Clark, Roland. "Missionaries." *Sectarianism and Renewal in 1920s Romania: The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation-Building*. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 125–139. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350100985.ch-007>>.

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Missionaries

Evangelical groups such as Baptists, Brethren, Pentecostals and Nazarenes saw an enormous difference between themselves and other Repenters such as Seventh-Day Adventists and Bible Students. The Romanian police did not. They categorized all Repenters as criminals, together with a number of other illegal religious movements including Inochentists and Old Calendarists. Officials often confused the Bible Students with Nazarenes in particular, although both movements took pains to distance themselves from each other.¹ One report from 1923 claimed that Inochentists and Adventists from Piatra village in Orhei county became over-excited when they saw two rockets in the sky that had been launched by a military unit nearby as part of a celebration. Believing that the Holy Spirit had come to earth, they attacked the gendarme station, the post office, the priest and a Jew.² As Kapaló has shown, such reports had little basis in reality. This one was copied almost verbatim from a sensationalist newspaper article in *Universul* and the facts were not verified until five years later, when another report confirmed that nothing of the sort had happened.³

Many of the groups that police equated with Repenters were Russian movements such as Shtundists, Dukhobors, Molokans and Old Believers (Lipoveni). According to the police, Reapers (Secerătorii) believed that they were living in the last days and that Jesus would soon return to gather them to heaven. They refused to take oaths or to serve in the military. Karaimites were Jewish Christians who practised circumcision, Skopty castrated themselves entirely and Khlysts (also known as Milenariști) were apparently pantheists who believed that God communicates directly with all of creation. If one believes the police reports, they engaged in ecstatic dances to gain supernatural visions and indulged in night-time orgies. The Swedenborgians followed the teachings of the

¹ ANIC, Fond MCA, Dosar 137/1922, ff. 13, 18.

² Ibid., Dosar 177/1923, f. 9.

³ Kapaló, *Inochentism*, 156–9.

eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg; the Quakers (Tremurătorii) worshipped by dancing, jumping and weeping in order to gain illumination; and the New Israelites tried to convert Christians to Judaism. Finally, Salvationism – or the Salvation Army – ‘is a military organization with ranks, decorations, marches, parades, etc., including uniforms for both men and women. They conduct propaganda through singing and fanfare.’⁴ One heresy gave birth to another, Vartolomeu Stănescu said, and heretics made sins into virtues, such that Inochentists supposedly treated sexual immorality as a means of salvation.⁵ Convinced that Repenters were a threat to society, individual gendarmes abused their power to prevent them receiving permission to open churches, to stop children attending school, or arresting and beating men, women and children attending prayer meetings.⁶ Particularly zealous gendarmes occasionally closed Reformed or Lutheran churches as well, and these churches had to write to the ministry reminding them that they were legally recognized denominations.⁷

The international connections Repenters enjoyed made them particularly susceptible to accusations that they were ‘not Romanian’. Occasionally, priests wrote entire pamphlets about the dangers of Khlysts and Mormons even though there were very few Khlysts and no Mormons in the country.⁸ These pamphlets used fear campaigns about Mormons spreading polygamy to tar all ‘sectarians’ with the same brush. Repenters in Broscăuți, in Dorohoi county, reported that the priest and teacher were planning to murder them and throw their bodies into the river. Other priests encouraged their parishioners to attack Repenters, disrupting weddings, vandalizing prayer houses and beating preachers.⁹

The earliest coordinated Orthodox attempt to combat Repenter Christianity in Romania was the Romanian Orthodox Association, founded in 1885 to fight ‘foreign propaganda’, which it said was being distributed freely by Repenter evangelists.¹⁰ During the inter-war period the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) appointed anti-sectarian missionaries whose role was to work in rural communities combating the influence of Repenters and trying to convert them back to Orthodoxy. They produced a vast quantity of anti-sectarian writings

⁴ ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar 10727, vol. 2, ff. 3–6.

⁵ Vartolomeu Stănescu, ‘Ce sunt ereziile creștine și din ce cauza se nasc ele?’ *Misionarul* 2, no. 6 (1930): 499.

⁶ Dobrinu, ‘Sub puterea cezarului’, 116–19.

⁷ ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar 13408, vol. 1, f. 250.

⁸ Vasile Loichița, *Chiliasmul (Milenarismul): Expunere și critică dogmatică* (Cernăuți: Editura Autorului, 1926); Marin Iliescu, *Poligamia în America: Secta mormonilor: Doctrina, obiceiurile și istoria lor* (Alexandria: Tipografia Alecsandri, 1932).

⁹ Dobrinu, ‘Sub puterea cezarului’, 121.

