

# UC Riverside

## UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

The Romanian Orthodox Church During World War II

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8wr74725>

### Author

Pearce, William David

### Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

The Romanian Orthodox Church During World War II

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

William David Pearce

August 2014

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Georg Michels, Chairperson

Dr. Ann Goldberg

Dr. Kiril Tomoff

Copyright by  
William David Pearce  
2014

The Dissertation of William David Pearce is approved:

---

---

---

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank first and foremost my wife for supporting me through graduate school. Without her this dissertation never would have happened. I would like to thank the University of California Riverside's Department of History for taking me on even though I was not necessarily the best fit. Thank you to Dr. Kiril Tomoff and Dr. Randy Head for getting me here in the first place. Thank you to Dr. Ann Goldberg for her help on this project. Thank you to Dr. Tomoff also for his help on this dissertation. Special thanks to Dr. Georg Michels, who took me as a new graduate student and has supported me so much as my advisor these several years. Thank you to all the faculty at UCR who have helped me over the years. Thank you to Dr. Radu Ioanid for opening doors for me even though we have never met. Thank you to everyone in Romania who helped me with the archival research.

Special thanks to my great-grandmother, Grandma Faye, who passed away shortly after my return from the archives. I used bonds she had given me in my childhood to help pay for my travels. Thank you to my parents for always supporting me.

*Dedicated to Theresa*

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Romanian Orthodox Church During World War II

by

William David Pearce

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History  
University of California, Riverside, August 2014  
Dr. Georg Michels, Chairperson

This dissertation is an examination of records relating to the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Second World War. Using primarily resources from The Romanian National Archives in Bucharest, the research focuses primarily on the decisions made by the Church's leaders in the Holy Synod. The Romanian government leading up to the war was a dictatorship led by a king and had a close relationship with the Church.

During the war the Church remained close to the central government under Marshall Ion Antonescu, who was an ally to Germany's Hitler. Publicly the Church was one of Antonescu's greatest supporters. The Church's leaders rationalized supporting the Romanian government before and during Antonescu's regime using popular notions of Romanian nationalism. Antonescu reciprocated the Church's support with laws and policies that favored the Romanian Orthodox Church legally and financially above other

confessions. One of these policies was to put restrictions on certain minority religious groups and outlawing them. Their resources were confiscated and often gifted to local Orthodox parishes. Another important law prohibited Jews from becoming Christians. The Orthodox Church's implementation of this law demonstrates that the Church supported the Romanian government's anti-Jewish philosophy and policies. The actions of other Christians who ignored the prohibition are used as contrasting examples to the Orthodox Church's policy.

While the Church did not participate with the Romanian government and military in perpetrating the Holocaust, the Church's strong presence in Transnistria indicates that the Church's clergy had direct knowledge of the violence there. The failure to take action in this area represents a moral failure by an institution that touted itself as Romania's moral compass. Based on the Church's wartime actions it was complicit in the Antonescu regime's crimes. Following the Antonescu regime's collapse in August 1944 the Romanian Orthodox Church quickly reversed its stance on many of its wartime policies.



## Table of Contents

Preface.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Romanian People’s Church.....	25
Chapter 2: The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Government.....	45
Chapter 3: The Anti-Sectarian Campaign.....	88
Chapter 4: Law 711: The Romanian Orthodox Church and Romanian Jews.....	123
Chapter 5: The Church on the Eastern Front.....	164
Conclusion.....	187
Appendix.....	197
Bibliography.....	205

## Preface

When writing about the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Second World War I refer to the Church generally and not individually, primarily addressing the Church's leadership and not the Church's membership. The archival materials I use do not tell the whole story of course. When planning my trip to the archives in winter 2012 I also tried to contact the Romanian Orthodox Church Archives. I emailed the people listed on the Church's website that I was doing research on the Romanian Orthodox Church and that I would like to know if I could meet with an archivist when I was in Romania. I explained that although I planned on doing my research at the National Archives I thought that going to the Church's archives would be even more beneficial to historical research about the Church. I justified that my research would be beneficial because there is so little published on the Romanian Orthodox Church in America. I explained I was eager and looking forward to meeting them.

No one responded. I thought well maybe they think this is a joke. After all, no one has ever heard of me and why would some guy claiming to be from California go to Romania in the winter? Internet scams are quite common so maybe they thought I was a hoax. So when I arrived in Romania I called the archivist in Bucharest. I left several voicemail messages on what was indeed his phone as he identified himself in his voicemail box. I even purposefully put on an American accent while making several grammatical flubs on purpose in one message while speaking Romanian to make sure he could hear that I was telling the truth. There were no returned calls or messages. When I went to the address listed I was told that they had no idea what I was talking about and

one person pretended not to understand me. *Măi omule, vorbesc românește!* [Hey man, I speak Romanian!]

