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Renewal

Responding to repeated complaints about apathy and irreligion of Romanian Orthodox believers, a number of Church leaders engaged in concerted campaigns to renew the interest of parish priests and lay Christians alike in attending church services, reading the Bible and cultivating holy living. One of the most outspoken pro-revival church publications of the early 1920s was *Noua revistă bisericească* (*The New Church Magazine*). Established in Bucharest during March 1919, *Noua revistă bisericească* was owned and edited by Teodor P. Păcescu, a priest who had earned his diploma with a study on whether or not the Bible was divinely inspired.¹ Its editorial board included several distinguished theologians and church leaders. ‘Our Orthodoxy is passing through a deep crisis of understanding, method, and action,’ Păcescu wrote in one issue. ‘Everything in our Orthodox church needs to be reestablished on the ancient foundations of Orthodoxy and rejuvenated in today’s struggle to shape and govern Orthodox Christian identity (*conștiința creștină ortodoxă*).’² Păcescu and the other contributors to *Noua revistă bisericească* wanted a revived Orthodoxy characterized by piety, good works, a passion for the study of the Bible and an enthusiasm for spreading the gospel.³ Revival was a Protestant concept, however, and had been the standard Protestant solution to religious indifference since the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century. At first preachers had thought of revivals as spontaneous, divine movements of the Holy Spirit, but by the nineteenth century churchmen had begun organizing them and scheduling them into the liturgical calendar.⁴ Orthodox leaders were aware of the Protestant

¹ Teodor P. Păcescu, *Inspirația cărților sfintei scripturi: Teză pentru licență* (Bucharest: Tipografia Speranța, 1907).

² T. P. Păcescu, ‘Nouii noștri episcopi’, *Noua revistă bisericească*, 1 May 1923, 33.

³ P., ‘Cum înțelege biserica unită intensificarea apostolatului în parohii?’ *Noua revistă bisericească*, 1 May 1923, 61.

⁴ Janice Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland, 1859–1905* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), 168–9.

connotations that talk about revival had, and Păcescu counselled that 'all these efforts need to be directed, guided and defined lest we pass beyond Orthodox dogma in our desire to evangelize and unexpectedly find ourselves in the camp of the sectarians'.⁵

Despite their small numbers, Repenters featured heavily in discussions about Romanian religiosity. The priest Gheorghe Sălcescu wondered why he saw 'a breathtaking fanaticism' among 'heretics' such as Baptists, Brethren and Seventh-Day Adventists, who are willing 'to suffer beatings, (military) prison, insults' and who take their Bibles to church 'to follow the sermon with interest', while among the Orthodox there was only 'indifference'. The average Orthodox believer, Sălcescu wrote, 'swears about his own faith, fights with his brothers from the village and lives a life devoid of holiness, almost without faith'.⁶ Păcescu and his colleagues attributed the rapid spread of Repenter Christianity to the Romanian Orthodox Church's (ROC's) failure to satisfy the widespread desire for a renewed spiritual life. He wrote, 'the need for repentance and spiritual rebirth, for religious activism, for an interiorization of the Christian faith, for consistency between words and actions, cannot be satisfied by mechanically carrying out church rituals. The sectarians profited from this spiritual moment and attacked'.⁷ If it was to survive, they said, the ROC needed to begin evangelizing more heavily. In the words of Petre Chirică, 'it is a painful fact, but we have to admit that so far the Church has remained silent. The Gospel has not been preached with zeal that it might serve the will of Jesus Christ. Its servants have focused on other domains, they have served zealously, but they have done no evangelistic work'.⁸ Orthodox leaders decided that if they wished to remain competitive in the twentieth century they would have to begin preaching, distributing literature, expounding Scripture and developing intentional communities of pious believers whose holiness and commitment rivalled that of the Repenters.

Attempts at renewing the Church began shortly before the First World War. Regular congresses for priests and deacons in the Old Kingdom began in 1910, which included discussions on how to run church services, how to confront social problems and how to minister to young people. One writer recommended that 'the giving of blessed icons to school children is a powerful way of attracting

⁵ Teodor P. Păcescu, *Noua revistă bisericească*, 1 January 1922, 1.

⁶ Gh. Sălcescu, 'Fanatism și indiferentism', *Noua revistă bisericească*, 1 May 1923, 36–7.

⁷ Teodor P. Păcescu, *Noua revistă bisericească*, July 1930, 1.

