Ionut Florin Biliuta

Sowing the Seeds of Hate

The Antisemitism of the Orthodox Church in the
Interwar Period

Abstract

The present article is focused on the antisemitic mindset of several prominent Orthodox clergymen and theologians associated with the Romanian Iron Guard and the radicalisation of Orthodox nationalism under the impact of fascism. During a wave of right-wing ideological radicalisation, Orthodox clergymen and theologians shifted from understanding the Jew according to the patristic theology and canon law to a more confessional, exclusivist trend of theology. It also discusses the Romanian Orthodox Church's position towards the development of an antisemitic theology and the implementation of this theology during the Holocaust by the Orthodox priests affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Exarchate in Transnistria.

The present contribution focuses on the entanglements between antisemitism and Orthodox theology in interwar Romania. More specifically, I focus on the way in which the Jewish minority was perceived through the theological lens of the Orthodox Church under the impact of its clergy's radicalisation. The advent of different fascist parties (the most important being the National Christian Defence League and the Iron Guard) in the Romanian public arena with their highly antisemitic and racist ideologies deeply penetrated and influenced the theological discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The present essay addresses several key issues to grasp the infiltration of antisemitic and racist ideas into the conceptual framework of the Romanian Orthodox theology. In order to carefully position this heretical development in the Church's doctrine I mapped the transformation that occurred after 1918 in the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards the Jewish minority. The increase in percentage of the Jewish minority in the Romanian state in the aftermath of the territorial gains following the First World War could be construed as the determinant cause of the change from a relatively mild patristic attitude towards Judaism to a more radical theology of hate. Paradoxically, this East European theological trend of endorsing the exclusion and marginalisation of the Jewish population occurred at the same time as the Russian émigrés in Paris ecumenically opened the sealed gates of the Orthodox doctrine for the values of the neo-patristic approach, preaching the unifying values of *sobornost* and Christian tolerance for all religious or ethnic groups.[1]

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1 The word *sobornost* meant in the 19th century Russian Slavophile philosophy both the fact that any decision in the Orthodox Church was taken by a synod of bishops (*sobor*) but also it was a synonym for the Greek word *katholon*, describing the universal, the ability to reassume in Christ's love all aspects of humanity. For further details, see William Leatherbarrow, Conservatism in the Age of Alexander I and Nicholas I, in: William Leatherbarrow/Derek Offord, A History of Russian Thought, Cambridge 2010, 110; G. M. Hamburg/Randall A. Poole, A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830–1930. Faith, Reason and the Defense of Human Dignity, Cambridge 2013², 46-48. For an Orthodox Christian understanding of the term, see Fr. Alexander Schmemann, The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy, New York 1963, 8-18.

ARTICLE

Departing from the initial patristic tenet of "deicide", which was attributed exclusively to the Jewish Orthodox theology from the early 1920s to the early 1940s, harboured the belief that even the Jews would eventually be reassumed in God's infinite love and that God's universality should function as an Orthodox blueprint for a continuous search for peaceful coexistence with other religions.[2]

Painfully aware of the Orthodox Church's millennial patristic tradition emphasising the peaceful separation from the Jews, the interwar Orthodox theologians endorsed a vilification of their Jewish neighbours based on antisemitic prejudices (the Jew as the intestine economic exploiter, as the moral corrupter of the masses, etc.). From Late Antiquity to the dawn of modernity, the exchange between Christians and Jews had involved seminal theological discussions regarding the biblical exegesis and unrestricted and mutually beneficial economic contacts.[3] Despite antisemitic innuendos and the millennial prescriptions of the Orthodox canon law prohibiting intermarriage and the sharing of liturgical spaces in Romanian territories from the late Byzantine to the late 19th century, the Jewish-Christian relations were devoid of pogroms.[4]

Another branch of research discusses the lines of argument in historiographical approaches to the present topic. By assuming uncritically the Byzantine political theology of symphony between the Church and the State, scholars in the field of Romanian antisemitism studies like Leon Volovici, Carol Iancu, Vladimir Solonari, Marius Turda, or Jean Ancel claim that only the secular realm, through its intellectuals, developed an anti-Jewish mindset.[5] By disregarding the antisemitic position of the Orthodox Church, which has always been expected to follow that of the state or intellectual elite, they fail to grasp the Orthodox Church's own millennial tradition of antisemitism and its interwar development.[6]

I argue that the Romanian Orthodox Church has developed its own form of antisemitism and that the radicalisation of the theological environment can be linked to a specific educational milieu: Orthodox theologians associated with antisemitic views maintained close ties with Austria and/or Germany, the breeding ground of

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2   Andrew Louth, The Neo-patristic Revival and Its Protagonists, in: Mary B. Cunningham/Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology, Cambridge 2008, 188-202; Aidan Nichols, Theology in Russian Diaspora. Church, Fathers, Eucharist, in: Nikolai Afanas'ev (1893–1966), Cambridge 2008, 83-93; Andrew Louth, Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology, Downers Grove 2013, 92-95.

3   Isabella Sandwell, Religious Identity, in: Late Antiquity. Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch, Cambridge 2007, 245-277; Dmitrij F. Bumazhnov, Adam Alone in Paradise. A Jewish-Christian Exegesis and Its Implication for the History of Asceticism, in: Emmanouela Grypeou/Hilary Spurling (eds.), The Exegetical Encounter Between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity, Leiden 2009, 31-43; Guy H. Stroumsa, The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity, Oxford 2015, 161-197.

4   Yossy Soffer, The View of Byzantine Jews in Islamic and Eastern Christian Sources, in: Robert Bonfil/Oded Irshai/Guy G. Stroumsa/Rina Talgam (eds.), Jews in Byzantium. Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures, Leiden 2012, 845-871; Andrei Oişteanu, Inventing the Jew. Antisemitic stereotypes in Romania and other Central-East European Cultures, Lincoln 2009, 378-440.

