

## THE RUMANIAN CATHOLIC DISRUPTION

THE people of the country we call Rumania are in part descended from the 'veterans of Trajan', colonists drawn from several parts of the Roman empire, chiefly Italy and Illyricum, and planted in the province of Dacia in the early years of the second century A.D. They fused with the Thracian natives, and during the great migrations were overrun by Goths, Huns, Avars and other barbarians; the new people thus produced retained a language Latin in origin but modified by Slavonic and other influences—the name 'Romania' explains itself.

St Niketas of Remesiana (d.c. 414), to whom the composition of the *Te Deum* is attributed, is claimed as one of the apostles of the Dacians, and they certainly at first formed part of the Western church. But they were conquered by the Bulgars in the ninth century, passed to the Eastern church, and so were eventually involved in the Byzantine schism during the later middle ages. For a long time the Rumanians (or Vlachs) depended on hierarchs of the Bulgarian and other churches, and it was not till the fourteenth century that three separate metropolitans were given to the Rumanian provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia by the patriarch of Constantinople; there were some Catholics of Latin rite and earlier in the middle ages bishops were appointed to look after these Kuman converts and Magyar, German and Polish colonists. The Moldavian metropolitan, Damian, signed the act of union at the Council of Florence in 1439, but his church refused to support him.

The Rumanians had to pay tribute to the Turks after the battle of Mohacs in 1526 until the nineteenth century. In 1859 the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia were united under a single vassal prince, Alexander John Cuza, and in 1877 they declared themselves independent of Turkish sovereignty. Four years later the kingdom of Rumania came into being. At the same time ecclesiastical independence was also secured, the Orthodox Church of Rumania being unwillingly recognised as autocephalous by the patriarch of Constantinople in 1885. At the end of the century the population of Rumania was about 6 million, of whom 91.5 per cent was Orthodox and 6 per cent Catholic; these 150,000 Catholics were mostly Austrians and Hungarians, with an archbishop at Bucarest and a bishop at Yassi (Jasi).

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But Wallachia and Moldavia were not the only areas where Rumanians lived. There was also that part of former Dacia called Transylvania (The Ardeal), to their north and west, west of the

Carpathian mountains. Whether Transylvania be Rumanian or Hungarian is the question at issue in one of those nationalist squabbles, carried on with fantastic propaganda, which have helped to bedevil east-central Europe, and which have done so much harm to religion through the use of ecclesiastical cultures and allegiances as weapons in the struggle: fortunately it is no concern of mine here.<sup>1</sup> The Magyars (proto-Hungarians) got control of Transylvania in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and when the Turks conquered most of Hungary, Transylvania became a separate principality under Turkish suzerainty. A hundred and fifty years later Austria reconquered the Hungarian lands from the Turks, in 1684-85; and from then on Transylvania was under the Habsburg dynasty till 1918, having been simply a province of the kingdom of Hungary from 1867.

We begin to hear of bishops of Byzantine rite in Transylvania during the middle ages, but they had no permanent sees. After the Magyar conquest, the Latin bishops bungled their relations with the Byzantines, largely through disregarding the pertinent provisions of the fourth Lateran Council, and in the sixteenth century there were several dissident bishoprics, e.g., at Feleac, Vad, Silvas and Alba Julia. The principles of the Protestant Reformation, however, had reached the German colonists in Transylvania very early. Those of Saxon origin mostly became Lutheran, the Suabians remaining Catholic. But havoc was played among the Hungarians as well, of whom many turned Calvinist, and a violent campaign was launched against the Orthodox Rumanians. By the middle of the seventeenth century the Rumanian church in Transylvania had become a monstrosity—'Calvinist by creed, Orthodox in certain of its rites', as a learned priest of Blaj, Augustine Bunea, put it. When, therefore, the troops of the emperor Leopold I of Austria occupied the country in 1690, the military chaplains, all of whom were drawn from the Society of Jesus, turned their attention to the local religious situation. The most successful of these missionaries was Father Ladislav Baranyi, his chief assistant being Father Francis Szunyogh, who compiled a catechism in the Rumanian tongue. At their instance, the Rumanian Orthodox bishop of Transylvania, Theophilus Szeremi, called a synod in 1697 which signed an act of union with Rome. Szeremi died soon after, and his successor, Athanasius (Atanasie) Anghel Popa, went according to custom to Bucarest to be consecrated. There he met Dositheos, patriarch of Jerusalem, who solemnly warned the Transylvanian bishop of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kalorz's *Myths and Realities in Eastern Europe* (London, 1946), a book that is much better than its title.

dangers of Protestantism.<sup>2</sup> The advice was taken to heart in a way that did not please Dositheos: Popa called another synod in Transylvania, at which the decision of the previous meeting was ratified, and in due course reunion with Rome was definitively declared.

