

SYSTEMS, DOCTRINES AND IDEOLOGIES

NICHIFOR CRAINIC AND “GÎNDIREA.” NATIONALISM AND ORTHODOXISM IN INTERWAR ROMANIA (II)

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4. 1926–1933. Nichifor Crainic between the Sense of the Tradition and Idol of the Nation

After 1926, Nichifor Crainic became the sole director of “Gîndirea” in Bucharest. If before this date he was just one of the leading editors of the journal, from this year he became the main figure behind the editorial staff. Another reason for selecting this date was the fact that in this particular year Eugen Lovinescu published the last volume of his masterpiece *Istoria Civilizației Române Moderne*¹ (The History of the Modern Romanian Civilization). Coming from the pro-Western intellectual faction, Eugen Lovinescu launched his theory on the cultural synchronism between Romania and the Western culture.² This was one of the turning points in “Gîndirea”’s development.³ Another reason for taking into consideration this particular year relates to the fact that the editorial board of “Gîndirea” started to change its contributors.

From 1926–1928 there is an obvious shift from the former contributors (Cezar Petrescu, Lucian Blaga, Alexandru Busuioceanu, etc.) to young people like Mircea Eliade, Vasile Băncilă, Radu Dragnea or even Nae Ionescu, who began to write in the pages of this journal. The shift was a direct result of the radicalization of Nichifor Crainic’s traditionalism. Although Crainic supported *Orthodoxism* even before 1926, after this year his option became permanent. The infusion of new people and Nichifor Crainic’s commitment to *Orthodoxism* had tremendous consequences: from this moment, Crainic assured himself the leading position as the main ideologue of “Gîndirea.”⁴

The reason why Crainic began to radicalize his Orthodoxist view lies in the fact that Crainic is an intellectual who wanted to become a political regime’s ideologue. This idea was common in that particular period. Heidegger’s or Carl

¹ Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria Civilizației Române Moderne*, București, 1997.

² For details about this theory see Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947*, Oxford, 1994, p. 293; for another presentation see Zigu Ornea, *Introduction to Eugen Lovinescu, Istoria Civilizației Române Moderne*, p. VI.

³ Dumitru Micu, *Gîndirea și gîndirismul*, București, 1975, p. 76.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

Schmitt's rapprochements with the Nazi regime⁵ took place in this particular period and so did the ideological involvement of Marinetti's avant-gardist circle in Mussolini's fascist party.⁶ These are the sign of an intellectual trend of the interwar period: the intellectual serving the political regime. Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*⁷ in which the intellectuals had as a task the "guidance of the leader" or Giovanni Gentile's major political role in Fascist Italy are enough proof of the formative functionality of the intellectuals in the totalitarian regimes.

Crainic makes no exception and his career after 1926, although not a committed Fascist sympathizer yet, reflects this intellectual tendency already present in the other countries from Western Europe. More precisely, as a politicized intellectual he started to balance vaguely his political option from a rightist position to an open supporter of the Iron Guard. Nevertheless, the nature of the political creed behind Nichifor Crainic's political rapprochement remained ambiguous, a position which seemed to characterize in the same age some other intellectuals from Germany or Italy⁸. His shift from the condition of an intellectual disinterested in politics in the 1921–1926 to his election as a deputy in the Romanian Parliament in 1927 demonstrates without doubt that something had changed in Nichifor Crainic's perception of politics and of its importance in the nationalist and cultural agenda. I think that his editorial efforts and his programmatic zeal to legitimize his understanding of the Orthodoxist traditionalism welcomed the National Peasants Party's eclectic ideology⁹ which was addressed to the Romanian peasantry, subjected to economical unevenness caused by problematic management of the Romanian economy, a peasantry neglected from 1921 to 1927 by the economical Liberal initiatives of the Romanian governments.¹⁰

⁵ Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind. Intellectuals in Politics*, Chicago, 2003 (Romanian edition, Iași, 2005, pp. 53-116).

⁶ For Marinetti's intellectual impact, see Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder & Maia Asheri, *The Birth of the Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, Princeton, 1994, pp. 28-30.

⁷ For a commentary on Heidegger, see Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, Cambridge, 1997 which tends to consider the entire philosophical work of Heidegger dominated by a subordinate position towards Nazism.

⁸ In the interwar period "there is difficult to attempt a distinction between Conservatives and Fascists" used to say Martin Blinkhorne in the *Introduction to Fascists and Conservatives. The Radical Right and the Establishment in the Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 1.

⁹ The National Peasants Party's ideology never presented itself in a unitary key: Maniu's centrists were mixing populist ideas coming from the Left in the garments of Peasantism which was obviously addressed to the majority of the Romanian population and corporatist ideas inspired by the Italian Fascism. Vaida-Voievod's rightist wing adopted a proto-fascist and highly nationalistic discourse in which all the Jews and the alien minorities had to be subject to a *numerus clausus* in the Romanian administration and schools. The leftist wing of the Party was highly populist and its political opportunism in the interwar period proved their political instability.

¹⁰ Henry L. Roberts, *Romania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Yale, 1969, p. 112.

Although Dumitru Micu considers that Nichifor Crainic, by assuming the leading role in the journal, offered a certain sense of cohesion to the review, it must be argued that people like Mircea Eliade, Dragoș Protopopescu, or Lucian Blaga, although they supported the traditionalist agenda behind "Gîndirea," cannot be labeled as exponents of Crainic's *Orthodoxism*. At this stage their cultural option was purely aesthetic and they did not involve in any kind of politics by the turn of the decade. Nevertheless, I argue that before 1926 Crainic was not interested at all in involvement in politics. He was simply content to criticize a cultural direction of the Romanian culture which was different than his, namely the intellectual circle gathered around Eugen Lovinescu, or to disapprove the official politics of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church.¹¹