¹⁰ Ursul, ‘From Political Freedom’, 233.

attacking and defaming Repenters.¹¹ Vasile G. Ispir was appointed Professor of Sectology at the University of Bucharest in 1922, publishing sermons, pamphlets and textbooks attacking Repenters and describing missionary strategies.¹² In addition to his active role as a preacher and teacher, on Sunday mornings Ispir organized teams of students to run 'Sunday Schools' in primary schools on the outskirts of Bucharest. Their goal was 'to touch those chords of the soul which develop in children with appropriate dispositions [*simțăminte alese*] and to cultivate a noble character and a respect towards holy things'.¹³

Other Orthodox churches had tried similar missionary initiatives during the nineteenth century. From 1885 onwards Serbian priests in Austria-Hungary began holding congresses to discuss how to combat the popularity of the Nazarenes. These were grassroots initiatives by parish priests. They began by calling for harsher state repression, but by the mid-1890s these assemblies began looking inward and argued that people were becoming Repenters because Orthodox priests were not doing enough to combat the threats of Western liberalism, the secular intelligentsia, civil servants and the press.¹⁴ Their arguments focused on Orthodox failures, national identity and foreign threats, and the solutions they proposed consistently involved changing Orthodoxy itself. This was as much a debate about the relationship between Orthodoxy and modernity as it was about actual conversions. The Russian Orthodox Church organized 'internal missions' between 1886 and 1917, which were specifically focused on preventing the spread of Repenters and other non-Orthodox religions.¹⁵ Metropolitan Evlogii

¹¹ Representative titles of this literature include Const. Nazarie, *Duminica, botezul și ierarhia bisericească după adventiști* (Bucharest: Tipografia 'Cărților Bisericești', 1910); Const. Gr. Chirică, *Lupi rapitori în piei de oi* (Galați: Institutul de Arte Grafice 'Energia', n.d.); Ioan Cotârlă, *Sf. Cruce, Sf. Icoane, luminările și tămâia* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografic Diecezane, 1929); Mina Gașpar, *Legea lui Moise, sâmbăta evreilor și duminica creștinilor* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografic Diecezane, 1929); Vasile Gheorghiu, *Despre botezul 'cu Spirit Sfânt și cu foc' și darurile harismatice* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografic Diecezane, 1929); I. N. Dăvărescu, *Feriți-vă de adventiști și de toți rătăciții vremurilor noastre!* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografic Diecezane, 1930); Ilarion V. Felea, *Critica ereziei baptiste* (Sibiu, 1937); V. Dolinescu, *Lupta contra sectelor religioase* (Bârlad: Atelierele Grafice N. Peiu, 1939).

¹² Vasile Gh. Ispir, *Bibliografia subiectelor tratate în Seminarul de Sectologie de sub direcțiunea d-lui Profesor Dr. V. Gh. Ispir, în anii 1932/33, 1933/34 și 1934/35* (Bucharest: Tipografia Ziarului, 1936); Vasile Gh. Ispir, *Curs de sectologie* (Bucharest: Facultatea de Teologie din București, 1938); Vasile Gh. Ispir, *Sectele religioase. Un pericol național și social* (Bucharest: Tipografia 'Cărților Bisericești', 1942).

¹³ *Asociația Misionară a Studenților Creștini Ortodocși. Zece ani de activitate (1926–1936)* (Bucharest, 1936).

¹⁴ Aleksov, *Religious Dissent*, 135–41.

¹⁵ J. Eugene Clay, 'Orthodox Missionaries', 38–69; Heather J. Coleman, 'Defining Heresy: The Fourth Missionary Congress and the Problem of Cultural Power after 1905 in Russia,' *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 52, no. 1 (2004): 70–91; Heather J. Coleman, 'Theology on the Ground: Dmitrii Bogoliubov, the Orthodox Anti-Sectarian Mission, and the Russian Soul,' in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context*, ed. Patrick Lally Michelson and Judith Deutsch Kornblatt (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 64–84.

wrote that 'in the dioceses, in Church circles, [the missionaries] were feared, but they were not loved nor were they trusted'.¹⁶ Associated with Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, the missionary endeavour in Russia was about reinforcing a close relationship between Church and state to prevent the spread of political dissent in any form.

