

Rev. Iuliu-Marius Morariu¹

NICHIFOR CRAINIC

and the Christian-Nationalism from the Romanian Space

Abstract: Using information from Nikifor Crainic's publications in periodicals such as *Gândirea* (Thought) and his books, this article aims to present how the Christian nationalism of this Romanian author is reflected in his journalistic works and to identify the main elements of his thought. It explores aspects such as ethnocracy, messianism, suffering, and national evolution. Additionally, the article examines how prominent nationalist movements of the time with which Crainic was engaged, such as Nazism and Fascism, influenced his ideas and affected his originality.

Keywords: *Christian Nationalism, Ethnocracy, Demophilia, Morality, Nationalism*

Important personality of the Romanian space from the interwar period, Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) was for sure a controversial man. Theologian, philosopher and author of literature, he was in many aspects a man that created a way of thinking in the Romanian space. This explains why he benefited during the time of several monographs and articles² (espe-

¹ „Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; *Angelicum Pontifical University*, Rome.

² See, for example: Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *The “Christian nationalism” of Nichifor Crainic reflected in his work from the 4th decade of the 20th century*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 2020; Stelian Spânu, *Nichifor Crainic – lights and shadows – a biography*, Bucharest, Saeculum Vizual Press, 2013; Roland Clark, “Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania,” in *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies*, 28 (2009), no. 2002, p. 1-47; Roland Clark, “Re-Membering Codreanu: Maligning Fascist Virtues in Aiud Prison, 1964,” in *Caietele CNSAS*, 8 (2015), no. 2, p. 181-215; Roland Clark, “From Elite Pamphleteers to Social Movement Protagonists: Antisemitic Activism in 1920s Romania,” in *Studies on National Movements* 4 (2019), p. 1-35; Gabriel Hasmațuchi, “Nichifor Crainic and the Interwar “New Spirituality,”” in *Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines*, 2 (2011), p. 57-59; Ioan Ică jr., 2018. “Nichifor Crainic,” in *Revista Teologică* 111 (2018), no. 2, p. 7-22; Emanuel Cășvean, Emanuel, Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Nichifor Crainic’s Eucharistic View Reflected in His Poetic and Philosophical Work,” in *European Scientific Journal* 11 (2015), no. 26, p. 56-70; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, Emanuel Cășvean, “The Youth of the Soul and its Relevance for Nichifor Crainic’s taught.” *Altarul*

cially after 1989) and of the reprint of some of his works.

After defending his doctorate in Wien, he will return to Bucharest, where he will teach initially at the Bucharest Central Seminary. Later, will start to become a professor of Spirituality in Chişinău Faculty of Orthodox Theology¹ and later, shortly after the middle of the 3rd decade of the 20th century, will develop the idea of teaching mystics. In this context, he will become the founder of mystics classes in the Faculties of the Orthodox Theology from the Romanian space. Reading the notes taken by some of his students and later published² one can find that, although he studied in the Protestant space, as a teacher, will be closer to the Catholic Mystics, that will be put in contact with some genuine Orthodox personalities. Therefore, from this point of view, Crainic can be considered a precursor of ecumenism in his area of work.

As a writer of literature and poet, he was a promotor of the *gândirist* (*taught-ist*) current³, a branch of traditionalism that had many adepts at those time and promoted the valorization of autochthon values instead of the import of Occidental ones. Of course, this is also linked with his nationalist attitude, as authors like Roland Clark will underline⁴, because in journals like *Gândirea* (*The Taught*), that he directed for almost two

Reîntregirii, 21 (2016), no. 3, p. 281-28; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Nichifor Crainic and *The Taught* journal," in *Tabor* 9 (2015), no. 3, p. 29-32; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Christian Elements in the Doctrine of the Romanian Far-right Political Movements from the Interwar Period – Case Study: Legionary movement," in Robert Mieczkowski (coord.), *Przeszłość i przyszłość prawicy*, Warsaw, Armagraf, 2016, p. 65-8; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Theological Ideas of Nichifor Crainic and their Relevance for His Political Activity," *Postmodern Openings* 9 (2018), no. 4, p. 54-64; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Between Poetry, Religion, Tolerance and Anti-Semitism: a Re-Evaluation of The Publicistic Work of the Romanian Theologian Nichifor Crainic from 'Gândirea,'" *European Journal of Science and Theology* 15 (2019), no. 2, p. 93-101.