⁸ Petru Chirică, 'Diferite soiuri de evanghelizare', *Noua revistă bisericească*, 1 April 1922, 6–7.

their attention to sacred history. Coloured icons are preferred to uncoloured ones because they stimulate much more the imagination and the happiest feelings.⁹ The Church threw itself into printing church newspapers and establishing parish libraries, and George Ursul writes that

By 1909, 3,032 village parishes [in the Old Kingdom] had libraries, mostly with 150 volumes or less; the 398 city parishes surveyed in 1919 revealed holdings of 500–2,000 volumes, some of them housed in their own buildings and providing facilities for lectures and conferences. By 1920 as the result of an active church press and the parish library movement, 123 societies of a religious and cultural nature had been established and were conducted by priests.¹⁰

There was a general consensus in the early 1920s that renewal was coming. The poet Dimitrie Nanu wrote that ‘the breeze of a spiritual springtime has begun to blow here and there: Father Gala Galaction, speaking from various pulpits with his skill and vast erudition, Father Nicolai Popescu at the Măgureanu Hermitage church, Father [Toma] Chiricuță in Botoșani, Father Ion Petrescu at the St. Visarion church, Simion Mehedinți in pamphlets, Mihail Sadoveanu through his most recent writings ...’¹¹ Galaction, Popescu, Chiricuță and Petrescu were all dynamic preachers at prominent churches with exceptional clerical careers ahead of them, while Mehedinți and Sadoveanu were, among other things, leading figures in the literary world. Toma Chiricuță moved to Bucharest later in the decade, where he began popular prayer evenings.¹² As Grigore Cristescu argued, prayer was central to religious renewal. ‘Orthodox contemplation is not sterile and static’, he wrote. ‘It is essentially an infinitely creative dynamism. The contemplative Christian is the most active Christian. The most heroic. He is, completely, an earthly angel and a heavenly man.’¹³ Hesychast prayer had been central to the monastic revivals of the eighteenth century. It was cultivated in the Burning Bush movement of the 1940s but was largely missing from efforts at reform during the 1920s.¹⁴

⁹ Quoted in George R. Ursul, ‘From Political Freedom to Religious Independence: The Romanian Orthodox Church, 1877–1925’, in *Romania Between East and West: Historical Essays in Memory of Constantin C. Giurescu*, ed. Stephen Fischer-Galati, Radu Florescu and George Ursul (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1982), 232.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹¹ D. Nanu, *Iisus vă cheamă* (Bucharest: Atelierele Adeverul, 1923), 8.

¹² Grigorie Comșa, *Ființa și necesitatea misionarismului* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1932), 21.

¹³ Grigorie Cristescu, ‘Înapoi la Molitfelnic’, *Predania*, 15 February 1937, 7.

¹⁴ Serafim, *Isihasmul: Tradiție și cultură românească* (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1994).

Social Christianity

In addition to seeking to inspire greater lay participation in the church, clerical writers began arguing that the ROC should engage more deeply with contemporary social problems. 'The Kingdom of God', that is, 'must start to reign on the earth as it does in heaven'.¹⁵ The leading exponent of Social Christianity was Vartolomeu Stănescu, Bishop of Râmnicului Noului Severin. Stănescu was a passionate advocate of religious reform, arguing that 'to keep [the church] as we have it now, for old women, for people about to be married and for a few sick people who still believe in the power of faith, would mean to replace the Gospel with the Horologion, that is, with the sort of strict ritualism that was around in pagan times as well'.¹⁶ Stănescu's vision involved changing what clergy did day to day. He said that the church 'must start to come down from the abstract heights that it had to climb in the days when it formed its dogmas and, without giving up its teachings, spend its energies more in social work to pull the simple multitudes out of the moral and material misery in which they suffer in our individualistic times'.¹⁷ As a reaction against secular liberalism and the separation of church and state, Social Christianity taught that the church must engage with society in new ways that took secular modernity into account. This was an ideology that treated not just individuals but society as a whole as a being 'with its own body, soul, and rules of life'; insisting that morality was social as well as individual and that Christianity must move beyond teaching dogma into practical action.¹⁸ Initially a reactionary theocratic movement led by French Catholics, it was enriched by the influence of Christian Socialists such as Charles Kingsley and Frederick Denison Maurice and expressed most powerfully in documents such as Pope Leo XIII's encyclical 'On Capital and Labor', *Rerum Novarum*.¹⁹ Gala Galaction championed the idea of Christian Socialism in Romania through his journalism and stories such as *Roxana*, in which a socialist priest uses the resources of his

¹⁵ Vartolomeu Stănescu, *Scurte încercări de creștinism social*, reproduced in Vartolomeu Stănescu, *Puterile sociale ale creștinismului: Opere alese* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2014), 173.

