



# HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## Parish Newsletter

RESTON

New Parish Center: 20937 Ashburn Rd., #110, Ashburn, VA 29 August 2020

He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law... "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love never wrongs the neighbor, hence love is the fulfillment of the Law. Romans 13.10 Hence, wearing a mask.

Readings for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost—Tone III  
The Weeks of Matthew are drawing to a close.

### READING FROM EXODUS.

<sup>20.1</sup> God spoke all these words. He said, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except me...Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God has given to you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his."

### PROKIMENON, Tone II

**Reader:** The prokimenon of the third tone: **Sing praises to our God, sing praises! \* Sing praises to our King, sing praises!** [v.6 RSV/OCA]

### PSALM 46

**NOTE:** The reader invites everyone to acknowledge the universal kingship of Christ.

People everywhere, clap your hands! Cry out to God with shouts of joy! <sup>2</sup>For the Lord most high is awesome, great king over all the earth!... <sup>4</sup>He chose us for his own, the pride of Jacob whom he loves....

<sup>6</sup>**Sing praises to our God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!** <sup>7</sup>For God is king over all the earth; praise him with all your skill. <sup>8</sup>God is king of the nations; he reigns from his holy throne.

<sup>9</sup>You nobles of the peoples, gather round, for the God of Abraham is the strong one: God is truly the king of earth, exalted above all!

**Reader: Sing praises to our God, sing praises! People: Sing praises to our King, sing praises!**

### READING FROM PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

BRETHREN: <sup>15.1</sup> Now I am reminding you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. <sup>2</sup> Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; <sup>4</sup> that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; <sup>5</sup> that he appeared to Kephias, then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

### ALLELUIA

### PSALM 30

**NOTE:** By the lips of the reader, through the psalmist, the Messiah/Christ expresses his feelings of anguish in his ordeal as well as his filial confidence in his heavenly Father.

I place my trust in you, O Lord; let me not be put to shame, O eternal one; in your justice set me free. <sup>2</sup> Turn your ear to me and deliver me at once!...

<sup>3</sup> For you are indeed my rock, my stronghold! Lead me and guide me for the honor of your name. <sup>4</sup> Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.

<sup>5</sup> Into your hands I commend my spirit...<sup>6</sup> I detest

those who worship false gods; I place all my trust in you....

<sup>11</sup>I have such enemies that all men scorn me;... <sup>13</sup>I hear how they whisper against me, how they threaten me, as they plot against me, as they work out their plans to take my life.

<sup>14</sup>Still, I count on you, Lord! I insist: You are my God!

<sup>15</sup>My fate is in your hands; deliver me from those who hate me. <sup>16</sup>Make your face shine forth on your servant; in your steadfast love, save me....

<sup>21</sup>Praise to the Lord for showing me the wonders of his love when I was hard pressed! <sup>22</sup>For a moment I was alarmed, and I said: He has shut me out! But I cried out to you and you heard my voice!

<sup>23</sup>So love the Lord, all you his loyal servants! The Lord cares for those who remain faithful to him.... <sup>24</sup>Be strong, take heart, all you who hope in the Lord!

### READING FROM THE HOLY GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW:

AT THAT TIME: <sup>19,16</sup>Someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?"

<sup>17</sup>He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." <sup>18</sup>He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "*You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; <sup>19</sup>honor your father and your mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" <sup>20</sup>The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup>When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. <sup>23</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich [*meaning someone who puts his trust in money rather than in God—Ed.*] to enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup>Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

<sup>25</sup>When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>26</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

### TROPARION

Greek Chant

LA Let rejoicing fill the heavens, \* and throughout the earth, glad--ness! \* For the Lord has shown the power of his arm \* by conquering Death by death \* and saving us from the gaping womb of hell! \* He is the first-born of the dead, \* from whom the world receives Great Mer----cy.