¹ Stelian Spănu, *Nichifor Crainic – lights and shadows – a biography*, p. 13; Nichifor Crainic, *Memories, 1st volume*, edited by Nedic Lemnaru, Bucharest, Orpheu Press, 1991, p. 338.

² Nichifor Crainic, *Holiness – the Accomplishment of the Human (Lectures of Mystical Theology)*, Iassy, Press of Metropoly of Moldova and Bucovina, 1993; Nichifor Crainic, *Lectures on Mystics: Mystical Theology, German Mystics*, edited by Ioan Ică jr. Sibiu, Deisis Press, 2010 ; Nichifor Crainic, Crainic, Nichifor. "German Mystics Lecture. Meister Eckhart and His School - First Inaugural Lecture," *Tabor*, 3 (2010), no. 10, p. 5-14.

³ For more information regarding this, see also: Dumitru Micu, „*The taught*” and „*taught-ism*”. *Moments and synthesis*, Bucharest, Minerva, 1975.

⁴ Roland Clark, "Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania," p. 7.

decades (from 1924-1944)¹, he promoted ideas from this current.

As a philosopher, he was important in the Romanian context due to the fact that he brought ideas from authors like Carl Schmitt² and brought into attention topics like the idea of political theology, *etnocracy*³, translated poets with philosophical ideas and often tried to see political events in the light of the philosophy. Still, it must be mentioned that he was not a philosopher with system and that his originality and creativity can be better seen in the aforementioned domains.

As a Romanian thinker with Christian roots, he was, together with many authors of the time, a man interested in the evolution of his country. Like other recognized after the First World War, that had, somewhere in history, moments of glory, Romania also tried to link the contemporary aspects with the past, in order to justify some aspects and to understand others. It was this aspect the point of departure of some excesses. In Romanian context, the fact that the country had minorities and neighbors that claimed to be the real possessors of some parts of its lands determined the radicalization of some exponentials of right-side. Crainic will also come, in some situations in their neighborhood (without being totally a legionary, as it was often accused). Of course, a honest approach of his ideas must also mention that, although is often quoted as a main head of accusation for him,⁴ *Căldariul (The Calendary)*, a journal that he published during the 4th decade of the 20th century is impossible to find today in any of the libraries from Romanian space, fact that constitutes a huge gap in the research.

But before seeing his approach on the topic that we intend to present, we consider useful to see what is nationalism. A contemporary researcher realizes an attempt of definition, showing that:

“Broadly speaking, nationalism refers to persons’ loyalty and devotion to a larger group—country and state—that shares a common identity, origin, history, and language. Nationalism is also an ideol-

¹ Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Nichifor Crainic and *The Taught journal*,” p. 30.

² Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the concept of Sovereignty*, translated into English by George Schwab, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985.

³ Nichifor Crainic, *Orthodoxy and Etnocracy*, Bucharest, Cugetarea Publ. House, 1930.

