

*Religion, Identity and Political  
Power in Twentieth-Century Romania*

**Rurality, Legalism, Discrimination.  
Ingredients of Evangelical Identity in Twentieth-Century Romania  
(Abstract)**

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The past experience of the Evangelical movements in Romania – I specifically include here the communities of Baptists, Brethren, and Pentecostals – has been mostly researched from the point of view of political and institutional history. The present study discusses some of the key elements which had a formative impact upon the Romanian evangelical communities during the twentieth century, especially in defining the main features of and in consolidating their collective identity.

Most of the evangelical churches in Romania were built in villages. This rural character thus remained, for a long time, an extremely powerful identity marker of the Evangelical Christians. The wave of migration towards urban areas during the first decades of the communist regime, which also strongly affected Evangelical communities, had an especially lasting influence on the destination communities in the cities. This was due to the large number of immigrants originating from villages, who had brought with them a whole array of rural-based ideas, practices and attitudes. ‘Legalism’ was a characteristic feature of these communities. The Evangelicals followed high ethical and moral standards, displaying powerful normative tendencies. They explicitly rejected luxury, condemned smoking and viewed alcohol consumption with a high degree of suspicion. Even while displaying a tendency of distancing themselves from the ‘lay world,’ the evangelical communities were far from being isolated. Particularly during the second phase of the communist regime in Romania, an increasing number of evangelicals successfully completed their secondary or higher education.

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Being a part of a nation-state that had been built during the second half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, the Evangelical communities in Romania accepted and internalized Romanian national identity. The Romanian state witnessed a succession of several types of political regimes throughout the twentieth century, evolving from a liberal-democratic political framework – notwithstanding its local specificity – toward extreme right-wing dictatorships, followed by the totalitarian communist model. Regardless of the type and essence of the Romanian political regime, the Evangelical communities were constantly viewed with suspicion and were discriminated against, in various ways and under different guises.