Bishop Gurie Grosu established a Romanian missionary society in Bessarabia in 1899 under the auspices of Russian anti-sectarian missions. This was equally an attempt to distribute religious literature in the Romanian language in a region that sorely lacked it. He reported on his efforts in 1922 that

A popular library has been established in the parish of Văncicăuți, Hotin county. Over twenty issues of a missionary newspaper have been edited in Romanian and Russian, each in at least 5,000 copies. Twenty lectures have been held and over 100 discussions and debates with sectarians in front of the people. Choirs of priests and children from church schools were organized for these occasions. Last autumn courses for missionary priests taught by missionary bishops were held for over a month. A choir was formed of priests and cantors from Chișinău, which gave several public concerts to raise money for the poor.¹⁷

Inochentism was particularly strong in Bessarabia at this time and Orthodox missionaries focused on combating Inochentism as much as they did on Repenters.¹⁸ There were clear continuities between the pre-war Russian missionary movement and Romanian efforts of the 1920s. James Kapaló even notes that 'some of the missionary priests who had been active in the same role in the Russian Orthodox Church continued to work for the Romanian Church'.¹⁹ Missionary priests in inter-war Romania were attached to individual bishoprics and had no central authority directing their ministry.²⁰ They held regular congresses from 1928 onwards where they encouraged missionary priests and discussed new strategies for combating Repenters.²¹ Grosu suggested publishing a newspaper for the movement at the 1928 congress and began printing *Misionarul* (*The Missionary*) on the press at Chișinău the following year.²²

¹⁶ Quoted in Coleman, 'Theology on the Ground', 65.

¹⁷ *Anuarul Episcopiei Chișinăului*.

¹⁸ Kapaló, *Inochentism*, 56–68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁰ Ic. St I. Andronic, 'Ne trebuie un organ central de conducerea operei misionare,' *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 39–40.

²¹ 'Într'un ceas bun,' *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 1.

²² Boldișor, *File din viața unei biserici*, 51–2.

Grigorie Comşa, who served as Bishop of Arad between 1925 and 1935, was the most prolific and active of Romanian missionary priests. Most anti-sectarian literature was published either in Arad as part of Comşa's 'Christian Orthodox Library' series (Biblioteca Creştinului Ortodox) or under the supervision of Gurie Grosu in Chişinău, who had his own series entitled 'The Library of the Right-Believing Christian' (Biblioteca Creştinului Drept-Credincios). Attacks on Repenters could be found in almost every issue of every Orthodox Church newspaper during the inter-war period, but Comşa almost single-handedly shaped the Orthodox discourse on Repenters through his vitriol, his prestige and the sheer number of his publications. In addition to providing arguments for missionaries Comşa hoped that Repenters themselves would read his tracts and be converted by the power of his arguments.²³ According to Comşa, 'mission includes all those things that missionaries do to proclaim the word, to fortify believers, those wavering or indifferent to religion and morals, but mission is also about preventing heretical diseases and forming a force of aware and devoted believers in the Church.'²⁴ He distinguished missionary endeavours from the pastoral work of priests. 'Carrying out the Holy liturgy, a baptism, anointing the sick, a wedding or a funeral', he said, 'is not enough.'²⁵ In addition, the Church had to preach the word of God. Comşa strongly encouraged preaching, which for him lay at the heart of the missionary endeavour.²⁶ What he said in his sermons depended on his audience. 'Evangelistic letters' that he wrote to prominent public figures in 1934 emphasized that Christianity was the key to a vibrant and healthy society and encouraged his correspondents to integrate the Church ever more deeply into their professional lives.²⁷ His message to Orthodox believers can be summed up by his imperatives 'to show that Christ is the Lord of our lives, and not human foibles' and 'to extend the Kingdom of God on earth without anything standing in its way.'²⁸ His anti-sectarian sermons, on the other hand, identified Repenters as 'false prophets' and 'lying heretics' who must be eradicated for the safety of the Church. His

²³ Grigorie Comşa, *Combaterea catehismului baptiştilor* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1926), 4.

²⁴ Comşa, *Fiinţa şi necesitatea misionarismului*, 11.

²⁵ Gheorghe Comşa, *Istoria predicii la români* (Bucharest: Tipografia Cărilor Bisericeşti, 1921), 4.

²⁶ Collection of Comşa's own sermons include Grigorie Comşa, *Predici pentru toate duminicile de peste an şi alte ocaziuni* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1918); Grigorie Comşa, *Pentru neam şi lege: Patruzeci cuvântări de învăţătură împotriva adventiştilor şi baptiştilor* (Caransebeş: Editura 'Librăriei Diecezane', 1923).

²⁷ Grigorie Comşa, *Scrisori creştineşti* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1934).

