

Dismantling a Human Rights Movement: a Romanian Solution

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The term "Romanian solution" usually describes the policy of mutual accommodation, worked out over the past 15 years, between the State and the Churches in Romania. Partly as a result of this the Romanian Orthodox Church today enjoys considerable benefits. Now some of the smaller Churches in Romania, in particular the Baptists and the Pentecostals, have begun to adopt this policy of accommodation as well. There have been regular reports about the advantages which cooperation with the government brings:¹ for example, permission to build new churches, openings for special visitors from abroad, an improved theological training for priests and pastors, and tolerance of the growing number of faithful (including young people), and of the small-scale fellowships created for them.

The Romanian authorities, it would seem, have decided that religion will continue to exist for much longer than predicted, and that it must therefore be tolerated. Nevertheless, the "Romanian solution" is at present showing another facet of its character. The imprisonment of at least 22 religious believers over the past six months indicates the State's answer to those who demand more than the privileges offered within the confines of the "solution".²

But imprisonment is only one aspect of the present policy of the State. An alternative method for removing malcontents is emigration, and this is sometimes made obligatory. This has the added advantage of giving the government a good record on emigration in the face of stickler international organizations monitoring human rights.³ But to be fair, the Romanian state officials are baffled by religious believers. The number of faithful continues to expand, and yet believers complain that they are deprived of their rights. In the State's view, religious believers should be grateful that the Churches are gaining strength and that they are tolerated by a system which is opposed to their world-view.

Recently the Romanian government has become increasingly concerned over human rights activists within the country. Since the emigration of the writer, Paul Goma, to France in 1977⁴ the responsibility of

promoting human rights in Romania has fallen, to a considerable extent, upon religious believers. Central to the movement are Baptists Pavel Nicolescu and Dimitrie Ianculovici, and the Romanian Orthodox priest, Gheorghe Calciu Dumitreasa. All are presently under close surveillance. Fr Calciu was arrested on 10 March this year, and is still being held in appalling conditions at the time of writing, whilst Ianculovici and Nicolescu are being forced to apply for emigration. The State's action towards them, and in general towards those associated with them, reveals how a threatening human rights movement may be dismantled.

The movement demanding religious rights grew up as a result of the 27th Congress of the Baptist Churches held in Bucharest in February 1977. The Congress [see *RCL* Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 94-8] came at the end of four years, during which many Baptists, led by Pastor Josif Ton, had protested about state interference in the Church's affairs.⁵ The Congress also provided a platform for fresh criticism of the second-rate status granted to evangelical believers in socialist society. A document circulated immediately after the Congress by Pastor Ton, Nicolescu, Aurel Popescu and three others, mentioned three areas of discrimination: education, employment and the right of free association. Never before had such a detailed account of religious infringements in Romania been gathered so systematically.⁶ The document formed part of the US Helsinki Commission's dossier on Romania, presented at the Belgrade review meetings that year.

The evangelicals' action coincided with the better known views on human rights of Paul Goma. On 3 April 1977 the police rounded up Goma, his supporters and the six evangelicals.⁷ It was a concerted effort to prevent any further development of what was becoming an extremely embarrassing movement. The presence of journalists in the country to report on the recovery of Romania after the earthquake of 4 March further increased the government's sensitivity. Goma and several of the secular dissidents were finally encouraged to leave the country, and it seemed that the quick and brutal action of the police had succeeded in quietening the religious element as well.

The State handed over to the Baptist Church's officials the task of punishing those members of the Church who had protested. In February 1978 Nicolescu and Popescu were banned from preaching, while Ton's position as a pastor remained shaky but intact.⁸ This discrepancy of action against the principal dissidents divided the Baptist dissidents, and this division gradually widened, though not intentionally. In April 1978 Pavel Nicolescu, with Ianculovici, formed the Christian Committee for the Defence of Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience (called ALRC after its Romanian initials). With nine founder members, mainly young Baptists, the Committee formulated a programme⁹ far exceeding Pastor Ton's earlier vision for internal denominational freedom. They called for

a "free religion in a free State", demanded redress for Greek Catholics and the Lord's Army (of the Orthodox Church), and drew attention to cases of discrimination against individuals for their faith.

