

BETWEEN PASSIVE AND ACTIVE ANTI-SEMITISM. FROM THE GREEK-CATHOLIC PUBLICATIONS CONCERNING THE SOLUTION OF THE “JEWISH PROBLEM” IN EUROPE AND ROMANIA

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Abstract. *Most post-communist studies regarding the Greek-Catholic (United) Church in Transylvania and Banat mainly focus on two major research topics, directly relating to the identity and historical legitimacy of the Greek-Catholic belief/cult: the Unification with the Church of Rome and the martyrdom and anti-communist resistance. Other, more recent studies analyze the Church's important role in the process of political and cultural emancipation of the Romanian nation in Transylvania and Banat during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the relationship between the Church, the Holy See and European Catholicism. Thus, our study cannot benefit from an extensive bibliography. This paper will analyze the official discourse of the United Church, particularly as it was recorded in religious press from Transylvania and Banat (see esp. the newspaper “Unirea” (The Union) and the magazine Cultura Creștină (Christian Culture). Tracking the latter discourse has not been an easy undertaking, mainly due to the fact that the dissolution of the Greek-Catholic Church (1948) had also affected the documentary background of this Church in Romania.*

Keywords: Church, anti-Semitism, press, ideology, discourse.

Several Aspects Regarding Anti-Semitism in Romania

A major political phenomenon of the interwar period, rightist extremism was dealt with in the public discourse of the Romanian Greek Catholics¹ in an impartial and tactful manner, by means of analyses that (also) sought the original root of Evil, or, on the contrary, advocated, in the literary language of the Revelation, the approach of the end of history. However, some of the ideas expressed were often tainted by the resentments of the epoch.

The anti-Semite Romanian propaganda became aggressive starting with the beginning of the fourth decade of the 20th century. In this respect, the most dynamic were the legionary and pro-legionary publications, among which the

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¹ We have aimed at the presentation of this type of leading discourse in “the uniate” press in the last decade of the interwar period; we insisted upon studying Greek-Catholic publications, such as: “The Union”, “Christian Life”, “Word of Truth”, “Christian Culture”, “The Herald”, “The New Youth”. We give thanks to Mr. Cornel Mosneag who gathered a part of the primary documentation; it was rather difficult to reconstruct the press collections, which are not complete in any documentary or public library in Blaj, Sibiu or Cluj. We also give thanks to Edit Szegedi for some suggestions regarding the issue.

most prominent were: “Stone Break” and “Time’s Command”, “Annunciation”, “The Word” and “Today’s Romania” newspapers; these publications were also concerned with denouncing Romanian-speaking Jews (they identified “unknown Jews”, who had adopted Romanian names). But the Orthodox press also manifested a hostile attitude towards the Jewish minority. Its position wavered between traditional anti-Judaism and anti-Semite nationalism, as in the case of the Bessarabian press – “The Illuminator”, official newspaper of the Diocese of Chisinau (1908-1944); “The Missionary”, the monthly newspaper of the Romanian Orthodox Mission, the Cultural Department of the Diocesan Council of Chisinau; the publication entitled “The Union of the Bessarabian Clergy for Romanian Action and Sentiment”, 1931-1944)² – but also important periodicals, such as “The Path to Redemption”, which belonged to the Diocese of Arad (beginning from 1935) and the “Romanian Telegraph”, published by the Romanian Orthodox Archbishopric³. Thus, Romanian religious press (especially the Orthodox press) began to show more obedience in respect to the governance starting from 1938, and therefore became an instrument of anti-Semitic propaganda, especially given that during the Goga-Cuza government (December 1937-February 1938), the government of Ion Gigurtu (4 July-4 September 1940) and the Antonescu regime, anti-Semitism became a state policy⁴ by decrees – laws inspired by the Nazi anti-Semitic legislation (view the Nuremberg Racial Laws adopted on the 15th of September 1935)⁵. By participating in the political agreement and not having any kind of reaction regarding the transformation of the Orthodoxy into militant orthodoxy, the Romanian Orthodox Church became responsible of the process of institutionalization of anti-Semitism in interwar Romania.

Romanian anti-Semitism of traditional origin (widely spread in the urban, political and intellectual environments), a type of anti-Semitism motivated by

² View further information in *Chisinau. Encyclopedia*, Chisinau, Museum, 1997. The press ignored the deportation and extermination in Transnistria of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina.

³ Perhaps the best known hierarch who confessed his anti-Semitic views was the Patriarch Miron Cristea. As prime minister, at the end of the fourth decade, Patriarch Miron Cristea agreed and applied anti-Semitic legislation, and here we are referring to the one initiated by the Goga-Cuza government, which brought the invalidation of the Romanian citizenship owned by a quarter of a million of Hebrews in Romania. Through his policy, his public discourse which is hostile towards the Jews, the former patriarch, though he died in 1939, can be held responsible for spreading anti-Semitism within the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the alienating effects of anti-Semitic legislation applied in Romania since 1938. Miron Cristea considered, as well as other Orthodox hierarchs, that Jews should be banished from Romania. His ethnocentric and anti-Semitic vision set him in the category of active anti-Semites.

⁴ View the decree-laws which mark the beginning of anti-Semitic legislation in Romania, largely inspired by the Nazi legislation.

⁵ See “Blood Protection Act” (Blutschutzgesetz), which forbade marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jewish persons; “Reich Citizenship Law” (Reichsbürgergesetz) and “Reich’s Flag Law” (Reichsflaggengesetz) – David Bankier, “Nuremberg Laws”, in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman, Vol. 3, New York, Macmillan, 1990, p. 1076-1077.

socio-economical factors, acquires new features during the period between the wars, namely racial features. However, the anti-Jewish dimension continued to govern the public area, being dominated by accusations of deicide and infanticide. But the anti-Semite public discourse, reflected by the political media through almost every publication of the period⁶, and also through an important part of the cultural elite, became more and more influent, therefore xenophobia turned into hatred.

The events that turned the feelings of most of those who had a negative attitude towards the Jews into extreme anti-Semitism were the territorial losses from the summer of 1940. The submission of Bessarabia and the North of Bucovina, as a consequence of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement and the Soviet Ultimatum, was conceived as a national apocalypse (see the mercilessness of the ultimatum, and the drama of the Romanian refugees, terrorized by the idea of accepting a Bolshevik regime). In this context, the Jewish communities, even those found in the Old Kingdom, were held responsible⁷. But the Jews who lived in the territories mentioned before found themselves in a tragic situation, because it was extremely difficult for them to choose among the “determining factors” which affected their position in one way or another. While the soviet authority they have known for a year meant nationalization of the private property, Antonescu’s

⁶ In Romania and Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina, anti-Semitism had a tradition. Among the promoters of anti-Semitism we can mention Mihail Kogalniceanu, Vasile Alecsandri, Vasile Conta, Mihai Eminescu, Nicolae Paulescu. In Transylvania, the most representative in this respect were Ion Slavici, Ioan Pop-Reteganul, but especially Octavian Goga, who, through his publication “Our Country”, managed to also spread among the rural elite of Romanian the idea that anti-Semitism is an ingredient of nationalism (most of the Transylvanian Jews were Magyar and were considered by the Romanian as being loyal to the nation). For many years, historiography ignored the causes and stages of transition, in the Romanian societies, from anti-Judaism to traditional anti-Semitism. We will demonstrate on another occasion, the manner in which the Transylvanian nationalist press and the religious press in southeastern Transylvania spread the stereotype specific to anti-Judaism, “reinventing them” in the context of the forms of manifestation of emancipation of the Romanian population. Although they held the majority demographically, but had an ethnic minority status, most of the Romanians in Transylvania – especially intellectual militants around ASTRA – did not like the Magyar Jews, considering those who lived in urban areas hostile group, subdued to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and those in rural areas as a threat that affected the core of the Romanian identity based on the values of the Romanian village. Xenophobia manifested towards the Hebrews was therefore almost unanimous, the anti-Semitic tradition being fed with nationalist resentments. Such a socio-political and cultural reality, as the economic competition between the Romanian petty bourgeoisie and the Hebrew commercial and intellectual one, fed anti-Semitism, especially after the Union was achieved. The press, especially the one with influence in the popular media (see the publication from Sibiu “The People Newspaper” which, since its early days – we refer to the period from 1892 to 1899 – referred to the Hungarian government and press as to “Jewish-Hungarian” institutional realities, dangerous for the assertion of Romanism identity; this publication, and also the nationalist magazine from Sibiu “Our Country” nourished – through articles and anecdotes, through pseudo-pedagogical narratives – the anti-Semitic imagery).

