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Orthodoxy and nation-building: Nichifor Crainic and religious nationalism in 1920s Romania

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This article uses the early career of Nichifor Crainic (1889–1972) to show why Orthodox Christianity became a central element of Romanian ultra-nationalism during the 1920s. Most Romanian nationalists were atheists prior to the First World War, but state-sponsored nation-building efforts catalyzed by territorial expansion and the incorporation of ethnic and religious minorities allowed individuals such as Crainic to introduce religious nationalism into the public sphere. Examining Crainic's work during the 1920s shows how his nationalism was shaped by mainstream political and ideological currents, including state institutions such as the Royal Foundations of Prince Carol and the Ministry of Cults and of Art. Despite championing "tradition," Crainic was committed to changing Romanian society so long as that change followed autochthonous Romanian models. State sponsorship allowed Crainic to promote religious nationalism through his periodical *Gândirea*. Crainic's literary achievements earned him a chair in theology, from which he pioneered new ways of thinking about mysticism as an expression of Romanian culture and as crucial to understanding the Romanian nation.

Keywords: Nichifor Crainic; Orthodoxism; nationalism; Romania; *Gândirea*

By the 1930s, Orthodox Christianity had become an integral part of Romanian nationalism (Durandin). In 1937 the philosopher and ultra-nationalist publicist Nae Ionescu (1890–1940) praised the revival of interest in religion after the First World War because it "remained Orthodox, reflecting the character of the nation and the spirit of the times" ("Pentru o teologie"). Election posters of the *Partid Naţional Creştin* (National Christian Party, PNC) that year called for national unity "around the Holy Cross and the swastika."[1] Also in 1937, *Păstorul ortodox* (*The Orthodox Pastor*), a magazine published by a clerical society in the Argeş episcopate, told its readers that "not only does Christianity approve of nationalism, it orientates it; it acts as its thermometer, and moreover, it overshadows it, intensifies it, fortifies it, serves it" (Ţicu 295). Only two decades earlier, most committed nationalists had thought of church and state as separate entities. Nationalist ideologues and prominent anti-Semites in nineteenth and early twentieth century Romania used scientific writings on race and secular philosophies of culture instead of language about transcendence, spiritual communities, and national rebirth.

This article traces the relatively sudden introduction of religion into Romanian nationalism during the 1920s through the career of Nichifor Crainic (1889–1972), one of interwar Romania's most prominent champions of religious nationalism. Born into a peasant family in southern Romania, Crainic rose to become a celebrated professor of theology, an influential publicist, and a minister in several governments. Crainic allied himself

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with radical ultra-nationalist parties from 1932 onwards, arguing that a peculiar form of nationalist Christianity he called Orthodoxism should be forcefully imposed by the state, and that ethnic and religious minorities be denied civil rights and expelled from Romanian territory. During the 1920s, he worked with state-funded organizations to promote Romanian culture throughout villages and in newly-incorporated territories where regional identities were as important as national ones. This article examines Crainic's writing and speeches up until 1932, showing how he gradually introduced Orthodoxy as a defining feature of Romanian culture before embracing fascist politics.

Emphasizing the importance of the context in which intellectual texts were written, I relate Crainic's published writings to his everyday political and professional activities. Zigu Ornea has situated Crainic's writings within the context of debates over development and cultural protectionism, and Dumitru Micu has shown effectively how Crainic's philosophy of art emerged out of the intellectual environment at the journal *Gândirea* (*Thought*). Because of the similarities in their outlooks, Keith Hitchins and Viorel Marineasa have also linked Crainic to other religious ultra-nationalists such as Nae Ionescu (1890–1940) even though the two men were bitter enemies. By drawing on archival sources, I relate these contexts to the bureaucratic and state-building activities in which Crainic participated during the 1920s. Rather than dwelling on Crainic's borrowings from nineteenth century Romanian literature, I follow Ovid Crohmâlniceanu and Irina Livezeanu in emphasizing Crainic's interaction with modernist poetry of the era. As I focus particularly on the period 1916 to 1932, I deliberately avoid using Crainic's later theological and racist writings to interpret his earlier ideas. Christine Hall and Ion I. Ică Jr. have dealt with his theological works from the 1930s with an expert touch, but like the approaches of Laura Bădescu or Liviu Petrescu to Crainic's poetry, they ignore the political implications that these ideas had for Crainic. Nichifor Crainic was a profoundly political thinker, and understanding why he related religion and nationalism to one another *during the 1920s* helps illuminate broader political and social developments of that period.

The Romanian synthesis of religion and nation was far from unique in interwar Europe. In Germany a group of mostly Catholic intellectuals formed the *Abendland* (Occidentalist) movement. They rejected liberal democracy, capitalism, and communism, seeking a strong state which could establish conservative Christianity in German public life (Pöpping). Catholic priests in France, Italy, and Hungary identified Catholicism with ethnic exclusivist doctrines (Caron; Dagnino; Hanebrink). In Yugoslavia and Poland, Serbian and Ukrainian clerics promoted irredentist nationalism as an appropriate expression of Orthodox Christianity (Falina; Shekhovtsov). Protestant pastors in Britain, Sweden, Germany, and elsewhere lent their support to fascist movements in their respective countries (Linehan; Berggren; Steigmann-Gall). What makes the Romanian case interesting is that here religious nationalism became part of a state policy of nationalization prompted by territorial expansion after the First World War. Elsewhere in Europe religious nationalism fed off disappointment over territorial losses (Germany and Hungary), fears that the church would be left behind by an increasingly secular state (France and Italy), or irredentist movements agitating for the creation of new nation-states (Serbian and Ukrainian nationalists). Many of the Catholic priests who supported Nazism in Germany did so because of Republican atrocities against priests during the Spanish Civil War (Griech-Polelle). But in Romania, religious nationalism was the expression of a victorious state struggling to find a cultural identity into which it could subsume a multi-ethnic population whose civic traditions stemmed from three different imperial systems.

