

**REACTIONS TO MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS  
IN THE ROMANIAN TERRITORY  
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY UNTIL WORLD WAR I**

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***Abstract***

The presence and emergence of Neo-Protestant cults on Romanian territory beginning with 19<sup>th</sup> aroused several reactions both from traditional churches and from civil authorities. The attitude towards the "newcomers" was different, taking various forms of manifestation. These reactions varied in intensity: from opposition to persecution. They also differed from one territory to another. The authorities (civil and religious) have acted independently of each other and in synergy. Most often the association was led by the pressure from the religious authority towards the political authority. These reactions also produced several effects among the modern religious movements. This presentation will show some of them. It is also worth emphasizing the attitude of civil society where it existed and was preserved in historical sources.

**Key words:** *Protestantism, Neo-Protestantism, persecutions, Church, religious liberty.*

The emergence of neo-protestant cults in the Romanian territory, starting with the nineteenth century, aroused several reactions from the native population, especially from traditional churches but also from civil authorities. The presence was provocative, determining an attitude that took various forms of manifestation towards the "newcomers". Religious influence and the loss of parishioners were real fears for the native churches, especially for the Orthodox Church, which, along with the Roman Catholic Church, had overcome the confrontation three centuries earlier against traditional Protestant movements (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church in the face of the penetration of Lutheranism and Calvinism in the Transylvanian territory). The presence of the new wave of *neo-Protestants* prompted different reactions in intensity: from opposition to persecution. Civil authorities often reacted to pressure from religious authority. However, these reactions also produced effects among the neo-protestant churches, paradoxically, most of the time in their favor. Some of these will be shown in this presentation. At the same time, it is also worth highlighting the attitude of civil society where it existed and was preserved in writing. The newspapers of the time, when reacting, maintained a detached attitude towards religious matters, but found an inappropriate form of reaction.

The modern religious movements that appeared in the Romanian territory from the nineteenth century until the First World War were the Baptist Church, which entered starting with 1856, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1869-1870 and the Christian Evangelical Church - 1890. Reaction to the emergence of these cults has been largely negative, especially from traditional and indigenous religious authorities. The

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naming of these cults as sects has continued until today<sup>2</sup>, although the term is used less and less frequently after the communist period due to negative connotations (Dobrincu and Mănăstireanu, 2018:23). These religious, neo-protestant movements<sup>3</sup> were born in the Romanian territory in a hostile religious context. Their perception was linked to the religious leaders of the time and seen as a potential danger to national identity as well. For example, the *Official magazine of the Diocese of Arad, The Church and the School*, stated about the Baptists, in the 12<sup>th</sup> issue from *March 18, 1912*, amid a donation from count Károlyi Gyula, for the construction of the Baptist church in Curtici, the following: "*the gesture of the count strengthens the nail in the ribs, because baptism is the nail driven by our enemies in our side, a sect persecuted differently by the Roman Catholic Church.*" (*Church and School*, March 18-31, 1912:1). These (Baptists) are enemies not only of the religion but also of the Romanian people: "*The Romanian Church is targeted. Baptist sectarianism is a destructive element of national character, thereby destroying the national character of the church.*" (*Church and School*, March 18-31, 1912:1). This argument has long been used not only before the Union of 1918 but also after it. It is true that this second aspect was also formulated after World War I, therefore after the Union (Dobrincu and Mănăstireanu, 2018: 51).

The political context, however, was more favourable. In the first Constitution of Romania published in the Official Gazette on July 1, 1866, it was stated in Title II, *On the Rights of Romanians*, art. 5, that Romanians enjoy freedom of conscience, and in art. 21, "*Freedom of conscience is absolute. The freedom of all religious denominations is guaranteed because, however, their celebration does not prejudice public order or morality.*" (*Constitution of Romania*, 1866) It is true that at that time the neo-protestant churches did not yet enjoy their recognition as cults, but the fact that, along with the Orthodox religion, which was recognized in art. Art. 21 of the Constitution as "*the dominant religion of the Romanian State*", offers freedom to other denominations (Roman Catholic Church, Traditional Protestant Churches, etc.), which offered an open framework for the future.

