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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

Reconciliation in the Ethnic Conflict in Transylvania: Theological, Political and Social Aspects*

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Introduction

In March 1990 a violent street confrontation between the Romanian population and the Hungarian ethnic minority in the town of Târgu Mureş was a clear sign that the situation of the ethnic minorities in post-Ceauşescu Romania had to be addressed without delay. Located in the heart of Transylvania, an area that has been co-inhabited by various ethnic groups for many centuries, Târgu Mureş contains a large Hungarian community. This violent clash, occurring just over three months after the collapse of the totalitarian regime in Romania, was a first warning sign indicating the social instability that the previous regime had managed to create. As Romania prepared to embark on its long journey towards democracy, the problem of ethnic minorities posed one of the greatest dangers to social and political stability. This particular explosion of interethnic hatred had no serious long-term consequences, mainly as a result of the moderate responses of the political representatives of the Hungarian and Romanian governments, but it highlighted how quickly such unresolved tensions inherited from the past could intensify and lead to serious interethnic and international conflicts in Eastern Europe.

Over the past 200 years the Romanian and Hungarian ethnic communities in Transylvania have experienced oscillating degrees of tension; these escalated during communism with the intensification of radical nationalism, xenophobia and the crass violation of human rights. The hostility, which had built up especially within the largest ethnic minority in Romania, emerged with the change in the political milieu and threatened the precarious social and political stability in postcommunist Romania. The task of constructing a democratic Romanian society required, and continues to require, the affirmation of a political strategy or ethic in which significant action needs to be taken toward the alleviation of the interethnic conflict. In this article, my concern is with proposing a strategy for understanding the theological, political and social factors involved in dealing with ethnic conflict. Such a strategy will entail analysing the nature of conflict and possibilities for resolution with reference to the concept of social reconciliation. The ethnic conflict in Transylvania will serve as a case study that will allow us to assess the relevance of this strategy to a concrete social and political context.

Social Reconciliation and its Theological Meaning

In the ministry of reconciliation a distinction is made between individual and social reconciliation. The Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter best describes the distinction between individual reconciliation, which refers to a victim's damaged humanity restored

by God and by a supportive community offering safety, 'accompaniment'[1] and hospitality, and social reconciliation, defined as the process of reconstructing the moral order of a society (Schreiter, 1998, pp. 111–12). The transition between these two types of reconciliation is inherent in God's work of restoration in the hearts of the victims of ethnic conflict.[2] This restoration of the victims' humanity should be continued by reconciled individuals who are better equipped to bring about social reconciliation. There are, however, three difficulties that can arise when one is attempting to effect a strategy for social reconciliation. One arises from the fact that there is still a lot to be learned about reconciliation. Another is that even where a formal process of social reconciliation has been completed, it usually takes years to judge the effectiveness of the strategy used. A third difficulty is that no two social or political situations are alike. In crafting a strategy for social reconciliation reference has to be made to concrete situations where ethnic conflict persists.

Social reconciliation should be regarded neither as an abstract mode of viewing and addressing ethnic conflict in a society, nor as another form of public apologising. Schreiter is again illuminating when he warns that social reconciliation '... is not only a matter of healing memories and receiving forgiveness, it is also about changing the structures in society that provoked, promoted and sustained violence' (Schreiter, 1998, p. 112). Whereas political forgiveness is the moral response of one person, group or nation to injustice perpetrated by another, reconciliation includes at least two parties coming together in mutual respect. One may forgive and yet not reconcile. This idea is best articulated in Miroslav Volf's 'theology of embrace', where he differentiates between the 'will to embrace' and the 'embrace itself' (Volf, 1996). Whereas the former is not dependent on the other party, the latter involves two parties in agreement. We can easily apply this illustration to the relationship between political forgiveness and social reconciliation and conclude that social reconciliation in an ethnic conflict should be perceived as a process that involves both parties that are locked into conflict working towards resolution.

There is risk involved in discussing concrete strategies for social reconciliation if one does not make direct reference to the theological underpinnings of this concept. The ministry of reconciliation represents above all a call to come under the cross of the Crucified. At the heart of the Christian message, reconciliation speaks about the changed relations between God and humanity as the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to 2 Cor. 5:19, reconciliation is the fundamental purpose of the Christ-event. Peter Kuzmic has been among those reminding Christians insistently that they cannot speak about reconciliation without speaking of the cross (Kuzmic, 1994, p. 53). From the experience of the recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia people have learned that 'Reconciliation is not brought about simply by a technical problem-solving mentality. It is a response to God's reconciling initiative in Christ' (Kuzmic, 1997a, p. 5).

Another scholar who has contributed in recent years to the theological dialogue around the reconciling significance of the cross of Jesus Christ is Jürgen Moltmann.[3] In *The Crucified God* Moltmann stresses that the only way we can consider the consequences of the theology of the cross for the economic, social and political sphere is through a 'political hermeneutics of liberation',[4] wherein the crucified Christ realises 'solidarity' with every social form of struggle against inhumanity (Moltmann, 1974, pp. 318–19). For Moltmann, the reconciliation that Christ's crucifixion brings into society is linked to the theme of atonement (Moltmann, 1993a, p. 24). Not only is Christ capable of suffering, identifying himself with the victims of the world and with the guilt of the perpetrators through the cross – Christ our Brother – but Christ also atones for the victims, for the perpetrators and for the community in which both victims and perpetrators live together – Christ the Saviour (Moltmann, 1992, pp. 133–35).[5] This divine atonement for sin, for

injustice and violence on earth, surpasses the mere solidarity of Christ with the victims by illustrating God's sacrificial passion and love for humanity. In this way, Christ becomes 'the God of the godless' (Moltmann, 1992, p. 137). True social reconciliation, therefore, can be achieved only under the cross of Christ: 'Here [under the cross], rather, is where the godless are justified, enemies are reconciled, prisoners are set free, the poor are enriched, and the sad are filled with hope' (Moltmann, 1971, p. 382).