I should not have expected anything else. When I arrived at the Romanian National Archives, thanks to Dr. Radu Ioanid's help the director met with me for an hour. We spoke about my project and he told me not to expect any cooperation from the Church. He explained that the National Archives had difficulties working with the Church and that even he found it frustrating. The wonderful ladies who worked in the office and were so helpful also were skeptical I would have success convincing anyone at the Church to let me in the Church's archive. When speaking to some of the other researchers at the archives they spoke bluntly. Every older professor explained that there was no way the Church would help me. One of the older gentlemen tended to have the same grueling schedule as mine and often talked to me about my project in the coat hall. He told me he hoped that I could publish it because if any Romanian historian published what I was finding it would be career suicide.

I cannot say it would be career suicide, but certainly it would ruffle a lot of feathers. Some of what I have written here may seem like a harsh criticism or analysis. I assure you it is not. The fact is that the Romanian Orthodox Church considers itself the direct descendant of the Ancient Church established by Christ's apostles and that it bases its teachings on those found in the Bible. The Church sees itself as the Kingdom of God on the earth, as do most Christian confessions. And so it is expected to teach certain principles and behave in a certain way based on its own high standards. Should the Romanian Orthodox Church or any other Christian confession fail to meet these

standards then it should expect criticism, even from outsiders. These criticisms are based solely on the events found in the documents used and the Church's own interpretation of what it means to be Christian. I hope that someday the Romanian Orthodox Church will give full archival access to outside scholars without worrying about its reputation.

## Introduction

This dissertation examines the activities of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Second World War with a special emphasis on the Church's involvement in the persecution of the Romanian Jewry and religious minorities, and the Church's close relationship with the Antonescu regime. It focuses on the Church generally as an institution, which necessitates a focus on the Church's leadership, policies on interactions with other sects or faiths, and church leadership attitudes that affected the situation of Romanian Jews and other religious minorities. This is the first major study to focus solely on the Church during World War II.

The historiography for Romania in all cases points to the Church as being adaptively supportive of the Romanian government from the end of World War I to the end of the socialist regime; even in the last days before Ceaușescu's demise Patriarch Teoctist publicly gave his support to the regime in an attempt to retain the Church's privileges given by the socialist regime vis-à-vis other confessions.<sup>1</sup> But there are no studies that focus only on the Church during World War II. The argument presented here is that the Church did more than just vocalize support for the Antonescu regime, it actively sought out ways in which it could further the regime's aims regarding Romania's Jews and religious minorities. It did so because the Church's leaders supported the regime's ideologies and the truth was that the Church could benefit from such activities,

---

<sup>1</sup> Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu, "Telegrama de felicitare adresată Exclenței Sale Domnului Președinte NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU de către Prea Fericitul Părinte Patriarh Teoctist" [A congratulatory telegram addressed to his Excellency Mr. President Nicolae Ceaușescu from The Beloved Father Patriarch Teoctist], *Biserica Ortodoxă Română: Revista Sfântului Sinod* 107, no.1-2 (1989), p. 3. Hereafter *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* will be abbreviated BOR.

from an influx of free or very inexpensive properties expropriated during the war. The Church was thus complicit in the Antonescu regime's crimes.

As other scholars have established, the Romanian Orthodox Church's leadership was publicly antisemitic prior to World War II. The Romanian Orthodox Church was also a strong proponent for ethnic Romanian nationalism prior to the war. The wartime Antonescu government provided an atmosphere where the Church's leadership could act on these ideologies, as well as take action against other minority religious groups the Church considered to be a threat. Because of its close relationship with the Romanian state, the Orthodox Church often acted more like a government agency than an independent religious institution. Although it was not technically a government agency, the Church's budget was actually part of the government's budget, and large numbers of priests also served as civil servants, public educators, and even elected officials. The Church's clergy was paid out of state coffers. For decades prior to the war, the Church and the education system were under the auspices of the same government ministry, and the clergy represented the largest group of educated Romanians and Romanian educators. The Church was the largest institution in Romania besides the actual government. For these reasons, how the Church interacted with the Antonescu regime is important for evaluating the Church during the war.

