

Between Isolation and Cultural Engagement: An Ecclesiological Analysis of Romanian Evangelical Churches in the European Diaspora

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Abstract: All immigrants, wherever they come from and in the specific socio-cultural context to which they immigrate, experience a never-ending struggle between the cultural imprint of their own country of origin and a process of acculturation to these societies. Indeed, the migratory experience entails simultaneously inhabiting one's "homeland" and the place where one wants to try to "forge" a new home. But moving isn't really over until you become part of the society to which you are now connected. Here, the question of the Church assumes special significance, and this precisely is her transcultural vocation. This leads us to the underlying question: how can the Church overcome ethnic and cultural barriers to fulfill its divine commission in a socio-cultural environment other than its motherland? This paper attempts to offer a response through the analysis of a specific case: the Romanian evangelical diaspora in Europe. Based on a questionnaire, the study examined the extent to which Romanian Evangelical Christians are integrated into their host culture and how they view the Church's relationship with culture, as well as sought possible ways to develop a relevant, contextualized Romanian Evangelical Church under local cultural norms.

Keywords: host culture, culture of origin, relevant church, contextualization, diaspora.

Introduction

The economic challenges in Romania after the fall of communism, but also the desire of Romanians for a better life, generated a significant migration to countries in Europe, especially Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, and England. The exact number of Romanian emigrants is unknown, as various institutions report different figures. Thus, "in 2019, the Ministry of Romanians Abroad estimated that there are 5.6 million

Romanian emigrants, roughly a quarter of the entire population.”¹ Based on statistical data made available by the authorities of the countries of residence responsible for registering foreigners, diplomatic missions/consular offices at the end of 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs² reports approximately 5.6 million Romanians settled abroad worldwide. According to this report, Romanians are present in 74 countries around the world, and the top 10 countries with a Romanian community of over 100,000 include: Italy (1,137,728), Spain (1,087,923), Great Britain (949,810), Germany (826,154), USA (464,814), Canada (238,050), Belgium (135,917), Austria (131,824), Ireland (125,077), France (106,464).³ Statistical data show that most Romanians have emigrated to countries on the European continent (approximately 4 million), compared to countries on other continents. Among the reasons that underpinned this decision are the fact that they are much closer to their country of origin and the legal aspect, as Romanians have been European citizens since 2007.

According to more recent data, “Romania had, in 2024, the highest share of emigrants among EU states, with 24% or 4.6 million people living abroad, as well as one of the highest volumes of remittances relative to GDP, namely 2.8% in 2023.”⁴ Looking at the situation from the perspective of the mobility of other European citizens, “according to the most recent public figures from Eurostat, Romanian citizens are ‘by far the largest national group among EU mobile citizens’.”⁵

The Romanian authorities explain why it is difficult to arrive at an exact number of Romanians moving abroad, namely, on the one hand, acquiring citizenship of the state of residence means that they are no longer identified as Romanians, and on the other hand, the fact that they have not “legally regulated their legal situation in relation to the state of residence.”⁶

Regarding the number of Romanian evangelical believers emigrating to Europe, it is also unknown. The lack of accurate statistical data on Romanian evangelicals in Europe makes me hesitant to state a number, but the realities on the ground can suggest the hypothesis that a significant number of Romanian emigrants are evangelicals. On the one hand, we see evangelical churches in Romania whose number of members has decreased due to migration; on the other hand, we see large Romanian churches, especially Pentecostal, in European countries, formed mostly by young people and young families. Even without an exact quantification, it can be noted that Romanian evangelical emigrants, through their presence in different countries, can be a resource for the evangelization of Europe, a continent where the number of evangelical believers is declining.

1 Migrademo Project, “Romania,” 15 September 2020, Accessed 23 September 2025, <https://migrademo.eu/countryprofiles/romania/>

2 Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, “Date statistice cu privire la cetățenii români cu domiciliul sau reședința în străinătate, la sfârșitul anului 2021,” Accessed 23 September 2025, <https://www.diaspora.gov.ro>.

3 Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, *Date Statistice*.

4 Radu Dumitrescu, “Romanians Abroad,” *Romania Insider*, 10 April 2025, Accessed 23 September 2025, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romanians-lived-abroad-2024-alpha-bank-analysis>.

5 Migrademo Project, *Romania*.

6 Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, *Date Statistice*.

But, to what extent will Romanians, coming from a different cultural and ecclesial context, succeed in building missionary strategies that have an impact on the inhabitants of the host country? This question actually brings us into the realm of culture, of how Romanians have managed to integrate culturally and how they manage to engage with the Gospel in the local culture. Knowledge of the Gospel was not the main concern, but the ability to build communities of faith that are relevant in sharing the Gospel in the local context is.

The content of the paper will present the results of the research in four steps: (1) a theological and missiological framework on the relationship between the church and culture, with an emphasis on contextualization; (2) a description of the research project (hypotheses, sample, instrument, method); (3) analysis of data on cultural integration, impact on personal/family/spiritual life, and perceptions of ministry; (4) discussion of results in relation to hypotheses and formulation of ecclesiological and missionary implications for the diaspora.

The Relationship of the Church with Culture: A Theological and Practical Challenge for Romanian Evangelicals

In the framework of my doctoral research (2001-2008), I studied the leadership of the church. I placed this theme in the context of the cultural philosophy that was knocking at the gates of our country. This philosophy was postmodernism. My thesis was entitled “Ecclesial Typology of Leadership in the Baptist Church from Romania, a Possible Paradigm in Postmodernity.”⁷ A possible model of ecclesial leadership for postmodernism could not be designed without an understanding of how the Baptist church, and evangelicals in general, relate to culture. It was not difficult to notice that isolationism was the predominant approach; that is, a Christian must be separated from the world to preserve holiness before God. This connection with the world was seen in areas such as clothing, women’s accessories (“no jewelry”), body beautification (“no lipstick,” “no hair dye,” etc.), and in the external appearance.