⁴ Roland Clark, “Re-Membering Codreanu: Maligning Fascist Virtues in Aiud Prison, 1964,” p. 185.

ogy that holds that the nation is the basic element of social life, taking precedence over other forms of organization and other forms of loyalty. Goldberg (2006) argued that Christian nationalism refers to those who identify themselves as Christian-Americans, and this identification primarily means loyalty and devotion to the United States as a Christian nation.”¹

If this happens in the American space, it must be said that in the Romanian one things are not strongly different. And the situation is similar both in other countries from the Eastern and Central Europe in the interwar period. The only nuance that can be found in Crainic, but it is imported from Nae Ionescu², to whom he had a great admiration, is the fact that the Romanian thinker prefers also the term „people” that often is confounded with the one of nation. Due to the fact that the term has also historical roots³, he also uses the historical aspects in order to justify his way of thinking. Of course, nation is related with aspects like ethnicity or religion, because as a contemporary researcher notes:

“Nation, ethnicity, nationalism and religion are four distinct and determinative elements within European and world history. Not one of them can be safely marginalised by either the historian or the politician concerned to understand the shaping of modern history.”⁴ (Hastings 1997:1).

For Crainic, once realized the Great Union from 1918, Romania is

¹ Mothe Ryan, „Mothe, Ryan Ia. 2008. “Salvation Coming: Christian nationalism and pastoral care.” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 18 (2008), no. 1, p. 2.

² Cf. Marta Petreu, *The Evil and his disciple: Nae Ionescu – Mihail Sebastian*, Bucharest, Polirom, 2009; Vasile Băncilă, *Nae Ionescu – a prestant cavalry of the spirit*, Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca, Comunicare.ro, Eikon, 2011; Dan Chiachir, *Taughts about Nae Ionescu*, Ploiești, Litera Ortodoxă Press, 2010, for more information about his life, activity and the impact of his ideas on the Romanian interwar cultural space.

³ Because as Bloomberg notes: “The term “Christian-National” comes from the nineteenth-century-counter-revolutionary, pro-authoritatrian, anti-modernist movements which sought to restore the status quo that prevailed before 1789, which is ordered, hierarchical, and it has a monarchist structure.” Charles Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa, 1918-48*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, p. 1.

⁴ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 1.

called to evolution. This means to avoid the danger, to purify the nation and to avoid dangers like the confiscation of the economy from other nations. As a promoter of a nationalism, he will underline that:

“Nationalism is the elementary condition of the renaissance of all peoples, while its absence is the sign of decadence and death.”¹

Being an adept of Christian-nationalism, he is also the promoter of the idea of a mesianim with moral and theological basis, but also with a potential political accomplishment. His ideas regarding this aspect are related with the cooperation between man and God. The spiritual order is the one who helps the first one and it is, according to his taught, a form of Providence, rather than one a predestination in the Protestant sense. When he will have the opportunity, he will write about it and will see as a practical aspect of its accomplishment the fascism:

“The man who believes in the spiritual order of the world does not lose its confidence. He knows that the disorder is a passing accident and that the order is given by the intimate nature of this world. Under the times it is destroyed only this part that is useless, it has no base in itself or outside itself. The man of faith, the man of conviction dominates the world: he creates the time, the history. This is why I have told you: I do not think together with the old man Miron Costin that the poor man is under the times; I believe together with Benito Mussolini that the force of the man destroys monsters’ had.”²

His sympathy to Fascism has as an important element the fact that fascism does not neglect the religious aspects. The fact that Mussolini comes close to the Church in order to justify his actions, makes him to fill closer to him. The fact that he is the leader of a people with Latin backgrounds also contributes to this aspect, together with political and economical reasons (Italy was also a young state and Romania was exporting

¹ Nichifor Crainic, „Nationality in art,” *Gândirea*, 14 (1935), no. 3, p.113. Cf. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Theological Ideas of Nichifor Crainic and their Relevance for His Political Activity,” p. 56.