¹⁶ C., 'În jurul alegerii mitropolitului primat. Convorbire cu P. S. Arhiepiscopul Vartolomeu Băcăoanu', *Dacia* 2, no. 27 (1920): 1, quoted in Cătălin Raiu, *Democrație și statolatricie: Creștinismul social la Bartolomeu Stănescu, Episcopul Râmnicului Noului Severin (1875–1954)* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2014), 101.

¹⁷ Stănescu, *Scurte încercări*, in Stănescu, *Puterile sociale*, 179–80.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁹ Cătălin Raiu, *Democrație și statolatricie: Creștinismul social la Bartolomeu Stănescu, Episcopul Râmnicului Noului Severin (1875–1954)* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2014), 29–70.

parish to help the poor.²⁰ Galaction's Christian Socialism did not gain many followers but Stănescu's position as bishop meant that he could enshrine Social Christianity in a number of his episcopal initiatives.

Stănescu argued that

Social Christianity is simply about introducing an equitable regime into the social body of the state, and of all human collectivities and institutions, which guarantees people of all classes an impetus to work, payment for their efforts, personal independence and moral prestige. Public offices and their corresponding salaries are organic elements of the social body and they should be organized equitably within this body; not in an arbitrary manner, but in line with the gospel morality of Christ the Saviour in a just system that dignifies.²¹

Stănescu's Social Christianity aimed at social reform through religious regeneration. It resonated strongly with clerical calls for renewal while also being able to frame itself as both anti-communist and anti-capitalist.²²

In 1920 Stănescu established the Solidarity Social Christian Study Circle, together with prominent Orthodox thinkers such as Vasile Ispir and Ștefan Ionescu. In an attempt to articulate the problem that the circle set out to solve, Ispir wrote in their magazine *Solidaritatea* (*Solidarity*) that 'I have not seen and I still don't see any social activities in the church that reduce the misery of many poor people, widows and orphans through offerings or by other means. I don't see an organized clergy fighting with all its might for social reforms, for charity, for social assistance.'²³ The Solidarity Study Circle only lasted until 1926, but in 1923 Stănescu also created a clerical society called Rebirth (*Renașterea*). He strongly encouraged all priests in his episcopate to join and published a regular magazine as well as holding frequent meetings for them to attend. The goals of the society included providing further study for priests, educating the people through the clergy, combating sectarianism, defending the prestige of the Church and cultivating a spirit of solidarity between priests and their parishioners.²⁴ In the society's inaugural manifesto, Stănescu explained that he wanted to

Bring together our church culture with secular culture, from which for the time being we should appropriate only that knowledge which is absolutely necessary

²⁰ Gala Galaction, *O lume nouă* (Bucharest: Editura Cugetarea, 1919); Gala Galaction, *Roxana* (Bucharest: Editura Națională S. Ciornei, 1930).

²¹ 'O nouă orientare pentru plata funcționarilor publici și a clerului', *Solidaritatea*, 1, no. 9–10 (1920–1): 330, quoted in Raiu, *Democrație și statologie*, 199.

²² Raiu, *Democrație și statologie*, 202.

²³ *Ibid.*, 111–12.

²⁴ Sperlea, *Vartolomeu Stănescu*, 46–7.

for the *health* and the *quality of life* of our people. We will *unite morality with hygiene* as the Old Testament does, and endeavour to help the people in their labour and in managing their households and society as a whole. We contribute not as specialists, but as moral guides and defenders of day to day needs of any and every variety.²⁵

Rebirth hosted lectures for priests on topics such as 'Biblical interpretation', 'The impact of the Gospel on the family, society, and the state' and 'What can the results of a Christian conscience be?'.²⁶ Priests were then expected to form their own 'Christian centres' and 'Moral Councils' (*Sfaturi moralizatori*) in villages, where they would teach people about the relationship between religion and science, the dangers of pornography and sectarianism, angels and the relationship between priests and laypeople.²⁷ In a circular from 1924, Stănescu instructed that

Every priest, as president of the moral council, will make a list of sins and virtues based on Holy Scripture and human habits and will study them together with the members of his moral council. Study will be according to Holy Scripture, from which members of the council – not the priest – will read indicated sections. The priest will elaborate with real cases and examples from the history of the church, national history, from anywhere in the world and from everyday life so that people will understand the text of Holy Scripture.²⁸

