Clark, Roland. "Reaction." *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building*. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 77–85. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350100985.ch-004>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 09:08 UTC.

Copyright © Roland Clark 2021. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Reaction

The process of unifying four different churches into a single patriarchate understandably caused some people to worry that something was being lost in the process. Tensions between metropolitans and bishops reflected dissatisfaction among parish clergy and laypeople as well, which in some cases resulted in the formation of new religious movements. As a society experiencing extraordinary social and political upheavals, including new borders, a nationalizing state, industrialization, new communication and transportation networks and new political ideologies, inter-war Romania was a fecund environment for religious innovation. With monasticism in decline and ever higher expectations being placed on both priests and laypeople, two of the most significant new religious movements of the period emerged in regions where monasticism and the monastic approach to spirituality had been strongest. The first, Inochentism, began in Bessarabia just before the First World War. Its apocalyptic belief that the end times were near included a strong criticism of the Church and the state, a critique that transferred smoothly onto the Romanian state and Orthodox Church once the region became part of Greater Romania. The second, Old Calendarism (*Stilism*), emerged in many of the same places, but the two movements developed independently. As a rejection of the Romanian Orthodox Church's (ROC's) decision to change the liturgical calendar in 1924, Old Calendarism expressed a deep hostility towards the ROC and the modern nation-state. Both Inochentism and Old Calendarism were grounded in traditional forms of rural Orthodox piety and sought to worship God more seriously than they believed was possible in the official Church. In many ways their critiques reflected the Church's failure to live up to the standards it taught in its sermons, catechisms and devotional literature.

Inochentism

Inochentism emerged out of the life and teachings of Ion Levizor, better known as Inochentie of Balta. Born in the village of Cosouți in Soroca county – then part of the Russian Empire – in 1875, he became a spiritual leader for thousands of people across Bessarabia. According to a hagiography written by Filimon Postolache in 1924, Inochentie had a religious experience at the age of nineteen when a supernatural voice cried out, ‘the time is now, hurry yourself!’ Postolache says that Inochentie understood this moment as ‘a revelation from heaven that the time when all the injustices of man will be overcome is close and it is time for him to call the people to repent.’¹ After a period spent wandering through Russia, he entered a monastery in Dobrușa, near his home town. He then began to travel, staying at various monasteries and holy sites around Russia for between nine months and three years, including apparently meeting Tsar Nicholas II and witnessing the Bloody Sunday massacre of January 1905. The foremost expert on Inochentism, James Kapaló, writes that during his ten years spent in various Russian monasteries ‘Ioan Levizor was undoubtedly exposed to the political and religious currents sweeping Russia and he seems to have developed a profound sense of the impending crisis and its implications.’²

Inochentie joined the monastery at Balta around 1906 and received a second spiritual calling during a ceremony for the reburial of the remains of the holy man Feodosie Levițchi. Approaching Feodosie’s coffin, Inochentie heard a voice saying ‘Inochentie! Take my cross and walk ahead, because fire will come from within it and all devils will be deposed. Call the people to repent as they won’t repent of their own free will, they have to be compelled to repent. With fire and sword you will cleanse the world.’³ He began a powerful preaching career from this point onwards, transforming Balta into a pilgrimage site where people experienced supernatural healings and Inochentie exorcised demons. Concern about Inochentie’s activities soon spread, and in 1910 Bishop Serafim of Bessarabia warned that

He practices rituals of exorcism in the presence of crowds of people and the possessed persons glorify him in their screams. Through this, he created amongst the dark masses of people an image of himself as saint, healer and

¹ Filimon Postolache, *În scurt viața și faptele Părintelui Inochentie de la Balta* (Bârlad: Tip. Const. D. Lupașcu, 1924), quoted in Kapaló, *Inochentism*, 20. My account of Inochentism is taken entirely from Kapaló.

² Kapaló, *Inochentism*, 23.

