

**"Ovidius" University of Constanta
Faculty of Orthodox Theology
Doctoral School of Theology**

DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

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**"Ovidius" University of Constanta
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**THE MISSIONARY DIMENSION OF ROMANIAN
RELIGIOUS LITERATURE IN ORTHODOXY**

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Romanian religious literature, within Orthodoxy, had a central role in the formation and development of spirituality and national identity. Over the centuries, it has served as the main vector for the transmission of Christian teachings, the strengthening of communities and the maintenance of social cohesion in a period marked by multiple historical and cultural challenges. During times of foreign occupation and oppression, religious literature was an important tool for maintaining cultural cohesion and continuity. The Romanian Orthodox Church has used this literature to strengthen community ties and resist the pressures of cultural assimilation. Understanding the missionary dimension of Romanian Orthodox religious literature involves a deep exploration of the evolution of this literature and how the Romanian Orthodox Church has used religious texts to spread and strengthen the Orthodox faith.

The first manifestations of Romanian religious literature date back to the sixteenth century, when the Romanian translations of the main religious books appeared. The translation of the "Tetragospel" by Deacon Coresi in 1561 marks an important moment in Romanian cultural history, providing access to sacred texts in a language understandable to believers. These translations were not only liturgical instruments, but also means of religious education, contributing to the formation of a common religious identity. The translation of the holy books into Romanian has had a profound impact on the consolidation of national and religious identity, facilitating the understanding and active participation of believers in church life.

In the seventeenth century, personalities such as Varlaam and Dosoftei continued this tradition, contributing significantly to the development of Romanian religious literature. Varlaam, the metropolitan of Moldavia, published "Cazania" in 1643, the first book printed in Romanian in Moldavia, which had an essential role in the religious education of the people. Dosoftei, the metropolitan of Moldavia, known for the "Psalter in verse", was another pioneer of religious literature, contributing to the popularization of sacred texts and to the enrichment of the Romanian language through poetic translations and liturgical works. "The religious literature of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century had a decisive role in the affirmation of the literary Romanian language. The religious book, not the chronicle, was the place of artistic turmoil, with repercussions on a wider audience. The Romanian chronicles were published very late, remaining known to a limited audience, while the religious prints, both by the increasing number of copies and by their use in the life of the Church, imposed a certain form of the Romanian language. In fact, the first concerns for the status of the Romanian language, expressiveness, etc.,

are recorded in the prerequisites of religious books (Varlaam, Simion Ștefan, Dosoftei and others)"¹ tag.

Anthimos the Iberian, the metropolitan of Wallachia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, is another prominent figure of Romanian religious literature. Through his works, Anthimos the Iberian promoted not only the Orthodox faith, but also the Romanian culture, printing numerous religious and literary books. Among his most famous works is "Didachies", a collection of sermons that had a special impact on the development of the Romanian religious language and on the formation of the religious conscience of the faithful.

The nineteenth century brought with it movements of national and cultural revival, in which religious literature played a fundamental role. Translations of the Bible and other fundamental texts were continued and improved, contributing to the spread and deepening of religious knowledge. During this period, personalities such as Andrei Șaguna and Nicodim Munteanu had a significant influence on religious literature. Andrei Șaguna, Metropolitan of Transylvania, was a fervent supporter of religious education and the printing of religious books in Romanian, thus strengthening the religious and cultural identity of the Romanians in Transylvania. In addition to improved translations of sacred texts, this period was marked by a concerted effort to integrate religious values into the national revival movement.

In the interwar period, religious literature continued to develop, reflecting the social and political changes in Romania. Writers and theologians such as Dumitru Stăniloae had a profound impact on religious and cultural thought. Dumitru Stăniloae, one of the greatest Romanian Orthodox theologians, was known for his theological works and for his translation of *the Philokalia*, a collection of ascetic and mystical writings². This monumental work played a pivotal role in revitalizing Orthodox spirituality in Romania and promoting a deeper understanding of Orthodox theology.

Romanian religious literature also played an essential role during the communist period, when the Romanian Orthodox Church had to face the pressures and persecutions of the atheist regime. Despite censorship and restrictions, religious literature continued to be a means of spiritual and cultural resistance. Many religious texts circulated clandestinely, and Orthodox writers and

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Carmen-Maria Bolocan, "Aspects of the religiosity of the sacred text in the Holy Metropolitans Dosoftei and Varlaam", in *Theology and Life*, No. 5-8, May-August 2014, p. 48

² Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan C. Teșu, "The Reception of the Work of Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae in Monastic Life and Spirituality (I)", in: *Theology and Life*, No. 5-8, May-August 2013, p. 51

theologians found ways to convey the Christian message and keep the faith alive among believers. A remarkable example is "The Diary of Happiness"³ by Nicolae Steinhardt, which offers a powerful testimony about living the faith in conditions of persecution⁴.