The Romanian nation-state was formed when Wallachia and Moldavia unified under Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1820–1873) in 1859, adding Northern Dobruja after the

Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. Romania annexed Southern Dobruja in 1913, and Greater Romania was created after the First World War by incorporating the formerly Habsburg regions of Transylvania and Bucovina, and taking Bessarabia away from what used to be the Russian Empire. These post-war acquisitions more than doubled Romania's territory, and increased its population from 7,771,341 to 14,669,841 (Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics* 8). As they Romanianized the new territories, bureaucrats and intellectuals from the capital eagerly promoted "Romanian" memory and culture at the expense of the art, literature, music, and religion that reflected minority cultures or which was non-national in orientation (Papahagi; Schifirneț Bucur). But what did Romanian culture look like? The decade of the 1920s witnessed passionate debates among the country's intellectuals over the definition of Romanian culture. "We are in a period of clarification, of self-interpretation," wrote the left-wing essayist Mihai Ralea (1896–1964) in 1926. "We must weigh up our abilities and identify our temperament. ... We need a definition of the Romanian phenomenon" (Quoted in Heitmann 171). During the 1920s, Crainic became heavily involved both in debates over defining Romanian culture and in promoting it in villages, magazines, and universities. While doing so, he helped shape a novel, religious interpretation of Romanianness which blended Orthodox Christianity with ethnic nationalism.

Secular nationalism

The mythology of modern Romanian nationalism originated with a group of Uniate intellectuals during the late eighteenth century known as the "Transylvanian School" (*Şcoala Ardeleană*). These historians and priests claimed a Roman (Latin) heritage for the Romanian people, thereby associating it more closely with the Roman pontiff than with Orthodox patriarchs in Constantinople or Moscow (Mitu 15). Other intellectuals also ignored Orthodoxy when they spoke about the nation. The French-educated revolutionaries of the 1848 uprisings, later known as the "Paşoptişts" (the forty-eighters), organized through Masonic Lodges and promoted a secular nationalism which clearly separated church and state (Parusi 223; Hitchins, *Romanians* 223–25). The next influential group of socially engaged intellectuals emerged in the 1860s within the "Junimea" literary circle, which cherished a secular worldview inspired by German philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer (Ornea, *Junimea* 120–45). Junimists identified the Romanian nation with the peasantry, and argued that to serve the nation meant helping peasants. Junimea's attitude inspired another literary movement at the turn of the century which called itself "Poporanism," and which tried to raise the quality of life for Romanian peasants through literacy education. Originating amongst Moldavian socialists who were also flirting with Marxist scientific socialism, most Poporanists were convinced atheists. Also like the Junimists, Poporanists opened Romanian elites to European – especially German – political and social trends (Ornea, *Poporanism* 83). Between 1890 and 1910, another literary movement known as "Sămănătorism" idealized the peasantry by emphatically rejecting anything foreign. Led by the historian Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), Sămănătorists cultivated an anti-liberal nationalism, promoting folk values in art and arguing against the free circulation of foreign literature (Ornea, *Sămănătorismul*). Also influenced by the Junimists as young men, most Sămănătorists were atheists and did not see Orthodoxy as important for Romanian nationalism (Nagy-Talavera 56, 102).

Throughout the nineteenth century, Romanian rulers moved to regulate the Church as a state institution, imposing oaths of allegiance on bishops, administering clerical salaries and appointments, and overseeing theological education (Ursul 217–22; Leustean).

Enrollment in Orthodox seminaries declined during the second half of the nineteenth century, as students flooded into the expanding state-run educational system, and secular literature replaced religious books as the mainstay of Romanian publishing houses (Drace-Francis 152, 168, 197). Obelisks and statues replaced crosses as monuments built by state institutions or local committees during this period increasingly drew on classical Greece and Rome rather than on Eastern Orthodox symbolism (Bucur 27–28).

Most ultra-nationalists and anti-Semites of the late nineteenth century were also atheists. The philosopher Vasile Conta (1845–1882) claimed that his nationalism and anti-Semitism were based on "the principles of modern science" (Quoted in Volovici 14). Similarly, the anti-Semitic publicist Ion D. Protopopescu defended the rationality of his position in the 1890s by stating proudly that, "I have no type of religious faith, being a complete atheist. I am guided only by national sentiment, by love for my people" (4). Anti-Semitic activists such as Nicolae Paulescu (1869–1931) and A. C. Cuza (1857–1947) introduced Orthodox symbols and rituals into ultra-nationalist organizing during the 1920s, but because they used them outside of church contexts it was clear to observers that these were now political, not religious symbols.[2] In 1925, Nichifor Crainic criticized the anti-Semitic movement's use of Christian language because he rejected the Old Testament as the work of a vengeful God who had nothing in common with the Christian deity (Paulescu 34–35). Crainic described the insults which anti-Semites hurled at "the God of the Jews" as insane "sacrilege" ("Pentru români creştini"). Orthodoxy and anti-Semitic ultra-nationalism were still separate currents during the 1920s, and they did not effectively merge until Crainic established the newspaper *Calendarul* (*The Calendar*, 1932–33) at the beginning of the following decade.

Crainic had little to do with organized anti-Semitism as a young man, but he was heavily influenced by the Sămănătorist movement. He attended the Central Theological Seminary in Bucharest on a scholarship and then studied theology at the University of Bucharest between 1912 and 1916. Crainic regularly read both *Sămănătorul* and Nicolae Iorga's *Neamul românesc* (*The Romanian People*, 1906–1940) while in seminary (Crainic, *Zile albe* 52). He made friends with the Sămănătorist literary critic D. Tomescu during his student days, who introduced him to Bucharest's literary scene and helped him publish his first book (Crainic, *Zile albe* 32–33, 95–99). After it was formed in 1910, Iorga's Nationalist Democratic Party (*Partidul Naţionalist Democrat*) brought explicit anti-Semitism into mainstream Romanian politics for the first time, and the pages of *Neamul românesc* were full of anti-Semitic propaganda during this period (Opriţescu 33–35). Much of Crainic's early poetry reflects a strong Sămănătorist influence (Bădescu 132). He published poems in the nationalist magazines *Ramuri* (*Branches*), *Drum drept* (*The Right Way*) and *Lumina* (*Light*) while he was a student, and released his first volume of poetry in 1916 (Crainic, *Zile albe* 98). Crainic's first two books were full of pastoral scenes and romantic evocations of a tranquil rural world overflowing with autochthonous poetry and art (*Şesuri natale*, *Zâmbete*).