5   Vladimir Solonari, Purifying the Nation. Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania, Baltimore 2010, 62-80; Vladimir Solonari, Patterns of Violence. The Local Population and Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina July-August 1943, in: Michael David-Fox/Peter Holquist/Alexander M. Martin (eds.), The Holocaust in the East. Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses, Pittsburgh 2014, 51-82; Marius Turda, Rasă', eugenie şi naţionalism în România anilor '40 ai secolului al XX-lea [Race, Eugenics and Nationalism in Romania in the 1940s], in: Wolfgang Benz/Brigitte Mihok (eds.), Holocaustul la periferie. Persecutarea şi nimicirea evreilor în România şi Transnistria în 1940–1944 [Holocaust in the Periphery. The Persecution and Annihilation of the Jews in Romania and Transnistria 1940–1944], Chişinău 2010, 258-262; Radu Ioanid, The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gipsies under Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944, Chicago 2000; Jean Ancel, The Image of the Jew in the View of the Romanian Antisemitic Movements: Continuity and Change, in: Shevut 16 (1993), 47-51; William I. Brunstein, Roots of Hate. Antisemitism, in: Europe before the Holocaust, Cambridge 2004, 68-69.

6   For the Romanian Orthodox Church's antisemitic tradition see Jean Ancel, The History of the Holocaust in Romania, Lincoln 2012, 56-60.

their post-1918 antisemitic radicalisation and import of theological categories that changed their views based on the patristic tradition. The theological training in Austro-Hungarian institutions especially for theologians from Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia extolled views that were more radically anti-Jewish than those of theologians educated in the Romanian Old Kingdom.[7]

The transformation took place when the theological attitude towards the Jewish religion and ethnic minority was amalgamated with a changed Christological perspective. Although they did not explicitly deny the Jewishness of Jesus or the relevance of the Old Testament for the corpus of the Scriptures, the Romanian Orthodox theologians claimed that the characteristics of the person of Jesus Christ were universal and beyond human categories of understanding and could not be expressed by ethnical, spatial or temporal concepts, nor in terms of religious denomination. By deliberately stressing the importance of His divinity over His humanity, theologians such as Nichifor Crainic, George Racoveanu, and Fr. Liviu Stan achieved a form of theological relativism, whereby Jesus' human nature dissolved in His divinity. In order to express the antisemitic character of Orthodox theology, the logic of redemption and salvation was changed: salvation became a totalitarian concept that privileged Christians and damned all other religions, a virtue that closely associated theology with the values of religious fundamentalism.[8]

And last but not least, one of the important scholarly questions with regard to the antisemitic position of Orthodox theologians, laymen and clergy is whether this was a theological excursus or the discourse of Orthodox laymen who used various religious tropes to justify and legitimise their engagement in a radical political project. They used an eclectic, abstract theology whose ultimate aim was not Christian salvation of the individual but the creation of a racist, extremist political discourse meant to carve out a place for the nation in the beyond.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In order to ground my research hypotheses, I use Brian Porter-Szücs' theoretical underpinnings when discussing the Catholic case in Poland to expand the views on the Orthodox Church and its relationship with the state as part of a 19th century redesign. In his book on the status of Poland's Catholicism in the 20th century, Porter-Szücs emphasised that there is a close relationship between the nation represented as an "ethnoreligious community" and a "religious discourse" which can be embraced both by the representatives of the Church and by lay intellectu-

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7   Bruce Pauley, From Prejudice to Persecution. A History of Austrian Antisemitism, Chapel Hill 1992, 89-101; Wolfgang Maderthaner/Lisa Silverman, Wiener Kreise: Jewishness, Politics and Culture in Interwar Vienna, in: Deborah Holmes/Lisa Silverman (eds.), Interwar Vienna. Culture between Tradition and Modernity, New York 2009, 59-80; Lisa Silverman, Becoming Austrians. Jews and Culture between the World Wars, Oxford 2012; Janek Wasserman, Black Vienna. The Radical Right in the Red City, 1918–1938, Ithaca 2014, 15-46, 74-105. For Hungary, see Attila Pók, The Politics of Hatred: Scapegoating in Interwar Hungary, in: Paul Weindling/Marius Turda (eds.), Blood and Homeland. Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940, Budapest 2007, 375-388. As an example, for the newly acquired province of Bukovina, see Ion Nistor, Bucovina sub dominațiunea românească. La 20 de ani dela Unire [Bukovina under Romanian Rule. Twenty Years from Unification], Cernăuți 1938, 49-51; Dragoș Vitencu, Când dai nas lui Ivan … Mic tratat despre ucrainomanie [When You Indulge Ivan … Small Treaty on Ukraino-mania], Cernăuți, 1934, 6, 65-78; Irina Livezeanu, Cultural Politics, 60-78; Radu Florian Bruja, Extrema dreaptă în Bucovina [The Extreme Right in Bukowina], Târgoviște 2012, 46-47; Victoria Camelia Cotos, Populația Bucovinei în perioada interbelică [Bukovina's Population in the Interwar Period], Iași 2009, 155-174.

