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**booklet**

נְעַבְרָה־נָּא עַד בֵּית־לְחֶמֶת

“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem...”

The City of David in the Holy Scripture  
and Early Jewish and Christian Literature

Διέλθωμεν δὴ ἕως Βηθλεὲμ . . .

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## ISBE November 11–12, 2024: Speakers

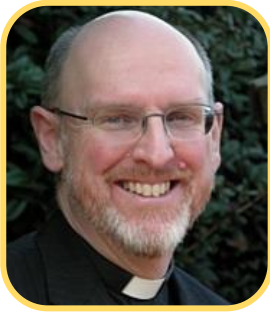
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## ISBE November 11–12, 2024: Speakers



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**“Bethlehem? In Jeremiah? Or: Why does Matthew refer to Jeremiah 31:15 in relation to the slaughter of the innocents in Matthew 2:16-18?”**

**Abstract**

As part of its explanation for Herod’s slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem, Matthew 2:16-18 purports to quote Jeremiah 31:15 with its mention of Ramah, some fifteen miles to the north of Bethlehem. Matthew’s use of Jeremiah is not without difficulty and has led to a range of explanations of both the text and the evangelist’s motivation. This study offers a short exegesis of both texts and examines some approaches to their reception. Suggestions that Matthew’s use of Jeremiah 31 is deliberately misleading are based on inaccurate assumptions about both Jeremiah 31 and Matthew 2.

**Keywords**

Bethlehem, Ramah, Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew 2:16-18, innocents in Bethlehem, use of the OT in the NT.

**Publications**

“To build and to plant’: Hope in Ordinary Things in a Time of Medical, Communal and Environmental Emergency’, in Firth, D., Grant, J. and Lo, A. (eds.) *Hope for the World: Festschrift in honour of Professor J. Gordon McConville on his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Wilmore. Kentucky: GlossaHouse, 2023.

“Narrative patterns for the communication of commissioned speech in the prophets: a three-scene model,” in G.J. Brooke and J.-D. Kaestli (eds.),

*Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, BETL 149 (2000) pp. 69-88.

“The fate of Zedekiah: redactional debate in the book of Jeremiah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 48, (1998), pp. 137-160 and 301-308.

*The Heavenly City: An analysis of the data collected by the Bishop of Manchester's Working Party on the Quality of Life of Urban Priority Area Clergy and Their Families*, Manchester: Diocesan Board of Finance, 1998.

“‘Peace, Peace, when there is no peace’: redactional integration of prophecy of peace into the judgement of Jeremiah,” in A.H.W. Curtis and T. Römer (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah and its Reception*, Leuven: University Press, BETL 128 (1997), pp. 51-90.

“Jeremiah and the seventy years in the Hebrew Bible: inner-biblical reflections on the prophet and his prophecy,” in A.H.W. Curtis and T. Römer (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah and its Reception*, Leuven: University Press, BETL 128 (1997) pp. 91-110.



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**“Bethlehem in Mandaism:  
Religious Critique and an Alternative Nativity Story”**

**Abstract**

Bethlehem figures just once in Mandaean writings in a polemical passage on Jesus. This passage is important for discerning the profile of the Mandaean reception of the Christian nativity story. The Mandaean polemic narrative on Bethlehem is fashioned along familiar references to astrology and its demonic origin, cast in a subtle critique of urbanity. Using the recent results of the Working Group “Religion

and Urbanity” at the Max Weber Kolleg in Erfurt, my contribution will seek to trace the ingenious polemical strategies of the Mandaean author, departing from the Christian account and promoting an alternative nativity story, that of the Mandaean “Prophet”, Yahya (John the Baptist).

### Keywords

Bethlehem, Mandaeism, Nativity Story, Yahya (John the Baptist).

### Biographical Note

Fr. Ionuț Daniel Băncilă studied Orthodox Theology in Sibiu (Romania) and obtained his PhD in Theology (2015) at the Humboldt University in Berlin, with a dissertation on the relations between Mandaeism and Manichaeism. Between 2017 and 2020 he was Assistant Professor at the Department for History of Religions (Chair of Orthodox Christianity) at the University of Erfurt, where he researched the reception of Western Esotericism in Orthodox Christianity. Until October 2022 he was a Fellow of the Einstein Center of Excellence „Chronoi” in Berlin. Currently he is Assistant Researcher at the Institute for the History of Religions, at the Romanian Academy of Sciences. He has published extensively on Gnosticism, Oriental Christianity, History of Religions and Esotericism.

### Recent Publications

“Orthodox Theological Education in Post-communist Romania: Structures, Discourses and a Local Profile,” in: Nikolaos Asproulis / Natallia Vasilevich (Hrsg.), *The State of Theological Education in Central and East European Universities: Challenges and Prospects in View of Secularization and Globalization* (Studies in Theology and Religion 33), Brill, Leiden (forthcoming, November 2024).

with Fr. Dr. Vasile Mihoc, “Scriptural Argumentation in Romans 11, 13-24,” in *Papers of the Colloquium Oecumenicum Paulinum*, Rome 2023, Louvain (forthcoming, April 2025).

“Die Stellung der mandäischen Version des 114. Psalmes in Qolasta [mandäisches Hymnenbuch]. Eine semantische Kontextualisierung,” in: Rainer M. Voigt (Hg.), »Durch Dein Wort ward jegliches Ding!«. 2. Mandäistische und samaritanistische Tagung (Mandäistische Forschungen 4), Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 3-44.



**MAREK IRENEUSZ BARANIAK, Ph.D.**

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**“The Bethlehem of the Gospel  
from the perspective of the rabbinic Targums”**

**Abstract**

Regardless of the hypothetical dates of redaction of the Rabbinic Targums, it is universally recognized that in many cases the Targumic tradition shows an exegesis of the Old Testament similar to that used by the authors of the New Testament. Much work has already been done on the general relationship between the Targums and the New Testament, but much research is left to be done on specific texts and topics.