³ Postolache, *Viața și faptele*, quoted in *ibid.*, 26.

prophet. By pronouncing incantations, by using various threats, by practicing open public confessions, hieromonk Inochentie leads many people into a state of ecstasy and illness.⁴

His following and reputation continued to grow despite attempts by the Church to limit it, and he was exiled to Siberia in 1913. A number of his followers accompanied him into exile, 'hiding in the forest and going to him at night when no one could see'.⁵ Inochentie died on 30 November 1917, but his movement continued. His followers built a new community in the province of Kherson, near Balta, creating an underground monastery known as the Garden of Paradise. The community was destroyed and hundreds of its inhabitants murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1921.⁶

Inochentism continued in Bessarabia even after the destruction of the Garden of Paradise, taking on strong millenarian features. Nae Ionescu's *Cuvântul*, which was markedly hostile to Inochentism, reported in 1932 that 'where the movement had once been restricted to a single point, now it extended and gained followers in every locality where those who were expelled from Balta are now installed'.⁷ Inochentists practised celibacy and sold their possessions to wait for the end times. They likened Inochentie to the prophets Elijah, Enoch and John the Baptist, as well as claiming that he was 'the embodiment of the Holy Spirit'.⁸ Inochentists dug and sanctified wells believed to contain holy water, had ecstatic seizures similar to those of epileptics and encouraged women to take an important role in the movement by serving as administrators and evangelists.⁹ One Inochentist community established by a monk named Ioan Zlotea criticized both the Church and state for their material wealth and abuses of power. They were well known for fasting regularly and for abstaining from pork, all of which enhanced their reputation in the region.¹⁰

Defining Inochentism as heretical and 'sectarian', the ROC, the state, the press and Romanian society more generally persecuted them throughout the inter-war period. Newspapers accused Inochentists of ritual murder and sexual deviancy and police often took bizarre and unverified allegations about them at face value.¹¹ A police report from 1923 wrote that 'they are not just simple religious

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 30.

⁵ Postolache, *Viața și faptele*, quoted in *ibid.*, 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47–9.

⁷ 'Cum se dezvoltă Inochentismul în Basarabia', *Cuvântul* (1932), quoted in *ibid.*, 107.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 57–71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 74–106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 178–88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107–77.

maniacs, but are real gangs of criminals who corrupt girls 11 and 12 years of age so that they can use water to cleanse them of sin and make saints out of them.’¹²

In addition to showing how peasants interpreted the violence of the First World War and the political upheavals of the Russian Revolution, the story of Inochentism illustrates widespread dissatisfaction with the spirituality available through the Orthodox Church. In particular, Kapaló argues that Inochentism represented ‘a radical rejection of the idea of the nation as a vehicle for salvation.’¹³ Lay Inochentists embraced monastic spiritual practices such as fasting, celibacy and poverty. They engaged in person-to-person evangelism just as Repenters did. An Inochentist oral tradition recorded by Kapaló in 2014 emphasizes that Inochentists saw their ascetic practices as a critique of what was lacking in the established Church.¹⁴ Both Inochentie and his followers were repeatedly victims of violent state oppression and their literature associated the Orthodox Church closely with the Russian and Romanian states as abusive, authoritarian institutions.

Old Calendarism

Old Calendarism (*Stilism*) emerged in reaction to the ROC’s decision to change the religious calendar, including moving saint’s days and the date of Easter. In 325 the Council of Nicea decided that Easter should be celebrated on ‘the first Sunday after the full moon which coincides with the Spring equinox or immediately thereafter.’¹⁵ The date of Easter thus moves from April to May each year, depending on the lunar cycle. There were various explanations for this movement. The fictional Moș Dragne, for example, learned from his priest that the date of Easter moves ‘so that we never celebrate it on the same day the Jews celebrate Passover.’¹⁶ The Julian calendar included too many leap days, however, and over time the date of Easter moved away from the March equinox. The slippage was rectified in the West with a new calendar introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, but Eastern Orthodox countries retained the Julian calendar. The rise of the scientific worldview and its association with Western modernity caused Romanian elites to worry that the Julian calendar

¹² ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 117/1923, f. 2.

¹³ Kapaló, *Inochentism*, 172.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁵ Quoted in N. Coculescu, *Chestiunea calendarului* (Bucharest: Tipografia Corpului Didactic C. Ispănescu & G. Brătănescu, 1898), 7.