### KONDAKION

Greek Chant

LA To-day you came forth from the tomb, \* Compassionate One, \* and saved us from the gap--ing mouth of Death. \* Today Adam and Eve are filled with joy, \* and the prophets join the pat--ri--archs \* in praising your power and dominion \* over all cre-a-----tion!

## THE ÉKTENY or FERVENT PRAYER

(Ancient Penitential Litany and Prayer)

Let us all say with our whole soul,  
and with our whole mind let us say:  
Lord, have mercy.

O Lord almighty! O God of our fathers!  
We pray you. Hear us and have mercy.

Have mercy on us, O God,  
according to your great mercy!

We pray you. Hear us and have mercy.

Again we pray:

For devout and Orthodox Christians.

For our Archbishop Tikhon.

For Emilia's daughter Elizabeth, and for all who have asked  
for our prayers: we pray for mercy, life, peace, health,  
salvation, visitation, pardon, and remission of their sins.

For Orthodox Christians who are made to suffer on account  
of Christ, and we pray for those who persecute them.

For Orthodox Christians and indeed all men who are  
victims of war and civil strife [and terror], of hunger and  
want, of intolerance and injustice.

For physicians, nurses, care-givers, and all serving those  
infected with the virus; and for the thousands who have  
succumbed to the disease—and for all who will die today.

### PRAYER OF THE ÉKTENY

Lord our God, accept this fervent prayer from your  
servants, and have mercy on us according to the  
greatness of your mercy. Send down your compassionate  
help upon us and upon all your people awaiting the rich  
mercy that comes from you.

For you are God, merciful and loving to man, and we  
render glory to you—to the Father and to the Son and to the  
Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

### Something we almost never hear about.

The Center for Orthodox Studies published an article  
signed by George Alexander, one of the founders of the  
Orthodoxy Cognate Page Society, which presents the  
mission of the Orthodox Church of Romania during the  
patriarchate of his Beatitude Patriarch Daniel.

The article entitled **The Resurgence of the Romanian  
Orthodox Church—Personal reflections** presents a brief  
history of our Church, with an emphasis on the transition  
from the communist regime to the present.

Considered “a new era in the history of Romanian  
Orthodoxy,” the patriarchate of his Beatitude Patriarch  
Daniel is seen as a revitalization at the administrative,  
social, media, educational and interfaith level.

“The founding of the Basilica News Agency revolu-  
tionized the media approach of the Romanian Church,”  
writes the author who appreciates the activity of the Media  
Center of the Romanian Patriarchate but also the eparchial  
sites that he considers “neatly maintained.” “In notable  
addition, the Basilica news agency has emerged naturally  
as one of the leading and most trusted new agencies in  
Romania. The Romanian Orthodox media centre has  
successfully reached out to the masses.”

The article highlights the efforts of the Orthodox  
Church in supporting disadvantaged people, especially  
during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also the efforts of the  
laity, educational and catechetical programs, relations  
with state authorities and other religious denominations  
in the country.

### The Resurgence of the Orthodox Church of Romania—Personal Reflections.

Romania is one of the most attractive countries located  
eastern part of Europe. It is an undiscovered gem in the  
eyes of travellers and explorers. The beauty of Romania  
exerts an enormous influence on the Orthodox of Church  
Romania. The fusion of the beauty of Romanian land and  
the spiritual beauty of Orthodoxy has resulted in a vibrant  
culture and diverse heritage in the region.

Romanians fondly cherish the apostolic Tradition. It is  
one of the 14 autocephalous Churches within the Eastern  
Orthodox communion of Churches. It is also one among  
the five junior Patriarchates, and it is the only Eastern  
Orthodox Church to employ Romance language for the  
liturgy. Romania is the third-largest Eastern Orthodox  
country in terms of population. Russia leads the graph  
followed by Ukraine.

Moreover, Romania is the European Union country  
with the most substantial number of Orthodox Christians.  
More than 86 per cent of the Romanians are members of  
the Orthodox Church. Romanian Church has produced  
many leading Orthodox theologians and historians. Du-  
mitru Stăniloae, Nicolae Dobrescu, Mircea Păcurariu,



Patriarch Daniel of Romania

Arsenie Boca are to name a few. The Church has delivered considerable contributions in the field of Pan-Orthodox unity and ecumenism.