In this context, the multidimensional historical and religious significance of Bethlehem is undeniable. For the Jews, because David, the future king of Israel, was born there. For Christians, because this is the place where, according to the Gospel of Matthew and Luke, Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born. Here, special attention is drawn to the prophecy from the book of Micah (Mic 5:1) quoted by Matthew (Mt 2:4-6), and to the motif of the shepherds' field (Lk 2:4-20) and the account of the slaughter of infants in Bethlehem (Mt 2:16–18).

The post-exilic Jewish community and the early Christian community were characterized by gatherings around the public reading and teaching of Scripture (Acts 2:42) during which messianic expectations and theology were uncovered. It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the synagogue tradition shared by the Targums and the early Church. In other words, both the Targums and the Gospels present the messianic theology of the Hebrew Bible itself. Perhaps the Gospel writers were in some way influenced by Targumic paraphrases, in any case a certain degree of independence must be recognized.



### Keywords

Bethlehem, Gospels, Targums, Mic 5:1, David, messianic theology.

### Research Interest

Dr. hab. Marek I. Baraniak's research interests include early Hebrew epigraphy and literature, Aramaic targums and biblical languages.

### Recent Publications

“Eshet Chayil (Prov 31:10-31). The Question of the Rhetorical Composition and Function,” in *Studi del settimo convegno RBS. International Studies on Biblical and Semitic Rhetoric*, edited by F. Graziano, R. Meynet and B. Witek, (Leuven: Peeters, 2021) 57–80.

“The Methods and Techniques of the Targumic Exegesis of the Song of Songs,” in *The Song of Songs Afresh: Perspectives on a Biblical Love Poem*, edited by G. Fernandes and St. Fischer (Hebrew Bible Monographs 82; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019) 215–243.



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## “Plērōma in the Epistle to the Colossians and the Symbolism of Bethlehem: Fullness, Christology, and Early Judeo-Christian Reception”

### Abstract

This paper examines the interconnection between the theological concept of *plērōma* (fullness) as presented in the Epistle to the Colossians and the symbolism of Bethlehem as it emerges in early Judeo-Christian literature (up to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE). Although Bethlehem is not explicitly referred to in the text, the notion of the

incarnate deity's fullness as described in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 resonates profoundly with Bethlehem's role as the site of divine birth. In the Christian tradition, Bethlehem is regarded as a symbol of the reception of God's fullness into the world at a specific point in history and in a specific location, thereby fulfilling messianic promises. This paper analyses how Jewish authors and Church Fathers interpreted the concept of *plērōma* in relation to the incarnation in Bethlehem. They saw this city as the beginning of cosmic reconciliation and the restoration of creation, a central theme also in the Epistle to the Colossians, where Christ is presented as the "image of the invisible God" and the mediator of universal reconciliation. Furthermore, the paper analyses the patristic sources that developed the concept of the fullness of deity manifested at Bethlehem and in Christ, the Davidic descendant. In conclusion, I suggest that the *plērōma* and symbolism of Bethlehem, seen as the place of divine "fullness", reflect not only historical and geographical aspects, but also a profound interpretation of early Christology and prophetic fulfilment.

### Keywords

*Plērōma*, Bethlehem, Christology, Incarnation, Early Judeo-Christian Reception, Cosmic Reconciliation.

### Biographical Note

Nicolae-Olimpiu Benea is archdeacon and assistant professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, executive director of the Centre for Biblical Studies of the UBB Cluj-Napoca, editor of Biblical broadcasts (university professors' section) at Radio Renaşterea of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj. His research focuses on the New Testament, especially the Epistle to the Colossians.

### Recently published articles

"The Use of the Epistle to the Colossians St. Basil the Great in the Treatise *Περὶ τοῦ Πνεύματος*", in *Sacra Scripta* XXI, 1-2 (2023), pp. 198-232;

"The Seat of Moses – The Responsibility of Interpreting the Law in Matthew's Gospel" in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologica Orthodoxa*, vol. 68 (LXVIII) No. 2 (2023), pp. 17-51.

"Perspective ale filosofiei colosene: aluzii și ecouri vetero-testamentare", Stelian Paşca Tuşa, Bogdan Şoptorean (eds.), *Studii biblice în onoare Pr. Prof. univ. dr. Ioan Chirilă*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023, pp. 15-28.

“The presence of doctor Luke in the Lycus Valley. A possible approach to the authenticity of the Epistle to the Colossians”, Stelian Tofană, Olimpiu N. Benea and Ovidiu M. Neacșu (eds), *Sfântul Luca – Apostol, istoric și evanghelist. Vol. I*, Ed. Mega / Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, pp. 69-84.

“Christ, The Image of the Invisible God, the Proscenium of Old and New Testament. Perspectives of Knowing God from Colossians”, în *ROOTS – Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies: Knowledge of God in the Old Testament*, No. 11 (1-6) 2024, pp. 116-134.

“Colossians 1.20 and 2.13-15 in the perspective of Romanian Biblical Theology”, în *Astra Salvensis – Revistă de istorie și cultură - XII (2024) 23*, pp. 90-99;

“Colossians 3:16 - a holistic view of Christian worship? Exegetical theses and antitheses”, în *Mai avem nevoie de bătrâni: Bătrânețe și înțelepciune, psalmodie și armonie*, Teofil Tia și Adrian Podaru (eds), Cluj-Napoca: Editura Renașterea, 2024, pp. 345-372.