²⁸ Grigorie Comşa, *Glăsuţul pietrelor: Principii călăuzitoare pentru ortodoxia activă* (Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială 'Cartea Românească', 1931), 7, 31.

goal was 'to tear the mask off the faces of the Adventists', accusing Repenters of a wide variety of dishonourable practices.²⁹

According to Comşa, priests differed from missionaries in that they ministered only to believers who already recognized their authority, whereas missionaries were there to spread the Gospel. Only ordained priests were able to do pastoral work, but laypeople could become missionaries. In 1930 students at the University of Bucharest formed a Student Missionary Society and dedicated their summer holidays to carrying out missionary work in rural communities.³⁰ The goal of the missionary, Comşa said, was 'Christianization in general, in particular the interiorization of religious life, the deepening of Christian thought and feeling, increasing Christian activities, [and] the discipleship of deeds'.³¹ Missionaries in Arad would hold three-day festivals in which they would set up a large number of icons outside a monastery, then preach sermons, hear confessions and administer the Eucharist.³²

What missionary priests did from day to day varied considerably. Gala Galaction fulfilled his duties as a missionary priest in Bucharest by having Teodor Popescu defrocked as a heretic (see chapter 9).³³ In a report from 1935, Ilie Imbrescu described his first year of missionary activity in Dobruja as having involved petitioning the patriarch for the establishment of a new monastery in his region, holding a religious service on the location of the proposed monastery, spending three days travelling around Repenter communities and resolving to establish 'centres' where he would systematically refute Repenters in the future.³⁴ In Chişinău missionary priests were supposed to be active preachers, lead collective singing in churches, give public lectures and establish missionary circles in communities with a strong Repenter presence. They were to cooperate with the local authorities, mobilize monasteries and religious youth groups and distribute anti-sectarian literature.³⁵

Missionaries in Hotin showed a film, *The Life and Passions of the Saviour*, accompanied by choirs, prayers, the lighting of candles and sermons against

²⁹ Comşa, *Pentru neam şi lege*, 8, 17 and passim.

³⁰ ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar 12694, vol. 3, ff. 1–4.

³¹ Comşa, *Fiinţa şi necesitatea*, 13.

³² Toma Gherasimescu, *Propaganda religioasă prin cinematograf: Cum se poate face ea cu o cheltuială foarte mică* (Roman: Editura Autorului, 1930), 1.

³³ Galaction, *Jurnal*, vol. 3, 158–65; Gala Galaction, *Piatra din capul unghiului: Scrisori teologice* (Bucharest: Tipografiile Române Unite, 1926).

³⁴ Ilie I. Imbrescu, *Misionarul eparhial al Tomisului: Gânduri după un an de încercări* (Bazargic: Tip. 'Gutenberg' Hristo Radilof, 1935), 14–16.

³⁵ 'Planul activităţii misionare stabilit în eparhia Chişinăului de Secţia Culturală,' *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 109–12.

Seventh-Day Adventism.³⁶ Clerical reactions to new technology were mixed. Irineu Mihălcescu, for example, welcomed the introduction of cinema into Romania, seeing it as a possible vehicle for public education and moral teaching, provided that it was used properly. When asked whether the liturgy should be broadcast on the radio, however, he replied that

it is the greatest impiety, the most profound sacrilege, a true profanation ... Wouldn't it be ridiculous to have a baptism, an unction, a wedding or an ordination on the radio? What sort of mystery would it be if the recipient was not there to participate in it, to see it, to receive the laying on of hands, the blessing and other rites through which the grace of the Holy Spirit is shared?³⁷

Most missionaries liked the idea of using films, but these were expensive to buy and hard to transport. Suitable religious films were rare and few villages had appropriate buildings in which to project them. It was only once Pathé-Baby projectors were imported at the end of the 1920s that this became a realistic option.³⁸

Comşa wrote that when he became an assistant director at the Ministry of Denominations in 1920 he 'was amazed at the high number of Repenter preachers who were requesting authorization to preach'.³⁹ Unlike Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Lutheran priests or Jewish rabbis, every Repenter had to receive permission as an individual if he or she wished to preach.⁴⁰ From the perspective of a clerk this law meant that large numbers of requests from Repenter preachers would have come across Comşa's desk. Moreover, Comşa said, there were many more Repenters than first met the eye because they were often difficult to identify.⁴¹ When Imbrescu tried collecting statistics on Repenters in Dobruja he discovered that the protopresbyters had no real idea how many were living in their parishes.⁴² Comşa saw sectarianism as being a result of 'excessive liberty', a natural desire to rebel against authority and the fact that people saw the Church as representative of an oppressive socio-economic

³⁶ 'Conferințe misionare cu cinematograf în județul Hotin,' *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 116–18.

³⁷ Quoted in Vicovan, *Ioan Irineu Mihălcescu*, 492.

³⁸ Gherasimescu, *Propaganda religioasă*, 2–3.

³⁹ Grigorie Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă împotriva baptiștilor* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1930), 5.

⁴⁰ Marius Silveșan, *Bisericele creștine baptiste din România între persecuție, acomodare și rezistență (1948–1965)* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 96–7.

⁴¹ Grigorie Comşa, *Cheia sectelor religioase din România* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1930), 1.