In line with official church policy Stănescu insisted that his priests avoid becoming involved in politics, but he and other leading Church figures struggled to follow this advice. Antisemitism was already deeply embedded in theological seminaries. From the economic antisemitism found in the writings of Pomponiu Morușca during the mid-1920s, by the mid-1930s even renowned Biblical scholars such as Nicolae Neaga and Ioan Popescu-Mălăești were arguing that the Jews were a cursed people; enemies of God.²⁹ The theology student Valeriu Beleuță led a 'nest' of the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael at the Andriene Theological Academy in Sibiu as early as 1932, and a few years later a solid group of young legionary theologians were employed in the Academy at Sibiu under

²⁵ Vartolomeu Stănescu, 'Ce urmărim cu Societatea Clerului Oltean "Renașterea" și cu organele de propagandă', *Renașterea* 1, no. 1 (1922), reproduced in Stănescu, *Puterile sociale*, 341.

²⁶ ANIC – Craiova, Fond Societatea Preotească Renașterea, Dosar 49/1930, ff. 1–2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 95.

²⁸ Quoted in Sperlea, *Vartolomeu Stănescu*, 52.

²⁹ Ionuț Biliuță, 'Sowing the Seeds of Hate: The Antisemitism of the Orthodox Church in the Interwar Period', *S.I.M.O.N.* 3 (2016): 26–7; Ionuț Biliuță, 'Arianizarea studiilor biblice în perioada interbelică: O polemică în studiile biblice românești', in *Interpretarea Biblică între Biserică și Universitate: perspective interconfesionale*, ed. Alexandru Ioniță (Sibiu: Andreiană, 2016), 28–30.

the patronage of Nicolae Bălan, including Liviu Stan, Nicolae Mladin, Spiridon Căndea and Teodor Bodogae.³⁰ Theologians such as Grigore Cristescu, Ion V. Georgescu and Gheorghe Racoveanu joined the Legion during 1933 and 1934, dedicating themselves to fascist activism until the movement was suppressed in 1941.³¹ In Bessarabia Gurie Grosu, Visarion Puiu and Veniamin Pocitan actively patronized legionary gatherings.³² Other reforming priests, including Ioan Gheorghe Savin, Irineu Mihălcescu and Ion Popescu-Mozăceni, supported A. C. Cuza's antisemitic National Christian Defense League and encouraged their students to do likewise.³³

Stănescu began patronizing legionary gatherings in 1932. He performed liturgies at their meetings, encouraged legionaries to do building projects on churches in his episcopate and priests spoke in his name when doing legionary propaganda.³⁴ In the process, Stănescu alienated local officials associated with the National Liberal or Peasantist parties as well as coming into conflict with other Church leaders he accused of corruption.³⁵ A perfect storm of scandals broke out around Stănescu in 1936. One of his cooks accused him of rape, others accused him of promoting only people with legionary politics and still others accused him of misappropriating church funds.³⁶ On trial for corruption, Stănescu resigned his post and withdrew to a monastery in 1938. It is tempting to see a connection between Stănescu's commitment to Christian social reform and his involvement in fascist politics. His talk about reform, corruption and self-sacrifice resonated perfectly with legionary discourses on the same topics. At the same time, support for the Legion was widespread within the upper echelons of the ROC and it is quite possible that anyone in Stănescu's position would have affiliated themselves with fascism for political gain regardless of their theological convictions.

³⁰ Ionuț Biliuță, 'Un fascism regional? Cazul Academiei Teologice Andreiene din Sibiu (1930–1941)', in *Cler, Biserică și Societate în Transilvania, sec. XVIII–XX*, ed. Cornel Sigmirean and Corina Teodor (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2016), 404–24.

³¹ ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, Dosar 258626, f. 23, Dosar 233835, vol. 2, ff. 224–30, and Dosar 234303, vol. 2, ff. 324–34.

³² Viorica Nicolencu, *Extrema dreaptă în Basarabia (1923–1940)* (Chișinău: Civitas, 1999), 84; Zosim Oancea, 'Ion Moța și Vasile Marin', *Lumina satelor*, 24 January 1937, 1–2.

³³ ANIC, Fond DGP, Dosar 1/1938, ff. 17–18; ACNSAS, Fond Penal, Dosar 011784, vol. 8, f. 202; I. G. Popescu-Mozăceni, 'Înviere și trădare', *Apărarea națională*, 24 April 1927, 1.

³⁴ Raiu, *Democrație și statologie*, 173–81; ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, Dosar 236684, ff. 26–107.