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**“A Typological Perspective on Benjamin’s Birth  
and Rachel’s Death: Foreshadowing the Incarnation”**

**Abstract**

The fame of Bethlehem in the New Testament is not anticipated in the Old Testament. The small settlement is not mentioned in any remarkable event throughout the Old Testament. Although it will be the place where David will be born, live and be anointed king, Bethlehem did increase its fame. The first mention of Bethlehem occurs in Genesis 25:16-19, in the episode of the return of patriarch Jacob/Israel from Mesopotamia. After he met his brother Esau for their

reconciliation, the caravan led by Jacob continued its way to Hebron. On its way, having left Bethel, Rachel died near Ephrath, after she had given birth to a second son: Ben-Oni/Benjamin. The sacred text foreshadows the Incarnation of the Savior: “The mystery hidden for long ages past” (Rom. 16:25). From the “right hand of the Father”, from the “heavenly Bethlehem”, “at the fullness of time”, God the Son will become incarnate, being born in Bethlehem of Judea. The events of the Old Testament have a typological value, foreshadowing messianic times. Bethlehem of Judea is mentioned again in Genesis 48:7, as Jacob/Israel and Joseph recall this event. Interpreted in the right exegetical key, the historical events refer to themes such as: birth/incarnation and loving sacrifice, themes with a strong messianic imprint. The multivalence of the names received by the newborn, remind us of Christ, the true God and true man, Son of pain but also the Son at the right hand of the Father. The location of this event leads us to the event of the Savior’s birth, to the place where the greatest joy of all time was announced to the world, but also to Rachel’s tomb, place of tears for the infants killed by Herod (Matt. 2:18).

### **Keywords**

Bethlehem, Book of Genesis, Rachel, typological interpretation of the Old Testament.

### **Biographical Note**

Dr. Eusebiu Borca is Lecturer in Old Testament Studies at the Justinian the Archbishop Faculty of Letters, North University Centre of Baia Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

### **Most Recent Publication**

“Perspective biblico-științifice cu privire la cronologia Potopului,” în *Fides quae per caritatem operatur: studii biblice*, Pr. Ioan Mihoc și Pr. Iosif Stancovici (eds.), Iași: Doxologia, 2023: 279-312.



**IRINA MARINELA DEFTU, Ph.D.**

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**“Some Issues Related to Polish Orthodox Terminology:  
Terms Used for ‘Priest’ in Orthodox Polish Bible Translations:  
*baciuszka, prezbiter, ksiądz*”**

**Abstract**

The diversity of Orthodox terminology in the Polish language is highlighted both in specialized texts and in everyday usage. Several committees have described the lack of uniformity in the use of Orthodox terminology in the Polish language. Their work emphasizes the need for systematizing this terminology and correcting errors and inaccuracies where necessary.

The corpus analysed for this study consists of dictionaries and lexicons, studies, and articles that record the terminology used to designate priests. I will refer to the terminology in Polish and Romanian, used by the Polish Orthodox Church and the Romanian Orthodox Church in various liturgical and ritual texts. Although the dictionaries and lexicons examined do not focus exclusively on Orthodox terminology in Polish, they record both similarities and differences between Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant terminology.

From a lexical perspective, Orthodox terminology in Polish is a relatively recent and highly dynamic phenomenon. This language is constructed especially in the exercise of translation. Through these cultural translations, the lexical norms that define and individualize Orthodox religious terminology in the language are established, transferring into the Polish cultural space a linguistic and confessional reality specific to countries with a tradition in Orthodoxy (cf. Dumas 2010: 10-11).

One of the pressing issues of Bible translation and the non-standardized and unstructured Orthodox terminology in Polish is the terminology used to designate

priests in written sources and in colloquial speech. In Orthodox translations of the biblical text into Polish, diverse terms appear: *baciuszka*, *prezbiter* and *ksiądz*. The terms are used interchangeably with similar meanings, due to the fact that no universally accepted and uniformly disseminated form has yet been found.

### Keywords

Bible, Orthodox Terminology, Polish, Priest, Translation.

### Biographical Note

Irina-Marinela Deftu has a PhD in Philology with a thesis in the field of comparative linguistics and biblical translation studies. She is associate lecturer at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, where she teaches Romanian as a foreign language to international students. Her research areas include: lexical dynamics, contrastive linguistics, acquisition of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), didactics of Romanian as a foreign language, Romanian in the world, Romanian studies.

### Recent Publications

- “‘Excentricitate’ lingvistică: forme de interlimbă în procesul de învățare a limbii române de către cetățenii străini”, in *Revista studențească „Gaudeamus. Alma Mater Crisiensis”*, (2024): 152-171.
- “Provocările predării limbii române cetățenilor ucraineni”, Elena Platon et.al (eds), *Discurs polifonic în româna ca limbă străină (RLS)*, Cluj-Napoca: University Press, 2024, 180-188.
- “The Concept of Evil in Romanian and Polish Cultures. Linguistic Study on the Construction and Reception of the Idea of Evil in the Orthodox Versions of the New Testament in Romanian and Polish”, Agnieszka Buk et.al. (eds), *New Vistas in Language Studies: Young Scholars’ Perspectives ATENA 2. Poland*, Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2023, pp. 118-135.



**KEES DEN BIESEN, Ph.D.**

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**“Bethlehem in Ephrem the Syrian’s Poetry”**

**Abstract**

Ephrem the Syrian writes about Bethlehem in connection with the birth of Christ. He does not propose an elaborate interpretation of the town’s significance, but instead creates a suggestive network of relationships between Bethlehem and several biblical towns and persons that generates both rhetorical power and symbolic meaning. We will read a selection of passages from Ephrem’s *Hymns on the Nativity* to see how he develops both his poetry and symbolic thought.

**Keywords**

Ephrem the Syrian, Bethlehem, Nativity, symbolic meaning.