### **A Brief History**

Romanian Church boasts a vibrant history, and I don't intend to provide a rigorous examination of history in this article. Preferably, I will barely mention a brief outline. According to the Romanian Orthodox history, a Metropolitan Church existed at least from the beginning of the 4th century in the Carpathian–Danubian territories. The Orthodox Church in the modern Romanian territory was under the spiritual and jurisdictional leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Orthodox Churches situated in the Metropolis of Un-gro-Wallachia and Moldavia came together to constitute the united Romanian Orthodox Church. The Romanian Church was granted autocephaly in 1885 and the Patriarchate was established in 1925. Both recognised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Miron Cristea, and Ferdinand I played a vital role in sufficiently establishing a deep foundation for the Romanian Church.

### **The Difficult Period of Communist Rule**

The Communist rule in Romania sufficiently proved a challenging time for the Orthodox Church. The Marxist-Leninist one-party communist Romanian state, known as Republica Socialistă România/Socialist Republic of Romania (RSR) began in 1947 and ended in 1989. From 1947 to 1965, the state was known as the Romanian

People's Republic. The Romanian Church typically encountered considerable difficulties under the communist leadership of President Nicolae Ceaușescu.

The leaders of the Romanian Church like Patriarch Justinian Marina and Patriarch Teocist were accused of collaborating with the Communist government in the country. However, it is significant to understand that during the communist rule the most urgent thing was to keep the Church 'running' in any possible manner. There was no other choice left. The basic survival of the Church and Christian Orthodoxy remained the most substantial thing that bothered the prelates, not only in Communist Romania but also in other Marxist-communist nations. My intention over here is not to sympathise with the prior relationship of the Romanian Church with the Communist government. But I point out the fact that it is important to understand the helplessness of any religious institution in a one-party communist state.

This day such helplessness is clearly evident in one way or the other in countries like China and North Korea. If you examine the history of Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, you may see that ancient Patriarchates like Constantinople, Antioch, *etc.* had to encounter severe pressure from the Ottoman and Muslim Sultans and leaders. Free practice of faith and proper conduct of Church affairs have been severely affected due to political interventions (in the past and in the present) irrespective of geographical locations. Radical Islamic rule is not something new to

the European churches at all.

After the fall of Communist leadership, Romanian Church sailed forward under the leadership of Patriarch Teoctist amid criticism against him in the press and various official forums.

### **A New Era Under Patriarch Daniel of Romania**

Patriarch Daniel was installed as the head of the Romanian church on 30th September 2007 with the title Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Muntenia and Dobrogea, *Locum tenens* of the throne of Caesarea of Cappadocia, Patriarch of Romania. I believe the consecration of Patriarch Daniel marked a new era in the history of Romanian Orthodoxy for many reasons. However, criticisms are always on the card irrespective of phenomenal achievements.

### **Church Life**

A significant number of people have been attracted to various aspects of the Romanian Church. It is worthier to say that much has been done under the leadership of Patriarch Daniel and the Holy Synod to keep the faithful close to the Church. Around thirty-three Romanian saints were canonised for their life and contributions to the Church and the Society. The Romanian church has been progressively expanding out of its traditional hubs.

In 2019 for the first time, a monastery was consecrated in Switzerland, and an abbess was installed. The Church has become a substantial spiritual force in contemporary Romanian society. The Romanian church has emerged as the most trusted institution in the country.

‘No village without a church’ remains a successful program initiated by Patriarch Daniel while he was the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina that directly benefited several disadvantaged sections. This program is presently benefiting families of priests serving in poor parishes.

### **Church Administration**

The administration of the Church has typically undergone drastic changes. Four new eparchies were sufficiently established for the Diaspora Romanians. The Romanian Patriarchate is meticulously organized into 10 Metropolitanates. Each Metropolitanate comprises several eparchies.