The analysis of the reaction and attitude towards these churches in their early period in the Romanian territory leads to six observations:

First of all, the attitude was influenced by the **ethnic aspect**. In the first years of religious activity of these neo-protestant churches, the mission developed mainly

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in his book *The Guide to the Orthodox Christian Today*, priest Vasile Răduce makes this distinction between Protestants and neo-Protestants in Romania: the Protestant churches (Lutheran, Reformed and Unitarian) are part of the historical churches of the Reformation and are somewhat recognized as the legitimacy of their existence. Neo-Protestant churches are perceived and defined as *cults*.

<sup>3</sup> Although the term *evangelical* – *evangelical churches* currently has a wide acceptance among historians (See: Dorin Dobrincu and Dănuț Mănăstireanu, *The Evangelical Man – An Exploration of Romanian Protestant Communities*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest 2018, p. 23.), it can be confusing, because it designates German Lutherans. Therefore, the term *neo-protestant* (although it may also confuse modern Lutheran Protestantism) is most appropriate because these cults are a historical continuity of classical Protestantism, manifested in the modern period, bringing new theological aspects but within the same Protestant mold. For using the term neo-protestant for these churches, including the Baptist church (see: Vlad Bogdan Cristian, *Modern religious movements in the Romanian space. Are evangelical cults in Romania historically neo-protestant?*, Acta Marisiensis, Seria Historia, 4, University Press, Târgu Mureș, 2022, pp. 27-44).

among the German and then Hungarian communities. The Baptist mission in Bucharest began with a group (which later became a church) of Germans. As long as the Baptist religion remained within the ethnic framework, the authorities did not react. The German Baptists in Bucharest also addressed the Germans and were even advised and warned by the authorities not to preach the Baptist faith among Romanians. The leaders of the German Baptist church were repeatedly summoned to the Capital Prefecture and the Capital Police to ask them to refrain from missionary work among Romanians, otherwise being threatened with closing of their church and punishment (Bunaciu, 2011: 37).

The situation was similar in Dobrogea where the Baptist mission among the Germans coming from Russia did not attract opposition and adversity. Later, with the mission and conversion of the first Romanians, persecution and resistance appeared. In Jegolia the first Romanians, Haralambie and Dobre Toancă were baptized by the Baptists in 1909. After their baptism, they were visited in the same year by a Baptist missionary, named Maxa Comloșan. He was reported to the authorities. Brought to the gendarmes' station in Jegolia, Maxa Comloșan, with three local Baptists, were investigated and sent to the town hall of Roseti. Here they were arrested and sent to the prefecture of Calarasi and then to the gendarmerie where they were subjected to horrific mistreatment (Popovici, 2007: 102). Then Maxa Comloșan was expelled to Transylvania. In Arabagii they also witnessed persecution, at first in 1902-1903. The notification of the authorities occurred after the first conversions among Romanians. The mayor and notary summoned the first Baptists and sympathizers of the Baptist faith (Romanians), being threatened with land sequestration. Despite the measures in 1903, 5 more people were converted to the Baptist faith (Bunaciu, 2006: 37).

On the Bihor side, along with their mission to Romanian-speaking localities, Hungarian Baptist preachers began to face opposition and persecution that they had not experienced in Hungarian areas. Thus, Mihály Kornya is persecuted in Gurbediu (1890) and thrown in the middle of winter, all night in a stable that had no bridge, with an unleashed half-wild bull<sup>4</sup>. In Tăut (1891) the local priest appealed to the gendarmes to stop the baptism of the Baptists, only the mass intervention of the locals who came to the river stopped the action of the gendarmes (Bunaciu, 2011: 37).

The situation was similar among the mission of Christians according to the gospel. The first religious activities were implicitly addressed to foreigners: in Bucharest the missionary Francis Berney rented a house (82 Teilor Street), arranging it for religious assembly. Outside the building was an advertisement with the inscription: "*Every Sunday at 2 p.m., prayer meetings and preaching the Gospel in French are held here.*" (Oprea and Ionescu, 2020: 53). On October 1, 1899, he started religious gatherings held in French, not attracting much attention. The first persons were young Swiss and French women and later also Romanians who knew French. Barney wrote, "*Here is such a great number of French-speaking Protestants who have been deprived of worship and assembly.... And some of them rejoiced at our arrival*" (Radut, 2019: 71). Beginning in 1901, preaching in Romanian began in November (Oprea and Ionescu, 2020: 54). With the first conversions among

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<sup>4</sup> He miraculously escapes until morning, much to the disappointment of the mayor, priest and village teacher.