Crainic served as a cantor at a small church in the center of Bucharest for the four years he was a student and hoped to receive a post as a priest here. He married quickly to facilitate his ordination, but the marriage soon disintegrated and the Metropolitan insisted that Crainic take up a rural position first, which he was disinclined to do. He became an army chaplain instead, serving in Iaşi and translating anti-German propaganda during World War One (Verhaeren). Crainic fell heavily under the influence of Nicolae Iorga while in Iaşi. He soon began to work at *Neamul românesc*, which was primarily filled with patriotic news about the war and now contained little of the violent anti-Semitism of its earlier days

(Crainic, *Zile albe* 107, 114–124; Bozdoghină 70–75). His next project was *Dacia* (1918–1922), a morning newspaper run by the former Sămănătorist Alexandru Vlahuţa (1858–1919), whose work had been a major influence on Crainic's early poetry (Crohmâlniceanu, vol. 2, 177). Another nationalist publication, *Dacia*, declared itself to be "an organ for the awakening of the [Romanian] people, for raising it up and for defending its rights" ("Scopul nostru"). Crainic wrote mostly cultural commentaries in *Dacia*, together with the occasional article attacking "gypsies" (*ţigani*) and "yids" (*jidani*) (e.g. "Rodica Maniu"; "Sărmanii vagabonzi!"; "Universitatea Ardealului").

Crainic also continued to write nationalist poetry after the war. *Icoanele vremii* (*Icons of the Times*), appeared in 1919 as a collection of essays and short stories on political, cultural and religious themes, and was followed by *Priveleşti fugare* (*Fleeting Glances*) in 1921. *Priveleşti fugare* was essentially a travelogue romanticizing the Romanian countryside and stressing the depths of patriotic feeling amongst the peasantry. These books placed the peasantry at the center of Crainic's artistic vision, and in a programmatic essay from this period he argued that "nothing is more logical than that writers and artists should imbibe their inspiration from this domain of life, which is superior not only numerically, but also through its purely Romanian and moral qualities" (Crainic, "Ţăranul în artă"). The poems in *Darurile pământului* (*Gifts of the Earth*, 1920) glorified wartime suffering and looked back to an idealized past when Christianity had been the dominant force in society. These early poems eventually won Crainic the National Poetry Prize in 1930 (Ică 12). Although Crainic's rural themes placed him firmly within the Sămănătorist current, the essays and poems in *Icoanele vremii* and *Darurile pământului* emphasized that Orthodoxy and Romanian nationalism were interrelated, introducing a new, religious vision that had been missing from the writings of the Paşoptişts, the Junimists, the Poporanists, and the Sămănătorists.

Traditionalism versus Europeanism (1922–1931)

In 1920 Crainic accompanied his friend Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) to Vienna where he attended lectures, read books, and met his second wife (Crainic, *Zile albe* 151–85). In need of money, he also did several translations to help cover his mounting debts and to improve his grasp of German. Flowing out of his newfound interest in religious mysticism, these translations all explored the relationship between mysticism and nature (Tagore; Posse; Rilke). Crainic returned to Bucharest in 1922 to become cultural advisor to the newly established Royal Foundations of Prince Carol, run by his friend Gheorghe D. Mugur (Crainic, "To Lucian Blaga," 117–18). Dimitrie Gusti (1880–1955), a famous sociologist and the head of the Royal Foundations during the 1930s, described their purpose as being to "restore to the peasant the consciousness of his own vitality and pride, and ... [to] stretch out to him a helping hand as he falters in bewilderment when confronted with the dazzling life of the great city" (*Royal Foundations*, 13). In a letter to Mugur, Crainic described the Royal Foundations as sounding like "a beautiful fairytale taking place on an ideal, supra-European plane" ("To D. Mugur" 114). Improving peasant culture was crucial for the nationalization of the new territories because the majority of ethnic Romanians were peasants at the beginning of the 1920s, while urban culture was dominated by Germans, Jews, Hungarians, and other minorities (Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics* 9–11).

Though he resigned two years later complaining of inadequate funding, Crainic remained involved in the Foundations' projects for quite some time ("To D. Mugur" 121–22). The modernization of Romanian villages was a focus of the periodical

Lamura (*The Cream of the Crop*, 1919–1931), which Crainic edited together with Mugur from 1919 to 1923.[3] In this context, modernization meant improved agricultural techniques, cleanliness, better medicine, and most importantly, "culture." Advertisements described *Lamura* as "a magazine of general culture for teachers [and] priests … It's a real textbook of culture, indispensable not only for elementary school teachers, but for all cultural leaders in the village" (Mugur et al., inside cover). The magazine published poetry and folk music with a religious-nationalist flavor, celebrated rural and religious artworks, and talked incessantly about the importance of village schools and Cultural Hearths (*Cămine Culturale*).

In 1922 Mugur, Crainc, and Vasile Voiculescu – who would continue to collaborate with Crainic for the next twenty years – wrote the inaugural manifesto for the Cultural Hearths that were established by the Foundations. The book described peasant villages as backward, dirty places with inadequate educational and medical facilities. Its solution was to set up schools, libraries, medical centers and museums in villages across Romania. The Royal Foundation intended the Cultural Hearths to promote literate and "modern" Romanian culture within villages. Each Cultural Hearth was to house a ballroom, a library, an office, a medical dispensary, and a bathroom, as well as being surrounded by a garden full of fruit trees. It was to be paid for by donations from the villagers, but also with financial support available from the Foundation. The vision was that "a Cultural Hearth is every villager's second home. When it is ready, it should be the pride of the village, its ornament, a nest, a house of books" (Mugur 18). Working together with village intellectuals, the Royal Foundations oversaw the establishment of over two thousand Cultural Hearths by 1938 (Gusti, "Cuvânt"). Crainic described the work of the Cultural Hearths as a "transfiguration" of the peasantry, and wrote that "the distinctive sign of a civilized state is the ever more intense functioning of cultural apparatuses through which the raw material of the popular soul is transformed from slavery to mastery of nature" (Crainic, "În pragul"). As Alberto Basciani has noted, these Cultural Hearths were part of an attempt to introduce Romanian culture into regions with few Romanian-language cultural institutions and were a deliberate attack on the cultural dominance of non-Romanian minorities (225).

