

CHURCH AND STATE IN RUMANIA

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The vast majority of the Rumanians are Members of the Greek Oriental — or, as they themselves prefer to call it, the Orthodox — Church. For that very reason the relation of the Greek Oriental Church to the State and the inner organisation of that Church, is regulated by a special Law in terms of which this Church is the "ruling church" ("*biserica dominanta*") in Rumania. All the costs of maintenance are provided by the State, which, on the other hand, makes every effort to convert the Church into a political instrument for its own ends. Some of the Rumanians living in Transylvania are Members of the Greek Catholic — or, as they prefer to call it, the "Uniate" — Church ("*biserica unita*"). This Church is also recognised by the State as "a Church of the Rumanian people"; and for that reason it is granted all kinds of special benefits in matters of a material character, though, seeing that the object inspiring the Greek Oriental Church to countenance such procedure is to unite all Rumanians within its fold, an endeavour fully supported by the State too, in practice the Uniate Church has to suffer a handicap as compared with the Greek Oriental Church, there having indeed at one time been violent dissensions between the two Churches on account of the Orthodox propaganda carried on for the purpose of forcible proselytising. Although apparently condemning and forbidding this propaganda work, the State has in reality never attempted to defend the Greek Catholics, — a circumstance proved also by the fact that, notwithstanding its being a "Rumanian religion" quite separate from that of the Orthodox Church, its relation to

* (from a Monograph entitled "*The Church Life of the Magyars*")

the State has been adjusted in the same provisions as deal with the other minority forms of "worship".

This so-called "Worship Act" — after a series of discussions and violent disputes lasting for years — was passed during the year 1928 in the course of a bitter Parliamentary struggle, and, though it contains a whole series of provisions that cannot be put into force without accompanying Instructions, so far (except for one or two details) those Instructions have not been drafted, so that the law has been put into working without them, on the basis of one or two novels and as interpreted by Government in each several case.

The "Worship Act" therefore regulates the relation to the State of all denominations, except the "dominant" Orthodox Church., A particularly characteristic moment is the very fact that the Act does not speak of "churches" but of "worships" ("cults"). The one and only "church" is the Orthodox Church, the others — inclusive also of the Rumanian Greek Catholic denomination — are simply "worships" (forms of religion), a circumstance which naturally involves far-reaching consequences in respect of their relation to the State. Although the Rumanian Constitution declares liberty of conscience and the equality of religions, the "Worship Act" abolishes these rights, for by differentiating between "church" and "worship" it creates a state of inequality and subordination and establishes differences also between the several "worships" by the exception made in favour of the Greek Catholics as constituting a Rumanian religion and by calling the others simply "minority worships". Apart from these "worships" the Act speaks of "religious associations", which (as, for instance, the Baptist Church) may function on the basis of ministerial permission.

The right of supervision of the State extends to every form of material, administrative, educational and missionary activity of the denominations; the protection and support offered is on the other hand merely a blind. The granting of legal redress is left to the discretion of the Minister.

Although State grants are given to church districts and clergymen, these grants are not remitted in any manner

prescribed by law, but the sums are fixed again every year and show a continuous decrease in amount; that given to the Reformed Church, for instance, now being much smaller in proportion than those given to the Rumanian Churches. There are no State grants for schools; and indeed educational matters do not come under the "Worship Act" at all, being subject to the provisions of the Education Act, and in Rumania to the jurisdiction of a separate Ministry and Department. The establishment of new church districts or any redistribution of the older districts can be effected only on the basis of a parliamentary law and is not within the sphere of authority of the respective Church; all rights of the kind relating to dioceses are vested in the Minister. The election of the heads of churches (bishops) becomes valid only after confirmation by the King and after an oath of allegiance has been taken. All circular letters addressed to the Members of any Church by the supreme ecclesiastical authorities must be submitted for approval to the Ministry.

As already stated, the Act speaks separately of "*religious associations*" as distinct from "worships". The vagueness of the terminology and the deliberate failure to issue Instructions for carrying the law into effect, however, makes this point fatal to the congregational life of the minority churches, and in particular of the Magyar Reformed Church. For the authorities — indubitably in a spirit of malice — treat as "*religious associations*" the Sunday schools, the youth associations, the women's unions, the men's unions and in general all the missionary organisations of the Church, which under the Act do not form separate fictitious persons but are merely working branches of the Church, forcing them to obtain ministerial permission in each individual case and preventing their activity by the aid of what are practically police regulations.