Romanians and implicitly the development of the mission, the ecclesiastical authorities intervened and thus, under pressure from the Orthodox Church, the Ministry of the Interior summoned Berney, on July 25, 1909, accusing him of "religious propaganda" giving him a week to leave the country (Răduț, 2019: 115).

Also, the missionary work of Christians according to the Gospel was initially addressed to the Germans in Dobrogea and Transylvania. For example, in Râșnov, between 1901-1903, Francis Berney and E. H. Broadbent addressed the Saxons, forming prayer groups and then an assembly. When an identical work was attempted among Romanians, the initiative aroused much opposition. Romanians who were invited to meetings organized by evangelical missionaries were threatened with beatings and persecuted. However, finally, after a few years, a Romanian language assembly was organized in Râșnov (Oprea and Ionescu, 2020: 70-71).

In Bessarabia, too, baptism penetrated through German colonists (Filat, 2021:180). Unopposed and enjoying freedom, the number of German Baptists in Bessarabia increased, as well as churches. Until 1907 in most German colonies around Odessa there were German Baptist communities (Filat, 2021:182), which were part of the union of German Baptists in southern Russia. In 1914 there were thus over 30 German Baptist communities with more than 1000 members in Bessarabia (Filat, 2021: 183) <sup>5</sup>.

Opposition in Bessarabia began with the first conversions among the Russian and Romanian -speaking population. For example, Archip Romanenko, from the village of Sagani in Bessarabia. after several periods of persecution by villagers and authorities, in 1874-1875, moved to Cișmele in 1876 and later became the first pastor in Cișmele, Ismail County<sup>6</sup>. Once the ethnic border was crossed, persecution was also carried out in Bender, Chisinau and Tiraspol.

Thus, the manifestation of neo-Protestantism within the German and Hungarian ethnic communities in the Romanian territory enjoyed freedom. With the mission's departure from ethnic boundaries, reactions were not long in coming. It is true that in the Romanian territories of Dobrogea, Bucharest, the religious changes among German Lutheran communities could not disturb the Orthodox Church (similar situation to the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia compared to German communities of Stundists), but it should be noted that the Orthodox Church in Romania and Bessarabia felt more threatened by the conversion of Orthodox to neo-Protestantism than the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Church in Transylvania (Hungary at that time), to the conversion of their own believers to these neo-Protestant denominations<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The numerical situation evolved until 1939 when Germany signed the nonaggression pact with Russia, following which a joint commission was created in September 1940 that organized the resettlement of Germans from the territories occupied by the former USSR to Eastern Europe (including Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina), being displaced in about two months over 93,000 Germans from Bessarabia. With this exodus the German Baptists also left, and with them ended a chapter in the life of the German Baptist communities in Bessarabia.

<sup>6</sup> At that time the Cismele (today Strumok) was located on the geographical border of Bessarabia with the Odessa region.

<sup>7</sup> The reasons for resistance can be multiple. For example, the form of government and organization of the Protestant, Lutheran, or Reformed church is less centralized than that of the

Secondly, reactions to neo-Protestantism took **various forms**. From the mildest to the harshest, neo-Protestantism has experienced many faces of persecution. Among the easiest reactions are found in *public debates* used especially in Bessarabia. They consisted of summoning new Baptists or prominent missionaries by Orthodox clergy at various hierarchical levels to interfaith "dialogues" in the villages or localities where they converted. These theological and faith debates, while ostensibly providing a neutral framework for arguments on both sides (churches), were in reality dominated by the Orthodox Church, giving Baptists very limited time to answer questions and accusations. For example, in Soroca, in front of 800 people, the Baptists were allowed only two short interventions in defense of their faith, they were interrupted each time, and finally the crowd present was instigated by the priests against them and only thanks to the police "they were not torn to pieces." (Filat, 2021: 202-203). After the debate, Orthodox Hieromonk Gurie Grosu recorded only the interventions of the Orthodox side, so that those who were not present and subsequently wanted to read about the debate would notice the "lack" of arguments of the Baptist side. The situation was repeated in Chilia, Cișmele, Șabo and Popușoi (Filat, 2021: 199), causing the Baptist leadership to refuse to attend these debates.