The basis of this reconciliation was the 'four points of the Council of Florence', viz., acceptance of the Catholic doctrines of papal supremacy, of Purgatory, of the double procession of the Holy Spirit (without necessarily adding 'and from the Son' to the liturgical creed), and of the validity and lawfulness (but not the necessity) of the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist. Popa and his protopriests stipulated that their Byzantine 'discipline, church ritual, liturgy, fasts and customs remain unchanged; if not, neither do our seals bind us'; and the Holy See of course gave the necessary assurance.

Both Protestants and neighbouring Orthodox were furious at this event; there was an outbreak of violence, and for a time the union was in danger. But it was not till nearly fifty years later, in 1735-51, that foreign influence, mostly of Orthodox Serbs, was able to bring about renewal of the state of schism, which reduced the neo-Catholics by half. The position of the remainder was then stabilised by the third successor of Popa, the holy Peter Paul Aron. In 1777 a second episcopal see, for the more remote part of the territory, was established at Oradea Mare (Naghy Varad).

This then was the beginning of the church of Catholic Rumanians of the Byzantine rite. The reunion of 1698 was certainly not wholly inspired by disinterested conviction of the truth of 'Roman claims' and abhorrence of schism. It seems that Szeremi and Popa both were moved primarily by fear of Protestantism and desire to get rid of the absurdity, indignity and tyranny of being under a Hungarian Calvinist 'superintendent'. There have been analogous ecclesiastical and political factors in some other reunions, which have sometimes been spoiled thereby from the beginning. In the case of the Transylvanian Rumanians the reunion eventually worked out well and became permanent.

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After the European war of 1914-18 the province of Transylvania was taken from Hungary and incorporated with the 'old kingdom' of Rumania, to form the kingdom of 'greater Rumania', thus from the Rumanians' point of view restoring a *terra irredenta* of which

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<sup>2</sup> This was the famous Dositheos who presided over an important synod at Jerusalem in 1672 which formally condemned Protestantism. Its confession of faith, which bears the name of Dositheos, is one of the official statements of Eastern Orthodox beliefs.

they had been deprived for nearly a thousand years. At this time the total population of Transylvania and the adjoining territory transferred from Hungary to Rumania was over 5 million. Of these, some 3 million were Rumanians,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million Hungarians and  $\frac{1}{2}$  million Germans. About a third of the people were Orthodox, nearly a quarter Catholics of Byzantine rite, a fifth Catholics of Latin rite and another fifth Protestants.<sup>3</sup>

The Orthodox of Transylvania (and those of Bessarabia and the Bukovina) became part of the Rumanian Orthodox Church, which in 1925 declared itself a national patriarchate, following the example of Yugoslavia a few years before.<sup>4</sup> Rumania was now the second largest Orthodox church (about  $14\frac{1}{2}$  million souls), and before the Soviet-sponsored revival of the Church of Moscow in 1943 there was no little talk of Bucarest being the heir of Constantinople and of Moscow as the leader of Orthodoxy. The Rumanian Church was not formally 'established'; officially it was simply the 'majority' church, in whose affairs the state was keenly interested. But the Byzantine Catholics of Transylvania were also looked on with favour, as the minority national church. The Latin Catholics of the whole of Rumania were fewer than their Byzantine brethren in the Ardeal (about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million respectively in 1932), and they were mainly of foreign origin, principally Hungarian and German, representing, at least in Transylvania, 'the oppressors' of the past.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly the Byzantines received such preferential treatment as having all their five hierarchs *ex-officio* senators of the realm, whereas of the five Latin bishops only the archbishop was so honoured, a state of affairs that was embodied in the concordat made between the Holy See and the Rumanian kingdom in 1929.

This was a great change for the Byzantine Catholics of Transylvania from being as it were merely 'poor relations' (to put it mildly) of the Hungarians, and after 1919 their prestige and influence grew out of all proportion to their numerical importance. They had played a conspicuous part in the awakening of Rumanian national consciousness, and it was one of their bishops, Julius Hussu

<sup>3</sup> It seemingly is impossible to get accurate statistics. The above figures are estimated from those given in C. A. Macartney's *Hungary and Her Successors* and in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, art. *Magyarie*.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of a patriarchate has now become almost completely degenerate. The latest candidate for patriarchal honours is Bulgaria, looking back to the earlier autonomous status of Okhrida and Tirnova.

