

## EUROPE AT THE DOOR: IDENTITY IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE, 1919-1939\*

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In the two decades between the World Wars intellectuals in Southeastern Europe engaged in sometimes passionate debates about the identity of their region and of their respective peoples and about their past and future course of development.<sup>1</sup> “Europe,” as they often called the West, lay at the center of their concerns and calculations. It was a presence that some welcomed and some rejected, but none of them was bold enough to ignore it. Each of the participants in this grand encounter about identity and Europe approached matters from his own highly personal philosophy of history, and thus it is difficult to arrange them neatly into groups. Nonetheless, certain general tendencies are discernible and allow for at least loose classifications. One group, then, could be designated as Europeanists because they held Europe up as a model to be followed and judged its influence on Southeastern Europe to have been generally beneficial. A second large group of theorists held the most divergent views on identity and development, but they found unity in their opposition to Europe’s intrusion into their region in the present as well as in the past. Since they were anxious to preserve what they prized as the uniqueness of Southeastern Europe’s culture and way of life, they are often called traditionalists. To a third grouping belong adherents of the so-called Third Way, those who strove to combine in some way what they thought was best in their own region and in Europe.

In this paper I shall be concerned with the traditionalists. As suggested above, they shared a deep suspicion of and even hostility toward European

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\* The text represents the last scientific study published in his lifetime by Keith Hitchins, in the volume Florin Anghel, Cristian Andrei Leonte, Andreea Pavel, *The Image of the Other. Memory and Representation of the Neighborhood and the World*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de scaun, 2018, p. 15-27.

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<sup>1</sup> Among numerous general works on the subject, one may consult: Zigu Ornea, *Tradiționalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea*, București, 1980; Costică Brădățan, *O introducere în istoria filozofiei românești în secolul XX*, București, 2000; Ivan Elenkov and Rumen Daskalov, eds., *Zashto sme takiva. V tursene na bulgarskata kulturna identichnost*, Sofia, 1994; Ivan Elenkov, *Rodno i diasno*, Sofia, 1998; Rumen Daskalov, *Mezhdru iztoka i zapada. Bulgarski kulturni dilemi*, Sofia, 1998; Andrija Stojković, *Razvitak filozofije u Srba, 1804-1944*, Beograd, 1972; Milan Radulović, *Modernizam i srpska idealistička filozofija*, Beograd, 1989; Dragan Jeremić, *O filozofiji kod Srba*, Beograd, 1977, p. 66-73, 136-150; Balázs Trencsényi, *A nép lelke. Nemzet karakterológiai viták Kelet-Európában*, Budapest, 2011, p. 169-297, 525-659.

influence, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual. To them, Europe represented modernization, that is, the undermining of societies that had evolved over the centuries in harmony with their natural and spiritual environments and had held fast to this way of life until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The trespass of the capitalist, urban, and secular world of Europe into the primitive, rural, and religious world of Southeastern Europe could not but lead, they argued, to a supreme crisis of identity. It is precisely to this crisis, its causes and solutions, that the traditionalists gave their anguished attention in the 1920s and 1930s.

They were all acutely aware of the differences that divided their respective homelands from the West. They knew that Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia were largely rural and agricultural and by the First World War had achieved only modest levels of urbanization and industrialization. They also recognized that their peoples were overwhelmingly Eastern Orthodox in religion and that only a thin layer of the population possessed a European-style, by which they meant secular, education. But the traditionalists by no means accepted these disparities as evidence of inferiority to the West. In fact, they judged their societies superior to the West, in matters of the spirit, as the differences that counted for them were not economic and social but essentially spiritual. They were certain that the crisis of identity they observed at home had been caused by unthinking, wholesale borrowings from the West. Nor did they doubt that the solution to the crisis that confronted them lay in a reassertion of age-old Romanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian spiritual identities.

Those who formulated and sustained traditionalist currents of thought were a diverse group of individuals who took a variety of approaches to the issues that challenged them. But on one matter, in particular, they were agreed: Europe was central to all their concerns about the identity and the future of their respective peoples and the region as a whole. They also shared a deep sense of anxiety over the crisis they discerned in contemporary Europe. For them, it was a crisis of the spirit that threatened Europe's very existence, and, because of the reach of Europe's influence, they were certain that it was undermining the integrity of their own region.