**Biographical Note**

I am an independent scholar in early Christian literature, phenomenological architectural theory and symbolic theology, and am particularly fascinated by the interaction between art, intellect and faith. My main interest is in the poetry, symbolic thought and spirituality of Syriac Christianity. I have published widely on the literary, intellectual and religious dimensions of the works of Efreem the Syrian. Among my main publications on Ephrem are *Simple and Bold: Ephrem’s Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscataway NJ, 2006), *Annotated Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* (lulu.com, 2011), and ‘Auf der Such nach Ephräm dem Syrer: Für eine neue wissenschaftliche Interpretationsmethode seiner theologischen Werke’ (in Dorothea Weltecke (ed.), *Neue Aramäische Studien. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Frankfurt am Main, 2018). I am visiting professor at the Pontificio Istituto Orientale at Rome, where I lecture on Syriac topics.

For some ten years, I was assistant of the Benedictine monk Fr. Hans van der Laan (1904-1991), who developed the most comprehensive theory of architecture, see Hans van der Laan OSB. *Trattati di architettura e liturgia. Il numero plastico. Lo spazio Architettonico. Gioco di forme. A cura di Kees den Biesen e Tiziana Proietti* (Melfi, 2020). Currently I am working on a monograph, *Proportion and Analogy: Hans van der Laan's Instruments of Thought*.

Over the years I have also dedicated much time to the study of Dante Alighieri's works, lecturing extensively and leading several groups with whom I read most of the *Divina Commedia*.



**Fr. CAPODISTRIAS HÄMMERLI**

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**“From King David to the Messiah:  
Bethlehem, Pivot of Sacred History”**

**Abstract**

The biblical concept of sacred history provides a unique theological framework, which sets Christian theology apart from Modernity's abstract top-down universalism and from the Postmodern view that historical meaning is merely context-dependent and deprived of any underlying meaning and telos.

This paper explores the biblical understanding of sacred history through the pivotal role of the city of Bethlehem, which is a bridge between the Old and the New Testament through the connection between King David and Jesus, the Messiah.

Through its initial genealogy (Mt 1.1-17), the Gospel of Matthew roots the coming of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament history and to King David, his ancestor. Bethlehem, the city of David, as the place of birth of the Son of David, is the first



locus of the manifestation of God incarnate in the world, becoming the fulcrum and focal point of the meaning of sacred history.

### **Keywords**

Bethlehem, sacred history, history, theology of history, King David, Messiah, the Son of David, the incarnation.

### **Biographical Note**

Fr. Capodistrias Hämmerli is Chaplain of the “Jean Capodistrias” Monastery in Beinwil, Switzerland. He studied Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox theology in Switzerland (Neuchâtel and Zurich) and the USA (Princeton Seminary and St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York).

From a robust background in biblical studies, he examines the intersection of Orthodox theology with contemporary issues, particularly in the fields of philosophy, law, and bioethics.

He has fostered an international network of Orthodox scholars (USA, Western and Eastern Europe) and strives to promote an interdisciplinary approach to deepen the understanding Orthodox theology’s relevance in today’s world.

### **Most Recent Publication**

Fr. Capodistrias Hämmerli, “L’euthanasie et le suicide médicalement assisté. Évolutions légales et culturelles en Europe” in: *Cahier du Vicariat, Vicariat Sainte-Marie-de-Paris-et-Saint-Alexis-d’Ugine*, 2023. (An unpublished Romanian translation of this article, title „Eutanasia și sinuciderea asistată medical. Evoluții juridice și culturale în Europa,” was presented at ISSTA 2024 in Alba Iulia.).



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**“The Importance of Bethlehem as the Birthplace  
of the Messiah in the Old and New Testaments”**

**Abstract**

Bethlehem is one of the most important cities in the Bible. Here two important personalities of the Bible were born: David - the most important king of Israel (G. von Rad, *OTT, vol. 1*, 1973, p. 308-327), and Christ - the son of God, also called ‘Son of David’. The biblical narrative of Bethlehem is a strong argument in support of the historicity of the Christian religion (Darrell Bock, *Luke*, 1996, p. 160-178). Bethlehem as the place of the Savior’s birth is presented in various sections of the Bible. Rachel - wife of Jacob (Israel) was buried here (Gen 35:19; 48:7). Bethlehem is the city of David’s ancestors (Ruth 1:1-4,19; 4:11-12,18-22). The anointing of David as king of the people of Israel took place in Bethlehem (1 Sam 16:1-13). The prophets spoke of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5.2). Isaiah describes the Messiah as a light that will rise from Galilee (Isaiah 9.1-6). The fact that the prophets mentioned these two geographical areas created difficulties for priests and rabbis in the New Testament (Matthew 2:1-6; Mark 1:24; 10:47; 16:6; Luke 1:26; 2: 4,39,51; 4:16, John 1:45-46). The Gospels refer to the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem as foretold in the Old Testament (Matthew 1; 2:4-6; Luke 2:1-21). Although the epistles do not mention Bethlehem, indirectly there are countless references to the incarnation of Christ. Paul insists on the historicity of the events related to His birth, life, death and resurrection (Rom 1:1-4; 1Cor 15:1-6). Paul defines the Gospel as the description of the Person of Christ, born of the seed of David as regards the body (Rom 1.3). The author of Revelation identifies Christ as belonging to the seed of David (Rev 1.5; 5:5; 22.17) - originally from Bethlehem.

### Keywords

Bethlehem, Christ, birth, historicity, Christian religion.

### Biographical Note

Dr. Mihai Handaric is Associate Professor in Old Testament Studies at the “Aurel Vlaicu” University in Arad (UAV), Romania. He has published seven books and co-edited three volumes. His books include *Treaty on Interpreting the History of Old Testament Theology: Research Developments in Romania, in Western Europe and Anglo-Saxon World* (2007) and *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2009).

