

(In 1995 a young Romanian student by the name of Lucian Dinca who had been attracted by Assumptionist religious life left his native land to continue his formation in France. Having earned a licentiate in theology, he was sent to Canada where he pursued a doctorate in patristics at Laval University in Quebec City. In 2008, after he successfully defended his doctoral work on St. Athanasius, he was assigned to the Assumptionist community in Florence, Italy, as a way of preparing for his eventual nomination to the new community which just opened in Bucharest, Romania. Here are some excerpts of a recent letter he wrote.)

"In order to provide you with a brief overview of the AA presence in Bucharest, I can begin by telling you that we arrived there in 1930s. Soon thereafter, the first religious sensed the need to build a house that could house the library of our Byzantine Institute, founded in Istanbul and well-known within scholarly circles as an extraordinary resource. In 1936 the house was completed and the first AA community moved in; very quickly the library began to attract Byzantine scholars from the world over and enjoyed a lively interest within the cultural world of Bucharest itself, thanks to Assumptionist scholars who knew how to place their passion and their competence at the service of anyone who came to the library. Unfortunately, the Iron Curtain arrived and Romania fell under the cloud of a Stalinist regime that made manifestly clear its intention to rid society of the "unhealthy influence of the Church." As a result, Catholic religious life was outlawed and foreign Assumptionists were expelled. Fortunately, among them there was a true apostle and prophet Fr. Barral, who knew how to read the signs of the times and was able to foresee the shadow that was about to darken Romania. In one night alone, with the help of others in the community, he was able to oversee the transfer of some 20,000 books along with a vast quantity of manuscripts of incomparable value from their house to the French embassy next door. Thus it was that the library was saved from the Communist flames to which it was destined, as happened to so many other books and libraries found in the houses of religious communities and residences of bishops and priests, a Communist regime that pretended to lead us to the "new fatherland" and to make of us throughout the Communist world "new men" on the model proposed by Stalin. Our house was seized by the State and transformed into an outpatient clinic; the chapel was converted into a workshop for the manufacture of dental artifacts, and the two upper stories into a laboratory for family planning. Only the space occupied by the library found no use and remained empty for 60 years. In 2005, the Assumptionists began the legal process of

recuperating the building and finally, in 2007, it was restored to us. Then we began to reflect on the future of the house, which was in a truly deplorable state. Very quickly there came to birth the idea of making the site a strategic center and the focus of our Assumptionist presence in Eastern Europe (Mission d'Orient). There followed a long period of renovation, which, due to the condition of the interior, meant gutting everything and starting from scratch. After two years of intense labor, costing millions of dollars, the renovations were completed and the house ready for occupancy and its new mission.

The concern of Assumptionist superiors was to find individuals who could provide one mind and one body to this house and this mission within the Church of Romania, largely Orthodox, and to the Assumption which, from its origins, manifested a clear desire for ecumenical work especially in Eastern Europe. Eventually, four of us were assigned to this ministry: a Belgian, Fr. Cornie Nelissen, who will work with the Greco-Catholic Church, a small minority present in Bucharest; a Frenchman, le P. Michel Kubler, who has been named director of the center named "Unitate Institute of Byzantine Studies and Ecumenical Encounters;" a Romanian, Fr. Ovidiu Robu, who will be responsible for our student center and treasurer of the community; and myself, who will be superior of the community and an aid to Fr. Michel in carrying out the mission of the house.



Our house is found in the very center of the capital. It is beautiful, practical, and quite large. It is now up to us to relight the flame the Assumptionist presence once provided here and to re-establish the reputation it enjoyed. I have already had an opportunity to meet with some of the great lights in contemporary Romanian society and all have said to me with a smile on their faces: "Welcome back to you all and to the library that enjoyed such prestigious fame in the past." Many have expressed their desire to work with us to make of this house a cultural, ecumenical, and intellectual center, in a word, to serve what the Archdiocese of Bucharest calls: Pastoral Ministry of Culture. There are three dimensions to this our work:

- Byzantine culture, by placing at the disposition of the public a university library, specializing in the history and doctrine of the Eastern Christianity ; the very existence of such a tool and the exchanges it will foster will build bridges between Orthodox and Catholic believers.

- Ecumenical dialogue, by organizing conferences, conversations, and study groups that bring together believers of all confessions to look at issues of interest for Church and society.
- The formation of young Christians, within the context of a student center where Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants will come to know each other better as well as their respective traditions.

To help us bear the enormous financial costs it will take to pursue our mission in a country where the economic crisis has been particularly severe, please send contributions to:

The Assumptionists
330 Market Street
Brighton, MA 02135

and indicate clearly the recipient of your gift.

May the peace of God be in your hearts.

Fr. Lucian, A.A.
Bucharest