The essence and variety of traditionalist thought is reflected in the writings of the Romanians Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972),<sup>2</sup> philosopher, theologian, and journalist, who was devoted to the task of uncovering the nature of Romanian spirituality; Nae Ionescu (1888-1940),<sup>3</sup> philosopher, teacher of the

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<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Micu, "*Gândirea*" și *gândirismul*, București, 1975, p. 55-70, 74-119, 187-294; Constantin Schifirneț, *Geneza modernă a ideii naționale*, București, 2001, p. 435-482; Geta-Marcela Pârvănescu, *Nichifor Crainic. Monografie*, Deva, 2010. On Crainic as a theologian, see Michael Weber, *Der geistig-geistliche Mensch im Konzept der Gnade bei Dumitru Stăniloae*, Berlin, 2012, p. 120-187.

<sup>3</sup> Dora Mezdrea, *Nae Ionescu. Biografie*, 4 vols., București and Brăila, 2001-2005. See contrasting appreciations of his influence in Mircea Vulcănescu, *Nae Ionescu așa cum l-am cunoscut*, București, 1992 and George Voicu, *Mitul Nae Ionescu*, București, 2000.

young generation of intellectuals at the University of Bucharest, and theorist of *trăirism*, the Romanian variant of existentialism; and Lucian Blaga (1895-1961),<sup>4</sup> widely recognized as Romania's most original philosopher and one of her great poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The traditionalist approach to identity and development is also evident in the works of the Bulgarian Yanko Yanev (1900-1944),<sup>5</sup> a philosopher of history deeply indebted to German philosophical and sociological thought and the creator of a bold definition of Europe linking the Slavic and Germanic peoples. Among the Serbs remarkable representatives of traditionalist thought were Justin Popović (1894-1979),<sup>6</sup> a preacher and teacher in the Orthodox Church for his whole career who greatly admired Russian Orthodox spirituality and was much influenced by Dostoyevsky; Nikolaj Velimirović (1881-1956),<sup>7</sup> the Orthodox Bishop of Ohrid in the interwar period, who was widely regarded as the greatest modern Serbian religious orator and stylist; and Miloš Đurić (1892-1967),<sup>8</sup> professor of ethics at the University of Belgrade, who was the most prominent Serbian philosopher of history and culture of the interwar period.

Although they were all absorbed by the problems of Southeastern Europe and their own peoples, they were by no means provincial. They were European in the range and depth of their interests and comprehensive in their acquaintance with the sources of European thought and sophisticated in the art of polemics. Their adherence to the broader currents of European intellectual life is evident in their receptivity to German philosophy and sociology. Their ideas about identity owed much to Nietzsche<sup>9</sup>, Hegel, and Spengler, among others. From the

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<sup>4</sup> Of the many works on Blaga's philosophy, the following deal with issues raised in this essay: Ion Mihail Popescu, *O perspectivă românească asupra teoriei culturii și valorilor*, București, 1980; Vasile Muscă, *Filozofia ideii naționale la Lucian Blaga și D. D. Roșca*, Cluj Napoca, 1996; Traian Pop, *Lucian Blaga- ontologia culturii*, Cluj-Napoca, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Atanas Kostov Stamatov, *Idei za istorijata v bulgarskata kulturfilozofska knižhnina (1878-1948)*, Sofia, 2000, p. 183-195; Ivan Elenkov, *On the History of Rightist Thought in Inter-War Bulgaria: the Existential Dimensions of 'Crisis' in the Writings of Yanko Yanev*, "Studies in East European Thought", Vol. 53, No. 1-2, 2001, p. 47-59.

<sup>6</sup> Jeromonah Atanasije (Jevtić), *Životopis ota Justina*, in Justin Popović, "Na bogočovečanskom putu", Beograd, 1980, p. 5-96; Jovan Pejčić, *Život*, in Justin Popović, "Zenica tragizma. Kratki spisi (1923-1940)", Niš, 1998, p. 345-354.

<sup>7</sup> Radovan Bigović, *Od svečoveka do bogočoveka*, Beograd, 1998, p. 27-50; R. Chrysostomus Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus und Europa bei Bischof Velimirović*, Erzabtei St. Ottilien, 1998, p. 21-33.

<sup>8</sup> Stojković, *Razvitak*, p. 348-350, 399-403, 487-489; Jeremić, *O filozofiji*, p. 137-143; Andrija Stojković, "Principi 'filosofije života' Miloša Đurića," Zbornik Filozofskog Fakulteta", Beograd, Vol 11, No. 2, 1970, p. 201-214; Andrija Stojković, *Filozofska antropologija Miloša N. Đurića*, "Zbornik Filozofskog Fakulteta", Beograd, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1970, p. 699-701.