The Diocese of Dacia Felix, Diocese of Hungary, Diocese of Australia and New Zealand, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Vicarage fall under the direct jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. Apart from these, the Church has several representations and communities in the Diaspora and also settlements at the Monastic Republic of Mount Athos.

### **Media, Press and Public Relations**

Under the outstanding leadership of Patriarch Daniel, the Romanian Patriarchate enthusiastically supported enormous steps in revamping the public-relations department. The founding of the Basilica News Agency revolutionized the media approach of the Romanian Church. Radio Tri-

nitias, Lumina Newspaper, Basilica news agency, Trinitas TV have attached considerable ethics and social values to the Christian media approach in Romania.

Web portals of the Patriarchate and Eparchies are neatly maintained. In notable addition, the Basilica news agency has emerged naturally as one of the leading and most trusted new agencies in Romania. The Romanian Orthodox media centre has successfully reached out to the masses.

### **Charity and Social Welfare**

Over 210 million Euros have been invested for charity work by the Romanian Church since 2007. The Church has signed agreements with various bodies of the Romanian government for the effective coordination and implementation of the charity programs.

“Health for Villages”, is a project that was initiated by the Patriarchate after ratifying a Protocol with the Romanian Ministry of Health in September 2015. According to a report published by the Basilica news agency, the Romanian Church own 107-day centres for children, 52 social assistance offices and community centres, 38 family-type centres, 51 social and afterschool kindergartens, 13 sheltered housing facilities, 15 emergency centres (for destitute people, for victims of domestic violence and for victims of human trafficking), 18 camp campuses, 51 educational centres.

In 2019 alone, more than 45,000 children benefited from the Church programs. The Church retains notable programs to support the unemployed, victims of human trafficking and domestic violence, released detainees, and victims of natural disasters.

The Church manages unique academic projects like ‘Christ shared with children’ and ‘Choose the school’ for school children and school dropouts. ‘Health for villages’ a medical project initiated by the church which benefits a countless number of people. ‘Donate blood, save a life’ and ‘Health at a click away’ has contributed the most considerable number of blood donors in the country (more than 35,000).

The Romanian Patriarchate has partnered with Selgros Cash & Carry and Carrefour stores, to deliver weekly food and hygiene goods through social centres. Saint Nectarios Palliative Care Center and the Saint Sylvester Residential Center caters the need for the elderly. The “Holy Empress Helen” Counseling and Information Center were inaugurated in the month of August 2020. The centre will provide support to women in pregnancy crises. Moreover, Patriarch Daniel donated an ikon and 6,000 Euros to the new crisis pregnancy centre.

The Church has assumed exceptional care to meet the needs of the Roma people where 621 thousand of them live in Romania. The Church manages around nine different social, health, infrastructure development, employment

and spiritual welfare programs for the Roma people. The “Filantropia” Federation is an NGO founded by the Romanian to enhance the impact and efficiency of the social actions of the Church and its bodies.

This is one among several other NGOs of the church. Alba Iulia Orthodox Philanthropy Association, The “Diaconia” Social Mission, St. Sava Children’s Foundation, The Deva Orthodox Philanthropy Association, The Christian-Orthodox Philanthropic Association” Saint Basil the Great are some other initiatives. Access the full list here.

### **COVID Support Efforts**

Extensive awareness programmes were organized by the Church. Moreover, food, accommodation, and quarantine facilities were provided by several church institutions. Nine monasteries from the Epararchy of Iași supplied bed linen sets for hospitals to handle Covid-19 outbreak. More than 25 eparchies of the Romanian Church raised funds, supplied hospital kits, donated blood, created quarantine centres, supported the homeless, supplied food and other basic needs like protective masks and materials. The Romanian church invested more than 820,000 Euros for COVID support efforts

Patriarch Daniel donated over 2,000 Euro from his personal funds to buy protection equipment for the volunteers involved in the Patriarchate’s social campaign ‘Help with joy’ geared to helping isolated patients all over Romania. Archbishops, bishops and priests donated from their salaries to support COVID efforts.