The legitimate question that arises from such a perspective on the role of the cross in the ministry of reconciliation concerns the role of the church, as the community of the crucified Christ, in the conveying of this ministry in conflict-ridden societies. According to the Pauline message in 2 Cor. 5:17–19, the church understands itself to be delegated with the ministry of reconciliation. Thus it is because of its moral place in society that the church should aid the creation of reconciled communities, particularly in situations of ethnic conflict. Karl Barth makes enlightening suggestions about how the church and politics should function alongside each other: 'The Church acknowledges and promotes the state insofar as service of the neighbour, which is the purpose of the state, is necessarily included in its own message of reconciliation and is thus its own concern' (Barth, 1981, p. 521). If they were to arrive at this kind of understanding of social reconciliation, the churches in Romania could become a more significant influence in conflict resolution in Transylvania by helping the Romanian state to fulfil its own purposes particularly with regard to the victimised groups in society.

Renarrating the Enmity of the Past

Social reconciliation cannot be limited to the role of the church in the alleviation of ethnic conflict. As noted above, my concern is with the formulation of a strategy for reconciliation that is aware of the theological, political and social factors involved in dealing with conflict resolution. I shall now focus on the role that the political leadership of a country can play in the reconciliation process.

In situations of ethnic conflict nationalism often plays a critical role in the fostering of hatred between ethnic groups, mainly because of its reliance on a particular interpretation of history. The expert on international relations Fred Halliday has pointed out that retelling history is central to nationalism: 'History, and legal claims, are there to be defined by the goals of the community. Selection, distortion, manipulation, plain fabrication are an intrinsic part of the operation' (Halliday, 2000, p. 155). In its relationship to nationalism history is important for presenting the origins of cultures and moral communities. The 'fallacy of autogenetic cultures', as Halliday dubs the historical assumption that there is such a thing as a 'given', or 'timeless', origin of a national community, can divert people from realising that nationalism is a product of the social practices of definition, instruction, writing and enforcement (Halliday, 2000, p. 156).

Social reconciliation cannot take place without an exploration of what past wrongs have been inflicted upon a particular ethnic group. In the absence of a willingness on the part of the antagonistic groups involved in conflict to *renarrate* history from the perspective of those who were its agents and its victims there will be little opportunity for bringing social reconciliation and the restoration of a moral society. In his book on forgiveness in politics the theologian Donald Shriver has stressed that only remembering history morally will protect the future against the repetition of the human atrocities of the past (Shriver, 1995, p. 70). How would such a task of remembering the enmity of the past have to be addressed in order to bring about reconciliation? Shriver sees the task of remembering as closely linked with a moral judgment of wrong, injustice and injury (Shriver, 1995,

pp. 7–9). Without an agreement between both parties that there is something to reconcile, the entire reconciliation process will most probably come to a halt.

Most ethnic conflicts draw their strength from moral judgments on irreversible events that have taken place in the past. However, in societies scarred by such political conflicts, antagonistic groups tend to have difficulties agreeing on the moral significance of their actions. This phenomenon, which Volf describes as 'the predicament of partiality', leads to situations of conflict where each one of the hostile groups or communities sees itself as a victim (Volf, 1996, p. 123). In such circumstances, therefore, an important element in the process of reconciliation is the renarration of the history of enmity that will allow the victims to gain a new memory of the past.

The danger with the renarration of history, however, is that it may generate new tales of historical glory and plausible explanations for past failures, so that hope for reconciliation is again lost. The way out of this predicament is to focus the historical investigation on the real interests and power bases of conflicting groups that have manufactured their accounts for political benefit. Nationalism has led for example to a whole industry of historical claims, many of them fabricated, with the goal of achieving or securing certain territorial claims. Halliday writes:

> The challenge to history, and tradition, assumes practical relevance in regard to what is one of the most contested areas of nationalist conflict, territory. Nationalism, by deriving legitimacy from the past, entails an ethic of territorial claims according to which *primacy of claims results from priority of occupation*. The first ones there have the best claims. (Halliday, 2000, p. 157)

With its territorial claims, nationalism is at the heart of most repressive versions of history, and the account of Transylvania is no exception. The retelling of the past of a nation often becomes a hunt for territories because at the heart of this aspiration lies a desire for political power. As the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran has emphasised in his characteristically pessimistic tone:

> The myths of a nation are its vital truths. They might not coincide with the **truth**; this is of no importance. The supreme sincerity of a nation towards itself is manifested in the rejection of self-criticism, in vitalisation through its own illusions. And, does a nation seek the truth? A nation seeks **power**. (Cioran, 1990, p. 29)[6]

The history of Transylvania is notorious for two contradictory historical accounts narrated by Romanian and Hungarian historiography. In her work on Transylvania the political psychologist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi indicates that the most unusual thing about the Romanian and Hungarian versions of the history of Transylvania lies in the fact that both disputed theories present the very origins of two neighbouring states, Romania and Hungary (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999, p. 60). On one side, the theory of 'Daco-Roman-Romanian continuity' asserts that the Romanians are the descendants of two races, the Dacians and the Romans, whose descendants have permanently inhabited the territories that were later called Wallachia and Transylvania and where Romanians were the majority population in the eighteenth century (Iordachi, 1996).[7] On the other side, the 'Röslerian hypothesis of immigration' proposes the theory that the Daco-Romans were forced out of their territory during the invasion of the Roman emperor Aurelian (AD 270–75) and that by the time they migrated back into Wallachia and Transylvania many centuries later the tribes of the Huns had already established their kingdom, which included both Pannonia and Transylvania (Rösler, 1871).

The moment the debate left its original academic setting, however, the question of the authenticity of the historical evidence was ruled out, and these theories of ethnic continuity became tools of political manipulation for clearly identifiable political ends. Hugh Seton-Watson is in no doubt when he argues that these two rival theories have been perpetuated by nationalistic interests, while both of them lack conclusive supporting evidence (Seton-Watson, 1962, p. 90).