<sup>9</sup> On Nietzsche's influence, see: Lucia Gorgoi, *Friedrich Nietzsche și cultura română interbelică*, Cluj Napoca, 2000, p. 125-281; Ljilja Ilić, *Srpska književnost i Niče*, Beograd, 2002, p. 419-458 (Đurić), 467-528 (Velimirović), 529-556 (Popović); Lat'o Iordanov Latev

German Romantics they learned to appreciate the superiority of “*culture*” (defined as a unique, “*organic*” expression of the spirit of community or nation) over “*civilization*” (conceived of mainly as material or technological progress), and German sociologists reinforced their belief in the village as the chief mold and protector of the national character. They thus belonged to a European intellectual elite, despite their suspicions of Europe.

The pervasive influence of German thought on the traditionalists is striking, for example, in the writings of Yanko Yanev. He was beholden to German philosophy and sociology for guiding his analysis of the contemporary world and for enabling him to grasp the nature of the overwhelming sense of tragedy and despair he felt as he contemplated the apparent meaninglessness of existence. He was thus swept up in the same “metaphysical rebellion” that stirred his peers in interwar Bulgaria and Romania. The primary objects of his (and their) wrath were the hallmarks of the modern capitalist world: mass man and his liberal politics, positivist approaches to the mysteries of existence, and the relentless rationalization of rural and urban life. Instead, Yanev did homage to the irrational, which owed much to his reading of Hegel and Nietzsche. He understood life in Hegelian terms - absolute, eternal, and sacred - and he insisted on a holistic interpretation of life that united the irrational with the rational.

Lucian Blaga was similarly indebted to German thought. He was a life-long admirer of Goethe, and perhaps it is mainly to Goethe that he owed his aversion to the method of analysis that “*pulverized rather than illuminated its object*”.<sup>10</sup> The German Romantics revealed to him the richness of myth and metaphysics and led him into those vague and inaccessible zones where his imagination could soar. From Nietzsche, in particular, he learned to appreciate the importance of cultural style and to question established spiritual values. Then, with Spengler he shared profound doubts about positivism and rational analysis as effective ways of grasping the nature of culture (and the nature of being itself). His advocacy of feeling and intuition, instead, as the foundations of his philosophy of cultural style suggests Spengler’s influence, though by itself it hardly accounts for the complexities and subtleties of his theory.

As a group the traditionalists were certain that Europe was in the throes of a severe existential crisis, and they were wary of and even hostile to European influence because they blamed it for the crisis that afflicted their own societies. Nichifor Crainic put the matter bluntly. He accused several generations of Romanian liberals of perpetrating a “*massive, unthinking*” Westernization on Romania, which had had the most baleful of consequences, by diverting the Romanians from their “*preordained course of development*”.<sup>11</sup> He found a theoretical

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and Anani Borisov Stoinev, eds., *Nitsshe v Bulgariia. Antologïia*, Sofia, 2012, p. 100-190 (Nietzsche’s reception in the interwar period).

<sup>10</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Goethe*, in L. Blaga, “Zări și etape”, București, 1968, p. 149-160. The article was originally published in 1925.

<sup>11</sup> Nichifor Crainic, *Politică și ortodoxie*, “Gândirea”, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1923), p. 80-81.

justification for his hostility to the West in the antinomy “civilization” and “culture”. Borrowing freely from Spengler, he adopted his thesis that the West (civilization), because of its embrace of scientism and materialism, had entered the period of old age and decline. He identified as the distinctive sign of Europe’s crisis the “world city”, Berlin or New York, an environment of “unrelieved materialism” and “colorless internationalism” which deprived man of his creative senses, leaving him sterile, “without metaphysics”.<sup>12</sup> He accused Romanian liberals, beginning with those of the revolution of 1848, of having introduced the spirit of the city into the world of the patriarchal Romanian village; they had imposed a sophisticated civilization dominated by scientific positivism on a culture of “primitive youth”, delicate and almost childlike in its feelings, whose means of expression was religion.

