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Romanian Orthodox Christianity

Romania was a predominantly rural country during the inter-war period. Peasants both made up the majority of the population and personified the Romanian national ideal for secular and church intellectuals. Engaging with peasant beliefs and practices thus became a priority for ethnographers and church leaders in the early twentieth century. In a book on *The Culture of our Villages*, Bishop Grigorie Comşa reflected a confident belief that Orthodoxy was inextricably bound up with a pure and unchanging rural existence. He wrote:

The belief that there is a God who directs the world is rooted deep in the soul of our peasant, and nothing can take this belief away from him. For centuries the peasant has been used to his Christian church being at the centre of his life. The village church was the fountain of goodness from which the whole village drank. The church was the embodiment of faith, and in the church the peasant felt that he was in the house of God. Everything changed and passed away in time, but the church remained. And here in the church the peasants gathered, calling to the Saviour just as the Apostles did: ‘Lord, have mercy for we are perishing’.

It is well known that for many ages reading and writing have been taught in the modest Romanian schools next to monasteries and churches. Children took turns reading from the Psalms, the Horologion,¹ the Octoechos,² and the Apostol.³ The Gospel was thoughtfully listened to. The contents of the holy books became cultural artefacts in the soul of the people. And thus our people in the villages placed the fear of God above the fear of evil. Our people fears God’s punishment more than the laws of men. For centuries, this fear of God has preserved out people’s proverbial nobility and goodness.⁴

¹ The Book of Hours.

² A liturgical book.

³ A collection of readings from the New Testament.

⁴ Grigorie Gh. Comşa, *Cultura satelor noastre* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1935), 80–1.

Romanian peasants apparently knew God intuitively, and if they lived sinful lives it was because of Western modernity, with its many temptations and impious ideas.⁵ But ethnographic fieldwork conducted by students in inter-war Romania suggested that even if they loved the church, not everyone knew a great deal about theology. Elderly peasants interviewed by students from their own villages demonstrated a remarkable ignorance about even apparently well-known Bible stories. When asked how the world was created, for example, Anca Fieraru, a 68-year-old woman from Pielești in Dolj county, recalled that

The land was created by God following the water. In the beginning there was only water everywhere, and the land was under the water. To build it he had to push the water back; a very difficult task. To see how much the water went down each time, God sent out different animals which, finding various objects, did not return. Then God sent out a hedgehog which [was the] only [animal who] brought back an answer. As a reward God gave it spikes so that no-one would eat it and so that it too could have a holiday, which is on Tuesday, when you shouldn't begin something new.⁶

Other sociologists and ethnographers of the early twentieth century recorded similar accounts. Few of them combined as many discordant elements as Fieraru's version of creation but all surprised their collectors by how significantly they diverged from the cosmologies of the educated elites.⁷ Inter-war ethnographers sought out the most elderly informants and recorded only the most remarkable beliefs they could find, but their reports should nonetheless have raised concerns about how orthodox most of the population was.

Young people had more chances to learn what the Church wanted them to thanks to the expanding school system. School textbooks from before the First World War presented fables such as 'the boy who cried wolf' alongside Bible stories and lessons for students to memorize on topics such as 'who should perform a baptism?', 'what should godparents be like?' and 'what should Christians do before receiving the Eucharist?'.⁸ They used a question and

⁵ Irineu Mihălcescu, *Cauzele necredinței contemporane și mijloacele de a-o combate* (Bucharest: Tipografia cărților bisericești, 1915).

⁶ 'Folklor in Dolj' (unpublished MS, Biblioteca Centrală Universitară – Litere), A60.238.

⁷ G. F. Ciușanu, G. Fira and C. M. Popescu, *Culegere de folclor din jud. Vâlcea și împrejurimi* (Bucharest: Cultură Națională, 1928); Aurel Cosma, *Cosmogonia poporului român* (Bucharest: Tipografia Ziarului Universul, 1942); Ion I. Ionică, *Drăguș: Un sat din țara Oltului (Făgăraș)* (Bucharest: Institutul de Științe Sociale al României, 1944); Ion Cherciu, *Spiritualitate tradițională românească în epoca interbelică* (Bucharest: Muzeul Național al Satului 'Dimitrie Gusti', 2010).

⁸ Al. Popescu-Cernica, *Catechismul religiei creștine ortodoxe conform cu programa analitică în us și însoțit de povestiri și istorioare morale și evanghelice pentru usul clasei IV urbană și V rurală* (Bucharest: Lito-Tipografia Motzatzeanu și Lambru, 1896).

answer format, often supporting each lesson with a Bible verse. Moise Toma's catechism, for example, taught:

How can one gain a good reputation?

