

The 'Rediscovery' of Scripture and its Impact on the Romanian Christian Context at the Beginning of the 20th Century

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Abstract

Scripture has always played a crucial role in the renewal of the churches throughout the history of Christianity and this was seen particularly well during the Reformation. This paper offers another example of the enduring power of the Scripture to change lives and renew communities. It looks at the impact of the 'rediscovery' of the Bible on the Romanian Christian context at the beginning of the 20th century, by presenting the life and influence of three key Orthodox priests, Dumitru Cornilescu, Dumitru Popescu and Iosif Trifa. Particularly, it explores the foundation, establishment and the theology of the Lord's Army – a unique renewal movement within the Orthodox Churches.

Key words: *Bible, church renewal, Protestantism, Lord's Army, Romanian Orthodox Church*

Introduction

It is a truism to say that for the 16th century Reformation and for the subsequent Protestantism, the Scripture represented "the central focus of Protestant demands for [a continuous] reform and reformulation of doctrine and practice in the church."¹ With the Reformation, the Scripture receives a unique position of authority – as "the prior norm of doctrine, the source of all necessary doctrines,

1 Richard A. Muller, "Scripture," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Reformation*, vol. 4. edited by Hand J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36.

sufficient in its teachings for salvation.”² The Scripture represented the Word of God given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thus possessing and expressing the truth with “Certainty and Clarity of the Word” – as the title of an early book by Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) illustrates: *De certitudine et claritate verbi Dei liber* (1524).³ Finally, fundamental for the Protestant emphasis on Scripture – beyond but closely related to its divinity and consistency as well as its authoritative and self-interpreting nature – was the concept of the centrality of Christ to the entire Scripture: the ultimate focus and the subject matter of the Scripture is the work of God in Christ to which the meaning of biblical texts point.⁴

The topic of this paper, however, is neither strictly about the nature and substance of Scripture, nor about its inspiration, divinity or authority, though it will indirectly touch on some of these important issues. Rather, I propose a far limited purpose, namely to look at a particular historical period in the life of the church in Romania at the beginning of 20th century, namely, the phenomenon that could be called a “rediscovery” of the central role of the Scripture for the everyday life of the believers. This led, in its turn, to a unambiguous affirmation of the centrality of the person of Christ. There was a remarkable and distinctive movement of this double emphasis – Scripture and Christ – at the beginning of 20th century in Romania which had two major influences in the Romanian context. On the one hand, it represented the foundation for a spiritual renewal within the Orthodox Church – via *Oastea Domnului*, i.e. The Army of the Lord – a unique movement among the Orthodox churches, which has grown continually ever since and today it affects some more than one million people in all parts of Romania. The Lord’s Army represents, for many, a real hope for an authentic renewal within the Romanian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, a new translation of the Bible, in the same period, in a contemporary, very accessible Romanian language, contributed substantially to the growth of a particular segment of Protestantism, that what in Romania is called Neo-Protestantism –

2 Ibid. The unique authority of Scripture was conceived in terms of its attributes: truth, certainty, infallibility, sufficiency, and perfection. Particularly relevant was the essential assumption among the reformers that there can be no other human authority above the biblical text as the norm or standard for the interpretation of Scripture but Scripture itself.

3 To be sure, there was not a total identification of the words of the text with the Word of God – a distinction was made between the word as substance or meaning (rex) of Scripture and the particular words (verba) of the biblical text. However, the divine nature of Scripture was clearly evidenced through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit and also through other intrinsic and extrinsic evidences.

4 See Richard A. Muller, “Scripture,” particularly 38-39.

which include the new evangelical churches⁵, with the three most significant churches being the Pentecostals, Baptists and Brethren. And this is significant indeed because even though the Reformation reached Transylvania at the very beginning, in the 16th century – it did not have a direct impact on the Romanian population until much, much later. Both of these major consequences of the 'rediscovery' of the centrality of Scripture for the life of the church are significant developments for the Romanian Christianity and they deserve to be explored adequately. However, the limited space of this paper allows me to develop in some detail only one of these major influences and I will concentrate on the unique and remarkable renewal movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church – the Army of the Lord.

The structure of the paper is simple: after giving a brief sketch of the roots of Protestantism in Transylvania, I develop the argument by looking closely at three key figures that contributed substantially to a "re-discovery" of Scripture at the beginning of 20th century in Romania, namely to Dumitru Cornilescu, Dumitru Popescu and Iosif Trifa, with some more space to Trifa the founder of the new movement. A separate chapter will be devoted to the foundation, establishment and the theology of the Lord's Army. A short section on the Orthodox Church's response to these developments will be presented just before the conclusion. It is my hope that by making this material available for a wider audience in English language this paper will contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of that particular segment of the religious phenomenon in Romania.

Transylvania and the Historical Roots of Protestantism in Romania

Historically, the Reformation entered very early in the territory that is today Romania. In the 1520s Luther's teachings were already circulating among the German speaking population of Transylvania. Those familiar with the complex history of this part of Europe will know that Transylvania made no exception sharing fully in the convoluted developments of events in this area, having itself a very reach and intricate history.

Today's Transylvania is a province of Romania, where together with

5 For all of these churches the Scripture represented a central cornerstone for their faith and practice from the very beginning, and that is why a closer look at that period of time that made it possible for Romanian people to read and understand the Bible in their own language, would help one have a better understanding of the beginnings and dynamics of Neo-Protestantism in Romania.

Romanians lives, as it did for centuries, a large Hungarian minority.⁶ It would be simply impossible to give even a short outline of the history of Transylvania.⁷ The major difficulty, however, lies not in the ‘intense’ or ‘intricate’ history of the region, as it lies in the fact that there are, in a sense, two historical traditions of Transylvania: a *Romanian*⁸ and a *Hungarian*⁹ tradition.¹⁰ The limited space I have for our topic allows me only to point out some major historical events and developments in Transylvania during the Reformation.

In the sixteenth century the principate of Transylvania gained political autonomy and soon became an important center for Protestant Reformation and “one of the first areas of Europe to practice religious tolerance.”¹¹ The spread of Protestantism in Transylvania was remarkable given the fact that it was ruled by Catholics (with a short exception period, 1563-1571, ruled by Janos Zsigmond

- 6 The 2002 census showed the Hungarian population to be in total 1,434,377, which is 6,6% of the Romanian population.
- 7 John Cadzow, *Transylvania: the roots of ethnic conflict*, pp. 10-36, needed 26 pages only for a simple list of “A Chronology of Transylvanian History” and Gabor Barta *History of Transylvania*, pp. 745-762, needed 17 pages for the same purpose.
- 8 For a Romanian perspective on Transylvania see Constantin Botoran, *Transylvania and the Romanian-Hungarian Relationships*; Nicolae Endroiu, *Nostalgia for an empire of sad memory: the Austro-Hungarian monarchy*; Ioan Suta, *Transylvania: himera ungarismului iredentist [Transylvania: the chimera of Hungarian irredentism]*; D. Prodan, *Transylvania and again Transylvania*; Constantin Giurescu, *Transylvania in the History of Romania*; Stefan Pascu, *A History of Transylvania*. For a complete bibliographical data and for more relevant titles for this particular perspective on Transylvania see the bibliography at the end.
- 9 See, for example, the following books in English for a Hungarian perspective on Transylvania: Michael-Titus C., *In Search of “Cultural Genocide” and The Magyar File*; N. M. Doodchild, *Hungarian realities in Romania: documentaries*; Lajos Kazar, *Facts Against Fiction*; George Schopflin, *Romania’s Ethnic Hungarians*; Istvan Lazar, *Transylvania: a short history*; Louis L. Lote, ed., *Transylvania and the theory of Daco-Roman-Romanian Continuity*. For a complete bibliographical data and for more relevant titles for this particular perspective on Transylvania see the bibliography at the end.
- 10 An extremely important observation we need to make here is that the primary question one needs to ask is not which of the two traditions is more ‘objective,’ or closer to reality. Rather, one should first understand the truth that, whether true or false, it is these traditions that have fundamentally shaped the thinking, understanding, and political consciousness of the two people in Transylvania. It is with this reality in mind that any discussion on various religious, socio-political or cultural issues in and about Transylvania should begin. It is thus remarkable to find not few scholarly works dealing with this area, particularly from the West, that take a very partial view, using sources and accounts of only one of the two historical traditions available. The reference in my next footnote is such an example.
- 11 Peter Schimert, “Transylvania” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Reformation*, vol. 4. edited by Hand J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 170.

