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1

Orthodoxy, *Symphonia* and Political Power in East European Communism

Orthodoxy and *symphonia*

Orthodoxy is the dominant religion in south-eastern Europe and Russia. Alongside Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, it is one of the three major branches of Christianity. It numbers around 200 million faithful and largely spans from the Far East to Eastern Europe, while important diaspora communities are present in Western Europe, North America, Africa and Australia. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines Orthodoxy as

a family of Churches, situated mainly in Eastern Europe: each member Church is independent in its internal administration, but all share the same faith and are in communion with one another, acknowledging the honorary primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople.¹

The 'Orthodox' in Orthodox Christianity means 'correct belief' or 'right thinking', while the sometimes-used adjective 'Eastern' in the construction of the term 'Eastern Orthodoxy Christianity' refers to the eastern part of the Roman Empire and the Christian conversion of Eastern Europe under the political domination of Constantinople. In contrast with the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, Orthodox churches lack a systematised doctrine regarding their relationship with the state.

In Orthodoxy, the relationship between church and state is characterised by the concept of *symphonia* (συμφωνία) or the 'system of co-reciprocity' (Σύστημα συναλληλίας, lat. *consonantia*), a doctrine which developed in Byzantium. As John Meyendorff states, 'the great dream of Byzantine civilisation was a universal Christian society, administered by the emperor and spiritually guided by the Church'.² According to this vision, the empire was considered the kingdom which would last forever, whose political and religious domination would be without competitor on earth, as it was the reflection of Christ's kingdom. Both the church and the state should collaborate towards 'achieving a sublime destiny'³ of the people under their jurisdiction

and there is no conflict between the means employed by the church or the state in promoting the welfare of their subjects. While there is a separation between the completely laic character of the state and the religious status of the church, *symphonia* promotes equality and an intimate relationship between these institutions, however, with different priorities and methods of operating. The state is interested in its survival within a system of states and the projection of its power in international politics. The church operates with religious methods leading the community towards the best way of achieving spiritual progress and salvation.

According to *symphonia*, both church and state use their own laws in order to promote their purposes and there is no confusion between them. The state does not rule itself according to church law or vice versa. There is no interdependency nor is there a complete separation. In fact, the major problem of the concept of *symphonia* is that the demarcation line between church and state remains unclear. For this reason, religious leaders could achieve strong political roles in society and political leaders could influence the church's position. From this perspective, the ruler and the priest are the major political and, at the same time, religious figures on earth.

Both the church hierarchy and the emperor had special status in the Byzantine Empire. The emperor was considered the thirteenth apostle or equal with the apostles (*isapostolos*) who fought for the 'right' faith, while the patriarch was in charge of ensuring that the community was following the spiritual path towards salvation.⁴ The church-state relationship was influenced by the mutual cooperation between the emperor and the patriarch on their respective paths to achieving their individual and their subjects' salvation. According to Orthodoxy, the emperor had a special place in the material and spiritual worlds as the chosen leader, 'similar to God, who is over all, for he does not have anyone higher than himself anywhere on earth'.⁵ As Steven Runciman stated,

the Church was a democratic institution. It was possible for any Orthodox Christian, however humble his origin, to attain to the Patriarchal throne; merit was in theory the sole criterion. And in practice, except when an Emperor deliberately appointed a nonentity – an action that was always unpopular – the Patriarchs were of a very high level of ability.⁶

The patriarch's main attributions were related to the spiritual progress of his faithful while the emperor regulated the life of the clergy, appointing the highest hierarchical positions and mediating conflicts between its clergy. The history of Byzantium also offers examples of patriarchs who acted against imperial policy. Thus, Patriarchs Photius, Germanus and Arsenius were deposed for defying their emperors who attempted to interfere too much in ecclesiastical policy while John Chrysostom lost his patriarchal throne for censuring the morals of the Court.⁷ From the fifth century onwards,

religious heresy was considered a state crime. Byzantium supported only one religion, Orthodoxy, and condemned its opponents, especially when they were politically dangerous for the stability of the empire, such as in the case of the Bogomils sect which had its own concept of Christianity and preached disobedience to state order.⁸

The concept of *symphonia* acquired a stronger dimension during the reign of Emperor Justinian, who, in the systematisation of civil law, set out some aspects of the relationship between church and empire. Referring to the importance of Christianity, Justinian stated in his *Edict to the People of Constantinople Concerning the Faith* in 529:

We believe that the first and greatest blessing for all mankind is the confession of the Christian faith, true and beyond reproach, to the end that it may be universally established and that all the most holy priests of the whole globe may be joined together in unity and with one voice may confess and preach the ORTHODOX Christian faith, and that every plea devised by heretics may be rendered null and void.⁹

Furthermore, the classical text which indicates the boundaries of the priesthood and imperial offices is Justinian's *Sixth Novel* in which he writes:

There are two major gifts which God has given unto men of His supernal clemency, the priesthood and the imperial authority – *hierosyne* and *basileia*; *sacerdotium* and *imperium*. Of these, the former is concerned with things divine; the latter presides over the human affairs and takes care of them. Proceeding from the same source, both adorn human life. Nothing is of greater concern for the emperors as the dignity of the priesthood, so that priests may in their turn pray to God for them.¹⁰

Justinian's model was followed by his successors and became the tenet of the relationship between Orthodoxy and politics. His *Novels* were further developed in the ninth century in a document titled *Epanagoge*, most probably written by Patriarch Photius. Even if this document was only a draft and was not officially adopted by the state, it was widely circulated in Orthodox territories and influenced the development of further legislation outside Byzantium, through the Middle Ages, to the creation of nation-states. *Epanagoge* states that 'the temporal power and the priesthood relate to each other as body and soul; they are necessary for state order just as body and soul are necessary in a living man. It is in their linkage and harmony that the well-being of a state lies.'¹¹

In Orthodoxy the body of the church is understood differently from that in Western Europe, where it is perceived as merely an ecclesiastical organisation within the state. According to Orthodoxy, the church includes 'the whole body of the faithful, the "holy catholic Church" of the Creed, or at

least the faithful of his own persuasion'¹² and for this reason, the emperor was obliged to interfere in church life, as he was responsible for the salvation of his own subjects before God.

Even if the Byzantine Empire disappeared from Europe's map with the fall of Constantinople on 26 May 1453, its religious and political legacy for Orthodox regions has remained.¹³ As Henri Grégoire states, 'The Byzantine Church is the most important of Byzantine survivals. The Empire has disappeared, but the Church remains.'¹⁴ Through its religious ceremonies and jurisdictional organisation, the church has continued to remind the faithful of the Byzantium model regarding the relationship between church and state. Myths, religious and political symbols of liturgical ceremonials continued to bring together the Orthodox people even if they were now subjects of other regimes. The commonwealth survived through the transformation of Orthodox churches into national churches which shared the same religious faith.¹⁵

The construction of nation-states in the Balkans was closely connected with the support of Orthodox churches for their countries' political regimes. The historical evolution of most Balkan states shows that politicians used Orthodoxy because of its nationalist message in order to induce national cohesion and gain support for their political programmes.¹⁶ Looking back in history, Orthodoxy influenced the nation-building process as its hierarchy saw the possibility of reviving the Byzantine dream of a Christian state while political leaders sought to transform the religious identity of their communities into a national identity.¹⁷

The evolution of Orthodox nation-states in the Balkans showed direct connection between religious and political spheres. Thus, four years after obtaining independence from Turkish rule in 1829, Greece ruptured spiritually from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and proclaimed the Greek Autocephalous Church. Comparably, the proclamation of independence of the Romanian Principalities led to autocephaly for the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1885. The establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918 was followed by the rise of the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920, while that of Greater Romania in 1918 led to the Romanian Patriarchate in 1923.

Orthodoxy and East European communism

Orthodox churches faced a new challenge with the emergence of communist ideology. Political leaders not only had to take into account the religious background of their countries but also sought to use the church's influence in order to benefit their regimes. Because Orthodoxy was moulded on political power, the church hierarchy generally remained passive to the threat of atheism and acted on the belief that 'every regime is the will of God'. Communists sought to control Orthodox churches because religious symbols remained deep rooted in society and offered legitimacy to traditional

institutions. Collaboration between church and state remained on a public level while, at the same time, the regime implemented its atheist doctrine by systematically persecuting religion.