Another form of reaction was **defamatory literature**. For example, in Kishinev, the diocesan anti-sectarian missionary for Bessarabia regularly attended Baptist services on Sundays, both morning and afternoon, and during the week he wrote sermons that punctually contradicted the teaching preached to the Baptists on the previous Sunday. The following Sunday he distributed the printed sermon. He distributed thousands of such sermons in June-September 2012 (Filat, 2021: 214). The following year the same priest modified the method: in the morning he went to the Baptist church and in the afternoon, he organized the service at the Orthodox Church and built his sermon on combating the teaching heard in the morning at the Baptist church (Filat, 2021: 215).

After the two forms of reactions, the **obstruction of worship services** followed in intensity. In Chisinau, at the request of the Orthodox Church, a guard policeman guarded the building where Baptists met, allowing access only to those already baptized. Guests from other denominations were banned and threatened with imprisonment. In Tiraspol the Baptists rented a building in 1911. It was immediately imprisoned and sealed off by police under pressure from Orthodox clergy and forbidden meetings (Filat, 2021:218) <sup>8</sup>. Similar situations occurred among

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Orthodox Church, and the encouragement of the study of Scripture and theological themes is freer, being based on the principle of universal priesthood of every believer. Although there has been persecution throughout the history of the Protestant church against other religious groups, yet the Protestant structure and doctrine makes them less intolerant. At the same time, the Orthodox Church invoked not only the religious aspect, but also the ethnic aspect. The theory of the plot of foreigners against Romanians was used. For example, baptism is considered "*the Trojan horse introduced by Hungarians among Romanians*", as the way of denationalization and weakening of national sentiment.

<sup>8</sup> Only after interventions from the governor of Kherson did the situation return to normal, until then the Baptists met at their homes, on a rotating basis, under various pretexts such as birthdays or various holidays.

Adventists. In Ploiesti in 1912, the meeting convened by the Adventist leaders had to be canceled during its unfolding due to a counterdemonstration, in front of the rented hall, by a considerable crowd of people, led by some of the clergy of the Orthodox Church in Ploiesti.

Increasing in intensity, **workplace interventions** were a slightly harsher form: in Soroca, at the insistence of the Orthodox Church, the paramedic of the Soroca hospital, Filip Radonenko, was dismissed in 1912 and five medical staff from the Chisinau hospital were fired (one of the doctors, Hizhnyakov, had eight children!), because they became Baptists. Similar case was Anton Lebedenko who worked in a bank and was fired after becoming a Baptist, at the request of the Orthodox priest (Filat, 2021:212). The case of the Aslan family from Pitesti should also be remembered. After they became mostly Adventists and opened in their home the first Seventh-day Adventist church (1870), the businesses of this merchant family suffered, the reason found would have been the opposition of the locals to their new religious orientation, and then were forced to transfer their business to Bucharest.

The expulsions *followed*: the Baptist missionary Maxa Comloșan was expelled from Dobrogea in 1909 (Popovici, 2007: 102), the Adventist pastor J. F. Hinter was expelled from Romania also in 1909, the Adventist pastor Constantin Popescu was expelled from Cernăuți in 1911 (Popa, 2008: 735-748), and the evangelical missionary Francis Berney was expelled from Romania in the same year 1909, and in the following years all foreign missionaries of the Christians according to the gospel (Radut, 2019: 75).

**The closure of houses of prayer** was another, harsher form of persecution. For example, in Bessarabia on July 4, 1894, through the efforts of Konstantin Pobedonostsev, high prosecutor of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, a law was issued persecuting neo-Protestants. Religious gatherings were banned, colporteurs of the British Bible Society for Abroad were banned, adoption of Orthodox children by neo-Protestants was banned, property purchases were banned. Evangelical leaders were also arrested and deported to Transcaucasia (Filat, 2021:229).<sup>9</sup>

**Forms of violence** represent other harsh forms of persecution. Beatings/tortures, for example the beating of Adventists by counterdemonstrators (Ploiesti 1912) or the torture of the Baptist pastor Vasily Pavlov (1894-1895) are conclusive examples. Beatings and other violence were also recorded in the commune of Pârlita, where Stefan Ivăncică got to feel the anger of the authorities instigated by religious representatives. The blows received publicly from gendarmes on three occasions did not discourage him (Popa, 2008: 565). In Aliman commune, Baptists Radu Tașcă and Nicolae Tașcă were arrested and sent from post to post to Medgidia, where they were beaten by gendarmes and sent back to Cernavoda. Baptist missionary Mihály Kornya also suffered several beatings and violent treatments in his mission among Romanians (Kimer, 2009: 117-119).