Romanian representatives appealed to the theory of Daco-Roman-Romanian continuity in an attempt to justify their demand presented to King Leopold II (1791) for equal political status with the other three recognised national groups in Transylvania and political representation in the Transylvanian Diet (Schaser, 2000, p. 215). At about the same date, Hungarian politicians began to use the immigration theory suggested by the Saxon historian Franz J. Sulzer (1781), which developed later into Rösler's immigration theory, to secure political and territorial hegemony over Transylvania in the face of the Romanians' demands for political representation (Xenopol, 1998, pp. 8, 38). The discriminatory policies carried out by the successive political leaderships in Transylvania throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and particularly during the communist period, produced a conflict-generating environment that is responsible for the distorted self-perception of the people of Transylvania. As long as these conditions continue to be perpetuated even after the collapse of communism through nationalist propaganda, they will foster a culture where reconciliation between the ethnic Hungarian minority and the Romanian population in Transylvania will be impossible. The years since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe have seen the emergence of a Hungarian national ideology that has reinvigorated themes such as nostalgia about Transylvania and is shaping a conflict-producing national identity among the Hungarian ethnic minority in Transylvania. 'All across Eastern Europe', explains Peter Kuzmic, 'a monolithic communist ideology was replaced by conflicting pluralist nationalist ideologies; whatever animosities communism repressed, these exploded once communism was gone' (Kuzmic, 1997b, p. 7). The resurgence of radical forms of nationalism has claimed the lives of thousands of innocent victims in the wars in the former Yugoslavia. It is therefore worrying that after the former Yugoslavia Romania is the Eastern European country that has seen the highest degree of national polarisation over the last decade. The new political elites in Romania and Hungary should regard as crucial the handling of the ethnic minority problem and take concrete steps toward social reconciliation in order to counter the ethnic strife and radical ideologies pervading their societies.

Many mistakes were made in Romania especially during the Iliescu regime (1990–96) when nationalist thinkers were encouraged to continue to redefine and reevaluate the national history in ways that suited the governing party's own agenda.[8] Several historiographical treatises on Transylvania were published in this period, some of them the result of individual efforts, some of them the product of elaborate projects sustained by the nationalist Romanian intelligentsia. Telling gestures, like the visit of President Iliescu to Cluj in March 1991 which coincided with the 200th anniversary of the *Supplex Libellus Vallachorum*, the petition edited and presented to Leopold II by the Transylvanian School, made obvious the fact that the use of history for the safeguarding of the unitary character of the Romanian state had not been abandoned. There were persistent references to an idealised Romanian past in political public propaganda, the newspapers of certain radical parties and history textbooks.

Romanian history textbooks that are used in Romanian-speaking schools today continue to present a mythical version of the history of Transylvania, while the Hungarian history textbooks used in Hungarian-speaking education in Romania include the history of Transylvania in its conflicting interpretation. When in one of the Romanian history

textbooks published after 1989 (Mitu, 1999) the Romanian voivodes were presented in a less grandiose manner than they had been in communist times, scholars reacted fiercely to what they considered to be the dishonouring of the Romanian nation. A leading Romanian intellectual, Octavian Paler, argued in relation to the publication of such a textbook that if 'integrating in Europe' meant 'denigrating the national history' he did not want to be part of it (Turda, 1999). When during an international colloquium on Romanian history textbooks held in Iaşi in 1996 the Romanian historian Lucian Boia warned that the current textbooks still reflected the nineteenth-century romantic view of Romanian history with its myths he was severely criticised by his colleagues (Balogh, 2001). Although efforts have been made in an attempt to approach controversial issues of Romanian history from a more neutral tone of historical discourse, reshaping and permitting it to become multicultural and relativistic and to eliminate clichés on facts and historical personalities, such efforts have been viewed as threats to the national survival of Romania (Lambru, 1999).[9]

Repeated allusions have been made in Romanian public political discourse to the dangers ethnic minorities are said to present: the decentralisation of the Romanian state and the destruction of the unitary character of the country as affirmed in the Romanian Constitution. During the 1996 presidential electoral campaign, in a desperate effort to avoid his apparently inevitable defeat, President Iliescu delivered an anti-Hungarian speech in which he warned the voters about the imminent Hungarian danger if they voted for the opposition. In the course of his address he displayed a map of Europe taken from Samuel Huntington's book on the clash of civilisations (Huntington, 1997), which showed Transylvania as part of Western Europe, and identified Huntington's theory with the hidden plans of the western 'outsiders', that is North American and European agencies influenced by Hungarian lobbying.

Postcommunist Hungary has experienced a similar resurgence of nationalist propaganda in relation to Transylvania. Nationalist activists have been busy, writing incendiary articles in newspapers and setting up nongovernmental organisations demanding the return of Transylvania to Hungary. Though the nature and quantity of this propaganda has been exaggerated in the Romanian mass media, dozens of books and articles indicate the intense preoccupation of populist Hungarian writers with the history of Transylvania. Imprudent declarations by certain Hungarian politicians with regard to Transylvania have become the subject of severe criticism and the occasion for political manipulation in the Romanian mass media. The resurgence of these radical nationalist tendencies is not conducive to the development of democratic processes in Hungarian society. Renarrating the past in a manner that feeds the anxieties of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania will continue to fuel ethnic conflicts and prevent the society from experiencing social reconciliation.

Would another account of the history of Transylvania offer a solution to the interethnic conflict between Hungarians and Romanians? In the words of the professor of theology Haddon Willmer,

> ... we do not have to spend our energies on the kind of historical work which does not free people from pride in and dependency on some past, which continually draws them back with fascination to play over the issues of the past as though they were still playable, as though somehow the past can be different, if it can be shown a different version of the past is true. But pure historical argument is relatively weak; and the most powerful uses of the past are those that feed existing identities and anxieties and so keep people going in new conflicts. (Willmer, 2001)

The task of achieving reconciliation should emphasise this crucial limitation on any renarration of history. The only remembering of the past which will help the conflict-resolution process is one that reveals the real interests and power bases inherent in the conflicting interpretations of Transylvania's history. The purpose of this remembering of a past characterised by enmity should be to bring the two divided groups to a place where they can begin to contemplate reconciliation. Much of the responsibility for this objective rests with the political leadership in Romania and Hungary. György Frunda, a former representative of the moderate wing of the *Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România/ Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetséget* (The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR)), has pointed out that reciprocal lack of knowledge is one of the primary causes of 'the ease with which the interethnic tension is maintained or even stimulated' (Frunda, 1997, p. 28).