¹⁶ Călinescu, *Dialog între Moș Dragne*, 49.

made their country look 'backward'. 'We are on the verge of the twentieth century', the astronomer Nicolae Coculescu argued in 1898, 'which we will enter thirteen days later than other civilized nations because we refuse to relinquish a secular error, finding ourselves behind Japan, which will be welcomed into the European concert before *the Belgium of the orient*!'¹⁷ An abortive attempt had been made to change the calendar in 1864, and the Gregorian calendar was adopted by the Romanian state in 1919 without being extended to the Church. The ecumenical patriarch called a pan-Orthodox council in 1923 to find a solution to the problem, which was attended by a Romanian delegation that included Iuliu Scriban and the astronomers George Demestrescu and Petru Drăghici. With several important exceptions, most Eastern Orthodox churches adopted the Gregorian calendar within the next ten years.

When the Romanian Synod introduced the new calendar in 1924 it emphasized that the purpose was not to conform the ROC with the West but to bring the church calendar in line with that of the Romanian state.¹⁸ Miron Cristea distributed a pastoral letter that was to be read in every church. Archbishop Gurie Grosu argued that 'some say that we're copying the Germans ... We are not copying anyone, but truthfully we want the signs of our calendar to align with the signs of the heavens. We are sticking with the Orthodox Church calendar, just without those thirteen days which separate us from the signs of the heavens.'¹⁹ Iuliu Scriban published an article in *Glasul monahilor* (*The Monastic Voice*) aimed at convincing a popular audience. Scriban imagined a fictitious peasant who, on being told of the reform by his parish priest, responded, 'well, if it changes, here in the village we'll kill the mayor first ...' The peasant's wise interlocutor replied that

The calendar is not a step that you take, but a path that you follow. And it is not you that follows this path, but the earth around the sun. You just calculate how long this path takes ... See why we have to fix it; if your clothes came back from the tailor a size too large, you give them back and make them smaller. It is the same for us at the moment, we are correcting some sewing from the past which was too large and making time fit, just as they did in the days of the Church Fathers.²⁰

¹⁷ Coculescu, *Chestiunea calendarului*, 10.

¹⁸ Radu Petre Mureșan, *Stilismul în România (1924–2011)* (Sibiu: Agnos, 2012), 22–5.

¹⁹ Gurie Grosu, *Luminătorul* 25 (1924): 1–4, quoted in Andreea Petrucescu, 'Mișcarea stilistă în Basarabia, 1935–1936. Cauze și soluții. Perspective locale', *Caietele CNSAS* 9, no. 1–2(17–18) (2016): 62.

²⁰ Iuliu Scriban 'Se schimbă calendarul', *Glasul monahilor* 1–6 (1923–4), quoted in Radu Petre Mureșan, *Stilismul în România (1924–2011)* (Sibiu: Agnos, 2012), 31.

Not everyone accepted – or even heard – Scriban's arguments, and a movement emerged in Moldavia and Bessarabia known as Old Calendarism. Old Calendarists argued that the new calendar ignored the natural rhythms of life. 'Everything functions in accordance with the old calendar', they said.

Look, the cuckoo doesn't sing on Annunciation with the new calendar; it sings with the old calendar. When has the cuckoo always sung? He sings until Midsummer. Now Midsummer passes and he is still singing ... The soil follows the old calendar too. No-one sows on the new first day of March, but the old first day of March is perfect.²¹

Old Calendarism was simultaneously a protest against the ROC and the increasing attempts of the modern nation-state to interfere in village life. Thinking about the iconoclastic controversy in the Byzantine Empire, Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon write that 'the relationship between individuals and the holy was redefined at the same time as that between individuals and their ruler'.²² Much the same argument could be made about other religious movements, including the sixteenth-century wars of religion, the rise of Old Belief in eighteenth-century Russia and the spread of Old Calendarism in 1920s Romania. As Andreea Petruescu notes, 'with time the acceptance of the calendar reform in Bessarabia became synonymous with the acceptance of the national church and the Romanian state'.²³ The ROC recognized this problem and in a pastoral letter from 1925 Gurie Grosu wrote that 'some troublemakers are saying that the calendar reforms come from our Romanian brothers, that they are breaking our laws ... But this rumour is not true. For the ones who introduced the calendar reform were the Greeks and the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1922'.²⁴

Old Calendarism appeared in many of the same areas that Inochentism was strongest and seems to have taken the authorities by surprise. A history of the movement written by local police in 1948 stated that

²¹ Silvia Grossu, 'Impactul social al problemei modificării calendarului creștin', in *Mitropolitul Gurie: Misiunea de credință și cultură*, ed. Silvia Grossu (Chișinău: Epigraf, 2007), 150.

²² Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10; quoted in Angie Heo, 'Imagining Holy Personhood: Anthropological Thresholds of the Icon', in *Praying with the Senses: Contemporary Orthodox Christian Spirituality in Practice*, ed. Sonja Luehrmann (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 88.

²³ Petruescu, 'Mișcarea stilistă în Basarabia', 62.

²⁴ Quoted in Boldișor, *File din viața unei biserici*, 64.

In the regions with monasteries and especially where religious mysticism was more widespread, this decision of the Synod [to change the calendar] is seen as a blow to the foundations of the Orthodox faith and so many refuse to accept the new calendar in any way, continuing to hold the feast days according to the old (Julian) calendar. They are known as Old Calendarists. Several monks who have been expelled from the monasteries, whether for inappropriate monastic behaviour or for not recognizing the new calendar, associate themselves with others who do not want to accept the new calendar, organizing them and pushing them even further into religious mysticism. These monks, coming in particular from Baia and Neamţ counties, succeed in gathering about 60 percent of the population of these counties around them, building churches and houses of prayer in a number of places. To distinguish the new sect from Orthodox Christians who follow the new calendar, Old Calendarists display their sectarianism by growing large beards.²⁵

The problem was complicated by a lack of consensus about the changes even among elites. Alexandru Averescu's People's Party made returning to the old calendar one of its election promises in 1926 and the right-wing National Christian Defence League (LANC) did the same during the early 1930s.²⁶ Moreover, Gurie Grosu and Visarion Puiu allowed Easter to be celebrated according to the old calendar in 1929, thus undermining the very reform they claimed to support.²⁷ A group of protesters marched down the village streets of Careii Mari that year chanting, 'Down with the priests! Long live Disorder!'.²⁸ One newspaper article claimed that the Old Calendarists avoided Orthodox priests, 'not even saying hello', and that 'the churches remain empty of believers'.²⁹ Newspapers such as *Credința ortodoxă* (*The Orthodox Faith*) combated Old Calendarism and Inochentism by giving advice about Orthodox praxis, such as how to properly cross oneself and the proper ways to fast.³⁰

An Old Calendarist protest took place in the village of Fântânele during 1933, when Old Calendarism grew rapidly in the wake of claims that the parish priest was charging too much money for services such as baptisms and funerals. Old Calendarists designated a private house as a 'house of prayer', setting up

²⁵ 'Studiu', in the Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (henceforth ACNSAS), Fond Documentar, Dosar 9486, vol. 1, f. 238.

²⁶ Mureșan, *Stilismul în România*, 34; Petrușescu, 'Mișcarea stilistă în Basarabia', 71.

²⁷ Mureșan, *Stilismul în România*, 35. Police complained that Bishop Visarion even supported Old Calendarism. ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 125/1935, f. 27.

²⁸ Mureșan, *Stilismul în România*, 36.

²⁹ Activitatea dezastruoasă a stilștilor în jud. Baia și Neamț, *Calendarul*, 469 (1933): 3.

³⁰ *Credința ortodoxă* (1932–40).

icons and prayer books in the courtyard and barricading the gate to prevent the police from entering. Led by an itinerant monk, they claimed to be ready to die for their beliefs and threatened to kill anyone who tried to prevent them worshipping.³¹ The conflict between Old Calendarists and the state escalated in 1935 due to increased efforts by police to contain the movement and thanks to the new Bishop of Bălți and Hotin, Tit Simedrea, who worked to enforce Orthodoxy in his episcopate.³² Old Calendarists locked up Orthodox churches and prevented priests from performing the liturgy according to the new calendar. They provided bodyguards for their own priests who barricaded themselves in their churches to avoid being imprisoned by the gendarmerie.³³ Police targeted Russian minority communities in particular, claiming that they were being supported by White Russian émigrés from Belgrade and Vienna.³⁴ According to complaints received by the government, worshippers were pulled out of their churches and beaten on the streets while gendarmes watched.³⁵ A young girl from the village of Cuciurul Mic in Cernăuți county reported seeing a vision in September 1935 in which God told her to keep celebrating the feast days according to the old calendar.³⁶ Despite low literacy levels in the region, Old Calendarists produced pamphlets defending their beliefs and ‘exposing the lies’ of the ROC.³⁷ One pamphlet apparently warned that ‘he who accepts the Gregorian Easter and the Papist calendar, be he priest or lay person’, may he ‘not decay after death but labour for all eternity’.³⁸