This research explores the specific actions taken by the Church to support and participate in the government's anti-Jewish and anti-minority programs, and the ideology that drove these actions. The first chapter explores the ideology espoused by Church leaders. It discusses three interrelated ideas: nationalism, anti-communism, and anti-

Semitism. Nationalism as envisioned by Church leaders was on par with the period's popular and academic notions of belief in ethnic Romanian superiority and Orthodox religious superiority. This ethno-religious nationalism had strong anti-communist and anti-Semitic components common to extreme right political groups and academics in Romania and throughout Europe at the time.

The second chapter explores the Church's relationship with the Romanian government. The government tried to support the Church by strengthening religious laws to promote the Church ahead of other religions and confessions. The Church even supported the fascist Iron Guard when it briefly held power. However, during the Guard's pivotal coup attempt against Antonescu in January 1941 the Church's leadership chose to support Antonescu. The Church's leaders would continue to support Antonescu until his regime's demise in 1944.

The third chapter explores the Church's moves to improve its position within Romania by pressuring the government to exclude other religious minorities. It turns out that smaller Christian sects drew the wrath of the Antonescu government and the Church. Smaller confessions were restricted or even banned. The core idea behind this anti-sectarian campaign was a variant of ethnic Romanian nationalism. The Church took credit for the idea that the only church for the Romanian people was the Romanian Orthodox Church. More than just an ideology, the cooperative efforts of the government and the Church in this campaign reaped financial benefits as well.

On 21 March 1941, Law Number 711 was put into effect by the Romanian government. The law took away the religious freedom of Romania's Jews to convert to

other faiths. Chapter four focuses on the law's background, the Church's reaction to the law, and the Church's eventual support of the law that leaves no doubt that the Church used anti-Semitism as an important justification. One of the questions researching the subject was whether or not Romania's Jews could be exempted from anti-Jewish policies by being Christian. For example, if Jews who converted to Christianity could be exempted from anti-Jewish legislation, then a law preventing conversion would eliminate one way of escaping government persecution. Was this why the Romanian Orthodox Church moved to exclude Jews from conversion? It turns out that Church leadership simply agreed with the regime's philosophy to keep the Church free and clean from Jewish influences. It was implied in several documents that Christians of Jewish descent would be able to escape Antonescu's anti-Jewish policies, but upon reviewing the sources there is no conclusive evidence that this was the case.

Most of the bloodshed perpetrated by the Romanian government and military during the Holocaust happened in Moldova, Transnistria, Northern Bucovina, and in Ukraine. The Church briefly ran a mission in Transnistria that was quite large. Chapter five brings to light some of the Church's work there, and while there is no evidence that the Church was involved in the genocide, there is also no evidence that the Church tried to intervene in any way to save victims. This was evidence of the extent to which the Church supported the Antonescu regime. Here in this chapter the Church's complicity in the regime's crimes is illuminated.

There are large collections of files dealing with the expropriation of Jewish owned properties and businesses, and, in many cases, with what happened to the properties once



they were expropriated.<sup>2</sup> While it would not be surprising to find that the Church or clergy were able to obtain ownership of these properties this simply was not the case. In the Ministry of Cults and Arts' collections there are very few examples of the Church or the clergy even requesting from Jewish property expropriation. One example is the seizure of a synagogue in the town of Giurgiu to be used by the local Orthodox administration for "a religious cinema... religious guidance" and catechisms.<sup>3</sup> It turns out that the Church and the clergy obtained large numbers of expropriated properties from other groups targeted by the regime.

After Antonescu was deposed the Church adapted to supporting the new Romanian government. This new regime very quickly reversed many policies concerning Jews, including allowing Jewish refugees to enter the country. It turns out that the Church made sure its policies were in line with the government's new policies, including the eventual public support of socialism. This demonstrates that in spite of the Church's wartime activities, it still valued its relationship with the government more than pursuing ideologies.

---

<sup>2</sup> These are found in many different archival categories for many different ministries, including the Ministry of Cults, and any taken by the Romanian Orthodox Church would have needed to go through the Ministry of Cults.

<sup>3</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG25.061M, Selected records of the Romanian Ministry of Cults and Arts (Inv. 2720), Reel 3, p. 91. Hereafter the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum will be abbreviated USHMM.

