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The Relations of the Rumanian Orthodox Church with Other Churches

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Dr. Mircea Pacurariu has published a three volume chronological History of the Rumanian Orthodox Church\textsuperscript{1}. These volumes form the largest up-to-date history of any national Orthodox Church within a Communist country. Of particular interest is Dr. Pacurariu's description and evaluation of the Orthodox Church's relationships with other churches and the Rumanian government.

In 271, the Roman legions evacuated the northern side of the Danube which is the present Rumania. However, the Latin terminology within the later Rumanian church language reveals that Christianity was known in the area prior to the evacuation. The Slavic migration in the sixth century initially quelled most of the Christian life in the area, but eventually the Slavs were Christianized. The Slavic language was then incorporated into the church which aided the Patriarch of Constantinople to keep the Rumanian church under Greek control and against the propaganda of the Roman Catholic Church. The Patriarch of Constantinople recognized a metropolitan in Muntenia in 1359, and one in Moldavia in 1401. The Rumanian princes in these two principalities built many monasteries and churches while supporting both metropolitanans. After the death of Stephan the Great, a great supporter of the Moldavian church, Rumanian Orthodoxy entered a period of decline, one accentuated by the Turkish conquest.

While Orthodoxy was established in Moldavia, Transylvania was occupied by Hungary around 1100. The Orthodox Church was now persecuted by the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church. At the time of the Reformation,
Lutheranism was introduced to the Saxons and Calvinism to the Hungarian population. The "Diet" acknowledged these two confessions as well as the Unitarians as religions, but Orthodoxy was only tolerated. Eventually, the Roman Catholic regime broke down with the result that the Calvinist princes oppressed the Orthodox Rumanians. However, Calvinism made little progress among the Rumanians.

After 1600, there was an increasing Greek influence in Muntenia and Moldavia. Many monasteries were consecrated to the (Greek) holy places of the East. Monasteries were also withdrawn from the authority of the local bishops. Muntenia and Moldavia supported the Greek Patriarchs and Orthodoxy became "Byzans after Byzans." In addition, Roman Catholic Poland forced the Orthodox to accept a Union with Rome in 1596 (Brest-Litovsk). Therefore, since an Orthodox Synod was not possible in Constantinople (Turkish) or in Kiev (Polish), it was held in Jasi, Moldavia, in 1642. This is where the Rumanian language was introduced as the church language, a process completed by Metropolitan Antim Ivireanul (1708-1716), and Peter Mogilas' Orthodox Confession was recognized. The Turk-Fanariot regime was introduced in Moldavia in 1711 and in Muntenia, 1715. Fanar became the center of the Greek Patriarchate with some of the metropolitans being Greek.

In Contrast, Transylvania was now dominated by Austria from 1690. With Austrian control, the Jesuits arrived and concentrated their missionary work on the Orthodox rather than on Lutherans or Calvinists. The Jesuits introduced the Uniate Church and diocese in 1701 subject to the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church. The Serbian bishops of Sibiu reorganized the Rumanian Orthodox Church, but the Orthodox priests claimed a Rumanian bishop. This led to a period of conflict during which
General Bukow destroyed almost all Orthodox monasteries. Eventually, Emperor Joseph II issued an Edict of Tolerance in 1781. This had the effect of allowing many Uniate villages to return to Orthodoxy. 

The Fanariot regime ended in 1821 in Moldavia and Muntenia. In Transylvania, the Rumanian Orthodox schools were still under the supervision of the Hungarian Roman Catholic bishops. After 1848, Bishop Andrei Saguna of Sibiu worked for the emancipation of the Rumanians in Banat from Serbian control and the reinstatement of a Rumanian metropolitan in Sibiu. Bishop Saguna became metropolitan in 1864. In 1869, the state sanctioned the "Statute Organic." This allowed the Rumanian Orthodox Church to be autonomous in its relationship with the state and to establish a synodal organization (1/3 clergy and 2/3 laymen). Such a superior democratic organization "...was not known in any other Orthodox Church."

Moldavia and Muntenia were united in 1859 under Prince Alexander Cuza. During this unification, the property of the monasteries was secularized in 1863. The monasteries in Moldavia controlled roughly 23 percent of the Moldavian territory while monasteries in Muntenia controlled 25 percent of the territory. The majority of these monasteries were owned by the Holy Sepulchre, Mount Athos, and by the Greek patriarchates. However, this secularization removed many foreign owners and was considered "an act of national and social justice" by the whole country. One year later, a Law on Monastic Life decreed that monks had to be sixty years of age and nuns were to be fifty if they did not have a superior monastic education. The result of the secularization and decrees was to empty the monasteries with a corresponding loss of importance. In 1864, Prince Cuza decreed that bishops would be nominated
by the Ministry of Cults. This nomination eventually became dependent on political parties.