Thus, the approach to Christian and ecclesial life was marked by what we can call legalism, which we can define as “an ethical-religious theory that imposes excessive compliance with a religious code that is external, according to which a person can obtain or ensure/guarantee salvation.”⁸ Legalism has to do with culture, specifically the conflict created between the subculture of the church and the culture of society. And, at least as far as Romania is concerned, “the legalistic pattern and its tendencies probably have their origins and causes in the geographical and historical structure of the evangelical faith in Romania.”⁹

7 Daniel Fodorean, *Conducerea Bisericii în postmodernism* (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint, 2011).

8 Cristian Barbosu, “Legalismul—sincretism din interior,” *Evangelical Missiological Society* (St. Louis, 2004), Accessed 23 September 2025, <https://ro.scribd.com/doc/127639616/Eseul-Despre-Legalism>.

9 Barbosu, “Legalismul—sincretism din interior,” 4.

Among the sources that influenced the formation of Romanian ecclesiastical legalism are: the traditional teaching and system of the Romanian Orthodox Church; Romanian cultural norms (Romanian society is a traditionalist one); Balkanism; the founders of the Baptist faith; communism; and the absence of theological education.¹⁰

The situation has changed significantly in recent years, but the mentality centered on isolationism and legalism is still present in some churches. This mentality is embodied most often by older believers. This fact has, and continues to, cause a “clash of mentalities,” and this ecclesiastical conflict has sometimes resulted in the stagnation or decline of the church, as well as in church splits and the beginning of new churches.

The isolationist approach to culture and legalism is not primarily a problem of ecclesial practice; it is a theological problem, namely the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Some aspects that have been misinterpreted are: a) the term *world*, b) the understanding of the teaching on sanctification, as well as c) the place of works in salvation and sanctification.

The biblical language does not contain the term *culture*, but it does contain the term *world*. Although “culture is not an explicit subject of the Old and New Testaments, biblical studies have clearly shown that human cultures have played a much more significant role in biblical history than we are prepared to recognize.”¹¹ The Romanian Bible, the Dumitru Cornilescu version, translates three Greek terms: κόσμος (*kosmos*), αἰής (*aion*), and οἰκουμένη (*oikoumene*) using the same word, *world*. Without an understanding of the biblical meaning, this could lead to a misunderstanding of what *world* and *worldly* mean, in other words, what we should avoid and what we should get involved in. An etymological study of each of these terms leads to the conclusion that, from a biblical point of view, “the world is the expression of the cosmic space (κόσμος—universe), human society (humanity) and spiritual beings (the spirit world) created by God, as well as the sinful and diabolical spirit of contamination and alienation of all creation from God.”¹² The Bible does not forbid us (James 4:15) from having no connection with the universe created by Him, although we should not worship creation. Christians should be actively involved in protecting the universe. They should also be involved in preserving the universe created by God. It would also be impossible for the church to fulfill its mission in the world if the prohibition against loving the world meant having no connection with unbelieving people.

The term *to sanctify* (Gr. ἁγιάζω) is widely known by Romanian evangelicals as “to consecrate, to set aside,”¹³ but it is also applied in the Old Testament ceremonial sense, meaning “not to touch” certain things and people that could defile you. In this sense, the idea of separation is clearly defined. To illustrate, entering a bar is

10 Barbosu, “Legalismul—sincretism din interior,” 4–6.

11 Robert Coote and John Stott, *Down to Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 33.

12 Fodorean, *Conducerea Bisericii în postmodernism*, 23.

13 James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), word 37.

considered a form of defilement, as is participating in an event organized by non-believers. These believers were disregarded by others, being considered worldly, that is, unholy, if: wearing their heads uncovered or inadequately covered (hats, scarves, ribbons, etc.), wearing jewelry, drinking a glass of wine, even listening to or performing contemporary Christian music (involving drums, electric guitar, etc.), or with performers from society,¹⁴ and others. The Bible asks us to separate ourselves from what is sinful, from the spirit of this world, and from immoral practices, but certain aspects, neutral from a moral point of view, are not rejected completely, but must be approached with discernment.

This separatist approach also changes how people understand the doctrine of salvation and its conditions. Certain practices that do not have an obvious and clear biblical support are not only required of believers, but also of those who wish to be baptized. These practices are imposed as conditions for being baptized. In fact, “some evangelical churches have largely converted the Orthodox principle of the necessity of deeds, transforming it into Protestant ethics (high Protestant ethics), which, however, functions more or less identically to the other; thus, you please God and inherit the kingdom not by obeying the Orthodox canons, but by conforming to the ecclesial code that your Baptist church imposes.”¹⁵

Cultural anthropology research highlights the complexity of the concept of culture. A more accessible definition would be that it represents “the totality of material and spiritual values created by a society.”¹⁶ Culture involves at least three dimensions: what people think, what they do, and what they achieve—in other words, thinking, beliefs, knowledge, and values.¹⁷ Various levels can be used to structure culture, including local, national, European, and global.