## **Romanian Historiography**

The historiography of the interwar period paints the Church as one of the major institutions in Romania that furthered anti-Semitism's growth. It is surprising then, that both the Holocaust historiography and the historiography of World War II present very little on the Church. Without a serious inquiry and an accurately presented historical narrative there remain only large gray areas where everyone can feel comfortable in their own ideas about what probably happened. This unfortunately is the current situation in Romania where Antonescu is still a popular figure for most of the public and where popular history negates Romanian collusion, collaboration, and participation in the Holocaust while passing sole responsibility to German actions in the area.<sup>4</sup>

The most important scholar on Romania and the Holocaust is Radu Ioanid. His 1990 book *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania* focuses on the root causes that led to fascism's growth in Romania and later to Romania's participation in the Holocaust. Ioanid identifies the important religious underpinnings of Romanian fascism that set it apart from other European fascist movements. This included a very narrow ultranationalist definition of "who" the Romanian people are ethnically and religiously. According to fascist ideologues, only those who belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church were truly Romanian. Ioanid points out that Romania's legionnaires, as the members of the Iron Guard were called, incorporated Orthodox mysticism into their doctrine from the beginning under the leadership of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Ioanid

---

<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps not emphasized enough in the current historiography, but it is essentially main-stream in Romania to negate Romanian participation in any events associated with the Holocaust. It seems almost unbelievable, yet I have discovered myself that this troubling negation is so popular that there are even historians and educators in Romania who believe this.

shows that the legionary movement relied for its propaganda on part of the Orthodox clergy that was devoted to it:

This became evident at the burial of Mota and Marin, as well as when the legionaries and General Antonescu, their ally, took power: "...During the first days of his ascent to power the general made extensive use of the Church in order to impose upon public opinion and especially on the lower strata of the population. Some of his appeals and convocations were ostentatiously broadcast through the churches, publicly read by the priests..."<sup>5</sup>

Ioanid also notes that about a third of the Iron Guard's candidates for election in 1937 were priests.<sup>6</sup> These fascist priests, their sympathizers, and Church leaders who tacitly allowed priests to become involved in Romania's most virulent fascist organization continued to serve in the Church during World War II when they had greater opportunity to act on their prejudices against Romania's minorities. Ioanid's use of academic publications by Iron Guard members, newspaper reports on the Iron Guard (both foreign and domestic), and a few Romanian government publications concerning the Iron Guard reveal a fascist group imbued with religious zeal. Had the Church rejected the ideals espoused by the Iron Guard, this dissertation's conclusion might have revealed that the Church was given a black eye by a few overly political priests and that the larger institution was free from such bigotry. In fact, there is almost no evidence to the contrary, and the evidence in the first two chapters shows that the Church generally espoused ideals similar to those of the Iron Guard.

---

<sup>5</sup> Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1990): p. 141. He cites A. Simion, *Regimul politic din România în perioadă septembrie 1940- ianuarie 1941* (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Dacia, 1976). Mota and Marin were Iron Guard leaders killed in Spain fighting for Spanish Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

Radu Ioanid's other important works include *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*; significant contributions to the translated version of Mihail Sebastian's *Journal, 1935-1944: The Fascist Years*; and his contribution to the *Final Report* by the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (ICHR) published in 2004.<sup>7</sup> *The Holocaust in Romania* reveals many of the details of the destruction of Jews and gypsies, giving especially detailed accounts of the mass murders in Bukovina, Bessarabia, Moldavia, and Transnistria. Many of these accounts come from a particularly important record called *The Black Book* [*Cartea Neagră: Suferințele evreilor din România 1940-1944*]. This book, published in 1947, is a collection of testimonies from Jewish survivor communities, a narrative based on official government reports, and further narratives from the trials of war criminals compiled by Matatias Carp, a Romanian Jewish attorney. *The Final Report's* detailed statements about the anti-Semitic preconditions of the Holocaust are invaluable because much of the research on the subject has for the most part been scattered among smaller scholarly publications.<sup>8</sup> The ICHR tried to paint as broad a narrative as possible of the ideas and events leading to the Holocaust in Romania and concludes that blame falls more on the Romanian government than any other party. However, the ICHR also notes that the roles of other Romanian institutions during the

---

<sup>7</sup> Mihail Sebastian was a noted Romanian Jewish intellectual who kept very thorough records that are comparable to Victor Klemperer's. His "Journal" was not published until the mid-1990s and not in English until 2000. It serves as a fundamental testimony of the Jewish experience in Romania, especially for the large Jewish population in Bucharest. Ioanid was a contributor in translating the English version.

<sup>8</sup> In other words, articles or monographs with very limited publication or no translations from original languages.

war are still generally unknown. The historiography lacks wartime narratives for most Romanian institutions outside the government.