⁷ Since the summer of 1940, after the Soviet ultimatum, many aggressions against Romanian Jews took place, especially in Moldova (see *Jews in Romania between 1940-1944*, Vol. III, I (1940-1942: a period of great tribulation), coordinated by Ion Șerbănescu Hasefer (Bucharest, 1997), p. 22 sqq. (see documents about the pogrom in Dorohoi, about cases in which Hebrews were killed and thrown from trains – see what happened at the station of Falticeni on July 3, 1940).

regime, an anti-Semite one, in addition to loss of properties, implied extreme marginalization, deportation and physical extermination. Without being given a choice, because usually the Jews were at most reticent at the arrival of the Romanian troops – based on the generalization of some particular pro-Soviet features and the fact that some Jewish communities spoke Russian – the Jews, especially those from Bessarabia and Bucovina, were considered agents of the former administration and became victims of the genocide in which units of the Romanian army and locals were involved⁸.

Limited Compassion, but above all – Indifference, Xenophobia and Passive Anti-Semitism

The attitudes with respect to the fate of the Jews in the time of the Holocaust and anti-Semitic policies were rarely present in the press from Transylvania and Banat, and they expressed indifference, at times compassion, xenophobia and anti-Semitic remainders, features that sooner belonged to traditional anti-Semitism (prior

⁸ See the massacre from the village of Boian. In July 1941, when the Romanian troops entered the village, some of the villagers took the Jews out of their houses (including the children) to the center of the village, where the Romanian soldiers shot them. I believe relevant in the way it presents the context and the following events one of the specific episodes of “cleansing the field” is the narrative – itself a tribute to some more or less old anti-Semitic clichés – posted on a site that presents the history of the village: “This event is probably the only black spot of our village throughout its entire history. Whatever did not cause this, it still has no justification [...] With the arrival of the new administration (the Soviet government) many villagers of Boian suffered and throughout the region there was a rumor which claimed that the Jews, who were in large number at the head of the Party, were also responsible for the death of those in Bukovina. This rumor became a historical fact. From 1921 to 1945 almost 80% of the Communist Party leaders were Hebrews (another myth, a new historiographical cliché even, which claims that the Jews brought Bolshevism in those areas and in the rest of Romania as well). However, this does not refer to those Hebrews who lived peacefully next to the villagers of Boian for nearly two centuries. Some of them were merchants, some doctors, veterinarians or teachers. The first stone houses in the village were built by Hebrews. That was God's will, that this people should be smarter than other people. Perhaps that is the reason why they suffered so much during Holocaust. [...] The village craved for the Romanian army which had arrived at Cernauti. Those who were ready to flee to Romania remained with the thought that this new government rule will end. By midday, at the entrance of the village from Cernauti, some Romanian soldiers came along. They talked to some old villagers. We do not know what the Romanian soldiers told those peasants. Maybe they said that the Jews fired at the Romanian army at the entrance in Cernauti, maybe they told them about the Nazi ideas, where the Jews were to be exterminated from the face of the earth, maybe something else, but we can definitely state that the soldiers encouraged the villagers to take the Jews out of their houses and bring them to the center of the village, assuring them that they will not be punished. This would be the only explanation for the behavior of the villagers from that night [...] Once brought to the center of the village, they were shot by the Romanian soldiers who had already arrived in Boian. 80 people were buried in a common grave. The remains of this tomb were moved in 1976 in the cemetery of the village of Stroiesti. We ask for pardon from those Hebrews, who, because of some drunks and criminals lost their lives on that cursed day (another cliché that diminishes the involvement of the locals in the massacre; the same attitude occurs with reference to the analysis of similar events occurred in 1941 in Bessarabia, Moldavia, Poland,). We apologize that we did not all have the audacity to hide them, to save them.” View: http://www.mareleboian.com/istorie_mold.html, accessed September 12, 2010.

to the formation of Greater Romania) than to interwar anti-Semitism, which was ultranationalist and racist. Nevertheless, there were some exceptions manifested against the enthusiastic background, enthusiasm with which the Greek-catholic press too welcomed the recovery of the eastern territory lost in the summer of 1940 – the first military success of the Antonescu regime, at the beginning of the anti-soviet war. Thus, an editorial dated from the end of October 1941 concluded that “*Romania has joined the nations that have decided to collaborate effectively in order to finally solve the problem of the Jews, on a local, as well as on a European level.*”⁹

During the economic crisis of 1929-1933, there appeared an increasing interest regarding the so-called “Jewish problem” in direct relation to the existing competition between the European and Jewish middle-classes, the latter being considered as alien. There were various reactions regarding this matter in the united press which triggered the major or “accidental” political episodes that took place in Western Europe. It provided information and comments on the subject, mostly related to the foggy political environment in the Second Spanish Republic; therefore, an anonymous editorial stated that, after King Alfonso XIII had ran away, the country witnessed an “exodus of the Jews” and that they made a great progress in economy and politics, while “*the head of the Spanish Catholics is impeded from crossing the borders towards his Episcopal residence*”¹⁰. Another anonymous author wrote about the fact that the Jewish traders were in economic competition with the native ones. More precisely, he presented the point of view put forth in a “Swiss newspaper”, concerned about the fact that in Romania too there was some sort of “*boycott manifested unconsciously by the Romanian population*” who preferred to purchase cheaper goods and products from the Jews than from the Romanian traders; the newspaper lamented this almost antinational attitude, concluding that: “*... and in the end we complain that the Romanian element is weak*”¹¹. Unfortunately, the public opinion ignored and even denied the Jews as citizens of the Romanian state¹², even though some of them had participated in the formation of Greater Romania¹³.

⁹ View the editorial *Solving of the Jewish Problem*, in “The Union”, October 30, 1941, p. 1.

¹⁰ View the editorial of the newspaper “The Union” from Blaj, year XLI, no. 27, July 4, 1931, p. 7.

¹¹ The editorial from “Cuvântul adevărului” [“The Word of Truth”] (infra: “The Word of Truth”), year XI, June-July, no. 6-7, 1933, pp. 318-317, “The Word of Truth” has been printed since 1913 at Prislop, then at Bixad, under the patronage of monks.

¹² Granting Romanian citizenship to Jews was a long process, largely a result of international pressure. By the Constitution of 1866, an act considered one of the most progressive laws in Europe after the Revolution of 1848, the Jews were subject to a particular type of discrimination, being considered “foreigners”, “individuals without a state”, although many of them were born in Romanian provinces (meaning those provinces that will become part of the Romanian state achieved by the Union Act of 1859). As a result of participation, as combatants, in the War of Independence (1877-1878), after the conflict, a number of 888 Hebrews were granted Romanian citizenship. But only those. The rest of the Hebrew people expected Romania to correct, as recommended by the Congress of Peace from Berlin (1878), the amendment to Article 7 of the 1866 Constitution, that is to grant civil rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of their ethnicity or religion. The actual effect was simply a restatement of that article that only granted individual citizenship to Jews residing for at least 10 years in the country. This decision made the naturalization of Jews to become almost impracticable. After World War I, Romania was asked again to introduce clauses regarding the minorities in the legislation. After delays and government resignation, on

During the fourth decade, the more detailed information regarding the existence of the Jewish communities was ignored. The discussions were usually focused on particular cases of miraculous conversions¹⁴ or the social and political assertion of the Jews in connection to Bolshevism. Such approaches were also made in relation to several political events in which Jewish intellectuals were involved, who, similar to Max Goldstein¹⁵, functioned within the anarchist and communist

December 9, 1919, the government of Coanda signed with the allied states the *Treaty on Minorities*. The Constitution adopted in 1923 and the law of 25 February 1924, takes up the text of the treaty and states that all citizens of the former Austro-Hungarian or Tsarist Empire, people who were inhabitants of Transylvania, Banat, Crisana and Maramures (1 December 1918), Bukovina (28 November 1918), Bessarabia (on 9 April 1918), are to be granted Romanian citizenship – see Dinu C. Giurescu, *Jews in Romania (1939-1944) in Romania during World War II, 1939-1947*, Bucharest, ALL, 1999. However, active anti-Semitism, which became institutionalized politics since 1938 also meant the marginalization of Hebrew communities. The governments of Ion Gigurtu and Octavian Goga, through laws referring to the Hebrew minority, have dramatically affected the status of the Jews, citizens of the Romanian state. The Goga-Cuza government, through Decree no. 169 of January 21, 1938, decided to revise Jewish citizenship (all Jews who had Romanian citizenship had to prove that they had legal right to own the citizenship, according to the law of 25 February 1924, within 20 days since the public display of the lists in communes and cities). The short amount of time made that 225.222 (36.50%) of 617.396 Jews lose their statute as Romanian citizens. They were considered foreigners without passport and were subject to a special legal statute. Moreover, since the decision of Charles II from August 8, 1940 made at the proposition of the Prime – Minister Ion Gigurtu, by the Decree-Law concerning the legal status of the Hebrews in Romania, there occurred a differential treatment of Hebrew communities, “developing”, in this sense, some cultural-religious and historical features (see the exaggerated emphasis on the differences between Orthodox and Neologist Jews). Also, the formerly mentioned decree, following the model of the anti-Semite Nazi legislation, established: the juridical and political distinction between blood Romanians and Romanian citizens; elimination of Jews of mosaic religion, and those born out of mixed marriages, from the actual performance of military service, replacing this duty with the payment of a debt or employment in the public interest; Jews were forbidden to own properties, bear Romanian names, also Hebrew employees were fired, and it was decided the segregation of education. Obviously, the Antonescu regime completed the process of socio-cultural segregation, of dispossession of Jews from Romania from their citizenship, their property or any positive perspective, he elaborated and applied “cleansing the land”, the Romanian version of the Final Solution. See details about the legislation adopted and implemented during 1940-1942 in *International Commission for the Study of Holocaust in Romania. Documents*, ed. Lya Benjamin Polirom, Iași, 2005.