The willingness of the political leadership in Romania to promote interethnic reconciliation will be favourable not only to the internal stability of Romanian society, with all its economic problems, but also to the advancement of the process of European integration. It is fortunate that both Romania and Hungary have been preparing to join the European Union and therefore have to subscribe to the EU's requirements on the treatment of ethnic minorities. Change, however, should not be arbitrated or imposed by international organisations but ought to come from inside in order to generate a lasting transformation. Referring to Romania, Smaranda Enache, the vicepresident of the organisation 'Liga Pro Europa', stressed that it is possible that 'the internal stability of the country and its chances of becoming an EU and NATO member are strongly dependent on its ability to maintain interethnic harmony' (Salter, 1996, p. 92). The fact that in 1999, at the Helsinki EU summit, Romania received approval to begin negotiations for integration into the EU is encouraging, but at the same time it is a warning that efforts should be intensified toward the consolidation of the unstable Romanian democracy. Romanian national interest lies in NATO and EU integration, and being active in national politics in Romania today means working toward this integration. As has been pointed out, '... in our days, the national interest is tied to European and trans-Atlantic openness not nationalist extremism' (Project on Ethnic Relations, 2000, p. 13). Whoever opposes integration by promoting another political agenda is working against the civic national interest, against the sort of nationalism that is based not on ethnicity but on the common goal of achieving a more just, more secure and more affluent society.

Public Repentance and Political Restoration

Social reconciliation should be assisted by a genuine apology for the wrong that both groups have done to one another. As Sándor Birö has noted, knowing the past '... would provide both sides with an opportunity for self-examination and for a sincere acknowledgement of the sins of the past' (Birö, 1992, p. xix). In situations of ethnic conflict this important element is sometimes referred to as 'repentance' or 'penitence'. Although the idea of repentance has a strong religious overtone, it should not be perceived as inadequate to the social and political realms. A basic definition of the concept reveals that repentance involves not only the theological principle of the washing away of sin, but also a practical aspect: '... a radical alteration of the course and direction of one's life, its basic motivations, attitudes, objectives' (Dunn, 1992, p. 120). Jesus' teaching makes it plain that repentance is required not only of the oppressor but of the victim too. For Volf, this seemingly paradoxical tension that he calls the 'politics of the pure heart' makes sense because only in this way will the victims be released from the danger of seeking for revenge and thus perpetuating oppression (Volf, 1996, pp. 114–17).

Joanna Udal has shown how the Stuttgart Declaration, the first official declaration of German guilt made by eleven leading German churchmen in connection with a visit by an ecumenical delegation on 18–19 October 1945, confirmed the important role of public repentance, as repentance became the only road open to the church in postwar Germany (Udal, 1997, p. 67). The confession of the German Lutheran Church's guilt for its lack of courage and witness during the Nazi regime led to a restoration of fellowship among the German churches and to a realisation of the need for spiritual renewal (Udal, 1997, p. 68).

Repentance through confession or apology can represent a facing of the reality of what a particular group, community or nation has done in the past. Shriver has insisted that a very convincing way of emphasising a clean break with the past is to recall that past clearly and publicly (Shriver, 1995, p. 116). Approaching the issue of repentance from a more personal point of view, the Faith and Politics Group, whose main focus has been the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, has stated that '… public rituals of atonement are important to help individuals come to terms with the painfulness of their societies' past, for their healing and for reconciliation' (Faith and Politics Group, 1998, p. 28). Once the past has been retold and unknown facets of the history have been revealed, repentance becomes an acknowledgment of the wrongs done. Even though we should not feel responsible for acts we have not done, the fact that we belong to a community or a nation whose history has brought suffering on others would be reason enough for solidarity in repentance. Last, if the public repentance is to have power, it should be uttered by political and religious leaders who have credibility and who can be considered the representatives of both groups involved in the reconciliation process.

Public repentance has to be followed by an attempt to make a clear break with the past, that is, an effort to undo wrongs, to act differently and to establish a new relationship. Genuine repentance should lead to some sort of political restoration, which may involve concrete steps by civil society and by the political leadership toward a reconsideration of the current status of the ethnic minorities in the society in question. In the Romanian context, the restoration process may amount to constitutional changes that secure the ethnic minorities' status within the state, allowing them to regain the properties seized from them during the Ceauşescu regime, and involving assistance in the rehabilitation of their traditions and culture, access to higher education in their native language, and the opportunity to use their language in local administration and judiciary, especially for those ethnic minorities that represent a significant percentage of the general local population. Some of these requirements are actually stipulated among the 31 chapters of the European Union's *Acquis communautaire*, which Romania has to adopt and meet in the enlargement negotiations.

Recent developments on the political scene in Central and Eastern Europe have led to important changes of attitudes in relation to the interethnic problems in Transylvania among the political leadership of both Romania and Hungary. In 1994 the president of Romania, Ion Iliescu, promulgated a law on the ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights and its additional protocols. According to Article 3 of that law, Romania recognises the right to individual petition to the European Commission of Human Rights and the compulsory jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights (Meleşcanu, 1994). In 1996 Romania signed a Treaty of Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations with Hungary, which was commemorated five years later.[10] Furthermore, during that same year Romania signed and in 2003 ratified the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities.