Prince Cuza personally had good feelings toward the church and, in 1872, founded the Holy Synod which was recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1895. By 1893, priests were dependent upon the state as well as municipalities (parishes) for their salary. Overall, the state's intervention into church life had negative consequences for church life. Metropolitan lost their former authority. The theological seminaries at Iasi (1860) and Bucharest (1884) were placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Cults. Relationships with Orthodox churches which used the Greek language became "worse" on account of the 1863 secularization while relationships with the Russian Orthodox Church became intensified.

In Transylvania, Bishop Saguna conducted a Rumanian National Assembly at Blaj in 1848. It was decided that the Uniates should return to the Orthodox Church, but the Hungarian Roman Catholics worked for the incorporation of the Uniate Church. In addition, confessional Orthodox schools flourished under Saguna who also founded a theological-pedagogic institute in Sibiu in 1850.

After World War I, Transylvania was united with Muntenia and Moldavia under the principle of synodality (1/3 clergy, 2/3 laymen) as outlined in Saguna's "Statute Organic." This also became the basis of the Statute of Organization of 1925. The Patriarchate of the Rumanian Orthodox Church was recognized by Constantinople under Patriarchs Miron (1925-1939) and Nicodim (1939-1948). A commission of the Holy Synod, led by Metropolitan Nicolae Balan, voted in 1927 that theological teaching should be under the leadership of the church. In 1929, the state signed
a concordat with the Vatican making the Roman Catholic Church "...a state within the state". Bishops were to be appointed by the Vatican; theological seminaries were outside of state control, and the Uniate Church was to be considered more dependent upon the Catholic Church. In 1936, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church recognized the validity of the Anglican Holy Orders.

After World War II, Rumania came under a Communist regime. Patriarchs Justinian (1948-1977) and Justin (1977-present) worked for good church-state relations and have been "representative figures of contemporary ecumenism." The 1948 Law of Cults recognized the freedom of conscience and the autonomy of the equal cults. Theological schools (eight) were left to the care of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church was placed under the Department of Cults. Two seminaries for nuns in Hurezi and Agapia functioned from 1949 to 1957. In 1948, the Roman Catholic concordat was repealed and the Uniate Church was reunited with the Orthodox Church. The Saguna statute was used as the basis of the 1948 State of Organization. There are five metropolitans, thirteen suffragan bishops, 8,157 parishes, and sixty-five monasteries. The "central deliberative organs" are the Holy Synod (spiritual and canonical) and the National Church Assembly (economical and administrative). The central executive organs are the National Church Council and the Patriarchal Administration.

As with the Russian Orthodox Church, the Rumanian Orthodox Church did not participate in the World Council of Church's General Assembly in Amsterdam (1948) and Evanston (1954). It did join the W.C.C. in New Delhi (1961). It has participated in the ecumenical movement as shown by the work of Patriarch Justin. He was formerly a member of the Central
Committee of W.C.C. and led the Rumanian Orthodox delegation to New Delhi, Uppsala (1968), Nairobi (1975), and to the Pan-Orthodox Conferences at Rhodes (1961, 1963, 1964), and Chambesy (1968). Up until 1977, Patriarch Justin was a deputy in the Great National Assembly of the Rumanian state.

During Patriarch Justinian's tenure, the Rumanian Orthodox had contacts with the Vatican, the Roman Catholic Church in Austria, West Germany, and Belgium; the Old Catholic Church, the Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches; and with the W.C.C. in Geneva. He also sponsored theological conferences with other confessions in Rumania ("local ecumenism").

Edited by A. J. Bittner

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END NOTES

1 Dr. Mircea Pacurariu has published a volume History of the Rumanian Orthodox Church, Volumes: I (1980, 644 pp.), II (1981, 707 pp.), and III (1981, 591 pp.). These volumes contain many illustrations, a large bibliography, and indices of names. He is a professor of Rumanian Church History at the Theological Institute at Sibiu. These three volumes are an update (1949-present) of a two volume series published in 1957-1958 which ended in 1949.

2 The Western press wrote that a similar decision in 1959-1960 decreed that monks had to be 55 and nuns 50 years of age if they had no theological education. In 1956, I visited the convents at Hurezi and Agapia each with 200 and 400 nuns respectfully. In September, 1960, I again visited Hurezi and Agapia and found that the young nuns had been sent away. In September, 1982, I found young nuns in convents near Bucharest, but I did not visit Hurezi and Agapia again.