Someone earns a *good reputation* with good behaviour and good deeds. Solomon the wise spoke about a good reputation: 'A *good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and favour is better than silver or gold.*' (Proverbs 22:1)

How should we seek happiness?

We should look for *happiness* in spiritual riches and pleasures and in good deeds. The Saviour says: 'Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!' (Luke 11:28).⁹

By the inter-war period lessons for primary school students were bookended by prayers when entering or leaving the classroom, and textbooks were illustrated with icons and snippets of poetry. Students were told Bible stories in simple language, then had their significance explained in more detail.¹⁰ The curriculum for secondary schools stated that, during their two hours of religious education per week, in their first year students should learn basic Old Testament stories such as the creation of the world, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the kings David and Solomon and the Babylonian captivity. In the second year they studied Jesus's life and parables as presented in the gospels. They learned about Orthodox liturgy in the third year, including the history of the liturgy, ritual books, priestly garments, church music and the liturgical calendar. The fourth year was dedicated to theological concepts such as the existence of God, the Trinity, life after death, the Virgin Mary and sacraments such as baptisms or weddings. Church history occupied the fifth and sixth years, dogmatics the seventh year and Christian morality the eighth.¹¹

Teachers struggled with how to transfer these lessons into everyday life. It was at moments of loss such as funerals, they said, or when priests were able to *practice* the faith together with students, that effective education happened.¹² As the future patriarch Nicodim Munteanu argued, once Christians learned *what* to believe they had to change the way they lived. His advice was 'to love the Lord your God with all your soul and all your thoughts, desires, and actions, living

⁹ Moise Toma, *Catechism pentru învățământul religiunii dreptcredincioase-răsăritene în școalele primare* (Nagyszeben: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhideceane, 1912), 10.

¹⁰ Irineu Mihălcescu and Petru Barbu, *Carte de religie pentru clasa III-a primară* (n.p.: Editura Librăriei Pavel Suru, n.d.); Aristide C. Cucu, *Carte de religie pentru clasa IV-a primară* (n.p.: Editura Autorului, 1938).

¹¹ ANIC, Fond Ministerul Instrucțiunii, Fond 310/1923, ff. 238–42.

¹² Dumitru Călugăr, 'Treptele formale și învățământul religios', *Revista teologică* 28, no. 4 (April 1938): 140–9.

in a way that pleases him.¹³ Munteanu suggested believers try to remember that everything they had came from God, that God saw all their thoughts and actions, that God sends both blessings and trials to help them grow, and that they must remain submitted to the Church in all things. Practices he recommended included frequent prayer, regular confession, Bible reading, disciplining one's thoughts and avoiding luxury or lethargy.

School was not the only, or even the most important, place that people learned about religion. As the anthropologist Vlad Naumescu notes, most believers experience Eastern Orthodoxy first and foremost as 'ritual participation ... through authorized practice and collective worship'. One 'masters' Orthodoxy by growing into the faith from childhood, and taking part in the sacraments over a long period of time has a transformative impact on the self.¹⁴ Naumescu sees this as an organic process that takes place within the family and is guided by the parish priest. In this vein, the majority of early twentieth-century catechisms focused on very practical issues such as how to visit a monastery and what to do when one goes to church.¹⁵

One of the most accessible of these books was a dialogue written by the priest and teacher Ștefan Călinescu in 1904. The hero is Moș Dragne, a wise peasant over a hundred years old who constantly asks his priests and cantors to explain his religion to him. Over the course of the book Moș Dragne learns that every aspect of Orthodox practice is significant. 'Why do all churches face east?' asks Moș Dragne. 'Churches are built that way so that we will look east, towards the place where Jesus Christ was born', his priest answers. 'Towards the light, just as the grass does when it bends towards the rising sun.'¹⁶ 'Why does the cloth on the altar look like it does?' asks Moș Dragne. 'The shine of the cloth reflects the shining throne of Jesus Christ in heaven', his priest replies. 'Everything is covered, even the leg, so that no one who is not ordained touches it. For not only the *holy relics* and *incenses* are placed there, but so is the *great and holy myrrh* which no-one should touch unless they are being anointed with it.'¹⁷ 'Truly the mysteries of

¹³ Nicodim Munteanu, *Ce să crezi și cum să trăiești? Adică schema credinței și moralei creștine* (Bucharest: Albert Baer, 1905), 17.

¹⁴ Vlad Naumescu, 'Becoming Orthodox: The Mystery and Mastery of a Christian Tradition', in *Praying with the Senses: Contemporary Orthodox Christian Spirituality in Practice*, ed. Sonja Luehrmann (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 31–2.