³⁵ ANIC, Fond DGP, Dosar 45/1937, ff. 4–10; C. Cernăianu, *Răspuns adversarilor mei spre eterna lor osândă* (Bucharest: Tipografia Capitalei, 1934); Vartolomeu Stănescu, *O lămurire în legătură cu eparhia locală* (Râmnicul Vâlcea: Tipografia Episcopului Vartolomei, 1938).

³⁶ ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, Dosar 236684, ff. 26–30.

Christian students and the YMCA

Orthodox currents of renewal also appeared among university students in Bucharest thanks to the efforts of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). A Congregationalist by the name of George Williams founded the YMCA in London in 1844. With a strong focus on sport and recreation, the organization flourished in an age of muscular Christianity and eugenic thinking.³⁷ Based primarily in Britain and the United States, the YMCA first appeared in Russia in 1868 and opened an office in Vienna in 1873, but had more success in Bulgaria, where it began in 1899. It earned the respect of Romanians for its work alongside the Red Cross during the First World War and began a concerted effort to establish itself in Eastern Europe as a bulwark against communism once the war was over.³⁸

The American John Swift expressed the YMCA's attitude towards work in countries where the majority of the population was not Protestant succinctly in 1889, arguing that 'we are simply inviting our fellow Christian young men in these distant lands to join us in systematic work for other young men. The workers must be the native young men. From them will soon come the leaders needed.'³⁹ The YMCA opened in Romania in 1919 at the invitation of Queen Maria.⁴⁰ Staffed by two Americans and receiving money from British diplomats, it nonetheless immediately began cultivating local students as future leaders of the organization.⁴¹ The organization received the blessing of the metropolitans Miron Cristea and Pimen Georgescu, the support of the government and invited prominent public intellectuals such as Nicolae Iorga, Marin Ștefănescu, Vasile Pârvan, Simion Mehedinți and Isabella Sadoveanu to give lectures.⁴²

The YMCA was legally incorporated as the Christian Youth Association (Asociația Creștină a Tinerilor, ACT). Its statutes specified that 'the Association's

³⁷ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³⁸ Kenneth Steuer, *Pursuit of an 'Unparalleled Opportunity': American YMCA and Prisoner of War Diplomacy among the Central Power Nations during World War I, 1914–1923* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

³⁹ John Swift, quoted in Matthew Lee Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900–1940* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 13.

⁴⁰ 'Police report, 23 March 1943', in ANIC, Fond DGP, Dosar 55/1937, ff. 25–27.

⁴¹ 'Referat, 7 June 1921' and 'Notă informativă, 27 Nov 1945'; reproduced in Carmen Ciornea, *Sandru Tudor și asociațiile studențești creștine din România interbelică* (Bucharest: Eikon, 2017), 153–6, 350–4.

⁴² 'Buletinul Asociației Creștine a Femeilor și Asociației Creștine a Tinerilor, Nov 1920' and 'Referat, 7 June 1921'; reproduced in *ibid.*, 145–56.

principle focus is the education of young people in a Christian spirit, occupying itself with their religious, social, national, intellectual and physical education as well as with their protection and physical needs'. It also claimed

to help young people to establish a life worthy of the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with the teachings of the Christian Orthodox Churches, respecting and being in complete harmony with the other Christian confessions; to develop true character, cultivating the spiritual virtues and enriching their lives through the study and practice of Christian truths by serving their neighbours; to continue unmoved in love for the Church, the country, and the king and to resist all opposing currents.⁴³

The YMCA expanded rapidly on university campuses after the turn of the twentieth century and began outreach to Russian university students in 1909.⁴⁴ With most YMCA workers being middle or upper class and university educated, it was natural that the organization would turn to the universities when it entered Romania. Romanian students established the Romanian Christian Students' Association (Asociația Studenților Creștinilor din România, ASCR) in 1921, which became the Federation of Christian Students' Associations in Romania (Federația Asociației Studenților Creștini din România, FASCR) in 1923 with the goal of 'realizing the Christian ideal in individual and social life by shaping Christian personalities within the student body and making the Christian religion into an active ideal through the work of its members, capable of influencing the world in fundamental ways'.⁴⁵ The organization held annual congresses, which until 1928 included the active involvement of YMCA leaders in the country.

