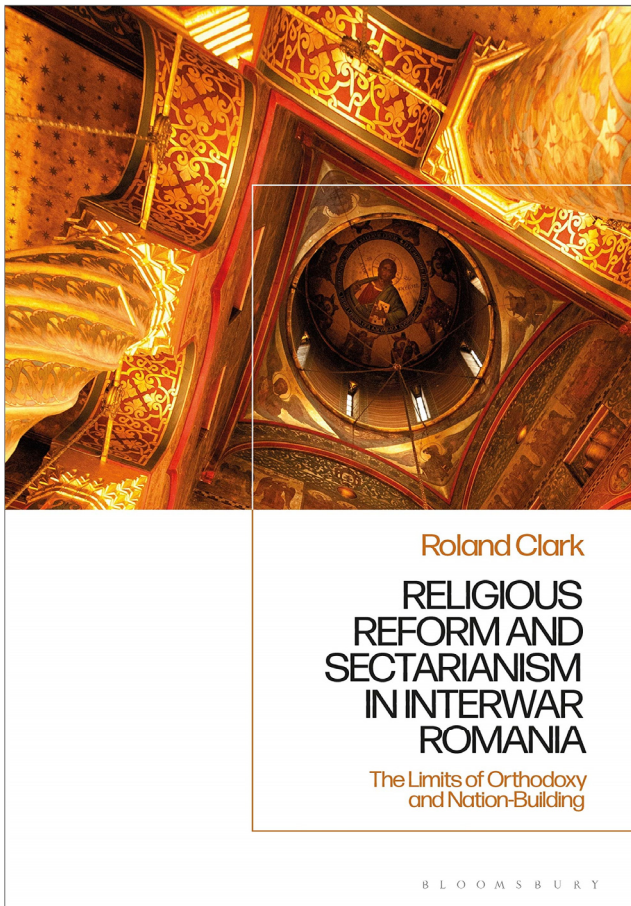


**Book Review:**

**Roland Clark, *Religious Reform and Sectarianism in Interwar Romania. The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation Building*, Bloomsbury Publishing, UK, 2021, 232 p.**



Dr Roland Clark is senior lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Liverpool. Roland Clark specialises in the history of East-Central Europe and of interwar Romania, in particular his research include fascism, social movements, violence, theology and lived religion.

*“Religious reform and sectarianism in interwar Romania. The limits of Orthodoxy and nation building”* published at Bloomsbury Publishing, UK in 2021 has three parts preceded by an Introduction followed by Conclusions chapter.

In the Introduction chapter the author presents what noted down as observations a former Anglican missionary in her eight-day trip to Bucharest. Ruth Rose notes that the Romanians attitudes, back in 1911, about the religion is hard to explain by criteria of British Protestantism.

First, the educated Romanians are not interested in religion. The orthodox priests are low-class men, often uneducated and preoccupied to received money for their religious services. Also, the Romanians are very suspicious of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and that makes almost impossible the missionary work among them. Even some prominent writers such Nicolae Iorga, claims that the Orthodox Church is incapable of doing its job as a social and spiritual institution. Some haw that was the reality of the period and the author work is founded upon the interest in reform movement and the position of Romania at the intersection between Orthodoxy and Western Christianity.

Then, the revival movements can explain themselves by the tensions between regional Romanian orthodoxy which dominated the 1920’s. This tension gives birth to the movements which they tried “to rejuvenate” Romanian Orthodox Church.

Further on the author presents a percentual presence analyse of repenters denominations and Protestantism in 1930’s on Romanian territory, also with historical information about their spreading and evolution.

Chapter 1 of Part I-*Romanian Orthodox Christianity* presents how lived the religion looked in Romanian villages by tracing changes in preaching and catechol practices. The author introduces us into what means orthodoxy back in 1920’s in rural areas of Romania and how priests begun to preach and write their sermons in order to try to cover all the aspects of life of the believers in an attempt to ensure social progress for all. He notices that a successful preaching requires to know the Bible well and to have a new generation of biblical scholars able to deliver to the people the message of the Gospel.

Chapter 2-*Renewall*-looks at the influence of western Christianity on renewal movements, especially in the cities. It was the period in which the students were involved in so called “social Christianity” and they were invited to take an important role in different associations, most of them, with foreign influences. The author underlines that the Church leaders recognized politically potential of social engaged Christianity and were interested that these efforts to serve the political goal of the institution. All this associations were attempts to combine lay orthodoxy with political nationalism of the 1920’s.

Chapter 3-*A contested Patriarchate*-looks at the tensions and the struggle produced by unification of separate orthodox churches into a single Romanian Orthodox Church in the after First World War period. The author analyses the situation of the orthodoxy in The Old Kingdom Romania as the Romanians have to come to live in a standardized state with one church after great efforts to Romanianization from the part of the Church leaders. The situation in Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina is presented from the historical point of view emphasizing on the attempts to free themselves from foreign control and to survive as Orthodox Church in a hostile environment in order to cultivate Romanian national identity through the Romanians within those provinces. These provinces became targets of concerted romanizations campaigns as part of nation-building project of Greater Romania. The Church took part happily at this project during the process of creating an autocephalous Romanian Patriarchate.

Chapter 4-*Inochentism and Old Calendarism* presents what great disappointment came along with the new established patriarchate. This new religious movements illustrates dissatisfaction with spirituality provided by Orthodox Church and also the fact that the state and the Church manifest themselves as abusive, authoritarian institutions towards this movements. The author points that both these two movements flourished in region where disappointment from Great Romania state were the highest and, for example for the followers of Old Calendarism to accept the new calendar was synonymous with the acceptance of the national church and the Romanian state, especially in Bessarabia. These two cases are the proof of the choice of the Church to stay close with the government from that period, fact that explain the movements success too.