¹⁵ Ioan Mihălcescu, *Explicarea Sfintei Liturghii* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1917); Damian Stănoiu, *Cum se vizitează o mănăstire* (Bucharest: Tipografiile Convorbiri Literare, 1923); Al. Săndulescu, *Mergerea la biserică* (Buzău: Tipografia M. Mracek, 1941); Florea Codreanu, *Cunoaștințe liturgice* (Arad: Editura Diecezană, 1945).

¹⁶ Ștefan Călinescu, *Dialog între Moș Dragne și Logofătul Stoica Călinénu explicând întregul organism liturgic* (Bucharest: Tipografia Gutenberg, 1904), 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

God are great and wonderful!’ exclaims Moș Dragne once everything has been explained. ‘May God teach these divine truths to everyone; that every soul might lift itself up towards divine things and understand the power of God and the gift of the anointed [priests].’¹⁸

Symbolism is particularly strong in Orthodox worship. Trying to explain ‘mysticism in the Eastern Church’ to Western readers, the Serbian theologian Nikolaj Velimirović commented that everything in the natural world can be a symbol or a sign of spiritual realities. In the words of Symeon the New Theologian, ‘the man who is enlightened by the Holy Spirit ... contemplates spiritually visible things and bodies as the symbols of the things invisible.’¹⁹ Thus someone who washes themselves in baptism ‘becomes clean, just like they had been born again,’ and a chandelier (*policandrul*) hanging in the centre of the church directly under an icon of Jesus holding everything in his hands (the *Pantocrator* icon) can symbolize the fact that God cares for and sustains all light in the world.²⁰

Icons adorn every Orthodox church in the world and are ‘a way of exteriorizing an external feeling.’²¹ Apologists for icons argued that they have existed since the time of Christ, citing the tradition that a woman wiped Jesus’s face on his way to be crucified, leaving an image of his face on the cloth. Icons portray stories from the Bible as well as moments from the lives of saints, who mediate between believers and God just as one might ask a holy person to pray for them. Particularly important churches also housed the relics of saints, which were venerated in the same way as icons. These were primarily medieval Romanian saints associated with particular cities such as Parascheva of Iași, Filofteia of Argeș, John the New of Suceava and Dimitrie the New (Basarabov), the patron saint of Bucharest.²²

Protestants claimed that Orthodox Christians worshipped icons as idols, but Orthodox writers reminded them that there is a significant difference between ‘worship’ – which is due to God alone – and ‘veneration’ – which should be given to icons and holy people. Moreover, they insisted, ‘when we venerate and bow to the icons we are not bowing before the paint or the wood, but to the saints

¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

¹⁹ Quoted in Nicholai D. Velimirovich, *The Universe as Symbols and Signs: An Essay on Mysticism in the Eastern Church* (Libertyville, IL: St Sava Monastery, 1950), 2.

²⁰ Călinescu, *Dialog între Moș Dragne*, 20, 26. See also Laurențiu Streza, ‘Liturgical Space’, in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), 591–603.

²¹ Const P. Beldie, *Cultul sfințelor icoane* (Bârlad: Tipografia N. Chiriac, 1937), 3.

²² Ioanichie Bălan, *Sfintele moaște din România* (Roman: Editura Episcopiei Romanului, 1999), 5–6.

who are portrayed in the icons.²³ The veneration of icons followed a particular pattern which constituted polite behaviour in church. The priest Alexandru Săndulescu explained that

One bows twice, kisses the icon, bows a third time, then moves on. The believer goes first to the icon of the Saviour, then to the icon of the Mother of God, to the icon on the left of the Saviour, to the icon on the right of the Mother of God, to the icon on the iconostasis and then goes to their place. If the Holy Gospel has been placed on the tetrapod in the middle of the church, the believer kisses the Holy Gospel after they have kissed the icon on the iconostasis then goes to their place.²⁴

Antonie Luțcan reflected that by ‘viewing the face of the saint we are praying to, even our physical eyes take part in the prayer, making it, in the words of Scripture, “face to face” (Exodus 33:11)’.²⁵

The Bible also plays an important role in Orthodox worship. The Gospel is placed at the centre of the room during church services, sections of the Bible are read out loud as part of the liturgy, Biblical scenes are represented on icons and the prayers incorporate many Bible verses and references. But the idea that lay believers would read the Bible for themselves was a relatively new one as rising literacy rates prompted a growing desire for Bible reading across the country.²⁶ Priests taught that explaining Scripture puts believers ‘in connection with the divine spirit itself’ and encouraged lay Bible reading because ‘God revealed his teachings and his holy will to all people, regardless of nation, sex, social standing, or age.’²⁷ At the same time, however, they warned that interpreting the Bible is not easy. Iuliu Scriban wrote that only someone with adequate moral and intellectual abilities and training was able to properly understand the Bible. Even then, it could not be done by an individual but only in accordance with the teachings of the whole church.²⁸ Biblical interpretation, insisted inter-war textbooks, was a *scientific* endeavour that required a deep knowledge of historical context, archaeology, philology and spiritual insight.²⁹

²³ Ibid., 12.

