



# A HUNDRED YEARS OF MISSION COOPERATION

The Impact of the International Missionary Council 1921-2021



Editor: RISTO JUKKO

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**World Council  
of Churches**  
Publications

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Editor: Risto Jukko

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## CHAPTER 15

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### ***Report of the Regional Center for Central and Eastern Europe***

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*Cristian Sonea, Dorottya Nagy, Wojciech Kluj,  
Doru Marcu, and Pavol Bargar*

At the invitation of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in collaboration with different associations involved in mission and ecumenical studies, the Regional Center for Central and Eastern Europe convened at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, through its Center for Mission and Nomocanonical Studies (CMNS<sup>1</sup>, in collaboration with the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies (CEEAMS). Its aim was to reflect on how the International Missionary Council (IMC) has influenced mission theology and practice in Central and Eastern Europe, taking into account different contextual realities.

The CMNS is organized as a scientific research unit within the Babeş-Bolyai University and is established within the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Cluj. CMNS is an autonomous structure, without legal personality, with a professional, scientific and educational profile. The headquarters of the Center for Mission and Nomocanonical Studies is located within the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. At the present time, the centre comprises two research departments: the Department of Mission Studies and the Department of Nomocanonical Studies.

CEEAMS is an international and interdenominational platform for reflection on missiological issues and practice established in 2002 as an informal network and facilitates a variety of initiatives in missiology in the region. In 2015, CEEAMS became a legal entity as an association under Hungarian law with missiologists from ten countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Moldavia, Romania, Russia, the United Kingdom and Ukraine) serving as founding members. The majority of them are young missiologists under the age of 40, with various church affiliations

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1 For more details, see “Statut de Organizare și Funcționare a Centrului de Studii Misionare și Nomocanonice,” Center for Mission and Nomocanonical Studies, <https://cmns.ro/statute-of-the-center/>.

such as Methodist, Pentecostal, Orthodox, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Baptist, Reformed, and Lutheran. Through its members, the association functions as a network organization actively stimulating the study of missiology, initiating research projects, and disseminating knowledge on the praxis of mission in Central and Eastern Europe.

Our centre's team and working group include the following people: Fr. Prof. Cristian Sonea, the current director of CMNS; Prof. Dorottya Nagy, CEEAMS President; PhD Pavol Bargár CEEAMS Vice-President; and PhD Doru Marcu. Together we identified other scholars from the region to work on the report and on the study process itself. We tried to select scholars from different countries and belonging to different denominations. Moreover, we organized an international meeting 27–29 September 2021, in a hybrid form, online and on site.<sup>2</sup> It is important to mention the presence with us in Cluj-Napoca of two special guests, Marina Ngursangzeli Behera and Michael Biehl, members of the steering committee of the IMC centenary study process.

According to the general framework of this study, our report is focused largely on historical details. Central and Eastern Europe, as defined by the United Nations Statistics Division, includes the countries of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, and Slovakia, as well as the republics of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 took place at a time when missionary enthusiasm had reached its peak, and the missionary responsibility of the Christians was a clear axiom that had to be fulfilled.<sup>4</sup>

David Bosch pointed out that two events “shattered the confidence that Edinburgh would be a sure victory”<sup>5</sup>: World War I (1914–18) and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The First World War, provoked by “Christian” countries, called into question the ideal of Western civilization as the embodiment of the gospel. The communist revolution of 1918 led to the unravelling of the dream of evangelizing the entire world in one generation.

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2 The people who participated were as follows: Bishop Benedict Vesa (Romania), Daniel Buda (Romania), Dimitrios Keramidis (Greece), Evi Vulgarakis-Pissina (Greece), Klara Csiszar (Romania), Olga Zaprometova (Russia), Parush Parushev, Paul Siladi (Romania), Teofil Stanciu (Romania), Wojcek Kluj (Poland), Cristian Sonea (Romania), Pavol Bargar (Czech Republic), and Doru Marcu (Romania). Also contributing to the final research are Tim Noble (Czech Republic), Laszlo Gonda (Hungary), and Roman Soloviy (Ukraine).

3 “Eastern Europe,” *New World Encyclopedia*, [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Eastern\\_Europe](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Eastern_Europe).

4 Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 11.

5 David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 161.



Despite its shortcomings, the conference at Edinburgh set in motion something extraordinary: the dynamic principle of joint missionary efforts. As a result, the IMC was organized in 1921 at a meeting in Lake Mohonk, New York State, as an organic development of the standing committee established by the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference.

The establishment of a standing committee at the 1910 Edinburgh conference was hailed by many participants as one of the most important events in the history of the mission. With John R. Mott as chair and J. H. Oldham as secretary, a communication and consultation structure of the missionary societies was established.<sup>6</sup> The Continuation Committee met four times between 1910 and 1914. But in 1914, when the work of setting up an international missionary committee was in full swing, war broke out throughout Europe and brought international cooperation to a standstill.