No less categorical in his denunciation of the course the West had taken since the Renaissance was Nae Ionescu. Western rationalism and scientism struck him as bankrupt, as he insisted that the world was guided by forces intractable to man’s cognitive powers, that nature concealed within itself “latent virtues” whose operations were unpredictable, and that all life was a spontaneous gushing forth of the human spirit which reason was powerless to contain. For him, true reality lay in action, and his belief in the primacy of the exuberant life over the intellect, he confessed, had led him to religious faith. Only the existence of God and His intervention in phenomena, he insisted, relieved the world of its character as an “absurd anarchy”.<sup>13</sup> It was religion, or a “mystical attitude”, then, that allowed man a “realist” understanding of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Nikolaj Velimirović shared with his Romanian co-religionists the conviction that the West itself had been responsible for embarking on the road to destruction because it had renounced its Christian origins. He stood close to Justin Popović in his negative attitude toward Western Europe and in his judgments about the effects of its modernizing ambitions on the spiritual foundations of Serbian life. He and Popović shared the conviction that contemporary Europe had abandoned religious faith, that is, Christianity, in favor of other gods, and he rejected its embrace of reason and science as the only means of acquiring knowledge of man and of grasping the meaning of life. He warned that Europe would either live with Christianity or die in a “barbaric” materialism and superstition. Europe, he complained, had spurned that which had made it great – Christ, banishing him from art, politics, and all social life. In place of Christianity, he lamented, Europe had installed secularism, individualism, and

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Parsifal*, “Gândirea”, Vol. 3, No. 8-10 (1924), p. 181-182.

<sup>13</sup> Nae Ionescu, *Roza vânturilor, 1926-1933*, București, 1937, p. 25-27.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Metafizică*, Vol. 1, București, 1942, p. 148-161.

liberalism, which he denounced as the slogans of the de-Christianization of Europe and represented the death of its culture.<sup>15</sup>

Of all the traditionalists, it was perhaps Yanko Yanev who made the most comprehensive analysis of the sources of Europe's distress. He was uncompromising in attributing the specific crisis in Bulgarian society to contamination by a world (the West) in process of dissolution. Of one thing Yanev was absolutely certain: Europe was in crisis, and in the early 1930s he warned that the illness from which it was suffering could be fatal unless Europe abandoned the path it had followed since the Renaissance. The causes of Europe's unhappy state he discovered in its thwarting of man's natural desire to live creatively and freely, in its attachment to science and its submission to "*scientific hypnosis*", and in its cultivation of religion as a mental exercise practiced in temples that were merely *objets d'art*.<sup>16</sup> Yanev left no doubt that rationalism lay at the heart of Europe's tragedy. Sometimes he referred to it as the "*intellect*", but, whatever its name, it was the "*all too evident*" cause of the anxiety that pervaded every aspect of European life. He criticized Western rationalists for their failure to admit that other paths to knowing existed besides the intellect. As a result, instead of confronting the world as it was with its chaos and unintelligibility, they had turned the world into a set of rules, and they had endowed it with blueprints instead of life, laws instead of freedom, stagnation instead of movement.<sup>17</sup>

At the level of everyday life Yanev also found Europe wanting. He was manifestly hostile to capitalism. But technology was a special object of his scorn. He thought that its main use was to satisfy modern European man's striving to achieve mechanical regularity. Technology, he warned, turned man into a tool, labor into money, and time into numbers; in the end, it transformed living beings into benumbed objects. The modern factory system epitomized for him the atmosphere of the new age of the machine. It had replaced the artisan's shop, where the sensitive man worked close to the people. The intimacy and warmth of work had thus been lost; work had become an activity engaged in solely for the purpose of gain, and, as a result, "*natural man*" had become "*complex man*".<sup>18</sup>

Because of Yanev's grim assessment of Western Europe's attributes and his gloomy predictions about its future in the early 1930s, he was deeply distressed by what he saw as "*irresponsible*" borrowings from the West by Bulgarian intellectuals. He complained that since the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they had based their country's political organization, society, and culture on European models, which they had taken over wholesale. He insisted that this overwhelming presence of the West had disrupted the normal course of Bulgarian life and had thus prevented the Bulgarians from embarking upon a modern path of

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<sup>15</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *The Agony of the Church*, in N. Velimirović, "Sabrana Dela", Vol. 3, Himmelsthür, 1986, p. 83-84 (originally published in 1917).

<sup>16</sup> Yanko Yanev, *Probuzhdane*, "Zlatorog", Vol. 12, No. 5-6, 1931, p. 277.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 267-268.