Also important for the Hungarian minority has been the participation of the DAHR in the governing coalition alongside *Conventia Democrată Română* (the Romanian Democratic Convention (RDC)) and *Uniunea Social Democrată* (the Social Democratic Union)

between 1996 and 2000 and alongside *Partidul Social Democrat Român* (the Romanian Social Democratic Party (RSDP)) since 2000. Notwithstanding the overstated 'electoral and office-holding success' denoted by the 25 representatives' mandates and 11 senators' mandates obtained by the Hungarian party in the 1996 national elections, the inclusion of the DAHR in the coalition was not forced on the government, which had a comfortable parliamentary majority, but happened for symbolic and practical reasons. According to a recent study on the impact of minority participation in Romanian government, the DAHR was granted a place in the governing coalition as 'symbolical compensation' for those Hungarian voters who have supported the RDC, as well as for pragmatic reasons, including the building up of foreign relations' image-capital in connection with membership of NATO, a higher level of insurance for the coalition's parliamentary majority, and the opportunity to tackle the concerns of the Hungarian minority (Chiribucă and Magyari, 2003, pp. 75–76). The goals of the DAHR in the coalition between 1996 and 2000 in relation to ethnic minorities in general and the Hungarian minority in particular included the initiation of a new system of legal provisions to regulate minority rights and laws allowing for the use of minority language at all levels of education. However, by 2000 the coalition including the DAHR had to admit failure in establishing a Hungarian university, failure to achieve the teaching of Romanian history and geography in minority languages (leaving the issue of the use of minority languages in local administration unfinished), and other unresolved problems like the restitution of community and church goods (Chiribucă and Magyari, 2003, pp. 76–80).

In December 2000, one day before assuming office, the RSDP signed cooperation agreements with the DAHR and *Partidul Naţional Liberal* (the National Liberal Party (NLP)), but by April 2001 the NLP had renounced the agreement, leaving the DAHR as the major coalition partner of the SDP. The targets stressed by the DAHR and accepted by *Partidul Social Democrat* (the Social Democratic Party (SDP))[11] for 2001 included political measures concerning the preservation of the autonomy of linguistic and religious heritages, the restitution of property, administrative issues concerning the Hungarian and other minorities and the creation of the Hungarian-language university (Szász, 2003, p. 105). A year later, the SDP–DAHR cooperation agreement presented a different order of priorities as the major concern of Romanian politicians with European integration prompted a policy focused on administrative decentralisation, the restitution of property and welfare state expansion with less emphasis on ethnic diversity. Although there were some achievements, such as the enactment of an antidiscrimination law and the implementation of legislation on the use of multilingual signs giving the names of towns and villages, there was little progress on the use of minority languages in administration and especially in the judiciary, the property restitution process, the history textbook situation or the Hungarian-language university (Szász, 2003, pp. 106–9).

In a recent foreword to his famous study about the extent to which Romanian consciousness is based on a mixture of history and myth, Lucian Boia comments that the 'surprising semi-alliance' between the SDP and the DAHR manifests an intriguing discrepancy best characterised in terms of the tension between 'devotion and tactic' (Boia, 2002, pp. 5–6). In his view, what has been forcing the SDP and generally most Romanian politicians to achieve this tactical 'arranged marriage' with the Hungarian party is European integration rather than a real devotion to social reconciliation and ethnic pluralism. Although the presence of the Hungarian party in the governing coalition means that its interests in relation to the Hungarian ethnic minority in Transylvania have a greater opportunity of becoming reality, we nevertheless need to be cautious about the discrepancy between political discourse and real social change in Romania. Zoltan Szász's conclusion in his study of recent developments in Romanian political life is relevant:

The last three years have not been a success story in Romania in terms of democratization and minority rights, and suggest the following: – Democracy cannot progress without the management of ethno-cultural diversity and guarantees for minority rights; nor can minorities achieve their political goals under 'imperfectly' democratic auspices. – Both democracy and minority rights should be of equal concern to both majority and minority ethnicities. (Szász, 2003, p. 111)

Civil Society and Social Reconciliation

Among the most recent efforts toward social reconciliation, 'The Project on Ethnic Relations' (PER) has been at the forefront, initiating the first discussions and negotiations between leaders of the Romanian government and of the Hungarian minority, replacing confrontation with a pattern of dialogue. The PER is a US-based organisation dedicated to reducing interethnic conflict in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. A PER meeting in Poiana Braşov brought together the leaders of the principal Romanian parliamentary parties to discuss the avoidance of nationalist rhetoric during the sensitive period of the 2000 electoral campaign (Project on Ethnic Relations, 2000, p. 1). The PER proposed that an agreement should be signed by each of the parties represented at this meeting concerning their conduct during the forthcoming elections.[12] This was the first time that politicians in Romania had signed and publicly presented a pact of this kind. It is thus clear that a commitment to, and potential for, openmindedness and tolerance toward ethnic minorities exists in Romanian society, although much more effort will be needed to set in train a significant social reconciliation process.

Civil society in Romania could do much more in stimulating respect for ethnic diversity, interethnic dialogue and regional solidarity and could function as a bridge between the Hungarian and Romanian communities. A number of nongovernmental organisations have already been established in Romania and their activity should be crucial to the reconciliation process, as they engage in dialogue and confront unpopular issues, thereby promoting respect for ethnic minorities and a culture of partnership. Among them *Asociaţia Pentru Apărarea Drepturilor Omului în România – Comitetul Helsinki* (the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania – the Helsinki Committee), established in 1990, is a nongovernmental, non-profit organisation that strives to change both the legislation and the mentalities in the field of civil rights, stress being laid on individual freedom, the right to privacy, fair trial, access to information and similar issues, and on the rights of minorities. *Liga Pro Europa* (the Pro-Europe League) was one of the first nongovernmental organisations in postcommunist Romania. Implemented predominantly in Transylvania, its central programmes are based on the promotion of interculturalism, human rights and minority rights, on civic education and on preventing conflicts. Other organisations such as *Asociaţia Pentru Dialog Interetnic* (the Association for Interethnic Dialogue), *Grupul Pentru Dialog Social* (the Group for Social Dialogue) and *Asociaţia Pro Democraţia* (the Pro-Democracy Association) have maintained an important focus on interethnic dialogue in Romanian civil society. Whereas between 1996 and 2000 civil society seemed more active and united in efforts to act as a link between the expectations of various social groups and the Romanian political leadership (Tismăneanu, 1998), its influence at the political level has been questioned in the period following the electoral triumph of the PSD in 2000 (Blandiana, 2001).