The membership of the Committee grew and attracted one or two significant individuals from the Romanian Orthodox Church, who exposed instances of repression in the Orthodox Church. They unearthed examples of psychiatric abuse against priests and nuns, such as Fr Samiznicu and Ioan Boboc, and sisters Lidia Abebe and Zimnicu Ursu.¹⁰ Their documentation supplemented evidence of psychiatric abuse from the secular dissidents who had arrived in the West.¹¹ The situation of the Orthodox priests, Fr Costica Maftai and Leonida Pop, who were unable to carry out their priestly duties, was also publicized. It was clear that the Committee threatened to tarnish the reputation of the "Romanian solution".

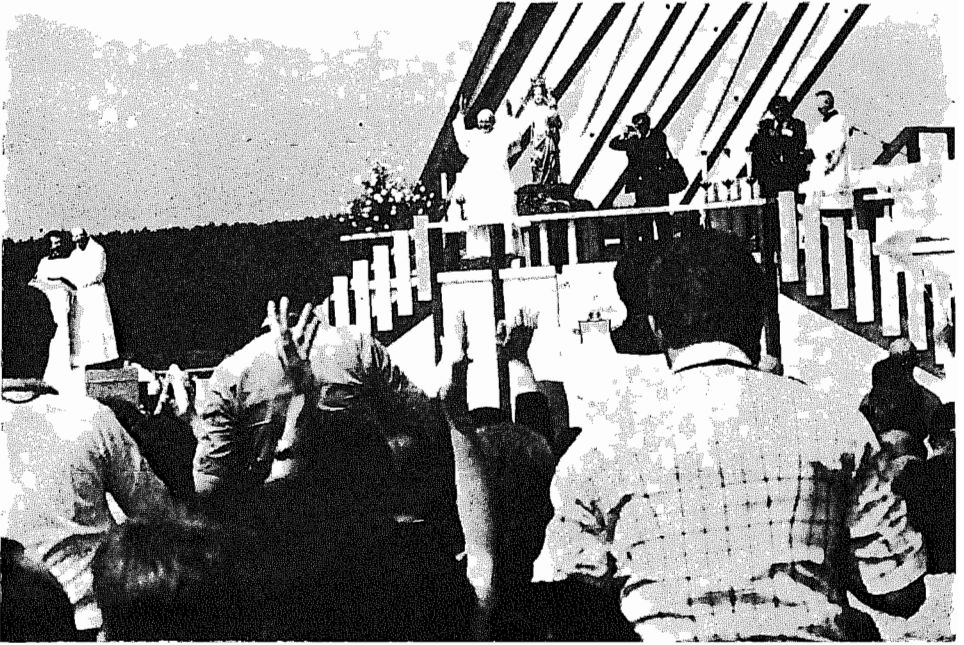
Ton and Popescu expressed their support for the group, but refused to join it because they felt that they should be more closely involved in evangelism.¹² The uneasy alliance between these former fellow-activists reached breaking-point in September 1978. Nicolescu and Popescu were expelled from the denomination, together with all other members of the ALRC.¹³ As in February 1978 Ton, however, escaped expulsion. He has come to terms with the present leadership of the Baptist Church, leaving his relationship with Nicolescu and Popescu shattered. His silence when three members of ALRC from the Caransebes Baptist Church were arrested on 15 October 1978 was the final straw, being labelled by ALRC as the moral cause for the arrests. Although now Ton denies responsibility for the present human rights movement, ALRC's adherents claim him as their initial inspiration. Thus the State has managed, through its relatively lenient attitude towards Ton, to weaken the human rights movement more effectively than would have been the case had it attacked Ton personally at an earlier stage.

Another prominent religious figure in the Romanian human rights movement is the Orthodox priest, Fr Gheorghe Calciu Dumitreasa. He was arrested on 10 March this year. There has been considerable concern about him in the West,¹⁴ and within Romania a committee (see p. 177) has been formed to campaign on his behalf.