8   Peter Herriot, Religious Fundamentalism. Global, Local and Personal, London 2008, 211-242.

als.[9] Romanian intellectuals (theologians included) envisioned shaping the national community *(Volksgemeinschaft)* on the basis of religious denomination – a common trend in all Eastern European states during the interwar period. By associating ethnicity with the dominant religious denomination of the time, the national community presented itself as an exclusivist circle, i.e. one that marginalised ethnic and religious minorities. In the Romanian case, the 1930 debate between the orthodoxist philosopher Nae Ionescu and the Roman-Catholic intellectual Iosif Frollo stand out as perfect examples of this identification between the nation and the dominant Christian denomination.[10]

Another conceptual underpinning that I use to explain the paradoxical association of contradictory discourses such as the Christian love-hate for Jews is Roger Griffin's concept of modernity as a "mazeway resynthesis".[11] Faced with the increasingly liberal values of the Western civilisation, the mechanisation of industry, the alienation of the individual when confronted with the atomised world of the big city, the increasing secularisation of the European mind, a feeling of "malaise" and "decadence", and the increasing fear of social anomie, the traditional communities tried to resist by taking refuge in a remote, traditional existence. Taking up Roger Griffin's interpretation, I argue that under the pressure of modernisation, the exacerbation of progress as a societal myth, the highlight placed by the modern state on a secularised worldview disenchanted of any metaphysical sense, traditional intellectuals forged a "mazeway resynthesis" based on Orthodoxy in order to build a new "sacred canopy"[12] to defend the religious cultural *nomos* against the dangers of secularisation and pure nihilism:

> "[…] religion in its manifold forms originated when the socially *constructed nomos* was 'cosmicised' and projected communally unto the universe as a higher order, thus forming a 'sacred canopy' over the abyss of meaningless. The opposite of the sacred is thus not just the profane, but, at a deeper lever, chaos, the intimation of nothingness."[13]

Against this individualist ethos associated with the State's emphasis on rapid industrialisation and atomisation of the society as expressed in the secular cities of Europe,[14] but also in view of the disturbing news coming from Bolshevik Russia or Béla Kun's communist Hungary, where religion was persecuted and the importance of national community tended to disappear, wrapped in the red banner of revolution,[15]

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9 I took the terms and the conceptual framework from Brian Porter-Szücs, Faith and Fatherland. Catholicism, Modernity and Poland, Oxford 2011, 4-15, 167. For Austrian Conservative thinking which seem to share a common ground with some ideas of the traditionalists, see Stefan Jonsson, Crowds and Democracy. The Idea and Image of the Masses from Revolution to Fascism, New York 2013, 1-50.

10 Keith Hitchins, Gîndirea: Nationalism in Spiritual Guise, in: Kenneth Jowitt (ed.), Social Change in Romania, 1860–1940, Berkeley 1978, 140-173.

11 Roger Griffin, Modernity, Modernism and Fascism. A 'Mazeway Resynthesis', in: Modernism/modernity 15 (January 2008) 1, 9-24; Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler, Houndmills 2007, 106-108.

12 The term has been coined by Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, London 1967. I understand here this term as in the reading of Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 74-80.

13 Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 74.

14 For the tension between city and village in Prussian Germany, please see Hans Otte, 'More Churches More Church Goers'. The Lutheran Church in Hanover between 1850–1914, in: Hugh McLeod (ed.), European Religion in the Age of Great Cities, 1830–1930, London 1995, 89-116; Shelley Baranowski, The Sanctity of Human Life. Nobility, Protestantism & Nazism in Weimar Germany, New York/Oxford 1995, 102-116.

15 For the impact of Hungarian revolution from 1919 see Leonard Paukerow, Experimente bolșevice. Ce am văzut în Ungaria Comunistă. Bilanțul Regimului Bolșevic în Ungaria [Bolshevik Experiments. What I Saw in Communist Hungary. A Balance of the Bolshevik Regime in Hungary], Cluj 1920. For Bolshevik Russia's impact on Romania, Maxim Gorki, Un an de revoluție rusească [One Year Russian Revolution], București 1919. For the aftermath of the Hungarian Bolshevik Revolution, see Thomas Lorman, Counter-Revolutionary Hungary, 1920–1925. István Bethlen and the Politics of Consolidation, Boulder 2006, 5-42.

traditionalist intellectuals started to search for a new source of transcendent meaning. The carnages of the First World War and the Bolshevik revolutionaries taking over Russia, Germany, and Hungary increased this sensation of uncertainty and growing despair among intellectuals, who felt that they lived in an apocalyptic age. As a consequence, intellectuals looking for shelter from this general dissolution of the traditional world searched for a spiritual sanctuary that would give significance to their lives and access to transcendence so they could face the deluge and dehumanisation of the modern world. Apparently, through a synthesis of opposing categories or notions, the modernist drive was aimed at forging a new worldview in which decadence and degeneracy were epitomised in one enemy, the Jew.

In the Orthodox world, this "mazeway resynthesis" was coupled with a process of hybridisation of the Orthodox doctrine with ideas from the Roman Catholic, Protestant, or even secular milieus. This process, which Fr. Georges Florovski referred to as "pseudo-morphosis", was characterised in the 19th century by the penetration of foreign ideas such as nationalism to the Church's doctrine.[16] Contrary to the claim of exceptionality of the Romanian Orthodox case, this concept also designates the transferability of religious and secular concepts from one area to another as well as their ultimate appropriation and re-adjustment according to the specific needs determined by the context in which they were adopted.[17] As this process intensified in the wake of the formation of Orthodox national churches in the Balkans and their consolidation after the end of the First World War, the transfer of ideas to the Orthodox doctrine surpassed the theological innovations from Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and even included secular ideas such as antisemitism and racism.[18]

The fact that Orthodox theologians became more radical in their views of Judaism and sided with the fascists is also related to the academic milieu of faculties of theology in post-WWI Romania. Discontented with the theological faculties' rationalist teaching methodology borrowed from the Austrian/Prussian academic context, young students started to explore more irrational, radical intellectual alternatives associated with a highly nationalist, extremist political mindset.[19] The faculties of theology all over Romania wholeheartedly embraced the nationalistic, antisemitic drive cultivated by the radical fascist movements. Students of theology envisioned themselves as missionaries chosen to enlighten the masses as to the importance of radical nationalism and antisemitism. Paradoxically, many fascist theologians such as those affiliated with the Sibiu faculty of theology also adhered to the principles of inter-orthodox relations, ecumenism, and tolerance contained in the

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16 Fr. Georges Florovsky, The Ways of Russian Theology, in: Fr. Georges Florovsky, Aspects of the Church. Volume Four in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Belmost 1975, 183-213. For Fr. George Florovsky's theology see Peter E. Chamberas, Some Aspects of the Ecclesiology of Father Georges Vasilievich Florovsky, in: D. Neiman/D. Schatkin (eds.), The Heritage of the Early Church. Essays in Honor of Rev. George V. Florovsky, Rome 1973, 421-436; Paul Gavrilyuk, Florovsky's Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Future Ways of Orthodox Theology, in: George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), Orthodox Constructions of the West, New York 2013, 102-124.