Apart from the extensive social and charity programs operated by the Patriarchate, every eparchy of the Romanian church implements their own unique charity and welfare programs. Monasteries of the Church of Romania are active serving the poor, needy and sick. An example remains the philanthropic works of Mother Ecaterina from St Leontius of Radauti Settlement. The church and her bodies provide social, health and spiritual care to a substantial number of disadvantaged sections of the population. Learn more on the Charity programs.

### **Tourism**

The Romanian church has many magnificent churches and monasteries that encourage tourists and pilgrims alike. Romanians have exercised exceptional care to preserve their spiritual institutions in an organized manner. Basilica Travel, the travel agency owned by the Romanian Orthodox Church is another unique venture.

The agency operates tours in Romania and abroad. The profit generated from the agency is utilized by the church to support its social and pastoral activities. According to a report by Wall Street Romania, Basilica the travel agency recorded a turnover of EUR 1.41 million in 2017.

### **Empowering Laity**

Apart from charity and social outreach, the Church cares and honours her faithful in an extensive manner. The

Patriarchate has exercised particular care to honour and cherish the success and contributions of celebrities and laity alike. Since 2014, various eparchies of the Church of Romania have been hosting ‘the International Meeting of Orthodox Youth.’ More than 4,000 youngsters from various Eastern Orthodox communities around the globe take part in the celebration.

### **Education**

There are nearly 25 Universities that offer studies and extensive research in Orthodox theology and allied areas in Romania. The Orthodox theological education has undergone drastic changes after the fall of communism. However, teaching religion in schools in Romania (a secular state) remains a controversial and highly debated topic. The 2014 ruling by the Constitutional Court of Romania halting compulsory religious education met with protest from the church.

Nevertheless, in June 2020, the Parliament of Romania amended a recent law to include mandatory sex education in official school curricula. The Romanian church protested the decision calling it an attack on childhood innocence. Hence, the Parliament had to scrap the new law for mandatory sex education.

### **Government Relations**

The Romanian church has enjoyed extensive relations with the government authorities since the fall of communism. The church has gained certain rights and privileges from the government. The Romanian state recognizes the substantial role of the Orthodox Church of Romania. It equally recognizes the role of other religious groups as well.

The church has consistently remained a sympathiser of the Romanian monarchy. King Michael I of Romania, the previous monarch of Romania upon demise, was given a grand funeral in December 2017. The funeral ceremony was presided over by Patriarch Daniel. The Romanian Patriarch stated the late king was a symbol of the suffering and hope of the Romanian people.

### **Celebrating Romania**

Since 2008, the church has been dedicating specific themes of celebration (jubilee and commemorative) every year. The year 2020 is dedicated as the solemn year of Ministry to Parents and Children and the commemorative Year of Romanian Orthodox Philanthropists. The Romanian Church intensifies her spiritual, cultural, missionary and philanthropic activities based on the themes of dedication.

In October 2019 to honour the Romanian villages the Patriarch, bishops and priests celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Bucharest in special vestments with traditional motifs to highlight the importance of the Romanian village as keeper of the country’s traditions, culture and spirituality. The Patriarchal Cathedral specially marked the days of the Romanian Village as well.

Pan-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interreligious Outlook

The Church of Romania has kept herself open to wide PanOrthodox and ecumenical encounters. Romanian Church leadership has employed an open-minded and objective approach to the recent schisms in the Orthodox world. Patriarch Daniel has stressed the importance of Orthodox conciliarity in PanOrthodox councils as an ideal way to resolve inter-orthodox schisms. The Romanian Patriarchate had problems with the Jerusalem Patriarchate over the settlement in Jericho. However, the problems were overcome through dialogue and reconciliation.

They have always remained open to dialogue and cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and ecumenical bodies like WCC. Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Saucă, the interim general secretary of the WCC is a faithful member of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Even though the Romanian Church cherishes pleasant relations with the Vatican and the Latin Rite Church, it encounters several difficulties with the Romanian Greek-Catholic Uniates.