There is also a need for an increased number of workshops, seminars, festivals and publications to aid the process of reconciliation (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999, pp. 16–17).[13] One such recent project undertaken by Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals and political

analysts has begun to ponder the question of the possible economic devolution of territories like Transylvania within Romania (Andreescu and Molnár, 1999).[14] Unfortunately, the devolution argument, while framed in economic terms, has taken on ethnic overtones that affect the efficiency of the dialogue. However, such cooperation within Romanian civil society begins to inspire hope that the Hungarian presence in Transylvania will be 'turned to good account' and that Romanian society will attain a national consciousness that respects and appreciates diversity.

Social Reconciliation and the Churches in Romania

In this section I am referring to all the churches in Romania, of whatever denomination, which express a concern for the welfare and security of Romanian citizens. It may seem reasonable to make distinctions among the Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Neoprotestant Churches in Romania, particularly in relation to their contribution to the reconciliation process. However, such distinctions are rendered unnecessary, because all these churches lack either social thinking or the experience of social praxis that would result from it. In my view the churches in Romania are unlikely to be prepared to contribute in a significant way to the resolution of the current ethnic tensions in society. It could be argued that a church is not an institution called primarily to such a task. As Professor Haddon Willmer has cautioned, it cannot be assumed that churches have the power to represent a coherent voice in the political realm; at best, a partnership could be developed between theologians, civil society and political leadership, in the sense that the former could become the interpreters of the efforts and achievements of civil society and politicians (Willmer, 2001).[15] Cooperation of this kind between church and state in Romania could well be conducive not only to bringing about social reconciliation between ethnic minorities but also to developing the relationship between the churches and the state. For example, Romanian politicians may not perceive the amendment of the debated 'nation state' clause in the Romanian Constitution, or the reform of an education law so as to provide ethnic minorities with access to higher education and local administration in their mother language, to be part of a moral effort on the road to reconciliation, but the churches may well do so and may well wish to stress this aspect. The churches may also support the discussions on ethnic minorities in the Romanian parliament with their prayers. As Karl Barth observes, the Christian community should pray for the civil community 'all the more since the civil community as such is not in the habit of praying' (Barth, 1954, p. 23). The churches should also support the endorsement by the Romanian government of legislation on ethnic minorities which would stress the equality of all people, regardless of their ethnicity. David Steele, a specialist in religion and conflict resolution and the director of various projects designed to facilitate dialogue and provide conflict resolution training for religious people and community leaders from the former Yugoslavia, has indicated that the churches in Romania could protect minority rights by building an exemplary transcultural community (Steele, 1992, p. 38).

Péter Lakatos, the pastor of a Hungarian Reformed church in Romania and a graduate of Princeton Seminary, has indicated, correctly in my view, that the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) defines itself as a spiritual factor in society but does not have a strong sense of social responsibility, and that while the Catholic and the Protestant Churches have comprehensive teachings about the mission of the church and the role of the state and are willing to assume responsibility for shaping social, political and economic processes their attitude is nevertheless mostly polemical (Lakatos, 1998, p. 6). Lakatos' conclusion summarises the reality of the inability of the contemporary Romanian churches to make a positive contribution to interethnic or other forms of social tension that characterise

postcommunist countries. Over the last few years Orthodox theologians have begun to work on the potential shape of a Romanian Orthodox social theology and praxis. When Romanian Orthodox theologians in some recent writings have wanted to describe the involvement of their church in the social realm they have pointed to the notion of Christian philanthropy (Vicovan, 2001; Ciobotea, 2001).[16] The late Fr Ion Bria, a renowned Orthodox theologian and an active participant in the ecumenical discussions in Geneva, insisted that Romanian Orthodoxy must relinquish its triumphalism and historical passivity to social and political thinking (Bria, 1995). To him, missionary revival, ecumenical witness and social presence are the tenets of a new social ethic which are currently absent from the ROC's activity. However, Fr Bria's very accurate and bold critique of the ROC was moderated by a defensive attitude concerning the collaboration of the ROC with the repressive regime during communism and a lack of commitment to religious and ethnic pluralism.

The limitations in the nationalist ideological position assumed by the ROC's theologians mentioned above lie in the absence of any reflection about the nature of democracy and its commitment to interconfesional and interethnic dialogue and reconciliation. Often thought to be permeated more by nationalism and pragmatism than by critical theological reflection (Negruţ, 2000), the ROC is incapable of making a convincing contribution to the reconciliation of denominational tension or of exercising a reconciling role in ethnic conflicts because of its close identification between religion and nationhood: you cannot be a good Romanian unless you are a good Orthodox! Although during a recent conference the Romanian patriarch Teoctist, a former collaborator with the *Securitate* (Romanian Patriarch, 2000), suggested that the ecumenical contacts of the ROC have a national, European and worldwide sweep, it remains unclear in which concrete ways the ROC contributes to the ecumenical dialogue with the religious communities in Romania and what exactly is the 'common attitude' of the ROC towards social and political challenges in Romania (Teoctist, 2003, p. 1). Thus far, the ROC's prelates have demonstrated reluctance about resolving Greek Catholic demands for the restitution of properties forcibly seized by the communist regime, unwillingness to change their discourse about the 'sectarian' character of the Neoprotestant churches and uncritical support for the ratification of a law on cults which continues to give the Romanian state major control over religious life.[17] As the report on Romania issued by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the US State Department indicates:

> The ROC shows a degree of hostility towards the non-Orthodox churches and criticises the aggressive proselytism of the Neoprotestants and of other religious groups which the ROC constantly categorises as 'sects'. The resistance of the ROC to return religious properties to other cults, especially to the Greek Catholic Church, continues to present a problem. (Sârbu, 2001)[18]