After 1926 Crainic calibrated his articles on a political agenda focused on the relevance and the future role reserved to the Romanian peasantry in the future development of the Romanian state and culture. This type of cultural discourse was not innocent; in that year Iuliu Maniu and his followers from the National Peasants Party challenged the political hegemony of the Liberal government with an electoral offer directed towards the peasantry.¹² The ideological consanguinity between the two discourses¹³ is too evident to be just a coincidence and Crainic's election in 1927 as deputy in the Romanian Parliament on the electoral lists of the National Peasants Party confirms this hypothesis as well.¹⁴

Therefore, the written works of Nichifor Crainic from this period are either bitter criticism addressed to Eugen Lovinescu¹⁵, or programmatic texts about the role of the traditionalist culture in shaping the true Romanian culture. One of the most charismatic pieces of text ever written by Crainic in "Gîndirea" is *Sensul Tradiției*¹⁶ which best reflects Crainic's crystallization of the traditionalist ideology as Orthodoxism and the future career of this text only comes to prove its impact on the Romanian understanding of ethnicity.¹⁷ By criticizing bitterly the European

¹¹ Even from this period the Romanian Orthodox Church began to present itself as a key-spokesman of the Romanian nationalism. Olivier Gillet, *L'Église orthodoxe roumaine et la 'nation' au XX^e siècle: une forme d'ethnophylétisme contemporaine*, in vol. *Church and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Maria Crăciun, Ovidiu Ghitta, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, pp. 292-315.

¹² Stephen Fischer-Galați, *The Interwar period: Greater Romania*, in Dinu C. Giurescu, Stephen Fischer-Galați, *Romania. A Historical perspective*, Boulder, 1998, p. 302.

¹³ Although I think it is too much to claim that Maniu and the Peasantist ideology were traditional at all.

¹⁴ Armin Heinen, *Die Legionen "Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien, Soziale Bewegung und Politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, München, 1986 (Romanian edition, București, 1999, p. 168).

¹⁵ Nichifor Crainic, *A doua neatîrnare*, in "Gîndirea," V, 1926, no. 11.

¹⁶ Idem, *Sensul Tradiției*, ibidem, 1927, no. 4 (I will use the text from idem, *Puncte cardinale în haos*, Iași, 1996, p. 123 and *passim*).

¹⁷ Nicoleta Sălcudeanu, *Present Day Reverberations of the Traditionalist-Nationalism-Orthodoxism. Synthesis professed by "Gîndirea" Magazine*, in vol. *Church and Society*, ed. by Maria Crăciun, Ovidiu Ghitta, pp. 338-344.

intellectuals from the 19th and 20th centuries for fabricating a Romanian culture deprived of any spirituality¹⁸, Crainic argued against this trend that they had shaped the Romanian culture only as culture of consummation of the French culture neglecting the possibility of a cultural assimilation of the West¹⁹.

“For the traditionalists, the everlasting issue of Westernization or the relationship with the West which bothers and disorients so many Romanian intellectuals is reduced to a naturally process of cultural assimilation. But beyond this assimilation, the higher target is national creation. A Nicolae Bălcescu, a Mihail Kogălniceanu, a Bogdan-Petriceicu Hașdeu, a Mihai Eminescu, a George Coșbuc, a Vasile Pîrvan, or Nicolae Iorga appear to us under both aspects of vast assimilation of the foreign culture and the monumental autochthon creation. Traditionalism sees in them historical revelations of the substance of permanent life which lies in the depths of this people. If the mission of the Romanian people is to create a culture after its image and likeness, this implies also how its orientation must be resolved. Whoever recommends an orientation towards the West speaks nonsense. ‘Orientalism’ contains within itself the notion of ‘Orient’ and means directing ourselves toward the Orient, in accord with the Orient. Altars face toward the Orient, the icons of hearth face us from the Orient; the peasant who kneels in the field faces the Orient. Everywhere it is said light comes from the East. And for us, who find ourselves geographically in the Orient and who, through the Orthodox religion, hold to the truths of the eastern world, there can be no other orientation than toward the Orient that is toward ourselves ... Westernization means the negation of our orientalness; Europeanizing nihilism means the negation of our creative potential. This means to negate in principle, a Romanian culture, to negate a destiny proper to Romanians, and to accept the destiny of a people born dead.”²⁰

What Crainic meant was that Western imports in the Romanian culture had no meaning because this was an inorganic process which did not take into account the cultural tradition which, although imported some cultural features from the West has assimilated that features and created an original autochthon culture. Practically, Crainic brought again in the discussion the Junimist idea that any future national culture had to take into account the presence of the Romanian culture. But Crainic had this idea reinterpreted and he brought his own contribution. If for Junimists national culture was only an ideal, Crainic enjoyed the privilege of having an intellectual legacy which became normative for the Romanian culture before him. He named this continuity tradition and presumed

¹⁸ Nichifor Crainic, *Sensul Tradiției*, pp. 123-125.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 126. I have to argue that Crainic’s understanding of cultural assimilation of the West can be very closely associated to Lovinescu’s synchronism.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 126-127. The translation of the text *apud* Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology and National Character in Interwar Romania*, in vol. *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, ed. by Ivo Banac, Katherine Verdery, New Haven, 1995, p. 112.

that this cultural tradition was intimately associated with the Christian autochthonist tradition. Accordingly, he understood that a future process of creating an original culture had to take into account the rural Oriental civilization that is the mixture between Orthodoxy and the rural culture and this is Crainic's main achievement and element of novelty: unlike the Junimists, he took into consideration the relevance of the Orthodoxy as a decisive factor in building an authentic Romanian culture which would have kept the organicity between the past, the present, and the future untouched.