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<sup>9</sup> There were cases following the new law when Baptist children were taken from families and forcibly baptized or taken to monasteries or Orthodox families.

Murders were in the list of these acts of violence: in Talpoș (1890) the Baptist Lazar Ioan Sab died, as a result of persecution and beatings (Popovici, 2007:40).<sup>10</sup>

Reactions were also influenced by the aspect **of relationship/collaboration between religious and political authorities**. The authorities were both independent of each other and in synergy. Most of the time this association was determined by the pressure and intervention of religious authority over political authority. Regardless of the territory we are talking about, in the Romanian territory, at that time<sup>11</sup> the ecclesiastical authorities always pressured the state to intervene in limiting and stopping the mission of these cults. Whenever this synergy was achieved, reactions were harsher, and persecution took more intense forms. Thus, besides the examples already shown above, to the harsh forms of persecution, we also mention in Bihor County, in Tăut (1891), the local priest appealed to the gendarmes to stop the baptism of the Baptists, only the mass intervention of the locals who came to the river stopped the action of the gendarmes (Popovici, 2007:39). The appeal to the authorities was also used in Chisinau. As already mentioned, at the request of the Orthodox Church, a guard policeman guarded the building where the Baptists met and allowed access only to those already baptized. Guests of other denominations were banned from entering and threatened with imprisonment. The use of authorities was also highlighted in 1912 when a group of 25 people were prepared for baptism and the police chief managed to prevent baptism after the Orthodox priest identified the place and people to be baptized (Filat, 2021: 214). In Bessarabia, collaboration could be extended between authorities in several localities and over a longer period of time. It took the form of pursuit under pressure from religious authority. Mikhail Kashtanov, the Baptist carpenter, after leaving Soroca was followed with the help of state authorities, at the notification of Orthodox hierarchs, both in Kiev, Dimieikva and Chisinau. Wherever he settled in these locations, the state authorities warned the local Spiritual Consistory of his presence and address of residence. Subsequently, the Orthodox authorities tried to limit his influence (Filat, 2021: 204).

Collaboration between civil and religious authorities also manifested itself in Tâmbouiești, Vrancea County, in 1912, when a group of 13 Adventists are brought before the Orthodox Church (Popa, 2008: 474) and are mistreated and forced to renounce their "Jewish ideas" (alluding to Saturday keeping and abstinence from "unclean" meat, pork).

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<sup>10</sup> Considered the first martyr of the Baptists in Transylvania, Lazar Ioan was severely beaten by a teacher from the confessional school in Talpos, right in the schoolyard. Dragged and thrown into the communal prison, a makeshift cellar, Lazarus John died shortly after they pulled him out of it.

<sup>11</sup>From 1856, the date when the first religious movement (the Baptist church) made its presence and until 1918, the Romanian space was under the rule of various states and powers: *Transylvania* was in 1856 a Principality that was part of the Austrian Empire and from 1868 to 1918 it became incorporated into the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Empire, the Danubian Principality (a preferred term in international historiography) - *Wallachia* next to *Moldavia* formed Romania in 1859, *Bukovina* in 1849 was called a duchy subject to Austria and *Bessarabia* was under the domination of the Tsarist Empire since 1812.

Collaboration between authorities was also carried out at the level of higher officials. The expulsions of 1909 were against this background and are an eloquent example. (Maxa Comloșan is expelled from Dobrogea in 1909 (Popovici, 2007: 102), Adventist pastor J. F. Hinter is expelled from Romania also in 1909, Adventist pastor Constantin Popescu is expelled from Cernăuți in 1911 (Popa, 2008: 735748) and evangelical missionary Francis Berney was expelled from Romania in the same year 1909. As for evangelical Christians, all foreign missionaries were to be expelled in the coming years (Radut, 2019: 75).

Another example is the interpellation of the Minister of Religious Affairs in the Romanian Parliament in 1912 against the Adventists against the background of the events in Ploiesti (counterdemonstration against the conference of Adventists that was supposed to take place in a rented public hall) in October of the same year (Popa, 2008: 491).

**Society's reaction** to "newcomers" is another aspect that needs to be analyzed. First of all, on a personal level, from the ranks of society, of the population, were conversions; So for this category *the reaction was positive*. People from different social classes were attracted by the characteristics of neo-Protestantism which, through its call to authentic Christianity, through the revival of early Christianity, to a simpler, more enthusiastic, and participatory Christianity, imposed itself in many situations on "*traditional and ceremonial ballast that drowned out worship and the carrying of piety*." (Popovich, 2007: 13). It was within these terms that the neo-Protestant pioneers carried out their mission.