During the war, suspicions between Anglo-American leaders and German societies became so severe that in the spring of 1918, the Continuation Committee was dissolved and an emergency committee formed among the missionary societies, excluding the German ones. Mott and Oldham remained the leaders of the new committee.

After the war, some preliminary meetings took place between the directors of the German missions and the leaders of the emergency committee. In June 1920, in Crans, Switzerland, with four Germans participating as informal observers, the decision was made to replace the emergency committee with a permanent IMC.<sup>7</sup> The first meeting of the council was held in October 1921 in Lake Mohonk, New York, where its organization was completed. Mott was re-elected chair, Oldham was chosen for London, and A. L. Warnshuis for New York. Although the Germans were not present at Lake Mohonk, the German Protestant Committee (*Ausschuss*) was listed among the founding members.<sup>8</sup>

By 1921, even with the aftermath of the war crisis, the Edinburgh directive to form an international missionary committee was finalized. Once German participation was restored and a permanent organization was established,

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6 See World Missionary Conference 1910, *Report of Commission I–VIII* (1910) (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier and New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 134–38.

7 Jan van Lin, *Shaking the Fundamentals: Religious Plurality and Ecumenical Movement* (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi B.V., 2002), 64–65.

8 James L. Cox, “Jerusalem 1928: Its Message for Today,” *Missiology* 9:2 (1 April 1981), 141, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182968100900202>.

the missionary movement once again began to consider the central issues involved in presenting the Christian gospel to non-Christian religions.<sup>9</sup>

In October 1921, at Lake Mohonk in New York, 61 representatives from 14 different countries came for the meeting at which IMC was formed. In the council it was expressly declared that members were to be the national missionary organizations, all of them belonging to the Protestant tradition, not individual churches, as in the later WCC. At the outset, these national organizations were 17 in number.

The functions of the IMC were defined as follows:

1. To stimulate thinking and investigation on missionary questions.
2. To make the results available for all missionary societies and missions.
3. To help coordinate the activities of the national missionary organizations of the different countries and of the societies they represent.
4. To bring about united actions wherever necessary in missionary matters.
5. To help unite Christian public opinion in support of freedom of conscience and religion and of missionary liberty.
6. To help unite the Christian forces of the world in seeking justice in international and inter-racial relations.
7. To be responsible for the publication of *The International Review of Mission* and other such publications, that may contribute to the study of missionary questions.
8. To call a world missionary conference if and when this should be deemed desirable.<sup>10</sup>

Having in mind the fact that the Orthodox churches, as a majority Christian community in Eastern Europe, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant communities from this region did not participate in the conference, our report will present the missiological development between 1921–2021 in three different countries and three different traditions, trying to evaluate if the missionary dynamic corresponds to the functions of the IMC. Before doing that, we consider relevant to briefly present the specificities of the religious situation in Central and Eastern Europe.

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9 James L. Cox, *The Development of A. G. Hogg's Theology in Relation to Non-Christian Faith: Its Significance for the Tambaram Meeting of the International Missionary Council, 1938* (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1977), 227–31. Cox, *Jerusalem 1928: Its Message for Today*, 141.

10 William Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952), 204.

## Old Christian Roots But a Painful History

According to the observation of Gerhard Linn, the region that we are referring to is one whose past and culture have been moulded over a period of almost two millennia by the Christian gospel and holy tradition. Therefore, missionary efforts in these countries cannot be focused on enabling their peoples to come into contact with the word of God, as if they had never heard of it before.<sup>11</sup> They encountered and engaged with the gospel in different stages of their formation, in some cases, the local identity being defined in Christian terms. Even the historical background from our region is common in many parts, but it also has a lot of particularities. There are countries with Orthodox churches, under communism (Russia, Romania, Serbia) or under democratic rule (Greece), Catholic churches, also under communism (Poland, Croatia, Hungary), with Reformed churches (Hungary), but in all these countries there are Christians from other denominations, too. In Albania, for example, the church was outlawed. It can be easy to understand that in most countries from this region the missionary work was very hard to do, if not impossible (in Albania, when religious freedom was restored, only 22 Orthodox priests remained alive).

In the period we are discussing, the history of Christianity in those states has been aggressively “interrupted”: on the one hand, when the Russian empire became the Soviet Union after the revolution of 1917 and the subsequent years of civil war, and, on the other hand, when the states bordering the Soviet Union came under the Soviet sphere of influence in 1945 after World War II.

The Christians in the Soviet Union were viciously persecuted. Thousands of practising Christians and particularly priests and bishops were incarcerated, tortured, and murdered. The active persecution of the Christians and the annihilation of the church’s normative, axiological, and cultural role were made final by the systematic and well-orchestrated attempts to replace Christianity with the ruling party’s atheistic ideology. The youth were indoctrinated from the very beginning by an unequivocally anti-Christian ideology that condemned Christianity for its “unscientific” and reactionary worldview.