⁴² Imbrescu, *Misionarul eparhial*, 7. The police also kept statistics of Repenter communities which were much more detailed than those Imbrescu managed to obtain from his protopresbyters.

order they wanted to escape. He argued that the Orthodox Church was in a particularly difficult position because, despite its support for the state, nineteenth-century reforms had successively stripped it of its wealth and now parish priests had too many souls in their care, which is why people turned to Repenter churches, which promised more personal pastoral care.⁴³ Not content to take souls away from the Orthodox Church, the Repenter emphasis on the priesthood of all believers apparently masked their intention to do away with the clerical class entirely even though they too had priests, known as 'ministers'.⁴⁴

Comşa repeatedly used military symbolism and references to spiritual warfare in his writings, comparing Baptists to 'the Yids who murdered the Author of life' and calling missionaries 'to arm ourselves and to join the holy war for the defence of the faith and the Nation'.⁴⁵ He claimed that 'we never attacked, but we did defend ourselves'.⁴⁶ This is not quite true. Comşa was quite comfortable appealing to the authorities to shut down Repenter groups and the first Pentecostal tortured to death by police was arrested at Comşa's instigation in 1927.⁴⁷ Other Orthodox writers admitted quite openly that missionaries frequently requested gendarmes to repress Repenters by force.⁴⁸ Missionaries targeted Greek Catholics as well as Repenters, and in a harsh critique of Orthodox missionary methods, Greek Catholic writers argued that

If it really believes in the true teaching 'Go and make disciples ...' [Matthew 28:19–20], every Church is and should be like that of Rome: to seek to win souls. 'Only those who do not believe can turn their backs on mission', as the Most Reverend Bălan proclaimed at the FOR [Romanian Orthodox Brotherhood] congress. There is nonetheless an enormous difference between peaceful 'mission' based on conviction, enlightenment, winning people over through persuasion, the power of the truth and good works ... and demagogic proselytism, which disturbs public order and is practiced with money and axes, with envy and deceit, with the illegal intervention of the authorities.⁴⁹

Comşa described the growth of Repenter communities in the early 1920s as a diabolical continuation of the First World War using 'the flaming arrows of the evil one' (Ephesians 6:16). Repenters, he wrote, were disgusted by the pleasure-driven

⁴³ Comşa, *Cheia sectelor religioase*, 11–17; Comşa, *Fiinţa şi necesitatea*, 6–9.

⁴⁴ Comşa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 25, 43–50.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18; Comşa, *Glasul pietrelor*, 39.

⁴⁶ Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă*, 15. Note that by the following year he was demanding that 'we need to attack. Defence is not enough'. Comşa, *Glasul pietrelor*, 36.

⁴⁷ Bălăban, *Istoria bisericii penticostale*, 41.

⁴⁸ Ioan G. Savin, *Iconoclaşti şi apostafi contemporani* (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1995), 47.

⁴⁹ 'Cartea frăţiei', *Unirea* (1934), quoted in Kührer-Wielach, 'Orthodoxer Jesuitismus', 314.

society around them and wanted to create a new society, separate from the old.⁵⁰ The implication here was that they also sought to separate themselves from the nation-state. Comşa spoke about the 'sins' that Baptist leaders had 'towards the Romanian people' (*patimile ce le au față de neamul românesc*).⁵¹ By this he meant that converts publicly claimed their parents were irreligious, that Baptists did not acknowledge the important contributions Orthodox Church leaders had made to Romanian nation-building in centuries past and that they did not participate in national celebrations. He argued consistently that Repenters 'were a danger to the state and to the spiritual union of Romanians'.⁵² Other Orthodox voices agreed. The theologian Ioan Savin wrote in 1932 that 'not only Orthodoxy but nationality is targeted and under threat by sectarian propaganda'.⁵³

Repenters were dangerous because they encouraged Romanians to mix with Hungarians and were allowed to teach religious studies in schools when they themselves had not graduated primary school. They also refused 'to swear military oaths and to bear arms even in the barracks, let alone in times of war'.⁵⁴ Moreover, Repenter preaching caused Orthodox believers to doubt their faith and turn to atheism.⁵⁵ Repenters, he said, claimed that primitive Christianity had been corrupted by Judaism and Paganism, meaning that Baptists who went back to Scripture had more in common with the early Church than did the Orthodox, who claimed apostolic continuity.⁵⁶ In some places Baptists apparently taught communism to children while at the same time refusing to baptize them regardless of the implications their unbaptized state had on their eternal destinies.⁵⁷

Comşa and his colleagues argued that the ROC was under attack from foreigners just as the Russian Church was suffering under 'Judeo-Bolshevik' anti-clericalism. Social democracy, according to Comşa, was 'the greatest enemy of the Church', and it was no accident that Repenter communities were essentially democratic.⁵⁸ Emphasizing the Jewish and Hungarian origins of some Baptist preachers, he claimed that Repenters represented a foreign attempt to undermine the creation of Greater Romania.⁵⁹ Comşa said that individuals who became

⁵⁰ Comşa, *Cheia sectelor religioase*, 13.