Zapolya¹² – who embraced a Unitarian doctrine). Beginning with the acceptance of Lutheranism in the Saxon communities, followed by a destruction of the Catholic hierarchy and culminating with the diversification of the Protestant groups, Transylvania had initially only implicitly recognized other confessions than Catholics but slowly the emerging Protestant majority was accommodated so that a legal toleration was established among the four different religious communities: Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Unitarians. The Romanian people continued to adhere to the Orthodox Church.¹³ Even though this was a partial toleration, for those times it was remarkable phenomenon about which Peter Schimert makes a valuable observation:

Although the spirit of religious toleration did not master every subsequent disagreement over religion, the spirit survived and safeguarded the continued existence of various Christian confessions in Transylvania.¹⁴

It is well known that the Reformation affected primarily, if not exclusively, the German and Hungarian population of Transylvania and that is why the Reforma-tion did not have a stronger and lasting impact on the Romanians, respectively, on the Orthodox Church. What is less known, however, is the fact that, initially, the Reformation had also an impact on at least some of the Romanian people and that there are evidences according to which in the 17th century there existed some Romanian Calvinist communities – and, extraordinarily, there is even today a Romanian Calvinist church in the village of Turdaş – as it is excellently argued and documented in a exceptional research by George Hancock-Ştefan intitled *The Impact of Reformation on the Romanian people from 1517-1645*.¹⁵ He argues persuasively not only that some of the Romanians became Protestants, but also that, they have contributed

12 Zapolya had a very important role and contributed substantially to the establishment of religious toleration. Shortly before his death in 1571 he declared formally that “no one should be harmed on account of his confession.” Schimert, “Transylvania,” 172. Schimert makes another pertinent observation: “Religious toleration came to Transylvania not because most people subscribed to a theory of toleration as socially beneficial, but because practical necessity compelled toleration of other religious viewpoints.” Ibid., 171.

13 We should probably note here that, though remarkable for that time, this was still a partial toleration since the Romanian people in Transylvania at that time had not equal rights, neither as a political group to serve in the ruling diet nor as a religious group.

14 Peter Schimert, “Transylvania,” 172.

15 The author presents a strong argument in defence of this impact and offers an excellent study on the various influences that the Reformation had on the Romanian people. See George Hancock-Ştefan, *Impactul Reformei asupra românilor între 1517-1645* [*The Impact of Reformation on the Romanian people from 1517-1645*], (Oradea: Editura Cartea Creştină, 1993).

significantly to the development of the Romanian people in multiple ways: by promoting and using the Romanian language in the church, by developing educational, cultural and linguistic centers of a Latin language – thus causing an awakening of the Romanian consciousness – and by forcing the Romanian Orthodox Church to take clear attitude on a number of important doctrinal issues.¹⁶ Without denying or minimizing the direct impact of Reformation on the Romanian people, it is also true that, for the next two centuries (18th-19th), the Reformation did not have a lasting theological effect among the Romanians (there is today not a single Romanian Reformed church). It will be only at the beginning of the 20th century that the Protestant spirit and emphases will begin to influence and affect the Romanian people. There was, indeed, a particular and significant period for the life of the church in Romania in that time and to that we will now turn our attention.

The “Re-discovery” of the Scripture in the Romanian Orthodox Church: Key Figures

In the first half of 20th century the Romanian Orthodox Church experienced a good deal of what could be called an “internal unrest!” Priests, lay people, and many intellectuals were dissatisfied with their “empty” Christian life. Searching for a deeper and more fulfilling faith they discovered for themselves the essence of the gospel as it is written in the Scriptures, and have experienced a new vitality of their Christian spiritual life, due particularly to a close and living relationship with Jesus Christ. Although the number of people directly and notably involved in this process was very large, I will refer only to the activity of three Orthodox priests whose influence has been extremely significant ever since: Dumitru Cornilescu, Tudor Popescu, and Iosif Trifa.

16 Hancock-Stefan brings excellent evidences to prove that the Romanians who converted to Protestantism did it motivated by religious and theological factors and not by economic and political advantages. Today this truth is denied by the Orthodox Church which likes to present itself as the only constant factor in the life of the nation and the sole contributor to the maintenance, development and consolidation of the Romanian language and nation. The very fact that the Orthodox Church was compelled to give numerous theological responses to Protestantism, coupled with other undeniable and established facts from that period, represent clear evidences against the classical interpretation by the Orthodox Church vis-à-vis the impact of the Reformation on the Romanian people.

3.1. Dumitru Cornilescu¹⁷ (1891-1975) and the Modern Romanian Translation of the Bible¹⁸

A grandson of Orthodox priests, Cornilescu felt attracted to the priesthood and so decided to study theology at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Bucharest. Yet, as a student of theology he was discontent with the teaching and the rituals of the church. With the permission and help of the director of the Seminary he read and translated many Christian books from English, French, and German.¹⁹ These books spoke of a Christian life completely different from that which he had experienced. Becoming very impressed and enthusiastic about this new life he decided the purpose and ministry of his life: "This will be my job when I will be a priest: to make known this life to our people."²⁰

Cornilescu noticed that all the books he read spoke about a daily reading of the Scripture. Presuming that this is the mystery of the "new life" he decided to read it every single day in order to find the secret of the new life. But after a few days he got disappointed. Here is how his biographer, Maianu, describes his reaction:

At the beginning he did not like the Bible. He was very disappointed. The Romanian translation of the Bible available in that time was so difficult that he was not able to understand it. 'How is it possible to praise so much the Bible, he asked himself, since it does not have anything nice or interesting in it.' But as soon as he started to read it in a foreign language, he understood it and was very satisfied.²¹

17 There are three major sources that I'm using for the life and activity of Dumitru Cornilescu. First is his own testimony: "Cum m-am întors la Dumnezeu și cum am spus și altora" ("The way I have turned to God and the way I told to others"). Then it is I. Țon's *Credința Adevărată* (*The True Faith*), and Paul Negruț's published PhD dissertation *Revelație, Scriptură, Comuniune: O interogare asupra autorității în cunoașterea teologică* (*Revelation, Scripture, Communion: An interrogation upon the authority in the theological knowledge*). Unless otherwise noticed by direct quotation the information I'm giving here comes from these sources.

18 I will refer briefly only to the main aspects of the activity and influence of Dumitru Cornilescu. For a better and larger treatment of the subject, in English language see Ioana Constantineanu, *The Modern Romanian Translation and Reformation Attempts within the Romanian Orthodox Church*, unpublished thesis, presented to the Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia for the Associate of Theology Degree, 1997.

19 Among the writers whom he read were: F. Thomas, F. Bettex, R. A. Torrey, S. D. Gordon, J. H. M. Conkey, G. Muller, C. H. Mackintosh, and others (Negruț, *Revelație*, p. 121).