The churches in the socialist states outside of the Soviet Union were not subjected to the same extensive persecution, with the sole exception of Albania, where Christianity was completely outlawed. The persecution took on different forms, depending on the country, but overall, every ruling

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11 Gerhard Linn, “Some Reflections on Mission in Central and Eastern Europe,” *International Review of Mission* 80:319–320 (July 1991): 407–408, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000846656&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

communist party attempted to enforce their atheistic ideology and to further the secularization, that in some cases had begun well before World War II. Their efforts to silence the Christian message of hope were never entirely successful, because even though preaching the gospel was confined to the premises of the church, there would always be some fortuitous moments to bear witness to the faith in public.<sup>12</sup>

The missionary work of the church was excluded from public life and only tolerated in ecclesiastical environments, whilst the official state program was that in five decades socialist society would become an atheistic one. Under these circumstances, the mission of the church became almost impossible to carry out. We call this kind of mission a *mission for survival*.

Even so, there is an ambiguity to the relationship between Christianity and communist systems. In almost all communist countries, there had some official contacts between the communist system and clergy/church. This makes the question of mission even more complicated, because in many cases a Western understanding of missionary movements or missionary work went underground. Yet, almost all these countries, through their churches being members of the WCC, officially participated in shaping mission theology through and within the context of the WCC.

The year 1989 brought the fall of the Berlin wall, the fall of the Soviet empire, and the end of an era. According to Ioan Ică Jr, 1989 is the contemporary equivalent of 1453. It marks the beginning of a new world, of a new “empire.” For the Eastern European countries, it was not just the end of the Communist regime or the return to 1917 or 1948, but the beginning of a new world, dominated by values and paradigms different from the traditional or modern ones that they had historically known before. Soon after becoming free from communism, Central and Eastern Europe were plunged into a post-modern civilization which it they have not been able to understand and digest even after three decades. The global economy and scientific and technological development caused profound change in society, culture, and, implicitly, religion. For Eastern Europe, post-communism is increasingly identified with post-Christianity and post-humanism.<sup>13</sup> Following the dissolution of communism, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe went through radical social changes as they tried to replace their former centralized economies with the market economy. This led to high unemployment rates and living costs, which translated to widespread social insecurity for many people who were

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 407–408.

<sup>13</sup> Ioan Ică Jr, “The Modern and Contemporary Orthodox Theology. Moments, Figures, Development, Interpretation”, in *Orthodox Theology in the 20th Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective*, ed. Viorel Ioniță (Basilica, 2013), 92–93.

either unprepared for or simply could not grapple with the new social, economic, and political circumstances of their countries.<sup>14</sup>

In this context, the churches had to adapt and rapidly find a new way of doing mission. On the one hand, they had to recover what had been lost under the communist regime, while on the other hand, they had to offer answers to all the new contemporary challenges.

Another challenge came with the European integration of a large number of the countries from the region, in the form of labour migration. Migration as a phenomenon can be looked at from different perspectives. We must first consider the emigrant, the ones who leaves their country, city, or village, thus leaving a mark on their families, but also on society in general. The families are separated, the cities and villages are depopulated, and some countries from Central and Eastern Europe are subject to a constant demographic decline. In such circumstances, especially in the rural area, the pastoral work of the church consists simply in offering assistance to the elderly or in performing funerals. A second perspective is the one regarding the immigrant, the person who enters a country for a longer or indefinite period of time. Entering a brand-new world, such a person is forced to go through a stage of adaptation that is often very painful. Based on Charles Hirschman's three Rs system of defining immigrants' needs—refuge, respect, resources<sup>15</sup>—Berit Thorbjørnsrud offers an interesting analysis of the new wave of Orthodox immigrants in Norway.<sup>16</sup> Alienation, lack of recognition, and stereotypes about some ethnic groups make immigrants feel vulnerable. Because of this, they tend to stay close to their national communities, as that is where they feel they belong or they feel safe. Consequently, the national consciousness is cultivated and the integration process becomes difficult. They feel they are Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian or Russian and they often think of their situation as being temporary and they plan to return to their home countries sooner or later. This situation can be a reason for the resurrection of the nationalistic attitudes and the rejection of foreigners.

So, looking back at the past 100 years in the Central and Eastern Europe, we become aware of the roots of Christianity in the region, but also of its history.

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14 Linn, "Some Reflections on Mission in Central and Eastern Europe," 408.

15 Charles Hirschman, "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States," *International Migration Review*, 24 July 2018, 1228.

16 Berit Thorbjørnsrud, "'The Problem of the Orthodox Diaspora': The Orthodox Church between Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Universality," *Numen* 62, no. 5–6 (7 September 2015): 642, [https://brill.com/view/journals/nu/62/5-6/article-p568\\_4.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/nu/62/5-6/article-p568_4.xml).

## Three Case Studies

In the historical context mentioned above, the churches passed through a process of missionary revival, then missionary survival, and finally, missionary re-adaptation, all being marked by the political and social changes that had happened over time in the region. In order to have a general idea about those developments, we selected as hallmarks three case studies: the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, and the Romanian Orthodox Church.