⁵¹ Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă*, 10.

⁵² Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă*, 16.

⁵³ Savin, *Iconoclaști și apostăți*, 51.

⁵⁴ Comşa, *Cheia sectelor religioase*, 5–7.

⁵⁵ Comşa, *Ființa și necesitatea*, 18.

⁵⁶ Comşa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 38.

⁵⁷ Comşa, *Ființa și necesitatea*, 18–20; Comşa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 23.

⁵⁸ Comşa, *Istoria predicii*, 3.

⁵⁹ Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă*, 6–8, 20–22.

Baptists even stopped wearing Romanian peasant garb and began dressing like Germans.⁶⁰ As one missionary wrote to his colleagues in 1929, 'the whole world knows that Baptist proselytism happens with foreign money'.⁶¹ Comşa agreed, pointing out that Romanian-language publications were often financed by American donors.⁶² In 1930 he told a remarkable story about a meeting he had apparently had on a train heading towards Oradea nineteen years earlier:

Sitting in my compartment, I heard songs that I had never heard before. In the next carriage there were scores of women and men singing Baptist hymns. Curiosity drove me to them and suddenly a baptised Yid, their preacher Mayer Carol, comes up to me and asks me who I am. Learning that I was a graduate of the Theological Institute in Sibiu, he took me into the corridor and said: 'You could make a lot of money if you become a Baptist. Look, I left my parents to sell needles and buttons and shoelaces in Budapest, I became a Baptist and even at my baptism I immediately received 2,000 crowns.'⁶³

In case the reader had failed to notice that these were 'women and men', not 'men and women', that the train was heading to an area with a strong Hungarian presence and that the preacher was a 'baptised Yid' who came from Budapest, Comşa then pointed out on the next page that the Baptists were on their way to a baptism that was to take place 'in a Hungarian Baptist meeting hall in Oradea-Mare'.

Not all Repenter money came from abroad. As Gheorghe Livovschi pointed out, the Jews who were apparently behind Seventh-Day Adventism did not like spending their own money to achieve their goals so they collected money from Adventist converts to spread the religion.⁶⁴ Money was a frequent problem raised in these polemics. Comşa complained that Repenters accused Orthodox bishops of receiving money for sanctifying churches. This was untrue, Comşa insisted. In reality, he said, bishops gave money away to the poor. Repenters apparently lied about themselves, too. They claimed that they did not drink alcohol, but Comşa insisted that they would have if they could afford it.⁶⁵

Comşa saw the fact that many early Pentecostals originally came from Baptist churches as evidence that Repenters were not deeply committed to their

⁶⁰ Comşa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 5.

⁶¹ Nicolae A. Murea, 'Pentru congresul general al misionarilor ortodocşi români din ţară', *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 64.

⁶² Comşa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 7; Comşa, *Pentru neam şi lege*, 14.

⁶³ Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă*, 1.

⁶⁴ Gh. Livovschi, 'Iudaism şi adventism. Rolul iudaismului în mişcarea sectei cunoscute sub numele de Adventism', *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 81.

⁶⁵ Comşa, *Zece ani de luptă*, 18–19.

denominations, repeatedly telling stories about preachers who moved from one denomination to another.⁶⁶ Their schismatic tendencies as well as their ecclesiology convinced Comșa that Repenters did not believe that the Church was one body and that Repenter congregations were not actually part of the Church.⁶⁷ Comșa also quarrelled directly with Repenter beliefs. His polemical tone consistently patronized Repenters, who he considered simple and uneducated, in need of his extensive education. He accused them of playing God by expelling sinners from their churches when only God has the right to separate the wheat from the weeds (see Matthew 13:30). But ultimately for Comșa this doctrine was just another example of Repenter hypocrisy because, he wrote, 'they proclaim loudly: there are only pure members in our assemblies because we have shown sinners the door', but in fact he knew of one sinner who Repenters claimed they had expelled when in reality 'not even a hair on his head moved'.⁶⁸

Adventists apparently cared so little for the Bible that they changed the text to suit their own doctrines and Comșa showed that Baptists did not really believe in *sola scriptura* (the authority of Scripture alone) because their own catechism admitted that the Gospel was passed down through word of mouth as well as in written form and they taught the 'entirely unscriptural' doctrine that only 'ordained pastors' could baptize people.⁶⁹ Similarly, Baptists taught that baptism takes place *after* one believes, whereas St Paul said that 'you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified' (1 Cor. 6:11), putting baptism *before* sanctification and justification.⁷⁰ Moreover, said Comșa, if salvation is a miracle, why does God have to wait until one turns fifteen, which was when Baptists baptized young people?⁷¹

Baptists refused to recognize Orthodox sacraments such as the Eucharist. Not realizing that God forgives sin here and now, they claimed that He forgave sins at the time of the resurrection and just 'remembered' their salvation when taking the Lord's Supper.⁷² Comșa condemned Baptists both for their divergences with Romanian Orthodoxy and for their similarities. He complained that Baptists had 'stolen' their beliefs from the Orthodox Church because they, too,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁷ Comșa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 19–22.