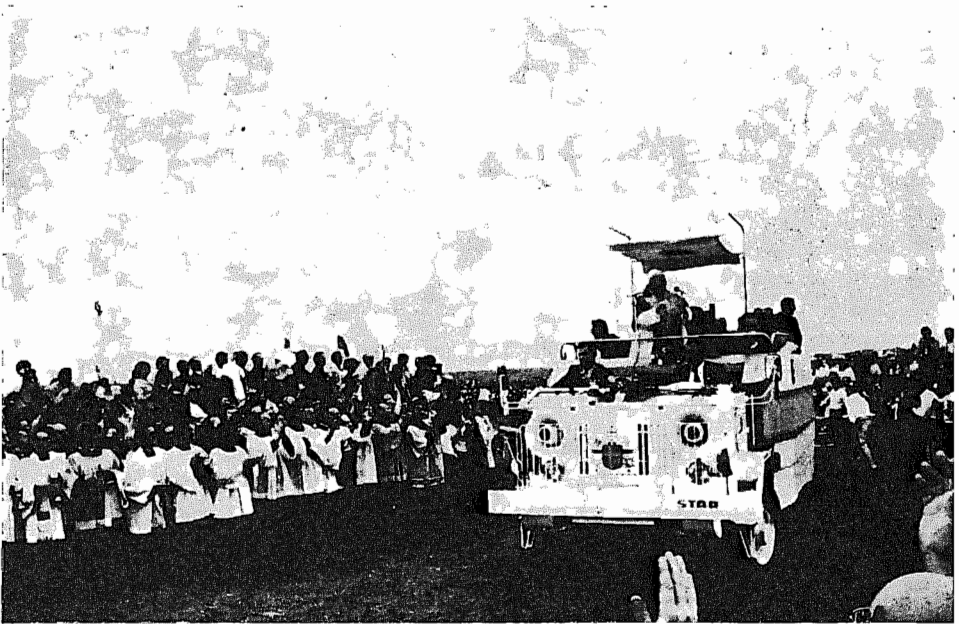
Fr Calciu faces a long sentence and has had to endure torture in prison. He is clearly being used as an example to stop any future protest action within the Romanian Orthodox Church, especially among the many seminary students whom he once taught and who have already shown their solidarity with him.¹⁵ He first crossed the authorities in the autumn of 1977 when he protested publicly against the demolition of Enea Church in Bucharest. (The demolition had been ordered, according to a rumour, by the President's wife.) At the beginning of 1978, when preaching in the Patriarchal Cathedral, he described atheism as a philosophy of despair.



Pope John Paul II standing in the window of the Bishop's Palace in Krakow, where he had lived as Cardinal Wojtyła. Beside him stands the new Archbishop of Krakow, Franciszek Macharski (see RCL Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 127). Alexander Tomsky discusses the Pope's visit to Poland on pp. 160-5. (© J. Ruševski)



The Pope in Nowy Targ, near the Tatral mountains, where he spent many holidays before his election as Pope. About a million people were there to greet him. (© J. Rušecski)



After celebrating mass at Nowy Targ, the Pope is driven through the vast crowds. (© J. Rušecski)

He mentioned both subjects again in a series of Lenten sermons which he gave at the Seminary in Bucharest in March and April 1978.¹⁶ Subsequently Fr Calciu was removed from his teaching post and placed in the Patriarchal administration.

The committee formed to defend him, and ALRC, publicized his situation.¹⁷ Soon he in turn appealed on behalf of the three imprisoned Baptists from Caransebes.¹⁸ Documents which reached the West earlier this year indicate that he had also begun to experiment with open seminars as a forum for discussing aspects of religious life in Romania. One paper presented at such a seminar discusses the position of religious groups among the national minorities of Germans and Hungarians.¹⁹ Furthermore, some of Fr Calciu's associates in these open seminars launched a Romanian Free Trade Union last March.²⁰ This was too much for the authorities. Although Fr Calciu is in no way connected with the Free Trade Union, his association with its leaders provided sufficient grounds for his arrest. Thus, in order to avoid being accused of religious discrimination, the Romanian authorities are finding political grounds for the arrest of human rights activists. Most serious is their accusation that such activists are members of a neo-fascist organization.²¹ Sadly, a number of priests in the Romanian Orthodox Church have been encouraged to condemn Fr Calciu (see pp. 175-7) and a systematic transmission of letters from Baptist and Orthodox officials has been ordered by the Romanian authorities to counter bad publicity abroad. Keston College has been one of the recipients of such letters.²²

To predict the outcome of the present situation is a difficult task. The dual method of selective arrests and enforced emigration will certainly help in the short term to undermine the human rights movement. But, unfortunately, the present obvious advantages of cooperation may also prove short-lived. It will then be necessary for others to rediscover the ideals of the human rights activists as expressed in the final paragraph of the Free Romanian Trade Union declaration :

There exists the possibility that we, the founders of the SLOMR, will be physically crushed and morally broken by the perfectionist apparatus of repression. . . . We can be annihilated, but the ideals for which we fight will not perish as long as there is a Romanian in his land. We are sure that others, younger and more courageous, will come and will lead further the inextinguishable flame of dignity of man in Romania.²³

Selected documents relevant to this topic have been published in English translation in *Romanian Report*, 1979, prepared by the Society for the Study of Religion and Communism, Keston College's associate in the USA.