<sup>18</sup> Janko Janoff, *Dämonie des Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1939, p. 289-290.

development in keeping with their own nature.<sup>19</sup> Since Western Europe was worn out, was, in effect, perishing, he thought it high time for the Bulgarians “to break free” of Europe, time for them to look inward and define themselves and set out on a path of development that “would lead to themselves”.<sup>20</sup>

Justin Popović took a similar approach and, like Yanev, he argued that the fundamental cause of Europe’s breakdown was spiritual. He put the blame squarely on “European man”, who was guilty of placing himself above God. This European man, he admonished, refused to accommodate himself to God-man, that is, to Christ, because he had already accommodated God-man to himself. He had, in effect, transformed Christ into his own image. As a result, by exaggerating the value and importance of man at the expense of God, European man had, in the end, come to see himself as infallible. The “dogma” that man was above God and could not be in error, Popović claimed, synthesized the very spirit of Europe, its values, its ideals, and its goals.<sup>21</sup> He perceived affinities between the early church heresy Arianism and modern Western civilization because both refused to acknowledge Christ as God-man and, instead, put their faith in human reason.<sup>22</sup>

As European man thus deified himself through his philosophy, his science, his culture, and even his religion, Popović detected the workings of the spirit of Roman Catholicism, which he depicted as the successor to ancient, pagan Rome. Ultimately, he thought, all the problems that afflicted European man could be traced back to the pervasive influence of Roman Catholicism and no less to Protestantism, which he regarded as its most faithful and consistent collaborator; both churches strove to create infallible man and to make him the highest good. Yet, he reasoned, Roman Catholicism was the real culprit because through its scholasticism, casuistry, and indulgences it had so mechanized the human personality as to reduce it to sheer callousness and inhumanity. Thus, he concluded, European man by his haughty, self-proclaimed infallibility and his “proud autarky” had condemned himself to spiritual death and had transformed Europe into a giant grave.<sup>23</sup>

Popović had no doubt that the world he represented and the West were incompatible. The rationalism and scholasticism of Roman Catholic and Protestant Europe, he thought, did not fit “our Orthodox soul”. He found abundant proof of this fact in the ideological and moral confusion he perceived among Serbian intellectuals, who, he admonished, had lost their Orthodox orientation

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<sup>19</sup> Yanko Yanev, *Iztok ili Zapad*, “Zlatorog”, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1933, p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178-179.

<sup>21</sup> Justin Popović, *Dostojevski o Evropi i slovenstvu*, Beograd, 1981, p. 276.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, *Od Arijevog do modernog evropskog arijanizma*, in “Hrišćanski Život”, Vol. 4, 1924, p. 245-252, cited by Klaus Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren. Orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien, 1850-1945*, Wiesbaden, 2011, p. 319.

<sup>23</sup> Justin Popović, *Dostojevski o Evropi*, p. 340-341.

on the ultimate questions of life and death. Thus, he argued, enlightenment in the style of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century European rationalist and scientific *Aufklärung* could never be enlightenment for Serbs,<sup>24</sup> and his concern for their future was profound precisely because they had had to endure strong European influences. In effect, he argued that the Serbs were living in a watershed between two worlds, two cultures, between East and West, and he wondered if they could even continue to exist if their souls remained thus divided in two.<sup>25</sup>

Miloš Đurić, following the general line of reasoning of his Romanian and Bulgarian colleagues, also discovered the source of Europe's decline in its wholehearted embrace of materialism. He shared with Popović, in particular, the conviction that modern European culture, which had had its origins in the Renaissance, was in decline and was gradually being degraded to a civilization. It was a civilization that lacked true religious feeling and was characterized, instead, by an amoral structure of life, by "*machinism*" and an attraction to technology, by pleasure for its own sake without true creativity, and by a bourgeois view of life and the "*cult of money*".<sup>26</sup> Thus, it seemed to him that European culture had slowly drifted away from the creative forces that had made it great, notably, its relationship with God, and in its place it had given birth to the cult of the "*arithmetical-machine mind*", that is, reason, which knew "*neither God nor mystery*". Yet, unlike many doomsayers, he remained optimistic and did not foresee the death of modern European culture. Rather, he put his hopes in the *Svečovek*, that is, the complete man, the synthesis of all that was best that the world had so far created, who would be the bearer of a new cultural and spiritual ethos.<sup>27</sup>