20 Cornilescu, "Cum m-am întors," in Țon, *Credința Adevărată*, p. 103.

21 As quoted by Negruț, *Revelație*, p. 122. This quotation and all the others from the Romanian authors represent my own translation. Cornilescu's comment on the poor quality of the Romanian translation of the Bible raises indeed the question of the place of the Bible in the life of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 20th century.

There were two important things that determined Cornilescu to start a new translation of the Bible: first, the lack of clarity of the Bible version used by the Orthodox Church and second, his strong conviction that it is only through the people's direct access to the Bible that the religious life of the Romanian people could be improved. When he started to translate the Bible, he was very confused by many Greek and Hebrew words and concepts which were in contradiction with his beliefs at that moment. At that time Cornilescu also experienced many contradictory feelings, which guided him to a new understanding of soteriology and of the relation between the Bible and the church, an understanding closer to the Protestant understanding of these doctrines.²² One of the things that surprised him was that the Bible talks so much about sin, and this seems to be something very hateful in God's eyes. Cornilescu said:

All the time I thought that sin is a terrible thing. But if somebody would have asked me 'what is sin,' I would have probably answered: 'if someone kills somebody, he commits sin. The killer is a sinner and his place is in prison.' But when I read the word of Matthew 5:22, 'But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment,' I was shocked thinking that all of us are angry every day.²³

Reflecting on these and similar texts, two concepts were being fixed in Cornilescu's mind: "imputed sin" and "imputed justice." By these terms he explained the relation between sin and death of humanity, on the one hand, and the lack of sin and the death of Christ as the basis of justification by faith, on the other. For the first time in the history of the Romanian translation of the Bible, Cornilescu uses the expression, "to be counted as righteous," in order to communicate the idea of "imputed" righteousness. He also changes all the expressions which contained the synergical concept of salvation. He changes the active voice of the verb used in the Orthodox translation regarding redemption, salvation, justification, and sanctification, with the passive voice in order to emphasize that salvation is the work of God and not of humans.²⁴

No one would be surprised to read his testimony according to which while working at his translation Cornilescu experienced a real conversion. He specifies in his "history" the steps that he followed:

I see that there is a **forgiveness of sins**, that Christ died for me, so forgiveness is for my sins as well. Praise the Lord!... And so I took for me the forgiveness

22 See A. Maianu, *Life and Work of Dumitru Cornilescu* (pp. 19-24), in Ton, pp. 108-115.

23 As quoted by Negruț, p. 129.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

of sins. This was the first step. The second step when I discovered that we do not have a dead Savior but a **living Savior**, with whom we can come into a relationship. ... The last step was when I discovered that He is also **Lord**, ... and so I accepted Him as my Lord and Master. ... This is the way I came to God. Now I knew I was born again and I was a child of God. I knew that from now on everything must be renewed in my life.²⁵

Regarding the relationship between church and Bible, Cornilescu remarked that in the Orthodox understanding and practice, the Bible is not the “book of the people” but the “book of the institution.” In this way it was so integrated into the liturgy that nobody who was not an expert in this area, could make a difference between what is tradition and what is the Word of God.²⁶

Cornilescu decided to put the Bible in the hands of people and after that, to encourage them to read it and to live in conformity with its teaching. After six years of hard work, the Bible was ready for printing, and so it was published by the Romanian Evangelical Society in 1921. Not very long time after that, the British Biblical Society adopted Cornilescu’s translation as its standard text and after its revision in 1924, 100,000 copies of Cornilescu’s version were published every year since then.²⁷ As a matter of fact, Alexandru Maianu, the author of a biography of Cornilescu, estimated that between 1921-1981 the British and Foreign Bible Society, printed around five million copies of Cornilescu’s Bible.

Implications of Cornilescu’s Translation of the Bible

For Cornilescu, the Bible represented the source of authority both for theology and practice. Therefore, as we have already mentioned, he decided to spread the Bible among the laity, and to encourage them to read and study it regularly. Since in the Orthodox tradition the Bible and its interpretation belong to the Church, individual believers have not been personally concerned with the message and interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, Cornilescu’s hope was that if people would read the Bible for themselves they could have the same experience of conversion as he had had. And indeed, he found out that many people were looking for “something more” than simple formalism and legalism in the Church. So, in addition to the official liturgical services of the Orthodox Church, Cornilescu organized in his own house regular small groups for the purpose of studying the Bible. His ideas and goals were accepted and supported by another Orthodox priest, Tudor Popescu, together with whom they would continue having these

25 Cornilescu, “Cum m-am intors,” in Țon, *Credinta Adevarata*, pp. 106-107.

26 Maianu (p. 8), in Negruț, p. 131.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

house Bible study groups.

Cornilescu's work had an important success in Romania, not only because of his theology, but also because of the favorable social circumstances in Romania at that time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a noteworthy openness of Romanian people toward the religious phenomenon. The Orthodox Church was in a real moral decline and therefore a large segment of its members were ready to find the answer to their questions and spiritual needs in other Christian movements present at that time. So, with the spread of the Protestant teachings about the authority and sufficiency of the Scripture, people started to be interested in reading the Scripture but the Orthodox Church could not satisfy this new interest, because its difficult translation, the high price of a Bible, and the scarce number of copies available. On the contrary, Cornilescu's version of the Bible, translated into a contemporary language, was very easy to read and understand by the common people, thus resulting in a very large distribution.

Because of the Cornilescu's wide distribution of the Bible among the Orthodox people, the Orthodox Church took very strong repressive actions in order to stop this phenomenon. With the help of the state, the church started to persecute and to interdict all the other religious movements existing at that time. However, despite its desperate efforts, the Orthodox Church did not succeed in this attempt.

I would close this brief presentation of Dumitru Cornilescu with this reminder: not only did he experience a new life but he formed around him many groups of people whom he also helped to experience this new life. They gathered together, usually in Sundays, for prayer and Bible study. Even though Cornilescu's major influence toward a renewal within the Orthodox Church has been through his translation of the Bible,²⁸ he was also directly involved in organizing many home groups where many Orthodox have experienced a renewal of their spiritual life. The Orthodox priest Tudor Popescu and his movement represent such an example of renewal began within the Orthodox Church.

3.2. Tudor Popescu (1882-1963), the Preacher of the New Life in Christ

Tudor Popescu, an Orthodox priest, was among the people that were directly influenced by Dumitru Cornilescu's new life as well as by his new translation of the Bible. As soon as he was convinced himself of the necessity of a new life

28 Later on when other renewal movements started, as those of Tudor Popescu, they used exclusively Cornilescu's translation of the Bible, which, in fact, made it possible for these movements to grow so fast. As a matter of fact, Cornilescu's Bible had an immense impact and contribution to the spread of the Neoprotestant churches in Romania. The Orthodox Church, however, soon rejected it as being "Protestant" and did not allow their people to read it.

in Christ, in a close relationship with him, Popescu started to preach this in his church. He insisted on the Scripture as the ultimate authority for doctrine and life. He preached that salvation comes only by faith in Jesus Christ. His ultimate concern was to bring souls to Christ, as he says:

The only thing I am concerned with is to bring souls to Christ. I say to every one: You are a lost sinner. Christ died for sinners in order to save them. Do you truly believe in Him? You are then saved. You don't believe? You are lost. What is your attitude toward this Jesus? Do you receive him as a Savior and Master of your life? It is on this that your eternal life depends. Decide to follow him, or otherwise stop to name yourself with his name! This is the content of every one of my sermons. ...I did not and I will not preach but the crucified Christ, and our life with him. ... The only thing that matters is to bring souls to Christ.²⁹

His preaching activity was very successful so that large crowds of people received his message and were transformed by it. He took seriously and actualized for his hearers all the vital questions that the Orthodox church did not, such as: the eternal life, the judgment of God, the nature of God as it is revealed in the Scriptures, one's position toward God, sin, forgiveness, salvation, Jesus Christ, faith, Bible, personal relationship with Jesus, the Gospel. Of course, he reinterpreted all these issues from a biblical perspective and from his new life-in-Christ experience, thing which, ultimately, caused his expulsion from the Orthodox Church under the accusation of being "heretic." Yet his desire was to live and "to work within the church in which I was born and in which I grew."³⁰

Moreover, together with Cornilescu, Tudor Popescu decided to publish a journal named *Adevarul Crestin (The Christian Truth)*, in order to provide a systematic biblical teaching for their new converts. In all their teaching and writings they emphasized the authority of the Bible over the Church and its Tradition and therefore they started to remove those parts from the liturgy that, according to their new understanding of things, were in contradiction with the Biblical teaching.³¹ All these changes caused a strong reaction from the Orthodox, so that finally, both Cornilescu and Popescu were expelled from the Orthodox Church.