Both Church and state were eager to wipe the movement out, but each blamed the other for failing to do so. The police complained that Church leaders in the area did nothing to combat Old Calendarism or even to alert them to its presence.³⁹ This was not quite true. Priests in Oltenița tried getting people to go to church by force. When the Old Calendarists refused to stay for the liturgy the priests began refusing to conduct funerals, leading to a stand-off that the gendarmes had to step in to resolve.⁴⁰ Lacking the resources to properly control

³¹ ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar 13408, vol. 2, f. 9.

³² Petrușescu, ‘Mișcarea stilistă în Basarabia’, 72–3.

³³ ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 125/1935, f. 5, 92.

³⁴ Ibid., Dosar 125/1935, ff. 10–11, 27.

³⁵ ANIC, Fond Ministerul Propagandei Naționale, Dosar 5/1930, ff. 12–13.

³⁶ ‘Nota informativă, 4 octombrie 1935’, in ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 125/1935, f. 1.

³⁷ Petrușescu, ‘Mișcarea stilistă în Basarabia’, 70, n. 34.

³⁸ According to a report from the newspaper *Cuvântul*. Quoted in Mureșan, *Stilismul în România*, 37.

³⁹ ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 125/1935, f. 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Dosar 20/1924, f. 126.

the problem, gendarmes warned that only 'a military occupation of the region' would wipe it out.⁴¹ In response the Synod argued that Old Calendarism was 'a movement aimed at changing the current regime' and that 'the old calendar is only a platform'.⁴² 'Encouraged by the fact that no action is taken against them,' Miron Cristea wrote to the Ministry of the Interior, 'these agitators become aggressive and dangerous to the safety and lives of missionary priests and other believers.'⁴³ According to one report, by 1936 Old Calendarism had over a million adherents.⁴⁴

Over time the movement developed its own rituals and practices. A police report from 1948 noted that Old Calendarists disturbed church services by singing songs appropriate to the old calendar, sanctified wells by throwing crosses into them on particular dates and refused to send their children to school on days that had been feast days in the past.⁴⁵ A study on an Old Calendarist community in Slătioara commissioned by the ROC in 1968 wrote that the Old Calendarist leadership were substituting themselves for the ROC hierarchy and labelling the official Church as schismatic. They encouraged believers not to have any contact with Orthodox priests and cultivated a sober attitude on festive occasions such as weddings as well as avoiding going to the cinema. The report said that they gave money to the poor, helped the sick and contributed to the digging of wells. Evangelism was a core element of the movement by this time. Believers spread their message from person to person, through religious celebrations and by door-knocking on the New Year. They refused to work on feast days and did not register marriages with the state.⁴⁶

Separating themselves from Romanian society, and in particular from the secular state and the Orthodox Church that supported it, Inochentists and Old Calendarists engaged in a sustained critique of Church-state relations. They identified the ROC as fallen by avoiding Orthodox priests and by developing their own, higher, standards of holiness. Both movements flourished in a region where dissatisfaction with the Greater Romanian state was highest, and their success can be seen as evidence that for many people the state's failings reflected badly on a church that had tied its fate to an earthly government.

⁴¹ 'Aviz nr. 188 din 18 Sept 1935', in *ibid.*, Dosar 125/1935, f. 90v.

⁴² Letter, Sfântul Sinod to Ministerul Instrucţiunii, 15 July 1935, in *ibid.*, Dosar 125/1935, ff. 100–5.

⁴³ Quoted in Petrucescu, 'Mişcarea stilistă în Basarabia', 75.

⁴⁴ Petrucescu, 'Mişcarea stilistă în Basarabia', 62.

⁴⁵ '1 Februarie 1948', in ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar 9486, vol. 1, f. 228.

⁴⁶ ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 153/1968, ff. 12–45.