### Recent publications

“Nahum,” in *Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary*, Gen. ed. Corneliu Constantineanu and Peter Penner (London: Langham Global Library, 2022): 950–956.

“The response of philosophy and theology to the problem of human nature,” in *Journal for Freedom of Conscience* 10.1 (2022): 99–132.

“The Books of Moses and their Interpretation in Modern Period,” in *The Proceedings of the International Conference Globalization, Intercultural Dialogue and National Identity: Language and Discourse (GIDNI - 10), from 20-21 May 2023* (Tîrgu Mures: Archipelago XXI Press, 2023).



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**“The Doctrine of Predestination and Romans 8:29-30”**

**Abstract**

Salvation in Christ stands at the centre of the Pauline corpus. As such, it has received significant attention of both ancient and modern commentators. This paper deals specifically with the understanding of salvation in Romans 8:29-30, since this verse has been used extensively to support different and divergent understandings of salvation. On one hand, it has been used to form and justify the doctrine of predestination, while on the other it has also been used as an argument in support of the free nature of salvation in Christ. This paper examines exegetical viewpoints of both, by analysing and comparing their respective positions. The paper concludes that, on the basis of traditional Eastern exegetical understanding of Romans 8:29-30, this passage cannot be used to support the doctrine of predestination.

**Keywords**

Salvation, Free will, Predestination, Augustine, Luther, Chrysostom, John Cassian.

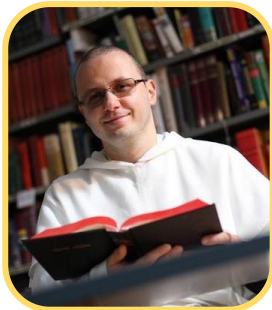
**Biographical Note**

Vjekoslav Jovanović is a PhD student at the University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Sveti Vasilije Ostroški”. He holds a BDiv degree from St. Sava’s Serbian Orthodox School of Theology and MA and ThM degrees from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. His academic interests lie in the fields of biblical theology and church history. He has authored several articles on various theological topics. He also completed several translations. He is an Orthodox priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church, is married and father of one child.

### Recent Publications

“A Deo et Rege: Military and Political Use of Christian Symbolism in the Yugoslav Wars” (English) in *Godisnjak: Journal of the Theological Faculty of the University of East Sarajevo*

“Several Remarks on Ethnophyletism in the Balkan Churches” (English) in *Godisnjak: Journal of the Theological Faculty of the University of East Sarajevo*



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## “Reception of Charisma in the Early Arabic Translations of the New Testament”

### Abstract

The paper discusses the Arabic lexemes that translate the Greek lexeme *charisma*, as used in the early Arabic translations of the New Testament attested in the early manuscripts such as Saint Petersburg BN Ar. NS 327, Vaticanus Arabicus 13, Sin. Ar. 151, and Paris BNF Arabe 6725.

### Keywords

New Testament, Arabic, Charisma.

### Biographical Note

Dr. Srećko Koralija holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge (Divinity Faculty) where he was a Vice-Chancellor’s Scholar. His PhD thesis focused on the

linguistic and corpus-based relationship between different versions of ancient translations of biblical texts in the wider socio-cultural context. He is a passionate polyglot mastering several ancient and modern languages. See also: <https://research.vu.nl/en/persons/srecko-koralija>



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**“Latin Christian References  
to the Town of Bethlehem from the 4th-5th Centuries”**

**Abstract**

The end of the persecution of Christians, following the Edict of Milan (313), made it possible for those who wanted to know more about the places where the Savior Jesus Christ lived to participate in initiatory pilgrimages. Christians from Spain, Scythia Minor, Latin bishops and especially the translator of the Holy Scriptures – Jerome – referred to the “city of David”, where the Child Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. In his Exposition to the Gospel of Luke, Bishop Ambrose of Milan mentions the city of the birth of the Child, emphasizing the episode in the Book of Ruth, which precedes the prophecy in Micah 5:1, as the place of the marriage with Boaz, the grandfather of King David in the New Testament genealogy. It therefore proposes a theological, intertestamental pilgrimage.

Written documents in which the city of Bethlehem is mentioned make nominal references without detailing aspects of the geography or chronology of the 4th-5th centuries.

**Keywords**

Latin, pilgrimage, Bethlehem, monk, Ambrose of Milan.

### Biographical Note

Fr. Dr. Ilie Melniciuc-Puică is an Associate Professor in New Testament Studies at the Dumitru Stăniloae Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania. His research interests include Biblical intertextuality and the relationship between text and image in ecclesial iconography.

### Recently published articles

“Isaianic Text in Luke’s Writings and Iconography,” *Orthodox Theology in Dialogue* 8 (Craiova, 2022).

“The Relationship between Text and Image in the painting of Biblical Parables,” *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity* 11.3 (2023).



### ALEXANDRU MIHĂILĂ, Ph.D.

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## “Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem: History and Tradition”

### Abstract

Rachel’s tomb in Bethlehem is an important element in the history of the city. The tradition of patriarch Jacob legitimizes the history of the northern kingdom (Israel) and the belonging of Bethlehem to the tribe of Benjamin, while the birth of King David in Bethlehem represents a proclamation of the city for the tribe of Judah. The tradition of Rachel’s tomb can help to understand the history of ancient Israel and the formation of biblical literature.

### Keywords

Rachel’s tomb, patriarch narratives, Bethlehem, Benjamin, Judah.

### **Biographical Note**

Dr. Alexandru Mihăilă is Associate Professor in Old Testament Studies and Biblical Hebrew at the Justinian the Patriarch Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest.