17 Elizabeth Harvey, Emissaries of Nazism: German Student Travellers in Romania in the 1930's, in: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften 22 (2002) 1, 135-160. For a complete overview of the German expansion in the Balkans see Stephen G. Gross, Export Empire. German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945, Cambridge 2016, 68-107.

18 John Connelly, From Enemy to Brother. The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965, Cambridge 2012, 13-16.

19 Geoffrey J. Giles, Students and National Socialism in Germany, New Haven 1985, 250-265; Steven Remy, The Heidelberg Myth. The Nazification and Denazification of a German University, Cambridge 2002, 12-49; Susannah Heschel, For 'Volk, Blood, and God': The Theological Faculty at the University of Jena during the Third Reich, in: Anson Rabinbach/Wolfgang Bialas (eds.), Nazi Germany and the Humanities, Oxford 2006, 365-394. For Göttingen's Faculty of Theology, see Robert Ericksen, Complicity in the Holocaust. Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany, Cambridge 2012, 61-93.

concept of *sobornost* and preached by the Russian theology, as well as to the rediscovery of the Fathers of the Church known as the neo-patristic renaissance.[20] Paradoxically, the views of young theologians were determined by the association of opposing aesthetic and philosophical categories in the same narrative. In the vortex of modernity, Christian theologians now found their love for the neighbour tainted with hate, and expanded their Christology grounded on Christ's commandment of love for humankind by a downright ecumenical theological justification of racial hatred directed against the Jews, Roma or other ethnic minorities. Like in Nazi Germany, in addition to social and economic reasons the fascination of theologians and Christian clergymen with the 'science of antisemitism' was related to the innovative, 'avant-garde', irrational nature of the synthesis between Christian theology and the narrative of racial hate. This new theological approach was a challenging and provocative research methodology, offering young scholars a scientific foundation for their theological racist idiom.

Racial Theology or Antisemitism Religious Fascism?

After a secular, antisemitic 19th century with a secular intellectual elite that denied religion a role in building the national community and perceived nationalism as a secular ideology, a new approach to antisemitism spread across Europe. As different scholars have pointed out (George L. Mosse, Jay Winter, Christopher Clark), the end of WWI also meant a return to religion as a therapeutic way to deal with the horrors of the Eastern and Western fronts and the feeling of social anomie that dominated European societies. In the Romanian case, this return to religion and the millennial values exhibited by the Orthodox Church was coupled with a growing, almost apocalyptical fear of social unrest and "godless Bolshevism" as "products" of the world Jewry.[21]

In targeting the Jew as a pathogenic source of social decomposition and spread of socialist and communist ideas, Alexandru C. Cuza, the leading patriarch of the Romanian antisemites, joined forces with the physiologist professor Dr. Nicolae Paulescu. They exposed what they believed was a Masonic/Bolshevik/Capitalist conspiracy threatening the Romanian nation's very existence. At the beginning of 1920s, with a Jewish minority of five per cent of the population, these two Romanian intellectuals gave vent to their rabid, radically antisemitic views to energise the student youth in adopting their political ideas. As for religion, the self-declared atheist Cuza criticised the Romanian Orthodoxy in a book from 1925 programmatically entitled *Învățătura lui Isus. Judaismul si Teologia creștină* (The Teachings of Jesus. Judaism and Christian Theology) for not doing its national duty of resisting the Jewish flood,

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20 One of the most striking examples of coexistence of the theological openness towards *sobornost* and national Orthodoxy can be found in the pages of Nicolae Terchilă, Metafizica lui Vladimir Solovieff. Introducere: Viața lui Vladimir Solovieff [Vladimir Solovioff's Metaphysics. Introduction: The Life of Vladimir Solovioff], in: Nicolae Colan (ed.), Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreiene [Yearbook of the 'Andrei Șaguna' Theological Academy] XI (1934–1935), 5-39. In the same volume there was an article signed by the student Ioan Faur, Creștinismul și Naționalismul [Christianity and Nationalism], in: ibid., 65-71. For a theological reading of the concept of *sobornost* by a fascist theologian, see Hierodeacon Nicodem Ioniță, Natura și sensul termenului 'sobornicesc' [Nature and Meaning of the Term ,Sobornost'], in: Revista Teologică [Theological Review] XXVI (January-February 1936) 1-2, 32-34. For one of his fascist texts supporting the Iron Guard, see Hierodeacon Nicodem Ioniță, Problema iubirii lui Dumnezeu și a omului [The Issue of God's Love and of Man's love], in: Gândul Neamului [The Nation's Thought] II (December 1935) 1, 6.

21 William I. Brunstein, Roots of Hate, 177-264; William I. Brustein/Ryan D. King, Balkan Antisemitism: The Cases of Bulgaria and Romania before the Holocaust, in: East European Politics and Societies 18 (2004) 3, 422-423.

which, according to him, was invading Romania and stripping its population of its rights and fortune. In the 19th century, the Jewish minority started to engage in liberal professions the Romanians were not interested in. They were also part of a process of rapid urbanisation, which made them stand out in university centres, where they interacted with Romanian students, most of whom came from villages to complete their education.