⁶⁸ Grigorie Comșa, *Pedepsirea păcătoșilor și scoaterea din adunările Baptiste* (Arad: Tiparul Tipografiei Diecezane, 1929), 4.

⁶⁹ Comșa, *Pentru neam și lege*, 13; Comșa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 8–10, 27.

⁷⁰ Comșa, *Combaterea catehismului*, 33.

⁷¹ Ibid., 41.

⁷² Ibid., 51–8.

used the Apostles' Creed.⁷³ At the same time, Baptists believed that they could understand God's word by themselves, without help from nineteen centuries of wise Christian teachers – a claim that Comşa thought ludicrous because Baptists themselves admitted that the human mind is incapable of understanding all of God's mysteries.⁷⁴

Comşa was concerned with what he perceived as widespread irreligion in the villages, which produced ignorance about Orthodoxy and subsequently made people vulnerable to Repenter proselytism. 'In church life,' he wrote in 1920, 'we see indifference about indifference. We are painfully aware that there are even priests who have taken up commerce. People don't really go to church any more; the laws and commandments of the church are ignored. Adultery is spreading, the name of God is mocked, the holy mysteries are trodden underfoot and sectarianism runs rampant.'⁷⁵ In the cities, Comşa said, 'we have printed pornography, frivolous literature; in schools there are people teaching evolution and Darwinism, monism continues, free thinking exists, [and] Masonic humanitarianism and atheism are winning all the prizes.'⁷⁶ He argued that 'we are called to show that our people is not only religious in terms of patriarchal village traditions, but also through education and religious instruction.'⁷⁷ Others were not so pessimistic and saw in sectarianism evidence that people really did long for greater religious involvement. The missionary priest Mihail Madan wrote in 1929 that

Even while atheist and non-Christian propaganda spreads we find that many people long for religious truth. The very spread of the sects is evidence of a religious movement among the people. We should not see the sick growth of the sects as a sign of spiritual death. If the social organism was dead then diseases would not show up on the body. The fact that there are diseases shows that the organism is alive.⁷⁸

Greek Catholic writers echoed the same ideas that could be found in Comşa's works. Nicolae Brânzeu described the spread of Adventism as 'one of the sad results of the war'.⁷⁹ He equated Adventists with Bible Students and warned that 'in five to ten years villages and entire regions will end up with empty churches,

⁷³ Ibid., 11–13.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14–17.

⁷⁵ Comşa, *Istoria prediceii*, 3.

⁷⁶ Comşa, *Glasul pietrelor*, 15.

⁷⁷ Comşa, *Ființa și necesitatea*, 1.

⁷⁸ Mihail Madan, 'O nouă eră pentru activitatea misionară', *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 60.

⁷⁹ Nicolae Brânzeu, 'Adventismul și combaterea aceluia', *Cultura creștină* 11, no. 7–8 (1922): 223.

and even worse, this religious revolution implies a complete social revolution!’⁸⁰ Like the Orthodox, Greek Catholics argued that evangelism was the only solution to the spread of Repenter Christianity. ‘Catechize, brothers!’ wrote Iuliu of Gherla in 1927. ‘Preach every Sunday and holiday. Catechize the adults in church, catechize children in school. Proclaim the Gospel in all its power. Establish the Kingdom of God in people’s souls ... *There is no other way for the people to be reborn.*’⁸¹

Despite the best efforts of missionaries, the number of Repenter groups continued to grow. Their apparent failure led to constant debates about the best ways to combat the threat. Iosif Trifa argued in 1926 that ‘there is no other way to combat sectarianism than a great movement of evangelism.’⁸² Comşa taught that successful missionaries needed to be well organized, popular with the local priests, persistent in prayer and mindful of the needs of parishioners.⁸³ With the aim of creating what he called ‘a militant church’, he suggested modelling Orthodox missions on the youth wing of Catholic Action that developed in Mussolini’s Italy in the late 1920s as a way of strengthening lay activism.⁸⁴ Others insisted that philanthropy was the key to winning hearts and souls and encouraged their colleagues to make this a core part of their ministries.⁸⁵ Still others worried that ‘not every representative of the clergy is prepared [to combat sectarianism] and furthermore, we lack the material needed to carry on the fight.’⁸⁶ By this the author meant that Romanians still lacked a reliable translation of the Bible, commentaries, theological works and published anti-sectarian polemics.