Crainic had also worked as a state functionary while at university, and in 1926 he became Secretary General of the Ministry of Cults and of Art under Vasile Goldiş (1862–1934). He used his position to promote autochthonous Romanian culture by introducing new departments in the Fine Arts Schools and appointing new members to the Conservatorium.[4] Ministry inspectors appointed by Crainic were artists and writers well known for their nationalist leanings.[5] He also provided the funds to establish a new phonographic archive by collecting thousands of folk melodies from all over the country using wax cylinders and a team of eager folklorists (Breazul). Village libraries need books, and Crainic bemoaned that "Perhaps in no other country in the world do there exist libraries and bookstores more agrammatical and more incorrect than in Romania" ("Stat şi cultură" 328). With this in mind, he oversaw the "Cartea vremii" series, a collection of important recent translations of literature published by the Royal Foundations which were designed to raise the cultural level of the Romanian reading public. He organized a series of lecture tours on Romanian culture over the next ten years, and collaborated in the production of school textbooks on elementary reading, grammar, arithmetic and geography. His geography textbook stressed how idyllic rural Romania was, encouraging students to go out into the mountains and to experience it for themselves.

At the same time that Crainic sought to improve peasant living conditions, he became involved in a much publicized debate with Eugen Lovinescu (1881–1943) and Mihail

Ralea (1896–1964) over the preferred developmental model for Romania to follow. These discussions often became quite biting, with the protagonists resorting to petty sarcasm and caricatures of their opponents' positions.[6] As Zigu Ornea notes, this was the same debate which had fascinated the Paşoptists, the Junimists, the Poporanists, and the Sămănătorists in the past (*Tradiţionalism* 305). This time it was sparked by the publication of the first volume of Eugen Lovinescu's *Istoria civilizaţiei române moderne* (*History of Modern Romanian Civilization*) in 1924. Lovinescu rejected the notion that Romanian culture had to develop out of Orthodoxy, which he described as "an obscurantist religion, stuck in outdated texts and formalism" (Quoted in Micu 278). The "Europeanists" Lovinescu and Ralea argued that Romania should attempt to develop along the lines of European Liberalism, borrowing Western ideas through a process of "integral imitation" (Hitchins, "Gândirea" 231–232). "Educated literature," Lovinescu wrote, "is the result of the refraction of foreign ideologies through the ethnic individuality of the Romanian people" (Quoted in Heitmann 216). Calling himself a "traditionalist," Crainic maintained that this was not imitation, but the wholesale imposition of French culture. "That which is called "Europeanism" is nothing but Frenchism;" he argued in a seminal article from 1929, and "that which they call "intellectualism" and "rationalism" is nothing but the adaptation to a certain direction of French culture, and always means the abdication of autochthonism." Instead, he proposed that Romania draw on its own "traditions" as the basis for its future development ("Sensul tradiţiei").

Crainic's notion of "tradition" has often been misunderstood by historians, who often suggest that "traditionalism" meant rejecting technology and social change in general. In his seminal work on the 1920s, Zigu Ornea describes Crainic's quarrel with the Westernizers as a dispute "between traditionalism (that is, the resistant forces which wanted to maintain the old state of affairs from one decade to another) and modernity (or the forces aspiring to the renewing of structures)" (24–25. cf. Micu 65; Epure 741). Other traditionalists, such as Aurel C. Popovici and Dan Botta (1907–1958) did indeed oppose the spread of popular literacy because they said that it destroyed authentic village culture. But as one might expect given his work with the Royal Foundations, for Crainic traditionalism did not mean rejecting technology and learning (Petreu, 75). "Traditionalism does not appear as … a static force, dead with its back to the future," he argued, "but as a living, dynamic force, which bursts torrentially forward out of the past towards the growth of new and more adequate forms of its existence" ("A două neatârnare"). The education system he wanted to see introduced in Romania was one "suitable to the folk spirit" ("Parsifal"). According to Crainic, promoting Romanian culture meant disparaging and ignoring foreign culture. He believed that each nation had to develop its own culture to its fullest potential before it could embrace those of its neighbors, even if this meant temporarily "comparing oneself to a distorted image of one's neighbor" ("Tradiţie şi internaţionalism" 77). If Romanian culture was to flourish, it had to be protected from corrupting influences and supported by the state. All of his efforts, Crainic stated in 1931, were part and parcel of the Romanian state's protectionist cultural program "to develop the favorable and stimulating conditions necessary for the Romanian creative spirit" ("Stat şi cultură" 325).

Western cultural imports, Crainic argued in 1923, could never take root in Romania because they ignored the Orthodox Church. "Agricultural peoples are religious peoples," Crainic wrote, and Romanian peasants would never accept anything that was not first and foremost Orthodox ("Politică şi ortodoxie" 77). Only Orthodoxy, Crainic argued, could save his "virgin nation," a truly "naïve child of nature" from the corruption of Western civilization ("Parsifal" 186). Crainic suggested that Christianity had seeped so

deeply into Romanian culture that it had become a Romanian religion: "the popular imagination takes Jesus out of the sanctuary, it scatters him amongst the fields and vineyards, transforming the country's soil into an eternal and never-ending Eucharist. . . . There is a close correspondence between the atmosphere of the gospel and our atmosphere, its scenery and ours, its spirit and our popular wisdom" ("Isus în ţara mea" 118). In Crainic's vision, Romanian culture had to be Orthodox culture.

Crainic was not alone when he made these arguments, but the leader of a significant current within Romania literary circles known as Orthodoxism. Orthodoxists were a diverse group of intellectuals held together by friendship ties and a belief in the peasantry, tradition, mysticism, folklore, and Orthodoxy as reactions against secular modernity (Hitchins, "Orthodoxism"). The literary critic Pompiliu Constantinescu (1901–1946) wrote that Orthodoxism "has strangled our Latin reality only to suffocate us in orientalist weeds, and it has crucified us for negating the people, only to affirm the people for us in Byzantium" (Quoted in Verdery 125). But Crainic's "orientalism" was less a claim about *which* foreign cultures should be accepted than about affirming Orthodoxy as something which was already Romanian. "Our orientation can only be towards the Orient," he wrote, "that is, towards ourselves, towards what our inheritance has made us" ("Sensul tradiţiei" 3).