¹³ See details in Dumitru Hancu’s *Jews in Romania during the country reunification war of 1916-1919*, Hasefer, Bucharest, 1996.

¹⁴ See “Tineretul Nou” [“New Youth”] (infra: “New Youth”), no. 8 April 1935, pp. 124-125, about cases of Hebrews and Bolsheviks converted to Catholicism; see the case of the so-called “apostle to the streets man”, David Goldstein.

¹⁵ Max Goldstein was the chief of an anarchist group. On 8 December 1920, Max Goldstein, Saul Osias and Leon Lichtblau organized a terrorist bomb attack on the Romanian Senate. The blast killed the Minister of Justice (Demetrius Greceanu) and Demetriu Roger, Greek Catholic Bishop of Oradea – see *Rightist Totalitarianism in Romania, origins and actions from 1919 to 1927*, the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, Bucharest, 1996, p. 150. Another “Judeo-Bolshevik” personality who haunted Romanian publishing in the interwar period was Bela Kun, leader of the communist revolution in Hungary (March-November 1919). But the same public opinion ignored the fact that these Bolshevik leaders denied their Jewish identity. Thus, Bela Kun and other leaders of the Council Republic had been excommunicated by the Jewish community of Hungary. Georg Lukacs, the Marxist esthetician was baptized according to the Calvinist rite and did not received Hebrew education of any kind, as other communist leaders in Hungary, who were educated at Christian religious schools.

movements. Most of the articles that elaborated on the Judeo-Bolshevik theme date from 1935-1936. There was a single publication that presented the point of view of the Jews¹⁶, in the context in which the actions of the extremists were exaggerated and extrapolated on the background of the increase of the European anti-Semitic influence; and it was no coincidence that the answer came from Oradea, a city with a large, rich and respected Jewish and Hungarian-speaking community. The Greek-Catholic publication "The Herald" presented the opinion of Robert Serebrenik, the chief rabbi of Luxembourg, who maintained that the associating the Jews with the Bolsheviks was an anti-Semitic trait: *„It sufficed to come across a few Bolsheviks who are pure-blooded Jews, in order to state that Bolshevism and Judaism are one and the same. This is not true. (...) If there were many young Jews in Russia who turned to communism, it was not Judaism and its moral that made them Bolsheviks; but rather anti-Semitism with its atrocities, which banished them and denied them the opportunity of having a peaceful and decent life.”*¹⁷ This account of the Greek-Catholic newspaper was inspired by the "L'Osservatore Romano" –, officios vaticanens, a publication that noticed the fact that the "red prophets" (Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassale) or the „socialist and communist princes" such as Lenin, Trotski, Zinovief, Bela Kun, Tibor Szamuely (Hungary), Kurt Eisner, Rosa Luxemburg (Germany), Heinz Neumann (surnamed „The Pillar of Madrid") were Jewish, and believed that these "undeniable actions" must not however lead to conclusions of a global nature, which would be unfavorable for the Jewish communities. Even though the reference we mentioned earlier maintained that these political orientations are a consequence of discrimination, none of the Greek-Catholics who analyzed the phenomenon in question was interested in finding and presenting the real causes which determined a part of the Jewish cultural elite to join the "communist credo"; instead, there were formulated numerous pseudo-metaphysical ideas regarding this reality and opinions of a psycho-religious nature concerning the "messianic obsession", characteristic of the Jewish nature and identity, an obsession which could have caused the implication of the Jews in global projects which concerned the deconstruction, and afterwards the reconstruction of the society: *“Even though Bolshevism found a fertile ground in the Hebrew race, we cannot identify one with the other, because Bolshevism seeks to destroy religion, and implicitly Judaism, which is a religion [...] their major contribution to the communist revolution proves that the ancient messianic idea is not gone yet and that they intend to accomplish it by means of social downthrows, which they hope that would help them become rulers of the world. Therefore, even though communism and Judaism are not one and the same, the former will always find its roots in Judaism”*¹⁸.

¹⁶ See the article *Is Judaism Communist?* In "Vestitorul" ["The Herald"] (infra: "The Herald"), year XII, no. 22, November 15, 1936, p. 1; the publication was the organ of the diocese of Oradea, being printed since 1925.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The discussions regarding the “Jewish problem” were usually inspired from traditional themes belonging to anti-Semitism, such as the Judeo-freemasonic conspiracy theory, theory which insisted upon the assumed powerful relations – personal, group and ideological ones – which exist between freemasonry and the Jewish extremists, and upon the connections between the universal humanism advanced by the freemasons and the ideology of “the universal egalitarian republic” promoted as a socio-political project by the communists; there were also discussions regarding the so-called inopportunity of granting Jewish citizenship to Romanians¹⁹, which belonged to the same anti-Semitic field as well. But truly aggressive anti-Semite attitudes, with reference to the Zionist political project²⁰, were expressed in the publication “The Word of Truth”. The information regarding the immigration of the European Jews to Palestine, which was under British administration, the goal of the Zionists to form a Jewish state on the historical territory of the former Kingdom of Israel, the conflicts between the Palestinians and the Jews in the years 1922-1933, the Peel Plan²¹ – all these facts represented opportunities to accuse the British government of having suspicious connections with Hebrew nationalists, with the Freemasonry, and with “the economic Hebrew circles”. In fact, the author of the analysis meant to express the disappointment of the catholic circles, which were unhappy with the fact that the Vatican was not consulted about the territorial succession of Palestine, identified in the religious discourse with the “Holy Land”. After making these observations, brought about by the international political scene of the epoch, the author of the article launches an aggressive anti-Semitic speech inspired from the medieval anti-Jewish themes and from the stereotypes regarding the deicide and amoral people; concisely, the Greek-catholic priest – author of this article – accused the British authorities of intending to offer”... *the Jews a large part of Palestine, the holy ground, to those who are the greatest enemies of Christianity*”²², “*enemies of the cross*”²³ and adepts of luxury²⁴; the same author thought that the formation of a Hebrew state on the Palestinian territory would be “*a desecration of the Holy Land*”²⁵ Such an attitude was unacceptable in the context in

¹⁹ See the editorial by Felix Wircinski from the “Word of Truth”, year XV, no. 9-10, September-October. 1937, pp. 415-422. The article was brought about by the ban in 1937 by King Charles II, of the activity of the local Masonic lodges.

²⁰ Wircinski, Felix, *What will be the Fate of Palestine*, in “Word of truth”, year XV, no. 11, November 1937, p. 465.

²¹ The *Peel Commission Plan* (the Palestine Royal Commission headed by Earl Peel) stated that the Jews should self-administrate in a territorial enclave controlled by the British. The Palestinians rejected the plan, and in September-October 1937 triggered the second stage of the rebellion against British rule and the Zionist project in Palestine. The Chamberlain government gave up the Peel Plan (1939) and took steps in the reconciliation with the Arabs and limited the immigration of the Jews to Palestine (May 1939, White Book). See further details in Thierry Camous, *Orient, Occident. 25 centuries of war* Bucharest: Cartier, 2009, p. 384-390.

²² Wircinski, Felix, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

which in Europe there was a process of dehumanization of the Jews going on, manifested through: defining the Hebrews as ethnic group that is harmful for the racial health, stigmatizing and forcing them to wear distinctive marks, imposing restrictions on them and confiscating their possessions; there immediately followed the stages that defined the Holocaust and which represented the most tragic manifestation of the genocide: banning the Jews from their communities and forcing them to live in ghettos, isolating and exterminating them²⁶ by the enforcement of the Final Solution (the Nazi project) or “*purification of the land*”²⁷. A different

²⁶ Jean-Michel, *Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st century*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2001.