Research in anthropology and theology has identified several key characteristics of culture that are crucial for understanding ecclesiology and missiology. “The following propositions have been advanced regarding culture: (1) Culture has been created by God; (2) Culture is assumed and not determined; (3) Culture is not static, but in continuous change; (4) Culture is local and global; (5) Culture is a diagnostic tool for society.”¹⁸

The church’s strategy for achieving its mission while considering local culture is known as contextualization and cultural relevance. Contextualization is strategy or methods of ministry adapting to a specific social and cultural context. Regarding cultural relevance, this concept is present not only in ecclesiology. It is also present in other fields. It is generally accepted that “an organization is culturally relevant if its actions and methods hold significance for multicultural audiences.”¹⁹ When it comes

14 Barbosu, “Legalismul—sincretism din interior,” 3.

15 Barbosu, “Legalismul—sincretism din interior,” 4–5.

16 Fodorean, *Conducerea Bisericii în postmodernism*, 20.

17 Bălțătescu, *Sociologia culturii*, 21.

18 Fodorean, *Conducerea Bisericii în postmodernism*, 30–35.

19 The Avarna Group, “What Does Cultural Relevancy Mean Anyway?,” July 2016, Accessed 10 June 2025, <https://theavarnagroup.com/what-does-cultural-relevancy-mean-anyway/>.

to the church, this term refers to the act of delivering the Gospel in a manner that is straightforward and relevant to the everyday lives of the community.²⁰

In contemporary missiological literature, contextualization is approached critically and integratively by authors such as Paul G. Hiebert, Stephen B. Bevans, Andrew F. Walls, and others. Paul G. Hiebert, former Professor of Anthropology and Missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, argues that “the gospel must be contextualized, but it also must remain prophetic—standing in judgment on what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons.”²¹ His approach is called critical contextualization, which “involves four steps: (1) the phenomenological analysis of the local culture, (2) a community Bible study, (3) critical evaluation, and (4) the creation of new contextualized practices.”²² Through this approach, he tries to avoid both syncretism and cultural alienation²³.

Another approach to contextualization is that of Stephen B. Bevans, who argues that “There is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology—theology that takes seriously both the meaning of the gospel and the meaning of the human situation in which the gospel must be proclaimed and lived.”²⁴ In his approach, he identifies models of contextualized theology that are useful for choosing appropriate forms for different contexts.

Other approaches to contextualization that could be mentioned are: Andrew F. Walls’ *principle of indigenization and pilgrimage* (the creative tension between local roots and the call to transformation);²⁵ *the translatability of the Christian message* by Lamin Sanneh²⁶ and Andrew Walls²⁷, showing that the passage of the Gospel into other languages and cultures is not a historical accident but a constitutive feature of the Christian faith; Scott Moreau’s approach to directions of contextualization and tools for cultural analysis.²⁸ J. H. Bavinck, Michael W. Goheen, and Christopher J. H. Wright develop a missional reading of Scripture (*missio Dei*) that offers theological criteria for discerning the limits of contextualization.

Romanian evangelicals have a high respect for the Bible. In the current debate related to the relationship between the Christian and culture, specifically between the church and culture, the question frequently Romanian evangelicals ask is: *What*

20 Jason Nelson, *Culturally Relevant Evangelism*, Niddrie Community Church, 2011, Accessed 10 June 2025, <https://niddrie.org/culturally-relevant-evangelism/>.

21 Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (1987): 104–112.

22 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 88–92.

23 Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” 104–112.

24 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and exp. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016).

25 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 7–9.

26 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

27 Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*.

28 Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).

is said about it by the Holy Bible? What theological models emerge from it? An answer that could summarize the biblical perspective is the following: “In accordance with God’s plan, which has been progressively revealed throughout history and meticulously documented in the Holy Scriptures, three distinct models can be identified: the theistic model, the Christological model, and the ecclesiological model.”²⁹ Thus, three arguments are highlighted that contradict the separatist approach, namely: God’s relationship with the world He created (theistic model), the incarnation of Christ and His teaching about the disciples and the world (the Christological model), as well as the fact that the churches referred to in the New Testament had a precise “address,” mentioning the localities where they were located and aspects of the socio-cultural situation of those places to which they had to respond (the ecclesiological model) are all part of the discussion.

Even though these three models carry within themselves a tension that brings balance between extremes—identification with the world and isolation from the world—they represent landmarks to which we should also relate. God, being transcendent, did not refrain from being immanent; disciples are called to be in the world, but not like the world, and the church is made up of citizens of this earth, but also of citizens of heaven.

The Mandate of Evangelical Christians in Europe and Cultural Factors: A Quantitative Research Approach

The biblical understandings and ecclesial practices that had been established in their country were actually brought with them by the migration of Romanian evangelicals to Europe. How will Romanians relate to the local culture in their ecclesiological and missiological approach, and what implications will this have for their religious practices and the way they engage with their own identity and that of their community? Will they build their churches as safe havens for a culture that poses a threat to them, or will they create a separate, religious enclave? Or will they follow the biblical mandate given to the church and seek the most relevant methods to fulfill it? What will happen to young people from Romanian families who were born and raised in the culture of the host country? Will they consider the Romanian church irrelevant to them, and will they sever ties with any church? All these questions and others were the driving force that generated a research project on this topic. Part of this project was carried out by me as part of the coordination of a bachelor’s thesis at the Baptist Theological Institute in Bucharest by a student (Timotei Pădure) whose theme was the relationship between Romanian evangelicals and Italian culture. I found that a more extensive research on Romanian evangelical churches throughout Europe would be not only beneficial, but also necessary.

29 Fodorean, *Conducerea Bisericii în postmodernism*, 40.

The research project “Between Isolation and Cultural Involvement: An Ecclesiological Perspective on Romanian Evangelical Churches in the European Diaspora”³⁰ was based on the following research premises: a) Romanian evangelical churches in Europe are, in general, isolated from a cultural point of view; b) Romanian evangelical churches in Europe, in a concrete way and not just declaratively, do not manifest a real desire to serve the inhabitants of the host countries spiritually; and c) Young Romanians born or raised in Europe feel increasingly alienated from the traditional church model practiced by Romanian communities.

The objectives of this research were threefold: first, to understand the impact that the culture of the host country has on Romanian emigrants and their level of integration; second, to assess the openness to the culture of the host country and the willingness to adapt ecclesial forms to fulfill the biblical mandate to make disciples of “all nations”; and third, to propose a possible model or models for a church relevant to the cultural context of the host country.