²⁴ Săndulescu, *Mergerea la biserică*, 10.

²⁵ Antonie Luțcan, *Cuvinte de îndrumare* (Jud. Sorocea: Editura Monăstirei Dobrușa, 1926), 16.

²⁶ Vasile Vasilache, *Biblia în ortodoxie* (Neamț: Tipografia Sfintei Mănăstiri Neamțu, 1939), 6–11.

²⁷ Ibid., 95, 115.

²⁸ Scriban, *Manual de ermeneutică biblică*, 18–22, 151–3.

²⁹ Ibid.; Iustin Suciu, *Ermeneutica biblică sau știința interpretării Sfintei Scripturi* (Arad: Editura Autorului, 1933).

Worship was and is a particularly sensory experience in Eastern Orthodoxy. Antonie Luțcan wrote that ‘seeing the holy icons, illuminated by candles, the candlesticks full of light, the ceiling of the church reflecting the vault of the heavens, we are easily overcome by the humble thought that God is near and easily our lips mouth the words of the prayer’.³⁰ In addition to the visual stimulation of the icon, the aroma of incense and the physical sensations of crossing oneself and of standing still for long periods of time, choral singing became common at large religious gatherings from the late nineteenth century onwards, combining polyphonic Western harmonies with traditional Orthodox chant.³¹ Musicians such as Gavril Muzicescu, Nicolae Lungu and Ioan Chirescu created new harmonies that brought religious music back to the attention of the Romanian public.³² In the preface to a songbook assembled by the director of the patriarchal choir, Eugen Bărbulescu wrote that ‘when it rises in the careful harmony of talented voices, religious music transforms the entire prayer time, joining it with the *supreme being*, to whom you give yourself completely’.³³

Prayer in Eastern Orthodoxy can be chanted or recited, out loud or silent. Believers are encouraged to pray in their own words but most make use of prayer books. Books with prayers to be prayed together during worship services usually contained musical notation alongside the words. Like corporate singing, praying together allowed believers to express particularly strong emotions, knowing that their feelings were echoed by others. Quoting Teophan the Monk, for example, Bishop Andrei Magieru pointed out that ‘the Paraklesis of the Mother of the God is a call for help to the Virgin Mary “which is sung with complete disgust at oneself and at times of need”’.³⁴ Repentance and contrition feature heavily in Orthodox prayers. Most of the prayers collected by the monk Nicodim in 1799 and used throughout Romania contrasted the absolute holiness of God – ‘He who is unknowable in being, incomprehensible in greatness, and whose goodness is immeasurable; the deep and untold fount of power and wisdom’ – with the abject sinfulness of man, who is ‘not worthy to speak, for I am very sinful’.³⁵ This

³⁰ Luțcan, *Cuvinte de îndrumare*, 9.

³¹ Stelian Ionașcu, ‘Chanting in the Romanian Orthodox Church in a Pan-Orthodox Context’, in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), 859–67.

³² Jim Samson, *Music in the Balkans* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 150.

³³ Eugen Bărbulescu, ‘Prefață’, in *Zece cântece religioase*, ed. G. Cucu (Bucharest: Editura Proprie, 1928), 3.

³⁴ Andrei Magieru, *Acatistul Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos și Paraclisul Preasfintei Născătoare de Dumnezeu* (Arad: Diecezana, 1940), 3.

³⁵ *Rugăciunile Sfinților Părinți sau Apanthisma* (Bucharest: Cartea Orthodoxă, 2007), 129–30.

contrast allowed believers to reflect on the amazing mercy that God shows by not destroying them but instead giving them salvation and eternal life.