² Nichifor Crainic, „Cardinal Points in Chaos,” *Gândirea*, 11 (1931), no. 12, p. 469-476. Later his ideas regarding the politics and the way how he understood the context of his time will be developed in a book. See: Nichifor Crainic, *Cardinal points in Chaos*, Bucharest, „Cugetarea” Press, 1936.

grains to them during the interwar period)¹. The idea of dempohily will become a real landmark of his discourse regarding the nationalism. The fact that, ad least in the beginning, Anti-Semitism was not very strong emphasized in the Fascist doctrine will also contribute to his orientation towards it. For this reason, in the middle of the fourth decade of the 20th century, he will write a critical article regarding the German nationalism. He will underline there that:

“German nationalism is based on this completely arbitrary dogma of the superiority of the German race. Starting from the premises of this theoretical arbitrariness, he interprets the history of Europe in *a sui generis* way and draws a series of consequences whose particularism sometimes goes so far as to be bizarre. The replacement of Roman law with a German law, as well as that of sterilization to obtain a pure race, are among the most curious, but more striking than all is the problem of replacing Christianity with a non-pagan religion which, as a specific product of the German race, would serve exclusively for this race.”²

Of course, one may argue that there can be found elements of his Anti-Semite thought in some of his articles, especially after the beginning of the Second World War and in this case, his critics of the race does not make him a defense of Jewish people. Indeed, it must be said that the writer was inconsequent in his ideas and often, there are alternate contradictory phrases in some of his articles. While it is not the purpose of this

¹ “Between the two materialistic extremes, the attempts of rectification, compromise, synthesis, are not missing. The great German movement of Adolf Hitler is one. Mussolini’s so architecturally built political work is another. What is to be remembered in fascism, with all its decreases, it is the hierarchical system that corresponds to the natural order of things, the effort to rectify the democratic bargain through the corporate parliament and the authority opposed to anarchy, an authority that, though sometimes used as oppression, is still justified by a moral stance and by a fact that saved Italy. Mussolini believes in his homeland, and in this dynamic and creative faith, he knew how to employ the spiritual powers that are an integral part of the Italian people. Mussolini is not a Democrat because he is sincere, but he is a demophile, because he is wise. I do not know if the formula he gave may be the one seeking modern life, but it is doubtful that modern life is seeking a new synthesis that materialistic doctrine cannot give.” Nichifor Crainic, „Cardinal Points in Chaos,” p. 474-475.

² Nichifor Crainic, „Race and Religion,” *Gândirea*, 14 (1935), no. 2, p. 57-66.

research to analyze his attitude towards the Jewish people, we will let it open there, and suggest the fact that previous research like Roland Clark ones approached and offered interesting keys of understanding it.¹

What it is interesting in his understanding of Fascism is the fact that Crainic relates it with the Roman Empire and sees it as a continuation of it and in the same time, as a synthesis of force and Spirit:

“Fascism, as a totalitarian form of life, is the synthesis of force and of the Spirit. The Roman Caesars represented the force; the popes, the best of them, represented the Spirit. Paganism and Christianity mix and balance their essences in the conception that revived Rome and has made Italy a modern state masterpiece. The state created by Mussolini is the exemplary state. Amidst the continuous and endless ruins of the false political settlements in Europe, Rome erects a form of integral life in which all opposing tendencies within a people’s bosom they appear harmonized and hierarchized under the authority of the spirit.”²

For him, Fascism represents a form of practical ethnocracy. The fact that the Italian dictator had a plan of developing the country, contributed to its economical increase, sustained the autochthon production and in the same time decided to remain close to the Church and in certain situations to use some of the ideas expressed in some encyclical letters like the fact that *corporatism* can be considered the 3rd way between communism and capitalism³ (that will determinate also Crainic to speak about “corporative ethnocracy”⁴), will make him to feel it as a program that could be implemented also in spaces like the Romanian one. Aspects of Nazism and notions like „race” will be also found in his ideas, in the articles where he will define the ethnocracy as a political program:

“We call ethnocracy the political will of the autochthonous race to

¹ Cf. Roland Clark, „Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania,” p. 1-47; Roland Clark, “Re-Membering Codreanu: Maligning Fascist Virtues in Aiud Prison, 1964,” p. 181-215; Roland Clark, “From Elite Pamphleteers to Social Movement Protagonists: Antisemitic Activism in 1920s Romania,” p. 1-35.