<sup>5</sup> But in the 'old kingdom' the Latin Catholics are thoroughly 'rumanized'. So much so that in the diocese of Jasi, until 1924, they actually followed the Julian kalendar. For this and other information I have to thank Father Austin Tremer, A.A., who resided in Rumania for years.

of Gherla, who in 1918 had conveyed, from Alba Julia to the king in Bucarest, Transylvania's decision to be joined with Rumania; it was their clergy and clerical families (over 90 per cent of the parochial clergy are married, according to Eastern custom) who had laid the foundations of Rumanian literary and academic culture during the nineteenth century; the Rumanian professional classes in Transylvania were the elite of the whole 'new kingdom'; the peasantry were a hardworking and religious people, and ethnically thoroughly Rumanian.

Accordingly during the years between 1919 and 1939 the Catholic Rumanians and their Byzantine church progressed and prospered. The see of Alba Julia & Fagaras, with its episcopal residence at Blaj, had been made metropolitan in 1853, with the suffragan eparchies of Oradea Mare, Gherla (residence now at Cluj) and Lugoj. A new eparchy, of the Maramures, was formed in 1930, with its headquarters at Baia Mare. The first three had senior seminaries, two of them with over 150 students, and a pontifical Rumanian college was founded at Rome in 1930. All together the parochial clergy came to number over 1,500, organised into deaneries under protopriests who exercised considerable powers. The small minority of Byzantine Catholics outside Transylvania came under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Alba Julia & Fagaras. This hierarch had in some respects almost patriarchal authority, and representatives of all the clergy had an advisory voice in selecting him.

For over a century, thanks to the ecclesiastical activities of the Emperor Joseph II, there were no Catholic Rumanian monks or nuns in Transylvania. But about twenty-five years ago a small community of Basilians of St Josaphat<sup>6</sup> was established in the ancient monastery of Bicsad, near the Podcarpathian border; since then it has grown and planted out four smaller daughter houses, and itself became a very considerable place of pilgrimage, to the shrine of the All-holy Mother of God. The publications of the Bicsad printing press had a very large circulation. The religious life is also represented by Byzantine members of Western orders—Conventual Franciscans, Jesuits, Brothers of the Christian Schools and, especially, Augustinians of the Assumption. The last named set up in 1923 a Rumanian vice-province of Byzantine rite, and in 1938 transferred their well known Institute of Byzantine Studies from Kadi Köi (Chalcedon), near Constantinople, to Bucarest. They

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<sup>6</sup> These religious, up till then exclusively Ruthenian, are successors of the old monks of the Ukraine. But since 1595 they have come to resemble the clerks regular of the West, and as such have done great work among the Ruthenians in Europe and America.

opened a special house for the spiritual formation of aspirants to the priesthood at Blaj, and were entrusted with the direction of the 'internat' attached to the old-established 'Pavelian' school at Beius, and were responsible for other works of great religious value. Convents of Oblate sisters of the same congregation were established, including a novitiate for Rumanian sisters, and during the war of 1939-45 they took over a large hospital at Bucarest, from which other nuns had withdrawn. Metropolitan Basil Suciú in 1921 founded at Obreja, near Blaj, the teaching and nursing Sisters of the All-holy Mother of God, who had four houses. The teaching Sisters of Our Lady of Zion came to Oradea Mare in 1934; and the contemplative Annunciation Sisters of Langres opened a convent of Byzantine rite at Edera, near Ploiesti, in 1937.

The number of colleges, schools, technical institutes and the like, and of hospitals and orphanages, under ecclesiastical auspices, was in 1939 considerable and growing, especially in the metropolitan eparchy of Alba Julia & Fagaras, and the Catholic Rumanians are heirs of a good tradition in ecclesiastical art, especially church music. This in Transylvania consists of native melodies derived from the old Byzantine chant, and for long transmitted orally.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, in that province the native church architecture has been almost superseded by neo-classical forms, at any rate in the larger churches.

This brief, almost statistical, sketch is enough to show that in 1939 the Catholic Rumanian church of Byzantine rite was an important and worthy province of the Universal Church, full of promise for an even finer future.