Student politics during the 1920s frequently used the label 'Christian', but rarely in a spiritual sense. The largest and most vocal student organizations were ultra-nationalist and antisemitic. From their roots on individual campuses they came together to create the National Union of Christian Students in Romania (Uniunea Națională a Studenților Creștini din România, UNSCR) in 1925. Known for their violence, hooliganism and rabid antisemitism, organized Romanian students terrorized minority students, especially Jewish students, and frequently came into conflict with the police and the military.⁴⁶ FASCR thus

⁴³ Statutul Asociației Creștine a Tinerilor, in ANIC, Fond DGP, Dosar 55/1937, ff. 13–19.

⁴⁴ Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture*, 17; David P. Setran, *The College Y: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴⁵ Quoted in Ionuț Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu: O microistorie a interbelicului românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Eikon, 2015), 99.

⁴⁶ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 28–62.

presented a puzzle to the authorities. One policeman commented on the 1924 FASCR congress that ‘although the members of the association are Christians, and therefore antisemites, their propaganda is nonetheless based on conviction, not on violence as the propaganda of the Student Centres is’.⁴⁷ Whereas the antisemitic students worked hard to exclude non-Romanian students and promoted a misogynistic, male-dominated culture, FASCR actively included Jewish and Hungarian students in its ranks and elevated women to important leadership positions.⁴⁸

As Ionuț Butoi notes, FASCR’s language about a ‘rebirth’ of Christianity in the face of a mechanized modernity and the need for ‘courage’ to provide spiritual solutions for ‘a petrified humanity, a nation suddenly without direction or orientation, a university student population without ideals but desperate to have one’ echoed phrases found in the writings of the ‘Young Generation’.⁴⁹ A group of intellectuals led by Mircea Eliade and including several people who were also involved in FASCR, the Young Generation claimed to be pioneering a new spirituality that would renew Romanian culture, by which they meant first and foremost art, theatre, literature, music and philosophy.⁵⁰ Open to a diverse range of influences, members of FASCR celebrated French Catholic writers and poets such as Leon Bloy and Charles Péguy, and Mircea Vulcănescu adopted a variety of neo-medievalism after spending time in Paris with theologians such as Jacques Maritain and Nikolai Berdiaev.⁵¹

While the Young Generation was heavily influenced by the philosopher Nae Ionescu, members of FASCR also embraced the ideas of the sociologist Dumitru Gusti, seeing them as a means for realizing the sort of Social Christianity preached by Vartolomeu Stănescu by improving the living conditions of other students. One FASCR leader, Ștefan Georgescu, wrote in 1923 that

When our student body raised the alarm that it was suffering in poorly maintained dormitories, that it ate at inadequate and poorly run canteens, that it does not have the books and living conditions necessary for study, this cry found an echo in our souls ... A handful of ASCR students formed an action committee and took up the difficult but lovely instruction of Christ to work at supporting students.⁵²

⁴⁷ Quoted in Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 103.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 104, 107; ‘Referat, 7 June 1921’, reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandru Tudor*, 153–6.

⁴⁹ Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 109.

⁵⁰ Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania: The Criterion Association* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 25–57.

⁵¹ Philip Vanhaelemeersch, *A Generation ‘Without Beliefs’ and the Idea of Experience in Romania (1927–1934)* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006), 139–40.

⁵² Quoted in Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 111.

They organized a market for second-hand clothes, gave out food vouchers, provided information about exams and university life and even ran their own clinic staffed by university doctors.⁵³ Sports also played a major role in the life of the organization, including gymnastics, volleyball, boxing and table tennis.⁵⁴

The YMCA claimed not to be a missionary organization but there was a close association between its work and Protestant missions. Matthew Lee Miller writes that 'by 1900 more than 50 percent of the active American Protestant foreign missionaries were former "student volunteers," participants in the Student Volunteer Movement, the international outreach of the YMCA and the YWCA'.⁵⁵ It nonetheless worked hard to develop close ties with the Orthodox Church. The organization held a congress in Bucharest in 1923 to which it invited representatives of the Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav Orthodox Churches, who participated 'on the condition that the Orthodox Christian members of the Association confess the Orthodox faith, remaining practicing children of the church and using it for the purpose of educating Christian priests within ACT'.⁵⁶

The blending of evangelical Protestantism with Orthodoxy in the FASCR is evident from the titles of the talks given by students at the 1924 congress. British students attending the conference spoke about 'The Bible and Scripture' and 'Contemporary missions', and a Hungarian student discussed 'Luther and Calvin', whereas Romanian students gave talks on 'What Jesus thinks about holiness and submission to the will of God', 'The Virgin Mary' and 'Patriotism'. Imre Lajos, a Professor of Protestant Theology from Cluj attended some sessions, as did Vasile Ispir, the General Secretary at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Professor of Orthodox Missiology at the University of Bucharest.⁵⁷ The YMCA also worked closely with Russian émigrés at the St Serge Theological Academy in Paris.⁵⁸ Some of these theologians attended the FASCR conference in 1925, contributing new and fecund Orthodox perspectives that inspired the Romanian students.⁵⁹

As a student movement, FASCR existed in permanent tension with the antisemitic UNSCR. The UNSCR also enjoyed the patronage of senior Church

⁵³ Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 113.

