Catholic Church or had a hostile attitude publishing defamatory articles in its own reviews. Such examples were offered by the *Telegraful Român* magazine in Sibiu, by the *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* review in Bucharest and by other metropolitan publications of the Orthodox cult. The Romanian totalitarian communist state controlled not only the cultural and political opinions but also the religious life of the entire population<sup>11</sup>. It satisfied the nationalist pride of some of the representatives of the Orthodox Church, who saw in the continuation of Greek-Catholicism a danger for the dissolving of the ethnic and national unity. It is an explanation for the fact that often the state manipulated the cults according to its own ideological opinions.

Orthodoxy – as an institution – cooperated with the regime. It accepted that a department (that of the cults) especially organized by the government dictates its ideological orientation, selects its personal managers, its international and internal relations. While the Orthodox Church was free to develop its activity, the Greek-Catholic Church was forbidden as it could have been the main opposition with the communist totalitarian state. Without trying to compare the sufferings, both physical and moral and the material depriving, it must be mentioned that even the Orthodox world was watched by the regime from 1948



to 1989. There were situations when the Orthodox priests from Transylvania and Banat showed understanding for the Greek-Catholic traditions and admitted unofficially their perpetuation. This happened for instance in Lugoj and Timișoara where the rites of both churches were respected on the occasion of many Christian holidays. After the events of December 1989, the Greek-Catholic Church tried to get into the possession of its assets. By the decree law no. 8 of December 30, 1989 issued by the provisional government (installed after Ceaușescu's removal) the decree of October 1, 1948, which forbade the activity of Greek-Catholics was annulled. By another decree-law no. 126 of April 9, 1990, all goods belonging to the Greek-Catholic Church were returned: churches, schools, residences, hospitals, orphanages and so on. The most important problem was and still is the retrocession of churches. The only region where some of the churches were given back without any problems is Banat. This was due to the tolerant attitude of the local population and to the decisive contribution of the Orthodox archbishop of Timisoara Dr. Nicolae Corneanu. Thus the Lugoj church became one of the most important diocesan Greek-Catholic Churches.

The situation was different in Cluj, Maramureș, Sălaj and Bistrița counties, where the conflicts between the two institutions degenerated many times<sup>12</sup>. The mixed committees that come together periodically did not always reach common points of view in order to solve the problem. The final sentences were in favor of Greek-Catholics in most cases but were not observed. In other circumstances the retrocession were delayed without any reason. There are towns in which even today the mass is hold under the open sky. This happens because the Orthodox Church wants the problem to be solved by dioceses. The mixed committees came to the same conclusion in December 1998 and January 1999. Usually, the representatives of the govern do not interfere as they do not want to risk to loose their popularity before the electorate.

The hierarchy of the Greek-Catholic Church has been reestablished immediately after the 1989 events. By the decision of Pope John Paul II of March 13, 1990 the bishops of the Greek-Catholic dioceses of Romania have been nominated: Alexandru Todea archbishop of Alba-Iulia and Fagaras, but was replaced by bishop Lucian Mureșan as he got severely ill; Ioan Ploscaru bishop of the Lugoj diocese, George Guțu archbishop of the Cluj-Turda diocese, Vasile Hossu bishop of the Oradea diocese, Ioan Cherteș archbishop of the Cluj diocese. In March 1991 Alexandru Todea was elected president of the Confederation of the Greek-Catholic Episcopate of Romania and in 1991 he became cardinal by a Papal decree. The number of this congregation today is not equivalent to that of the inter-war period but it is rising constantly. There are regions – Maramureș for instance – where the statistics indicate the existence of 140,000 faithful after the 1992 census. Surely their number rose during the last years and proof for it are the multiple friction in the villages and towns of the

above-mentioned region for the churches. There are 240 parishes and 13 districts of Greek-Catholic archbishops. All these data contradict the opinions according to which “the Greek-Catholics have hierarchy and bishops but do not have believers and ask even their retrogression”<sup>14</sup>.