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The direction of Soviet ecclesiastical policy could be seen pretty clearly after the recognition of a Russian patriarch in 1943 and subsequent events, especially the destruction of the Catholic Byzantine church in Galician Ukraine; and it was not difficult to foresee what was coming in Rumania. And as the campaign against the Catholic Ukrainians (Ruthenians) seems to have waited on the death of their great metropolitan, Andrew Szepticky (Cf. BLACKFRIARS, February 1948), so the signal for action, after preliminary skirmishes, in Rumania was apparently the filling of the vacant Orthodox patriarchal throne there in the spring of 1948. But first a word on relations between Catholics and Orthodox between the wars.

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<sup>7</sup> Until the seventeenth century the Rumanian liturgy was celebrated in Church Slavonic. It was then changed to vernacular Rumanian in Transylvania, which is now the usage of both Byzantine Catholics and Orthodox throughout Rumania.

It was the opinion of the very experienced Catholic bishop Valerius Trajan Frentiu that in Rumania particularly reunion was an administrative and personal psychological problem rather than a doctrinal and 'ideological' one; and, though not uniform, relations between Catholics and Orthodox were better and closer probably than in any other Orthodox country. Strong opinions in favour of reunion were expressed by Orthodox clergy and others from time to time (as by the priest Jeremias Chekan in 1933), the churches co-operated in educational and other public affairs, and official contacts were sometimes more than courteous. All this was helped by the fact that for historical reasons the Rumanian bishops were more conscious of the dangers of Protestantism than in other Orthodox lands. Their first patriarch, Miron Cristea, tried to arrange for some of his clerical students to attend Catholic universities; some of them in fact went into residence at Strasburg, and the present pope, while still Cardinal Pacelli, arranged for a few to receive scholarships in Rome. Nevertheless, as time went by, a certain hostility towards Catholics developed among the Orthodox bishops of Transylvania.

The new Orthodox patriarch of Rumania, Justinian Marina, is, it appears, a person of somewhat equivocal antecedents, who was imposed on the electors by the government, and at his enthronement in April 1948 he gave an address in which he announced his object of bringing back to the Orthodox Church the Rumanian Catholics of Byzantine rite, whose clergy he has denounced as 'agents of imperialism'. In the following month the Orthodox metropolitan of Sibiu, Nicholas Balan, who is bitterly anti-Catholic, issued a national appeal to Catholics to return to their 'mother church'. The Byzantine Catholic bishops, who a year before had been called to Bucarest, asked to hand over their church schools to the state, and had refused, were now again summoned to the capital. This time they were asked to break with the Holy See. They refused again.

It is likely that the final details of the campaign were settled when Patriarch Justinian attended the congress of Russian Orthodox bishops at Moscow, 8-19 July 1948. On July 17 the Rumanian government denounced the subsisting concordat with the Holy See, and proceeded to reduce the ten Catholic dioceses to four, two for each rite, deposing the other bishops. On September 27-29 many priests in Transylvania received a visit from a police or other official, often a member of the Communist party, presenting a form for the nomination of priest delegates to a conference which should proclaim the return of the Byzantine Catholics to the Rumanian

Orthodox Church. Various means were used to secure signatures; promises of advantage, threats of prison, of deportation, of death, even physical coercion. The signatures thus obtained were said to number 423; and it is known that some who signed under duress afterwards tried in vain to get their signatures withdrawn.

The assembly met on 1st October at Cluj, capital of Transylvania. There were thirty-eight delegates present, under the presidency of Protopriest Trajan Belascu.<sup>8</sup> The secret police kept a sharp eye on the proceedings; and separation from Rome was duly voted without open dissent. No doubt some of these priests were genuinely disaffected; but their dejected and unhappy appearance was remarked, and one of them, Father John Florea, has declared, 'We [the delegates] were dragged from our homes by the police . . . taken to Cluj and then to Bucarest, where we were kept under guard at the Athenée Palace Hotel. Throughout this time we did not know exactly what we were doing, and one of us went mad.'

No bishop, of course, had any part in the proceedings, and at the end of the month all six of them were arrested: John Suceiu, administrator of the vacant archbishopric of Alba Julia & Fagaras, Valerius Frentiu, the aged and revered bishop of Oradea Mare, John Balan of Lugoj, Julius Hossu of Gherla & Cluj, Alexander Russu of Maramures, and Basil Aftenie, auxiliary of Kyr John Suceiu. They just had time to send a joint letter to the head of the State protesting against what was going on. The bishops are believed to be confined in the monastery of Campulung, and doubtless will be brought to 'trial' in due course.