### The Hungarian Reformed Church

According to the official minutes of the first meeting of the IMC in 1921, there were no Christian representatives from Hungary, Poland, or Romania present. Most probably, none were invited. At least, from Europe, representatives were present from the following countries: Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and Finland.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1910 and 1948, the most important Hungarian theologians involved in missiology or foreign mission included Gyula Forgács (in 1917 he published *The Theory of Mission*), Pál Podmaniczky (in 1926 he published *An Outline of the Discipline of Mission*), László Ravasz (1882–1967), Jenő Sebestyén (1884–1950), Sándor Virágh (in 1938 he published *Foreign Mission Handbook*), Sándor Makkai (1890–1951),<sup>18</sup> János Victor (in 1941 he published the article “What Is Mission Work?”), and Lajos Jakos. The most important forum for mission was the Hungarian Reformed Foreign Mission Society.

At the same time, two important personalities who marked the missionary path in Hungary must also be noted: John R. Mott, Chair of the IMC, and Johannes C. Hoekendijk, Secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council.

In April 1927, in Hungary there was a worldwide conference on Jewish Mission, in the presence of Mott. He had visited this country in May 1925. Even so, at the second meeting of IMC in Jerusalem in 1928, Hungary was not represented. The following countries from Europe were represented:

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17 *The Minutes of the Committee of the International Missionary Council, Lake Mohonk, NY, USA, October 1-6, 1921*, 1921, 4–8, <http://archive.org/details/wccmissionconf027>; International Missionary Conference, *The Missionary Situation After the War: Notes Prepared for the International Missionary Meeting at Crans, Near Geneva, June 22-28, 1920* (Forgotten Books, 2018), 13–14.

18 Dr. Sándor Makkai was Reformed Bishop of Transylvania, Romania (1926–36), then a professor of Practical Theology at the Reformed Theological Faculty of the István Tisza University of Debrecen (1936–51).

Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, and Switzerland.<sup>19</sup>

According to Anne-Marie Kool, Hungarian theologian Andor Enyedi was invited to participate at the next meeting of IMC, in Tambaram, in 1938, through the intervention of John R. Mott,<sup>20</sup> but in the end he did not take part.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the religious situation in Hungary, there was a mention about the wave of anti-semitism of that time:

There are sixteen million Jews in the world. They are scattered to the ends of the earth and there must be very few countries in which at least one Jewish family is not to be found. Today virtually one-half of the world Jewry is the victim of more or less severe persecution. A great tidal wave of anti-Semitism is sweeping the world. It has already over-run Poland, Romania and Germany. It is spreading extensively in Italy, Hungary and the new Czechoslovakia, and there are now very few lands where its influence is not to be felt.<sup>22</sup>

The second important figure for the relationship between IMC and the Reformed Church in Hungary was Dutch Reformed missiologist Johannes C. Hoekendijk. The first initiative to visit Hungary was around 1947, when Hoekendijk was invited by Benő Békefi. They met in Bossey, at the Ecumenical Centre.<sup>23</sup> In the end, with the intervention of László Makkai, who also took two courses in Bossey, Hoekendijk arrived in Hungary on 10 October 1947, as the secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council (Nederlandse Zendingsraad). He informed the Hungarian churches about the state of the foreign mission cause throughout the world. He pointed to the key role of missions in the renewal of the church. Following World War II some change could be observed: “The issue of the training of missionary candidates stood in the center of the attention of the Mission Association after the Second World War. The increasing number of young people interested in

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19 International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of Christianity: Messages and Recommendations of the Enlarged Meeting of the International Missionary Council Held at Jerusalem, March 24-April 8, 1928* (Jerusalem: International Missionary Council, 1928), 87–95.

20 Dr A. M. Kool, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way: The Hungarian Protestant Foreign Mission Movement (1756–1951)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 552.

21 See the list of participants: *Addresses and Other Records, International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras, December 12th to 29th, 1938* (Oxford, London: University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1939), 181–202.

22 *Ibid.*, 100.

23 See Rev. Laszlo Gonda, “Hoekendijk, Bossey, Hungary,” in *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 25:3 (2005), 38–47.

missionary service and the (mainly financial) difficulties related to sending them to mission schools elsewhere, gave a significant impetus to this matter.”<sup>24</sup>

Hoekendijk paid a second visit to Hungary on 25 October 1948, also on behalf of the WCC/IMC, to discuss the possibility of the Hungarian Reformed Church joining the IMC. In general, Hoekendijk sensed a great upcoming revival in the Hungarian Reformed congregations for the foreign mission cause. An important aspect of Hoekendijk’s visit was therefore to seek together with the Hungarian church a way to initiate the Indonesian Mission.<sup>25</sup> After the memorable visit of J. C. Hoekendijk on 14 November a subcommittee for foreign missions was established within the mission committee. But the real shift came with the establishment of the National Reformed Missionary Working team in July 1948. In a letter of 10 November 1947 to the Netherlands Missionary Council, the General Assembly underlined the importance of the visit of Hoekendijk for developing the interest in foreign missions but thanked him for what he had done in the revival of the church self-consciousness. In other words, the visits of Johannes C. Hoekendijk saw a considerable growth in the interest in foreign missions. A first group of missionary candidates was ready to go to Holland for their training in preparation for Indonesia. But the missionary candidates on their way to Indonesia were not granted permission. For the next years, Hungary would be completely isolated behind the Iron Curtain. It seemed that this time external, political factors had brought a decisive halt to the Hungarian foreign mission cause. The Hungarian foreign mission movement continued, at grassroots level, even behind the Iron Curtain, despite the external hindrances. The internal factors, the commitment of a number of friends of the foreign mission cause, proved to be stronger.