Being expelled from the Orthodox Church, and with the help of the same princess Calimachi who had helped Cornilescu, Tudor Popescu built a new

29 Tudor Popescu in his defense letter to the Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as quoted by Țon, *Credinta Adevarata*, pp. 122-123.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

31 Maianu (p. 59), in Negruț, p. 133.

house and used it as an independent church where the accent was not anymore on forms and pre-established rituals, but on the fellowship of the believers and the preaching of the Word of God. Following his example and under Popescu's direction, there were many other such gatherings that were formed especially in the central and southern part of Romania, churches that took his name, "Tudorian" churches. These churches were independent until the communists took over the political power. Thereafter, they had to come under the umbrella of one of the recognized denominations. Thus, the Tudorian Churches joined the Brethren denomination. However, even though they were formally within this denomination, the Tudorian churches preserved their own teachings and practices. One such practice that differentiated the Tudorian church from the Brethren church was that the Tudorians continued to practice infant baptism, while the Brethren practiced adult baptism administered to those who believed and confessed Jesus Christ.

It was only because of the rejection and condemnation by the Orthodox Church of these two priests that determined their separation from Orthodoxy and the creation of independent churches. Who knows where would have the Orthodox Church been had it not rejected and expelled these two great modern 'prophets.' However, despite of its desperate and violent attacks and numerous attempts to stop it, the Orthodox Church could not combat the third wave of spiritual renewal initiated, established, and developed by another Orthodox priest, Iosif Trifa, the founder of the Army of the Lord.

3.3. Iosif Trifa (1888-1938) and the Origin of the Romanian Lord's Army³²

Iosif Trifa was born in 1888, in Certege, the district of Turda, not far from Cluj-Napoca. He studied theology at the Orthodox Theological Institute in Sibiu. Upon his graduation in 1910, he returned in his home village as a school-master, and then was ordained as a priest in the local Orthodox church. The first essential thing that Trifa encountered, and which had a tremendous impact for his future great activity, was that he "discovered" the Scriptures. No comment can replace Trifa's own testimony of how he came to "know" the Bible. Therefore I will let him describe it:

I think it will be useful if I will tell to others how I knew the Bible. To be honest I should confess from the very beginning that I didn't know well the Bible when I finished the Seminary. On the contrary, the responsibility for this

32 For this chapter and, in fact, for the whole present work I'm grateful to Nicolae Pavel, a leader of the Lord's Army, who made available for me his diploma work, *The Theology of Iosif Trifa*, from which I obtained valuable and unique information, otherwise almost impossible to have, regarding the life, theology, and ministry of Iosif Trifa. Of course, the most important aspect of his work is that I could have "access" to many essential writings of Trifa.

said reality was resting neither on the shoulders of my beloved professors nor on mine, their student. Rather the whole responsibility was due - and is still due - to another circumstance: the unfit outfit of the Cyrillic characters with which the Bible we used in the Seminary was dressed. This old cloth should be changed today without any delay, otherwise it will prevent again and again our young theologians and priests to penetrate into the beautiful treasures of the Bible. [...]

I have immediately realized that the ignorance of the Scriptures is an impossible situation for me, a minister and a preacher of the Word! So in one morning I woke up with an irrevocable decision to end with this state of affairs and to begin to learn the Scriptures. I have procured an edition of the New Testament with Latin characters, the Psalms, and the Old Testament, I have bound them together in the best possible way and then I started to study them. [...]

My whole strength, my whole value as a Christian, as a pastor, is taken out from the Bible and it is given to me by the Bible. As to a Christian it gives me the peace of my soul that nobody can take away or disturb. It gives me the enthusiasm, courage and love in my heart that nobody can put them out. It gives me the strength to bear a fight, to pass a difficulty, to overcome a sin.

As to a pastor, it gives me everything I need to shepherd the souls. In all my pastoral duties the Bible accompanies me, enlightens me, advises me, and strengthens me. It gives me the thrill, dimension, and responsibility of my ministry of the gift that I was invested with. It gives me the warmth of my heart and the light of my mind in order to proclaim continually the Word. It gives me the enthusiasm and love, the continuous anxiety and pastoral unrest, of making Jesus known by any means.

The Bible represents my daily relationship with the Savior. Whenever I open and read it, it's like I feel something that comes from it to me and thrills my whole being: the Spirit of the Lord. ... This daily relationship is my strength, my value, my life. I have before me the Holy Book: the Bible. All I am and all I have belongs to it.

Take from me this Bible and you took me everything, all my qualities. Take everything and leave me the Bible - I didn't lose anything. Stop me to read it a few days and you have given me the greatest punishment and torture. A treasure I have found in the Bible, a holy treasure, for which only I live my life. I don't hide this treasure and I'm not afraid to lose it: nothing and no one can take it or steal it from me. At the end of my life, with my last move, I will embrace it. With it I will pass away into the other world because I have lived in this word with it and for it.

This is then how I discovered the Bible and the benefits I had from knowing it.³³

33 Iosif Trifa, *Revista Teologica* (1921) 8-11, p. 252, in Pavel, *Teologia lui Iosif Trifa*, pp. 3-5.

About the same time, in 1920, the distinguished professor Dr. Nicolae Bălan from the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Sibiu was invested as the Metropolitan of Ardeal, a large Romanian province. Since his installation, the Metropolitan had fixed as his goal to bring the people to the light of the gospel, as he himself declares on the occasion of his inaugural speech: “We will seek, together with the ministers of the altar, to raise the conscience of our holy mission, and to perfect the methods of our supervision of the souls... I want an alive church and a militant religiosity for the fulfillment of the ideal.”³⁴

In 1921, the Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan called Iosif Trifa to Sibiu and made him the chaplain of the Orthodox Theological Seminary there. In 1922, Bălan decided to publish a journal of religious education for the Romanian villages, *The Light of Villages*³⁵ and named Trifa as its editor. Here is what Iosif Trifa wrote in the first number of the journal, which shows us his strong convictions and aspirations:

The foundation of the new order in the village - and in the state - should be the fear of God and the obedience to His Word. To start from the beginning: from the faith and love of God... because without this beginning it will not be possible to do anything good and stable... There is only one medicine that can give health and salvation to the world and to the state: people's return to Jesus, to his teaching and his commandment of love. Then the peace and the good will among people and nations will come.³⁶

Armed with this kind of thinking and animated by the desire to change and direct the hearts of people to Jesus, Iosif Trifa took full advantage of his position at that journal and “preached” for the whole year by his articles against all the unrighteousness of the individuals and of the nation. Not only was Trifa condemning the individual sins of people but he denounced the “absence” and the “silence” of the Orthodox Church in this respect. Referring to this fact, the great poet Traian Dorz³⁷ wrote in his history: “while the orphans are dying, the people suffer, the faith is being lost, the poverty is spreading, the strangers are getting fat, and the devil is laughing - the Church is silent, inactive and absent.”³⁸

34 Pravila Oastei Domnului (Sibiu, 1937), pp. 1-2, in Pavel, *Teologia*, p. 6.

35 Called *Lumina Satelor - foaie saptaminala pentru popor, The light of the Villages - a weekly paper for the people*.

36 Iosif Trifa, *Lumina Satelor* (January 2, 1992), in Ton, *Credinta*, pp. 141-142.

37 He was one of the disciples of Trifa and became the leader of the Lord's Army after the death of Iosif Trifa. He wrote a valuable history of this movement from its very beginnings: *Pentru istoria unei jertfe - Marturii despre inceputul si primii 12 ani ai Oastei Domnului*, (“For the history of a sacrifice: Evidences concerning the beginnings and the first twelve years of the Army of the Lord”).