Political employment of religion remained the norm throughout the communist period. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church was raised to the rank of Patriarchate and the regime combined international ecclesiastical prestige with internal mass religious persecution. From 1917 to 1922, 28 Russian bishops and 1215 Orthodox priests were executed, while the clergy were deprived of civil rights.¹⁸ Stalin's intention to transform the church into a national museum failed mainly because it retained its authority in society. Despite persecutions, the beginning of the Second World War led to a higher level of cooperation between the Soviet communists and the church. The 1937 census in the USSR showed that 50 per cent of the urban and 70 per cent of the rural population considered themselves religious.¹⁹ The regime employed the church as a propaganda tool both internally in motivating the people to participate in the war and externally in propagating the superiority of communist ideology in other predominantly Orthodox countries.²⁰

Metropolitan Sergii, who was responsible for the Moscow See, sent a Pastoral Letter to the faithful on 22 June 1941 urging the people to fight against the enemies of the Soviet Union.²¹ For his subservience the regime allowed more than 17,000 churches to be reopened and the church began to recover rapidly.²² The main claim of the Russian Patriarchate was that it was the heir of the third Rome and that the other Orthodox countries should recognise the dominance of Moscow over Rome and Constantinople. This religious point went hand in hand with the suggestion that the other Orthodox countries might follow communism as the leading political ideology of the time. With the regime's support, the Russian Orthodox Church started a campaign sending delegations to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in April 1945, Romania in May 1945 and attending a Slavonic conference in Belgrade in 1946. Patriarch Alexius went even further and visited the ancient Orthodox Patriarchates (Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria) in Syria, Palestine and Egypt in 1945 attempting to bring Oriental Orthodoxy under Russian influence. Furthermore, Moscow sought to dominate the Russian diaspora; its delegation, led by Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutic, went to London in June, to Paris in August and to the US in September 1945 failing, however, to bring these communities under its control.²³ Soviet interest in employing the church in its foreign policy was evident through the fact that the Department of External Church Affairs, which was established in 1946, had the largest number of employees of all the Patriarchate's departments.²⁴

Another political method of Moscow was directed against the independent autocephalous Orthodox churches in its vicinity. The Latvian, Lithuanian and Georgian Orthodox churches were incorporated under Russian jurisdiction, while the small Orthodox Church in Poland was forced to declare

illegal its autocephaly offered by Constantinople on 13 November 1924, and to ask the Russian Patriarchate, as the third Rome, to issue a new *Thomos* of recognition.²⁵ A pattern of offering autocephaly to the Orthodox churches in the region extended after the Second World War. Church leaders who had not previously held prominent positions but who visited Moscow were suddenly elected as their countries' leading hierarchs.²⁶ Metropolitan Timothy of the Polish Orthodox Church visited Moscow in July 1948 and was made head of his church in November 1948. Metropolitan Justinian of the Romanian Orthodox Church had a similar visit in October 1946 and became patriarch in May 1948. Bishop Paisi from Albania went to Moscow in January 1948 and became head of the Albanian Orthodox Church in August 1949. Thus Moscow extended its religious authority to the Orthodox commonwealth and this was to be followed by the political ideology of the Soviet Union. The prime position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Orthodoxy was perceived as a thing of the past as the new political situation led to the rise of Moscow's religious and political authority.²⁷

The ecclesiastical domination of Moscow was not only over broad Orthodoxy but also at the expense of other religions. In the confessional clash between the Orthodox Church and the Vatican, the Greek Catholic Uniate churches were forced to 'reunite' with the Orthodox churches and major religious confessions were forcibly abolished by the communists.²⁸ The climax of these combined political and religious methods was visible on 17 July 1948 when delegates of the most important Orthodox churches, which were already under Soviet influence, sent an 'appeal to all Christians' urging them to fight against the terror of the West while Stalin was portrayed as the 'genius peace-maker'.²⁹

The installation of communism in Eastern Europe revealed comparable religious patterns. In those countries where religion was perceived as indissolubly tied to national identity, political leaders had to ensure that their authority was drawn from both the political and the religious spheres. Across the region, communists appeared at mass rallies together with religious hierarchs mainly because their association with the church's representatives strengthened their own political legitimacy. This had a direct effect as by combining religion with politics the regime prevented opposition and ensured stronger control of the population. The communists took advantage of the ecclesiastical organisation of the church, which followed not only the civil law of the state but also its own canon law, parallel to state structures. Political leaders interfered in church matters and imposed their verdicts while the church presented itself as independent from politics, giving the false notion of religious freedom. Those members of the hierarchy who were seen as undesirable for the regime were tried by the church and expelled by their hierarchical fellows rather than by communist authorities. Religious trials were followed by civil trials suggesting that the church was active in supporting the establishment of a new society.