According to Keith Hitchins Crainic foresaw little hope for the West: "but Romania could avoid the ruin if it would commit itself to the cultivation of higher spiritual values – namely those set forth in the gospel as interpreted by the Eastern Orthodox Church and those in the deeper layers of the folk culture. In other words, Romania would have to cleave to tradition and avoid the leveling and uniformity of civilization which was being pressed upon the new generation by Westernizers like Eugen Lovinescu with his theory of synchronism. Using the theory of cultural style, Crainic attempted to demonstrate the organic nature of culture and the sterility of imitation."²¹

Crainic considered that any future Romanian culture was related to a Christian Orthodox horizon which was presented in an Oriental key with maximum moderation because of the Bolshevik phobia which circulated among Romanians.²² By privileging two elements through which he could frame the concept of tradition, language and blood,²³ Crainic proposed an interwar variant of the Junimist idea on the organic character of the Romanian culture. As Zigu Ornea pointed out²⁴, there was a huge difference between traditionalism as a cultural trend which advocated for a return to an uncorrupted culture and tradition in which Crainic saw the organic character of the Romanian culture about which the Junimists had spoken before him.

However, there are certain points of departure between what the Junimists had in mind and what Crainic intended to achieve. First of all, for Crainic "organic" means a Christian tradition disseminated in the Romanian rural culture which has nothing in common with the Junimist intention. Again, Crainic applied the concept of a Christian, rural tradition as the ultimate expression of an authentic

²¹ Keith Hitchins, "Gîndirea": *Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise*, in vol. *Social Change in Romania, 1860–1940. A Debate on Development in a European Nation*, ed. by Kenneth Jowitt, Berkeley, 1978, pp. 153-154.

²² For the relation between Bolshevism and traditionalist orientalism in Romania, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology*, p. 111.

²³ Although, as Zigu Ornea had pointed in *The Romanian Extreme Right. The Nineteen Thirties*, Boulder, 1999, pp. 94-95, Gobineau's theories about the relation between blood and ethnicity were at that time proved wrong by biologists.

²⁴ Zigu Ornea, *Tradiționalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea*, București, 1980, p. 25.

Romanian spirituality in front of a generation of intellectuals which were not supporters of this idea. What could surprise the reader is the presence among the prophets of Romanianness of Nicolae Bălcescu and Nicolae Iorga who were both famous for their secular views regarding Romanian character and culture. Nevertheless, after this programmatic text, Crainic wrote two articles dedicated to Bălcescu²⁵ and Iorga²⁶ in which he presented both of them as precursors of Orthodox traditionalism, although Bălcescu, for example, did not fit in Crainic's traditionalist and Orthodoxist pattern.²⁷

Therefore, Crainic fabricated an intellectual tradition with appealing names for his contesters which were quoting in their defense Crainic's most important references (Maiorescu, Iorga, the Junimist movement from Iași) to demonstrate that Crainic was proposing an alternative which lacked one of its fundamental features, namely its "organic" character. Although Nicolae Bălcescu was a representative of the 1848 secular generation that he criticized heavily in his previous texts for forcibly Europeanizing an Oriental/Orthodox traditional culture, Crainic preferred Bălcescu because he was one of the first Romanian historians who advocated openly for the ethnical unity of all Romanians and because Crainic saw in the 1848 historian a messianic feature characteristic for the young generation, a generation to which Crainic was addressing then. Nicolae Iorga represented the linkage between the Junimists and Crainic's generation and the nationalist impact of Iorga before World War I assured him a place in Crainic's intellectual tradition. Thus, though it was a cultural and ideological paradox, Crainic was reframing himself as the continuator of the 1848 generation and the Junimists, both interpreted in a traditionalist Orthodoxist key.

In 1929, Crainic added to his previous discourse another feature whose presence was determined by the emergence of a generation of young Romanian intellectuals: the youth. As in Germany, the youth was the first exponent of the Romantic *Völkisch* spirit and the most revolted category of people against modernity with its cosmopolitanism, revolt which will be used in their advantage by the fascist leaders, including Hitler or Codreanu²⁸. He started to propose his ethno-theology to the young elite which began to appear especially at the end of the 1920s in Romania. The first text of Crainic which was consecrated to the Romanian young generation was *Spiritualitate*²⁹ (Spirituality) and this text became paradigmatic for the future evolution of Nichifor Crainic's speech at the turn of the

²⁵ Nichifor Crainic, *Nicolae Bălcescu*, in "Gîndirea," 1927, no. 12, pp. 340-347.

²⁶ Idem, *Estetica lui Nicolae Iorga*, ibidem, 1931, nos. 6-7-8, p. 341 and *passim*.

²⁷ For example, in *Nicolae Bălcescu*, p. 340, Crainic described the 1848 revolutionary and historian as the materialization of the "twofold ideal: reunited nationality and demophile democracy."

²⁸ For Germany see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York, 1998, p. 266 and *passim*.

²⁹ Nichifor Crainic, *Spiritualitate*, in "Gîndirea," 1929, nos. 8-9, pp. 307-310.

decades. I will suggest that the motives of Crainic's interest in the Romanian youth are manifold; nevertheless, this period in Crainic's writing, after the conclusion of his ideological program has as main cause of Crainic's depart from the National Peasants Party in which he failed to become a leading ideologue the absence of a political radicalization of Iuliu Maniu's political ideology and the transfer of his interest towards a new generation of intellectuals whose ideologue Crainic hoped to become eventually.

The feeling of the young, revolutionary generation was close to Fascist ideology, especially with the Iron Guard's electoral offer from the beginning of the 1930s. I will not go that far as to claim that in this particular period, the end of the 1920s, Crainic had any pro-Iron Guard sympathies. Rather, Crainic attempted to attract the adherence of the Romanian young elite to his Orthodoxist ideology and, accordingly, to transform, as Iorga before him, into the foremost ideologue of the Romanian young generation. The fact that a number of young intellectuals like Mircea Eliade³⁰, Vasile Băncilă or Dragoș Protopopescu started to publish in one of the most prestigious cultural journals in Romania under Crainic's supervision is another sign about Crainic's intentions to advertise his traditionalist ideology among the young generation of the late 1920s.³¹

In *Spiritualitate* Crainic started with a dismissal of the secular academic life from Bucharest before the beginning of World War I, including Iorga and his professors in the Faculty of Theology and the main reasons for this was the "positivist [secular] spirit" and "the political subjection of the Romanian culture and its strict limitation around the ethnical, historical egoism."³² The only escape for the present generation, argued Crainic, was "to return to the people's soul, that soul which our ancestors identified with religion ... Our traditionalism wants³³ ... the alliance of our ephemerality with eternity."³⁴

Crainic continued his meditations about nationality, Orthodoxy, traditionalism and the mission of the young generation in another article *Puncte cardinale în haos*³⁵ (Points of the compass in Chaos). Crainic returns to his initial

³⁰ In his letters addressed to Cezar Petrescu Eliade spoke with respect about Nichifor Crainic and a possible collaboration between him and "Gîndirea," see Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America ... Corespondență II*, București, 2004, pp. 462-466.