The research method chosen was data collection through an opinion poll, more precisely a questionnaire. A questionnaire is defined as a “list of questions compiled to obtain, based on the answers, information about a person or an issue.”³¹ Despite being presented as a quantitative research method, the researchers recognize that “the potential for collecting qualitative data during a survey is still possible; we can pose specific questions and allow subjects to respond in the manner and with the level of detail they prefer.”³²

The research employed a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to capture both general trends and interpretative nuances in the responses. The primary instrument was a questionnaire comprising closed, semi-open, and open-ended questions, grouped into three dimensions: cultural integration, church involvement, and perceptions of contextualized mission. To avoid speculative interpretations, the results were integrated through triangulation, correlating quantitative and qualitative data. For example, the high percentage of respondents who reported good language skills (82.4%) was interpreted in light of open-ended responses that revealed difficulties in getting involved in local events, suggesting a cultural barrier rather than a linguistic one.

The questionnaire was designed specifically for this research. It was first used for researching the situation in Italy. Then it was updated. It was applied for research among evangelical Romanians throughout Europe. It was structured in two major sections, the first being the general part (Questions 1–8) and the second being the special part (Questions 9–33), with a total of 33 questions. The first part aimed to collect demographic and contextual data about the respondents, such as their area

30 I will refer in this article as the “Questionnaire” to describe the content and results of the questionnaire “Between Isolation and Cultural Involvement: An Ecclesiological Perspective on Romanian Evangelical Churches in the European Diaspora.”

31 Septimiu Chelcea, *Tehnici de cercetare sociologică* (București: Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative, 2001), 70.

32 Sorin Dan Șandor, *Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale* (Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, n.d.), 99.

of origin in Romania, country and period of stay in the host country, age, religious denomination, conversion, ethnic structure of the church, and involvement in ministry. The second part, which was composed of 25 questions, investigated the relationship between the church and culture and was structured as follows: the degree of integration of Romanians into the host culture is measured by questions 9–18; the impact of the host culture on personal, family, and spiritual life is measured by questions 19–24; and the church service in the host culture is measured by questions 25–33.

I distributed the link to the questionnaire form via WhatsApp and social media platforms to Romanian evangelical leaders and believers known to me from September 1–21, 2025, with the request to forward it to their churches. The completion of the questionnaire was left to the discretion of the participants, without imposing any preliminary conditions. It was designed to be anonymous. A total of 114 people responded to the questionnaire.

I recognize that the study has limitations, namely:

- (1) Limited national representation—the sample relied on volunteer participation and thus could reflect more active communities in particular;
- (2) Subjectivity of the responses—self-assessment of language proficiency or level of community involvement may be either overestimated or underestimated;
- (3) Possible omission of local cultural nuances—differences between host countries may influence the findings;
- (4) Limited correlation between variables, as the instrument was primarily designed for descriptive purposes. These limitations do not detract from the value of the study, but they do call for caution in interpreting and generalizing results, while also opening up perspectives for future research with a broader and more comparative methodological design.

In the introduction, the concepts used in the questionnaire were briefly explained, more specifically, the terms *culture of origin* and *host culture*. The term *culture of origin* refers to Romanian culture. The terms *host culture* and *local culture* refer to the country where the respondents live.

The study included a total of 114 respondents, distributed across several European countries. Most came from Italy (20), followed by respondents from the United Kingdom (18) and Spain (18). Significant respondents were also found in Germany (13), Austria (12), and Belgium (10), while 7 people from France and 6 from Sweden participated. 5 participants responded from Romania, apparently Romanians who lived in the diaspora for a while or are from the Republic of Moldova living in Romania, and only 2 from Ireland. There was also one respondent from Belgium/the Netherlands and Cyprus. The distribution of the sample reflects significant geographical diversity. The distribution of respondents in the sample aligns to a large extent with the ranking of European countries by the size of their Romanian communities, with the top countries having the most Romanian communities. Romanians are well represented

in countries like Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Germany, as evidenced by the high number of respondents from these regions.

Respondents come from all major regions of Romania, with the highest shares recorded in Transylvania (26.3%) and Moldova (25.4%), indicating a balanced geographical distribution and a significant representation of historical areas with a migratory tradition. The highest percentages of experience in the host country are found among those who have been living there for 5–10 years (22.8%) and 20–25 years (22.8%), followed by those with 15–20 years of residence (21.1%), suggesting both the presence of a recent generation of migrants and the consolidation of a long-term established community. In terms of age, active adults predominate, especially the 50–55 (16.7%), 40–45 (14.9%) and 20–25 (14%) categories, reflecting both the experience of mature generations and the dynamism of younger cohorts. Overall, the profile of respondents is characterized by geographical diversity, solid migration experience, and a balanced representation of age segments, which provides a relevant foundation for the analysis of adaptation and integration processes.

The religious affiliation of the respondents indicates that most of them found their way back to God while in Romania (70.2%), and a smaller percentage (27.2%) during their stay abroad—communities from the diaspora being perhaps important in such spiritual awakenings. By denomination, Baptists clearly lead (78.1%), followed by Pentecostals (14.9%), and the other confessions have less than 7% combined.

The majority are members in Romanian churches (78.1%); others attend mixed communities (14%), reflecting identity loyalty and openness to intercultural integration. There is a strong involvement in leadership (22.8%), worship (19.3%), and preaching/teaching of the word (15.8%), as well as ministry among children (9.6%) and youth church-based (10.5%).

Integration of Romanians Into the Host Culture: Assessment and Perspectives

The essential elements of a culture, according to its definition, represent “the sum of manifestations through which a people expresses its soul: language, faith, art, customs, and science.”³³ Also the culture “represent the set and process of all manifestations, practices, norms, beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, structures, and systems of communication and intra- and extra-community relations of a group in relation to itself and in relation to other groups.”³⁴ Within the research project, several dimensions of culture were investigated in order to try to determine the actual degree of involvement of Romanians in the culture of the host country. The elements investigated were: knowledge of the language, involvement in the traditions and customs of the place, assimilation of the native lifestyle, perception of acceptance and rejection, cultural commitment, and others.