In 1947, between 5 and 24 July, there was another meeting of IMC, in Whitby, Ontario, Canada. No official representative from Hungary, Poland, or Romania was present.<sup>26</sup> This was also the situation with the next meetings of IMC in Willingen (1952) and Ghana (1958).<sup>27</sup>

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24 Kool, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, 829.

25 According to Rev. Gonda, László Makkai “mediated between Hoekendijk and his father about the issue of sending Hungarian Reformed missionaries to Indonesia in cooperation with the Dutch Reformed churches and he translated several lectures of Hoekendijk into Hungarian” (Gonda, “Hoekendijk, Bossey, Hungary,” 41).

26 International Missionary Council, *Minutes of the Enlarged Meeting of the International Missionary Council and of the Committee of the Council: Whitby, Ontario, Canada, July 5-24, 1947* (London; New York: International Missionary Council, 1947), 3–6.

27 *Minutes of the Assembly of the International Missionary Council, Ghana, December 28th, 1957 to January 8th, 1958* (London, New York, Eaton Gate, Fifth Avenue), 10-14.



The relationship with WCC was different. In this case, at the 1st Assembly of WCC in 1948, Hungary was represented by the Lutheran Church (Radvánszky Anton, Vajta Wilmos) and Reformed Church (Nagy Barnabás, Pap Laszlo Istvan, Ravasz Ladislas, Vasady Bela).<sup>28</sup> Also, Poland was represented by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>29</sup> Of course, these churches were represented at all the next WCC assemblies.

### The Catholic Church in Poland

In Poland, the new missionary era came in the period between the First and Second World Wars. Even though this period lasted only 20 years, the range of activity of the missionaries from Poland grew considerably wider. Some new missionary congregations came to Poland at that time and soon sent their members abroad. The Verbists (SVD) went to Papua New Guinea and the Oblates (OMI) to Canada and Ceylon. Certain missionary regions were entrusted to Polish missionaries, for instance, Brokenhill (Rhodesia) to Polish Jesuits (SJ), Szunthefu (China) to Polish Lazarists (CM), Karafuto (Japanese Sakhalin) to Polish Franciscans (OFM). Among better-known missionaries of that time is St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, the Franciscan missionary in Japan. A Polish Verbist, Fr. Franciszek Białas, founded the Catholic University Fu-Yen and the institute Monumenta Serica in Beijing. Among missionary women, the Służebniczki Sisters, with the special permission of the Holy See in 1928, were allowed to go as the first Polish Missionary Sisters to Africa. Altogether, about 500 Poles were sent to missions in this short period.

In this period, we have also the beginnings of Polish academic missiological reflection. The special active centre at that time was Poznań. A big International Missionary Congress took place there in 1927. Among 27 main presentations, 8 were given by speakers from France, Austria, Italy, Belgium, and Germany (among others, Schmidlin, Charles, Freitag, and Bertini). There were also some national missionary congresses. Besides Poznań, some centres of academic reflection on missions started in Lublin, Kraków, Warszawa, and Wrocław (now in Poland, although not at that time). The first Polish missiological magazine started in Poznań: the *Annales Missiologicae*. Two important figures of Catholic Missiology, Karl Müller SVD and Robert Streit OMI, although usually considered as Germans, were born in the territory that now belongs to Poland. The first Polish textbook of missiology was published in 1938, written by Hugo Król CM.

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28 W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held at Amsterdam, August 22nd to September 4th, 1948* (London: SCM Press, 1949), 240.

29 *Ibid.*, 232.

Unfortunately, in 1939 the Second World War started. There was no way to develop academic reflection on missions. The true stagnation of the missionary animation, however, came after 1945, being forced by the Soviet Union. There was no possibility of sending new missionaries abroad. All missionary press and academic missiological activity were stopped. The communists dissolved even the Pontifical Missionary Works.

The dawn of the new missionary and missiological era came in the middle of the 1960s. The year 1965 was a providential one for Polish missions and missiology. On the one hand, the Second Vatican Council was coming to an end, with a reflection on missions in the form of the *Ad gentes* decree. On the other hand, Polish communist authorities finally allowed the departure of the first missionaries to Oceania. Even though missionaries were gradually being allowed to work outside of Poland, publications were still very limited through censorship. It was only in 1983 that the first four missionary magazines were permitted to be published (and still with a limited number of copies). The general opening of Polish missiology was still limited. We were behind the “Iron Curtain.” Some influence came also out of the teaching of John Paul II.