Irina Livezeanu's research provides an excellent account of the meteoric growth of Romania's fascist parties and shows that they had little involvement with foreign fascist groups during the 1920s. She also notes the Orthodox Church's approval of most of the ideologies expressed by Romanian fascists.<sup>9</sup> Besides the Iron Guard, the two other main political parties involved in anti-Semitic and ethno-nationalist agitations were the League of National Christian Defense and the National Christian Party. All of these parties counted Orthodox clergy among their membership and supporters.<sup>10</sup> Livezeanu categorizes these parties as extremely nationalist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, anti-communist, militant, and holding a view of Romania as an Orthodox Christian nation. This led foreign observers to label all three parties as fascist by the end of the 1920s. Livezeanu relies heavily on foreign accounts for her analysis. Unfortunately, the Church escapes serious inspection in spite of the fact that it supposedly had ties to all of Romania's political parties.

William O. Oldson characterized the Romanian Orthodox Church for the interwar period as being guilty of "self-righteous nationalism."<sup>11</sup> He shows that the Orthodox Church informally supported or tacitly approved of most groups that had anti-Semitic

---

<sup>9</sup> Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> See Z. Ornea, Eugenia Maria Popescu translator, *The Romanian Extreme Right: The Nineteen Thirties*, (East European Monographs, Boulder, 1999). Ornea relies on the publications of the political parties' leaders and party newspapers.

<sup>11</sup> William O. Oldson, "Alibi for Prejudice: Eastern Orthodox, the Holocaust, and Romanian Nationalism," *East European Quarterly* 36, No. 3 (2002), p. 308.

views and was able to spread these much faster through the country than any political party could. Priests were often the most educated in their community, often taught at schools and at universities, and were seen as important spiritual and civic leaders. Oldson takes issue with current defensive explanations of the Orthodox Church's contributions to Romania's anti-Semitism. These include the idea that the Orthodox Christian portion of the Iron Guard was tangential. In other words, priests who participated in fascist organizations did not really represent Orthodox Christianity or the Church as an institution. Also, the Orthodox Church did not proselytize Jews, and therefore was not directly involved in repressing Jews.<sup>12</sup> While not exactly an analysis of Holocaust related documents as his title suggests the study points to the fact that the modern Romanian Church's denial of involvement is a farce. Not proselytizing Jews is not the same thing as non-persecution; and proselytizing does not equal persecution even if some people find it annoying.

Alan Scarfe notes that the Orthodox hierarchy had a difficult time in remaining detached from political movements during the interwar period.<sup>13</sup> Scarfe's brief history of the Church gives an assessment that during its entire history the Church maintained strong ties with Romania's many different governments. Paul A. Shapiro explains that even though Romania's fascist movements in the 1920s-30s took on the characteristics of

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 308-309. These rationalizations come primarily from a 1990 article published in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* entitled "The Attitude of the Orthodox Church regarding Jews from 1918-1945" ("Atitudinea Bisericii Ortodoxe față de evrei între 1918-1945").

<sup>13</sup> Alan Scarfe, "The Romanian Orthodox Church", *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Pedro Ramet ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), p. 215. This chapter provides an overview on the Church's extensive involvement in Romanian politics especially for the first 75 years or so of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

other fascist movements (e.g. “economic, cultural, and racial antisemitism and violence against Jews and what they perceived to be a ‘Judaized’ establishment”), they still preserved religious belief, Orthodox symbolism, and spirituality as key components of their dogma.<sup>14</sup> All the major radical right-wing and fascist political parties in Romania during the interwar period strongly identified themselves with Romanian Orthodoxy.

Shapiro also explains that this trend was actually a continuation of a strong radical nationalist discourse that had already begun in the nineteenth century. Both Scarfe and Shapiro also use interwar Romanian scholarly journals and newspapers to demonstrate how cruel the Church’s attitude could be towards Romania’s Jews. Shapiro goes further into the Church’s past and looks at prominent Orthodox leaders’ published statements and articles on Jews to demonstrate that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards anti-Semitic attitudes were common among the Church’s leading scholars. Among the most prolific anti-Jewish clerics, almost all interwar Church accounts use Nichifor Crainic’s writings as one of the prime examples of anti-Semitism’s prevalence in the Church. Crainic (1889-1972) edited or published in widely circulated magazines and newspapers including *Gândirea*, *Ramuri*, *România Nouă*, *Calendarul*, *Cuvântul*, *Cuget Românesc*, and the notorious *Porunca Vremii* and *Sfarmă-Piatră*. Although Crainic was a theologian, professor, and cleric, he attained celebrity status during the interwar period among Romania’s anti-Jewish government officials. He is considered one of the most influential thinkers of his time.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Paul A. Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection: the Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church”, *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, Kevin P. Spicer ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 136.