38 As quoted by Ton, *Credinta*, p. 142.

In such circumstances Trifa's voice became the more relevant and needed. Indeed, Traian Dorz remarks:

In all this struggle with the general evil, the voice of "*Lumina Satelor*" was not the only one which was crying out. But it was the only one that had the conviction that it is *only a spiritual renewal* that would stop the collapse and would still be able to bring salvation. That it is *only a total and powerful return* to Christ that would be able to save and lift us up. That faith and His Cross and Sacrifice is *the only way* of salvation... While others were giving all sorts of 'solutions' and were prescribing all sorts of 'remedies' against the illness of the country, the father Iosif was insisting on the Only Salvific Remedy yet possible: *Christ*.³⁹

For a whole year Trifa used the opportunity to call people to repentance and to a new life but after such an intense writing activity Iosif Trifa felt that all his efforts was being futile. He realized that no one took action or put into practice his appeals. "Around the beginning of 1923," he would write later, "I was considering my 10 years activity as a village priest, and one year as an editor at *Lumina Satelor*; I was painfully realizing my 11 years of futility, of no results."⁴⁰ And so this man of God will reach a crisis moment. Conceiving the desperate state of people without Christ his heart was broken. He felt guilty that he didn't do anything to change this state of affairs: "What did I do in order that Christ would be brought *to people*, and people brought *to Christ*?" This was the hopeless question that Trifa asked himself over and over again. He repented once more, dedicated himself again and fully to Christ and made a new covenant that from that moment on he will start with a new strategy. Out of that moment of crisis a decision was born: to call people to take action and to fight against sin, especially against two very 'popular,' drunkenness and cursing. His action had tremendous consequences, and multitudes of people were responding to his appeal by signing *the Decision* he had distributed. This represents the initial point of the Lord's Army. Here is the way the initiator of this great movement describes, a few years later, that critical moment:

The plan with the Army of the Lord, came out of a prayer. Around the New Year 1923, reflecting on the pagan custom that people have to spend their New Year enjoying themselves in drinking and cursing, and having in mind to write an article, some drunken men passed by my window shouting and screaming. At that moment I knelt at my bureau and prayed: Lord God, the wickedness and darkness is overcoming us, the flood of unrighteousness is upon us... people are sinking in spiritual death... O Lord, give us more strength in our struggle against the darkness and the devil ... Come Lord Jesus, for

39 Ibid., p. 142.

40 Iosif Trifa, *Ce este Oastea Domnului* (1936, p. 34), in Pavel, *Teologia*, p. 7.

again it is stormy on the sea of our life...

So when I started to write the article for the New Year, an idea came in my mind that I should write a call for a fight against sins, followed by a *Decision*, things that I immediately did...⁴¹

Since the document of this “Decision” is very relevant for our discussion I will reproduce the complete text. This represents, indeed, the constitutional event and the germ of the subsequent renewal movement called the Lord’s Army. Here is the full text:

“All those who want to enter in this open battle against drinking and cursing, will sign this *decision*. Then you put this signed decision on the wall of your house and especially in your heart, so that you will have it with you throughout the year ... and so you will be able to see how many of you have fought till the end the good fight for the defeat of Satan and for our salvation.

Dear reader, be among those who will sign this decision and enter yourself in the Army of those who decide for the Savior Christ and for the battle against sins. Obey the voice and prayer of my heart and sign and keep the following decision:

DECISION

The undersigned _____, thinking how I should enter into the New Year in a useful way toward the salvation of my soul, I decide through the present declaration that with the beginning of the New Year I will renounce drinking and cursing. I realize how great sins are they.

Through this I enter into the line of those who decide like me to be good soldiers of Christ. To begin the holy battle of our purification of our many and heavy sins.

Ahead of our army is the Savior Christ, and He will lead us into victory.

Asking my Savior Jesus Christ to help me to fight in his Army - I sign this decision that was made for my good and my salvation.

Given at _____ on the New Year 1923

N. N. _____

*Subscriber of the journal ‘Lumina Satelor’*⁴²

Four months later, in the Easter number of the journal Trifa published the list of the first “soldiers,” that is of those who engaged themselves to faith in Jesus’ army and this represented the very conception of the Romanian Lord’s Army. To be

41 Ibid., p. 34.

42 Iosif Trifa, *Lumina Satelor* (January 1923), in Ton, *Credinta*, pp. 144-145.

sure, this initial step was followed by subsequent and concentrated efforts toward the establishment and the consolidation of the movement.

4. The Lord's Army – A Biblically Based Renewal Movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church

4.1. The Foundation of the Lord's Army

Very soon after everything started, Iosif Trifa realized that the *decision* in itself is not enough. To say “no” to some sins is not sufficient. To be simply soldiers of the “army” does not necessarily help. What was really needed, understood Trifa, is that people have to go deeper into a knowledge of Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Because people do not have the capacity, the strength to live a holy life since they lost their relationship with Jesus Christ, Trifa was absolutely convinced that all the decisions people make may last for a period but they cannot produce the renewal of a life, which is done only by Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Thus, the foundation of the newly created movement was a personal relationship with Christ. This will be emphasized from the very beginning in Trifa's writings:

We must go further, to advance toward the gift and the light of our Savior Jesus Christ from the New Testament. Allow therefore the light and love of the Savior to enter your house and to enlighten your spirit, to clean all of your sins⁴³... You cannot bear good fruits because you do not have a relationship with Jesus the Savior. ... As long as you will not enter into a living relationship with Jesus, my sermons and my advice is useless. ... The strength of a real destiny is the relationship that one has made, and continues to have with the Savior.⁴⁴

4.2. The Establishment of the Lord's Army

Once the “army” got moving it was spreading vigorously and grew to such an extent that it became a massive movement. Yet, as a newly constituted group it had to be clearly defined so that everybody may know what they believe and what is the goal of the movement. Therefore, immediately Iosif Trifa, as its spiritual leader, had to think of different options through which to do all these and to build it up. Thus, there were general meetings of the “soldiers” from different areas of the country. There were many gatherings through the villages, and there were special groups of “soldiers” formed for the purpose of studying the Bible

43 Trifa, *Lumina Satelor* (April 8, 1923), in Ton, *Credinta*, p. 146.

44 Trifa, *Mai linga Domnul meu*, in Pavel *Teologie*, p. 10.

together and for mutual brotherly encouragement. But probably one of the most important means Trifa had at his disposal was the weekly journal *The Light of the Villages* where he published numerous articles through which he defined for all the fundamental principles of the Lord's Army.