⁵⁴ Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 74, n. 88.

⁵⁵ Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture*, 15.

⁵⁶ Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 67.

⁵⁷ 'Raport, 11 Sept 1924', reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 164–8.

⁵⁸ Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture*, 207–25.

⁵⁹ Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 120–1.

figures including Metropolitan Pimen Georgescu, Archbishop Gurie Grosu and the future patriarch Nicodim Munteanu.⁶⁰ At first the antisemitic students noticed few differences between them. In one article from *Ogorul nostru* (*Our Pride*) in July 1924, the author praised the American YMCA, noting that 'the movement of moral and religious renewal and the fight against the Yids is not just happening in Romania', as if antisemitism was a core programme of the YMCA.⁶¹ This state of affairs did not last long and that September antisemitic students attended the FASCR conference in order to disrupt it by attacking Jews.⁶² Two years later the UNSCR congress at Iași passed a resolution about

The YMCA: Recognizing the upsetting activities of the international Yid associations – under cover of different charities of which the above-named society is one – we request that the appropriate ministries place the above-named society under surveillance and curtail its activities so that it would not influence the Christian student associations and thus inhibit their nationalist activities. In the case that its international humanitarian (communist) character be proven the students ask that it be abolished.⁶³

The UNSCR claimed that the YMCA was bringing foreign missionaries into the country who then worked to support Repenter groups. They also blamed the YMCA for the fact that the International Student Confederation had expelled them for being too antisemitic.⁶⁴

The popularity of FASCR dropped markedly in the face of opposition from the antisemitic students and its leadership began to question their affiliation with the YMCA from August 1927 onwards, when the right-wing philosopher Nae Ionescu and the celebrated writer and New Testament scholar Grigorie Pișculescu, better known by his pen name of Gala Galaction, both attended the FASCR congress in Bran. Although he was well known as a philo-Semite, Galaction had attended the UNSCR congress in Chișinău in March and was a dedicated opponent of Miron Cristea's attempts to form ties with the Anglican Church.⁶⁵ Ionescu spoke about the difference between religions that are or are

⁶⁰ 'Raport informativ, Dec 1926', 'Raport informativ, 16 March 1927' and 'Dare de seamă asupra congresului studențesc de la Mănăstirea Neamțu, 8 August 1927'; reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 191–210, 216–25, 235–67.

⁶¹ 'Asociațiile creștine', *Ogorul nostru*, 30 July 1924, 3.

⁶² 'Telegrama cifrată, Sept 1924'; reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 162.

⁶³ Quoted in Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 117.

⁶⁴ Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 89, 109.

⁶⁵ 'Dare de seamă asupra congresului studențesc de la Mănăstirea Neamțu, 8 August 1927'; reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 216–25. On Galaction's opposition to ecumenicism, see Galaction, *Jurnal*, vol. 3, 213, 227, 241–2.

not based on Tradition, and the following day he published an article in *Cuvântul* attacking theologians who claimed to be both Anglican and Orthodox. Two weeks later he wrote another piece accusing the YMCA of trying to 'modernize Orthodoxy'.⁶⁶ The student Mircea Vulcănescu, who became a great admirer of Ionescu, wrote that at this congress

We in ASCR had discovered, together, by ourselves, the call of 'Social Christianity' from books by [Walter] Rauschenbusch and [Harry Emerson] Fosdick⁶⁷ and we were waiting for salvation to come this century through the realization of the Gospel in souls and in society; immediately, within a generation, with a sort of lavish jubilation in which religious values would blend with a whole garden of less pure and less religious emotions which would come from somewhere, though we weren't quite sure where ... Nae Ionescu said firmly to those of us who wanted to hear ... that Christianity with its heavenly and earthly purposes is one thing and that intellectual promiscuity and that vague spirituality which claimed to be Christian in some circles of our young people was quite another.⁶⁸