The Romanian church retains an increased level of its cooperation with other religious communities in the country in comparison to the initial years of the post-communist rule. It leads the Consultative Council of Religious Denominations (an ethical, autonomous, apolitical, non-governmental and non-profit organization). This organization is a federation of 13 legally recognized religious institutions in Romania.

The church of Romania has been negotiating with the government bodies to receive the mention as the 'national church' in the Romanian constitution. Such extensive negotiations may take a considerable while to typically yield desired results due to the secular nature of the Romanian State. However, with no possible doubt, we may state the Romanian Orthodox Church is the 'one true' national Church of Romania as she uniquely qualifies all the necessary characteristics of a national institution.

### **The Autonomous Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia in Moldova**

In Moldova at least 13 percent of the population belongs to the autonomous Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia of the Romanian Patriarchate. The Metropolitanate encountered many difficulties. It was established in 1918 but remained inactive during the Soviet occupation (1944-1991). It was reactivated in 1991 but it was only granted state recognition in 1994 after a prolonged legal struggle with the Moldovan authorities.

At present, the Metropolitanate consists of four eparchies namely Eparchy of Chişinău, Eparchy of Bălţi, Eparchy of Southern Bessarabia and the Eparchy of Dubăsari and Transnistria. Only a few Orthodox Churches recognise the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church. The autonomous Metropolitanate of Bessarabia of the Romanian Patriarchate has challenging encounters with the Eparchy

of Chişinău and All-Moldova of the Orthodox Church of Russia. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church has adopted a stand for brotherly and peaceful cooperation between the two Metropolitanates.

The Church fulfils a significant role in the spiritual and social life of the Bessarabian Orthodox faithful. For example, Diaconia, a social establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia has been active throughout the Republic of Moldova since 2001. The organization serves in the area of youth empowerment, substance abuse and treatment, housing and clothing, medical care, child protection, etc.

### **People's Salvation Cathedral**

The National Cathedral remains an iconic church under construction in Bucharest, the capital city of Romania. Upon finishing in 2024, this church building is expected to be the world's largest Orthodox Christian Cathedral. The consecration was held on 25 November 2018 by Bartholomew I of Constantinople and Patriarch Daniel of Romania. Many have criticised the construction of the Cathedral that it is a waste of national funds. However, these critics forget the idea of building a national Romanian Cathedral was not something new.

The idea surfaced after the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878). Moreover, this is not the first church to be built with such enormous financial and human effort. There are many Christian Cathedrals and Churches that are lavishly built and preserved by several Christian denominations across the globe.

I cherish the fact that the Romanian Church leadership has offered a sensible approach in improving the administrative and institutional structures of the church, without compromising the spiritual life of the faithful. The Romanian Church indulges herself with the spiritual and social needs of her faithful by strongly upholding the Christian values. Does this mean Romania and her national Church is beyond criticism? To be sure, no. They are sounded by challenges of modernity and globalization. Their struggles are immense. Amid challenges and struggles the National Church of Romania cruises forward.

### **The Belarusian Protests and the Orthodox Church**

*Berkley Forum, by Fr. Cyril Hovorun August 28, 2020*

In Russia, there is a widely spread superstition that August brings national-scale catastrophes. The mass protests in Belarus against Alyaksandr Lukashenko are seen as such a catastrophe for the regime of Vladimir Putin. Even though Mr. Lukashenko struggled to preserve some independence for his country from Russia, Belarus under his rule represented the model of a Neo-Soviet colony that Russia has tried to impose on its neighbors since Putin's presidency

began. Belarus under Mr. Lukashenko preserved many symbols and most of the ethos of the Soviet era.

The key feature of the Soviet ethos is paternalism, which means that the regime offers its subjects basic social welfare in exchange for complete obedience. The Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in 2014 (also known as the Maidan), for example, was a revolt against this sort of paternalism. What is going on now in Belarus looks more like a revolution that started within the paternalistic framework. There are good signs, however, that eventually the Belarusian revolution will turn against paternalism as such.