²⁷ “Cleansing the Land” was the Romanian version of the Final Solution. The operation of ethnic purification through genocide involved the deportation and extermination of many of the Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina, and of the Roma as well. It involved the institutionalization of racism in the context of anti-Semitic atmosphere that has been fed, on the traditional background of hostile tolerance of the Orthodox Church. Specifically, the “cleansing of the land” involved institutions such as the gendarmerie and the army. Thus, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, General Iacobici, ordered the commander of the Branch 2, lieutenant colonel Alexandru Ionescu, to implement “a plan to remove the Jewish element from the territory of Bessarabia with the help of the organization and operation teams which would advance the Romanian troops”; concretely, these orders meant: physical extermination, of Jews in rural areas, their execution – see the execution of the 3.500 Hebrews from the ghetto of Cetatea Alba. The “Special orders” that were meant to apply the plan mentioned above were considered “classified” and were transmitted orally. They were given directly by Ion Antonescu to the Army, the Special Intelligence Service and the Gendarmerie, while Mihai Antonescu transmitted them to the civil administration. The result of this genocidal plan, in the summer and autumn of 1941, the territory between the Dniester and the Bug became the scene of unimaginable atrocities: tens of thousands of corpses left to rot along roads and in the cities, in the waters of the river Bug. Since August 1941, the Romanian solution also received help from the Germans (Mihai Antonescu established agreements on “cooperation in the field” with Einsatzgruppe D). In June 1942, Mihai Antonescu, on behalf of Marshal Ion Antonescu, discussed to the Nazis about accelerating the “Final Solution” in the territories controlled by the Romanian state, meaning the continuation of “cleansing the land” operation, which was too visible and harder to control, and involving deportation of all the Jews from Romania to the extermination camp from Belzec, Poland, where they would be gassed and burned (an average of 2.000 people per day). The Hebrew minority in Romania (292.149 souls, according to the census from the spring of 1942) was to be exterminated (apart from 17.000 individuals considered “useful” to the national economy). The plan was abandoned on October 13th, 1942 by the Romanian, Antonescu administration understood that the German and Romanian interests were no longer compatible, that the Romanian army was to be concentrated exclusively in first line, in the hardest part of the Battle of Stalingrad and Hitler was not going, despite the material and total commitment of Romania to the anti-Soviet front, to return Northern Transylvania to Romania. However, due to the operation “cleansing the land”, the essence of Romanian Holocaust, out of a number of 441.293 Jews registered in 1942 as residents of the Romanian territory (at that time, in addition to the space of the Old Kingdom, the Romanian State also included Southern Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina), in August 1944, only a quarter of a million were still alive. See details in Jean Ancel, *Contributions to the history of Romania – The Hebrew problem. On the involvement of the Romanian army in the application of the “special orders”*, vol. I, Bucharest: Hasefer, 2001, pp. 119-125; *The “Indictment prosecution against Popoiu Constantin, Commander of the Gendarmerie Legion of Orhei, the Secretary of the Legion, Sergeant Eftimie Vasile, and Other Commanders”* in Jean Ancel, *Documents*, VI, no. 41 and 43, pp. 444-445; “The Indictment Against 19 Military Commanders and Policemen who Executed the Special Orders in Bukovina and Bessarabia”, 12 February 1946, in *Documents*, VI, no. 15, pp. 199-201 (see the

approach, even though altered by religious enthusiasm, is found in a comment regarding the fate of Polish Jews at the outset of the Hitlerite domination. Even though the beginning of the text seems to express compassion for the “rough life of the Jews” and their condition as stigmatized, which constrained them to wear David’s Star as a symbol of ethnic identity, towards the end, the comments on this issue turn into considerations strongly affected by opacity and traditionalist perception regarding the position of the Hebrew communities: “... *the Hebrew people shall not find its peace and serenity until it turns to God and believes in the Messiah they have turned away from (Zachariah 12, 10)*”²⁸. Such accounts were rather frequent in the Romanian intellectual circles. Therefore, the attitude of Nae Ionescu was typical regarding the matter; in the preface of Mihail Sadoveanu’s “Two Thousand Years Ago” (1934) legitimized anti-Semitism from a metaphysical and theological point of view, arguing that the historically marginal condition of the Hebrews was due to their destiny as aliens from a metaphysical perspective (“The Jews have no possible hope because they are Hebrew”). Romanian anti-Semitism considered them a threat to Romanian national identity, to the “Romanian race.” This kind of anti-Semitism ignored even the fact that there were Jews who pertained to Christian communion²⁹. As a matter of fact, the conversion of the Jews to the Christian religion rose suspicion, were considered unauthentic and capable of causing trouble and division within the traditional church. There also was a discussion regarding the issue of a historic event, namely the instauration of Adventism by the “kike” Joseph Wolff, a former Anglican who later became a prophet³⁰. The article was written with a renegade’s ardor, for, after 12 years of Adventism, the author became a Greek-catholic, and revived every ancient stereotype regarding the wicked, treacherous and deicide Jew, eager for money and power, whose “nature” does not recommend him as a “good Christian”: “*This is what the yid is like (one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear; can the leopard change his spots?) [...] and the kike went, not to choose a religion, but to form a religion of his own, a religion in his own taste – the religion of money*”³¹.

In their familiar and malicious manner, the anecdotes also generated insecurity and marginalization vis-à-vis the Hebrew communities. This type of

series “Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry”, Vol. 12, Jerusalem, Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986; *Extermination of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Regime*, coordinated by Randolph L. Braham, Bucharest, Hasefer, 2002; for details about the “failure” of the joint Romanian-German plans with reference to the extermination of Jews in the territories under Romanian government see Michael Chioveanu, *The Unforeseen Defection. Romania’s Disengagement from the Final Solution*, “Studia Politica”, vol. VII, no. 4, 2007, pp. 879-802.

²⁸ See: *Hard Times for the Hebrews*, “Viața Creștină” [“Christian Life”] (infra: “Christian Life”), year V, no. 50, Cluj, December 10, 1939.

²⁹ See Roman Catholic Jews, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Messianic Jews (the latter were found in rural areas).

³⁰ In fact, the founder was William Miller; Joseph Wolff, the son of a rabbi in Germany, turned to Anglicanism, and was one of the preachers of the second coming of the Messiah in 1844 in the U.S.

³¹ See John Florea, “Christian Life”, year IV, no. 6, Cluj, May 22, 1938.

humor was often present in the Greek-catholic calendars, in publications that were addressed to a large mass of readers. A short story of the sort talks about a Jew, in fact the stereotypical Jew, who was desperately seeking for a place to hide from the Nazi persecutions; realizing that his possibilities were almost inexistent, he claimed another globe, another planet³².

There is no information given neither regarding the outbreak of the anti-Soviet war (22 June 1941) and the tragedy of the Hebrew communities from the North of Bukovina and Bessarabia, nor regarding the tragedy of the Romany communities in Transnistria³³, affected by deportation and extermination.

The attitude of the Romanian Greek-Catholics was generally inspired by the policy of Vatican. Even though the Holy See denounced Nazism, considering it a pagan religion, a “religion of blood”, it did not take an official position against the anti-Semitic policy³⁴. The Agreement signed by Hitler and the pope in 1933 was meant to protect catholic identity in Germany³⁵, but instead it granted the Nazi leader with credibility and prestige. Later on, Pope Pius XII invoked the traditional

³² “Bisect Calendar of Blaj for the year 1940”, year XVII, p. 172.

³³ The census of 25 May 1942, a secret census commissioned by the Leader Ion Antonescu, found that 208.700 Roma live in Romania; eugenic anthropologists, political circles and even a considerable part of the population believed that the Roma were responsible for the increasing social delinquency (vagrancy, theft, parasitism), were anti-social elements, and in addition, infested the “Romanian race”. In this hostile context, a decree of King Michael in 1942, established the criteria for confiscation of property and the deportation of “nomads and sedentary gypsies” in Transnistria, the so-called labor colonies. As a result, by the end of 1942, approximately 85% of the Roma nomads were deported. Then followed the evacuation of over 30.000 sedentary Roma. The Soviet offense on the Eastern Front, the approach of the Red Army to the borders of the Romanian state, prevented the execution of the plan of extermination of the Roma community. The Romanian Commission on Holocaust victims estimated that 36.000 Roma were killed in Transnistria. For more details see e.g. Ionescu, Vasile, *Deportation of Roma to Transnistria. From Auschwitz to Bug*, Bucharest: Aven Amentza, 2000; *Romania and Transnistria: the Issue of the Holocaust. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Viorel Achim, Constantin Iordachi, Bucharest: Old Court House, 2004, *Final Report*, International Commission for the Study of Holocaust in Romania, eds. Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, Mihail E. Ionescu, Iasi: Polirom, 2005; Ioanid, Radu, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Roma under the Antonescu regime, 1940-1944*, Bucharest: Hasefer, 2006.