As for the subject of this dissertation, the *Final Report* (2004) states that the “Romanian Orthodox Church itself had strong anti-Semitic leanings, both in its senior hierarchy and among local clergy.”<sup>16</sup> An example of such sentiments was expressed by Miron Cristea, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church during much of the 1920s-30s: “One has to be sorry for the poor Romanian people, whose very marrow is sucked out by the Jews. Not to react against the Jews means that we go open-eyed to our destruction... To defend ourselves is a national and patriotic duty.”<sup>17</sup> Importantly the *Final Report* synthesizes much of the secondary literature on Romania and the Holocaust and is a microcosm of the current historiography. The subjects addressed focus primarily on Romania’s anti-Semitic interwar period when the Church played a significant role, and the wartime tragedies perpetrated by the Romanian government and military, while the Church is hardly mentioned among other nongovernment institutions. By all accounts the Church was a major instigator of anti-Semitism during the interwar period. But while the Church is mentioned in most of the Romanian Holocaust historiography as a part of the problem there is no single narrative for the Church, nor is there even a lengthy article on the Church for its wartime activities. Perhaps comparing the Romanian

---

<sup>15</sup> See also Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 181-190. Ramet mainly followed Scarfe’s and Gilberg’s works and used similar sources, as they had both worked together 10 and 14 years earlier respectively, see footnote 13. Also see Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery eds., *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995), pp. 103-180; they come to the same conclusion about the Church. See also Trond Gilberg “Religion and Nationalism in Romania”, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, Pedro Ramet ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> The International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid and Mihai E. Ionescu editors, *Final Report*, (Bucharest, Polirom, 2004): p. 36. The international Commission on the Holocaust in Romania will be abbreviated ICHR.

<sup>17</sup> *Final Report*, p. 36.



Orthodox Church to other European churches very briefly will explain why the historiography has nearly a blank space in the most important years in modern European history.

### **Religion and the Holocaust historiography and some Analytical challenges**

To include a church as a perpetrator in the great European tragedy of the modern age has proven at times to be difficult. The German case is a good example. Eriksen and Heschel explain:

Unlike other professional groups, such as doctors, nurses, engineers, police officers and the military, pastors and theologians did not play a direct role in killing Jews. Theirs was a role of influence, persuasion and the assuaging of troubled consciences. The killers of the Jews were all Christian... and clearly aware that murder of innocent civilians was wrong... The Churches have often been placed outside the framework of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Towards the end of the war, some constituencies within the German Churches quickly developed a myth of Christian resistance... that the Churches had not taken an active role in opposing the persecution, deportation and murder of Jews was explained away as a result of their ignorance... Secular historians tend to dismiss the Churches... in their attempts to explain the German people in relation to the Nazi regime.<sup>18</sup>

Romania is somewhat similar in that the evidence presented was that the Church had a role of influence and persuasion. Although historians have not dismissed the Romanian Orthodox Church, it has remained an aside in the narrative and analysis on Romania and the Holocaust.

However, looking at the extent to which the Roman Catholic Church has been examined in the Holocaust historiography there is hope that historians can place churches

---

<sup>18</sup> Robert P. Eriksen and Susannah Heschel, "The German Churches and the Holocaust", Dan Stone ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 296-297.

within the framework of the Holocaust. Perhaps the best example is Michael Phayer's *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*. The Catholic Church's wartime record was often contradictory; on the one hand monasteries, convents, and many local clergy became safe havens and heroes; on the other the Vatican never vigorously opposed the Nazis and after the war enabled the escape of Nazi war criminals. His conclusion is that only local heroes emerged from an institution that was unsympathetic to the plight of the Holocaust's victims. Although years after the fact the Catholic Church expressed remorse Phayer concludes that the Church as a whole failed to take action to intervene on behalf of groups targeted by fascist regimes during the war because of the Vatican's leadership. His methodology is to primarily examine the Church's leadership and larger institutional centers while including some local examples. His method is effective in showing broader concerns across the Catholic Church as an institution. Phayer's work also shows how complicated dealing with churches and the Holocaust can be.<sup>19</sup> The contradictory record stems from the relationship between the Vatican's leadership and the varied directions of local Catholic institutions across Europe. This methodology of primarily examining the institution's central leadership while including some local examples reflects the methodology for this work.