Thus, for example, in several successive numbers of his journal from 1928 he published a document called "*Small regulation for those who entered and those who want to enter the Lord's Army.*" Among the most important regulations we found: the necessity of the new birth, of a new life after one has first finished with his previous, sinful way of living; obedience and absolute surrender before God, according to the example one has in the life of Christ; the continuous training for becoming a skillful soldier of Christ, by means of prayer, church attendance, partaking the sacraments, and by daily reading of the Bible and other Christian literature; a soldier of the Lord must be active, to fight constantly for the extension of the Kingdom of God, for bringing others to salvation; the complete abstinence from any kind of alcoholic drinks, from smoking, and from any form of curse.

When Trifa wrote his foundational book *Ce este Oastea Domnului?* (*What is the Lord's Army?*), he outlined the purpose and the strategy of the movement. There are basically four major themes that stand out as constitutional for the life and activity of the Lord's Army:⁴⁵ (1) The crucified Christ stands as the core principle in the Army of the Lord teaching. The cross is the door to salvation and the key to victory over temptation and sin; (2) The struggle against sin and the importance of living righteous lives comes through a true understanding of Christ's victory on the cross. For Trifa the sign of the cross "has the power to drive away Satan only when we put it in the understanding of the sacrifice of the cross, especially as we receive the gift of the sacrifice, Jesus the Savior, and his victory;" (3) Personal moral and ethical renewal come through personally encountering Christ at the cross. Trifa emphasizes the receiving of Jesus and His gifts, the need for the church to wage war against sin and evil, regular Bible study as a foundation for personal piety, and the danger of alcohol consumption, which curses not only individuals but whole nations; (4) The Army of the Lord exists through lay and voluntary involvement. Trifa defines the Army of the Lord as a grassroots, Bible-based force for revitalizing the Romanian Orthodox Church.

As we have already mentioned, evangelism represented one of the key emphases of the Army of the Lord and I will briefly note here the five specific means of evangelism that Trifa commends: 1) the daily life of a Christian, which he defines as the best sermon; 2) acts of mercy; 3) love and prayer; 4) forgiveness and suffering; and 5) the distribution of Christian literature. As a

45 As they are summarized by Tom Keppeler, "A Summary of Trifa's What is the Army of the Lord?" in *East-West Church & Ministry Report* (vol. 2, Summer 1994), pp. 8-9.

very interesting note, Trifa is silent about the role of liturgy, the church, and icons in salvation and spirituality. This fact, we will see, explains the controversy surrounding his writings and the movement he founded. Because, rather than the traditional Orthodox emphasis upon mystical union with God, he expresses his understanding of salvation and witness in language more commonly associated with Western Protestantism.

4.3. The Theological Emphasis in the Teaching of the Lord's Army

There are five theological emphases that can be traced in the teaching of the Romanian Lord's Army, as they are expressed in Trifa's thought as well as in the contemporary teachings of the movement. A few remarks will be made about each of these basic principles. At the end of the section, I will comment on an extremely important emphasis for the Lord's Army, namely *the role of the Bible*.

1) Personal relationship with Jesus, accepting him by faith as Savior and Lord

Iosif Trifa understood from the very beginning that the secret of salvation and the power of his Army's victory was and will always be in Christ, in the living sacrifice of the crucified Christ. After he found Christ and received Him as a personal Savior, and after he had been changed and transformed, Trifa did not tire to preach and to call people to Christ, as to the Only One able to give to humanity a life according to the will of God. In fact, in that consisted the very essence and the motto of the whole movement: "The Army of the Lord – he will say – is to find and to proclaim Jesus, the Crucified."⁴⁶ But here are Trifa's own words of what Jesus means for him:

All the ministry of our salvation consists only in the Cross and Sacrifice of Jesus, the Crucified. The Cross and His Sacrifice on Calvary has made our salvation possible. Without this our struggle and labor is in vain. Our whole struggle and all our hope for salvation consists only in our faith and unconditional trust in the Cross and the living Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In fact, the entire ministry of the Lord's Army is to find and proclaim Jesus, the Crucified... Thus, we find out that the first and the greatest need of the nation and of our people consists exclusively in a living knowledge of Christ. If we would really have Christ, we will miss nothing. We would get everything through Him and with Him, for in Him we have completion.⁴⁷

If the very beginning of the Army, even its conception, was associated more with the idea and call of a personal struggle against the two sins of drinking and

46 Trifa, *Isus Biruitorul* (59/1934), in Pavel, p. 21.

47 As quoted by Traian Dorz, *History*, in Ton, *Credinta*, pp. 147-148.

cursing as the greatest sins of the nation, later on Trifa will realize that:

in fact it is not the drink and curse that are the greatest evil from which our nation suffers - but the greatest evil is that we do not know and follow Jesus, the Crucified. For if we would have Him, not only would we no longer live in these horrible sins, but we would all walk in the holiness and the joy of the wonderful light of God.... Thus, it comes more powerful and deeper, as the Cornerstone of the Ministry, the foundation of knowing and receiving Jesus Christ as a personal Savior by everyone who really wants the salvation of the soul as well as the salvation of our nation.⁴⁸

There are two interesting aspects that we find in the theology of Trifa in this regard. First, he redefines one's status before God as his child on the basis of one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ according to John 1:12. Second, the Christian victorious life is also conditioned by one's own relationship to Jesus: "we also have to live a victorious life. But we can experience this victory only by receiving the Lord and his gifts of victory won for us through the sacrifice of the cross, at Calvary."⁴⁹ Finally, we would only say that in the teaching of the Lord's Army the only foundation for salvation consists in receiving Christ as a personal Savior and Lord.

2) *The New Birth*

The second great principle or concept in the theology of the Lord's Army is "the mystery the new birth," or "the mystery of conversion." Traian Dorz connects the first two principles and says: "The miracle of discovering Christ produces in our being another miracle: the secret and divine work of the new birth."⁵⁰ According to the teaching of the Lord's Army the new birth means the inner transformation through one's grafting into Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings the new life, from God, in the one being born again. In order to distinguish and differentiate the event of the new birth from the act of infant baptism as practiced by the Orthodox church, Iosif Trifa will support his position with two examples from the Church fathers: St. Athanasius the Great, who speaks even of three births, and St. John Chrysostom who emphasized that "it is not enough to be born Christian, you must become a Christian."⁵¹ But here is what the father of the Lord's Army wrote about the new birth, underlining that in all this work toward a new life, the Holy Spirit has a major role:

48 Ibid., p. 148.

49 Trifa, *Ce este Oastea Domnului* (1934, p. 61), in Pavel, p. 21.

50 As quoted by Ton, *Credinta*, p. 146.

51 *Foaia Oastei Domnului* (50/1933), in Pavel, p. 11.

The new birth is a big mystery in which the greatest work belong to God and not to man. From his side man cannot do much, but... to accept the Lord and his sacrifice; then the Holy Spirit begins to work toward a new birth. ...Only those who truly found and accepted the Lord are able to understand and receive this mystery. The new birth is a hidden work of the Holy Spirit, but the fruit of this work is a change from the foundations of a man's life, is a new life.⁵²

The biblical basis for this teaching was found in such texts as John 3:3-5; 4:14; Tit 3:5 ("he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit"). Furthermore, it is emphasized that it is the Word of God that bears in itself the divine seed having the capacity to bring a soul to life, to regenerate it: 1 Peter 1:23 "You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God." So we have seen that the Holy Spirit awakens sinners, convincing them of their sins, of their helplessness, as well as presenting Christ to them - the only chance with regard to acceptance before God. Yet, in his turn one must respond in faith and repentance.

3) Repentance

In the teaching of the Army of the Lord repentance consists of three things: the recognition of sins, the confession of sins, and the breaking with the sinful past.