The main Protestant (Hungarian Reformed and Evangelical Lutheran) and Neoprotestant Churches (Baptist, Pentecostal, Brethren, Adventist) in Romania do not normally have a clearly defined social agenda either, or when they do, it is completely isolated from an adequate theological notion of social reconciliation. Neoprotestant churches in particular, with their pietistic and socially conservative traditions, tend to reduce reconciliation to its vertical, individual aspect, referring to the relationship between church members and with God with no bearing on further implications for the wider society. This is sad, because Neoprotestant churches with their inherent autonomy with regard to cultural identity or nationalist ideology could have a potential advantage in serving as agents for social reconciliation. The western, often North American, roots of the Neoprotestant churches in Romania protect them from the dangers of ethnic nationalism, but at the same time

challenge their loyalty to the well-being of the nation.[19] As for the Protestant churches, whereas their theological stance is seldom apolitical, as they understand the limitations of social withdrawal, they tend to place at the heart of their social agenda the pursuit of social justice and the struggle for freedom, making reconciliation subsequent to these processes.[20] Very liberal in their social perspective, the Hungarian Protestant churches in Romania tend to seek first the restoration of justice in society; only afterwards will it be appropriate to address the question of reconciliation between people. This may seem an insignificant problem, but these churches' pursuit of social justice in a manner that makes it difficult to distinguish them from any other nongovernmental organisation actually translates into complete disregard for the theological tenets of the concept of reconciliation.

Ecumenical bodies that have developed in postcommunist Romania may succeed in bringing about reconciliation among the diverse ethnic and religious groups that characterise the Romanian landscape. In 1990 *Asociaţia Ecumenică a Bisericilor din România – Ajutor Interbisericesc Departamentul România* (AidROM) (the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania – Interchurch Aid Department Romania) was established. Its members are committed to help foster reconciliation among churches and communities of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the German Lutheran Church, the Reformed Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church in Romania. This organisation has already implemented projects focusing on Holocaust victims and their relatives, helping especially the Jewish and Roma communities in parts of Romania. However, since its inception AidROM has been reluctant to expand and accept new churches beyond its current membership. Another ecumenical body, established in 1992, is *Societatea Biblică Interconfesională Română* (SBIR) (the Romanian Interconfessional Biblical Society). It comprises twelve churches and denominations; it concentrates on communicating the Gospel message in schools, prisons and orphanages, and is producing a translation of the Bible in a version acceptable to all member-churches of the society. With its interdenominational character, this ecumenical body could help further the dialogue regarding ethnic minorities in the interdenominational context. A recently completed bilingual Romanian-Hungarian Bible for ethnically mixed families by the SBIR can be regarded as a constructive step towards social reconciliation.

Conclusion

The churches in Romania need to develop an understanding of their role in society in situations of interethnic conflict by rediscovering the theology as well as the practice of social reconciliation. As Schreiter has observed, the churches are not inactive socially because they have somehow been dismissed from the dialogue table, but because they are guilty of complicity in ethnic violence as a result of their own timidity and fear (Schreiter, 1998, p. 129). To be capable of exercising a positive role in the alleviation of conflicts between ethnic groups, the churches in Romania must learn to avoid fighting on the side of their cultural groups, employing faith as a weapon in the struggle. Empirical research by Ralph Premdas on the churches' reaction to interethnic conflicts has shown that Christians tend to express an overriding commitment to their respective cultures and ethnic groups (Premdas, 1994, pp. 53–56). In the interests of reducing the tension between the Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania, the churches need to become actively involved in ecumenical cooperation and dialogue with civil society. The first step would be to ensure that ecumenical contacts between the Romanian and Hungarian denominations are not determined by ethnicity: that is, to overcome the current tendency to have ecumenical dialogue amongst the Hungarian churches rather than ecumenical meetings

involving all the churches of Romania (Lakatos, 1998, p. 20).[21] The agenda of the churches should include more interconfessional dialogue on the subject of conflict resolution so that their awareness of the issues involved in the reconciliation process is enhanced. In this respect, the Banat is a rare example of a place where religious tolerance is evident in the fact that there are annual meetings of all the religious leaders and representatives of the churches in the region, which promote a degree of interethnic openness. Such instances should become paradigmatic for interdenominational cooperation in parts of the country where the Hungarian-Romanian interethnic conflict is more acute, such as Transylvania.

In this article I have attempted to suggest how the ministry of reconciliation should be advanced in situations of ethnic conflict in postcommunist Romania by proposing a strategy for understanding the theological, political and social factors involved in this process. In choosing this approach to reconciliation my intention has been to concentrate on some of the aspects that churches and theologians often neglect, regarding them as outside their field of expertise. I believe that the churches should address precisely these issues so that they will be able to offer their informed support whenever a conflict or a crisis emerges in society. As Premdas argues vigorously, the leaders of the churches will have to take the issue of ethnic conflict more seriously, investigating the origin of such conflict by appointing committees specifically designed for such a task, examining the social science literature on ethnic conflicts, studying the theory and practice of conflict resolution and devising tools for popular education that raise people's knowledge of the issues at stake (Premdas, 1994, p. 56). Above all, the churches in Romania will have to rediscover the theological meaning of social reconciliation because this concept stands at the core of the Christian faith. Without such a theological understanding of reconciliation, the churches will be prone to become accomplices in conflicts rather than agents of peace.

Notes

[1]   For Schreiter, the ministry of reconciliation begins with a careful accompanying of victims. This accompaniment is marked by a listening patience that allows the victim to reveal that which is a burden (Schreiter, 1998, p. 88).

[2]   Schreiter considers the process of restoration to be the very heart of reconciliation. By restoring the humanity of the victim, which the wrongdoer has tried to destroy, God equates the experience of reconciliation with the experience of grace, which is the restoration of one's damaged humanity in a life-giving relationship with God (Schreiter, 1998, p. 15).

[3]   Moltmann's view on the implications of the cross for life in the world is developed in many of his published works (Moltmann, 1974, 1992, 1993b,c).

[4]   Moltmann stresses: 'Political hermeneutics of liberation reflects the new situation of God in the inhuman situations of men, in order to break down the hierarchical relationships which deprive them of self-determination, and to help to develop their humanity' (Moltmann, 1974, p. 319).