³³ Mehedinti, *Creștinismul românesc*.

³⁴ Grigore, “Romanipen—Elemente fundamentale ale culturii tradiționale rromani.”

A first essential element of cultural integration is *language*. Knowledge of the language of the host country is not only a communication tool, but also a key to social participation, cultural understanding, and relevant service in the culture of the host country. The investigation of this dimension of culture was done through two questions: “To what extent do you know the language of the country in which you live?” and “What language do you use in communication with other family members?”.

The two questions highlight a tension specific to immigrant communities between linguistic integration and the maintenance of cultural identity. On the one hand, most respondents declare that they have a “good” or “excellent” command of the host country’s language (82.4%), which indicates a high capacity for social and professional integration. On the other hand, in the family setting, the use of the Romanian language predominates, either exclusively (43%) or in combination with the local language, but with an emphasis on Romanian (46.5%). This situation suggests that, although Romanian immigrants adapt to the linguistic context of the receiving society, the family space serves as an environment for preserving the mother tongue and, implicitly, cultural identity, reflecting the dynamics of bilingualism and the strategies of balancing integration and ethnic continuity.

Regarding *customs, traditions, and lifestyle*, the answers to the question: “To what extent do you participate in traditional events specific to the local culture (e.g. national holidays, traditional festivals, community events, etc.)?” indicate that the respondents’ involvement in local cultural events is relatively low. Only a small proportion participates constantly, and the majority (64.1%) declare that they participate rarely or not at all.

This indicates little integration at the community level; individuals often remain separated from their villagers’ traditions. Nonetheless, almost a third of the respondents attend occasionally, signifying an openness to intercultural interaction but not continuous participation.

Answers to the question “What custom, tradition or way of life do you practice from the host country culture?” show a variety of responses that range from openness to cultural influences and resistance to change. Many respondents report that they have not taken on anything of local culture, keeping their cultural customs. But many also refer to the assimilation of values, like punctuality, discipline, lawfulness, and a sense of responsibility, considered defining in Western cultures. Also, food (in particular Mediterranean diet, Italian cuisine, espresso coffee consumption, or the *interstizio*) is an assimilated feature as well as the contact with nature or biking and group activities. A few referred to involvement in local celebrations (Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick’s Day, Pancake Day, Father’s Day) and others highlighted values such as kindness towards others overall, or honesty or having a calm home environment; tolerance of diversity and respect for other people were also foregrounded by some parents. In general, they reveal a selective and pragmatic adoption of the local practices regarding social values and healthy lifestyle, to maintain “the Romanian” cultural identity.

The research results indicate that the experience of Romanians within other cultures is ambivalent, oscillating between a sense of acceptance and facing discrimination. At a general level (Question 13), the majority of respondents (62.3%) state that they feel comfortable and accepted in the host society, which suggests a favorable framework for social and cultural inclusion. However, a significant part (32.5%) declare that they have adapted only partially and maintain a certain distance, which denotes an incomplete integration, marked by differences in mentality and cultural identity. The low percentages of those who feel isolated (0.9%) or who have major difficulties in understanding the local culture (4.4%) confirm the existence of marginal cases, but not without relevance for the analysis of the integration process. This subjective perception of integration is, however, complemented by concrete experiences of discrimination. The experience of discrimination (Question 15) adds a critical perspective on integration: almost three-quarters of respondents have experienced discrimination in various forms (“often”—7.1%, “sometimes”—30.1%, “rarely”—37.2%). Only a quarter of participants state that they have not faced discrimination at all.

Overall, Romanians live in a fragile balance between integration and discrimination: on the one hand, they feel accepted and manage to adapt to the host culture; on the other hand, the confrontation with prejudices and discriminatory experiences affects the consistency of this process. Integration is therefore not a linear phenomenon, but a complex process, in which the personal perception of inclusion is often tested by the social attitudes of the majority community.

The factors that contributed to the integration of Romanians into the host society (Question 16), of those who managed to do so, are mainly determined by the professional context, with the workplace being mentioned by 70.2% of respondents as the main supporting factor. The religious community also plays a significant role, with 38.6% of participants indicating attendance at the Romanian Church as a facilitating element of the adaptation process, while friendships with locals (36.8%) and participation in courses or school (34.2%) confirm the importance of social and educational interactions. Informal factors, such as previous language knowledge or personal attitude, although marginally mentioned, suggest that integration involves a combination of institutional, community, and individual resources, where the professional and religious dimensions emerge as central elements.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (87.7%) define cultural integration (Question 16) as a process of balancing between the local and the original culture, which suggests an orientation towards an intercultural model, based on preserving one’s own identity while being open to the values of the host society. Only a relative minority (7.9%) considers integration as a complete adoption of the host culture, while marginal options, such as cultural isolation or refusal to adapt, confirm the general tendency to privilege cultural harmonization, to the detriment of total assimilation or separation. The answers to the question, “How are you personally committed to the local culture?” (Question 18) highlight a polarization among respondents: on the one hand, 42.1% declare that they have no commitment to the local culture, which may suggest a rather passive or limited integration to the professional and

family sphere; on the other hand, a significant proportion (approximately a quarter to a third) are actively involved in community life by participating in social activities (28.1%), supporting local people (27.2%) and collaborating with local churches (25.4%). These results indicate that, although there is a majority tendency towards reserve or non-involvement, there are also nuclei of intercultural initiative that reflect an openness to dialogue and cooperation with the host society.