² Nichifor Crainic, „Universal Rome,” *Gândirea*, 14 (1935), no. 4, p. 171.

³ Claudia, Carlen Ihm, *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, Raleigh, The Pierian Press, 1981, p. 415-444.

⁴ Nichifor Crainic, „The Autochthon Spirit,” *Gândirea*, 17 (1938), no. 4, p. 167.

make the state the expression of its properties and the organ of its mission in the world. If democracy has placed the centre of gravity of the state towards the minority periphery, ethnography is entitled to reshape it into the national personality of the majority that created it.”¹

The idea of Parsifal, together with the one of sacrifice and fight become also, as expected in this system of thinking, based on the idea of revival of national consciousness and on the exaltation of the feeling of national belonging, with exclusivist accents, important parts of his speech. In one article published in *Gândirea* in 1936, Crainic will see it in relationship with Christian conception regarding sufferance and purification. He will write there:

“In Christian spirituality there are people who love Jesus Christ so intensely and plunge so deeply into his suffering that their bodies exactly reproduce the crucifixion drama on the cross. Their arms and legs dripped with blood, as if in them beat the Golgotha’s spikes. The forehead gives them red bristles as if it were wearing a crown of thorns. The bloody coast, pierced like the spear of the Roman centurion. The science contests this stigmata phenomenon, but it cannot explain it and it can not show why it makes you one with Christ.

Demophilic heroism plunges so deeply into the love of the nation that the wounds of this nation become the wounds of the nationalists. If we were to gather the prisons made by young warriors lately, from their total hundreds of years I would understand what service by sacrifice means. In the camp of democracy there is no punishment for virtue, not even for the wrongs of the democrats. There is, without a doubt, a Golgotha of the young generation, because in her flesh they bleed the stigmas of an entire nation.

But all world’s Golgotha ends in the light of the resurrection.”²

Ideas like the personified nation, sufferance and revival, chosen people or the continuity between important personality from the ancient his-

¹ Nichifor Crainic, „Childhood and Santity,” *Gândirea*, 18 (1938), no.1 p. 3.

² Nichifor Crainic, „Heroic Man,” *Gândirea*, 15 91936), no. 6, p. 271.

tory define therefore the Nichifor Crainic's Christian-nationalist conception. Without being a singular element in the Romanian interwar cultural space, but rather a special one among others (because although he was oriented towards the far-right extreme, there are only some moments in his life and activity when he clearly expressed his approval for Legionary Movement and his ideas are, in many situations not very consequent), he is an important author that, in some points of his thought expressed himself as a Romanian in loved with his country.¹ Few decades after the end of his life, there still are aspects of his life and activity that must be discovered. Some in order to be criticized and to show how did he fall into a wrong conception (but always taking into account the context when he lived and wrote), some in order to show his visionary way of thinking and his creativity (for example, the founder of the class of mystical theology in Bucharest Faculty of Orthodox theology). There still must be discovered some aspects related with his prison experience from the communist period and with the way how he changed his perceptions after the release from there. Regarding the Christian-nationalism that he understood, it must be noticed, as we have tried to see there that it was influenced more by the Fascism than the Nazism, but there still are aspects like the Anti-Semite attitude (that sometimes he had), that come from this area, and also elements of originality in his way of thinking.

¹ Moreover, in some situations, he synthetised the conceptions of his times, as Vasile Băncilă underlined in an article dedicated to him: „We must emphasize, with all the needed discretion, that Nichifor Crainic would not be able to arrive to this result without the help of the Romanian spirit and Orthodoxy. There are proud and exclusivist peoples, peoples with a political prevalence, that do not admit to live free and many aspects.... Those people use God as an appendix and they are capable easily to change their religion. If Romanians would be such a people, it would be difficult for Crainic to see the harmony that must define the relationships between ethnical and religious.” Vasile Băncilă, „Nichifor Crainic – Theology and Nationalism,” *Gândirea*, 18 (1939), no. 8, p. 417.