The recognition of sins comes through the light of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Scripture, that make people understand that their sins hurt God, that sins obstruct the access to God, and that sin's wage is death. When someone understands that, he/she experiences grief and pain for his/her sins, and these will lead to repentance: "Repentance has a significant importance in the work of our salvation. Repentance leads to forgiveness of sins. ... The first door is recognition of the terrible state of sin. ... This recognition must open the next door - repentance for sin."⁵³

The confession of sins is based on three Scriptures: Proverbs 28:13 ("No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy"); Psalm 32:3-5 ("While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin"); and 1 John 1:9 ("If we confess

52 Trifa, *Corabia lui Noe* (pp. 69-69), in Pavel, p. 12.

53 Trifa, *Lumina Satelor* (12/1929 p. 12), in Pavel, p. 18.

our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”). “The sign that one truly entered the grace of repentance - says Trifa - is exactly this, when the person starts to confess without shame his past and his sins.”⁵⁴

The complete break with sin represents the third element of repentance and involves a redirection of one’s life: if before one used to live in unrighteousness, in sin, repentance will mean the interruption of this kind of life and living for God in the future.

4) The Assurance of Salvation

Another concept extremely important in the theology of the Army of the Lord is the assurance of salvation, the certainty of belonging to Christ, of knowing Him personally. In one of his books, *The Ark of Noah*, Iosif Trifa wrote an interesting chapter titled “The ark was floating with salvation over the waters of death - all those entered in it were having the absolute assurance of their salvation.” By using Noah’s story, he illustrates the assurance of salvation that those who have received Christ should possess:

After Noah entered the ark and God locked the door, he was in a total assurance. ... He was not afraid since God locked the door and was watching it. ... Noah had the assurance of salvation. God himself was his certainty. The ark was under the protection of God. The flood was the scourge and wrath of God, but the ark - only the ark - was taken out of this scourge. It was under the love, forgiveness, and the protection of God. ... Noah’s assurance is an icon of the believer’s assurance, of those saved by the precious blood of the Savior. ... All those who received and are truly receiving Jesus the Savior and his holy sacrifice have the absolute assurance of their salvation (John 5:24). Thus, we have full assurance of salvation in the precious sacrifice of our precious Savior.⁵⁵

In the Lord’s Army’s perspective, an authentic Christian enjoys certainty, the certainty of the knowledge of the Lord; he knows that he is rescued from the punishment of sin and hell, and rejoices in the salvation that God has started already to work in his heart. They accentuate the biblical teaching from Romans 8:14-16 (“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God), and 1 John 3:2 (“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this:

54 *Tilcuirea Evangeliilor*, in Pavel, p. 18.

55 As quoted by Pavel, p. 24.

when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is”).

5) Evangelism

As we have seen from the chapter on the origin of the Lord's Army from the very beginning, after he experienced the miracle of conversion, Iosif Trifa devoted himself fully to the ministry of evangelization. His ultimate purpose was for people to know Jesus Christ:

The Lord's Army is first and foremost an evangelistic movement... The social reforms come only from the great spiritual reformation, following the example of our Great Teacher, who has not reformed the world by social, financial, and political reforms but by the great reform of the souls. The reforms will come by themselves when we will have a Christian world and true Christians.⁵⁶

There is a great emphasis in the teachings of the Army of the Lord that every single “soldier” should be active and not to stay indifferent to those who did not yet find Jesus. That it is not enough only to taste, personally, the joy of the new life but it is necessary to go out to bring new souls to Christ. Regarding the means of evangelism Iosif Trifa suggests two very important ones: through the personal example of one's life (including here good deeds, love, prayer, patience, suffering, forgiveness), and through the spreading of books and religious literature. But here is how he puts it:

Our life and our deeds represent the best sermon and the greatest help for bringing souls to the Savior. When you live a life according to the Gospel, then your life in the midst of people becomes the salt that salts and preserves the life [...]

Let us go in prisons, hospitals and wherever there are suffering people, and let us give them material and spiritual help. They are people that cannot be brought to salvation otherwise than by the parable of the Samaritan put into practice [...]

Use always prayer in your efforts of winning souls for the Savior and for the Army. Prayer makes here wonderful things... Cover always the sinners with prayers, with the evangelical love and you will have great victories [...]

Let us spread everywhere Bibles, Psalms, books, and religious pamphlets. Every single soldier of the Lord must distribute books and religious tracts because through this he becomes a sower of the evangelical light and he will win many souls for Christ.⁵⁷

56 Ibid., p. 27.

57 Trifa, *Ce este Oastea Domnului* (pp. 142-143), in Pavel, p. 27.

4.4. The Role of the Bible

Since its beginning, and then throughout its life and existence, the Army of the Lord valued the Bible as the only source and authority of the church's renewal and vitality. It is only the light of the gospel, the power of the Word that will be able to awake people to a new life. It was the strong conviction and goal of the Lord's Army initiator⁵⁸ that the Bible should be taken out of the church altar and delivered to the families, to the society at large, to the whole nation, in the midst of the world, in the life of every single man and woman. And all this despite the difficulty of such a mission. Iosif Trifa will devote a special place and writing to the Bible in his weekly journal *The Light of the Villages*. Moreover, in order to encourage the reading and the spread of the Bible, he initiated, within the same journal, a "Bible School" encouraging, by monetary rewards and different gifts, a deeper study of the Bible. This habit developed, eventually, into a regular practice of the Army of the Lord which soon afterwards started the evening "Bible Schools" where people had the opportunity to study the Bible together and to know it better. Here are a few words of Iosif Trifa in this respect:

The Bible is the widest spread book on the earth. Even this thing tells us that it is not an ordinary book but that it is the Book of God. Therefore, whoever takes the Bible in his hands he must take it as a book, as a letter from God... We have devoted this number of our journal to the Bible in order to make this Book of Life known to our readers. *The Light of the Villages* brings thus to them not only news that are changing from day to day, but it brings them the Word of God that remains forever.⁵⁹

Finally we will say that, probably the most important aspect with regard to the Bible that the Army of the Lord had always as its essence was that *it is only in the Bible that people can find Jesus Christ, the only foundation of salvation*.

4.5. The Practical Emphasis in the Life of the Lord's Army

It is known from the history of the universal church that having a right theology, though extremely important, does not automatically guarantee a successful and victorious Christian life. There must be provided always appropriate means by which the true teachings and doctrines can find their way into the everyday life and experience of the believer. The Army of the Lord has found in a wonderful

58 We have reproduced by an extensive quotation in a previous chapter how Iosif Trifa discovered the Bible and what that meant for him.

59 In Ton, p. 154-156.

way the means by which to combine the theory and practice into an attractive life style. One of the key factors that provided this achievement was *the gathering* of the Army.

The Gathering

The father of the Lord's Army would bring back within the regular meetings of the congregation the atmosphere of the early church, where people had the freedom in the Spirit to manifest in a free way their spiritual gifts. He will often refer to and quote from the apostle Paul's advice to the Corinthians: "What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26). However, at the center of every meeting of the Army should always be the person of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Brothers, do not forget the promise of Mathew 18:20: Wherever two or three soldiers are together, they gather in the name of the precious promise of the Savior: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' ... The gathering of the Army is a gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus, around the cross..., a gathering of souls that call Jesus in their midst.⁶⁰

There are three distinctive things that characterize the meetings of the Lord's Army. I will illustrate each one of these three aspects by a representative quotation from Iosif Trifa.

