

# The Romanian Orthodox Church: Relations with the State and with Other Orthodox Churches

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In communist times the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) was recognised by the state but firmly under state control. All prominent church figures had to gain state approval and were expected to collaborate with the secular authorities. Very few ROC leaders have confessed to collaboration, however, so this is still a live issue. One of the first to do so was Patriarch Teoctist himself, who then stepped down in 1990; but after three months, at the insistence of other members of the Synod, he came back and remained as patriarch until 2007.

Teoctist was a monastic; his successor Patriarch Daniel is a man of the world who is interested in marketing the church in contemporary society. Teoctist was pro-Russia and under his leadership the ROC tended to issue statements critical of the West; Daniel by contrast is pro-western and pro-EU. As far as church-state relations are concerned, Teoctist favoured the English model of an established church, and he and some clergy argued that bishops should be members of an upper house of parliament. Daniel is more in favour of the German model: partnership between church and state but not dependence. Previously the ROC encouraged priests to stand in elections; nowadays it discourages this on the grounds that priests, as Romanian citizens, have the right to engage politically, but not in a partisan manner by running on a particular party list. Several church leaders we have spoken to, including Daniel before he became patriarch, are not in favour of the *symphonia* state-church model, but prefer the idea of partnership, whereby for example the state would devolve social care to the church, giving it money to carry this out.

Probably the biggest achievement for the Romanian churches in the postcommunist period has been the introduction of religious education into state schools. Other problems have however remained unresolved, perhaps the most important of which is the question of church property. About 85 per cent of the Romanian population identifies itself as Orthodox. In 1948 there were about 1.5 million Greek Catholics. In communist times the Greek Catholic Church was illegal, but it was relegalised in 1989. According to the 2002 census there are now only about 200,000 Greek Catholics, and the ROC has been reluctant to give back churches and property on grounds of diminished numbers. Up to 2007 the Greek Catholics were expected to try to

get property back through dialogue with the Orthodox, but since that date they have been allowed to take cases to the courts, a development which has not gone down well in Orthodox circles.

Romania's neighbour on its eastern border is the Republic of Moldova, formerly a republic of the Soviet Union and now independent. Its president until 2009, Vladimir Voronin, was the only elected communist head of state in the postsoviet period. He has said that Jesus was the first communist, that the Bible does not condemn communism, and that the Moldovan Orthodox Church is the religious equivalent of the leading Communist Party, while all other religious denominations are equivalents of the opposition. All Orthodox priests and believers should vote for the communists.

The Moldovan Orthodox Church is under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. Amongst 'other' (oppositional) denominations Voronin includes the Metropolis of Bessarabia, a diocese reestablished by the ROC in 1992, a move which led to strained relations between the world's two biggest Orthodox Churches, the ROC and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarchate has never recognised the new structure within what it sees as its canonical territory. The diocese is headed by the now suspended former Russian Orthodox bishop Petru Paduraru. Talks on canonical settlement of the problem held in 1997 and 1999 resulted in no mutually acceptable arrangement.

In October 2007 the Synod of the ROC decided to establish seven new dioceses, three of them in Moldova and neighbouring Transnistria, also formerly part of the Soviet Union. According to the deputy head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, 'This is a nationalistically tainted expansionist adventure and an act directly leading to a split in the Christian Orthodox world... One is getting the impression that the Church of Romania is simply a toy in the hands of nationalistically minded politicians and it is surprising that the Romanian Church has taken this road.'

Meanwhile the ROC maintains cordial relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate based in Istanbul. Since the demise of the Soviet Union there has been increasing tension between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate, relating chiefly to rivalry over jurisdictions. In 2009 Patriarch Daniel visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios, and in October 2010 Bartholomaios paid a return visit to Romania.

For further information on and analysis of the ROC since the end of communism see the article by Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu 'The

Romanian Orthodox Church and democratisation: twenty years later', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10, 2–3, May–August 2010, pp. 144–59. This article starts by presenting the legacy of the communist past, as relating to the use of nationalism by the Romanian Orthodox Church and its reluctance to confront its collaboration with the communist regime. Its second part discusses religious education in state schools, arguably the religious denominations' most important achievement after 1989, before, in the third part, examining the different models of church-state relations embraced by the Romanian Orthodox Church during the reigns of its two post-communist patriarchs, Teoctist and Daniel. It argues that although marred by its communist past for almost the first decade and a half after 1989, the church, like the country itself, has transformed in the process of accession to the European Union. In particular, it argues that the search for a model of church–state relations has evolved in the view of the country's dominant church, from one of establishment to one of partnership.

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