After the fall of the communist regime, Romanian religious literature experienced a renaissance, benefiting from the regained freedom of expression⁵. This allowed the publication and re-edition of fundamental works, as well as the emergence of new theological and spiritual creations. In this new context, religious literature has continued to play an important role in spreading and strengthening the Orthodox faith, also addressing the new challenges of contemporary society, such as secularization and globalization⁶. Contemporary authors have explored various themes, from spirituality and ethics, to interreligious dialogue and the challenges of modernity, reflecting the diversity and vitality of Romanian Orthodox religious literature.

Thus, Romanian religious literature, through its diversity and depth, has been and remains an essential instrument of the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It contributed to the formation of the religious and cultural identity of Romanians, provided spiritual support in times of crisis and facilitated the transmission of Christian values from one generation to the next. The study of this literature from a missionary perspective allows a deeper understanding of how the Romanian Orthodox Church fulfilled its mission of spreading the Gospel and strengthening the faith among the Romanian people. Analyzing the evolution and impact of religious literature, it highlights how it has been used as a means of education, inspiration, and cultural resistance, while reflecting the challenges and adaptations to the social and historical context of each era.

In this paper I wanted to explore in detail the missionary dimension of Romanian religious literature in Orthodoxy, given its importance in defining and consolidating the religious and cultural identity of the Romanian people. We considered it essential to understand how Orthodox literature has played a vital role not only in transmitting the faith, but also in cultural resilience to the major historical challenges that the Romanian community has faced over the centuries.

³ N. Steinhardt, *The Journal of Happiness*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2008

⁴ Drd. Răzvan Cătălin Benzal, "Theological Landmarks in the Work of Monk Nicholas of Rohia", in *Theology and Life*, No. 9-12, September-December 2013, p. 122

⁵ David Pestroiu, "From Postcommunism to Postmodernity. Some considerations regarding the missionary challenges in Romanian Orthodoxy after the fall of communism", in: *The Altar of Reunification*, Supplement 1, 2015, pp. 154-155

⁶ Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006

I began by clearly defining the essential notions that structure this research – "mission", "religious literature" and "orthodoxy" – because they constitute the conceptual core of my analysis. In Orthodox theology, mission is not limited only to the preaching of the Gospel, but has a holistic dimension, being closely linked to liturgical life and to the personal witness of faith. Also, Orthodox religious literature is not only a corpus of texts written to educate the faithful, but it is a tool for catechesis, moral education and spiritual formation, with a profound missionary significance.

In this sense, Romanian religious literature has been a central vehicle for transmitting Christian values and Orthodox theological contribution, and the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church cannot be fully understood without taking this aspect into account. I therefore wanted to investigate how this literature influenced not only the spiritual dimension of believers, but also the cultural identity of Romanians, especially in times of trial, such as the Ottoman domination, communism or the national rebirth of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Methodologically, the work combines literary and theological analysis with a historical approach, thus offering an interdisciplinary perspective on the subject. We researched fundamental religious texts, such as biblical translations, the theological works of the Holy Fathers and hagiographic writings, in order to reveal not only their educational and spiritual role, but also their cultural and identity impact on the Romanian people. It is remarkable how these texts have become points of reference not only for the Church, but also for national identity in the face of external and internal oppression.

This overview of the theme helped me to define more clearly the objectives of the research: to analyze not only the content of these texts, but also their effects on the Romanian Orthodox community, on the development of the Romanian language and culture, and on the spiritual resistance in the face of regimes that tried to suppress the faith. The missionary dimension of Romanian Orthodox religious literature cannot be separated from its impact on our history and culture, this aspect being explored in detail throughout the work.

The work focuses on exploring the missionary dimension of Romanian Orthodox religious literature from a theological and cultural perspective. At the heart of my research is how religious literature has acted as an agent of the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church, playing a fundamental role in shaping the religious and cultural identity of the Romanian people. It was not

limited only to the transmission of Orthodox teachings, but was an instrument of education, resistance and strengthening of spiritual and national cohesion.

One of the main points that we have analyzed is the relationship between mission theology and religious literature, in the context of the teachings of the Orthodox Church. In Orthodoxy, mission is not only an external activity or an effort to evangelize, but an expression of deep Christian living, integrated into community and liturgical life. I have emphasized how, in this sense, Orthodox religious literature, through liturgical texts, catechisms and patristic writings, was a means by which faith was strengthened and penetrated the daily life of the faithful.

Another important point is the historical analysis of the evolution of Romanian Orthodox religious literature. In this section, we have investigated in detail the key periods in Romanian history, starting with the sixteenth century, when the first Romanian translations of sacred texts had a decisive impact on the formation of a common religious identity. The works of Varlaam and Dosoftei have been studied as important moments in the consolidation of the Romanian language and in the spread of Orthodox teachings. These authors not only facilitated access to sacred texts in the vernacular, but also contributed to strengthening the sense of religious and national belonging.

The work continues with an in-depth analysis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, periods in which figures such as Antim the Iberian and Andrei Saguna played essential roles in the promotion of Orthodox religious literature. I focused on the way in which these personalities used religious literature both as a means of catechization and religious education, and as a vehicle for the Romanian cultural renaissance. Through works such as the "Didachies" of Antim the Iberian and the biblical translations of Andrei Saguna, not only the Orthodox faith was strengthened, but also the Romanian cultural identity, in a period of political and social challenges.