³¹ Nevertheless, after 1928 Crainic began to understand that the Romanian young generation had some other mentor: his rival, Nae Ionescu. For details about the divorce between Crainic and the young generation, see Florin Țurcanu, *Mircea Eliade. Prizonierul istoriei*, București, 2003, pp. 150-151. Nevertheless, why Crainic's *Orthodoxism* had so little appeal among the intellectuals of the 1930s generation remains an open question.

³² Nichifor Crainic, *Spiritualitate*, p. 309.

³³ As Dumitru Micu has correctly pointed out, these expressions mark the traditionalist speech in making.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

³⁵ See note 16.

preoccupation which gravitates around the concept of demophily³⁶. In both texts, Crainic made use of this concept which summarizes a Romanian definition of nationalism which leads to Orthodoxy: “the demophile feeling is one of the methods through which we can reach to the thinking of the spiritualism about which I have spoken. Because our people is not materialist or idealist; in his soul live the elements of the spiritualism, in instinctive form, in form of nature. They only wait to be reflected by the scholarly keenness and to acquire the blazing form of culture.”³⁷

The new nationalist catechism of the Romanian young generation represents the peak of Nichifor Crainic’s interwar career. Fighting on double fronts – both King Carol II and the new generation – Crainic hoped that he could catch the eye of the new generation and he failed twice.

After 1932, there is another shift in Crainic’s ideological discourse regarding his involvement in the new generation. He became director of “Calendarul” newspaper, recognized as one of the first daily advocating openly in favor of the Legion of Archangel Michael led by Zelea-Codreanu and supported financially by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Ardeal.³⁸ The reason why an Orthodox bishop started to support a newspaper which soon will turn out to be the most important public rostrum of the Iron Guard remains uncertain. Many of the young contributors from “Gîndirea” like Dragoș Protopopescu, Radu Dragnea, but also new figures like Toma Vlădescu, Vasile Vojen, Emil Cioran, or Mihail Polihroniade, the later ideologue of the Iron Guard and director of “Axa” were the main contributors of this newspaper. In 1932 it was plain for everyone that Crainic changed his speech from “Gîndirea” for a more fascist focalized discourse and the reason for this attitude was related to the collapse of democracy and economic crisis in Romania, but also to the dissipation of the National Peasants Party in different wings under the instigations of King Carol II.³⁹ The affinity between fascism and the Romanian King and the fact that after his coronation he started to encourage financially the Iron Guard hoping that he could subordinate the movement to his authoritarian purposes together with Nichifor Crainic’s sympathy towards King Carol, determined Crainic to understand that his last gambling on National Peasants Party and Carol II failed to institutionalize Crainic as the official ideologue of any political regime.

³⁶ The concept was created by putting together two Greek words: *demos* which meant “people” with political rights and *philia* which is a synonym for “love.” For Crainic, “demofilia” was intended to be synonymous with Jesus’s love for its people described in the Gospels. In other words, by using this term Crainic sought to find a Christian origin in order to legitimize nationalism as according to the Christian doctrine.

³⁷ Idem, *Puncte cardinale în haos*, p. 26.

³⁸ Elie Miron Cristea, *Note ascunse. Însemnări personale (1895–1937)*, Cluj-Napoca, 1999, p. 149.

³⁹ Stephen Fischer-Galați, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

In 1932 the fact that the Iron Guard succeeded to secure two seats in the Romanian parliament – although this first electoral success did not have much impact on the Romanian political scene⁴⁰ –, together with Hitler's political rise in Germany gave Crainic the feeling that the tide had turned. Consequently, he commenced to reframe his intellectual discourse from "Gîndirea" to a more fascist influenced speech in journals like "Calendarul" and "Sfarmă-Piatră." To the fascist adhesion of Crainic contributed also the fact that some of his collaborators (Toma Vlădescu, Mihail Polihroniade, Dragoș Protopopescu, etc.) from "Calendarul" chose to join the Iron Guard in the last months of the 1932.⁴¹

In "Calendarul," Crainic is no longer the apolitical intellectual which up to 1926 considered that framing an authentic Romanian culture was the matter at stake for any nationalist, but rather he expressed his political convictions clearly in his first articles in which he advocated for economical corporatism according to the Italian fascist model⁴², against the Liberal or Communist view on property to which he opposed a "Christian function of the property" that is "the allotment of the wealth has to be changed according to imperative of social justice and love for the neighbor"⁴³, by advertising indirectly for the redemptive young generation of the Romanian Iron Guard⁴⁴, by sending the Romanian intellectuals to earn their living through agriculture.⁴⁵

One of the most penetrating texts of Nichifor Crainic from "Calendarul" seemed to be *Spre noul Bizanț. Epilog la o conferință balcanică*⁴⁶ (Towards the new Byzantium. Epilogue to a Balkan conference) in which Crainic supported the idea that, for the societies from the Balkans "Orthodox civilization and its ideal for

⁴⁰ Armin Heinen, *Die Legionen "Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien, Soziale Bewegung und Politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, (Romanian edition, p. 161).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

⁴² *De la conștiința profesională la corporatism*, in "Calendarul," 1932, no. 176, p. 1.

⁴³ *Drama proprietății*, *ibidem*, no. 177, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Alte măști – aceeași față*, *ibidem*, no. 182, p. 1: "Romania's redemption cannot come only through the young and unblemished generation, through those who grew up in the profound repugnance towards the politician regime thievish and destructive, through those who endured in their own flesh and nerves the afflictions of this politicianism through which some have been martyred from one side of this country to the other by the ruthless revenges of the club's bandits."