It was the parish priest who mediated God's mercies to believers, and his role expanded significantly during the early twentieth century. In the mid-nineteenth century priests were expected to do four things: (i) to teach the people; (ii) to live holy lives; (iii) to administer the sacraments; and (iv) to pray for the people.³⁶ As the population increased and levels of education rose, the expectations placed on priests rose with them. Ștefan Călinescu reflected in 1908 that 'things which were tolerated and passed over in the past can no longer be tolerated today. Everything is changing in the world, and we change with it'.³⁷ In addition to administering the sacraments and running church services, Călinescu said that

The priest should actively direct all activity for the better. He should encourage the inhabitants of rural areas to build good, healthy houses, to manage their businesses well so that their lives might be made easier and they might preserve their energy for things that must be done. He must be a guide in economic matters so that no one lacks anything or is forced to rely on the charity of others. He should instruct people to send their children to school so that foreigners no longer think of us as a country of blind people. He should be a devoted supporter of the popular banks so that the people might escape from usurers who wring out even the marrow from the bones of those who are suffering. He should set a wise example in improving the cultivation of the soil so that everyone's productivity might increase.³⁸

Priests argued that they played an irreplaceable role in ensuring social progress. They called for people to support their efforts because, working together with parents and teachers, they were the ones responsible for guiding the next generation to maturity.³⁹

The number of monks and nuns, on the other hand, decreased significantly during the second half of the nineteenth century in part because the secularization of monastic estates deprived them of important financial resources.⁴⁰ The spiritual life of the monasteries also suffered to the extent that Episcopia Moieșcu complained that 'today's monasteries do not reflect their calling in any way'.⁴¹

³⁶ *Datoriile preoților*, trans. C. Mavruța [1852] (Bucharest: Editura Bizantină, 2011), 27.

³⁷ Ștefan Călinescu, *Povățuitor în activitatea pastorală a preotului* (Bucharest: Tipografia Gutenberg, 1908), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁹ Florea Codreanu, *Sămânța de lângă cale* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1929).

⁴⁰ Mihai Săsăujan, 'Țara românească și Moldova', in *Monahismul ortodox românesc: Istorie, contribuții și repertoriizare* (Bucharest: Editura Basilica, 2014), 615.

⁴¹ Episcopia Moieșcu, *O chestie de interes moral* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1910), 4.

Monastic properties from the new territories were nationalized during the land reforms of 1921 just as those in the Old Kingdom had been sixty years earlier, although monasteries in Bessarabia remained more active than those in the Old Kingdom thanks to the patronage of Metropolitan Gurie Grosu.⁴² Nonetheless, his successor, Metropolitan Visarion Puiu, argued that inter-war monasticism 'is in the most concerning stages of decomposition. Totally lacking in spiritual models, writings that show its necessity and the need for its reorganization, and leaders who can put these things into practice, the trunk of monasticism is drying out, the leaves wither, the roots weaken, and its entire appearance is pitiful.'⁴³

Preaching became an increasingly common practice during the early twentieth century as priests began writing their own sermons instead of reading from published collections of homilies. Romanian Orthodox writers connected to the magazine *Predicatorul* (*The Preacher*) had vigorously promoted preaching during the late 1850s, but the enthusiasm surrounding preaching and the number of publications on the topic that appeared after 1900 was unprecedented.⁴⁴ Scores of books appeared exhorting priests to preach regular sermons on Sunday mornings and it became common for individuals to publish collections of sermons for particular audiences.⁴⁵ Prominent preachers began delivering sermons on the radio, taking their message directly into people's homes.⁴⁶ Sermons were not always high quality, as many priests were discovering the sermon as a genre for the first time. As Dumitru Buzatu noted in 1933, preaching is easier said than done and empty churches were a sign that priests needed time and training if they were going to become better preachers.⁴⁷

⁴² Eugen Onicov, 'Viața monastică din Basarabia în cadrul României Mare (1918–1940)', in *Monahismul ortodox românesc: Istorie, contribuții și repertorizare* (Bucharest: Editura Basilica, 2014), 867–71.

⁴³ Visarion Puiu, *Monahismul ortodox din România de astăzi* (Chișinău: Tipografia Uniunii Clericilor Ortodocși din Basarabia, 1936), 1. See also Visarion Puiu, *Glas în pustie: Îmbunătățiri bisericești întârziate* (Chișinău: Tipografia Eparhială 'Cartea Românească', 1931), 123.

⁴⁴ Comșa, *Istoria predicii la români*, 171ff.; Teleanu Bogdan Aurel, *Metaforă și misiune: Valorificarea literaturii laice în predica românească* (Iași: Doxologia, 2007).

⁴⁵ On the importance of preaching, see Coman Vasilescu, *Datoria preotului de a predica învățătura creștină* (Bucharest: Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, 1900); Constantin Nazarie, *Călăuza predicatorului* (Bucharest: Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, 1902); Alexandru Popescu-Cernica, *Predica și foloasele ei* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Universală, I. Ionescu, 1911). For examples of collected sermons, see Groșoreanu, *Scrieri pentru popor*; A. Cristea, *Colecțiune de predici populare* (Bucharest: Tipografia 'Speranța', 1907); Luțcan, *Cuvinte de îndrumare*.