The Greek-Catholics’ discontents intensified as the solving of the patrimonial problems has been postponed *sine die*. The disputes in Cluj during 1998 and at the beginning of 1999 degenerated in violent conflicts of both congregations. In one of the churches lawfully regained by the Greek-Catholics a conflict broke out between the parishioners. All these were due to the Orthodox bishop of Cluj who in the last 10 years maintained a hostile atmosphere, connecting his own activity to that of the xenophobe National Unity Romanian Party and the Mayor Gheorghe Funar. We must not forget the register the Greek-Catholics used when they made their demands. The lack of tact and diplomacy of the journalists and of some of the Greek-Catholics show the existence of certain resentments. It is without any doubt that the political ideas enormously contributed to the conservation of the above-mentioned state of spirit. In the last decade Cluj was the place ‘par excellence’ where both the religious disputes between the Orthodox and Greek-Catholics and these ideological-administrative between the Romanians and the Magyar minority took place. Is it a collision of two cultural options or are they remnants of Ceaușescu’s communist-nationalistic regime? What happens in Cluj at the decisional level suggests that modernization be behind hand. It could be that the modest echo of the institutions that educate has a word in the political field or in the local printing press. Poor education of many people makes them easily manipulated by leading politicians. The revival of religious life of the Greek-Catholics was unexpected for the Romanian and international public opinion. It showed the survival of different spiritual aspirations within the Romanian society. This is quite surprising after half a century of oppression. As for the elucidation of dogmatic problems, this did not take place. Parts of the dissension of the two churches have been taken over by the cultural press, but no fair way of solving the problem has been found yet. I think that the social and political reality of having belonged to the Greek-Catholic Church for over 300 years as part of the western church must be understood. It is the desire to recognize the affiliation to modern European civilization. The actions and consequences of communist times reflect a history close to that of religious groups belonging to nations of Central Europe. The representatives of the cult are of the opinion that a consonant evolution with the western neighbors indicates the role of school, seminaries, priest’s vocation and dogmatic rigor<sup>15</sup>. The activity – as well as the church dogma – can be appreciated as being more than a bridge between Orthodoxism and Catholicism. The fact that the challenges of the modern world have not been the subject of a debate had as consequences the incapability of the Orthodox Church leaders to make the necessary distinctions to preserve the autonomy of the cult. The

explanation that no reform had taken place within the Orthodox Church should be taken into consideration when we present the confrontation between the two Romanian cults in Transylvania, centralism or disregard of specific regional problems. The two totalitarian regimes took advantage of the fact that some of the champions of the Orthodox Romanian Church detested democracy, pluralistic forms of social, religious and cultural existence. The overlapping of the concepts of state, church and nation could function because not only the representatives of the church and politicians cultivated intellectual ignorance but also the laic intelligentsia. This leads to the following conclusion: each cult demands its right to speak in the name of the nation, the promotion of the formula “church of the nation”, claiming competence in problems that concern exclusively the state and civil power. In this respect it should be mentioned that the revival of Greek-Catholicism in Transylvania after 1989 coincided with XIXth century discourse, which can be easily viewed as full of resentments.

The first visit of the Pope in a majority Orthodox country was due to the existence of Greek-Catholics, to their sufferings during the communist regime and to the necessity to sustain them in their attempt to regain the position they lost in the religious and cultural life of Transylvania. The encounter between the Pope John Paul II and the patriarch Teoctist gained the admiration of the Romanian Orthodox clergy. The trans-confessional message of the Pope was resumed by the words “all people should be my family - and all Christians be one”. The two cults were invited to meditate the following political step of the Romanian majority depending to a great extent on the content of the inter-confessional dialogue<sup>16</sup>.

The presence of the Pope John Paul II in Romania in May 1999 showed that both cults are prepared for a dialogue. When he spoke, the Pope evoked the idea of understanding between the two Romanian cults. He underlined the merits of the Greek-Catholics during the communist resistance period, and suggested that evocation of past should not be done by one church to the detriment of the other. The Papal message rose the admiration of the Romanian public of any confession and has done away with the false image cultivated by the anti-Catholic folklore.

The Romanian Orthodox Church had the merit to accept the Pope’s visit, to sustain – through the patriarch’s voice – the idea of ecumenism, to have cooperated positively with the democratic forces of Romania. On this occasion the Romanian Orthodox Church had to deal with the problem of secularization, which is in relation with one of the basic principles of modern world functioning. It is meritorious that it was open to dialogue and that it put the problem of revising its anti-modern orientation that estranged it from the traditional values of Western Europe.

1 The Greek-Catholic Church is the result of the unification of a part of the Romanian Orthodox faithful in Transylvania with the Church of Rome. That is a number of Orthodox accepted that under the leadership of their bishops they convert to Catholicism, keeping a number of specific elements of the Orthodox rite. This happened between 1697-1701. The suggestion came from emperor Leopold I of the Habsburg Empire who initiated the whole action by the Act of 1692. The meaning of the unification was both religious and political. The unification should have led to the catholicisation of the entire Romanian population of Transylvania. Its conditions have been transformed into political requirements by the representatives of the Greek-Catholic clergy. These requirements were: ceasing to be considered tolerated, the right to have positions in the administration of Transylvania and of the empire, the right to have Romanian schools and to use the Romanian language. The Greek-Catholic Church made the first important step toward the forming of the conscience of collective identity of the Romanian population of Transylvania. The goal of assimilation – proclaimed when the church had been found – stimulated the forming of an intellectual elite and the emancipation of part of the population. The unification with the Church of Rome opened the perspectives of learning to read and write and of the assertion of a whole generation of scholars well known under the name of *Școala ardeleană* (*Transylvanian school*). The unification also contributed to the reception of the Austrian idea of *Aufklärung* and of the concept of nation.