Of great importance is the provision of the Act relating to the regulation of the religion of children of mixed marriages. The Act cancels and abolishes all previous agreements. Thus, in Rumania reversions are unknown. In the case of persons living in a mixed marriage union the religion of the children is to be determined by the father when registering the birth, separately for each child and irrespec-

tive of the child's sex, though no other religion can be determined than that of either of the parents. We cannot help suspecting that the Act is hereby endeavouring to ensure the incorporation in a Rumanian church of the children of a minority mother married to a Rumanian.

The Act is so completely concentrated upon carrying into effect its own State policy objects that it does not take into account the interests of religious education or even the state of the faith and the conscience of young people already past pubescence who have been confirmed. This is shown by the provision which stipulates that in the event of either of the parents changing his or her faith, the children of the same sex shall *until the age of eighteen* profess the faith of the parent who has changed his (her) religion.

The conversion to another faith of persons who have completed their eighteenth year is made exceedingly easy by the Act, which at the same time makes it impossible for the Churches to intervene pastorally in the matter at all. The conversion is effected, without the mediation of the Churches or clergymen, simply in the presence and through the agency of a registrar, all that is required being a simple statement or declaration, the conversion becoming valid in law unless that declaration is withdrawn within thirty days. The clergyman concerned merely receives a notice from the competent registrar which has to be delivered within eight days; but the intervention of such clergyman is made quite illusory, seeing that the convert is not required to report himself to him. Although the letter of the law may not perhaps betray the fact, experience proves all the more decidedly that this provision making the act of conversion exclusively the work of State authorities is an attempt to further the rumanianisation of the Magyars by the aid of religion.

We must refer our readers also to the provision of the Act which forbids the acceptance — without previous permission of the State — of material assistance from foreign countries. In the life of the minorities this provision puts into the hands of the State a powerful weapon for continuously molesting and for crippling the minority churches.

Apart from its political tendency the "Worship Act" betrays an equally dangerous anti-Reformed character also in its conception of religious life. The work of drafting the Act was influenced very considerably by Greek Oriental prelates and godless politicians of a Freemason persuasion. Both factors alike—each as dictated by the particular spiritual disposition — aimed at the common end of confining the religious life of the minorities generally and of the Magyar Reformed Church in particular to their church services and — more than that — to suppress its manifestation in their congregational life. That this tendency is fatal above all to the Reformed Church, need not be explained. It is only due to the special grace of God that the Magyar Reformed Church has found its own hidden, narrow paths to replace the confined broad roads as means for the fostering of its religious life and the fulfilment of its congregational mission.

The Rumanian State has so far prevented the development of the Reformed Church as a unit by refusing to recognise the *establishment of the Királyhágó Region District*, thus impeding also the *legislative work of the Synod*. The result is that in Rumania the Church Act of the years 1904/17 — which is out of date, obsolete and unsuitable and has been invalidated in Hungary — is still in force in our Church.*

The chicanery inflicted upon the Church schools in Rumania has a special history of its own. The *Private Education Act* (1925) and the *Instructions* for the carrying into effect of the same (1926) have developed into an inexhaustible source of suffering. The cardinal postulate of the Church Act — to the effect that our schools with all their appertenances are part of the body of the Church and are subject to the Church authorities — has become the subject of ironical indifference. Rumania has simply degraded the Church schools to the position of "*private schools*", applying to them the destructive provisions of the Private Education Act which

* We have just learned that an Order in Council has recently recognised the Királyhágó Region District; though that Order has at the same time formulated demands in respect of the election of bishops, for instance, as in practice once more render the autonomy of the Church quite illusory.

cannot possibly be complied with. Under the absurd system of control hundreds of schools have wasted away; a whole series of schools have been compelled to close their doors while struggling in vain to obtain the so-called "right to figure as public schools"; and those remaining are groaning beneath an endless series of persecutions humiliating alike to teachers and pupils. The instruments of torture known as "name analysis", language test, "national subjects" etc. have left an indelible impression in Transylvania. By the establishment of "*Magyar sections*" in the State schools the State has succeeded in breaking the unity of the school-front of the Hungarian Churches, in alluring some of the teachers to accept service with it and in withdrawing two-thirds of the pupils, thus succeeding also in making these sections themselves to all intents and purposes Rumanian. The doom of the Church schools is sealed; their religious and Magyar spirit is wasting away gradually under the weight of the requirements of the syllabuses; and their very existence too must become problematical, unless a change ensues in the situation in some way hidden from our sight, by the special grace of God — an issue for which we shall never cease to pray and for which we shall never give up hoping.