¹ Cf. letter to Michael Bourdeaux from Dr Ioan Bunaciu of the Romanian Baptist Seminary, *RCL Bibliography* (hereafter *RCL Bibl.*) RO/1979/BAP/2, in this issue of *RCL*; "Romanian Baptists resolving church-state issues", Gerhard Class, *European*

Baptist Press Service, 28 February 1977, p. 3; "Believers in Romania - divided they stand!", *Christianity Today*, 20 May 1977, pp. 18-21.

² Cf. RCL Bibl. RO/1979/BAP/4.

³ Romania still has to apply annually for Most Favoured Nation status with the USA and would like to have this on a permanent basis.

⁴ *The Times*, 22 November 1977, p. 6.

⁵ Cf. "Romanian Baptists and the State" by Alan Scarfe, RCL Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 14-20.

⁶ "Neoprotestants and human rights in Romania," March 1977, available in English translation from Keston College.

⁷ *The Times*, 14 April 1977, p. 7; *ibid.*, 14 May 1977, p. 4.

⁸ Cf. RCL Bibl. RO/1978/BAP/2, 3, in Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 206.

⁹ Cf. document in this issue of RCL, pp. 170-3.

¹⁰ Cf. RCL Bibl. RO/1978/ORT/2, 3, 4, in Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 63.

¹¹ *Le Monde*, 24 November 1978, p. 8. Also, *Romania, the sun, the sea, the sand, the labour camps*, published by Amnesty International, November 1978.

¹² Cf. RCL Bibl. RO/1978/BAP/8, in Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 206.

¹³ Cf. *Indrumatorul*, 7-8, 1978, pp. 8-9. Sedinta Extraordinara a comitetului Ununii.

¹⁴ *Le Monde*, 22 March 1979, p. 4.

¹⁵ Cf. appeal from the seminary students, published in *Catacombes*, January-February 1979, p. 10.

¹⁶ Fr Calciu's lenten addresses are available from Keston College.

¹⁷ *Catacombes*, October 1978, p. 10. Also, RCL Bibl. RO/1978/ORT/4, 6, 8, in Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 63.

¹⁸ "To our brother man", by Fr Calciu, available from Keston College; RCL Bibl. RO/1978/ORT/10, 11, in this issue of RCL.

¹⁹ RCL Bibl. RO/1979/ORT/4, in this issue of RCL.

²⁰ *Le Monde*, 7 March 1979; *Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 1979, p. 4.

²¹ *Keston News Service*, No. 72, 10 May 1979, p. 4; *Le Monde*, 12 April 1979.

²² Cf. RCL Bibl. RO/1979/BAP/2; RO/1979/ORT/2, in this issue of RCL.

²³ *Declaration of the formation of the Romanian Workers Free Trade Union*, p. 8; also *Free Trade Union News*, May 1979, publishes the document in full.

NB—On 12 June Keston College received news of the arrest of Dimitrie Ianculovici, and two other ALRC members, Ludovic Osvath and Nicolae Traian Bogdan. Ianculovici has been sentenced to six months imprisonment. The others have received three and two months hard labour respectively. A.S.

Appendix

ALRC's Programme of Demands

In April 1978 the Baptists, Pavel Nicolescu and Dimitrie Ianculovici, formed the Christian Committee for the Defence of Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience (ALRC). It addressed the following "Programme of Demands", dated 5 July 1978, to the Romanian State and Communist Party. Although initially the Committee attracted mainly Baptists as members, later a few members of the Romanian Orthodox Church joined.

APPEAL FROM THE ROMANIAN CHRISTIAN
COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF
CONSCIENCE

To The Council of State
Minister of Justice
Department of Cults
Baptist Union

Spokesmen of the above
Committee:

Pavel Nicolescu, Dimitrie Ianculovici