2 It was the case of Nicolae Bălan who accepted the position of a metropolitan bishop in the territories occupied by the Romanian army during its campaign side by side with the nazis against the Soviet Union. On the other hand the same bishop spoke with Antonescu in favor of the Transylvanian and Banat Jews to stop their deportation to the extermination camp of Lublin. See Alexandru Șafran: *Un tison arraché aux flammes. Mémoires*, (București: Hasefer, 1995). In a chapter of my book, *The History of the Jews of Banat County*, to be published at Tel-Aviv University, I have mentioned the role played by baron Franz von Neumann in preventing the deportation of the Jews from Timisoara, Arad and Turda. See also Victor Neumann; *The History of the Jews in Romania. Documentary and Theoretical Studies*, (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1996).

3 See *Sematismul Episcopiei greco-catolice de Cluj-Gherla* for the year 1947, p. 65, apud Silvestru Aug. Prunduș, Clemente Plăianu, Alexandru Nicula, Ion M. Bota, Ion Costan, *Cardinal Iuliu Hossu*, (Cluj:Unitas, 1995), p. 117.

4 The Chief Rabbi of Romania, Alexandru Șafran, interceded in his favor. See Alexandru Șafran, *op. cit.*

5 Apud the newspaper *Drapelul nostru* [Our Flag], Baia-Mare, no. 29/1948, p. 2.

6 Alexandru Mircea, Pamfil Carnatiu, Mircea Todericiu: “The Ordeal Of the United Church”, in *The United Romanian Church. Two Hundred Fifty Years of History*, (Cluj, 1998), p. 253.

7 See the documents published in the volume: *The United Romanian Church. Two hundred fifty years of history*, pp. 257-258.

8 *Romanian Statistical Yearbook*, 1930.

9 Valeriu Achim: *The Sighet Prison Accuses*, (Baia Mare, 1991), p. 59.

10 Apud newspaper "Graiul Maramureşului" [The Voice of Maramureş], year IX, no. 64/1998, p. 2.

11 All the other cults had been put under surveillance, but the Orthodox one. No other faith had been suppressed as the Greek Orthodox one; no other was declared outlaw as the Greek-Catholic. Even the neo-Protestant cults were considered less dangerous than the Greek-Catholic and in some cases they were allowed to have international relations and to get material help from abroad.

12 See, for example, the articles from the newspaper "Graiul Maramureşului", Baia Mare, year X, no. 42/1999.

13 *Romanian Statistical Yearbook*, 1992.

14 Teodor Damşa, *The Greek-Catholic Church in Historical Perspective*, (Timişoara: West, 1994), p. 246.

15 Dialogue with vicar George Surdu, head of the Romanian Catholic Mission in Paris, July 19, 1999.

16 On June 10, 1999 a new meeting of the mixed committee of Orthodox-Greek-Catholic dialogue took place; it analyzed the visit of Pope John Paul II in Romania. Cf. "Vestitorul Unirii" (revue of the Greek-Catholic bishopric) Oradea, year VIII, no. 1/1999, p. 2.

## REFERENCES

ACHIM, Valeriu (1991): *Închisoarea din Sighet acuză*, [The Sighet Prison Accuses], Baia-Mare: Gutinul.

BOTA, Ioan (1994): *Istoria Bisericii Universale*, [History of the Universal Church], Cluj: Viaţa Creştină.

CARMILLY-WEINBERGER, Moshe (1994): *Istoria evreilor din Transilvania* [History of the Transylvanian Jews], Bucureşti: Enciclopedica Publishing House.

MIRCEA, Alexandru; CARNATIU, Pamfil; TODERICIU Mircea (1998): "Calvarul Bisericii Unite" ["Ordeal of the United Church"] in the volume: *Biserica Română Unită. Două sute de ani de istorie*, [The United Roman Church. Two Hundred Years of History], Cluj: Viaţa Creştină Publishing House, 1998.

NEUMANN, Victor (1996): *Istoria evreilor din România. Studii documentare și teoretice* [History of the Romanian Jews. Documentary and Theoretical Studies], Timişoara: Amarcord.

NEUMANN, Victor (1999): *The History of the Jews of Banat County*, to be published at Tel-Aviv University.

PLOSCARU, Ioan (1994): *Scurta istorie a bisericii române* [Short History of the Romanian Church], Timişoara: Signata Publishing House.

PRUNDUS, Silvestru Aug.; PLĂIANU, Clemente; NICULA, Alexandru; BOTA, Ion M.; COSTAN Ion (1995): *Cardinalul Iuliu Hossu* [Juliu Hossu Cardinal], Unitas: Cluj.

RĂDULESCU, Al.; SĂDEANU C. (1948): *Reîntregirea Bisericii Românești din Ardeal* [Re-unification of the Romanian Church], Bucureşti.

RĂȚIU, Alexandru (1994): *Persecuția Bisericii Române Unite*, [The Persecution of the Romanian United Church], Oradea: Imprimeria de Vest Publishing House.

VICTOR NEUMANN

---

ŞAFRAN, Alexandru (1995): *Un tison arraché aux flammes. Mémoires*, Editions Stock, Paris, 1989.

ZAHARIE G., VAIDA L., (1974): *Rezistența antifascistă în partea de nord a Transilvaniei [Anti Fascist Resistance in the Northern Part of Transylvania]*,

“UNIREA” (Blaj), Greek-Catholic newspaper, 7.11.1936.