Moreover, the church became engaged in communist discourse and its prayers were invaded by communist slogans. By combining religious and communist language, communist regimes increased their authority. The portrayal of Stalin as a 'Saviour of the people' and the propagandistic construction of 'a new man and society' were slogans adopted by both the party and the church. This type of language influenced the ways in which the position of the church and the authority of the communist leadership were regarded, and ultimately the evolution of their political regimes.

Communists sought control not only through the subservience of church hierarchs but also through a systematic method of controlling opposition. Following the Soviet model of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, communist countries developed their own apparatus of surveillance and state security. By censoring every pastoral visit and sermon of the church hierarchy the regime ensured that religion was a method of controlling the people, and especially those who preached or showed public dissatisfaction. Even the space of the church confessional was no longer private and, in many cases, words uttered there led directly to political and religious persecution.

The church was effectively transformed into a state department, a process with a history as previous regimes had also used the church in their political designs. The employment of religion by the communists had a direct impact on the political evolution of the country and on the place of religion in society. Officially, in all communist countries, people were free to profess their faiths, but in practice the state sought to erase and destroy any form of religious belief. The regime's stance on religion was especially evident in education from primary to university levels where special courses on atheism were taught. Furthermore, atheism was an academic course even in church seminaries in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.³⁰ However, despite anti-religious propaganda, in some cases the regimes reserved a special attitude towards religion. It is still uncertain how deeply anti-religious some members of the party were during the Cold War period. For example, in Romania, Prime Minister Petru Groza was the son of a priest and a layman within the church's structures. Many Romanian communists continued to bring up their children in the Orthodox faith attending religious ceremonies outside their cities where the party could not easily control them.

Analysing religious factors which influenced the evolution of church-state relations in East European communism, Pedro Ramet proposed six main elements:

- 1 the size of a religious organisation,
- 2 its amenability to infiltration and control by the secret police,
- 3 its allegiance to any foreign authority,
- 4 its behaviour during World War Two,
- 5 the ethnic configuration of the country in question, and
- 6 the dominant political culture of the country.³¹

A large religious organisation represented a direct challenge to communist authorities. Orthodox churches were not only controlled through political infiltration of the secret police but also through the church's own perception of the concept of *symphonia* which argued for cooperation with political power. In addition, because Orthodox churches were not under the jurisdiction of any external ecclesiastical authority, the actions of regimes were seen as internal affairs. Most Orthodox churches supported the invasion of the Soviet Union during the Second World War, representing another reason for the communists to replace hostile hierarchs. Moreover, the ethnic structure of the state led to competition between churches which wanted to expand their influence at the expense of destroying others; for this reason, Orthodox churches were eager to 'unite' with the Greek Catholic churches. The communists took into account the previous political culture of the state, and their attitudes towards religion followed existing forms of collaboration between church and state.

In addition to these factors, a fundamental point in analysing Orthodoxy in post-war Europe had been the employment of religious channels for international purposes. Orthodox churches proved to be important vehicles through which the image of a regime could be perceived and often improved abroad. The Orthodox commonwealth provided the framework for political cooperation between countries, while interwar relations between Orthodox churches and clergymen in the West were reopened in an attempt to infiltrate the diaspora and propagate communism abroad. By preserving relations within the Orthodox commonwealth and with the West, Orthodox hierarchs asserted not only their religion but also reinforced the national identity of their countries. In Orthodoxy, international contacts led to an awareness of similarities and divisions between religions and political regimes and encouraged religious revival after the fall of communism. This book will explore the religious and political contacts between East and West and how Western religious leaders perceived the place of church-state relations during this period.³²

The religious and political authority of Romanian Orthodoxy

Although the first historical records mention the presence of Romanians as the dominant ethnic group in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, their evolution as a nation has been inextricably linked to Orthodoxy which was instrumental in preserving their cultural identity. Romanians spoke a language derived from Latin which distinguished them from the mass of Slavic neighbouring countries. Language and religion became major elements which unified the populations in these territories even when they were subject to different empires. In the Millet system, Turkish control of the region assigned the church the task of providing education while the first manuscripts in Romanian came from the Orthodox monasteries.³³