To the cosmopolitan and urban Europe they shunned the traditionalists opposed the rural world of Southeastern Europe. Justin Popović put their case succinctly. He found at least a partial solace for the apprehensions that afflicted him in the Serbian village. He praised rural society as "*authentic*" and "*organic*" in contrast to Western society, which he branded as "*artificial*" and "*inorganic*". Arguing from a theological perspective, he made a sharp distinction between the "spiritual" and "human" East, where a sense of community prevailed and which offered man salvation, and the "*rationalized*" and "*mechanized*" Europe, where a fragmented society had lost its humanity and could offer man only death.<sup>28</sup>

Lucian Blaga, from the perspective of his philosophy of style, was also convinced that Romanian spirituality, which, he thought, mainly determined national character, had been preserved in purest form in the village. It was the center of an organic, eminently human mode of existence, which, borrowing

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<sup>24</sup> Idem, *Lelek za Khristom*, in Idem, "Filosofske urvine", Beograd, 1999, p. 399.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, *Na vododelnici kulture*, in Idem, "Filosofske urvine", p. 436.

<sup>26</sup> Miloš Đurić, *Problemi filosofije culture*, Beograd, 1929, p. 152-153.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, *Pred slovenskim vidicima*, Beograd, 1928, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> Justin Popović, *Dostojevski o Evropi*, p. 287, 350.

from Spengler, he called “*culture*”.<sup>29</sup> It stood in stark contrast to the city, the embodiment of “*civilization*”, a mechanical, bourgeois world facing imminent extinction, which Blaga characterized also as the locale of the rationalist, scientific spirit and of such “*non-creative*” occupations as the accumulation of positive knowledge. Here man lost his “*cosmic sentiment*”, as his natural, organic relationship with his fellow man slowly disintegrated. He contrasted the city, which dissolved the “*concrete phenomena*” of existence and isolated man from nature,<sup>30</sup> with the village, the zone of myth and magic thought where the Romanian essence had remained whole and man was brought fully into a creative relationship with existence.

For Nichifor Crainic, too, the ideal Romanian, the bearer of the nation’s distinctive character, belonged to the village, not the city. He was a peasant who worked the land and stood in an intimate, “*organic relationship*” with the land, and who interacted naturally with his fellow man. Above all, he was Orthodox, a quality, Crainic insisted, that was ingrained in the peasant’s very being. Here in this noble rustic, contemplative and lacking the work ethic of capitalism, he found the antithesis of the “*bourgeois spirit*” of the West, with its unrelenting rationalism and zealous pursuit of worldly goods.

Some traditionalists insisted that Southeastern Europe and their respective peoples were as they were, unique and separate from Europe, because of the pervasive influence of Orthodox spirituality. Nae Ionescu was convinced that the influence of Eastern Christianity had been so overwhelming among the Romanians that it had become a part of their very being, or, as he put it: “*We are Orthodox because we are Romanian, and we are Romanian because we are Orthodox*”.<sup>31</sup> Justin Popović shared Ionescu’s appreciation of the protective role of Orthodoxy. He was certain that Orthodoxy had been the decisive force in molding the national character of the Serbs and that it now served as their chief defense against the intrusion of secular, rationalist Europe into a culture “*long governed by the rural soul*”.

Yet, many traditionalists, while subscribing fully to the proposition that spirituality was the decisive force in shaping the character and evolution of a people, called into question the predominance of Orthodoxy in this process in Southeastern Europe. Yanko Yanev accorded Orthodoxy no significant role in determining the character and way of life of the true Bulgarian - the peasant. Christianity, whether Eastern or Western, he was convinced, had left no deep traces in the spiritual life of the peasant; it had touched only the surface of things

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<sup>29</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Elogiul satului românesc*, “Academia Română, Discursuri de recepție”, No. 71, București, 1937, p. 3-5, 12-16; Idem, *Hronicul și cîntecul vîrstelor*, București, 1965, p. 24-28.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii (1937)*, in Idem, “Trilogia cunoașterii”, București, 1943, p. 345-347.