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## **“Bethlehem and the Incarnation: Perspectives from Justin Martyr and Origen”**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the theological significance of Bethlehem as the birthplace of Christ in early Christianity, specifically in the writings of Justin Martyr and Origen. Justin Martyr, an early apologist, views Bethlehem as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, situating the Incarnation as a historical and divine intervention. Origen, a later theologian, interprets Bethlehem through a more allegorical lens, viewing it as a symbol of the spiritual birth of Christ within the soul of each believer. Through comparing these interpretations, the paper highlights the distinct approaches of these theologians, emphasizing how each contributes to a deeper understanding of the incarnation and the significance of Bethlehem within Christian thought.

### **Keywords**

Bethlehem, Incarnation, St. Justin Martyr, Origen of Alexandria, prophecy fulfilment, allegorical interpretation.



### Biographical Note and Main Publications

Fr. Ioan Mihoc is lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy, and Theology at the West University of Timișoara, specializing in New Testament Studies. His books include *Morala Predicii de pe Munte și influența ei asupra gândirii și vieții creștine* (2008), *Credință, viață și misiune în perspectivă paulină și ioaneică* (2012), and *Studii asupra Epistolei Sfântului Iacov* (2019). He also contributed to the volume *Studiul Noului Testament: Introducere generală* (Basilica Publishing, 2022). Rev. Ioan Mihoc has published extensively in academic journals and contributed to collective volumes, including theological and literary analyses of New Testament texts such as “The Resurrection of the Lord in the Gospel of Matthew” (*Revista Teologică*, 2004) and “Hebrews 13: A Re-reading of the Whole Epistle?” (*Revista Teologică*, 2012). He co-edited the volumes *Fides quae per caritatem operatur. Studii biblice* (Doxologia Publishing, 2023) and the forthcoming *Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem! Prayer, Thanksgiving, and Worship in Times of Peace and War. The 3rd International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis, November 10–12, 2022*, which will appear as a special issue of *Teologia* journal, No. 2, 2024.



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### **“The Role of Gnosis in the Interpretation of the Old Testament in the *Epistle of Barnabas*”**

#### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the use of gnostic motifs in the *Epistle of Barnabas*. While interpreting selected Old Testament passages, its author employs the motifs of secret knowledge transmission and understanding of mysteries. Furthermore, he identifies himself with the figure of a spiritual teacher and uses the lexeme γνῶσις. Some

scholars, influenced by the thesis of “the Hellenisation of Christianity,” considered the presence of these motifs as a result of gnostic influence.

This work employs an alternative approach. Gnostic symbols are given profoundly Christian meaning, departing from the assumption that early Christian ecclesiology shaped exegetical stances in the Epistle. The church community understands itself as a prophetic community that possesses secret knowledge, namely the understanding of the Old Testament message in the light of New Testament revelation.

### **Keywords**

Reading the OT in light of the NT, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, γνῶσις, allegory, early Christian exegesis, holiness.

### **Biography**

Mihailo Milenkovic (1997) is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Theology from the same faculty, as well as an M.A. in Classics from the Faculty of Philosophy (2022). In 2024, he earned a licentiate in Patristic Theology from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. He also attended a course in Greek palaeography at the Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics, and Archivistics (2023-24). His research focuses on the patristic reception of Biblical texts and Byzantine theology.



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**“You will find a Baby Wrapped in Strips of Cloth, lying in a Manger’ (Lk 2, 12):  
The Paradoxical Sign of acknowledging God made Man”**

**Abstract**

The importance of the event of the Nativity of the Lord in Bethlehem of Judea, placed in the universal context of the world in those times, dominated by the supremacy of the Roman aquila, on the one hand, and presented as a fulfilment of the Lord’s promise made to king David and his house (2 Kgs 7) on the other hand contrasts strikingly with Luke’s account of it, which is extremely laconic and severe. It is Saint Luke’s manner of presenting and anticipating the paradoxical manifestation of the Son of Man, so hard to understand and accept for us, which is why it was necessary to have a revelation from Above made to the first witnesses of the event by an angel of the Lord. This revelation which has wrapped the Sacrament of the Lord’s Incarnation in mystery: “You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” (Lk 2, 12)

**Keywords**

King David, the Son of Man, Bethlehem, birth, mystery, incarnation, humbleness, amazement.

**Biographical note**

Alexandru Moldovan is a priest and an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology within the University of Alba Iulia. He specializes in Theology, Biblical Studies, Anthropology, and Biblical Propedeutics and is a member of the Society of Orthodox Biblical Scholars in Romania (SBOR). He defended his doctoral thesis titled “St. Luke’s Infancy Gospel (Lk 1-2) – Exegesis and Theology” in 2009; it

was published in 2011 (Cluj-Napoca: Mega). He published several books under the aegis of the Centre for Biblical Studies in Cluj-Napoca: *Biblical Prophets* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2018), *Biblical Propedeutics: From the Primordial Age to the Maccabean Revolt* (2 volumes, Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2019 and Stockholm: Felicitas Publishing House in Stockholm) and *Propedeutics to the Holy Gospels* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2022). He is the author of over 40 studies in Biblical Theology, published in Romanian academic journals.



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**“The Star of Bethlehem and the Star of Jacob:  
Patristic Exegetical Associations from the First Three Christian Centuries”**

**Abstract**

Early Christian exegetes connected the Star of Bethlehem from the Gospel of Matthew with the prophecy of Valaam about a star that will rise from Jacob (Num 24, 17). This approach was facilitated by the fact that the prophecy had already been interpreted in a messianic way in pre-Christian Judaism. The first Christians associated it with the person of the Savior Jesus Christ, often without mentioning Saint Matthew’s account of the Magi. However, around the middle of the second century CE a firm connection was established between Num 24:17 and Mat 2:1-12, i.e. between the Star of Jacob and the Star of Bethlehem. This presentation explores this exegetical line in the Christian authors of the first three centuries.