⁴⁵ *Fenomenul canadian. Intelectualii se reîntorc la plug*, *ibidem*, no. 193, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 202, p. 1. Sorin Antohi's hypothesis from *Culianu și Eliade. Vestigiile unei inițieri*, in vol. *Exercițiul distanței. Discursuri, societăți, metode*, București, 1998 about the parallelism, which Crainic seemed to establish between *românofilism* and *Slavophilism* and between Moscow and Bucharest as the Third and the Fourth Rome, though seductive, for the present moment, in the absence of sufficient texts, is nothing more than a historical hypothesis requiring some further investigations.

universal harmony are the political platform” of a “pan-Orthodox policy” of the states from the region. Although he often spoke about Orthodoxy and its political implications, culture was neglected by Crainic and the only initiative he had on this subject was an article from 1932 in which he declared that “the spiritual assets created by the artistic, reasoning, and scientific elites of this people”⁴⁷ should have kept alive the national culture.

Another issue of interest on Nichifor Crainic’s agenda was the young generation. What was different from “Gîndirea” lies in the fact that in “Calendarul” Crainic did not propose a Christian alternative for the young generation, but he had already noticed that his project was taken into account by the young generation: “a young generation who believes in the dogma of race purity and proclaims the absolute of the religious faith does not wander” because “from its beginnings Romania has been built on these two great ideas: the national idea with its earthly substance and the Christian idea with its heavenly essence.”⁴⁸

In this period from “Calendarul” Crainic’s shifted towards an anti-democratic and anti-Bolshevik, pro-ethnocratic and corporatist discourse which was directed to the young generation sympathizing with the fascist ideology of the Iron Guard. The intellectual discourse of Crainic which in “Gîndirea” was ideologically traditionalist and highly dominated by an aesthetical ideal was abandoned by the ideologue Crainic for a more journalistic and inquisitorial approach of his own ethnocratic stance and of the political and social context of interwar Romania. This choice had as a consequence a broader audience for Crainic’s intellectual ideas which were presented in a more abridged and uncomplicated form.

From a different angle, although Crainic had a cultural ideology behind his statements, the director of “Gîndirea” chose to become also director at “Calendarul” because he wanted to back up a political ideology without which his Orthodoxy would have remained only an idealist project destined to obscurity and oblivion⁴⁹. By conducting the editorial efforts of “Calendarul,” Crainic played his cards double-handed: on the one hand, he maintained himself as the undisputed ideologue of *Orthodoxy* but, on the other hand, he decided to leave his political seclusion after the coronation of King Carol II and to embrace the political ideology of the young generation: the movement led by Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu.

⁴⁷ *Faliții și senatul cultural*, in “Calendarul,” 1932, no. 330, p. 1.

⁴⁸ *Congresul studențesc*, ibidem, no. 230, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Zigu Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right. The Nineteen Thirties*, p. 29 confirms that Crainic was offered a place for the Romanian Parliament on the electoral lists of the Iron Guard and that many Orthodox priests had joined the Iron Guard because of Crainic’s influence.

5. After 1934. Nichifor Crainic between Fascist ethnocracy and Anti-Semitism

After the assassination of Prime Minister I. G. Duca by three legionaries of Codreanu on 29 December 1933, both "Calendarul" and "Gîndirea" were prohibited from being published on the accusation of Fascist propaganda for the Iron Guard. Moreover, Nichifor Crainic was imprisoned together with Nae Ionescu and other leaders of the Iron Guard for a few months without trial for his pro-Fascist articles under the accusation of being the moral author of the crime against Duca. Nevertheless, he was released afterwards.⁵⁰ Accordingly, his first article after his imprisonment is a return to his ethnic *Orthodoxism* and a reply to Nicolae Iorga who accused Crainic of being "irresponsible" for his fascist sympathies. After writing his public defense, Crainic produced a public defense of the Iron Guard as well.

Entitled programmatically *Tineretul și creștinismul*⁵¹ (The Youth and Christianity), Crainic's first article after the days spent in prison started with a clear statement which leaves no doubt about the real intentions of the author: "our age is the age of the youth."⁵² Crainic changed again his political agenda and I would dare to argue that this text is another clear sign of his adherence to the Romanian Iron Guard. By making reference to the Romanian youth which is no longer the young generation of the intellectuals from the end of the 1920s, the abyss between the "old world" and the "new world" which is about to come⁵³, the psychology of death⁵⁴, "the metaphysical meaning of existence"⁵⁵, anti-Semitism, the new Romanian Christian Students Association, the introduction of the Christian element in the University as a reply to both Judaic element and academic positivism are all elements already present in the incipient ideology and in the political speech of the Romanian Iron Guard.⁵⁶

What confirms in my view the suspicions about a certain remaining affinity between Crainic and the verdant Iron Guard is another eloquent paragraph from the

⁵⁰ Nichifor Crainic, *Zile albe. Zile negre*, București, 1991, p. 253 and *passim*.

⁵¹ Idem, *Tineretul și creștinismul*, in "Gîndirea," 1934, no. 3.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁵³ This was a metaphor dear to Benito Mussolini who in an article about "the world to come" written apparently by Giovanni Gentile for the *Enciclopedia italiana* in 1931 spoke about "the new principle in the world, the clear, the final, and categoric antithesis of democracy, plutocracy ... The fascist conception of the State is all-embracing, and outside the State no human or spiritual values can exist, let alone be desirable." The information is from George Lichtheim, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, London, 1972, p. 159.