In Transylvania, Romanians had a comparable historical trajectory. During Habsburg rule, despite forming the major ethnic group, Romanians lacked political and religious rights being considered a 'tolerated' nation. At the end of the seventeenth century the Habsburg authorities sought to diminish the position of the Orthodox Church and established a rival church, the Greek Catholic Uniate Church, which accepted jurisdiction of Rome while maintaining most of its doctrinal corpus with Orthodoxy. The Uniate Church took further the task of protecting the Romanians in Transylvania, and Uniate leaders were the first to use a nationalist discourse in asserting political rights for their communities.³⁴

The evolution of Romanian nationalism was one of the most complex issues in the history of the Balkans. This was especially so since the construction of the Romanian state was itself the political product of various factors, such as the political interests of the European empires in the region, the political opportunism of the Romanian elite and historical chance. Unification of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 is considered to mark the start of the Romanian state-building process which reached its climax in 1918 when Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina united to form Greater Romania.

In building the political architecture of the Romanian state, the Orthodox Church played a vital role as one of the major elements of political attention: politicians believed that controlling the church hierarchy would lead to control of the masses and to the development of a Romanian national identity. Following the unity of the principalities, the church contributed to the construction of the Romanian state by reinforcing the mythologisation of political figures from the Romanian past, thus making a connection between the newly-established state and previous rulers from the Middle Ages who fought for the sovereignty of their states.³⁵

The Orthodox Church acquired a new place in the institutional design of the state and the church's evolution ran parallel to the political trajectory of Romania. The state benefited by including religion in its national policy while Orthodoxy was used as a political tool because it confirmed the historical legitimacy of the state and enabled the construction of national myths. The Orthodox Church also benefited by collaborating with the state, aspiring to identify Orthodoxy with the Romanian nation. Close relations between Orthodoxy and Romanian nationalism reached an extreme in the interwar period when right-wing parties claimed the superiority of Orthodoxy over other religions and promoted the idea of an indissoluble relationship between Orthodoxy and nationality. The unification of the state and close relations between the monarchy and top religious hierarchs revealed a thin line between religion and politics. At times of political crises the monarchy looked to the church as the only stable institution. The patriarch became a member of the regency and led the government three times. The church supported the invasion of the Soviet Union, blessing its troops to fight against 'those without God'.

The gradual installation of communism after 6 March 1945 had to take into account both religious and political positions of the church and, for this reason, the regime spared it from violent religious purges and mass persecutions. The official attitude of the Romanian communist leadership towards religion followed the same principles as their Soviet counterparts in the 1940s indicating that collaboration was possible between the church and the regime. After 1947, having gained complete control of political power, the communists saw the church as part of the Orthodox commonwealth; it could foster the country's relationship with the Soviet Union and could help in imposing its domination over the people.

Romania remained a unique case in the Orthodox bloc during the communist period as the only state which did not have mass religious persecution on the scale of its neighbours. Being a dominantly agrarian society, the authority of the Orthodox Church remained strong and posed a serious threat to a sudden political change. For this reason, in the first years of communism, the regime was careful in organising anti-religious campaigns. By controlling the church hierarchy and employing the church in the propagandistic battle for the construction of a new society, the regime promoted the false idea of religious freedom. The general passive attitude of the church towards the regime did not lead to mass protests; on the contrary anti-clericalism remained low, as the main discourse of the church was that every regime is the will of God and people should not follow political disputes but rather focus on spiritual progress. While this type of discourse did not lead to public opposition, it indirectly retained the authority of the church throughout communism.

The security police in Romania was one of the harshest in the Eastern bloc and religion became one of its methods of eliminating political opposition.³⁶ The main charges against those condemned were that they propagated mysticism and were dangerous to society. In many cases the church hierarchs acted on the borderline between religious and police realms. The effectiveness of religious control was evident through the fact that the number of religious dissidents was reduced and not capable of mobilising the masses; in some cases they only denounced the regime and attracted the attention of mass media when in exile. The 'Lord's Army', a religious movement founded in the interwar period in Transylvania, which posed a challenge to traditional Orthodoxy, was banned by the communists in 1947. However, while the movement clandestinely continued its activity on a smaller scale, some of its members joined Protestant churches rather than becoming involved in political opposition to the collaboration between the Orthodox hierarchy and the regime.³⁷