Not all Orthodox leaders agreed with using force against Repenters. Vartolomeu Stănescu in particular was outspoken against the use of violence to persecute religious minorities.

Our Romanian state, so new and with such a young social life, so buffeted inside and out by disturbances for such as time, *is obligated* more than any other state, *to prepare a peaceful future for itself in religious matters, now and in the most urgent manner.* Its first duty is to stand by its church, which has been privileged

⁸⁰ Nicolae Brânzeu, ‘Adventismul şi combaterea lui’, *Cultura creştină* 11, no. 11–12 (1922): 308.

⁸¹ ‘Calea renaşterii’, *Unirea* 37, no. 4 (1927): 1.

⁸² Ioan Trifa, ‘Viaţa Bisericească: Probleme actuale’, *Revistă teologică* 16, no. 1 (1926): 24.

⁸³ Grigorie Comşa, ‘Secretul misionarismului’, *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 7–10.

⁸⁴ Comşa, *Glasul pietrelor*, 18–22, 31ff.

⁸⁵ I. Puiu, ‘Activitatea filantropică’, *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 29–31.

⁸⁶ Al. Bogdan, ‘Un început bun’, *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 90.

up until now in both *confessional* and *constitutional* terms, but to renounce oppression *decidedly* and *in its entirety*.⁸⁷

The problem, Stănescu believed, was that Orthodox Church services did not engage laypeople enough. 'In our churches', he wrote, 'Orthodox Christians are just an audience, stuck on their feet for hours on end during a service which they often don't even understand the words of'.⁸⁸ His solution to the problem of Repenters was to encourage both priests and laypeople to read and discuss the Bible, to establish Orthodox choirs and cultural associations and for the Church to increase its charity work to the poor.⁸⁹

After an unsuccessful year of missionary work Ilie Imbrescu concluded that arguing with Repenters was futile and that the Orthodox Church would combat sectarianism much more effectively by having wise and sensitive priests, church printing presses, bookstores, candle factories and by giving to the poor.⁹⁰ Representatives at the 1928 Congress agreed with him, suggesting innovations such as establishing Sunday schools, choirs and cultural committees in every parish, making monasteries into religious tourist attractions for young people, distributing popular Bibles and icons, selling religious tracts, founding 'moral committees' in parishes to combat sin and setting up cinemas.⁹¹ In many ways these strategies were a deepening and continuation of ordinary, everyday Orthodox ministry. The state eventually withdrew funding from the missionary programme in 1931, but the strategies and hatreds promoted by Comşa lived on in organizations such as the Lord's Army and in the missionary committees, youth groups, catechism courses and university courses missionaries had established over the last decade.⁹²

What missionary writings rarely mentioned was the role of the police and gendarmerie in preventing the spread of Repenters. Repenters were frequently beaten, arrested, tortured and even killed by the authorities, often at the instigation of missionaries or parish priests. Anti-Repenter activities involved close cooperation between the Church and the state, which saw Repenters as a common threat. Both Church and state embraced the Orthodoxist doctrine that to be Romanian was to be Orthodox, and persecuted Repenters accordingly.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Raiu, *Democrație și statolatrie*, 303–4.

⁸⁸ Vartolomeu Stănescu, 'Mijloacele pentru preîntâmpinarea ereziilor', *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 40, no. 2 (1921): 129–32, reprinted in Stănescu, *Puterile sociale*, 332.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 336–7.

⁹⁰ Imbrescu, *Misionarul eparhial*, 17–20.

⁹¹ 'Dezideratele Congresului general misionar din Arad, sesiunea 1928', *Misionarul*, 6 October 1929, 104–5.

⁹² Comşa, *Glasul pietrelor*, 9–11.

The changing and uncertain legal status of Repenter denominations further exacerbated the situation, giving local gendarmes the perfect excuse to persecute Repenter communities even when they were legally allowed to operate.

A common anti-Repenter rhetoric also helped overcome regional tensions within the Church to a certain extent, bringing Orthodox leaders in Arad, Oltenia and Bessarabia into close cooperation and creating a platform that no Orthodox leader could challenge. Visarion Puiu tried to expand on this success by writing to Orthodox leaders across the region and suggesting that the difficult situation the Church now found itself in meant that it was time for all of the Orthodox churches to unite across national borders. His initiative was welcomed but had no lasting impact.⁹³ Although evangelism, lay involvement and holiness movements lay at the heart of the anti-Repenter agenda, fears about Repenters simultaneously cast doubts over the orthodoxy of such practices. Part Three is concerned precisely with that tension between promoting individual piety as a solution to the scourge of Repenters and the concern that all such practices were quintessentially Protestant.

⁹³ Const N. Tomescu, 'Spre unire in Domnul', *Misionarul* 2, no. 19 (1930): 887–909.