The Impact of the Local Culture on the Dimensions of the Personal, Family and Spiritual Life of Romanian Immigrants

The data analyzed points to the varied effects that migration has on Romanian migrants' families and its influence on many dimensions of their lives. Their children's cultural belonging (item 20) is seen by the parents as being mixed (Romanian and local) (37.7%) or rather local (23.7%), but most importantly, only 20.2% consider it predominantly Romanian and 18.4% cannot rate yet the place that will be. This demonstrates a hybrid culturalization tendency toward these ethnic categories.

On a socio-familial level, the fact of going to live in another country is considered to have generally positive effects (Question 21). For 58.8% of people, it provided stability and prosperity, and for 53.5%, a favorable background for spiritual development, favorably affecting family relationships. However, there are also less positive effects: 7.9% say that more emotional distance and conflicts have arisen, and the same proportion of respondents revealed that the family relationships are growing weaker.

The findings point to the ambivalent opportunities of enacting material security and spiritual flourishing, nested with risks for relational fragmentation and family disintegration in migration. The results concerning the spiritual struggle of cultural difference (Question 22) emphasized tensions in the process of faith transmission among Romanian immigrant families. Difficulties in communicating on spiritual topics are mentioned by 30.7% of respondents, as is the influence of the secular environment—the latter once again detecting the ongoing pressure exerted by a host socio-cultural context on religious values—on children that grow bigger than before.

Furthermore, 12.3% also affirm that their own children feel more attached to the local culture than to faith and religion, leading them on the road to eventually merging these two, hereby reducing the role of faith in shaping young souls. Yet, 40.4% of the participants report that they do not face serious spiritual challenges, indicating that a substantial number of families can negotiate these tensions successfully and hold together a coherence between spiritual moral values and cultural adaptation.

This data brings to the surface part of the paradoxical nature of diaspora lives, where successful incorporation and the maintenance of continuity from one generation to another in relation to religious identity, and its decline, are possible at once.

Also, the following question was part of the research project: "How has experiencing another country affected your lifestyle?" (Question 23). Considering the

responses, a mixed profile of lifestyle changes that Romanian immigrants face when they relocate is sketched out.

A large number of the interviewees refer to increased discipline and organization of daily life, with related punctuality, better time management, and higher responsibility in work. At the same time, many stress that the decision to leave Romania has provided financial and professional stability, a more decent life, and some security—all those factors resulting in peace and balance in family lives. Moreover, these “good-news” developments are frequently associated with a stronger sense of spiritual life, greater commitment to church, and re-evaluations about family relationships and faith.

At the same time, challenges of importance are also addressed: social isolation; absence of close friendship networks, reduced cultural life; or problems obtaining acceptance in a local environment. Some families feel the stress of a hectic work pace, exhaustion, and lack of time together; others describe a more withdrawn lifestyle and less social interaction, related to both cultural barriers as well as different values.

Consequently, the life of Romanians abroad is one marked by ambivalence, fostered both by an unequal balance between stability, discipline, or spiritual growth, and alienation itself, as well as the difficulties encountered in acclimating to a new social environment.

The research explored how the local culture influenced the Romanian evangelical immigrants’ faith journey with God (Question 24). The majority of respondents (67.5%) stated that the challenges they faced brought them closer to God, and 38.6% stated that the experience led them to ask themselves deep questions about their faith, aspects that indicate a process of spiritual maturation and deepening faith in the context of migration. In contrast, only 4.4% mentioned that they distancing themselves from their spiritual experience, and 18.4% believed that cultural change had no significant impact on their religious life. These results suggest that, although adapting to a new culture involves tensions and trials, for many Romanians in the diaspora, it becomes a catalyst for strengthening faith and drawing closer to God, rather than a factor weakening their spiritual life.

Overall, the results show that migration and host culture have a complex impact on Romanian immigrants: they bring stability, organization and development opportunities, but also create risks of isolation and family tensions. Children’s identity is often shaped in a mixed form, between Romanian and local culture, and spiritual life, although confronted with the pressure of secularization, it becomes for many a space of maturation and closeness to God. Thus, the host culture is both a factor of integration and progress and a terrain of challenges for preserving family cohesion and spiritual identity.

Romanian Evangelical Immigrant Churches in the Host Culture: Ministry Challenges and Perspectives

The data reveal that 83.4% of respondents agree with the statement: Romanian evangelical churches in the diaspora should be open to local culture (Q25). However, the idea of such openness is viewed differently: it is seen as a “missionary need” by 43% of respondents, while 40.4% accept it with reservations. This reflects the tension between mission relevance and the maintenance of spiritual and cultural identity.

Conversely, a minority expresses reservations or indifference: 8.8% fear that increased openness would dilute the identity, and 7.9% are indifferent to this issue. The findings suggest that there are strong beliefs within the diaspora regarding the necessity of integrating into the host culture. However, this integration must be achieved wisely to avoid losing Romanian specificity.

The study examined how respondents think Romanian evangelical churches abroad can become more accessible to locals (Question 26). The largest percentage of responses refers to services translated into the destination language (71.9%), illustrating the importance of the linguistic dimension of integration. Meanwhile, respondents stressed the importance of intercultural social gatherings and activities (62.3%) and social engagement through volunteering and charity (59.6%) to foster links with members of host communities. About half of the respondents pointed out the importance of training leaders to work cross-culturally (50.9%) and of adapting sermons and materials to the local context (43%).

That there are marginal choices, such as, for instance, “I don’t think it is necessary” or “Other,” with percentages below 1%, means that the opposition to giving these directions of adaptation is very little. In general, data demonstrate a widespread agreement that points to the fact that access to the churches in the Diaspora to the culture is linked with linguistic openness, social intervention, and cultural sensibility. This perspective confirms the need for an integrated missionary approach, which is not limited to preaching but includes active participation in the life of the host community and the training of leaders capable of mediating between Romanian identity and the local cultural context.