Arguing that the Romanian Orthodox Church had been bought by the Jewish finance in order to keep a quiet distance from the Jewish problem, Cuza recommended to Orthodox theologians that they adopt a new Christology in line with his antisemitic views. He 'cleansed' Jesus of His Jewishness and proclaimed the end of the 'Judaic religion'; the main messianic attribute of Christ was that of being an assiduous fighter against the Jews. Accordingly, he lambasted the Church for its inefficiency and lenience towards the Jews, and of course the Jews themselves, whom he perceived as sons of the devil:

> "Christianity is a mystery. It has a meaning. The meaning of this mystery is in the being of Jesus and is summarised in a word. This word, decipherer of the mystery, is not what the Christian theology imagines it to be. It is not the mercy, the forgiveness, the passive acceptance, but exactly their opposite – the fight! The fight of the truth against the lie. The fight of the good against the evil. The fight of the light against the darkness. The truth, the good and the light are from the loving God. The lie, the evil and the darkness are from the devil, the one that kills people. Therefore in an abstract and symbolic way Jesus is the Son of God and the Jews he is fighting against are the people of Satan."[22]

Following Claudia Koonz, I argue that Cuza's tirades against the Orthodox Church's commandment to love thy neighbour provided the necessary moral anaesthesia for the Christian conscience regarding the Jews.[23] The clergy fully embraced this biased perspective, asking for a more involved Orthodox Church in the struggle against the internal enemy, the Jew. Shortly after Cuza's book came out, the same argument related to the Jewish economic superiority and their overwhelming presence in the cities could be found in the most prestigious Romanian theological journal, *Revista Teologică* (Theological Review), published in Sibiu. In describing his impressions of a pilgrimage to the Monasteries of Bukovina, the young priest Pomponiu Moruşca, a professor and spiritual confessor at the Sibiu Theological Academy, represented the residual antisemitism present in the Transylvanian academic milieu from the former Austro-Hungarian context:

> "The sea of Jews that crowds the streets of our town proves our statements that our poor Bukovina is flooded by this herd drying out its seed and stripping its inhabitants of their energy, thus ripping off their incomes. Regardless of how much humanitarian largesse our soul of Christian believers and priests has, it was troubling to see how the daily work of the Romanian peasant and the goods that he accumulated go into the pockets of the foreigner; it is because of our incapacity and weakness obviously since we don't have the sharpness that it takes to get them out of commerce, move them from the booths and send them to the hard labour in the fields."[24]

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22 A. C. Cuza, Învăţătura lui Isus. Judaismul si Teologia creştină [The Teachings of Jesus. Judaism and Christian Theology], Iaşi 1925), 7.
23 Claudia Koonz, The Nazi Conscience, Cambridge 2005, 190-220.
24 Policarp Moruşca, Un drum de reculegere [A Road of Silence], in: Revista Teologică XV (August-September 1925) 8-9, 275.

Fr. Pomponiu Morușca's view represents a vulgar, economy-centred version of the antisemitism that inspired most of Cuza's followers, who clung to the late 19th century antisemitism that originated in the views of Édouard Drumont, Houston Stewart Chamberlain and the Viennese Christian Socialism and yielded writings like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. According to these paranoid dystopian views, the Jews extended their global influence through financial power, aiming for ultimate domination of the world and the nations.

In 1930, the Bucharest *Cuvântul* (The Word) newspaper launched a major campaign headed by the philosopher Nae Ionescu against the Greek-Catholic and Roman Catholic minorities, denying them the status of 'true Romanians' and relegating them to the inferior status of being 'good Romanians'. By welding together ethnicity and religious confession, which were henceforth considered as synonymous ontological concepts, Nae Ionescu, a lay intellectual involved in issues of the Orthodox Church, tore down the already porous dikes that had kept at bay the religious marginalisation of the Jews. This was the turning point in constructing a theological narrative of racial hate against the Jewish minority. Going further still, in 1934, after adopting the fascist ideas propagated by the Iron Guard, Nae Ionescu focused his attention on the Jews. Asked by his disciple Mihail Sebastian to preface his latest novel entitled *De doua mii de ani* (For Two Thousand Years), Ionescu wrote an inflammatory introduction in which he reshuffled some of his earlier insights on the Jewish question:

> "Therefore the Jews either admit that the Messiah has come in the shape of Christ and then, from that moment, they cease to be the chosen people or they question the authenticity of Christ the Messiah and then they deny their function as the chosen people, as God's instrument for the salvation of the world [...] Judah suffers. Why? Because Judah lives in the midst of people who cannot be hostile to him even if they wish not to be; because by refusing to acknowledge Christ as Messiah, by continuing to rightly or wrongly hold himself apart in his capacity as the chosen people he owes to himself to fulfil the role which devolves on him, that of the Christian values. Judah suffers because he birthed Christ, because he saw Him and did not believe in Him. This would not have been a too serious matter. But others believed; we did. Judah suffers because he is Judah."[25]

Nae Ionescu denied the Jews any chance of salvation and believed that in their case the Messiah had already come. He went even further in his theological argument by clearly and boldly stating that Jews were destined to eternal damnation unless they confessed to Christ as Messiah and converted to Christianity.

Appalled by their mentor's radical remarks, some of his disciples such as Mircea Eliade, Mircea Vulcănescu and Constantin Noica criticised their professor's theological assumptions and his defiance of God's sovereign will to choose who would be saved and who would be doomed to hellfire.[26] Against their criticism of Nae Ionescu's assertions, a young Romanian graduate in Orthodox theology and philosophy associated with the Romanian Iron Guard championed the professor: Gheorghe

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25 Nae Ionescu, Introducere, in: Mihail Sebastian, De două mii de ani [For Two Thousand Years], București 1934, 8 and 9.

26 See Mircea Eliade, Judaism și antisemitism [Judaism and Antisemitism], in: II Vremea (22 July 1934) 347, 2; Constantin Noica, Creștini, marxiști și teologi [Christians, Marxists and Theologists], in: Credința [Faith] II (9 September 1934) 231, 4. For a complete scholarly overview of the polemic see Leon Volovici, Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism. The Case of the Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s, Oxford 1990, 101-105. See also Zigu Ornea, Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească [The Thirties. The Romanian Far Right], Iași 2015, 148-178.