³⁴ Anti-Nazi encyclical of Pope Pius XI, entitled *Mit Brennender Sorge* (March 15, 1937), offered the opportunity to discuss the nature of Nazism, and the comparison of the forms of totalitarianism, of Bolshevism and Nazism. The Greek Catholic press also gave feedback on the papal encyclical in the official newspaper *Osservatore Romano* (22-23 March). A general idea expressed in all Greek Catholic publications explicitly states that a political movement is credible mostly through its visible purpose, and less through a public discourse on this purpose.

³⁵ The conclusion of the Concordat was considered a milestone event in the policy of the papacy, for it had, for a short time, the effect of Hitler’s immediate revocation of the order of dissolution of the educational and charitable Catholic religious organizations, freedom from arrest and detention of the leaders of these organizations. But soon Hitler violated the terms of the Concordat (since 1934). For details see Grancea, Mihaela and Cornel Mosneag, *Discourse of the Romanian Greek-Catholic press on the nature of Nazism (1933-1939)*, “Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica”, VII, Sibiu: Lucian Blaga, 2010, pp. 245-259.

neutrality of Vatican in respect to international affairs³⁶, even though he had information regarding the extermination of the Jews. He cautiously ensured though the salvation of the Italian Hebrews who, during the German occupation in Italy, took refuge in Vatican. Usually, in a discussion about the justification of the roman-catholic church in the issue of passivism and even collaborationism regarding Nazism we are reminded about the encouragement of the racial Nazi law. In this situation, Pope Pius XI would answer “Spiritually, we are Jews”; in this manner, he underlined the fundamental cultural-spiritual connection existent after Judaism and Christianity³⁷.

If, to the Romanians, the road covered by the military units meant the liberation of the territories taken by the soviets in the summer of 1940, for the Hebrew communities in north-eastern Romania, the beginning of the anti-soviet war also entailed the release of the Holocaust. As we mentioned earlier, the mass extermination of the Jews was a consequence of the advancement of the Romanian-

³⁶ The Nazis acted mainly for defeating of the autonomy of the Catholic religious organizations and for “nationalization” of Roman Catholicism. But the leaders of the Catholic Action in Germany opposed, also the monks, but they were reduced to silence. The historian Max I. Dimont analyzed the resistance to National Socialism, resistance defeated in 1935 by assuming by the three Protestant churches of the Nazi ideology. In short time, Catholic priests and Protestants in Germany were assimilated with other “subversive elements”, such as Jews and Communists (see Max I. Dimont, *Jews, God and History*, Bucharest: Hasefer, 2007. A. Besançon provides a more complex and dramatic vision, claiming that after a vast German population was converted to Nazism, there was an invasion of the parishes and clergy by the Nazi Catholics [...], and the German Catholic church acted in the manner of the German nation. In these circumstances, the Catholic clergy ended up by accepting the division of the people into Aryans and non-Aryans, Nazis and Communists. It was a time when European nations underwent a harsh confrontation between national traditions and Marxism. In the manner of the political leadership of many countries at the end of the fourth decade, the papacy accepted Nazism as an alternative to communism. View Alain Besançon, *Le Malheur du siècle: sur le communisme, le nazisme et l'unicité de la Shoah*, 1998. A serious problem is the ambiguity of papacy policy manifested in issue of the application of the Final Solution. Pope Pius XII, even though he was informed of the extermination camps, has not publicly denounced the mass murders. Any public reaction could possibly entail repression, even destruction of the Catholic Church. Not even after the war the papacy did not give credible explanations with reference to its moral and political responsibility in the issue of denouncing the Holocaust; the act of repentance however, was made later by Pope John Paul II. But there were churches and hierarchic conferences which condemned the actions against the Jews, triggering their boycott on the part of the population – see the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, part of France, Bulgaria (Bulgarian Orthodox Church), but these churches have never been prejudiced *in corpore*, that is their abolition was never mentioned. It is true, individuals have suffered, but the churches as institutions have survived. The Confessional Church in Germany was illegal anyway, its clergy could have been arrested for its mere existence (it is the case of the martyr priest, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pastor and theologian who was in a hostile relation with the Nazi party, a defender of the cause of the Confessional Church; he was sentenced to death for participating in the anti-Nazi resistance, being executed on April 9, 1945 – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The price of Discipleship*, Cluj-Napoca: Pilgrim, 2010, pp. 9-32.

³⁷ See Luigi Giussani, *I, The Power, The Works*, trans. Andrei Niculescu, Bucharest: Nemira, 2005, p. 107.

German troops in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia (the summer of 1941). During the time of the conquest of Northern Bukovina alone, thousand of Jews were killed by the soldiers³⁸. In these tragic circumstances, there were several commentators from the Greek-catholic press who took phrases from the fascist discourse (see the “Jewish-Bolshevik propaganda”³⁹), phrases which compared the Jews with the Bolsheviks and Judaism with communism. Such notions were mingled with the fundamentalist speech on “*the holy war fought in the name of faith*”⁴⁰. Thus, the catholic press became an agent of dictatorship, under the excuse that the war released for the freedom of the Romanian territories and for the “liberation” of the Church was legitimate and sacred⁴¹. In order to comply with the official discourse, there were some who wrote, evidently in a brief manner and depending on circumstance, about the anti-Soviet war waged alongside “*our great ally, the third Reich, a holy war fought for the freedom of our brothers from Bessarabia and Bukovina and for the defense of European culture and civilization*”.⁴² During the years of the war, the official discourse, including the Greek-catholic one, considered that Antonescu’s regime was in conformity with the Romanian traditional values. The strategy of regaining the Romanian territories lost in the summer and autumn of 1940, the fear that Antonescu, who was an orthodox practitioner, would follow the advice of the orthodox hierarchs who wanted the abolishment of the Greek-catholic church, determined the Greek-Catholics to declare officially that the nationalism of Antonescu’s government is of religious nature, and that its politics agreed with the Church’s values.⁴³

A significant approach regarding Judaism and anti-Semitism belonged to priest Augustin Popa, who wrote many editorials and articles which appeared during the interwar period in Greek-catholic publications, especially in “Christian Culture” and “The Union”. However, the theologian almost never made a clear association between the problem of “racist heresy” and national-socialist anti-Semitism. Analyzing the evolution of the Nazi ideology, the author claimed that Germany was under “*the mystic spell of the racial ideal which strives to become a powerful concept and change the*

³⁸ See Dennis Deletant, *Transnistria: the Solution to the Jewish Problem*, in *About Holocaust and Communism. Yearbook of the Institute of History Nowadays*, vol. I, 2002, p. 88.

³⁹ See Theodore Munteanu about the drama of the priests in Bessarabia; in *Journal of the War*, he wrote of “Judeo-Bolshevik” propaganda which, in Bessarabia in 1940-1941, affected the status of the Church; see “Union”, no. 35, August 30, 1941, p. 1.

⁴⁰ See *Holy War*, “Union”, no. 26, June 28, 1941, p. 1 – it is considered that, although the war is not holy by nature, the anti-soviet war was however legitimate, because it involved the liberation of the territories occupied by the Soviets in the summer of 1940 (“our justice”, gaining the honor lost along with the abandonment of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, the fight “... for mankind, for God. Bolshevism is the Kingdom of Lucifer, for the deliverance of the the cross”).

⁴¹ View: *Glances to the Future*, “Union”, no. 35, August 30, 1941, p. 2.

⁴² See Stephen Pop, *Lieutenant Horia Agarici*, “Union”, nr. 26, June 28, 1941, p. 3.

⁴³ See: *Christian Nationalism*, “Union”, nr. 31, august 2, 1941, pp. 1-3.

world, a new civilization, a new culture, a new order”⁴⁴ and that “against the warnings of Rome, racism began to turn from a theory with scientific claims into a fanatic religion”⁴⁵. Near and during the war, the publicist Augustin Pop⁴⁶ became very interested in the cause and nature of anti-Semitism, but he never got to decipher the phenomenon or free himself from xenophobia and from the limits of religious perception of anti-Jewish nature. The analysis concerning the “Protocols of Zion”⁴⁷ are very relevant in this sense. Although A. Popa considered that the so-called “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” represented “a gross lie”, he believed in the existence of a “Hebrew problem” in Europe, which he thought must be solved “in the manner of Christian justice and love”. Even though he blamed the aggressiveness of anti-Semitism, the theologian shared some of the ambiguous ideas belonging to the European intellectual circles, especially those regarding the particularities of the “Israelite nature”; among these he mentioned: the historic nature of the Jewish self-pride, the desire to dominate, the energy and ability to adapt, social extremism, but above all, the so-called “metaphysical difference” which separates the Jews from the others, the latter being considered by A. Popa the primary source of anti-Semitism: “*Since its birth, Israel has always been an enigma and a source of controversy. Abhorred by everyone and humiliated, it shows the pride of the most daring dream of greatness and of universal domination. Spread all over the surface of the earth, it has an indestructible ethnic unity. Mingled in the life of other people, it is the protagonist of opposing ideals, it accommodates to any climate and it identifies with the national goals of any place of the world, although it carries a strange and inassimilable world inside. When banished, it becomes stronger; when defeated, it does not cease to grow and challenge. Its destiny is indeed a great enigma of history. Beyond its particular urges, of a social and ethnic nature, anti-Semitism has a metaphysical root*”⁴⁸. The author, citing the source that theorized on the matter of the “metaphysical” difference between Jews and Christians, concludes that this difference is responsible for the alienation of the Jews on a “supernatural” level, and also for the hostility of the others⁴⁹. The theologian focused his analysis on the description of the psycho-ethnic portrait and the particularities which lead, as the author

⁴⁴ Augustin Popa, *Headstones* (infra: *Headstones...*), ed. Marcela Ciortea River, Blaj: Buna Vestire, 2008, p. 96.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Dr. Augustin Popa was for many years the director of the newspaper “Union”, edited at Blaj.