Contrasting "culture" and "civilization" as Oswald Spengler had done, Crainic rejected Western culture while keeping what he saw as the achievements of Western civilization ("Parsifal" 181). He understood tradition to mean an Orthodox tradition steeped in peasant culture, which he hoped would shape Romanian *culture* without abandoning the technology of modern *civilization*. Though it shared important similarities with conservative German thinkers who also used the culture/civilization distinction to oppose the dominant culture of their society, Romanian Orthodoxism was subtly different to what Jeffrey Herf has called "reactionary modernism." In Germany, reactionary modernism emerged first amongst conservative engineers who rejected Enlightenment reason while embracing technology (Herf). Orthodoxists both turned their back on the Enlightenment and used technology, but they also engaged with modernist trends in art and literature. Most Orthodoxists were writers and artists, and their traditionalism involved bringing rural and religious themes into what were otherwise modernist literary forms.

Literary journals (1918–1932)

Orthodoxism's relationship to European modernism was most obvious in Crainic's contributions to Bucharest's lively literary scene, which expanded dramatically after 1918. Counting only those which ran for more than two years, over 300 literary periodicals appeared in Romania between 1918 and 1944 (Sârghie 116). Many of the early periodicals were organized and financed by the literary celebrities of Iorga's generation, but it was Crainic's generation who were the primary contributors. Crainic took over *Luceafărul* (*The Morning Star*, 1902–1920), a literary journal financed by Octavian Tăslăuanu (1876–1942), who then promptly abandoned literature to enter politics. Under Crainic's leadership, *Luceafărul* was written by a group of young poets in Bucharest, most of whom would continue to collaborate with him for the next twenty years.[7] Very soon Crainic began polemicizing with the left-wing journal *Ideea europeană* (*The European Idea*, 1919–1928), using *Luceafărul*'s pages to make a name for himself as a defender of Sămănătorist autochthonism.

After returning from Vienna, Crainic helped C. S. Făgeţel – another former Sămănătorist – reorganize *Neamul românesc*, radically changing the layout and content

of the now almost defunct journal. Crainic and Făgeţel temporarily resurrected *Neamul românesc* until personal quarrels caused Iorga to dismiss Crainic together with the rest of the editorial board (Crainic, *Zile albe*,188–89). Together with many of those who had worked on *Luceafărul*, Crainic was also one of the founding editors of the conservative daily *Cuvântul* (*The Word*, 1924–1938), which launched itself as "an independent political newspaper written by intellectuals."[8] In line with his growing interest in Orthodoxy, Crainic's contributions were primarily concerned with religious issues and with defending the rights of the Romanian Orthodox Church (e.g. "Între govern şi Sf. Sinod").

Crainic first developed Orthodoxism within the pages of the literary magazine *Gândirea* (1921–1945).[9] *Gândirea: literară – artistică – socială* (*Thought: Literary – Artistic – Social*) was founded in 1921 by a group of young intellectuals in Cluj who had moved there to try and cultivate Romanian culture in the newly-incorporated province (Roberts 63; Vrabie 58–65). In the opening manifesto, Cezar Petrescu (1892–1961) presented it as a journal without an ideology (19). Crainic was initially reluctant to become involved in *Gândirea*. His letters to Petrescu and Blaga show that he approved of many of their innovations, but that he would not become a regular contributor, sending several poems only "through friendship". He agreed that their elders should be "pushed aside," but qualified *Gândirea*'s position with "when these [elders] have no talent." "I am for novelty," he said, but he wanted the novelty of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* instead of that of German expressionism. Van Gogh was wonderful, he agreed, but not those "scribblers" that he had seen in Viennese art galleries (106–09). Crainic continued to contribute to *Gândirea* nonetheless, and officially became its editor when Cezar Petrescu left for Paris in 1926.

A very heterodox publication, the early *Gândirea* is difficult to reduce to a single doctrinal position. Dumitru Micu calls it "an *agora* of the most different writers, . . . a meeting place for talented and intelligent individuals of any orientation" (989–90). *Gândirea* carried contributions from radical modernists such as Ion Vinea (1885–1964) alongside Crainic's own poetry, which still reflected strong Sămănătorist influences (Crohmâlniceanu, vol. 1, 55). Crainic writes that "once I took over I began callously cutting certain collaborators who did not fit with my vision for the journal, and adding others whose values I had felt an affinity with since my days at *Luceafărul*."[10] Crainic was very clear about the direction he wanted to take *Gândirea*. Against the imitative "uniformity" which he believed Westernization was reducing Romanian culture to, Crainic demanded that writers and artists look to Orthodoxy and to the Romanian village for inspiration ("A două neatârnare"; "Între Apollo şi Isus"). *Gândirea* became increasingly shaped by Crainic's personal philosophy, although it is important to note that his own tastes evolved during the 1920s. In poetry as in politics, Crainic's "traditionalism" did not necessarily mean conservatism, and *Gândirea* contained a great deal of modernist poetry, prose and art in its early years, and continued to do so for several years after Crainic took control (Livezeanu, "Generational Politics" 213). Ovid Crohmâlniceanu writes that "although it vehemently combated the modernism of *Sburătorul* (*Incubus*, 1919–1927) and other avant-guardist groups, *Gândirea* accepted "new poetry," not being afraid of obscure expressions, of extending the metaphoric arc beyond the commonly observed limits" (vol. 1, 69).