The religious situation in Romania could be compared with that in Poland, where the Roman Catholic Church did not suffer mass religious persecutions. This was especially due to the prime role of Catholicism for Polish identity and the fact that one-fourth of its clergy was killed in the Second World War. Poland was the only country in which Catholic bishops were

sent to concentration camps and after the war the communists had to take into account the influence of religion.³⁸ Some Catholics were even members of parliament and supported the establishment of a Polish construction of socialism. The main difference between Romania and Poland lies at the core of church–state relations. Owing to the concept of *symphonia*, the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy did not hesitate to fully engage the church according to the regime policy. By contrast, in Poland the church remained independent and was not completely under the party control.³⁹ This fact later fostered the rise of the Solidarity Movement in the 1980s and public opposition to the regime.⁴⁰

Another comparable case was provided by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. After the fall of the Coburg regime on 9 September 1944, the Orthodox Church was incorporated into state structures, becoming highly dependent on its financial support. At the end of the Second World War, Bulgaria was one of the least religious countries in Europe and there was limited church opposition to the communist regime.⁴¹ Georgi Dimitrov, who fled to Moscow in 1923 and returned in 1946 as president of the Central Committee of the Fatherland Front, appeared at mass rallies with church hierarchs. He publicly presented his own vision of the church's place in Bulgarian society in a speech at the millennial commemoration of the death of Saint Ivan Rilsi on 26 May 1946.⁴² In his opinion, the church preserved the national sentiments of the people and had a significant contribution in Bulgaria's history. He followed the Soviet view that collaboration between church and state was possible for the reconstruction of the country and was beneficial to the regime.

Despite official good relations between communists and hierarchs, in order to impose its domination, the regime launched extensive campaigns of religious persecution, to the extent that Metropolitan Kiril, the future patriarch, was imprisoned and tortured. Many high-ranking clergy were executed and the church was transformed into a propaganda tool. The 1947 Constitution stated the freedom of religion and separation between church and state while the 1949 Law of Confessions named the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as 'the traditional Church of the people'.⁴³ The church had been in dispute since 1870 with the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding its autocephaly. However, in 1953 with the direct support of the Russian Orthodox Church, it re-established its Patriarchate, a sign of Soviet influence abroad.

The religious situation in Bulgaria was similar to that in Romania. The Orthodox clergy were incorporated into the Priests' Union and the church's educational and social settlements were confiscated. Metropolitan Kiril enjoyed good relations with top Bulgarian communists and other foreign clergymen. He attended the enthronement of Patriarch Justinian in Bucharest in 1948 and developed a close relationship with him. They visited each other and travelled together to Moscow; in 1953 Kiril was raised to the rank of patriarch (1953–71) and Justinian was the first to congratulate

him during his enthronement. However, the church witnessed a constant decrease in the number of clergy from 2446 in 1948 to 2263 in 1951 and around 1700 in 1977.⁴⁴ After the international détente between the great powers, the church supported the Bulgarian version of national communism, manifested by the bicentenary celebration of the writing of the *Slavic-Bulgarian History* by monk Paisii of Khilendar in 1962, the centenary of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1970 and the 130th anniversary celebration of the Bulgarian state in 1981.

The trajectory of Orthodoxy in Romania differed from that in Bulgaria in the ways in which the church hierarchy retained an autonomous religious discourse. Bulgaria suffered significant religious persecutions and the church was more dependent on their regime, while Romanian hierarchs were more eager to follow the party line. The Bulgarian church had a limited voice in political and social affairs and remained a weak institution without large popular support. This difference had a direct impact on the evolution of their churches after the fall of communism. In 1992 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was split when some members of the hierarchy accused the patriarch for collaborating with the communists. In Romania, there was a brief crisis when the patriarch resigned in December 1989, however, he returned to his position in April 1990 and the church preserved its structure intact.

The Romanian Orthodox Church could also be compared with that of its Serbian counterpart. The Serbian Orthodox Church suffered extreme losses during the Second World War. Many hierarchs were imprisoned in German concentration camps, around 25 per cent of its buildings were destroyed and a fifth of the clergy were killed. The communist regime imposed its authority over the church by accusing many clergy of collaborating with the fascist regime, confiscating its properties in the 1945 Law on Agrarian Reform and Colonization and removing education from religious affairs.