Also, among the population, of society, whether in urban or rural areas, there were also people who offered to help the authorities, especially religious ones, to silence the activity and influence of these cults through a **negative reaction**. For example, in Tâmboiești, acts of violence against Adventists, instigated by religious authorities, with the consent and in the presence of state authorities, were exercised upon village people. Another example is in Ploiesti, also in 1912, when, during a Conference of Adventists that was supposed to take place over several days in the cinema hall of the Cooperative Passage, on the very day of the beginning of the Conference, a counter-demonstration was organized in front of this hall rented by Adventists, on behalf of a considerable crowd of people, led by some of the clergy of the Orthodox Church in Ploiesti.

Thirdly, society's reaction was also **neutral**. To this event in Ploiesti, immediately the press of the time had an ironic reaction satirizing the counterdemonstration: the magazine *Veselia* published in the next issue (October 26, 1912), an article with what happened under the title "*The skirmish between the Adventists and the Teachers of Ploiesti*"<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, the event of counter-demonstration by people instigated by Orthodox priests, gathered in front of the cinema hall in the Cooperative Passage also turned into violence. The then Adventist leader, P. P. Paulinii, along with other decision makers, decided to immediately discontinue the conference and free the public hall by the approximately 200 Adventists. To avoid a confrontation, the Adventists walked out of the building in small groups. The

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<sup>12</sup> This issue of the magazine is in the personal archive of the former President of the Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Romania, Dumitru Popa.



incidents apparently occurred among the last groups to clear the hall. An Adventist, who was with his three sons, were assaulted with clubs and clubs and were hit and their heads broken (Popa, 2008: 489).

The article also contained a poem about the incident. The lyrics are valuable because they express the attitude (at least) of the intellectual class composed of both the editors of the magazine and the subscribers. The attitude, in a note of humor, reflected the secular spirit of this category and the non-interference in detail aspects between cults. Also, in a spirit detached from such religious conflicts, there is slight irony against the Orthodox Church, which was responsible for generating the conflict<sup>13</sup>. Here are the lyrics that need no further comment:

*"Look, in Ploiesti, just like in the Balkans, there was war.  
For the cross fought / Citizens as heroes.  
For in the City of Liberty, / Together with oil,  
Boulevard and brandy, it is / Someone with a great role.  
It's a sect, an insect, / - Who knows what they are –  
Adventists, they are called / And worship other gods.  
And the Pravoslavnici Christians / What they have traditions from Christ,  
Violation they don't want the law / And I tell them they're anticrists.  
And therefore, there is fighting, / One day when the Adventists.  
He wants the world to speak... / Without calling the vardists.  
For Christians protest, / Priests and chapel workers  
With rods instead of rifles... / They flatten the monshers.  
And they set out to attack... / But the enemy withdrew,  
With new troops, the offensive / A popa Năstase took it.  
And with the band strengthened / From through the square and start again.  
To the redoubt with the insect / And in attack you destroy it.  
Destroy!... This is the news / From the official source,  
The truth is different / And it's more original.  
He broke their heads, for they willed / Christian Pravoslavnici  
Out of him to draw their creed / Lost by the Adventist.  
And it was like you saw / In Ploiesti pure war...  
Lord, for the cross-now / All the way there are heroes."*

Dălacomplect – Veselia Magazine, October 26, 1912  
(Popa, 2008: 490-491).<sup>14</sup>

The incident was also discussed in the newspaper *Adevărul* in October 1912 (Popa, 2008: 752-755).<sup>15</sup> In the article *The Strange Idea* signed by Dr. Urechie, a parable was used on the situation and efforts of the Orthodox Church to counter the Advent

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<sup>13</sup> Following the trial, it could be proved that the action of the counterdemonstrators was started by the Orthodox clergy from Ploiesti.

<sup>14</sup> The issue of the magazine is in the personal archive of the former President of the Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Romania, Dumitru Popa.