⁵⁴ Nichifor Crainic, *Tineretul și creștinismul*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 67-68.

same text in which he practically framed a hagiographic account of the Iron Guard's leaders who were imprisoned together with him. By imitating Codreanu's text, Crainic framed a link between the 1924 and 1934 young generations of the Iron Guard, although he was not supporting anymore the Iron Guard movement after the entrance of Codreanu under the influence of Elena Lupescu, the mistress of Carol II.⁵⁷ "Thrown into prison, the heads of the student movements have time to analyze better their souls. Some chose to hunger, some to write everyday their thoughts and their feelings. They fast and gathering in a single group began to pray to God ... In their religious exaltation, the imprisoned young men have religious visions. It seems to them that Archangel Michael himself, the commander with the blazed sword of the celestial legions reveals himself and takes them under his protecting wings. From this moment, religious mysticism will descend in the tormented soul of this youth and some of them will put their organizations under the protection of the archangel and his icon will patronize their meeting houses."⁵⁸

Although it is obvious that Crainic spoke about the famous group⁵⁹ imprisoned in 1924 in Văcărești penitentiary for plotting against the political regime and preparing a number of assassinations against the Jewish and Liberal elites and which later on will become the "charismatic group" of the Iron Guard⁶⁰, Crainic had something else in mind when he wrote this text. Even though he was a mere sympathizer of the Iron Guard, he used this example in the text to prove that his nationalist convictions attracted social support and nationalism as Orthodoxy had finally found a social incarnation in the new generation represented by the Iron Guard, depicted as a new stage in Romanian nationalist tradition: "religious mysticism becomes from now on [from the moment when the Iron Guard came into existence] a constitutive element of nationalism and this new nationalism, which until yesterday crawled on earth, today bathes its upsurges in the unseen world of the angels."⁶¹

For the new generation Crainic proposed the values of the new Romanian nationalism: "Christ, the King, the Nation meaning the religion of the Fatherland, the national monarchy and the demophily, namely the deep feeling of love towards

⁵⁷ According to Crainic's own testimony from *Zile albe. Zile negre*, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Idem, *Tineretul și creștinismul*, p. 68. The text is a resumed version of Ioan Moța's account, Codreanu's lieutenant: *Minunea cerească întâmplată zilele trecute în închisoarea Clujului. Cu cine e Isus*, in "Pământul Strămoșesc," 1 February 1928, no. 3, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁹ It was formed by Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu, Ilie Gîrneață, Radu Mironovici, Ion Moța, Tudose Popescu and Corneliu Georgescu. They were all acquitted of all the accusations brought to them in March 1924.

⁶⁰ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, New York, 1995, p. 280 and *passim*.

⁶¹ Nichifor Crainic, *Tineretul și creștinismul*, p. 70.

the Romanian people and its institutions."⁶² The presence of the King among the fundamental values of the spiritualist nationalism of Crainic can be deceitful: although Romania had a King in the person of Carol II, Crainic chose to use a principle in order to show to his reader the respect towards the idea of authority embedded in the concept of monarchy, despite the fact that the King had disappointed him in the first place by preferring Nae Ionescu as the official ideologue, and in the second by sending him to prison.

*Titanii Ateismului*⁶³ (The Titans of Atheism) and *Rasă și Religie*⁶⁴ (Race and Religion) represented a double shift in Crainic's discourse. On the one hand, as Keith Hitchins noticed, it seemed that Crainic was more and more interested in the Western realities which he had rejected earlier. They became for Crainic political patterns as Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. By considering the Mussolinian state "created according to the principles of Christianity" and by contradicting the viability of a German religion, a Nazi Christianity, Crainic expressed his preference for the Italian fascism and his disagreement with Nazism. "Crainic's emphasis upon ethnicity and his admiration for fascism caused him to turn away from the venerated East towards the secular Rome."⁶⁵ On the other hand, Crainic practically uttered publicly his dissatisfaction with the Romanian Iron Guard, now under the influence of Nae Ionescu and, accordingly, he felt excluded from his leading position in the Iron Guard. I argue that up to 1944 Nichifor Crainic's texts continued to dwell on the same topics as before⁶⁶ with only one exception: his growing interest in Italian fascism.⁶⁷

Dissatisfied with Codreanu and Carol II, Nichifor Crainic, "with his traditionalism with an Orthodox shade, created a direction in the interwar movement of ideas. This is not little, though its founder wanted more. He sought to turn this ideological direction into a political one. He did not succeed although – as we shall see – he went as far as to set up a program."⁶⁸ Accordingly, inspired by Italian fascism⁶⁹, he shaped his own definition of the state which was for him the

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 70. This profoundly conservative creed was symmetrically similar to one represented by the Zbor movement in interwar Serbia. About this aspect see Maria Falina, *Between "Clerical Fascism" and Political Orthodoxy: Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Interwar Serbia*, in "Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions," vol. 8, 2007, no. 2, pp. 248-253.

⁶³ Nichifor Crainic, *Titanii ateismului*, in "Gîndirea," XIII, 1934, no. 7, pp. 257-263.

⁶⁴ *Rasă și religie*, *ibidem*, XIII, 1935, no. 2, pp. 57-66.

⁶⁵ Keith Hitchins, *Orthodoxism: Polemics over Ethnicity and Religion in Interwar Romania*, in vol. *National Character and National Ideology ...*, ed. by Ivo Banac, Katherine Verdery, p. 155.

⁶⁶ *Naționalitatea în artă*, in "Gîndirea," 1935, no. 3, pp. 113-116; *George Coșbuc, poetul rasei noastre*, *ibidem*, no. 5, pp. 258-267.

⁶⁷ *Roma universală*, *ibidem*, no. 4, pp. 169-175; *Omul eroic*, *ibidem*, 1936, no. 6; *Creștinismul și fascismul*, *ibidem*, 1937, no. 3.

⁶⁸ Zigu Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right*, p. 103.

⁶⁹ For Giovanni Gentile's influence over Crainic, see Dumitru Micu, *op. cit.*, p. 96. For Gentile in general see Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism. A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919-1945*, New York, 1971, p. 57-58 and James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals. Fascist Social and Political Thought*, Princeton, 2005, p. 1 and *passim*.

ethnocratic state hoping that someone would eventually embrace his idea and put it into practice. This was a mixture between some elements already present in Crainic's thought (cultural Orthodoxism, traditionalism, nationalism) with whole new elements: fascist corporatism⁷⁰ which was popularized by Mihail Manoilescu in a book named *Secolul corporatismului* (1934)⁷¹ but in a dissimilar manner⁷², anti-Semitism and xenophobia. I will not focus on the ethnocratic state because many of its features are nothing more than a summary of the articles and ideas already advertised by Crainic in his previous articles. The most striking consequence of his Orthodoxism from this stage is the anti-Semitic characteristic of his discourse which was much more moderate before⁷³.