Crainic's relationship to literary modernism in many ways mirrors the position he took in the debates over traditionalism and Westernization: he supported reform in the villages only insofar as it was an "autochthonous" development, and novelty in poetry only because it allowed him to speak more profoundly about religious and nation-oriented themes. Crainic first discovered modernism in Vienna in 1921 through the works of the

Russian symbolist Dimitri Merezhkovskii (1865–1941) and the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) (Crainic, *Zile albe* 151ff; "To Blaga" 102). His writings about these men suggest that his attraction to Rilke and Merezhkovskii lay not in modernism for its own sake, but in their religious approach to the artistic process (*Zile albe* 176; "Simbolul androgin"; *Nostalgia Paradisului* 279, 283). Crainic claimed that Rilke's work had "deep roots in medieval German mysticism," in addition to its modernist developments ("Spiritualitate" 308). Believing that art should "theurgical," Crainic attempted to use his poetry as a window into the divine. This approach was very popular among turn-of-the-century Russians such as Merezhkovskii, from whom he learned a great deal. The change became evident in his 1931 volume of poetry, *Ţara de peste veac* (*The Land Beyond the Century*). Keith Hitchins describes the imagery in these poems as "sophianic": "A gentle, almost surrealistic light spreads across the rural landscape," Hitchins writes, "joining the edges of earth to the regions of heaven, and … Jesus moves through yellow fields of grain in a stylized mosaic that calls to mind Byzantine iconography" ("Gândirea" 239). Both Iorga and Lovinescu recognized that Crainic's modernism involved a decisive break with Sămănătorism. Iorga reprimanded the young poet while Lovinescu praised Crainic for introducing a new style (Livezeanu, "After the Great Union" 118–21).

On the magazine's tenth anniversary, Crainic wrote that "*Gândirea* was born through friendship, … [but] it lives … through the common experience of great restrictions and from a common testimony to a salvific belief." He defined it as belonging to a "spiritual, that is, an essential, order of things" ("Zece ani"). Crainic promoted *Gândirea* as the representative expression of an entire "generation" of religious poets and writers. There were in fact far fewer genuinely religious voices in the Romanian public sphere than gândirists were willing to admit but, as the critic Alexandru Dima (1905–1979) was quick to point out, defining Romanian culture as the spiritual expression of a people's soul put Orthodoxists at its very center (147).

Gândirea was not an official publication, but state institutions financed the magazine because its cultural program resonated with their official position on promoting national culture. In 1924 *Gândirea* found itself in debt and without a printer after Petrescu made the mistake of upsetting the Marmorosch-Blanck Bank who owned the press.[11] Crainic exploited his connections with Prince Carol through the Royal Foundations, who paid the journals' debts and gave *Gândirea* free use of the Foundations' press as well as ensuring that schools and state-sponsored reading groups throughout the country subscribed.[12] This arrangement lasted until a scandal in 1925 caused the two to part ways, and *Gândirea* to cease publication for a while (Vrabie 66). The Ministry of Cults and of Art then contributed 700,000 lei a year until 1926, when as Secretary General Crainic cancelled the donations to avoid a conflict of interest.[13] In December 1929 the well-known writer Liviu Rebreanu (1885–1944) appointed Crainic as a functionary at "The Education of the People" (*Educaţiei Poporului*) as well as granting *Gândirea* 300,000 lei per year in lieu of the money that it had previously received from the Ministry of Cults and of Art (Rebreanu 5). The two men soon quarreled, however, and *Gândirea* lost its state funding again during the financial crisis in 1931.[14] Receiving funding from state sources depended on personal connections and political exigencies, but it was also an affirmation that Crainic's religious nationalism was in line with the state's cultural policy.

Teaching mystical theology (1926–1932)

Territorial expansion impacted the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) just as strongly as it did the Romanian state. Church–state relations had to be renegotiated, Orthodox Christians

in the new territories had to be incorporated into the old administrative structure, and the Orthodox bishops had to decide how they would relate to the large number of non-Orthodox citizens now living in Greater Romania (Maner 13–15). Church–state relations had been close long before the rise of religious nationalism in the Romanian public sphere. Church histories taught that Christianity entered the area in the second century, at the same historical moment when Romanian ethnicity was created through a merger of the Romans and the Dacians (Enăceanu). Whereas most prominent nationalist activists had imagined a secular nation-state, churchmen had enthusiastically promoted the Romanian national movement throughout the nineteenth century (Hitchins *Orthodoxy*; Leustean; Ursul). The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the BOR as an autocephalous church in 1885, identifying the BOR's administrative reach with the borders of the Romanian nation-state, and Romania's 1866 constitution acknowledged Orthodoxy as the official state religion (Gillet 349). State expansion earned the BOR the title of "Patriarchate" in 1925, placing it alongside the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, and Serbia as a leader in the Orthodox world.

A year later Ion Petrovici (1882–1972), the newly appointed Minister of Education and a regular contributor to *Gândirea*, travelled to Iaşi where he had been a professor of philosophy for over twenty years, and told his colleagues there of his plans to establish a new Faculty of Theology in Chişinău, which would be under the control of the University of Iaşi. Chişinău had only been incorporated into Greater Romania in 1918, and with its Russian-language schools and high illiteracy rates, policy makers in Bucharest considered it to be a backward city devoid of Romanian culture. With its proximity to communist Russia, the province had been a focus of sustained cultural propaganda by Romanian speakers since 1917, and teachers were mobilized by the military to teach Romanian language and culture as part of the initial occupation in 1918 (Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics* 100–12, 233–34; Basciani 166–68, 224). A Popular University was established in Chişinău in 1918 which included a Romanian-language library and brought academics out from Iaşi to hold public lectures on Romanian history and literature (Negrescu). This was still not a regular tertiary institution, however, and Petrovici told the University Senate that even though he personally would have preferred that the new faculty also be in Iaşi, Chişinău had a greater need. After some debate, the Senate agreed, concluding that "Bessarabia needs a superior cultural institute which is not to be only a center for theoretical learning but also a place which radiates Romanian culture to the great masses of Moldovan people beyond the Prut River."[15]

The Romanian Orthodox Church felt the same way. A separate Bessarabian episcopate had been established under Russian control when the then Ottoman Empire ceded the province to Tsar Alexander I in 1812. Although the episcopate had several Romanian-language presses, students at the seminary in Chişinău studied in Russian and then had to go to the theological academy in Kiev for their tertiary qualifications (Păcurariu 402–05). Despite the hurdles which it faced, the church presented itself as a defender of the Romanian national movement in the region. In 1919 the Bishop of Bessarbian monasteries, Vissarion Puiu (1879–1964), described the monasteries under his care as "wonderful national islands" that had preserved Romanian culture in a foreign land (3). Similarly, in 1923 the Metropolitan Primate of the BOR, Miron Cristea (1868–1939) spoke in Parliament about the high rates of alcoholism in Bessarabia caused by an apparently sudden rise in the number of taverns there (Basciani 183). Taverns were typically associated with Jews in interwar Romania, and fighting alcoholism was one way of expressing that the Romanians in Bessarabia were under the influence of "foreign" powers (Oişteanu 176). Once it became a Patriarchate, the Church asked the Ministry of Education to

add a theology faculty to the University of Iaşi and to establish a separate theological academy in Chişinău (Ionescu "Tot despre Facultatea"). Locating the theological faculty in Chişinău was a compromise solution, but one which solved the problem of cultural propaganda.