Another central aspect of the work is the impact of religious literature on local communities, highlighting its role in liturgy, education and spiritual formation. In this section I have studied concrete cases in which religious literature has been used in the religious education of young people, in sermons and catechetical activities, but also in spiritual resistance in the face of oppressive regimes. In particular, we have also analyzed the communist period, when the Romanian Orthodox Church used religious literature as a tool for spiritual survival. Writers such as Dumitru Stăniloae contributed to the preservation and deepening of Orthodox spirituality in the

face of an atheistic and repressive regime, and "The Diary of Happiness" by Nicolae Steinhardt is an example of religious literature that acted as a spiritual refuge.

Also, an important point that we discussed is the role of religious symbols and language in reinforcing the missionary message of religious literature. The specific, profoundly theological and symbolic language of the Orthodox religious texts was important for the transmission of the Christian message among the faithful, and this language was studied as a fundamental component of the Romanian Orthodox culture. Through hymnography, hagiography and sermons, the Romanian Orthodox Church transmitted not only dogmas and teachings, but also a way of life based on fundamental Christian values.

I sought to demonstrate that Orthodox religious literature is not only a product of theology and culture, but an active means of mission, which has contributed to the strengthening of faith, religious and cultural identity and social cohesion in the Orthodox communities in Romania. We have shed light on how these texts have had a profound influence on national history, culture, and identity, emphasizing that Orthodox religious literature is essentially a vital instrument of the Church's mission.

As I completed this research, I realized more clearly how deep and essential the missionary dimension of Romanian Orthodox religious literature is for the spiritual and cultural development of the Romanian people. This literature, constantly ignored or considered only a secondary instrument of the Church, has proven to be an essential vehicle for the Orthodox mission, both among the clergy and among the ordinary faithful. Through it, Christian values, moral teachings and Orthodox dogmas have penetrated the heart of Romanian communities, contributing not only to religious life, but also to the preservation of a distinct cultural identity.

One of the important conclusions we have reached is that Orthodox religious literature has been, above all, a tool for spiritual education and moral formation. We have seen how Bible translations, sermons, lives of saints, and catechisms have acted as powerful means by which the faith has been taught, but also lived practically. The educational role of these texts cannot be underestimated, since they have formed generations of believers not only by providing theological information, but also by shaping moral and spiritual consciences dedicated to the Christian life. This contribution of Orthodox religious literature to the education and spiritual shaping of Romanians was a lasting one, transmitting Christian values from one generation to another, even in the most difficult periods of history.

Another aspect that came to light in my conclusions is that religious literature played a vital role in preserving national and cultural identity in the face of external pressures. Periods of foreign domination, political oppressions and later the communist regime tried to weaken the spiritual and national ties of the Romanian people. But the Romanian Orthodox Church, through religious literature, managed to keep this connection alive, offering Romanians a point of support in times of crisis. Religious writings, from the works of Antim the Iberian and Dosoftei, to those of Dumitru Stăniloae and Nicolae Steinhardt, were true spiritual fortresses, capable of offering believers refuge and hope in the face of oppression.

On another level, we found that religious literature was not only a tool for preserving tradition, but also one for adapting to the new challenges of each era. The translations of the sacred texts into Romanian, starting with Deacon Coresi, were a missionary act in itself, through which the faith became accessible to all. Also, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religious literature responded to the new challenges of the national renaissance by integrating religious values into the cultural and political movements of the time. This ability to adapt has been essential for the survival and continued relevance of the Romanian Orthodox Church in public life.

Another important conclusion I have drawn is the close connection between literature and the liturgical life of the Church. In Orthodoxy, religious texts are not just written words, but are lived within the liturgy and church rituals. Through liturgical prayers and songs, religious texts have become an integral part of the spiritual life of the faithful. So I have shown that religious literature is not just an object of theological study, but a living experience that manifests itself within the community, in every Divine Liturgy and in every daily prayer.

Finally, Orthodox religious literature has been and is a powerful tool for dialogue with modernity. In the current context of secularization and globalization, we have observed how contemporary Orthodox theological literature is trying to respond to new moral and social challenges. This dialogue with modernity is reflected in the writings that address topics such as bioethics, social justice and the spiritual crisis of contemporary man. Through these contributions, the Romanian Orthodox Church continues to fulfill its mission, providing believers with solid landmarks in an ever-changing world.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that Romanian Orthodox religious literature has not only fulfilled its spiritual and educational mission over the centuries, but has been a central pillar in building and maintaining the religious and cultural identity of the Romanian people. This

literature remains a fundamental element of the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church, having a continuous relevance in the spiritual, cultural and social life of Romania. I concluded with the conviction that the study of the missionary dimension of Orthodox religious literature is of extraordinary importance for understanding both the past and the future of Orthodox spirituality in Romania.

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