Some of his later texts were afterwards included in *Ortodoxie și Ethnorație* together with an interesting annex named *Program of the Ethnocratic State*⁷⁴ which I think is the most fascist text ever written by Crainic and contained the most remarking statements regarding anti-Semitism. In his early years, Crainic had stated that: "We have not been, we are not and shall not be anti-Semites, because

⁷⁰ Crainic added to fascist corporatism a characteristic which made his ethnocratic state different from the Italian definition: the Ethnocratic State "differs from corporatism because in the professional legislation of the ethnocratic state it is introduced the principle of the numerical proportionality between Romanians and other minorities" (p. 249). For an overview regarding Italian corporatism, see R. J. B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism*, London, 1998, p. 106. I disagree with Mirel Bănică's idea from *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, stat și societate în anii '30*, Iași, 2007, pp. 223-224, that Nichifor Crainic's ethnocracy was inspired by the Catholic approach to politics or that it meant a project to reform the Church. For Crainic, ethnocracy was a political alternative shaped according to the fascist pattern and the Church was subordinated to the State in its efforts to establish cultural and ethnic uniformity.

⁷¹ After 1934, when he lost his political influence in front of King Carol II, he started to advocate for Italian corporatism hoping that he could approach the Romanian Iron Guard. However, the Iron Guard, through the voice of Ioan Moța, rejected corporatism as hidden Marxism. For Manoilescu's economical doctrine, see Philippe C. Schmitter, *Reflections on Mihail Manoilescu and the Political Consequences of the Delayed-Dependent Development on the Periphery of Western Europe*, in vol. *Social Change in Romania ...*, ed. by Kenneth Jowitt, pp. 117-139. For the rejection of corporatism by the Iron Guard, see Armin Heinen, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁷² Keith Hitchins ("*Gîndirea*": *Nationalism ...*, p. 156) argued that shaping the concept of ethnocracy, "unlike Manoilescu, Crainic based his sociology on the philosophy of religion and culture rather than upon economics, and he placed ethnicity at the center."

⁷³ As Andrei Oișteanu pointed out in *Imaginea evreului în cultura română*, București, 2004, p. 34, for Crainic the authoritarian ethnocratic state was characterized by Christian tolerance towards the Jews instead of the democratic indifference which seemed to characterize any democratic regime.

⁷⁴ Initially published in "Calendarul" in 1933, after his severance from the Iron Guard, *The Program of the Ethnocratic State* is an original application of the fascist corporatism to the Romanian society: "The Ethnocratic State sees the nation composed from different work social categories and professions ... The professions and the work categories are organic, consequent categories of the national life." (p. 248).

there is no cruelty in our souls against so many needy people who are suffering as we do, although they do not have our blood."⁷⁵ However, "... after 1933, the term enjoyed renewed popularity (...). To declare oneself an anti-Semite and openly praise anti-Semitism no longer dishonored an intellectual. Crainic did not hesitate to use anti-Semitism as a slogan of the new direction he represented; it became a guarantee of its validity: 'Our spirit is healthy because it is anti-Semitic: anti-Semitic in theory and anti-Semitic in practice.'"⁷⁶

The radicalization of Crainic's position can be seen best in two texts, one dedicated to Nicolae Păulescu⁷⁷ and the other written as a critique addressed to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru.⁷⁸ Placing himself in the continuation of Nicolae Păulescu's Christian defensive against Jewish aggression⁷⁹, Crainic stated that "Europe today is not stirred by a simple social war, nor by an ideological war. Today Europe is stirred by the war of the Talmud against the Gospel of Christ. The democratic regime of the last century, its unlimited liberties in paroxysm after world peace, has given the Jewish people an insane courage and the messianic frenzy of the White Horse. ... Since the French revolution, Judaism has won success after success, and its progressive domination in the world is blinding it to its limitations. However, these excesses of an immoderate people will be the downfall of Judaism."⁸⁰

For Crainic anti-Semitism was something borrowed from the cultural tradition of the Junimists and especially of their followers, namely people like Nicolae Iorga⁸¹ and A. C. Cuza⁸² and he felt somehow responsible for continuing this tradition. Another factor which led to the radicalization of Crainic's speech against the Jewish minority was the rise of the Iron Guard movement with its highly anti-Semitic doctrine. Therefore, Crainic remained faithful to the intellectual tradition of which he always saw himself as a direct continuator, but on the other hand, although his political and cultural options were influenced by the Italian fascism which was known for its moderation regarding anti-Semitic measures, he

⁷⁵ Nichifor Crainic, *În marginea unei sărbători*, in "Gîndirea," 1931, no. 11, p. 458.

⁷⁶ Leon Volovici, *National Ideology & Antisemitism. The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, Oxford, 1991, p. 97.

⁷⁷ Nichifor Crainic, *Nicolae Păulescu, fondatorul naționalismului creștin*, in Idem, *Ortodoxie și Etnocrație*, București, 1997, pp. 127-138.

⁷⁸ *Mistificarea românismului*, *ibidem*, pp. 95-111.

⁷⁹ Noticed by Leon Volovici, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁸⁰ *Naționalismul sub aspect creștin*, in *Ortodoxie și Etnocrație*, p. 143.

⁸¹ For Nicolae Iorga's anti-Semitism, see Răzvan Pârâianu, *Culturalist Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siècle Romania*, in Paul Weindling & Marius Turda, "Blood and Homeland": *Eugenics and Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940*, Budapest, 2006, p. 363.

⁸² Leon Volovici, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

embraced fully the anti-Semitism in order to remain in the sight of the Iron Guard which was gaining new political successes in the Romanian political sphere.