There is also the case of the German Christian Movement, the subject of Doris L. Bergen's *Twisted Cross*. She argues that even though the group numerically only represented a small percent of the German population, a group of Protestant laity and clergy roughly 600,000 strong, it was representative of German culture during the 1920s-

---

<sup>19</sup> Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

30s. The German Christian Movement was only discredited after the war's end. The movement's ideas included "the ideal of a people's church, Christian anti-Jewishness, racial antisemitism, an antidoctrinal, romantic understanding of religion."<sup>20</sup> Particularly strong was the romantic idea of the *völkisch* church, a church for the German nation and Aryan race. This idea then moved from romantic to sinister as the German Christian movement supported the Nazi program and tried to implement programs designed to exclude Christians of Jewish descent from German Protestantism. The aims and actions of the Romanian Orthodox Church resemble those of the German Christian movement as it espoused ideas remarkably similar to those of the German Christians.<sup>21</sup>

In both Bergen and Phayer, it is clear that examining European Christian churches and the Holocaust can present all of the problems raised by Eriksen and Heschel. The German Christian movement could have easily been dismissed as an aberrational religious group due to its small membership. Yet Bergen shows that the movement extended far beyond its numbers. The Catholic Church's responses varied so much regionally that to examine the Church as a whole is difficult. But Phayer is not mistaken in examining the Roman Catholic Church beginning with the Vatican as a way of understanding the wide variety of Catholic responses. Similar to the Roman Catholic Church in Italy the Romanian Orthodox Church represented an overwhelming majority of the population and enjoyed tremendous cultural and civic prominence. Just as the movement of German Christians wanted to exclude Jewish blood from Germany the

---

<sup>20</sup> Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin P. Spicer, *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

Romanian Orthodox Church saw itself as a Church for those who were Romanian by blood, not for Jews, and considered those who belonged to other confessions less Romanian.

To complicate things further, examining the Romanian role in the Holocaust and Romanian anti-Semitism in general has been problematic for post-communist historians in Romania. The problem relates directly to Romania's unfortunate twentieth-century history. Virtually all Romanians hold the socialist regime in contempt. The socialist period is now seen as a Russian imperialist venture that ruined four decades of Romanian life and socio-economic development. This has led Romanians to look to the first half of the twentieth century for a better national history.

It was after World War I that Greater Romania was created and Romanian nationalism flourished. The most important region added was Transylvania, the cradle of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Romanian nationalism, especially among Transylvanian Orthodox Church leaders. Many of Romania's most famous national historical figures come from the interwar period, that is, after the creation of most of Romania's modern borders.<sup>22</sup> Nicolae Iorga, Octavian Goga, A. C. Cuza, King Carol II, Nae Ionescu, the first Romanian Patriarch Miron Cristea, and other interwar intellectuals and political figures are considered great figures in national history. However, all those mentioned above were well known anti-Semites and certain individuals were also known fascists. Yet being prominent anti-Semites or fascists has not removed their names from schools, streets, parks, universities, and monuments.

---

<sup>22</sup> With the exception of the portion of Northern Moldavia or Bessarabia seized by the Soviet Union that now is the Republic of Moldova.

There were several campaigns in the early 1990s to rehabilitate Marshal Ion Antonescu, Romania's own red-headed Hitlerite, as an anti-Soviet hero, a national hero, and the man who saved Romania's Jews.<sup>23</sup> The last may seem strange, but it is a fact that most Jews in the Old Kingdom and southern Transylvania managed to survive official persecution and the war and that Antonescu came to reject the Final Solution for Jews still surviving in Romania's borders.<sup>24</sup> This has led to a very popular mythology surrounding Antonescu in which he is a national hero. The Romanian government after Antonescu even began to repatriate Romanian Jews who had been deported to Transnistria and accepted Jewish refugees from other countries. Most Romanians do not believe that their country had anything at all to do with the Holocaust and that any blame placed on the Romanian government during World War II is the result of historical fallacies created by Germans to ease their own guilt.

These popular myths distort the historical reality that the Antonescu regime was responsible for the death of somewhere between 250,000 to 400,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews. Also, Antonescu planned to rid Romania of the Jewish population by selling immigrants to Palestine in order to continue funding the war. The large number of Jewish "survivors" in Romania became the victims of anti-Jewish legislation, violence, theft, and general persecutions during the war. The Antonescu regime's attempts to

---

<sup>23</sup> Randolph L. Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts* (The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1998), pp. 61-70. This included nationally televised documentaries honoring Antonescu's historical contributions.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27. Braham's figure is 90 percent of Jews for the Old Kingdom (Wallachia and Moldavia) and Southern Transylvania. Although Braham also demonstrates, very effectively, that Antonescu's unwillingness to participate in the Final Solution was due to his own fear about what would happen to him after the war if the Soviet Union invaded Romania. Antonescu was still ultimately responsible for the Romanian military's murder of Southern Ukraine's Jews.