Being concerned with the way in which Romanian evangelical believers in Europe understand that the church could fulfill its biblical mandate (Question 27), three possible strategies were discussed, namely: a) to remain a church dedicated mainly to Romanians, with the mission of evangelizing their compatriots; b) to become a mixed church, made up of Romanians and locals; c) to support the planting, by young Romanians born or raised in the host culture, of churches relevant to the local culture and population (e.g. Germans, French, Spanish, etc.). Most responses (42.1%) indicate support for the planting of churches relevant to the local culture and population by young Romanians born or raised in the diaspora. This suggests a strategic orientation towards contextualization and missionary integration in the host society.

In contrast, 28.9% believe that churches should remain dedicated mainly to Romanians, focusing on evangelization of fellow Romanians, and an equal percentage

(28.9%) opt for the model of a mixed church, formed by Romanians and locals. The results show a diversity of visions: some privilege the preservation of ethnic identity, others propose direct cultural integration, and the majority lean towards a transgenerational missionary approach, which would capitalize on young people raised in the host context as a bridge between the Romanian church and the local culture.

Analyzing the responses of the respondents by age criterion, it is noticeable that none of the 15–20 year olds chose the option “to remain a church dedicated to Romanians”. This shows that the younger generation is much more open to integration and contextualization than the older generations, preferring church models that transcend ethnic borders.

In the respondents’ understanding of how a mixed church (Romanians–locals) functions, the most frequent choice (64%) was the idea that, regardless of nationality, all members relate to each other as brothers in Christ, and over half (55.3%) emphasized the importance of bilingual worship services. Almost half of the respondents considered both joint involvement in church leadership (44.7%) and support for the planting, by young Romanians born or raised in the host culture of churches relevant to the local culture and population (e.g. Germans, French, Spanish, etc.) (47.4%) to be essential. Also, meetings in small groups that can be held in the mother tongue (39.5%), the joint ownership and use of material resources (buildings, equipment, apparatus, etc.) (33.3%) and the sharing of financial resources through a common budget (26.3%) were mentioned as relevant dimensions, although with less importance.

The main challenges perceived by respondents in the case of a Romanian evangelical church transitioning to a mixed model (Romanians–locals) (Question 29) were concerns for cultural or subcultural differences (56.1%), which can generate tensions in the way of relating to community life. Almost as many respondents (52.6%) consider that the use of two different languages in worship represents a significant difficulty, while 42.1% mention the risk that Romanian believers will not accept integration into a mixed model.

Less frequently, but still relevant, is the challenge of managing and sharing financial resources (14%). Marginal percentages, such as “I don’t think there would be any problems” or “I don’t know” (below 2%), show that the overwhelming majority are aware of the difficulties of such a transition.

Overall, the data highlight that the transition to a mixed church model is perceived as possible, but dependent on careful management of cultural differences, language barriers, and internal resistance from Romanian members. These challenges indicate the need for solid theological, cultural, and organizational preparation to facilitate integration in a way that maintains the unity and missionary effectiveness of the community.

The data collected highlights respondents’ perceptions of the most effective methods of evangelization in their countries of residence (Question 30), namely, a significant percentage considers that authentic personal relationships (72.8%) and witnessing through good deeds, volunteering or social involvement (68.4%) are the most convincing ways, closely followed by inviting locals to church events (67.5%).

These results show that people emphasize personal proximity, the integrity of Christian witness and the community context as determining factors in transmitting the Gospel message.

Respondents also wrote that they used modern media, including social media, YouTube, and podcasts (39.5%), evangelism in public spaces (37.7%), and creative programs, including music, sport, and art (36%). These, however, are secondary. The lower percentages also mean that, as innovative as these technologies and digital channels may be, they are seen somehow more supportive than central.

In general, the figures clearly lean toward relational and contextual evangelism. This implies that diaspora mission practices should recognize social capital, communal engagement, and church hospitality as cornerstones of witness.

The greatest challenge that respondents reported they faced when evangelizing the locals (Question 31) was also the language barrier (42.1%), which underscores linguistic integration as an essential ingredient if mission is to be relevant. This is followed by the fear of rejection and ridicule (36%), which reflects emotional insecurity and distrust in intercultural contact.

The third problem is time (29.8%), which is basically an instrumental issue linked with the rushed nature of daily life in exile. Furthermore, 25.4% of Christian respondents equally did not understand the local cultural context, perhaps pointing to a challenge in contextualizing the evangelical impulse within lived realities and sensitivities of the host society.

Other responses (1% or less each) include apathy of local people, religious opposition, and absence of missionary frameworks. But the latter are not relevant to the general picture.

The statistics demonstrate that diaspora evangelization has linguistic, psychological, situational, and organizational difficulties. This emphasizes the importance of better theological, cultural, and relational formation of church members.

Following the investigation of the cultural adaptability of the transmission of the gospel message and the church's style (Question 32), the overwhelming majority (70.2%) consider that adaptation is necessary, as long as the principles of Scripture are not compromised, which shows a clear openness to theological and cultural contextualization. A significant percentage (13.2%) share a similar position, but with an emphasis on establishing clear boundaries, indicating a concern for maintaining confessional identity. On the other hand, 11.4% declare that they have no opinion, and small percentages (under 3% each) reflect positions of categorical rejection or skepticism ("no," "better not," "it is irrelevant," "it must be transmitted as it is"). These results suggest a majority consensus in the diaspora on the fact that evangelization and church life must be culturally contextualized, but with discernment, in order to avoid both doctrinal compromise and cultural isolation. Academically, they confirm that Romanian evangelical churches in the diaspora are at the intersection of fidelity to Scripture and missionary relevance, which calls for a theology of contextualization that balances principles with adaptation.

At the end of the survey, we investigated the respondents' vision of an impactful local church. There were many answers, which we tried to summarize to present a profile of this church.