The minutes from Petrovici's meeting in Iaşi show that no-one present believed that Bessarabian priests were qualified to teach in the new faculty, and Petrovici insisted that the most important thing about Chişinău's future professors was that they be "elements of national propaganda."[16] Three candidates applied for the chair of "Modern Religious Literature," Crainic was selected even though he had no doctoral degree on the grounds that his reputation within Bucharest's literary scene would help promote Romanian culture in Bessarabia, and at the urging of Irineu Mihălcescu (1874–1948), who was to be Dean of the new faculty.[17] Mihălcescu had also proposed Crainic for the chair of Apologetics at the University of Bucharest in 1925 but that application was unsuccessful (Crainic, *Zile albe* 199). Mihălcescu aligned himself with right-wing extremists such as A. C. Cuza and Corneliu Zelea Coderanu during the 1930s, as well as with Crainic's own ultra-nationalist political parties, but there is no evidence that their common political orientation was the reason why he had supported Crainic's candidacies a decade earlier.[18] Chişinău was not a particularly prestigious appointment, and many of the professors spent more of their time in Bucharest than in Bessarabia. Even the Dean carried out his duties by writing more often than in person (Vicovan, vol. 1, 68). Crainic took his work in Chişinău seriously, however, making the long train journey from Bucharest to Chişinău every week to hold his courses (Crainic, *Zile albe* 246). He understood his job as being to nurture Romanian culture, which he wrote had "remained strong and whole" despite "having lived for over a hundred years under the Moscovite yoke" ("Spiritul Basarabean").

Crainic taught a number of courses in Chişinău, including one which compared artistic inspiration to the inspiration of mystics, a history of the psychological aspects of mysticism, and a course on Latin mysticism focused on Teresa Avila, John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi and Jacopone da Todi.[19] Crainic's reputation as a theologian rests primarily on his courses on mysticism. During the late 1920s he promoted mysticism as the essence of Romanian poetry and Eastern Orthodoxy in radio lectures as well as in the pages of *Gândirea* (Muşeţeanu, vol. 1, 13435). The material which filled most of his courses was based on what he had learned in Vienna, and was a blend of German mysticism with writings of the Church Fathers read through the commentaries of Catholic authors. Crainic's approach represented the beginning of a major shift in Romanian theology that continued throughout most of the twentieth century. Crainic claimed that he had been deeply disappointed by his theological studies in Bucharest because of the overemphasis on idealist philosophy which left him "like a scratched and chipped mirror reflecting in a deformed way only a part of the great image which somewhere must exist completely and perfectly" ("Spiritualitate" 308). Influenced by Crainic, the 1930s saw a turn towards an independent Romanian theology drawing on a more ancient Byzantine heritage and with mysticism as a major element (Clark; Ică). Crainic's colleague Fr. Teodor Popescu (1893–1973) described him as an "initiator" and a "missionary" (281–82).

Crainic also taught a course on the philosophy of Nicolae Paulescu, a vocal anti-Semite who co-founded the fascist National Christian Defence League (LANC) with A. C. Cuza in 1923. Paulescu attempted to demonstrate Jewish inferiority on biological grounds, published frequent articles about the economic exploitation of Romanians by Jews, polemics against the League of Nations, and several books about a diabolical global conspiracy involving Jews and Freemasons (Manu and Bozdoghină). Paulescu was the first religious

nationalist before Crainic to associate himself with the anti-Semitic movement, and although no record of Crainic's lectures from this course remains it is likely that it was Paulescu's fusion of Orthodox Christianity and Romanian nationalism which most interested him. Paulescu used scientific theories to justify both Christianity and nationalism, explaining how "social instincts" necessitated believing in God and nation (*Spitalul*). Crainic lectured about Paulescu on the radio three months after the latter's death in July 1931 (Muşeţeanu, vol. 1, 135), and later described him as "the sole ideologue of Christian nationalism" (*Ortodoxie şi etnocraţie* 146). Crainic's theological writings on the relationship between Church and state all belong to the period 1932–1944, but they owe significant debts to Paulescu's belief that religion and politics should go hand in hand. Crainic's ethnotheology far outstripped anything Paulescu produced, however. Crainic argued that Christianity should be manifest in all human activities. The nation would be "transfigured," Crainic wrote, once Christianity permeated all social and political life (Clark 24–26; Hall).[20]

Crainic's most popular course at Chişinău was a year-long study of Dostoevskii's novels. He chose specific characters to represent various philosophical traditions and used them to recount a fragmented history of Russian philosophy, including the polemics between Slavophiles and Westernizers and questions about (Western) rationalism versus (Eastern) mystical knowledge. This allowed him to subtly but surely bring debates about Romanian culture and development into the classroom, where he could influence the next generation of church leaders. Crainic explicitly related the conclusions which he drew from Dostoevskii's novels to his own fight for "traditionalism", criticizing the church hierarchy and claiming that "the more traditionalist Christianity is, the truer it is." His students welcomed Crainic's politics and applied them to problems which they saw in the church in Bessarabia.[21] Teaching about politics and lay literature in a Faculty of Theology was controversial, but Crainic continued despite the protestations of his critics (Crainic, *Curs de istoria* 4). This bold move paid off, because in 1932 he was given the inaugural chair of "The History of Church Literature and Modern Religions" at the prestigious University of Bucharest, where he continued to teach various aspects of mystical theology for the next ten years.[22]