⁴⁶ Toma Chiricuță, Gh. Comana, Marin C. Ionescu and Manea S. Popescu, *Chemări de departe: predici la radio* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Pavel Suru, 1929); 'Faptele proaspete din viața bisericească', *Luminătorul*, February 1937, 117–18.

⁴⁷ D. Buzatu, 'Predicatorii', *Calendarul*, 2 October 1933, 3.

The sermons of the future patriarch, Miron Cristea, reveal a strong emphasis on morality and good deeds. The image that comes through in Cristea's sermons is of a jealous and vengeful God who punishes wrongdoers but rewards the righteous. When floods devastated the Banat in 1910, he distributed a circular saying that

I have arrived at the conclusion that the warnings of the prophet Ezekiel have come upon the inhabitants of this region: '*I ... bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you.*' (26:19) Considering this unhappy event in cold blood brought to mind the thought that our Heavenly Father has disciplined us for our sins and errors. He had to, for in this way he revealed his anger at those who have forgotten and ignored his stories, as Jesus the son of Sirah tells us: '*And the Lord will show his mighty voice, so as to let his anger be seen in his outstretched arm ... with thunder, hail, and heavy rain.*'

(30:30)⁴⁸

At the same time, Cristea consistently portrayed Romanians as an oppressed people suffering at the hands of foreign rulers. He compared them to 'a flower, a noble plant, or a useful vegetable planted in uncared for and uncultivated ground, choked by hidden weeds that are killing it'.⁴⁹ Only Jesus's commandments could save them from their condition: 'Without [God's teachings] life is a trial and the future is a riddle (enigma) that we cannot unravel; a mystery that we cannot penetrate. But the law of Christ brings us light and shows us the way to happiness in this world and eternal joy in the next.'⁵⁰

Ștefan Călinescu, a respected teacher and priest in Bucharest, wrote that parish priests should 'find time to speak, in particular, to the lost, showing them the evil they do to themselves, to their families and to the society they live in'. He gave a long list of topics that preachers should focus on which provides an insight into Orthodox preaching of the period. Călinescu said that sermons should ensure that lay people might not only know how to recite:

- 1) The symbol of the faith, but to understand it properly;
- 2) To explain the ten commandments;
- 3) The commandments of the church;

⁴⁸ Episcopal circular, 1910, ANIC, Fond Miron Cristea, Dosar 1902/1, f. 25. The quote from Sirah 30:30 is entirely fictitious. No such verse exists in the Bible.

⁴⁹ Elie Cristea, 'Cuvântare la Asociațiuni pentru literatură română și cultura poporului roman la 12/25 Mai 1902', in ANIC, Fond Miron Cristea, Dosar 1902/1, f. 3.

⁵⁰ Miron Cristea, 'Circulară', 6 December 1910, in ANIC, Fond Miron Cristea, Dosar 1902/1, f. 92.

- 4) An understanding of the *Our Father* prayer, which every Christian should be able to recite piously;
- 5) To explain the parables in the gospels, which contain the most beautiful examples of those morals necessary for life;
- 6) To explain the church service and the mysteries of Orthodoxy;
- 7) To explain the Gospel and the Apostle and the holy days of the year;
- 8) To speak about the duties of husbands and wives in a family or a marriage;
- 9) About raising children;
- 10) About the duty of care that every citizen has to educate and guide their children towards the right occupation;
- 11) About the ties of goodness and brotherly love between citizens;
- 12) About love of country, or patriotism;
- 13) About the duty to respect the laws of the country and to submit ourselves to the authorities of the country and the church for the good public ordering of the state;
- 14) About the health of the body, which can be injured by poor housing, bad food or illnesses that come from dirtiness or are transmitted from person to person;
- 15) About the health of the soul, which is darkened by bad habits, cravings and drunkenness;
- 16) About helping poor widows and orphans who have nowhere to lay their heads, no help in sickness and loneliness or who beg on the streets;
- 17) About decorating the town with useful plants;
- 18) About respecting your neighbour's life and property, for this is why we come together in communities;
- 19) About the duty to avoid strangers and foreigners who spread unsettling ideas among the children of the Romanian people;
- 20) About forming community groups for helping homeless orphans and the sick.⁵¹

In the 1921 *History of Preaching in Romania*, Grigore Comşa critically assessed the best published collections of sermons available. Many of the sermons he discussed were translations from the Church Fathers, but a number were by talented preachers experimenting with the sermon as a new genre. Comşa was not always impressed. Describing Coman Vasilescu's collection of sermons from 1902, he commented that 'in some sermons he talks about a topic without going

⁵¹ Călinescu, *Povătuitor în activitatea pastorală*, 14–16.