A church that impacts the culture of its country has its foundation in Christ and Scripture. It remains centered on the Gospel, does not make doctrinal compromises, and knows how to clearly and accessibly convey the message of salvation in a way that is adapted to the times. The Bible is the ultimate reference point, and the experiences of believers confirm the authenticity of the preaching.

Another essential aspect is authenticity and integrity. A spiritually healthy church is not limited to rituals but manifests humility, honesty, diligence, and transparency. Believers are "salt and light" in their families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and societies. Personal example is the most convincing form of evangelism.

To meet the community's needs, the church is actively involved in relief, charity, and volunteering. Acts of kindness and solidarity create positive visibility and build bridges of dialogue with those around them. At the same time, an open and hospitable church welcomes people of all cultures and nationalities, showing them authentic love and acceptance.

A particularly important dimension is working with young people and children. Integrating them into the life of the church, providing spiritual formation, and giving them responsibilities contribute to preserving their faith and transmitting the Gospel to today's generation. In the diaspora, young people grow up in mixed cultural contexts and need a framework through which to express their faith in relevant and courageous ways.

The church uses both the Romanian language and the language of the host country to make the Gospel message accessible to everyone. Bilingual services, contextualized preaching, and the use of music or contemporary art are effective ways to communicate without diluting the truth of Scripture.

Additionally, a relevant church collaborates with other Christian communities and fosters unity in diversity. Together with local churches, it can organize public events, evangelism projects, and social initiatives, becoming a credible and respected voice in public spaces.

Lastly, such a church embraces the call to discipleship and mission. It raises spiritually mature believers who carry the testimony of Christ forward and participate in planting new churches. Cultural impact is not achieved through isolation or the preservation of ethnic traditions, but rather through active involvement in the society in which God has placed the community of believers.

Conclusions

The research question focused on the extent to which Romanians, coming from a specific cultural/ecclesiastical context, can develop missionary strategies that have an impact on host cultures. The data support the following connections:

- Hypothesis (a)—cultural isolation: low participation in local events (64.1% rarely/never) and low level of cultural engagement (42.1% “no engagement”) confirm tendencies toward isolation, but high language proficiency (82.4% good/excellent) indicates potential for transition to involvement.
- Hypothesis (b)—limited service to locals: respondents’ suggestions for accessibility (71.9% translation, 62.3% intercultural events, 59.6% volunteering) show awareness of the necessary steps and provide an operational roadmap for contextualized mission.
- Hypothesis (c)—alienation of young people: the clear preference of young people (aged 15–20) for non-exclusively ethnic models (0% chose the option “only for Romanians”) supports the strategy of planting contextualized churches through young people raised in the host culture (42.1% of the total sample).

Based on the adopted missiological framework (Hiebert-Bevans-Walls-Wright/Goheen), the data tips the balance from legalistic isolation toward contextualized involvement, provided that intercultural leaders are trained, bilingual ministry is practiced, and critical community evaluation is conducted to avoid syncretism.

This research is only a starting point for future studies. It highlights several key conclusions:

1. *Challenge and opportunity.* The migration of Romanian evangelicals to Europe is both a challenge and an opportunity. Communities bring with them specific cultural and confessional baggage, but new contexts require adaptation. Preserving ethnic and religious identity is important, but integration into host societies opens doors for witness and public involvement.
2. *Major obstacle: isolationism and legalism.* Their legacy limits ecclesial and missionary relevance. Suspicion of local culture pushes toward ethnic enclaves, with the risk of losing social contact. Where there is openness and discernment, churches become bridges for intercultural dialogue.
3. *Ambivalent integration.* Romanians adapt linguistically, professionally, and socially, and their faith often deepens; however, discrimination and distance from local traditions maintain a fragile balance. Young people in the diaspora play a decisive role, preferring mixed models or plantings dedicated to the host context.
4. *Relevant church.* Faithful to Scripture and attentive to contextualization, the church combines personal witness and good deeds with intercultural hospitality, bilingual ministry, and local collaboration, avoiding both isolation and doctrinal compromise.
5. *The need for a missionary strategy.* The mission of Romanian churches in Europe needs to be strategically rethought: not just evangelizing fellow countrymen, but actively engaging in host cultures. The training of intercultural leaders,

the adaptation of preaching, and the development of contextualized ecclesial practices are necessary for the Romanian diaspora to become a real factor of evangelism and spiritual transformation in Europe.

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Між ізоляцією та культурною взаємодією: Еклезіологічний аналіз румунських євангельських церков у європейській діаспори

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Анотація: Всі іммігранти, незалежно від того, звідки вони походять і в який соціально-культурний контекст іммігрують, переживають нескінченну боротьбу між культурним відбитком своєї країни походження та процесом асиміляції у ці суспільства. Дійсно, міграційний досвід передбачає одночасне проживання на «батьківщині» та в місці, де людина прагне створити новий дім. Але переїзд не закінчується, поки ви не станете частиною суспільства, з яким тепер пов'язані. Тут питання про Церкву набуває особливого значення, і саме в цьому полягає її транскультурне покликання. Це приводить нас до основного питання: як Церква може подолати етнічні та культурні бар'єри, щоб виконати своє божественне доручення у соціально-культурному середовищі, що відрізняється від її батьківщини? Ця стаття намагається дати відповідь на це питання через аналіз конкретного випадку: румунської євангельської діаспори в Європі. На основі анкетування у дослідженні було вивчено, наскільки румунські євангельські християни інтегровані у культуру країни перебування і як вони сприймають відносини Церкви з культурою, а також шукалися можливі шляхи розвитку актуальної, контекстуалізованої Румунської євангельської церкви відповідно до місцевих культурних норм.

Ключові слова: культура країни перебування, культура походження, актуальна церква, контекстуалізація, діаспора.

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