Conclusion

During the third decade of the twentieth century, Crainic moved from the Sămănătorist focus on the peasantry towards a religious nationalism which became axiomatic for Romanian ultra-nationalists during the 1930s. Unlike the teachings of religious nationalists such as Nicolae Paulescu, Crainic's formulation was successful because – at least during the 1920s – his ideas resonated with the cultural program of significant elements within the Romanian state. Some politicians and bureaucrats certainly did call for tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and openness to Western models, but at the same time others insisted that building a nation-state meant supporting cultural projects that emphasized Romanianness. Raised in the Old Kingdom, nourished on Sămănătorist nationalism and educated by the Orthodox Church, Crainic was perfectly positioned to promote the sort of cultural nationalism which Irina Livezeanu and Alberto Basciani have shown was central to Romanian state-building in this period. His involvement with nationalist periodicals during and after the First World War established his credentials both as a poet and as a journalist who could be relied upon to support "Romanian causes." Employment first at the Royal Foundations and then at the Ministry of Cults and of Art gave Crainic institutional bases from which he could begin to implement the sorts of cultural programs

that Sămănătorists had been demanding for decades. These connections also meant that he could count on funding and distribution networks when he transformed *Gândirea* into a vehicle for religious nationalism. Finally, the reorganization of the Church as a national institution and the creation of a theological faculty in Chişinău allowed Crainic to integrate his passions for both religion and literature into a project dedicated to promoting Romanian culture in Bessarabia, whose urban culture during the 1920s was markedly un-Romanian.

Whereas elsewhere in Europe churchmen simply supported ultra-nationalist causes, the nation-building efforts of the Romanian state after the First World War integrated Orthodox Christianity into the nationalist imaginary. By settling on Orthodoxy as a defining element of Romanian culture, and on the Church as a vehicle for cultural propaganda, the state gave religious nationalism a prominence which it had lacked prior to 1920, and which ultra-nationalist Christians had nowhere else in Europe. State subsidies allowed journals such as *Gândirea* to set the tone of literary debates during this period, inflating the importance of religion to nationalism by making it the subject of heated debates. Finally, the expansion of theological education allowed professors like Crainic to teach religious nationalism to an entire generation of priests, guaranteeing that the following decade would be one in which Orthodoxy and ultra-nationalism marched hand in hand.

Notes

1. U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (Henceforth: USHMM), Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Reel #132, Dosar 3/1919, f. 22.
2. USHMM, Fond Ministerul de Interne – Diverse, Reel #136, Dosar 5/1926, f. 22; Fond SRI Files, Reel #105, Dosar 1151, f. 12–14.
3. Crainic only edited this journal for four years (1919–1923), but continued to contribute to it until 1931. Cenuşă 94.
4. Crainic, *Zile albe* 99, 194; Romanian National Archives – Central (Henceforth: ANIC – Central), Fond Personal Nichifor Crainic, Dosar 4, f. 4.
5. In 1926–1927 the appointments committee chaired by Crainic appointed Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Ion Teodorescu-Sion, Ioan Gh. Savin and Gheorghe Mugur as inspectors for the Ministry. ANIC – Central, Fond Ministerul Cultelor şi Artelor, 1920–1933, Dosar 1/1927, f 14, 112.
6. For example, see the exchange Ralea, "Rasputinism"; Crainic, "Mihai D. Ralea"; Crainic "Ortodoxismul nostrum"; Ralea, "Iarăşi ortodoxismul"; Crainic, "D. M. Ralea".
7. *Luceafărul*'s collaborators included Al. Busuioceanu, George Gregorian, Vasile Voiculescu, Emanoil Bucuța, Artur Enăşescu, Ion Pillat, Lucian Blaga and Gib. I. Mihăescu. Crainic, *Zile albe* 138.
8. The founding editorial board included C. Gongopol, Pamfil Şeicaru, Cezar Petrescu, Nichifor Crainic, I. Dragu, G.M. Ivanov, P. Costin, T. Devchi, Al. Radian, Adrian Maniu, Lucian Blaga, Wl. Ionescu, and I. Tolan. "Ce este "Cuvântul"."
9. The entire collection of *Gândirea* is available online at Bibliotecă Centrală Universitara "Lucian Blaga" in Cluj-Napocă. *Gândirea*. Web. 24 Oct. 2011. http://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/gandirea.
10. ANIC – Central, Fond Personal Nichifor Crainic, Dosar 4, f. 2.
11. Crainic also accused Petrescu of having lost 300,000 lei of *Gândirea*'s funds at a casino. Roberts 64.
12. Crainic, *Zile albe* 186–188. ANIC – Central, Fond Fundațiile Culturale Regale Centrală, 1921–1946, Dos. 43/1924, f. 1, 18.
13. ANIC – Central, Fond Personal Nichifor Crainic, Dosar 4, f. 4.
14. ANIC – Central, Fond Ministerul Propagandei Nationale, vol. 1, Dosar 179/1930–31, f. 4. On Crainic's disagreement with Liviu Rebreanu, see "Al doilea process".
15. Meeting of the University Senate of Iaşi, 10 Oct. 1926. ANIC – Iaşi. Fond Universitatea A. I. Cuza, Rectoratul, Dosar 1122/1926, f. 37.

16. Meeting of the University Senate of Iaşi, 10 Oct. 1926. ANIC – Iaşi. Fond Universitatea A. I. Cuza, Rectoratul, Dosar 1122/1926, f. 27.
17. Meeting of the University Senate of Iaşi with the Council for the Theology Faculty, 2 Nov. 1926. ANIC – Iaşi. Fond Universitatea A. I. Cuza, Rectoratul, Dosar 1122/1926, f. 58.
18. "Nota," 5 Octombrie 1936. National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, Fond Zelea Codreanu Corneliu, P. 011784, vol. 8, f. 202.
19. ANIC – Mun. Bucharest, Fond Universitatea din Bucureşti, Rectorat, Dosar 7/1932, f. 141.
20. Christine Hall has reflected in more detail on Crainic's ecclesiology in Christine Hall, *"Pancosmic" Church?, Specific Românesc: Ecclesiological Themes in Nichifor Crainic's Writings between 1922 and 1944* (Uppsala: Uppsala U, 2008). Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of this book.
21. Moldovan National Archives – Chişinău, Fond Ministerul de Interne, Dosar 7/1928, f. 295–296.
22. ANIC – Mun. Bucharest, Fond Universitatea din Bucureşti, Rectorat, Dosar 7/1932, f. 138–140.

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