The church's influence in society remained strong and the communists used its legitimacy in order to consolidate their position. Rather than appoint a new spiritual leader, Marshall Josip Broz Tito ensured that Patriarch Gavrilo returned to his hierarchical position, following his liberation from Dachau. He attended the 1948 Moscow meeting of religious leaders in the newly established communist countries. However, while other Orthodox hierarchs praised the new international situation, Gavrilo developed tense relations with the Russian Patriarch. In particular, he was critical of extending Russian jurisdiction over the Serbian communities in Hungary.⁴⁵ Serbian relations with Moscow remained difficult and followed Yugoslavia's political position in the Eastern bloc.

The Serbian Orthodox Church was challenged by the establishment of new religious structures such as the Croatian Orthodox Church in 1942, the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church in 1951, the autonomous American-Canadian diocese in 1963 and the autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox

Church in 1967. These divisions had a direct impact on the position of the church in Yugoslavia as, for example, the Macedonian clergy largely cooperated with the communists in order to obtain independence.

The main concern of the communist regime was that the use of nationalism by the Serbian Orthodox Church would diminish its influence. In order to control the church, the regime carried out extensive religious persecutions and, as in other countries in the region, set up priests' associations. Church-state relations improved under Patriarch Vikentije (1954–8). After Tito established independence within the Comintern, the hierarchs were able to restore relations with other churches behind the Iron Curtain.

In 1958 Tito imposed German, his own candidate, in the position of patriarch (1958–90), who would be compared to Justinian and also labelled as a 'Red Patriarch'. The Serbian Orthodox Church retained relative independence from political interference, focusing on the reconstruction of its destroyed churches and increasing its involvement in social issues.⁴⁶

In the 1980s the Serbian Orthodox Church began to extend its authority by extensively employing a nationalist discourse.⁴⁷ The position of Serbian Orthodoxy during this period differed from that in Romania as it combined Orthodoxy and extreme nationalism while maintaining autonomy from direct political interference. In 1988 the church exhumed Prince Lazar's remains and toured them around the country promoting the idea of a heavenly Serbia. The combination of extreme nationalism and Serbian Orthodoxy would have an impact on Yugoslavia's future shape. The church's discourse developed alongside that of Slobodan Milošević's regime which used references to Orthodoxy in its political actions.⁴⁸

After the fall of communism, despite half a century of atheist rule, the Romanian Orthodox Church retained its dominant position and authority in society. The country remains one of the most religious in Europe having one of the highest figures of believers in the existence of God.⁴⁹ In recent years more than 80 per cent of Romanians consider the church the most trusted institution, followed closely by the Army with 70 per cent while democratic institutions such as the Parliament and the Presidency gained less than 40 per cent.⁵⁰ The law of religious confessions of 1948 was in use until 2006 and many of the religious hierarchs of the late communist period remained in their ecclesiastical offices.⁵¹

At a time of increasing secularisation in Western Europe, shiny new churches were erected in Romania in contrast with derelict and bankrupt factories.⁵² National communism began as official state policy in the early 1960s and was perpetuated during the Ceaușescu period. After the fall of communism in 1989, the nationalist elements of this policy were reiterated in a new light as the church and the democratic regime continued to make strong references to the national past. The current religious revival has to take into account the complexity of Romanian nationalism which considers the church as a major political institution. During the first years of communism the

church showed the ways in which it could adapt to the new political regime. It is the task of this study to examine this transformation.

Conclusion

The relationship between church and state in Orthodoxy is characterised by the concept of *symphonia*. With the emergence of nation-states in the Balkans, political leaders used the powerful force of religion in order to gain authority and legitimacy. Orthodoxy, as the traditional institution which fostered religious identity in the region, was incorporated by political leaders in their institutional designs.

The spread of communism from the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe revealed a comparable pattern in which churches were employed for the regimes' benefits. Maintaining close relations between church and state, the regimes took advantage of the authority of the church and sought their own legitimacy. Analysis of the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the communist regime has to take into account both the status of religion in the Orthodox world and the role of the church in fostering national cohesion. For this reason, the historical trajectory of Romanian Orthodoxy, from the establishment of the state in 1859 to the first government with a communist presence in 1944, is essential for comprehending the development of Orthodoxy during communism and in contemporary Romanian politics. The concept of *symphonia* would become clearly visible in the attitude of religious leaders who stated that 'every regime is a will of God'. The church would continue to collaborate with the political powers, thereby imposing its authority in both the material and spiritual worlds.

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