1) The Reading of the Bible

The meetings of the Army of the Lord should be first of all a school of the Bible, a Bible school. And this school lasts for the whole life. ... In the gatherings of the Army, all the soldiers able to read should have the Bible. As a schoolboy does not go to school without his books, in the same way there can be no students without the book, the book of life. A true soldier can be only one who is a biblical soldier; only a soldier armed with the sword of the Holy Spirit, which is the Word of God - Ephesians 6:23.⁶¹

2) Praying together

Another element of the meetings of the Army of the Lord must be the prayer with the whole congregation. The soldiers of the Lord must learn to pray together around the cross of the Savior. The soldiers of the Lord must learn to pray not only from the prayer books but also with their own words. Prayer with specific and personal words is a sign of the work of the Spirit. For such a

60 Trifa, *Ce Este Oastea Domnului* (p. 175, 182), in Pavel, p. 32.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

prayer both the Holy Spirit and the mind of man work together.⁶²

3) *Singing together*

Singing together must be another element in the meetings of the Army. In addition to that there can also be readings from religious books, recitations of religious poems, there can be speeches, and other useful things...⁶³

The Reaction of the Orthodox Church

All the renewal movements initiated in the first part of the 20th century within the Romanian Orthodox Church by Dumitru Cornilescu, Tudor Popescu and culminating with the unique and extraordinary Lord's Army of Iosif Trifa, have had but one purpose: to determine the Orthodox Church to rediscover the fundamental value of biblical Christianity, to return to her true mission, i.e. to serve God and to represent God in the midst of the Romanian nation; to help people come to the gospel and to a personal and living relationship with Jesus Christ, the only hope for salvation, and to teach them the transformation of life that is in Christ, according to the Scripture. It should be stated once more that none of these priests wanted to leave the Orthodox Church and to start a new denomination. They all wished to work within their own church. At the same time, however, they were ready to pay any price in order to bring to all people what they have found themselves: a new, fresh, and vital relation with their Savior, Jesus Christ.

And yet the Orthodox Church rejected these attempts toward a spiritual and theological renewal, even though, paradoxically, none of these things were contrary to the Bible. Thus, for example, the Romanian Orthodox Church has avoided any kind of discussion with Cornilescu regarding the authority of the Bible. In a similar way, it avoided a critical reflection for the distinction of Cornilescu's and the Church's concepts with regard to the relation between Scripture and church, but prefer to reiterate the official formulation in this respect, and to reject Cornilescu's teachings arguing that they are Protestant and so, heretical. Also, because of Cornilescu's wide distribution of the Bible among the Orthodox, especially through the "soldiers" of the Lord's Army, the Orthodox Church had taken very strong repressive actions in order to stop this phenomenon. With the help of the state the church started to persecute and to interdict all the other religious movements existing at that time. However, the Orthodox Church did

62 Ibid., p. 178.

63 Ibid., p. 179.

not succeed in this attempt despite its desperate efforts.

As a result of the Orthodox reactions, the priest Dumitru Cornilescu had to leave the country under the pressure of the Church, and never to return. However, since the Orthodox Church did not accept his theology he eventually left the Orthodox Church and adopted a Brethren Community. In the same way, the Orthodox Church rejected and expelled Tudor Popescu from priesthood. Following the example of his predecessor he founded an independent church movement where he continued to preach the new life he found in Christ.

Iosif Trifa has experienced the same destiny even though he did not manifest any tendencies to leave the Orthodox Church. And, in fact, even after they have taken from him the right of priesthood, Trifa did not abandon the Orthodox Church but he remained there to continue his battle for the spiritual renewal of his brethren. And so did the movement of the Army of the Lord, which against opposition is still today within the Orthodox Church, representing the hope of the old and, at times, "tired" mother church!

The accusations that the Orthodox Church brought against the Lord's Army, and its initiator, Iosif Trifa, though many, were basically around two major issues. First, is the fact that the Orthodox Church denies any possibility of a person to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ otherwise than by the mediation of an official representative of the church. Closely related to that was the teaching of the Lord's Army with regard to the new birth, as an event that takes place at a mature age, when one accepts Christ and returns to God. By this teaching was denied the Orthodox doctrine of baptism according to which the person experiences the new birth by the very act of baptism. Therefore the Orthodox Church has rejected also this teaching as heresy.

The second important accusation against Iosif Trifa consisted in the fact that he refused to deliver the leadership and the destiny of the Lord's Army to the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. For several years the official church tried to take over this movement. However, as Iosif Trifa observed, all that the Church wanted was to transform this movement of spiritual renewal into a movement of cultural education.

Thus, we can say that although accepting and tolerating the Lord's Army within its walls, the Orthodox Church has always manifested resistance to it, at times even with strong opposition. Experiencing a continual rejection many of the leaders and "soldiers" of the Army preferred to leave the Orthodox Church and joined different evangelical denominations. The one great leader of the Army of the Lord that has fought against the tendency of leaving the mother church was Traian Dorz – who had many followers who would not like to leave the church but struggle to carry on the renewal of the Orthodox Church. There is no doubt however, that by its teachings and theological emphasis on Scripture and personal

relationship with Christ, the Lord's Army will always remain in a dynamic tension with the Orthodox Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is my hope that the present paper has helped us to have a fresh look at some significant developments of Romanian Christianity at the beginning of 20th century. We have learned from the examples of the three Orthodox priests, Cornilescu, Popescu, Trifa, how they discovered for themselves the true teaching and authority of the Bible and how they tried to preach in their churches the biblical teachings of salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by faith. We also saw that their work had a great impact on many Orthodox believers until today.

The rediscovery of the centrality of the Bible has fundamentally contributed to the establishment and growth of the Lord's Army, a fascinating reality within the Orthodox Church. For a "soldier" of the Lord's Army, being a Christian is not to be simply identified with membership in the traditional and historical Orthodox Church. On the contrary, being a Christian means to have a close and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, to experience the reality and joy of salvation, to read and study the Bible regularly, to grow permanently in the transformation of mind and life toward the likeness of Christ, to tell others the good news of salvation, to live the entire life under the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Crucified, to express in the everyday life the principles of Christian ethics.

The spread of the new Bible in Romania and the vitality of the Lord's Army had also a positive effect upon the Orthodox Church. It started to give to the Bible a central place in the liturgy and outside of it, a fact that had a beneficial effect for the life of the church as a whole. And these events have generated an internal dynamism within the Romanian Orthodox Church that, in many respects, is a unique phenomenon in the Orthodox world, as Timothy Ware rightly remarks: "Among all the Orthodox Churches, except the Greek Church, the Romanian Church is unmistakably the most vigorous in its external life and enjoys the strongest popular support."⁶⁴

Finally I would like to add that this study illustrated once more that an authentic renewal of the church can only spring forth from a rediscovering of both, the fundamental value of the Bible and the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ. This gives us a great and legitimate hope for the future: whenever the church may happen to go astray from its mission and destiny, there will always be

64 Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 176.

the Scripture – an unfailing source available to redirect the church and to guide it back to the original purpose for her existence in and for the world.

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Corneliu Constantineanu

“Ponovno otkrivanje” Biblije i njezin utjecaj na rumunjski kršćanski kontekst početkom dvadesetog stoljeća

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Sveto pismo je uvijek imalo ključnu ulogu u obnovi crkava u povijesti kršćanstva, a to se posebno moglo vidjeti tijekom reformacije. Ovaj rad nudi još jedan primjer trajne sile Svetoga pisma za mijenjanje života i obnavljanje društava. Prikazujući život i utjecaj tri pravoslavna svećenika – Dumitrua Cornilescua, Dumitrua Popescua i Iosif Trife – u tekstu se razmatra utjecaj ‘ponovnog otkrivanja’ Biblije u rumunjskom kršćanskom kontekstu početkom dvadesetog stoljeća. Posebice istražuje utemeljenje, uređenje i teologiju Vojske Gospodnje – jedinstvenog pokreta obnove u pravoslavnim crkvama.