Patriarch Justinian expressed his gratification at the union of all Rumanians in one church, which he declared had been decided on 'voluntarily and without compulsion', and on 1st December the governmental decree of ratification was issued. It set forth (article 1) that the dioceses, chapters, religious communities, protopresbyterates and all other organisations and institutions of the Catholics of Byzantine rite had ceased to exist; and decreed that (article 2) all property whatever of the above institutions now belonged to the state, except parochial property, which now belonged to the Rumanian Orthodox Church.

It is difficult to say what the 'ordinary clergy and faithful' make of all this: a good deal of news is coming out of Rumania, but not enough to give a complete and coherent picture.

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<sup>8</sup> He had been reconciled from Orthodoxy. Another prelate who took a prominent part. Father Iuga, appears to have had a grievance because of an unsatisfied ambition to be a bishop.



Whatever can be said in favour of a married clergy (and probably in some circumstances there is more than the Western Catholic readily realises), there is no doubt that it can be a source of weakness in time of persecution. The welfare of wife and family can be used as a potent weapon by the unscrupulous, and this has certainly been done in Transylvania, where so many of the Catholic clergy are married. But if some priests have failed—under who knows what ordeals—many are standing out heroically. Already some have given their lives, such as the newly-ordained priest who was shot by the police for refusing to repudiate Catholic unity, a few minutes after he had celebrated the Holy Mysteries for the first time. Many more have been committed to prison on one pretext or another: in January there were 120 in jail in Cluj alone. Blaj, where the archbishop lived, is a special centre of resistance. Here the police also closed the small church of the Latin rite because so many Byzantine Catholics were flocking to it, and the Sisters of the All-holy Mother of God had to be removed from their convent by force: 'their chapel was like a battlefield: broken glass, smashed benches, torn books, blood, all over the place, especially the steps down which the nuns were carried to the lorry'. The provincial superior of the Basilian monks, Father Maxim, together with the abbot of Bicsad, Father Marina, and two of his obedientiaries were arrested twelve months ago; the monastery and its institutions were seized by troops and police, and the lay-monks most brutally treated. The priest-monks were able to escape into hiding, and many other priests have taken refuge in the mountains and forests elsewhere. The importance of this 'catacombs movement' is suggested by the report that priests in Rumania are now authorised to celebrate the Liturgy without vestments and with other vessels than chalice and *diskos*.

Meanwhile the laity are far from being left unmolested. All the forces of the state and its propaganda are brought to bear on Catholics of the Byzantine rite. Police, Communist party members and other agents have gone from house to house seeking to cajole or trick or frighten the householder into signing a form, for himself and his family, declaring that, of their own free will and without any constraint, they have decided to unite themselves with their Rumanian brethren in the Orthodox Church. The news-bulletin of the Eastern Congregation in Rome has given touching particulars of what has passed on some of these occasions, and of the abominable devices used to force the hands of both pastors and flock (See, *e.g.*, nos. 61 and 63).

'Rarely in the history of the Universal Church', says the same

source, 'has there been so grievous a crime as this one, committed in the middle of the twentieth century and in defiance of that liberty of conscience and free exercise of religion proclaimed in the [Rumanian] constitution. This decree [of 1 December 1948] has taken away the last possibility of [fully] practising their Catholic religion from hundreds of priests and many thousands of faithful who, in spite of terrorism and violence, are not willing to give up their convictions.'

Surprise has been expressed at the 'spectacle of a Communist government espousing the cause of one church against another'. There is no need for surprise. If a government that aims at a completely 'unitary' state discovers—as the government of Russia has discovered—that religion is hard to get rid of, then the next best thing is to bind as many believers as possible into one church, and to bring and keep that one church in subservience to the state (Mussolini had need of only the second part of this programme); and there are several reasons why it is less difficult to force Byzantine-rite Ukrainians or Rumanians into the Orthodox Church than Latin-rite Poles or Hungarians. Moreover, not the least factor in Soviet Communism's enmity towards the Catholic Church is her supranational influence and prestige. To the Eastern Orthodox Christian the force of this influence is less than the appeal of the Orthodox ethos and tradition. But Catholics of the Byzantine rite combine the two—the supranational unity of Rome with most of the Orthodox tradition; and therefore the Soviet leaders regard it as a specially dangerous form of Christianity, even in a small minority. Hence the destruction of the Byzantine Catholic church in the Ukraine, in Rumania, and elsewhere. Hence, too, what many have never realised—the special bitterness with which the microscopic group of Catholics of Byzantine rite, including Mother Anna Abrikosova's Dominican nuns, in Russia were pursued and stamped out. The agonising death of their holy exarch, Father Leonid Feodorov, at Vyatka on 7 March 1935 meant more to the bolshevists than the simple event alone would suggest.

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