Accordingly, in *Mistificarea românilor* Crainic stood up as the defender of the true Junimist tradition which was anti-Semite against one of Iorga and Maiorescu's disciples, namely Constantin Rădulescu-Motru. In this article, after he resumed his view about Orthodoxy against a secular nationalism of Motru⁸³, Crainic added one more feature to this Orthodoxy that is anti-Semitism, a characteristic absent in Rădulescu-Motru's view: "Ethnocracy to which present day Romania tends is implicitly xenophobic and anti-Semite because its domination in culture, politics, and in the social life postulates the reduction of the foreigner's influence, the most modest case, according to the principle of numerical proportion. What kind of ethnocracy would be in the realm of culture when the press is in the hands of Jews and minorities who simulate our ideals replacing them in reality with the ideals of their own race? If every nation is a *unicum*, how can we recognize ourselves in the thought of the Jews which is determined by their own ethnical genius?"⁸⁴

Crainic's position about the minorities and the Jews is quite clear: in the best case a *numerus clausus* had to be introduced in order to reduce the influence of the foreigners in internal matters of Romania. Anti-Semitism remained a principal characteristic of Crainic's discourse in the *Program of the Ethnocratic State*. After stating that "The law of the State is the law of Christ"⁸⁵ and "the life conception of the state is spiritualist"⁸⁶, he came back to the one of his main themes which was expressed in the last of his ethnocratic principles, namely "the destruction of the Judaic parasitism."⁸⁷ This principle becomes manifest in the chapter relating to the "ethnic policy" where Crainic stated that the Romanian state had to "colonize Romanian people in the place of the Jews expelled from the land properties" and that "medicines would be removed from the hands of the Jewish profiteers." Nevertheless, one has to disagree with Dumitru Micu who stated that "Crainic embraced fully and integrally Nazism in his next years"⁸⁸; Crainic always rejected Nazism for its unchristian character and after 1940 he was elected Ministry of Propaganda and became a leading intellectual during the regime of General

⁸³ He criticized Motru's book in another article *Românismul Dlui Motru*, in "Gîndirea," 1935, no. 7, p. 192. As Zigu Ornea showed in *The Romanian Extreme Right*, pp. 110-111, Crainic's critiques were both "false and slandering."

⁸⁴ Nichifor Crainic, *Ortodoxie și Etnocrație*, p. 109.

⁸⁵ Idem, *Programul statului ethnocratic*, *ibidem*, p. 245.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 251.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

⁸⁸ Dumitru Micu, *op. cit.*, p. 202. Although Nichifor Crainic is far from what someone might call a theologian. He used his theological training in favor of cultural and political purposes, rather than religious ends.

Antonescu. Despite his pro-Nazi discourses, it is doubtful if Crainic converted to Nazism or if he believed in the validity of Nazi ideology.

6. Final remarks

Nichifor Crainic's work is just a brief example of the way in which a mutation of the theological discourse to the public and cultural sphere was possible in interwar Romania.⁸⁹ Although he was not interested in politics at the beginning of his career at "Gîndirea" and he framed nationalism from the perspective he knew best, namely Orthodox spirituality, Crainic wrote different texts especially after 1926–1927 in which he suddenly changed his apolitical view to a more partisan view towards either the electoral progress made by Iuliu Maniu's Peasants Party, or to the emerging Iron Guard. The reasons behind Crainic's options were connected to his traditionalist philosophy which placed an important emphasis on peasantry and the identification between Christian spirituality and the Romanian village.

After 1933 Crainic became both pro-Legionary and a detached Legionary supporter. Crainic at "Calendarul" and "Gîndirea" wrote in favor of the Iron Guard because he fell under the influence of his pro-Gardist colleagues from "Calendarul," but also because he saw in the electoral progress of the Iron Guard among Romanian people and elite the incarnation of his philosophical traditionalism. After the assassination on 29 December 1933 of the Prime Minister I. G. Duca, Crainic had to make a choice dictated by the reality that the Iron Guard became a terrorist organization, but also to maintain his Christian prestige untouched. For his exit from the Legion contributed also the fact that among the Iron Guard's heterogeneous elite he could never become a leading ideologue and that after November 1933 Nae Ionescu became the official Mentor of the Legion.⁹⁰

After 1934, Crainic wrote extensively and he took refuge in a utopian political system which he called ethnocracy. Mixing together corporatism, Orthodoxism and anti-Semitism, Crainic proposed to his reader an original

⁸⁹ A poignant critique of Nichifor Crainic was issued by Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, București, 1997, pp. 53-54.

⁹⁰ I find John R. Lampe's conclusions from *Balkans into Southeastern Europe. A Century of War and Transition*, New York, 1998, p. 126 about a mixture between Crainic's *Orthodoxism* and the intellectual background which characterized the 1930's generation influenced by Nae Ionescu both unsubstantiated and misleading. Although Crainic attempted several times to popularize his Orthodoxist ideology among the young generation, his intellectual initiative proved to be deprived of appeal among the young generation. Crainic's *Orthodoxism* influenced the Iron Guard and this explains partially the Christian mysticism describing Codreanu's movement. When these intellectuals joined the Iron Guard, their understanding of this *Orthodoxism* of the Iron Guard remained ambiguous.

alternative to both Romanian fascism and the democratic regime. Because he believed in the idea of the monarchy and he anticipated the dictatorial wishes of King Carol II, the publishing of his most controversial book in 1936 was not a coincidence and maybe he was intending to become Carol's personal ideologue. Nevertheless, he will turn to General Antonescu who would later propose him to become Minister of Culture.

Crainic represents only one face of the Romanian traditionalism, a side which was received by the young generation only through the mediation of others. Despite the fact that he was a leading theologian who joined the public sphere to defend his views and understandings of Romanianness, Nichifor Crainic built the most pertinent traditionalist ideology, which in cultural and political grounds remained the most appealing peak of the Romanian culture before the emergence of the 1930s generation.