⁴⁷ See Augustin Popa, the *Protocols of Zion*, in *Headstones ...*, pp. 148-162; originally, the article was published in “Cultura Creștină” [“Christian Culture”] (infra: “Christian Culture”), year XIX, no. 1-2, 1939, pp. 70-84.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ In other articles, articles centered on denouncing Nazi paganism, A. Popa demonstrates knowledge of the “sources” of scientific racism and Nazi political philosophy. See details in Grancea, Mihaela and Cornel Moșneag, *op cit.*

demonstrates, to anti-Semitism in Europe. But A. Popa ignored the complex causality of the phenomenon, the rivalries in the political and economical areas, the cultural differences and racism. His perspective is only relevant for situating him in the passive side of anti-Semitism (as it results from the citation above, the theologian believed, although he did not state it clearly, in the argument of the Jewish-freemasonic conspiracy; in his view, the Jews do not exist as individuals, only as a homogeneous, and potentially dangerous community: *“The Jewish problem is definitely real; it is not the product of mere demagogical turbulences or the release of an outburst of envy. The Jews are similar to a ferment, which, in the proper quantity, helps the “human dough” in which it is thrown grow, but, when it exceeds this quantity, it destroys the natural balance and causes the disintegration of the social system. It turns from ferment into solvent. Their eternal restlessness pushes them in the first ranks of any party that struggles for social or religious collapse. It may well be true that, even in this destructive position, they pursue a providential goal”*⁵⁰. Although he denounces extreme anti-Semitism, the author expresses ideas specific to the nationalist characteristic of the epoch, autochthonism, theories which universalize the cultural difference, a difference which is the less functional as European Jews tried to integrate by assimilating the culture of the host community and participating in the assertion of the European national cultures and identities; this very form of integration and the relatively stable balance between Jewish tradition and the culture of the host community acquired by the Hebrews was blamed by the Nazis, and also by their followers⁵¹, being considered a substitution. As a matter of fact, the strongest argument of the anti-Semite propaganda was the cliché of “the unknown Jew”, the absolute stranger who, through cultural and genetic involvement, would have besieged and infested the Arian blood, but other races as well, such as “the Romanian race”⁵². In the end of his argument, A. Popa states, in a discriminatory, even fundamentalist manner, that: *“... a Christian ethnic collectivity cannot allow itself to be ruled by spirituality that it does not feel interconnected to; each of them has the right and the duty to evolve according to its own specificities, the general state of tranquility being ensured by the basic principles of Christian spirituality and morality”*⁵³. In conclusion, according to the theologian’s analysis, the Jews should act as a silent, anonymous and marginal people and respect the rules of the system; as citizens, they should be placed at the lower part of the social body and not participate in the social and political competition.

⁵⁰ See Augustin Popa, the *Protocols of Zion*, in *Headstones ...*, p. 149.

⁵¹ See the legionaries, but also the followers of Antonescu’s regime.

⁵² The phrase appears frequently in texts as early as the interwar years. The first and most insistent theorist of Romanian racism was N. Paulescu. See Manu, Peter and Horia Bozdoghină, *Paulescu Debate; Science, Politics, Memory*, Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2010.

⁵³ See Augustin Popa, the *Protocols of Zion*, *Headstones ...*, p. 149.

There are other articles published in the “Christian Culture” magazine that also debate “modern Judaism”, stating that in the modern period, the Mosaic religion turned into an philosophical-ethnic system, based on the idea of racial superiority of the Jews, idea which strengthens after the advancement of messianism by the Zionists, which seduced the Jews who were interested in the process of asserting their identity own (according to Greek-catholic analysts, this phenomenon was stimulated by the acceptance of ideas pertaining to illuminist rationalism and the French Revolution, and to evolutionism). This kind of modernization would have stimulated the phenomenon of emancipation of the European Jewish communities which started after 1789. As a result of a quick emancipation, according to the Uniate press, this “fine people” would have shortly “*grasped enormous fortunes and gain a great influence in the economic, social, political and cultural domain*”⁵⁴.

Regarding the issue of the relevance of the racist theories, we cannot ignore the opinions formulated in conformity with the idea of Christian love and catholic universalism. These ideas can be found in the newspaper from Blaj – “The Union”, a religious publication, which also presented political debates, ideas which state that racism and extreme nationalism, also called “excessive nationalism” in this period, were attitudes that ignored Christianity as a religion of love. According to doctrines of religious love and universal brotherhood, the relationship between people – argues the author of an article written on this theme – is based on the traditional ideas of a common origin and brotherhood, but also on the modern need of preserving and asserting one’s identity: “*all the people represent one single human people with God as its father [...] Each people should remain as it is and cultivate its own language and tradition. The diversity of nations is a law of nature; nation is a reality and a virtue meant by the divinity ... it must be loved, asserted and cherished with all its qualities and potentialities. However, this adherence to the people you belong to must not turn into a separation wall between people; it must not turn into hate [...] the obscure doctrines related to blood and race destroy the doctrine of universal brotherhood*”⁵⁵. Such a statement is made at a time when, to racists and extremist nationalists, humankind does not exist as reference and the nation-race is the only accepted reality. An account of the sort was made on the occasion of the encounter between the Pope and the 200 students of the Fide Propaganda College (July 28, 1938), when the Pope said the following significant words: “*Catholic means universal, not racist or nationalist, when these two epithets are used in the sense of separatist [...] the word catholic is universal and it has no other explanation*”⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ See Septimiu Todoran, *Modern Judaism*, “Christian Culture”, year XXIII, no. 10-12, October-December 1943, pp. 620-622.

⁵⁵ See: *Racism and Catholicism*, “Union”, year XLVIII, no. 32, august 6, 1938, p. 1

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Separation from the Legionary Project

During the 1940's and the first years of the war, Romanian anti-Semitism became a "reinvented" ideology, which, besides the "classic" elements (racism, xenophobia, ultra-nationalism), also presented an apparently individual feature given by the religious character of the Legionary Movement, that is the vivification of the ideas characteristic to medieval and pre-modern anti-Judaism; the religious fervor of the legionaries became the major factor that differentiated Romanian rightist extremism⁵⁷ from Italian fascism, Nazism and other forms of fascism in the Balkan region⁵⁸.

Apart from the approach of Vatican regarding rightist extremism, especially Nazism, considered "a myth of the blood", the official Greek-catholic discourse on the nature and purpose of the Iron Guard, as it was presented by the uniate press, refuted the Legionary Movement for the reason that it tries to feed Romanian society with ideas and attitudes that have nothing to do with Christian or Romanian identity. The legionaries abused orthodox identity in order to accomplish their own political and national project, undermining the position of the Romanian Catholic Church which follows the Byzantine rite and denying the Greek-Catholic Church's contribution to the historical process of emancipation and assertion of Romanian