This is not going to be easy. For the many years that he has been in power (since 1994), Mr. Lukashenko offered the Belarusians a social contract: their complete obedience in exchange for paternalistic basic welfare and an illusion of stability. Now this social contract is broken. Most Belarusians believe that it was Lukashenko who broke it by the way he treated them in the last days. Several Belarusians were killed by the regime and thousands tortured with unprecedented cruelty. Lukashenko, in his turn, believes that the Belarusians broke the contract by not obediently accepting the results of the elections, which he does not even pretend to present as fair.

It seems, however, that the paternalistic contract was broken earlier. One of Lukashenko's serious mistakes that made many Belarusians think he was unable to fulfill the contract was his demonstrative ignorance of COVID-19. He publicly mocked those who took the pandemic seriously and forced people into the situations wherein they could easily contract the coronavirus. For example, on May 9, he gathered crowds for the Victory Parade in Minsk. Even Mr. Putin decided not to have such a parade in Moscow and was irritated by Mr. Lukashenko's initiative. In the meantime, the health system in Belarus was suffocated by the high numbers of COVID-19 patients, and the state did not seem to care. People had to take care of themselves and the suffering coronavirus patients—pretty much outside the social contract they believed they had with Lukashenko. It seems that COVID-19, or rather ignoring it, has challenged dictators on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is very tempting to compare the Belarusian protests with the Ukrainian Maidan. Belarusians do not like such comparisons—for various reasons. Many have been brainwashed by the official Russian and Belarusian propagandas, which concurred in con-



demning the Maidan. Others do not like to stay in the shadow of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity. There are indeed many similarities and dissimilarities between the two revolutions, which it is now not a good time to analyze. There is, however, a parallel, which is worthy exploring: between the attitudes of the churches.

The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2014 and now made the same mistake of publicly supporting the unpopular dictators. Such support stems from the policy of Patriarch Kirill, which he always had even before he became the Patriarch, to focus on political elites and ignore masses. This policy repaid him with some popularity among those in power but created a chasm between him and the ordinary flocks, first in Ukraine and now in Belarus. The same chasm between the lay and hierarchy is widening in Russia.

Following in the steps of the Patriarch, the church leadership in Belarus demonstrated the same blindness to the masses' demands. For example, the statement by the synod of the Belarusian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate on August 15 only vaguely condemned violence, without identifying the perpetrators, and, more importantly, kept complete

silence on the reasons of the mass unrest. Only a couple of hierarchical voices were raised against the injustice of Lukashenko's regime, with the loudest and most eloquent one by the Archbishop of Grodno and Volkovysk Artemy. Much more outspoken appears to be the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus. Its Metropolitan Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, together with other Roman Catholic bishops, has clearly identified and condemned the perpetrators of violence and injustice. Catholic hierarchs openly supported the people who rose against the regime. The standpoint of the Catholic Church in Belarus is very similar to the standpoint of the Greek Catholic [Uniate] Church in Ukraine in 2014.

There is another similarity between Ukraine and Belarus that I cannot skip: the ecumenical character of the protests. Like the Maidan in Ukraine was an ecumenical event, where people of different confessions and even religions stood next to each other and

prayed together, so lay people and some clergy from different Christian denominations came together in Belarus in the same religious processions. On August 18, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz led an ecumenical prayer in Minsk, with the participation of representatives from various churches and religious groups, including an Orthodox priest. The Belarusian protests, thus, although they pursue political goals, clearly feature a religious agenda. They are not secular like most political protests in the West. In this, they are similar to the Ukrainian Maidan, which inspired even a specific "Ukrainian public theology." I hope a "Belarusian public theology" will emerge as a reflection on what is happening in the country now.

*Editor's Note: This post was originally published on August 20, 2020 by Public Orthodoxy, a publication of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University.*