Racoveanu, at that time a PhD candidate in Orthodox theology at Bucharest University and with an impressive journalist track-record supporting the Iron Guard, defended Nae Ionescu. In a series of articles published in *Credința* (Belief), Racoveanu picked up Nae Ionescu's views of the necessity to convert Jews to Christianity to relieve them of their existential suffering and their hope for the Messiah to come. He also argued that God's grace is shared only by those who are already baptised and members of the Christian Church and refused to allot any moral or theological value to the good deeds of Jews. The novelty of Racoveanu's approach as opposed to Nae Ionescu's was in claiming that, in God's eyes, only two categories were damned from the start, namely the fallen angels (the demons, the devils) and the Jews. By picking up some references from the liturgy of the Orthodox Church, Racoveanu – like Fr. Ilie Imbrescu before him (who had spoken of a 'satanic generation')[27] – considered the figure of Judas Iscariot as the typological representation of the Jewish people and did everything in his power to demonise them: "Judah is an angel of the devil. Worse yet, the devil himself […]. Thus Judah and the devils will not find salvation."[28]

Racoveanu's deliberate demonization of the Jewish people took antisemitism one step further. When criticised by Mircea Vulcănescu, who grounded his opinion in the newest approach to Orthodox soteriology represented by Fr. Serghei Bulgakov and claimed that, in the end, even the demons would be saved by God's grace, Racoveanu provided a stunning, rabidly antisemitic answer.[29] First, he questioned the relevance of Vulcănescu's reference to Boulgakov's writings, quoting from a personal letter he received from Boulgakov saying that those writings were addressed not to the Orthodox, but rather to other Christian denominations, so they were not written with a strict observance of controversial doctrinal issues. Second, Racoveanu dismantled as heretical the theological idea that a final restitution (*apokatastasis panton*) of all being into God would take place at the end of time; after all, its best-known advocate, Origen of Alexandria, was condemned as a heretic at the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553 AD). Nevertheless, Racoveanu pointed out that, although the final eternal punishment of the demons was a reality of Christian doctrine, there was still hope for them to be redeemed in the beyond, whereas for the Jews there was no hope due to their obstinate refusal to recognise Christ as the Messiah.[30]

Because of the growing influence of Nazi Germany and the spread of theological ideas from the Third Reich, which advocated a Germanic version of Christianity based on Aryan Christology and racist ecclesiology, a transformation took place in the Romanian Orthodox theology with regard to the Jewish problem. Orthodox theologians affiliated to the Iron Guard dropped almost all patristic or scriptural references in shaping their antisemitic views and began to forge their theological expression of hatred against Jews by adopting a racist conceptual framework when arguing against the pagan character of the Nazi Germanic religion. As Susannah Heschel accurately pointed out in a book on the Nazification of Protestant theology during the Third Reich, the racial approach to theology was extremely appealing to theologians because it was regarded as avant-garde to mix nationalism, theology,

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27 Mircea Vulcănescu, O problemă teologică eronat rezolvată? Sau ce nu a spus d. Gheorghe Racoveanu [A Theological Problem Erroneously Solved? Or What Mr. Gheorghe Racoveanu Did Not Say], in: Credința II (3 September 1934) 225, 4.

28 Gheorghe Racoveanu, O problemă teologică eronat rezolvată: sau ce n-a înțeles dl. Mircea Eliade [A Theological Problem Erroneously Solved? Or What Mr. Mircea Eliade Did Not Understand], in: Credința II (29 July 1934) 195, 4.

29 Gheorghe Racoveanu, Pentru lamurirea dl. Mircea Vulcănescu, Noul Bogoslov [XXX], in: Credința II (5 September 1934) 227, 4-6.

30 Ibid., 6.

and racism.[31] This method was also extremely popular among Romanian theologians such as Nichifor Crainic, Fr. Nicolae Neaga or Fr. Liviu Stan, especially after 1936.

That year, Nichifor Crainic wrote a seminal text entitled *Rasă și religiune* (Race and Religion) in his cultural journal *Gîndirea* (The Thought). Crainic criticised the German Nazis for emphasising the superiority of the Germanic race, condemned the erroneous German spirit that engendered excesses like the sterilisation of the unwanted, and repudiated the pseudo-Christian Germanic religion and the exchange of the Roman for a Germanic Law; in short: he seemed to embark on a complete refutation of the Germanic antisemitic religion. And yet, he also preached the inequality of races, the degeneracy of the Jewish race, and the Christian spiritual factor as the leading argument for a fruitful development of the races:

> "Almighty is but God. And the values of this world are more or less valuable by how they report positively or not to the Almighty. A race for instance can be inferior or superior based on how its genius accomplished more or less from the essence of Christianity."[32]

In order to refute the Nazi idea that Christianity was a Jewish religion and its founder had been a Jew, Crainic envisaged Christ as a divine-human person in whom there was no hint of Jewish blood, thus radicalising the German hypothesis of an Aryan Jesus:

> "Is Christianity a Judaic religion? It could have been in just one instance: if its creator would have been nothing else but the son of the man from the royal line of David. Then its doctrine wouldn't have been but a Semitic myth of a relative value as all the other religious myths of the people. However the nature of Christianity is given by the divine and human nature of its creator. In Jesus the divine nature and human nature without being combined are actively and mysteriously united in the same person. What does the church teach us regarding the man Jesus? That this man was born without sin, that there is no sin in him and he cannot sin."[33]

Nichifor Crainic denied Jews the moral right to use the books of the Old Testament in their religious practice, claiming that the Jewish Scriptures were already fulfilled by the coming of Christ, who had abolished the Judaic religion and now only belonged to Christians. Furthermore, he acknowledged the rightful character of the Germanic racist religion only in what concerned the Jews, and claimed that Christians hated only the racial myth of Judaism based on the Talmud, whose historical and racial essence was centred on the denial of Christ as Messiah and his resurrection from the dead:

> "The Talmud is the obscurantist organisation of the most tremendous hatred against the Savior Jesus Christ and against Christians. Its spirit is the cruel spirit of Herod, the killer of 14 000 innocent babies and the spirit of the crime on Golgotha. The Talmud is the total negation of Christianity on the part of a people that has decreed that it is above all other peoples and that does not recognise God's salvation of any of them […] The Talmud is the wellspring of the worldwide Masonic action to discredit Christianity and

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31 Susannah Heschel, The Aryan Jesus. Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany, Princeton 2009, 19. For the Romanian case see Paul Shapiro, Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church, in: Kevin Spicer (ed.), Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust, Bloomington 2007, 136-172.
32 Nichifor Crainic, Rasă și religiune [Race and Religion], in: Gândirea XIV (1935) 2, 59.
33 Ibid., 65.

the Marxist action to transform through violent means people into atheists. As long as the Jews continue to isolate themselves from all other peoples in that fortress of diabolical hatred, there will be no peace between us and them. Henceforward, this road will blindly lead to the implementation of the prophetic words: Thou shall destroy thyself, O Israel!"[34]

The racist rants against the Jewish minority in Romania voiced by Nichifor Crainic went hand in hand with an already existing antisemitic discourse within the structures of the Church. Continuing the late 19th century obsession with Judaism as closely associated with the spread of freemasonry, the bishops, priests, and theologians of the Romanian Orthodox Church rejected from the beginning these kind of 'occult' organisations, which they perceived as being openly anti-Christian and the source of all malaise engulfing the Church's initiatives to promote a Romanian Orthodoxy. Seizing the momentum of the funeral of legionary leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin's, where three hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church led a procession of 200 priests, openly demonstrating their support for the Iron Guard, the Holy Synod took a historical decision: shortly after the funeral (on 11th March 1937), freemasonry was condemned at the behest and inspiration of Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, who had attended the burial and drafted a memorandum approved by the Holy Synod. This official step by the Orthodox Holy Synod in further isolating the Jews can be looked upon as a natural progression in the relationship between the Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church, since both the Synod and the fascists saw freemasonry and the Jewish world finance as the evil forces behind the Romanian political parties associated with the spread of communism and atheism. The Patriarch vainly tried to use his influence and persuade the bishops to ban priests from politics and stop them from decorating churches with political symbols or contributing to political propaganda. In the same session, the Holy Synod refused the request of the State to dissolve the newly created legionary working camps built around its churches and monasteries. Moreover, influenced by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, the Synod claimed to uphold "a Christian point of view" against "the spirit of secularism" in politics, arguing that the Church could choose what party was worthy of support according to its moral precepts.

The decision of the Holy Synod caused confusion in that part of society that was not attached to the legionary cause and values: they perceived the step as a direct attack against King Carol II's intimates, namely his Jewish mistress Elena Lupescu and his circle of influential cronies from the world of finance. The Iron Guard saw them as the epitome of Jewish capital penetration through freemasonry and the source of the nation's moral corruption, and thus the decision of the Holy Synod was perceived as a victory of the Iron Guard. Corneliu Codreanu saluted the decision of the Holy Synod as "the beginning of greatness" for the Romanian people in its struggle against the corroding influences from within. In his 64th circular, he urged all legionaries to read the acts of the March Synod.

After being appointed as prime minister on 11 February 1938 by King Carol II during his royal dictatorship, Patriarch Miron Cristea continued the racial initiatives of the previous government led by Octavian Goga and Alexandru C. Cuza. He oversaw and patronised the implementation of antisemitic legislation, but also the violent containment of the Iron Guard from the Romanian public sphere. Apart from the anti-Jewish legislation that was passed and implemented, the puppet government installed by King Carol II during his personal dictatorship and headed

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34 Ibid., 66.

by Patriarch Miron Cristea displayed an economic variant of antisemitism, disregarding its theological aspect.

The anti-Jewish legislation was toughened through the instauration on 6 September 1940, of a joint military and Iron Guard government led by General Ion Antonescu. In addition to confiscating Jewish property and looting Jewish businesses, the National Legionary State proclaimed on 14 September 1940 also decided to ban all masonic lodges in Romania. This particular step was perceived by the Romanian Orthodox Church as a direct confirmation of its 1937 decision. Thus, the Orthodox Metropolitan Irineu Mihălcescu, a representative of the theological view of freemasonry as a dangerous threat both to the Romanian nation and the Church, began to vent his antisemitism ideas, denouncing Jewishness as the essence of freemasonry. A professor of symbolic theology and Orthodox dogma and Metropolitan of Moldavia from 1939, Mihălcescu published in 1941 a detailed attack on freemasonry, which he considered to be 'Satan's Synagogue' and an open enemy of the Christian Church. Metropolitan Mihălcescu praised the earlier condemnation by the Holy Synod and the prohibition of the masonic lodges by the Romanian National Legionary State in 1940. Drawing inspiration from his articles published in the early 1920s, he stated his reason for endorsing these decisions:

> "One can tell that the Jews have infiltrated Freemasonry by simply looking at the leaders of the lodges around the world: both the leadership and the majority of members consist of Jews. Although recently appeared, Freemasonry has a bloody past."[35]

The same judgmental thinking that linked freemasonry with world Jewry was expressed by Deacon Nicolae Mladin. In a text dedicated to Dr. Nicolae Paulescu, Mladin recycled some of the arguments produced by others before him and suggested that "Judaism is a creation of the Talmud", "the Talmud is a testimony of a satanic messianism", and the "Old Testament belongs to Christianity and Judaism belongs to the Talmudic spirit". In defining the link between antisemitism and freemasonry, Mladin stated that:

> "Antisemitism is therefore directed not against the Old Testament but against the Talmud that grew from the hatred against Christ and shaped the twisted physiognomy of the current Judaism. Freemasonry is the tool through which Judaism recruits, even from among the Christians, fighters against Christ. Obviously we talk about people driven by material gains. The supreme leadership is held by the American Kikes."[36]

The purpose of the Jewish conspiracy embodied by freemasonry was nothing other than:

> "De-Christianising the people and keeping them enslaved by passions and wants under the yoke of the universal kingdom of Israel. This is why the Kahal and the Freemasonry are the cause for all the vices that destroy civilisations and crush the nations: debauchery (Freudianism, open marriage, sexuality and so on), alcoholism, thievery, murder, capitalism, anarchy, communism. An instrument of public corruption, Judaism made out of religion an opium of the people, from art a shameless exhibition, from science a weapon against God, from philosophy a negation of Christ, from

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35 Irineu Mihălcescu, Francmasoneria. Teologia luptătoare [Freemasonry. Theology's Fighter], București 1941, 5-6.
36 Nicolae Mladin, Doctrina despre viață a profesorului Nicolae Paulescu [Professor Nicolae Paulescu's Life Doctrine], in: Revista teologică (1942) 3-4, 200-201.

education an instrument of spiritual mess, from the free press a means of falsifying Romanian spirituality."[37]

Nicolae Mladin stated these suppositions bluntly and presented the consequences even to those who already followed the Masonic principles or simply had Jewish origins. According to him, there was no salvation for Jews or freemasons, but rather the reality of eternal punishment in hellfire: "A terrible downfall awaits those who reject Christ and fall into the hands of Judah."[38]

Crainic's racist rants against the Jews were confirmed and systematised later on in the works of Fr. Liviu Stan. A fervent reader of German and French racists and supporter of the Iron Guard, Liviu Stan authored *Race and Religion* in 1942, a theological explanation of the racist conception. As Crainic before him, he argued against the neo-pagan theology of the Third Reich and claimed that for any racist theology the main assumption had to be the primacy of the spiritual over the biological aspect of race. He refuted both moderate and radical views related to the relationship between religion and race and claimed that religion was beyond races and was the overarching principle, maximising the biological legacy of a certain race.

> "This original unity, lost in the meantime because of the original sin, is re-created through Christianity that is not in any way a product of the Semitic race but the religion par excellence, the absolute religion, that one that gathers all the natural and supernatural conditions to produce the straightest connection between man and God with the most suitable means and guiding him to the highest purpose of his life and of life in general."[39]

Referring to the Romanian theology's understanding of race, Liviu Stan claimed that

> "[t]he racist truth with all its consequences and addenda imposes in the life of the western Christian revisions and reforms. For us, the eastern Orthodox Christians, these reforms are not problematic because both racism and nationalism with their entire value system could be found in the doctrine and life of the Orthodox Church. They are realities that Orthodoxy considers both in the form of doctrine and in its practice with its organisation into national churches, honouring them as creations by the hands of God. Thus, if you are a racist you are and will be Romanian and when you no longer are racist, when you stopped being racist, you start to disappear as Romanian, as a nation, you start melting, dissolving in a stronger racist solution, a more concentrated one that will last and survive your temporary, natural and your eternal divine purpose."[40]

As Nae Ionescu and Nichifor Crainic before him, Fr. Liviu Stan established a close relation of dependence between religion/Christianity and race. In point of fact, he applied Ionescu's reasoning to the concept of race claiming that race associated with Christianity made someone a Romanian, and anyone who did not fit that particular model was not a true Romanian. In relation to the Jewish minority, this denominational understanding of race exported by the Orthodox chaplains on the Eastern Front and missionary priests of the Romanian Exarchate established in the conquered Ukraine tranquillised the moral and human feelings of the Orthodox clergy when involved in the Holocaust.

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37 Ibid., 201.
38 Ibid., 202.
39 Liviu Stan, Rasă și religiune [Race and Religion], Sibiu 1943, 92.
40 Ibid., 122.

Instead of conclusion

Interwar theological antisemitism in Romania stood not just as missionary means of spreading the nationalist and xenophobic gospel of evil, but also as a failed attempt to re-connect the outdated Orthodox theology with the newest developments in the German academic milieu. The alleged 'science of antisemitism' once adopted from German universities provided its Orthodox counterparts with the illusory hope that antisemitism could function as an independent nationalistic brand of theology. In an economically backward country such as interwar Romania, where the rural, agricultural and traditional proportion of the population reached almost 78 per cent, where the industrial modernisation stalled, where urbanisation lacked the input needed from state authorities and the autochthonous, urban middle class consisted of ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Saxons, Jews, etc.), the xenophobic prejudices and nationalistic dreams of grandeur out of sheer frustration thrived dangerously. In this unstable social and economic climate the Romanian Orthodox Church accommodated its public speech to the needs and increasingly anti-Semite tendencies of its parishioners.

People like Nichifor Crainic, Gheorghe Racoveanu or Fr. Liviu Stan scolded the Jews not only out of antisemitic conviction, but also due to their political options and the ideological trajectory of the Orthodox Church in its entirety. Antisemitism and a stern nationalism offered a moral and political justification of the other, more mundane grievances of the Church. Nevertheless, in endowing antisemitism with a theological significance and presenting their students with a theological justification for excluding Jews from the midst of the national community, the aforementioned theologians opened a dangerous path, with murderous consequences. Orthodox theology was transformed by these people from a moral and ascetical discipline into a powerful instrument of ethnical exclusion suited to the ideals and goals of the Romanian fascist movements (the Iron Guard, for example).

While former fascists translated the intellectual discourse of a limited number of highly-skilled theologians into the concrete action during the short-lived Transnistrian Orthodox Exarchate, students of these theologians and their powerful anti-semitic master narrative would pave the way for the Romanian Holocaust and the wilful participation of Romanians in the genocidal undertakings of the assigned missionary clergymen.

Ionut Florin Biliuta
Historian
ionut.biliuta@gmail.com