**Keywords**

Star, Book of Numbers, Gospel of Matthew, Bethlehem, Magi.

### Biographical Note

Dr. Adrian Murg is Lecturer in New Testament Studies at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania.

### Recent Publications

“The Paraclete’s Testimony: Hermeneutical, Liturgical and Communal Aspects,” Martin Tamcke, Constantin Preda, Marian Vild and Daniel Mihoc (eds.), *Scripture’s Interpretation Is More than Making Science*, Festschrift in Honor of Fr. Prof. Vasile Mihoc” (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 62, Göttingen: Lit Verlag, 2020), 123-141.

“Deepening Christ Tradition through Remembrance, according to the Fourth Gospel”, in *Teologia* 24 (2020): 132-146.

“Apocrifele Noului Testament. O scurtă prezentare”, in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie din Arad. Anul universitar 2019-2020* (2021): 183-199

“Fenomenul morții în Vechiul Testament”, Viorel Cristian Popa, Vasile Doru Fer and Emil Cioară (eds), *Pastorație și misiune în diaspora românească - provocări și perspective & Grija Bisericii Ortodoxe pentru cei răposați, reflectată în Ierurgiile consacrate* (Oradea: University Press, 2021), 328-361



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**“Motifs from the Legend of St. Simeon the God-Receiver  
in Byzantine Hagiographical Sources”**

**Abstract**

St. Simeon, who received the infant Jesus in his arms, is well known to Christians from the account in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:21-35). Less well-known in Western Christianity but very popular among Orthodox Christians is the legend that St. Simeon was one of the translators of the Septuagint. The presentation will begin with a brief description of the legend still circulating in Orthodox Churches. No early Greek witness to this legend is known so far. Consequently, the presentation will be limited to the exposition of some motifs of the legend that appear in medieval Byzantine sources.

**Keywords**

Simeon Theodochos, Orthodox hagiography, Luke 2:21-35, Septuagint, Letter of Aristeas.

**Biographical Note**

Fr. Constantin Horia Oancea is Associate Professor at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Sibiu. His research focused on prophetic narratives in the Bible and the reception of biblical texts in the Orthodox Church and modern society. His recent research focuses on biblical metaphors and their reception in Byzantine liturgical texts.

**Recent Publication**

“Water and Death as Metaphors in Jonah’s Psalm,” *Revue Biblique* 128.2 (2021): 173–189.



**Fr. ION RESCEANU, Ph.D.**

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**“The Nativity in Illuminations of Slavic-Byzantine Biblical Manuscripts”**

**Abstract**

This presentation analyses the iconographic representations of the Nativity in Slavic-Byzantine biblical manuscripts, exploring the biblical and aesthetic significance of these illustrations within the context of medieval religious art. Slavic-Byzantine illuminated manuscripts, created between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, blend Byzantine influences with stylistic features of the Slavic world, resulting in unique images that not only illustrate the sacred text but also convey complex theological messages. Special attention is given to the Tetraevangelion of Tsar Ivan Alexander, made in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. This manuscript, considered a masterpiece of East European medieval art, reflects a synthesis of Byzantine influences with local stylistic elements of the Bulgarian kingdom.

**Key words**

Biblical manuscripts, tetraevangelions, illuminations, Byzantine iconography.

**Biographical Note**

Ion Reșceanu is currently Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Craiova, where he teaches courses in Old Testament and Biblical hermeneutics in art. He completed his PhD at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology,

University of Bucharest. He edited many collective volumes and published a number of studies and articles in the areas of Biblical studies, old Romanian book circulation and old manuscripts. He was involved in research projects focused on the preservation of cultural heritage, specifically ecclesiastical heritage. He co-authored *Studies on the Greek Tetraevangelion from the Museum of Oltenia (12th century)* (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 2020) and authored *Credința și formele ei de manifestare în Vechiul Testament* (Craiova: Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, 2023).



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**“Where was Ephrathah?:  
Searching for an Enigmatic Biblical Toponym”**

**Abstract**

As a place name Ephrath (אֶפְרַתָּה) only occurs in Book of Genesis, chapters 35 and 48. A close examination of the citations reveals that Ephrathah was not simply an alternate name for Bethlehem. The aim of the present paper is to examine the ranges of interpreting Ephrathah as a personal and clan name and more narrowly as a family name (Elimelech’s family or *mishpāhāh*), which later evolved into the name of a region or a place close to Bethlehem. The paper will analyse three main hypotheses regarding the geographical location of Ephrathah, namely those proposed by William F. Albright, Guido Lombardi and Matitiah Tsevat.

**Keywords**

Ephrathah, Bethlehem, Genesis, Micah, Psalm 132.



### Biographical note

Fr. Iosif Stancovici is associate lecturer in Old Testament Studies at the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology, West University of Timișoara. He studied at the Hebrew University and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem (2010–2011). In 2015 he achieved his PhD from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu with a dissertation on family and education in the light of the Book of Genesis. He has published several studies in the field of biblical theology and archaeology in Serbian, Romanian and English. He is an ordained priest of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Timișoara (since 2021) and is married with three children. His research interests include the Book of Genesis, Old Testament Theology, Hebrew Language, Reception History of the Bible, Biblical Archaeology, and Pilgrimage and Travel Accounts to the Holy Land.

### Recently published articles

“The Memory of Patriarch Abraham in the Book of Judith,” *Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies* 8.2 (2022): 47–57.