The official lectures of missiology in the contemporary era began in 1969. Feliks Zapłata SVD was their *spiritus movens*. Famous guests from abroad were invited, especially in the first years. Fr. Joseph Masson SJ visited Poland in May 1970. The biggest work of the first period of missiology in Warsaw was a series of books called *Zeszyty Misjologiczne* (Missiological notebooks), which appeared from 1974 to 1986 (12 volumes). Another important publication was a two-volume collection called *Breviarium Missionum*. The core of this first group of leading persons, besides Feliks Zapłata, included such professors as Władysław Kowalak SVD, Antoni Kurek OMI, and Tadeusz Dajczer. The bibliographies of their publications are impressive, especially when we remember that the possibilities of publications at that time were always limited by the state.

After the first group retired, Jarosław Różański OMI became the *spiritus movens* of the new missiological wave in Warsaw. Now we formed a group of the three closest co-workers, together with Tomasz Szyszka SVD and Wojciech Kluj OMI. We managed to create the frame programme of studies of missiology. We decided to base our program generally on the study of theology (not culture, as some wanted). We decided to take a closer look at given continents from theological and cultural perspectives. We organized many conferences. Some of them were dedicated to local issues, but some had international reach and were given in different languages.

Poland now has published many missiological books and even whole series, as well as articles. Book series include *Studia i Materiały Misjologiczne, John Paul II in ...* (in different mission countries), and *European Mission Studies* (in English), and periodicals include *Lumen Gentium, Annales Missiologici Posnanienses*, and *Nurt SVD*.

Missiology in Poland is taught not only in Warsaw. Missiology chairs also exist in some universities, such as Lublin, Katowice, Opole, Kraków, Tarnów, Olsztyn. Generally, all theological faculties in Poland offer courses in missiology. Poland also hosts the Association of Polish Missiologists. Some Polish Missiologists also belong to IAMS or IACM. Wojciech Kluj is currently the president of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists.

At the moment, unfortunately there are no Orthodox or evangelical centres of missiological reflection in Poland, but it is worth recalling that there are already Polish editions of some famous books, such as Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos' *Mission in Christ's Way*, and the *Ecumenical Dictionary of Missions* of Ion Bria. Other books also are available about the missions of Orthodox and evangelical Christians.

## The Romanian Orthodox Church

Some historical landmarks in Romania over the past hundred years have influenced the way of understanding mission. In 1918, following the "great union" of Transylvania uniting with the Kingdom of Romania, a national idea had to be developed, especially in the new Romanian territory. Therefore, in the 1920s, the old Orthodox bishopric of Cluj (1921) and the Orthodox Theological Academy of Cluj (1923) were reestablished. The status of the Catholics was rediscussed (1920, 1927, 1929), and the coming of the evangelicals (called "Repenters") in the Western part of Romania was strongly opposed, facilitating the foundation of a defensive missiology, understood as "Sectology."

At the same time, some centrifugal movements were identified within the Orthodox Church (e.g., the Inochentists<sup>30</sup> and the Old Calendarists<sup>31</sup>) as well as some tentative renewal movements (e.g., the Lord's Army, and the movement animated by Orthodox priest Teodor Popescu, at St Stefan's Church in Bucharest, known as the Stork's Nest). The first, the Lord's Army, is still part of the orthodox community, meanwhile the second known today as the Romanian Evangelical Church, was cast out from the church after 1924 when Teodor Popescu was defrocked.

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30 J. Eugene Clay, "Apocalypticism in the Russian Borderlands: Inochentie Levizor and His Moldovan Followers," *Religion, State and Society* 26:3-4 (1 September 1998), 251-63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637499808431829>.

31 Radu Petre Mureșan, *Stilismul în România: 1924-2011* (Sibiu: Agnos, 2012).

The interwar period created conditions for the emergence on the political scene of a fascist party founded in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu as the Legion of the Archangel Michael (*Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*) or the Legionnaire Movement (*Mișcarea legionară*). Its ideology was ultra-nationalistic, anti-semitic, anti-Hungarian, anti-Roma, and opposed to both communism and capitalism; it also promoted Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Although some researchers considered this movement a kind of clericalist fascism, most researchers consider it a typical fascist movement that tried to subordinate the church. They had an anti-sectarian attitude, and they called the church hierarchy the “Satanic Generation.” They had an open conflict with Vasile Ispir, the first Romanian professor of Missiology from Bucharest, who criticized in the Romanian Parliament Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the movement, for using Christian arguments for supporting the Legionnaire ideology.

After the Second World War, the Orthodox Church became involved in the ecumenical movement from the beginning of its institutional organization. When the WCC was established in 1948, some of the Orthodox churches were among the founding members. Even before this date, in 1920, the ecumenical patriarchate invited all the Orthodox churches to be part of what would become the League of the Churches.