<sup>31</sup> Nae Ionescu, *Roza vînturilor*, p. 206.

and had never reached down to the very sources of existence.<sup>32</sup> He had no doubt that authentic Bulgarianness lay elsewhere than in Orthodoxy, and he urged a “return” to the “old Balkans” and to the “old Thrace”.<sup>33</sup>

Lucian Blaga also raised serious objections to according Orthodoxy the primary responsibility for shaping the Romanian spirit. He drew the ire of Nichifor Crainic and other devoted Orthodoxists by insisting that Orthodox dogma had had little to do with molding the Romanian soul, an accomplishment he attributed, instead, to the “derogations” of Orthodox dogma by the “spirit of heresy” inherent in the semi-pagan folklore of the Romanian village and preserved in such folk creations as the Romanian Christmas carol.<sup>34</sup> He confessed that he had been attracted to Orthodoxy not by its teachings but by the enormous wealth of ancient mythological and pagan elements which had survived in it.<sup>35</sup>

The traditionalists, then, however much they might differ from one another on specific issues, were united in discerning a deep divide between the West and Southeastern Europe. Some of them thought the divide was permanent and unbridgeable. Nae Ionescu, for example, made a stark contrast between the Romanian rural community and the urban civilization of Europe. He denounced the institutions of bourgeois Europe as artificial creations based upon purely “juridical” relationships between groups and individuals. The institutions of the Romanian village, on the other hand, he declared “organic” structures, since they had preserved the Romanian’s natural integration into nature and his community and had enhanced his receptivity to the mystery of existence. Such qualities, he insisted, explained why Romania could never become industrial: the Romanian lacked the spirit of calculation and the discipline of work that were the foundations of bourgeois-capitalist society.

Other traditionalists, as wary as Ionescu of the unhealthy effects of Western rationalism and institutions on their agrarian, peasant societies, nonetheless thought of Europe as a single entity and remained hopeful about a reconciliation of East and West. Some of the solutions they proposed were ingenious. Yanko Yanev, for example, in the 1930s conceived of a new Europe that was rooted in his understanding of early Europe and the relationship of the Balkans to it. Old Europe, the Europe of 2,000 years before, was, in his mind, a place where heroism and myths of the people predominated, where history depended on the “flow of blood of the villages and the air of blue mountain peaks”, and where the spiritual essence of life arose out of an ethnic-national (*völkisch*)

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<sup>32</sup> Janko Janeff, *Zwischen Abend und Morgen*, Leipzig, 1943, p. 76, 227-228.

<sup>33</sup> Nina Dimitrova, *Religiia i natsionalizum. Idei za religiiata v mezhduvoennia period v Bulgariia*, Sofia, 2006, p. 167-182; Nina Dimitrova, *Pravoslavie i ezichestvo v bulgarskata khumanitaristika mezhdur svetovni voini*, in “Religiia i tsurkva v Bulgariia”, Sofia, 1999, p. 423-426.

<sup>34</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Spatiul mioritic (1936)*, in Idem, “Trilogia culturii”, București, 1944, p. 181-182, 241-249.

<sup>35</sup> Idem, *Hronicul și cîntecul vîrstelor*, p. 167.

substance.<sup>36</sup> His great discovery was that old Europe had survived intact in the Balkans, that is, in its mountains and among its peasants and in their “barbarian” spirit. He attributed the success of the Balkan peoples in preserving their “pagan sense of destiny” to their isolation from the main currents of European religious and cultural life for two millennia. But now he perceived clear signs that the Balkan peoples were about to renew their communion with Europe through the revival of the traditional European world that was taking place in national-socialist Germany.

Yanev perceived an enduring affinity between the Germanic and Balkan peoples; they had shared the same fate, and in their veins flowed the blood of the same “world race”, the Indo-Aryans. The Balkans, he proclaimed, was in its essence more Nordic than Eastern and was as Indo-Aryan as the north and west of Europe.<sup>37</sup> It was no accident, he thought, that German influence had touched the soul of the Balkan peoples in unique ways and that a “secret dialogue” between the north and the southeast had blossomed.