<sup>15</sup> The issue of the magazine is in the personal archive of the former President of the Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Romania, Dumitru Popa.

mission<sup>16</sup> through an image in the field of food trade: an old restaurant *La Fleica lui Traian*, also called *La Costică*, loses customers to a new competitor: *La Schnitzelul Vienez* aka *La Fritș* (probably the name was an allusion to the fact that Adventism came to Romania through Germany, pastors Conradi and Hinter were Germans, and Stefan Demetrescu, the pastor from Ploiesti, had recently returned from Germany from his studies and mission in Berlin). In the face of competition, *La Costică* restaurant did not find a professional way to turn the "flies" from *Viennese Schnitzel* to Romanian Flange, because "it is not good at commerce and does not know how to beat its competition". So to bring the musketeers back to his shop, "the orthodoxy merchant used the club... but they found themselves scoundrels of flies who even with broken heads did not consent to consume Orthodox merchandise and continued to prefer Adventist merchandise". The article continues the parable by criticizing the actions of the representatives of Orthodoxy: seeing that he did not succeed with the bat, the merchant questioned the Minister of Religious Affairs to take measures by the Government "to defend the Orthodox Meatloaf from the Adventist Schnitzel".

Finally, the author of the article asks rhetorically, amending these steps: "How are you, Orthodox religion, weak enough to tremble at the slightest Adventist wind and have to ask for the protection of the Romanian Gendarmerie? But did Christ, Christ in whose name thou hast opened with the help of the gendarmerie, did He impose His doctrine?" Since this event in Ploiesti, the article alludes to several interventions of Orthodoxy with the authorities, also recalling the expulsion of Pastor Hinter from Romania in 1909.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in critical words, they ask "how do you, religion of our ancestors, instead of seeking victories with the goodness of your nature, with the height of your teachings, you appeal to the bat of those from Ploiesti, to the shackles of gendarmes, to the decrees of expulsion?"

This reaction reveals a neutral position on the part of this magazine regarding the dissensions between the traditional church and the newly arrived denominations that promoted it to the masses of readers. At the same time, the attitude of this category of authors/readers reveals a critical spirit to the way the majority church reacts and urges it to change methods: "You cannot fight with such weapons, you must fight. Look for others, hurry up, or not, the last flies will leave you, and on the shutters drawn... reason will write: Bankruptcy."

The last, fifth aspect to be emphasized in these reactions to neo-Protestants is the **effects in neo-Protestantism**. These were also observed through personal decisions of some leaders, but also through measures taken by the cult. For example, in the Adventist Church, pastor Stefan Demetrescu, who was pastor in Ploiesti in 1912 and host of the Adventist congress that ended, as already shown, later, after several years of pastoral and administrative activity within the Adventist church, He enrolled in law school to become a lawyer. After graduation he joined the bar as a lawyer, engaging in Adventist trials (Starling, 2019: 138).

At the cult level, this kind of events, which began in the first years of mission, were transmitted to world leaders in several parts of the world, including Romania, and

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<sup>16</sup> The incident in Ploiesti in 1912, as well as the fact that immediately after it, the Minister of Religious Affairs was heckled in Parliament asking him to take action against Adventists are two of the approaches of Orthodoxy.

<sup>17</sup> Pastor Hinter, due to his intense missionary activity, was expelled from the country by the authorities in 1909.

determined the Adventist Church to invest human and financial resources by establishing a religious freedom department.

Religious liberty issues within the Adventist church also began in the United States. In **1864**, the Adventist Church was forced to intervene with officials to protect the Adventist community during the Civil War. First, efforts were made to ensure the non-combatant status of its members. Adventist leaders have worked tirelessly on this (especially John N. Andrews, who as early as 1851 understood the importance of working to promote religious freedom). The same thing happened in **1880**: Adventist leaders reacted when the National Reform Association had legislative initiatives, including that the U.S. state introduce national Sunday laws (in some states they had already begun to be introduced and Adventists were in serious trouble, including being prosecuted for violating state-mandated Sunday observance). Adventist pioneers believed it was their duty to defend the legacy of such prominent American founders as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Beginning in **1884**, the Adventist Church published a journal, *Sabbath Sentinel*, which laid out ideas about the need for religious freedom. 500,000 copies were printed. In **1889** the Church established the National Association for Religious Liberty *with the aim of promoting freedom of religion and conscience and defining within this freedom the relationship between Church and State. In the declaration signed by 110 founding members, he declared: "We deny the right of any civil government to legislate in religious matters. We believe it is the right and should be the privilege of every man to worship according to the dictation of his own conscience."* (*Minutes of the Meeting of General Conference Committee*, March 11-21, 1889: 14, 15, 39 and <https://www.religiousliberty.info/history>). The association printed materials to promote religious freedom. He also collected in **1890** no fewer than 250,000 signatures that were submitted to the U.S. Congress to protest the religious legislation of that time. Beginning in 1893 he decided to print a monthly magazine "*The Advent Review*, January 17, 1893: 47).