Because of the political situation of the Orthodox churches within the Soviet area of influence, they did not join WCC in 1948. If those interested in the history of the ecumenism in the Orthodox churches from Eastern Europe read the theological journals of the time, they would easily notice a reluctance toward the ecumenical movement and its theology.

The situation changed in 1961, when the Orthodox churches from Eastern Europe joined WCC. The ecumenical theology after 1961 is quite different from the previous one. The most important theologian showing true ecumenical thinking in his work was Dumitru Stăniloae. His theology has influenced the Romanian ecumenical theology ever since.

### *Tendencies in Romanian Orthodox Missiology (1921–2021)*

The process of development of something implies a growth or a change, or becoming more advanced, adapting to the new challenges, or simple being different from a previous stage. The tendencies of Mission Studies in Romania can be traced back to the 1920s when the first chair of missiology called Missionary Guidance and Sectology was open at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest, and Vasile Ispir was appointed its first professor of Missiology. Since then, Mission Studies has had an interesting dynamic. Vasile Ispir’s outstanding work, the *Missionary Guidance Course* (Bucharest, 1929),

was the first missiology handbook in the Romanian Orthodox Church. The author professes his creed and his missionary motivation in the preface of the book. The course is structured in three major parts: “Theory of Mission,” “History of Mission,” and “Christian Mission in the Light of Social Issues.” The seventh chapter of the first part is dedicated entirely to “International Missionary Movements,” where one subchapter is dedicated to the IMC.

The attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church toward the missionary activity was deeply influenced by the sectarian phenomenon, and this led to missiology becoming a theological discipline. The focus of pastoral and sectological interest was the multireligious province of Transylvania. Bishop Grigorie Comșa must be mentioned when discussing issues of the sectological literature: in 1925–35 he was a beloved preacher who wrote and published several collections of anti-sectarian sermons, as well as brochures and articles defending the Orthodox faith in *Telegraful Român* (Romanian telegraph) and *Revista Teologică* (Theological review) from Sibiu, and *Biserica și școala* (Church and school) of Arad.

In 1926 he began to organize “religious missions” in the parishes where the sectarian movements were active in order to counteract their proselytization efforts and influence. This mission lasted for one year, involved two or three priests, and was planned by the dean during the Great Lent, following the guidelines set in Bishop Grigorie Comșa’s book *Mission for the People*, which had just been published. Furthermore, he instituted the post of “eparchial missionary priest,” whose occupant had to take on at least two missionary activities each month and had to prove he was knowledgeable in all matters relevant to his job. In order to make the Orthodox mission more dynamic, he also tried to give impetus to the “lay apostolate in order to prepare the land of the pastoral apostolate.” This initiative materialized in the creation of parish missionary committees and in the setting up of the Religious Propaganda Fund.

The anti-sectarian attitude of the Romanian Orthodox missiology in the inter-bellum era was presented and analyzed by Professor Petru Deheleanu in his exhaustive *Sectology Manual*. Deheleanu taught at the Theological Academy of Arad (1938–49) and was the director of the Missionary Guidance Center of the clergy in Arad (1949–52).<sup>32</sup>

In 1949 and 1975, Orthodox Missiology was reduced to the Missionary Guidelines that students received in the courses where they were integrated, respectively Exegesis or Patristics. In 1975, the course “Missionary Guidance” became autonomous within the Systematic Theology Department and was

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32 Valentin Moșoiu, “The Contribution of Father Professor Ion Bria to the Development of the Romanian Missionary Theology in the 20th Century,” *Teologia* 3 (2019), 154–55.

taught together with Dogmatics in the form of a course on “Dogmatics and Missionary Guidance” by professor Dumitru Radu. At this stage, we should mention Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, whose theology has influenced Romanian ecumenical theology ever since. Stăniloae developed the concept of “open sobornicity,” which might be a point to focus on as a key term that synthesizes the openness of the Orthodox to the others (members of the other denominations).

In 1977, the discipline became “Missionary Guidance and Ecumenism.” Animated by a vivid desire to give a Christian response to the existential problems of the contemporary world, Professor Ion Bria succeeded in consolidating a missionary theology. The following are a few of his contributions to the field:

- 1) The triadological nature of all ecclesial and human existence.
- 2) The Christological character of humanity and the mission of the Church, for this is nothing more than a confession of the Logos’s centrality in all creation. The understanding of Christ as God’s Logos was doubled by the rediscovery of the doctrine of the “cosmic” Logos.
- 3) The liturgical orientation of the Orthodox mission. This represents Bria’s most important contributions to the development of the missionary theology of the 20th century. He strongly emphasized the indissoluble relationship between the church, mission, and the holy sacraments, especially the holy eucharist. In this respect, he paid great attention to the phrase “Liturgy after Liturgy,” which brings together charity, spirituality, theological education, social ethics, and Christian political discipline.
- 4) The optimistic view of today’s socio-cultural realities. This is emphasized in Bria’s command for the realization of a “Christian culture.”<sup>33</sup>

When Bria was co-opted in WCC, the discipline was entrusted to the substitute lecturer Dr Petre I. David. He would devote himself with all his conscientiousness and dedication to the studies of sectology and to the preparation of students in this regard. He remains the dominant figure in the sphere of Romanian Orthodox Sectology, both before and after 1989. He is

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 165–67.

the author of the famous *Christian Guide* published in a first edition in 1987 and re-edited several times (see, for example, the 1994 edition).