Chapter 5-*Romanian Orthodox Church and the Others*. Part two focuses on the relationship of the Orthodox Church with the others: Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Repenters.

The relationship with Catholics was defined by three ideas. Catholicism was identified with ethnic and regional minorities, then, any reconciliation with the Catholicism is too difficult for the orthodox leaders and, in the end, to be Romanian was to be orthodox. Orthodox hostility towards Greek Catholics was great despite of the fact that they established the intellectual and literacy foundation of Romanian nationalism due to their higher education of their leaders. Also, points the author, their contribution as tireless advocates for the rights of Romanians in Transylvania and for building Greater Romania was ignored.

The relationship with Roman Catholics is defined by the author by the need of Roman Catholic Church to sign a deal in order to survive, deal which will express the type of connections with the state Vatican promotes to ensure

the save presence of Catholics on Romanian territory. To understand the situation the author gives as the example of catholic hierarchy which was replaced by Romanian ethnics and that the state closed confessional schools. Lutheran, Reformed Church, on the other side, were classified as “minority religions”. In 1927 Vatican sign the Concordat that recognize catholic churches as churches not as denominations despite the orthodox point of view that Catholicism is and remains a dangerous force against national state and Orthodoxy. The author shows that by accusations of the orthodoxists, in the end, they put religion at the heart of Romanian-ness by defining ethnicity in religious terms. This resonates with the state idea to unite population of Romania around the idea of ethnic dominance. This position was accepted by orthodox leaders which were more willing to work with the state in order to guarantee orthodox hegemony in post First World War Romania.

Chapter 6-*Repenters*- explore the origins of major repenters denominations, discusses how believers and critics understand their practices and beliefs. The author discusses Baptists, Brethrens, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, Seventh- day Adventists, Bible students and Jehovah’s witness from historical point of view, defining their particularities, their beliefs and the relationship with the authorities and the Orthodox Church. The authorities were worried about the impact of repenters on society so, beginning with the Constitution of 1923, they denied recognize any repenters domination as churches. Author explains that the fact that they have foreign origins reinforced in the policeman’s mind the idea that repenters are traitors to the nation even if they try so much to obey the law in the interwar period. Despite that, in conflict with repenters, the authorities constantly persecuted them taking the side of the orthodox.

In chapter 7-*Missionaries*- we can find analyses about in which way anti-sectarianism missionaries articulated their strategy in their attempts to combat repenters. The Church leaders understand that the Orthodox services did not engage lay people enough, solution is to discus and read the Bible, charity work and Sunday schools. Others keep saying that the repenters did not recognize the important contribution of Orthodox Church to build Romanian nation, so repenters are the result of excessive liberty and they are a big treat for the spiritual union of the Romanians. Also, was comfortably for the Church to call authorities to shut down repenters groups helped by the constant changes in their legal status which give to the policeman’s the opportunity to persecuted them and, by this, to have an important role in preventing to spread repenters all over the country. In the end, the author emphasizes the importance of repenters problem within Orthodox Church who has the chance to put aside the regional animosity in an attempt to unite as a national church in the new nation-state.

Part three explores parachurch movements. The author is trying to explain how the Lord's Army in Transylvania and Stork's Nest in Bucharest became liminal orthodoxy and how the new approaches to the Bible, interest in holy living, doctrinal and practical disagreements influence the Orthodox Church and which way orthodox leaders instrumentalized this movement in order to gain more influence.

The renewal movements are presented from their origins, how they grew up and develop, which types of relationships they have with orthodox leaders and how this movements survive in different period as parachurch movements affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Church, which is the case of Lord's Army. The movements are presented as attempts to revive Romanian spirituality in the interwar period of moral decadence and as a reaction at repenters work among Romanians but also as attempts to deepen Orthodox Christianity.

The two movements engaged a lot of society energy, leaders of the Church, important personalities get involved accusing them of protestant propaganda, of being part of World Judaism and heresy. The debate was about the authority of the Church, the role of tradition, the meaning of salvation, the regeneration of the people by preaching the Gospel of Christ, the altering of liturgy and the national identity of the Romanian people.

The Conclusion chapter the author underlines the fact that in 1920 the Church was placed in the central of Romanian nation-building, the state recognizes the demands for a dominant status for the Orthodox Church. The repenters and revival movements were the backdrop of all changes in Orthodoxy in the period. In this way, repenters and parachurch movements did not established themselves outside orthodoxy and, in the same time, orthodox initiatives became a response to repenters and foreign threat. The author explains way the Church response was sometimes inappropriate towards these attempts to change people spirituality, how and way orthodoxy in the imperial period became a nationalistic, xenophobic religion and in which way the frustration of some orthodox leaders about the new-born state drives them to embrace antisemitic and fascist politics.

Overall, the book is trying to explain how the conflict were resolved, is trying to understand the fears about foreign western influence and repenters disappointment about the new institutional church, the regional power battles all of this happening in a new-born nation-state. It looks at the effort of the state and the Church to established themselves as national institutions within the new borders. The book is trying to reveal how diverse religious communities reacted at the rapid changes of the period offering a imagine of different approaches of reading Bible, developing doctrine among Christians and how they practice their faith and beliefs beyond the policy of State-Church and different obstacles they encountered.

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In the end, the book is also about the new religious practices, the new way of engaging with the Scripture, the parachurch movements or the repenters Christianity as contributors for developing a new Orthodoxy and a new civil society, especially after 1918, the birth of Greater Romania.

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