[5]   Consequently, Christ's death on the cross is atonement because Christ's suffering is God's suffering and because His death is the death which God experienced for all sinners and victims. As Moltmann cautions, 'Christ did not die crucified because God sadistically crucified His Son through a criminal court decision. The very love of God, which had been wounded by human injustice and violence, became the love of the God that endured pain. In this way, God's anger became His compassion' (Moltmann, 1992, p. 135).

[6]   My translation of the following text:

Miturile unei naţiuni sînt adevărurile ei vitale. Acestea pot să nu corespundă **adevărului**; faptul n-are nici o importanţă. Suprema sinceritate a unei naţiuni faţă de sine însăşi se manifestă în refuzul autocriticii, în vitalizarea prin propriile ei erori. Şi apoi o naţiune caută adevărul? O natiune caută **puterea**. (Cioran, 1990, p. 29)

7   The debate around these theories on continuity has been addressed in numerous publications that I have attempted to review critically and impartially in the second part of my unpublished master's dissertation entitled *Forgiveness and Reconciliation between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania* (2001).

8   David Prodan, a noted nationalist Romanian historian who lived in Cluj, intensified his anti-Hungarian propaganda through his reassessment of the theory of Daco-Roman-Romanian continuity versus the immigration theory in the years following the collapse of Ceauşescu's regime. Not surprisingly, at the celebration of Prodan's 89th birthday, President Iliescu visited Cluj declaring that 'the main reason for his visit was to offer his good wishes to this illustrious historian'. Today there is a street in Cluj bearing the name of this controversial figure.

9   Lambru notes that this attempt at relaxing a historical discourse characterised by nationalism became the object of a huge scandal in the Romanian mass media. Those protesting against Mitu's textbook blamed multicultural approaches and the Education Office for its publication (Lambru, 1999).

10 In 2001 the governments of Hungary and Romania pledged once again that they would take all necessary measures to ensure the preservation of the national, cultural and linguistic identity of the national minorities, and their well-being and prosperity in their birthplace. Moreover, during the meeting the representatives of both states pledged that they would continue to create the conditions needed to carry out the tasks set out in the memorandum and recommendations of 19 October 2001 of the Subcommittee for Cooperation in Minority Affairs of the Intergovernmental Joint Commission (Declaration, 2002).

11 The SDP was established in 2001 through a merger between *Partidul Democraţiei Sociale din România* (the Social Democratic Party of Romania (SDPR)) and the RSDP.

12 The meeting was attended by the leaders of the main political parties of Romania: *Partidul Naţional Ţărănesc Creştin şi Democrat* (the Christian Democratic National Peasant's Party), the NLP, the RSDP, *Alianţa pentru România* (the Alliance for Romania), *Partidul Democrat* (the Democratic Party) and the DAHR.

13 In her study Alina Mungiu-Pippidi notes that several conferences, seminars and works have begun to deal with the delicate Hungarian-Romanian relations in Transylvania. She asserts that the whole question of whether Romania is ready for democracy or not hangs on the way in which the Transylvanian problem will be dealt with.

14 The study brings together a number of recent articles by significant Romanian, Hungarian and other political analysts (Miklós Bakk, Sorin Mitu, Renate Weber, Tom Gallagher, Liviu Andreescu, Antonela Capelle-Pogăcean, Liviu Antonesei, Elek Szokoly) who come into dialogue over Gusztáv Molnár's proposal for the devolution of Transylvania.

15 Willmer stresses that it may often be the case that the politicians are so secular, and thus so spiritually blind, that they may not think of their actions as reconciling. It is in this context that the theologians could become the interpreters of their actions, and point to them as instances of political forgiveness (Willmer, 2001).

16 In the view of Orthodox theologian Vicovan, Christian philanthropy has a dual aspect: theoretical and practical. The theoretical approach is made through sermons, lectures and conferences, which focus on the philanthropic activity of the church and are aimed at both clergy and laity. These sermons or lectures have an educational character and focus on biblical narratives interpreted in relation to today's real situations (Vicovan, 2001).

17 There are a few exceptions. Bishop Nicolae Corneanu was the first Orthodox church official to confess to having been an informant for the communist secret police. He also became the first bishop to keep his word and return the Catholic cathedral in Timişoara (in 1992), and half the Greek Catholic churches which were placed under his jurisdiction by the communists. His reformist perspective, which included his endorsement of the political movement *Alianţa Civică* (the Romanian Civic Alliance), made Nicolae the most liberal Romanian prelate but also the most marginalised by the ROC administration in Bucharest (Corneanu, 2002).

18 My translation of the following text:

   Biserica Ortodoxă Română a arătat o oarecare ostilitate faţă de Bisericile non-orto-
   doxe şi a criticat prozelitismul agresiv al protestanţilor, neo-protestanţilor şi al altor

grupuri religioase, pe care respectiva Biserică le califică în mod repetat ca fiind 'secte'. Opoziția Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în restituirea proprietăților religioase către alte culte, cu deosebire a bisericilor greco-catolice, rămâne o problemă. (Sârbu, 2001)

[19] Most Romanian Neoprotestant theologians and leaders who attempt to participate in the dialogue with civil society are dismissed because of the continuing stigmatising attitude of the ROC towards these so-called 'sectarians'.

[20] The most recent example is provided by the bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania and political leader of the *Consiliul Național al Maghiarilor din Transilvania* (the National Council of Hungarians in Transylvania) László Tökés, whose extremist political agenda includes claims for the territorial separation of Transylvania from Romania as the only solution to the problems of the Hungarian minority in Romania (Tökés, 2003). Former honorary chairman of the DAHR, Tökés was discarded by the Hungarian party because of his radical views on the constitution of Transylvania as an independent state (Toader and Anghel, 2003).

[21] Lakatos stresses that the leaders of the Hungarian churches have a monthly conference, whereas their relation to other Romanian denominations remains distant (Lakatos, 1998, p. 20).

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