“Nu puteau să-i vorbească în pace’: Facere 37,2-11 în literatura creștină primară”, în *Fides quae per caritatem operatur: studii biblice*, ed. Pr. Ioan Mihoc și Pr. Iosif Stancovici (Iași: Doxologia, 2023): 397–412.

“Învățăturile lui Tobit către fiul său Tobie”, în *Neagoe Basarab: model de semănare a Scripturii*, ed. Pr. Ioan Chirilă și Diac. Stelian Pașca-Tușa (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2024): 81–98.

“Ko je bila Lotova žena?: tumačenje Knjige Postanja 19,26” [“Who was Lot’s wife?: Interpretation on Genesis 19,26”], *Bogoslovlje: časopis Pravoslavnog bogoslovskeg fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu* (2024) forthcoming.



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**“Bethlehem as ‘House of Bread’ and its Theological Meanings”**

**Abstract**

The Hebrew name **בֵּית לֶחֶם** usually means “house of bread”, but researchers have suggested other translation variants of the expression as it occurs throughout biblical and extra-biblical literature. Because of its Davidic resonance and the place of the birth of Jesus Christ, Bethlehem is no longer “small among the thousands of Judah” (Mi 5: 1), but the place of the birth in the flesh of the One born from eternity from the Father, the King-Messiah, the Savior of the world. The study will first highlight the theological importance of toponyms that use the Hebrew term *bait*, “house”, especially in connection with the divine name, and here together with „bread”, „food”. These meanings lead us to understand the sacred space as a meeting of humans with God.

**Keywords**

Bethlehem, bread, house, places of worship, Messiah, Old Testament theology.

**Bibliographical Note**

Fr. Prof. Assoc. Dr. Cătălin Vatamanu (b. 1978), is associate professor at the “Dumitru Stăniloae” Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Iasi where he has been teaching Old Testament Studies since 2013. He completed a PhD in the area of Biblical Exegesis of the Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew in 2010. His MA was in Jewish Studies at the “Al. I. Cuza” University in Iasi. In 2005–2007 he held a research fellowship at the Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg and at the Institut für Bibelwissenschaften in Halle, Germany. In 2014, he was awarded by the Senate of the University of Iasi with the “Iuventus scientiae” Diploma “for the outstanding results obtained in research”. He edits the journal *Studii Teologice*.

### Most Recent Publication

*The Family in Biblical Israel*. vol. 1: Hermeneutical Premises, Jassy: Doxologia, 2023.



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## “Bethlem and Giscala: Jesus of Nazareth and Saul of Tarsus”

### Abstract

This study aims to discuss common elements between the life of Jesus Christ, as it is presented in the canonical Gospels, and that of St. Paul. The idea is not new in biblical studies, but the present research does not seek compare the historical Person of Jesus Christ with St. Paul, but rather to point out that there are some similarities in a providential way. These similarities draw attention to a spiritual perspective according to which “God chose the weak of the world to put to shame the strong” (1 Cor 2:27b). Indeed, both Bethlehem and Giscala were insignificant cities in New Testament times. Moreover, Christ was born in Bethlehem, although he later came to be known as “Jesus of Nazareth”. St. Paul, according to some traditions, was born in Giscala of Galilee, although he became known as “Saul of Tarsus”. This reality points both to the perspective of God's humble work for the salvation of the world and to the universality of the call to share in it - elements that will be explored in this study.

### Keywords

Bethlehem, Giscala, Jesus of Nazareth, Saul of Tarsus, humility, universalism.

### Biographical Note

Fr. Dr. Marian Vild is Director of the Department of Historical, Biblical and Philological Theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Justinian the Patriarch”, University of Bucharest. A graduate of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, he specialized in biblical theology at the same faculty (Master 2000, PhD 2010). Marian Vild was Graduate Teaching Assistant (2007-2011), then Assistant Professor (2011-2021) and Associate Professor (2021-present) at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest. He also held the position of vice-dean of this institution from 2016 to 2019. He won a post-doctoral research fellowship for the project: “The Role and Place of the Holy Scriptures in the Thought and Writings of the Movement of the Hesychastic Renewal in the Romanian Lands in the 18th Century”. It was carried out between June 2014 and September 2015 at the Romanian Academy, Iasi branch (POSDRU/159/1.5/S/133675). His research focusses on the theology of the Pauline Epistles, Biblical hermeneutics and the connection between the Bible and Spirituality in Eastern Orthodoxy. Since January 2020, Fr. Vild has been editor of the journal of the theological faculties of the Romanian Patriarchate, *Studii Teologice*. Ordained priest in 2003, he serves at the church of Buna-Vestire near Bucharest (Pantelimon, Ilfov). He is married and the father of seven children.

### Recent Publications

- “Aspecte ale rugăciunii în epistolele pauline și receptarea lor în tradiția isihastă”, in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă a Universității București* 22 (2022): 45-58.
- “Căsătorie și feciorie după I Corinteni 6-7 în contextul lumii greco-romane”, Ioan Mihoc and Iosif Stancovici (eds.), *Fides quæ per caritatem operator. Studii biblice*, Iași: Doxologia, 2023, 347-370.
- “Exegeza biblică ortodoxă: între știință și harismă”, in Ierom Agapie Corbu (ed.), *Scriptura în spiritualitatea monastică. Studii de exegeză biblică patristică*, Arad: University Press, 2023, 43-66.
- “Dumnezeieștile Scripturi - reper duhovnicesc fundamental în corespondența Sfântului Paisie de la Neamț”, *Ușemo Iohanan. Studii biblice „in Honorem” pr. prof. dr. Ioan Chirilă*, Cluj-Napoca: University Press, 2023, 463-473.
- “Valoarea taumaturgică a suferinței – repere biblice și patristice”, in *Ghidul preotului de caritate*, București: Cuvântul Vieții, 2024, 30-53.