⁵⁷ Other Romanian fascist movements – the National Christian Defense League (1923-1935) and the National Christian Party (created in 1935 by the merger of the Agrarian National Party and LANC) – rather imitated Italian fascism. Instead, ultranationalist populism was/is common to all rightist extremist movements – see Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Mirela Bădică, in *Romanian Orthodox Church, State and society*, insisted on the so-called mystical dimension of the movement; see for e.g. some theoretical references: Henry Roberts, *Rumania: Political problems of an Agrarian State*, New York: Archon Books, 1969, pp. 231-232; Weber, Eugen, *Varieties of Fascism*, New York: Van Nostrand, 1964, p. 96; Roger Eatwell, *Reflections on Fascism and Religion*, in *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism*, New York: Archon Books, 1969, p. 231-232; Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, New York: Van Nostrand, 1964, p. 96; Roger Eatwell, *Reflections on Fascism and Religion*, in "Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism", ed. A. Pedahzur, L. Wienberg, vol. IV, no. 3, 2003, p. 154 (see the integration of the legionary movement in the category of fascism, such as the Croatian, Slovak). But, in our opinion, the first analyst of the "legionnaire spirit", who wrote about Iron Guard mysticism, was Mircea Șoimu, in 1938. The main comparison was the one with Italian fascism, which had preserved Catholic values only because of "political opportunism" (cited from Alexandru Petrescu, *Reflections on the Fascist Movement in 1930 Romania*, in "Studia Politica", vol. VII, no. 4, 2007, p. 869). Only Roger Griffin stressed the fact that the legionary ideology, beyond its mystical official discourse, was primarily an ultranationalist movement which used Orthodoxy in order to legitimate the so-called eschatological purpose – national regeneration through the political project of the legionary state – Roger Griffin, "Fascism" in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda Brasher, Massachusetts: Berkshire Reference Works, 2000, p. 198 sq; Florin Müller himself, in *Metamorphosis of Romanian Politics, 1938-1944*, Bucharest: Universitatea din București, 2005, p. 122-124, supports the idea that the movement was firstly of religious inspiration, unlike corporatist (and secular) fascism and pagan Nazism.

identity in the modern era. The legionaries believed that the Romanian Orthodox Church was the national church, representative for the “Romanian race”. Such an ideological approach ignored not only the religious identity of the largest part of the Romanians from Transylvania, but also the universal character of the Christian message.

The tendency of the totalitarian views in the 20th century was to impose laic or political religion as official religion. Right before Eric Voegelin wrote about political religion⁵⁹, in 1938, and about institutionalization of the political religion of European totalitarianism⁶⁰, in the encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno* (June, 20 1931) Pope Pius XI cautioned against the spiritualization of politics, denounced the political manipulation of the sacred and demystified the religiousness of the cult of the state-party and the so-called religious-nationalist catechization advanced by Mussolini’s regime as an alternative to the traditional-catholic education carried under the patronage of The Catholic Movement, which was on the verge of being taken over by the fascists⁶¹. Current Romanian research tackles issues related to anti-Semitic theories, but also to the role played by the anti-Semite concepts and mentality in the outburst of the Holocaust in Romania during the Antonescu-legionary government (September 1940-January 1941) and later, during Antonescu’s regime. There are many writings on the manner in which Orthodoxy became the ground of the Legionary Movement and Romanian anti-Semitism, the former being conceived by some ideologists as a mystic side of orthodoxy or a “spiritual revolution”⁶².

Towards the middle of the fourth decade, there were many intellectuals who believed that the Romanian nation must be reinvented through a radical *renovatio*; Mircea Eliade was among the ones who shared the official legionary speech, and wrote about the messianic goal of the Iron Guard⁶³; the writer will later on perfect his “view”, an act which cannot be pardoned, for in the meantime, the legionaries had accumulated many political assassinations and anarchic anti-Semite positions, pointing out the superiority of the legionary ideology over the other extremist ideologies: “*If Nazism is based on the People and fascism on the State, then the*

⁵⁹ We had a late Edition – see Eric Voegelin, *Les Religions politiques*, CERF, Paris, 1994.

⁶⁰ Gentile, Emilio *La religion fasciste*, Paris: Editions Perrin, 2002, p. 314.

⁶¹ See the role of estheticism in the religious celebrations, the phenomenon is predominant in fascist Italy and in the quasi-religious ceremonies of the legionaries.

⁶² In his texts, Zelea Codreanu often tackles the topic of spoke about the fundamentalist state (ethnocratic and autocratic) in which “the Law of Jesus” would become “the law of the State” and ensured collective salvation, that of the nation. See also Mona Mamulesa, *Dialectic of closure and openness in Romanian Culture*, Bucharest: Academia Română, p. 423; See also: Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of Archangel- fascist ideology in Romania*, New York: Colombia University Press, 1990; Heinen, Armin *Legion of the Archangel Michael- a Contribution to the Global Problem of Fascism*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999.

⁶³ See the articles in “Time”

*Legionary Movement has the right to claim itself as the only Christian mystic ideology able to govern human establishments. There is a Christian revolution going on, a spiritual and ascetic revolution as Europe has never seen before*⁶⁴. On the other hand, the Greek Catholics have demonstrated that, a state such as the one imagined by the legionaries and their followers, turns the Church into a mere function of this state and de-spiritualizes it⁶⁵. This issue was discussed by the uniate press in relation to the echoes of the encyclicals that oppose Hitlerism⁶⁶, but also in relation to the open letter through which Zelea Codreanu tried to assure the Greek Catholics of the fact that a future legionary state will not demolish their religious cult; he also accuses Vatican Catholics vehemently of being ignorant of leftist political orientations, and gives the example of Spanish Catholics, who voted the republicans – “Jesus’ enemy”⁶⁷ and who, after the king was banished, submitted to the repressive actions⁶⁸.

Another subject of dispute between Greek-Catholics and legionaries was that of national salvation/“redemption of the people”. While the legionaries believed that the eschatological goal could only be accomplished through the edification of

⁶⁴ Eliade, Mircea *Comments to an Oath*, in “Timpul” [“Time”] (infra: “Time”), no. 476, 21februarie 1937, p. 2; at length, for Mircea Eliade’s enthusiastic approval of the legionary ideology, see his texts from *Legionary Texts and on being Romanian*, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2001, as well as the analysis on myopia of Andrei Oișteanu. Mircea Eliade *Between Orthodoxy and Zalmoxism*” in “Observator Cultural”, no. 127, July 2002. Eliade believed that legionaries were meant to reinvent and to sanctify the nation and the State (see the project of construction of the national Legionary State). Although the idea that the legionary movement had a messianic purpose was given credit to, the Orthodox religion was losing the universal character of the Christian message – see: Banica, *On the legionary commitment and the opportunism of the history of religions*; see: Florin Țurcanu and Mircea Eliade, *Prisoner of History*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005.

⁶⁵ Article *Legionary and the Church*, “Union”, year XLVII, no. 48, November 27, 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁶ See the encyclical entitled *Mit Brennender Sorge* (15 March 1937).

⁶⁷ The text of the letter is reproduced in “Union” XLVII, no. 48, November 27, 1937, p. 1-2.

⁶⁸ King Alfonso XIII abdicated in 1931, and on April 14, the same year, the Republic was proclaimed. On December 9, 1931, the Constituent Assembly brought together after the parliament elections in the summer, Parliament dominated by leftist Republicans (150 seats) and rightist ones (100 seats) adopted the Republican Constitution. But, unfortunately, for Spain began a very difficult period in history which brought about the aggravation of the economic crisis, political instability (until 1936, the country has known 26 changes of the Government), the political polarization of the country (in the years 1932-1933 the right-wing extremist political parties were founded – the Spanish Phalange and the Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right Wing; in reply, the leftist powers, constituted a Front of the People in 1935 which included the Socialist Party, The Communist Party, the General Confederation of Labor, the Republican Left, Republican Union – this coalition won the elections on February 16, 1936), civil war and the nationalist military dictatorship of Franco. Since 1931, the Republicans have separated the Church from the State, have limited the influence of congregations of confessional education. During the civil war, left-wing Republicans and especially the Communists have repressed any opposition coming from the ranks of the Catholic clergy. Some episodes of repression ended with executions and criminal acts; the Greek Catholic press from Romania also presented these facts.

the ethnocentric state and the spiritualization of the political, the Greek Catholics maintained that the spiritual endeavor – the salvation of the community – could only be made possible through the spirit of catholic universalism and respect of the civil rights, such an attitude being a must in acquiring peace and progress⁶⁹.

If in the 1940's, the Greek-catholic press referred to the legionaries as to "young men who are lost", arguing against the legionary doctrine of death (the cult of heroic death) and the use of assassination as a political instrument⁷⁰, the legionary rebellion caused major changes in the way they were referred to. Following several extremist antidemocratic and antinational manifestations, the legionaries started to be considered "beasts of doom", young men alienated from Romanian identity⁷¹ and destined to eternal damnation⁷², for they used the word on the Bible in order to pervert and kill; their rebellion was compared to a "most hideous monster that Satan's imagination could have invented" and defined as "spiritual death"⁷³. The legionaries' antinational attitude was also blamed, because they had betrayed their political associates and their nation, avid for power, in a very hard period for the Romanian people, who had lost significant territories in the summer of 1940. Obviously, this press only commemorated the military victims of the rebellion⁷⁴ and expressed such a great loyalty to Antonescu⁷⁵, that it even

⁶⁹ Orthodox Proto-Presbyterian, *Nationalism and Christianity*, "Union", year XLVIII, no. 13, March 26, 1938, p. 2; the article signed with the pseudonym Orthodox Proto-Presbyterian debated, with harsh irony, a cause dear to nationalists of any political orientation, the theme of "Salvation through nation"; he ironies N. Iorga as Patriarch of Romanian nationalism, A.C. Cuza, the legionaries and O. Goga, the conclusion being that salvation can be achieved only through Jesus Christ.

