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This book's thorough documentation of first-hand accounts comes at a critical time for many of the immigrant generation, including some of Dr. Djurić Milovanović's own informants, who have already passed from the earth. It is at just such times that many of the descendants in subsequent generations, myself included, seek a coherent narrative for understanding this legacy for their own identity.

To this end, these Serbian scholars, especially Dr. Djurić Milovanović, have provided the foundations by which the untold story can be told to the world in coherent form and help to make visible what has largely been invisible. Moreover, these works provide an invaluable resource, a mirror of sorts, by which the continuing Nazarene faith communities and their descendants can continue to reflect on their own collective history and identity in relation to the wider world, past, present, and, perhaps, even future. The book raises important ongoing questions for both the Nazarenes and similar

communities, especially the importance of understanding the ongoing effects of generational trauma on these communities and their descendants, even many years after the facts described, and the persistence of transnational communities even in the face of rising nationalism. As a unique study of a timeless phenomenon in the human experience, this book will have a long shelf-life as a valuable resource on the shelves of academic libraries for scholars of multiple disciplines, as well in the home libraries of Nazarene descendants, passed down as an heirloom for generations.

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IEMIMA PLOSCARIU, *ALTERNATIVE EVANGELICALS: CHALLENGING NATIONALISM IN INTERWAR ROMANIA'S MULTI-ETHNIC BORDERLANDS*.

Brill Schöningh, Paderborn, 2024, 221 pp.

*Reviewed by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović**

Iemima Ploscariu's monograph is a very well-researched and conceptually rich contribution to the social and religious history of interwar Romania. Drawing on archival sources from Romania, Moldova, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States, as well as a wide range of evangelical periodicals and police surveillance reports, the book reconstructs the multi-ethnic, multilingual, and socially diverse evangelical

communities that emerged in Greater Romania after 1918. In doing so, it challenges dominant narratives that portray the interwar religious landscape as a binary opposition between the Romanian

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Orthodox Church (BOR) and the state, on the one hand, and national minorities on the other.

Rather than examining evangelicals through the usual communist-era label of “neo-Protestants,” Ploscariu foregrounds their self-identification as evangelicals, a term consistently used in their own publications from the 1920s and 1930s. She argues that these communities provided an “alternative” social model precisely because they defied the state-sponsored project of homogenization, cultivating religious identities that transcended ethnicity, language, and class. evangelicals formed what contemporary Siguranța agents described as *lumi împeștritate* or “dappled worlds,” as their ethnically diverse communities included Romanians, Russians, Germans, Jews, Greeks, Roma, and others.

The book consists of five chapters and the Epilogue. Chapter 1, *Mapping the Evangelicals: A Social History*, maps out the demographic and regional distribution of four evangelical groups: Baptists, Brethren, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. These communities lived across the territories incorporated into Greater Romania after World War I. Ploscariu analyzes census data, legislation, and the complex legal categories (recognized denominations, religious associations, outlawed sects) through which the Romanian state sought to regulate religious life. Her analysis shows how these categories shifted repeatedly in response to political changes, foreign pressure, and the Orthodox Church’s lobbying power.

Chapters 2 and 3 bring two case studies, which are the most original sections in the book. *Fighting Nationalism: The Jewish Christians of Chișinău* examines the Jewish Christian congregation in Chișinău, led by Lev Averbuch, a figure largely

absent from Romanian historiography. Using police reports, missionary correspondence, and internal publications such as *Farul Mântuirii*, Ploscariu reconstructs a vibrant community that actively resisted both Romanian nationalist pressures and growing antisemitism. The chapter also explores the role of travel, transnational connections, and missionary networks (British, Danish, Swedish, and American) in shaping a specifically Bessarabian form of Jewish-Christian evangelical identity.

Chapter 3, *Crossing Social Divides: the Roma Baptists*, focuses on the Roma Baptists of Arad, tracing the emergence of the first Roma Baptist church, Credința, founded in 1932. Although the surviving sources are scarcer than for Chișinău, Ploscariu successfully demonstrates how Roma believers used evangelical structures to carve out autonomous spaces of religious, social, and cultural agency. These findings resonate with later studies on Roma Pentecostal revivals but serve as a crucial pre-history that has been largely overlooked in both Roma studies and Romanian religious historiography.

One of the book’s most innovative chapters is Chapter 4, *Motley Repertoires and the Performative Power of Music*, which examines the role of music—choirs, orchestras, communal singing—as a central component of evangelical identity. Ploscariu convincingly argues that music served not only liturgical functions but also as a conduit for crucial political work: it legitimized the evangelical presence in public space, fostered internal cohesion across ethnic lines, and became a visible marker of their modern institutional culture (seminaries, printing houses, orphanages, clinics). Through this lens of “lived religion,” the book demonstrates how everyday practices shaped the evangelical

sense of belonging and identity more profound than formal theology.

The Sectarian Bacteria: Social, Political, Religious Struggles is the title of the fifth chapter, which addresses the growing hostility toward evangelical groups from both state authorities and the Romanian Orthodox Church. Evangelicals were increasingly portrayed as sectarian bacteria threatening national unity—a language that echoed broader European discourses of purity and contamination in the 1930s. The book documents numerous cases of police surveillance, disruption of gatherings, deregistration of associations, and administrative persecution. The Epilogue, *Evangelicals and World War II*, explains how this hostility culminated in 1940, when all “sectarian groups” were declared illegal, and some believers—especially Jews and Roma—were deported to Transnistrian ghettos alongside other persecuted minorities.

Iemima Ploscariu’s book fills an important gap in Romanian religious history, focusing on the religious landscape of interwar Romania and its minorities. Demonstrating the ethnic diversity of evangelical communities, which incorporated Jews, Roma, Germans, Russians, Hungarians, and Romanians, the book challenges the widespread notion that ethnicity and religion were closely interconnected and mutually dependent categories in this period. Thus, the monograph takes its rightful place among similar studies that underline the supranational identity of evangelical groups in the Balkans. It argues compellingly that conversion to evangelical groups created new forms of identity that did not align with state-sponsored nationalist policies. As Ploscariu notes, conversion did not result in assimilation; instead, it often

meant increased marginalization and surveillance. Since the research focuses on borderlands and contested regions such as Bessarabia and Transylvania, the study contributes to the growing literature on national indifference, alternative loyalties, and multi-layered identities in East-Central Europe. The interesting data provided on Roma evangelicals could perhaps be supplemented with some comparative insights on Roma evangelicals in neighboring countries (Yugoslavia, Hungary, Bulgaria) to enhance regional contextualization. Iemima Ploscariu’s monograph represents a valuable contribution to the existing body of scholarship. The book demonstrates that the evangelicals were not marginal “sectarians,” as official narratives claimed, but rather dynamic, transnational, and pluralistic communities that offered an alternative vision of belonging at a moment when Romanian society was moving toward ethnic and ideological homogenization. Ploscariu’s book is a must-read for historians of Romania, scholars of evangelicalism, and anyone interested in the interplay of religion, nationalism, and minority identities in East-Central Europe. It is a unique contribution to the study of minority religious groups in this part of the world.

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