For his part, Galaction turned to Sandu Tudor, another student associated with FASCR, and recruited his help converting theology students in Chişinău, who he described as 'mostly completely illiterate in terms of the Gospel', into 'citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ'.⁶⁹ Galaction had little patience with the UNSCR's violence and antisemitism and lobbied the government to shut down future UNSCR congresses later that year.⁷⁰ Like Vulcănescu, Tudor turned his back on the YMCA at this time. The president of the YMCA's Romanian patronage committee, I. D. Protopopescu, responded to Ionescu's attack by specifying that 'the Association's goal is to form young people's character according to the norms of Christian morality. It does not involve itself in religious matters, leaving this to the churches of the different countries it works in'.⁷¹ Tudor was horrified at these claims. He wrote back, again in *Cuvântul*, asking Protopopescu

What do you call the so-called 'Bible circles' that I took part in, in which we explained Scripture according to Protestant methods? What do you have to say about the completely lay communal prayers that that I took part in at 17 Sălciilor

⁶⁶ Nae Ionescu 'Dumineca', *Cuvântul*, 29 August 1927, 1 and Nae Ionescu 'Y.M.C.A.', *Cuvântul*, 15 September 1927, 1; reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 272–5.

⁶⁷ Both Rauschenbusch and Fosdick were Baptist pastors from the New York area known as leading exponents of Social Christianity.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 126.

⁶⁹ Galaction, *Jurnal*, vol. 3, 208.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 208–10.

⁷¹ I. D. Protopopescu, 'În cheștiunea Y.M.C.A.', *Cuvântul*, 17 September 1927, 3; reproduced in Ciornea, *Sandu Tudor*, 276–7.

Street? Do you know what the *Week of Prayer* is, when all [YMCA] branches around the world have moments of silence? What do you have to say about the religious library I know on Sălciilor Street, which has books of pure Protestant guidance? What do you say about the fact that the Association of Christian Students was housed at the headquarters of the YMCA society with hidden aspirations before it was moved? What about the missionaries and foreign propagandists who come regularly every year? What are the public lectures on religious topics? The YMCA does no religious activity? Then why does one of the current American directors have a theological education and, it seems to me, was even a pastor?⁷²

The FASCR definitively broke with the YMCA in April 1928 on the grounds that 'the current leadership of the YMCA does not respect the so-called state church, which is to say that it does not apply Orthodoxy.'⁷³ Its congress that month was attended by both Ionescu and Galaction, and the organization came under the watchful leadership of Archimandrite Tit Simedrea, who encouraged the students to develop closer ties with other Balkan Orthodox Churches.⁷⁴ As Ionuț Butoi argues, the character FASCR had had during the early 1920s under the leadership of individuals such as Mircea Vulcănescu and Sandu Tudor changed significantly after 1928. Now shaped by what Butoi calls 'a second generation' of students led by Paul Costin Deleanu, FASCR embraced the Orthodoxy of Nichifor Crainic and Nae Ionescu alongside the increasingly right-wing politics of the ROC.⁷⁵ As an ultra-nationalist journalist and newspaper editor, Deleanu associated himself closely with Ionescu's fascist politics during the 1930s.⁷⁶

What had threatened to become a schismatic movement with Protestant overtones was brought back into the fold of Romanian Orthodoxy by the direct involvement of prestigious Orthodoxist figures such as Nae Ionescu, Gala Galaction and Tit Simedrea, who personally mentored the most promising of these students and guided them into a more socially and politically acceptable form of Christianity. The fate of Social Christianity, the YMCA and FASCR suggests that the stakes involved in renewing Orthodoxy were as much political as they were

⁷² Sandu Tudor, 'Urmare la Y.M.C.A.', *Cuvântul*, 27 September 1927, 2; reproduced in *ibid.*, 278–80.

⁷³ 'Referat, 18 April 1928', reproduced in *ibid.*, 329–30.

⁷⁴ 'Referat, April 1928', reproduced in *ibid.*, 325–8.

⁷⁵ Butoi, *Mircea Vulcănescu*, 129–36.

⁷⁶ ACSNAS, Fond Informativ, Dosar 234303, vol. 2, ff. 324–34. See also Deleanu's newspaper, *Ideea românească*, from 1935.

spiritual. Church leaders recognized that socially engaged Christianities were politically potent, and they insisted that the efforts of Christian laypeople serve the political interests of the Church lest they unknowingly benefited foreign powers.

Social Christianity, the YMCA and FASCR show that attempts to combine lay Orthodoxy with political nationalism were already underway in the early 1920s, emerging in the wake of a new openness to Western Christianity that flourished in the immediate post-war years.