⁷⁰ See the references to the murder/execution of Mihail Stelescu by a Legionary commando "it is a sign that barbarism is identified with heroism and violence with right"- editorial written by Augustin Popa in "Christian Culture", nr. 7-8 July, the 16th, 1937, p. 385-389; the same remark made in reference to the assassination of Rector of the University from Iasi, Prof. Dr. Ion Bratu, political crime that legionary students stated they had committed "in the name of Christ, the King and the Nation".

⁷¹ See *New Country*, "Union", nr. 5, February 1, 1941, p. 1: "... they have crippled the soul and body of our people, dressing it, with stubborn stupidity, in foreign clothes. We do not need a Communist or Legionary country, but simple and nice: "a Romanian, Christian country". Even legionary heroism was suspected as being an imported product. Thus, Augustin Popa argued that this type of manifestation of the cult of sacrifice was merely a roving alien from Romanian tradition – Augustin Pop, *Headstones ...*, pp. 58-60.

⁷² "... And we'll hide in another pit, furtively and lacking honor, the corpses of the miserables who gave their life, under the command of an fatal error"- see *Edges of precipices*, "Union" LI, no. 2, January 25, 1941, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ The list of officers and soldiers who died during the confrontations with the Legionnaires is published in the *New Country*, "Union", nr. 5, February 1, 1941, p. 3.

⁷⁵ The Greek Catholic Church feared that Antonescu, Orthodox practitioner, will comply with the wishes of the Romanian Orthodox Church to suppress Greek Catholic Church. The Constitution of 1923, and then the Law of Cults from 1927 defined the Orthodox and Catholic churches as national churches and granted them with parliamentary representation. Although the ROC had a status of "dominant Church", the relations between their two representatives were tense. During the Antonescu dictatorship, the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church was one of the stated objectives of ROC.

applauded the institution of death penalty for those who carried weapons without having an authorization⁷⁶. However, nothing was written on the massacre from Bucharest, a genocidal action executed by the legionaries.

The Romanian Orthodox Church did not accept either the abuse of the divine, the transformation of Orthodoxy into a mere instrument, the anticlerical attitude of several of the legionary ideologists, such as Nae Ionescu. Most of the members of the Holy Synod did not endorse neither the Legionary Movement openly and unconditionally nor the Legionary National State project. The bishops preferred Ion Antonescu, a dictator with traditional beliefs, who did not aim for spiritual revolutions and the reformation of the Romanian orthodox patriarchy⁷⁷. However, the priests and several hierarchs got actively involved in the ceremony and used the sacraments of the church, thus proving, in the end, their duplicity.

Despite the fact that, in the official speech, the Greek Catholics did not seem to support the Jews, when the German troops⁷⁸ and the pro-Nazi administration⁷⁹ triggered the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania⁸⁰, the main representatives of the Greek Catholics were very receptive and engaged in the rescue of thousands of souls in Northern Transylvania, but also in Hungary. Among the Greek Catholic

The most vehemently supporter of this nationalist project was the Metropolitan Visarion Puiu, head of the ROC in Transnistria, nationalist hierarch with anti-Semitic views, who, through several letters asked, between 1940-1943, for a law that would disband the Greek Catholic cult, the forced unification of the Byzantine rite Catholics with the Orthodox. A step towards this objective was the Decree Law No. 620/1943 which specifies that in the case of a confession, if the group that changes its religion exceeded that of the majority of the community in question, the objects of the cult went, along with the majority of the religious believers to the new cult; the Decree was designed, under the pressure of the ROC, to affect the patrimony and status of the Catholic Church-see Mircea Remus Birtz, Manfred Kierein-Kuenring, Sabin Sebastian Făgăraș, *Fărâme din prescură prigoanei* (1948-1990), Edit. Napoca Star, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 11.

⁷⁶ See the Decree-Law of February 5, 1941, published in "Union", no 7, February 15, 1941, p. 3.

⁷⁷ See Mirel Bănică's conclusion in *op. cit.*, p. 214-215.

⁷⁸ Adolf Eichmann has divided Hungary, occupied in March 1944 in 10 districts and 6 operational anti-Jewish gendarmerie areas, the concentration and deportation of the Jewish population was done by Sonder Einsatzkommandos (special action troops, SS troops specialized in the implementation of the Final Solution).

⁷⁹ After the occupation of Hungary by the Nazi troops, only formally head of State, M. Horthy was forced to appoint a new Government, most of the Ministers and Secretaries of State being anti-Semites (from March 19, 1944 on). The more extreme, such as László Endre and László were responsible for solving the "Jewish problem", more specifically with the implementation of the Final Solution.

⁸⁰ After the occupation of Hungary by the German troops and the establishment of a puppet government (March 1944), as mentioned before, the implementation of the Final Solution began (anti-Semitic policy in Hungary was institutionalized as early as 1938). According to the report of Edmund Veessenmayer, 437.402 Jews were deported and killed in concentration camps; most of the Jews and Transylvanian revolutionaries were ghettoized in Transylvania (May 1944), and then sent to Auschwitz; 135.455 of them have died – see details in Randolph L. Braham's *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary*, Detroit-Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2000, p. 138 sq.

priests who helped the Jews we can mention: Stan Gavrilă, rector of the Greek-catholic seminary of Oradea, Prof. Dr. Virgil Maxim and the administrator of the Gheorghe Măgura seminary, who hid Jews inside the building of the seminary and in the farm of the Greek Catholic Church⁸¹. The American historian, Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, the chief rabbi of the Jewish community which follows a neologic rite from Cluj, in 1936-1944, therefore a victim and witness of the events, wrote about the undertakings of the Greek Catholic bishop, Iuliu Hossu of Gherla-Cluj⁸² and the Roman Catholic bishop Márton Áron of Alba-Iulia⁸³, which aimed at saving as many Jews as possible from the dark future of deportation and death. It is thought that, due to these efforts and also to the function of the “network of altruism”⁸⁴, many Jews managed to find refuge in Romania and then emigrate to Palestine.

A Brief Conclusion that Can Help us Avoid Groundless Suspicions

This study does not intend to discredit, some way or the other, the churches which are considered by the contemporary public opinion as representative for the Romanian history and identity; however, their involvement, mainly that of the Orthodoxy, in socio-political competitions, in connections with the Power, in complex relations specific rather to the medieval or pre-modern epochs, had the inevitable effect of alteration of the image of the Church as a spiritual institution. But Greek Catholicism, through its resistance to the communist oppression, manifested by the entire cleric hierarchy, turned the Greek-Catholic Church into a “martyr church”. Our scientific approach does not challenge in any way the merits of this church. We only meant to show that some secular concepts (such as the case of anti-Semitism, which represents, from a certain perspective, an evolution of anti-

⁸¹ See Theresa Mozes *The Jews of Oradea*, Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997.

⁸² See Moshe Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger *The History of the Jews in Transylvania (1623-44)*, Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1994, p. 166 and 175; See also http://vestitorul.egco.ro/articol_521.html, retrieved on December 1, 2010. He converted Jews to Catholicism in order to save them from deportation and extermination. Alexander Nicula, former Secretary of Bishop Julian Hossu, later Archpriest of Cluj (until 1947), supported his actions of rescuing the Jews; Al. Nicula confessed, in a recent interview, these facts – see http://adevarul.ro/.../Parintele_Nicula-Schindler_de_sub_Feleac_0_385762005.html, accessed on December 7, 2010. We do not intend to approach the disputes related to the contestation of the actions of Raoul Șorban, who still holds the status of “Righteous among the Nations” or Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger’s credibility as historian and witness of the events (there is such a dispute, quite recent in current historiography).

⁸³ He managed to stand out through his opposition, made official, in reference to the deportation and extermination of the Jews; specifically, in March 1944, he asked the Roman Catholic community in Hungary and Transylvania to help, by any means possible, the victims found in ghettos and threatened to be deported.

⁸⁴ Adrian Riza, *Network of Altruism*, Bucharest: RAI, 1995, pp. 225-244.

Judaism of religious tendency), ideas of cultural heritage, sometimes intensified in political contexts or conflicts – ideas spread through the voice of the churches as well – may alter many features of our collective behavior. Only a critical and demystifying approach, and a clear analysis, would be useful to the modernization of the discourse regarding the history of the 20th century. Ignoring historicity, deficiency or the rethinking of several episodes in history with the intention of justifying an institution, would doubtlessly be irresponsible, and no institution or community must escape from the issue of historical responsibility.