into it in any depth ... Some sermons lack life; they are missing any practical and unifying aspect.' He noted that Visarion Puiu's sermons were written 'in urban church language' even though they had originally been published in a magazine for peasants. Puiu rarely quoted Scripture, Comşa said, and focused on topics such as 'love of the church, education, submission to authorities, theft, drunkenness, slander, Christian love, fasting, prayer, etc.' Ilie Teodorescu's sermons, on the other hand, were mostly exercises in explaining church doctrine. Teodorescu quoted frequently from the Bible but lacked any stories to help his listeners connect what he was saying to real life. Comşa consistently praised Iuliu Scriban's preaching, noting that 'we find a clear analysis of different virtues in every sermon' and showing that Scriban always chose his topics based on the appropriate dates on the church calendar.⁵²

Other manuals on preaching developed the sermon from different angles. In *Heart and Soul: Homiletics of our Times* (1927), Marin Ionescu argued that priests should master secular knowledge so that they could be convincing from the pulpit. In another book he suggested that preaching served the same function as the liturgy, which is to say that it should elevate the mind.⁵³ Grigore Cristescu argued that the preacher must be a psychologist and establish a spiritual connection with his audience if he wanted to win them over.⁵⁴ Cristescu's sermons focused on relating the Bible to problems of modern life. In a book from 1927 he promised to

Present the Saviour in various social positions so that we understand how to become his disciples according to our function in life. Like in a movie, we will see him as a worksite supervisor, a businessman, a bank director, a theatre director, a teacher, a judge, a military general, a lawyer, a doctor, a politician, a journalist, a prison director, a university student, a society president, an editor and a librarian.⁵⁵

Similarly, the Old Testament scholar Ion V. Georgescu wondered

what chaos would the words of the prophet [Isaiah] produce today if he spoke to the priests of Christ's church in our country? If today's life required

⁵² Comşa, *Istoria predicei la români*, 193–201.

⁵³ Marin Ionescu, *Inimă şi suflet: Omiletica vremurilor noastre* (Bucharest, 1927) and Marin Ionescu, *Altarul şi amvonul* (Bucharest, 1942), quoted in Vasile Gordon and Silviu Tudose, 'The Development of Pastoral Studies: Homiletics, Catechetics and Pastoral Theology', in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniţă (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), 781.

⁵⁴ Grigore Cristescu, *Predică şi cateheză* (Sibiu, 1929), quoted in *ibid.*, 781–2.

⁵⁵ Grigore Cristescu, *Isus în viaţă modernă* (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1927), 5.

sacrifice and a spirit of sacrifice from everyone; if the priests were called to transform society? ‘Depart from the world and sacrifice everything; by descending into the world some of you *might* change some of what you have destroyed!’⁵⁶

Successful preaching required a sound knowledge of the Bible, which not all priests had. Romanian dogmatic theology of the early twentieth century relied heavily on translated lectures by Russian and Greek theologians with a strong scholastic bent, and no Romanian moral theology to speak of had yet been written.⁵⁷ In 1924 the New Testament professor and future metropolitan Nicolae Colan commented that ‘the West continually asks us for doctrinal books of our orthodoxy. We do not have them and we do not miss them. The faith of the first seven Ecumenical Councils is enough for us.’⁵⁸ The attitude of Colan’s colleagues was already changing before the ink was cold on his article. The most positive thing Iuliu Scriban could find to say about Romanian theological publishing was that students now had access to some textbooks of questionable quality and a commentary that covered most of the New Testament.⁵⁹ According to Gala Galaction, the state of learning was so dismal that ‘in all of Romania there are probably only ten or fifteen theologians who know Orthodox doctrine.’⁶⁰ Teodor Păcescu agreed, noting that, because of the poor state of education, ‘the seminarian and the theology student learns the religious sciences for his exams, not for himself (*nu pentru conștiința sa*)’, and consequently few priests really knew much about their own religion.⁶¹ Such complaints were not unique to Orthodoxy. Greek Catholic writers similarly bemoaned ‘the almost complete lack of textbooks for our theological seminaries’ in the early 1920s.⁶²

⁵⁶ Georgescu was referring specifically to Isaiah 52:11. Ion V. Georgescu, *Actualitatea profeților* (Bucharest: Tiparul Academic, 1934), 28.

⁵⁷ Ștefan Buchiu and Cristinel Ioja, ‘The Development of Dogmatic Studies’, in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), 396; Nichifor Crainic, *Zile albe – zile negre: memorii* (Bucharest: Casa Editorială Gândirea, 1991), 93.