*Present situation in Romanian Orthodox Church*

According to Cristian Sonea, the missionary formation in the Romanian Orthodox Church has been shaped by the historical context. Mission was sequentially one of resistance, recognition, survival, then defense, the latter being understood as sectology. As a result, the present missionary formation vacillates between a modern paradigm and an antiquated one—and this perfectly reflects contemporary Romanian society, caught between tradition and postmodernism. The Basilica Publishing House Basilica of the Romanian Patriarchy published an *Orthodox Missiology Handbook* in 2021 that comprises texts signed by almost all Romanian Orthodox missiologists. The missiology curriculum may seem peculiar at a cursory glance: innovative topics (such as the trinitarian foundation of mission, the mission as Christian witness, and gospel and cultures) stand side by side with defensive and conservative themes (such as the principle of proselytism or the sectarian movements). Furthermore, wider topics such as interreligious or interfaith dialogues might appear to a non-Orthodox missiologist as completely foreign to the theology of mission or practice. However, all these different aspects are relevant to the theological understanding of mission. They are deeply connected to the realities of Romanian parishes and are necessary in the missionary formation of the future priests.

The aim of this curriculum is to make people aware of the role Christian mission plays in our current society, to help them acquire the skills necessary for the theological understanding and the interpretation of reality, to develop the capacity to engage in missionary efforts in various socio-cultural settings, and to be open to a dialogue with culture, science, and other Christian denominations and religions.<sup>34</sup>

The task of Romanian missiology is to analyze and interpret in a theological key the connection the church has with contemporary society and the role Orthodox theology still has to play in Romanian culture, all while bearing in mind the Byzantine heritage and its particular relation between Church and state. Romanian Orthodoxy can be seen as a bridge spanning the distance between East and West, by virtue of its geography and its unique Latin roots; in the present socio-political context, the Romanian Orthodox Church can

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34 Cristian Sonea, “The Missionary Formation in the Eastern Orthodox Theological Education in Present Day Romania,” *Transformation* 35:3 (2018), 150–53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90026383>.

redefine the relation between secular and ecclesiastical powers from a missionary angle.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

The period considered by the IMC centenary study process (1921–2021) is characterized by successive changes of perspective in the Christian mission. If after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910 there was a dominant concern for the evangelization of the world, seen as a missionary imperative, after the crisis caused by the First World War, the foundations were laid for a mission with a sociological dimension, denouncing secular ideologies as the greatest enemy of the Christian mission. Then, after the integration of the IMC into the WCC structures in 1961, the emphasis fell on the relationship between the mission and the church. This period is also characterized by the shift of the Christological dimension of the Christian mission toward a trinitarian dimension (seen at the Willingen conference in 1952).

Although the churches of Central and Eastern Europe, especially the Orthodox ones, were not part of the IMC until after its integration into the WCC (New Delhi, 1961), the reports of the World Missionary Conferences nevertheless provoked in the region the beginning of a complex process of reflection on the mission in the modern world, as we have seen. This process of reflection then represented the starting point for expanding and elaborating missionary theologies in the second half of the 20th century. The missionary theologies from Central and Eastern Europe have tried to connect with the global missionary directions, while at the same time, rising to the local missionary challenges.

The Regional Center for Central and Eastern Europe involved in the IMC centenary study process is in itself a proof of the diversity of the missionary challenges present in the region. It brought together Eastern, Central and Western theologies of mission and provided a place and a space for missiological encounters. During this working together, we found out that there is still much to be learned from each other in terms of terminology (Latin versus Greek), sources (historiographies of mission), and practices.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.



With its sister volume, this book is a must for anyone, academic, pastor, or mission practitioner, interested in knowing how Christianity was considerably expanded in the 20th century, through churches' mission and missionary work, and was transformed into World (or Global) Christianity.

For over 30 years now, the majority of Christians have been living in the global south, and Africa is the world's most Christian continent. Many churches in the global south are growing strongly today. One contribution to this phenomenon in the 20th century has been the International Missionary Council, a permanent ecumenical structure founded in 1921 in Lake Mohonk, USA, to foster unity and mission cooperation. The book goes deep in answering two questions: What had happened in mission because of the existence of the IMC and its historical successor, the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, since 1961—and what might have happened anyway, without a global ecumenical body such as the IMC and the WCC/CWME?

The book is divided into two parts. The first part contains the introduction—background reading for the reports of the study process produced by the IMC Centenary Study process. The second part of the book includes 13 regional reports. Contributions from all over the world analyse and evaluate the impact—or the absence thereof—of the IMC and the CWME from 1921 until our day.



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