Following numerous signals coming from the world, including Romania, with the expansion of the Advent mission, the National Religious Liberty Association, out of the need and "*desire to expand its sphere of influence and make the whole world its mission field*", changed in March **1893** to *the International Association for Religious Freedom* IRLA (*The Advent Review*, March 7, 1893: 158), making it the oldest religious liberty association worldwide to bring together representatives from other religious denominations (Baptists, Jews, Mormons, etc.). Later, in **1901**, **the Department of Religious Liberty was organized at the level of the Adventist World Church (PARL), which in 1906 began publication of Liberty: A Magazine of Religious Freedom.** Today it is the oldest publication to appear continuously worldwide, currently advocating for religious freedom for all and separation of church and state (<https://www.religiousliberty.info/history> and <https://www.irla.org/what-is-the-irla> accessed May 11, 2023).

Currently, among the neo-Protestant and Protestant churches, Seventh-day Adventists have the most developed department (PARL) in this regard, and through IRLA (recognized by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations) have representatives at the United Nations in New York and Geneva as well as at the annual meetings of the Human Rights council. The official magazine published by IRLA is *Fides et Libertas*, holding several events in Romania in collaboration with the Department

of Religious Freedom (<https://www.irla.org/search-results?search=romania&id=1488> accessed on 19 July 2023).

**Conclusions.** The attitude of the indigenous and traditional religious authorities was predominantly negative and did not differ from one area to another for the "newcomers". The Orthodox Church, regardless of territory, reacted most vehemently. Although the civil authorities were different at that time (the Romanian territory being under the rule of several powers - the Romanian State, the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire), collaborated in most situations with the religious authorities. Most of the time, this association was determined by the pressure and intervention of the authority, thus causing a harsher reaction. Also, in some places there was no continuous pressure on religious groups<sup>18</sup>.

The ethnic criterion mattered more than the area. Although apparently the reaction was different and milder in Transylvania compared to Romania<sup>19</sup>, Bessarabia and Bukovina, the ethnic aspect still had weight. The early period of the three neo-protestant movements (Baptist, Adventist, and Evangelical Christianity) enjoyed this ethnic aspect regardless of the territory: the church took root not among Romanian speakers, but among German, French and Hungarian speakers in all areas of the Romanian territory. After the first conversions among Romanians, opposition was attracted, but already the nuclei of several churches (German, French, Hungarian speaking) were already well organized and offered support later.

The intensity of the negative reactions unfortunately ranged from the mildest (literature defamatory of neo-Protestants) to the harshest (killings).

Civil society, especially at the level of the press, was neutral and ironic to the negative reactions and, detaching itself from religious issues between denominations, mocked the situation.

These reactions had two positive aspects towards the "newcomers": in most cases they gained sympathy from witnesses to the persecutions, the number of sympathizers increased where the persecution was greater<sup>20</sup>.

Finally, despite civil or religious opposition, one by one the main religious movements received official recognition ([http://culte.gov.ro/?page\\_id=57](http://culte.gov.ro/?page_id=57) (accessed July 19, 2023)).

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<sup>18</sup> Repeating the situation of the first part of the eighteenth century: religious movements in Bessarabia (especially the Molokans) under Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) enjoyed a window of peace during his reign. Subsequently, the situation changed.

<sup>19</sup> In Romania, too, a difference in reactions can be sustained between rural and urban areas and between Bucharest and Dobrogea, or Bucharest and Moldova.

<sup>20</sup> The Adventist Church benefited from moments of opposition such as the one in Ploiesti in 1912. The acid reaction of the press increased interest in this church and its teachings. Another example can be recalled that after the incident in Tâmbioești Adventism strengthened even more in this city, and even more the Adventist mission was carried to the neighboring places: Bordești, Dumbrăveni, Dumitrești, Dănulești, Dedulești, Bordești de Jos – where, due to the rapid growth of Adventists, a church of 30 members is organized – and today Adventists are the second numerical cult, after the Orthodox.

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