⁵⁸ Nicolae Colan, ‘Ortodoxie și esența ei’, *Revista Teologică*, 14, no. 2–3 (1924): 61, quoted in Ionuț Biliuță, ‘Periphery as Center? The Fate of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church in the Romanian Patriarchy’, in *Discourse and Counter-Discourse in Cultural and Intellectual History*, ed. Carmen Andraș and Cornel Sigmirean (Sibiu: Astra Museum, 2014), 386.

⁵⁹ Iuliu Scriban, *Studiul pastoral în biserica românească* (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhiepiscopale, 1924), 6.

⁶⁰ Gala Galaction, *Jurnal*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1999), 164.

⁶¹ Teodor P. Păcescu, ‘Propaganda neo-protestantă’, *Noua revistă bisericească*, 1 January 1924, 244.

⁶² I. Volbură, ‘Chestiunea manualelor teologice’, *Cultura creștină* 9, no. 1–2 (1920): 52.

Orthodox Biblical Studies in the nineteenth century was heavily reliant on Catholic writings, but this began to change after the First World War.⁶³ Only two of the twelve works Iuliu Scriban listed in the bibliography to his 1922 textbook on Biblical hermeneutics were by Orthodox writers. One was by an American Methodist, another by a Reformed theologian from Germany and the other eight were Roman Catholic scholars from continental Europe. All reflected the latest developments in the field.⁶⁴ A new generation of Romanian Orthodox Biblical scholars came into its own in the 1920s, including Vasile Tarnavski (OT) and Vasile Gheorghiu (NT) at Cernowitz, Nicolae Colan (NT) at Sibiu and Haralambie Roventă (OT) and Ion Popescu-Mălăiești (NT) at Bucharest.⁶⁵ The 'neo-Patristic turn' to the Church Fathers took place during the 1930s through the work of theologians such as Dumitru Stăniloae and Vladimir Lossky, but Romanian theologians had already begun to appreciate the value of the Church Fathers as they found them presented in Russian textbooks of the late nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Not everyone was happy with the new direction Romanian theological education was taking. Once again critics accused the reformers of introducing Western ideas. The priest, archivist and politician Ștefan Meteș wrote that theological education was now being

Delivered in the seminaries by lay professors who learned their culture from Protestant universities in Germany. The professors and students from the German and English Protestant theological faculties are a true catastrophe for our church. Their souls and minds are disorderly, anarchic; they understand nothing about how it is here and instead of consolidating the church, they destroy and undermine it. The teaching in Catholic seminaries, where they learn fanaticism and religious discipline loses us students who pass over to the law of Rome.⁶⁷

⁶³ Vasile Mihoc, 'The Development of the Biblical Studies', in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), 189.

⁶⁴ Scriban, *Manual de ermeneutică biblică*, 4–5.

⁶⁵ Mihoc, 'Development of the Biblical Studies', 190–3.

⁶⁶ Adrian Marinescu, 'Patrology and Related Studies in Orthodoxy in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: Schools and Research Directions', in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), 333–8.

⁶⁷ Ștefan Meteș, 'Câteva observații critice asupra Bisericii Românești în cei din urmă zece ani', *Societatea de mâine* 5, no. 22–4 (1928): 406, quoted in Florian Kührer-Wielach, 'Orthodoxer Jesuitismus, katholischer Mystizismus: Konfessionalismus in Rumänien nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg', in *Orthodoxa Confessio?: Konfessionsbildung, Konfessionalisierung und ihre Folgen in der östlichen Christenheit*, ed. Mihai-D. Grigore and Florian Kührer-Wielach (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 321.

Ironically, most of the leading Orthodox voices in inter-war Romania had all been schooled in Western theological faculties abroad. Miron Cristea earned his doctorate in Budapest, Nicolae Bălan and Gala Galaction studied at the Franz-Josephs-University in Czernowitz, Vartolomeu Stănescu learned Catholic and Protestant theology alongside law and sociology at the Sorbonne in Paris, Irineu Mihălcescu studied in Berlin and Leipzig, Iuliu Scriban in Strasbourg and Heidelberg, and Ioan Popescu-Mălăești in Strasbourg. Among the prominent reforming hierarchs of the inter-war period, only Gurie Grosu and Visarion Puiu had studied in an Orthodox country, which was to say, in Kiev. No matter how often Orthodox leaders complained that Repenters were bringing Western ideas into their Church, *they* were the ones whose theology had been profoundly shaped by Western learning. Not only had they personally studied in Western universities, they also quoted Protestant and Catholic writers in their own works and encouraged the translation of Western Christian texts into Romanian. At the same time, Orthodox priests and bishops alike cherished an Orthodox, Romanian spirituality centred on the liturgy, the eucharist and the sacraments of the Church.