Yanev was certain that the German and Balkan peoples were participating together in a movement that was shaking contemporary Europe to its spiritual foundations and was heralding the advent of a new age. He took this cooperation as dramatic proof that their destinies were linked. The German revolution under the National Socialists, he argued, had inaugurated the history of the new Europe and would at the same time foster the renaissance of Southeastern Europe. It would free the peoples of the region from pernicious foreign influences, notably Christianity and the “shadows of Byzantine civilization”, all of which had robbed its peoples of their ability to unite with the traditions of the true European spirit. But Yanev assigned to Southeastern Europe itself a no less crucial role in the transformation of Europe. He insisted that the new spirit, represented by the German revolution in the north, was borne in the southeast by the peasant, who was the protector of traditional values and who stood for an attitude toward life that was bound to the soil. Awakening from his long “exclusion” from the life of Europe, the Balkan peasant was the new man of the new age, alive and vigorous, who, like the peasant in the north, would serve as the living bulwark of the Europe being born. The very forces that the European man of the future would need, Yanev, argued, were to be found in the Balkans. These were forces that had created the “irrational circle of life” in the West when it was young and still close to nature and that the Balkan peasant and mountain man, sheltered for centuries from the corrosion of modern civilization, had preserved intact.<sup>38</sup> Should the West “grow stiff” again and be no longer capable of making history, then, Yanev predicted, Balkan blood would continue to flow and nourish Europe; the more

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<sup>36</sup> Janko Janeff, *Heroismus und Weltangst*, Herrsching, 1937, p. 45-46, 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, *Südosteuropa und der deutsche Geist*, Berlin, 1938, p. 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28, 44-45; Janeff, *Dämonie des Jahrhunderts*, p. 246-248; Janko Janeff, *Der Mythos auf dem Balkan*, Berlin, 1936, p. 146.

the West industrialized and urbanized the greater would be its dependence on the reservoir of Balkan peasant strength.<sup>39</sup> In the end, he thus conceived of Europe as a whole, which he defined in metaphysical terms as a process or a symbol by which the eternal continuously revealed itself. He concluded that Europe could not be divided into parts, eastern and western, because the essence of Europe was inherent in every people in every corner of the continent.<sup>40</sup>

Justin Popović and Miloš Đurić, sharing Yanev's faith in the unity of Europe and in the regenerative powers of the peoples of Southeastern Europe, were certain that the Slavs of the Balkans would initiate the revival of Europe and restore its essential oneness. Popović thought that any solution to the crisis affecting European man and the Serbs, in particular, would necessarily be spiritual. Like Yanev, he looked to the Balkans, but, unlike him, he turned to the devout Orthodox, not the ardent pagan. The opposite of European man, for Popović, was Slavic man, whom he endowed with evangelical love, a sense of brotherhood of all men, and humility. He discovered the essence of Slavic man in Orthodoxy, which proclaimed the God-man Christ and made Him the supreme value and ultimate measure of all things. In these strivings of Slavic man Popović was certain that he had found the key to salvation for European man through the abandonment of the infallible, autarkic man-God and the wholehearted embrace of the God-man Christ. Like Nikolaj Velimirović, he was certain that Europe's future depended on a "*religious rebirth*" and looked to the Orthodox Slavs, especially the Serbs and the Russians, to reawaken in European man his faith in God and thus lead him out of his spiritual crisis to redemption.<sup>41</sup> For the Serbs themselves, Popović offered the same prescription: they must be faithful to their Orthodox spiritual heritage because Orthodoxy was the soul of the Serbian people and the Serbs were Serbs precisely because they were Orthodox.<sup>42</sup>

Miloš Đurić assigned to *Svečovek*, the complete man, a cultural mission of enormous consequences not only for the Serbs and South Slavs but also for European man. For Đurić, that mission was to link the Eastern conception of life as peace with the Western conception of life as struggle, thereby combining Western rationalism, positivism, and materialism with Eastern irrationalism, intuitionism, and spiritualism. Only the Slavs, he argued, who belonged to neither East nor West, were capable of offering such a synthesis of competing conceptions of existence.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Janeff, *Zwischen Abend und Morgen*, p. 294.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus*, p. 99-102.

<sup>42</sup> Justin Popović, *O neprikosnovenom veličanstvu čoveka*, in Idem, "Filosofske urvine", p. 469.

<sup>43</sup> Miloš Đurić, *Kulturna misija slovena*, (1924), in Idem, "Kulturna istorija i rani filozofski spisi", Beograd, 1997, p. 256-268.

The Southeastern Europe that the traditionalists extolled and the spiritual Europe they hoped for were not to be. The Second World War destroyed their illusions about a rebirth of Europe, and the Communist order that followed imposed materialism and machines on their imagined rural spiritual world. Where, then, does the importance of the traditionalists lie? Perhaps it may be found, first of all, in the spirited contribution they made to the debate about identity and history and development in interwar Southeastern Europe. They stood for autochthonous values in the face of a relentless Europeanization. In so doing, they may have eased the transition of their region to the modern world.