“save Jews” were limited to territories it completely controlled after the war began; almost no effort was made to save the large Jewish population of Hungarian occupied northern Transylvania. Approximately 135,000 Romanian Jews in northern Transylvania were eventually victims of the Final Solution.<sup>25</sup> When Romania extricated itself from the Axis in 1944 it drastically reversed many of its anti-Jewish policies.

Where does this leave the Romanian Orthodox Church? Ramet described the historical Romanian Church-State relationship as “simple co-optive-nationalist,” that is the hierarchy was co-opted and espoused a nationalist line endorsed by the regime.<sup>26</sup> For example, Patriarch Cristea supported King Carol’s decisions to overhaul the government in the late 1930s. Also, as early as January, 1938 selected Jewish properties were taken over by the state under the direction of the short lived National Christian Party government, including the Jewish Center in Cernăuți which was then turned over to the Metropolitan Church of Bukovina.<sup>27</sup> This trend of the Church supporting the government would continue during the war with the unfortunate result of the Church giving public moral support for the Romanian government’s wartime decisions.

The *Final Report* mentions efforts to rescue Jews by a few Romanian churchmen. For example, Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan allegedly asked Antonescu not to transfer authority of southern Transylvania’s Jews to the Nazis, and Patriarch Nicodim is said to

---

<sup>25</sup> See also Braham, ed., *The Destruction of the Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era* (The Rosenthal Institute for the Holocaust Studies Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Ramet, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 13-18.

<sup>27</sup> *Final Report*, p. 41. See also Ancel, *Contribuții*, pp. 65-84; Iancu, *Les Juifs*, pp. 303-313; and Shapiro, “Prelude,” pp. 72-74. This was quite exceptional; very few Jewish properties made their way into Orthodox Church ownership or Orthodox clergy ownership.

have appealed to the government to cancel the order for Jews to wear the yellow star.<sup>28</sup> However, there is no official documentation of Bălan's or Nicodim's request.<sup>29</sup> In fact, I have found official documents showing that Bălan and the Patriarch were supportive of Antonescu's policies and even declared that Antonescu was leading a "Holy War."<sup>30</sup> Bălan even personally went to Transnistria to bless Romania's troops and helped organize a mission in the area to "Christianize" the people living there.<sup>31</sup> This was the same place to which the Romanian Army deported more than 150,000 Romanian Jews and gypsies to put them in concentration camps where more than half of them eventually died.<sup>32</sup> Bălan and the Patriarch were supportive of Antonescu and the war until the very end of the regime. If they ever did try to help Jews during Antonescu's reign, such examples appear only as isolated exceptions and anything done for Jews as a whole must have been done in private because the record I have studied tells a different story.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This dissertation focuses on the Church from 1937-1945, especially on the Church during the War. It is not meant to be a comprehensive project on the entire Romanian Orthodox Church and is limited mostly to examining the central policy decisions by the

---

<sup>28</sup> *Final Report*, p. 301.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 301. These statements are based on Rabbi Alexandru Șafran's postwar account and unconfirmed by official documents.

<sup>30</sup> USHMM, RG 25.004M, Selected Records from the Romanian Information Service, Reel 244, p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>32</sup> These figures vary by study, and it is no surprise given the poor record keeping by the Romanian military and government. Tens of thousands of Roma were also deported to Transnistria. Also, most of the Ukrainian Jews already living in the area were massacred.

Holy Synod and Patriarch, the Church's relationship to the Romanian central government, and the general ideology of the Church during the war. Local examples found in the archives are used to show how these decisions played out in local Romanian parishes. Geographically the research only includes the Romanian Orthodox Church in areas under the Romanian central government's control. These areas are southern Transylvania, the Old Kingdom of Wallachia and Moldavia, Bessarabia, and Transnistria. This will exclude Northern Transylvania under the Hungarian regime where the Church operated under very different circumstances.

## Sources

One of the most significant ways in which this dissertation differs from prior studies is in the archival sources used. Current Romanian Holocaust and World War II studies have primarily used war time military records. These include judicial proceedings following the war, wartime journals, and government bureaucratic records.<sup>33</sup> Scholars further examined letters, telegrams, official orders, gendarme and police records, and other documents written by Romania's military leadership, the Antonescu government, and local police and military leaders relating to their actions against Jews, the Roma, and others during the war. Scholars including Butnaru, Ioanid, Shapiro,

---

<sup>33</sup> The war time military records have been examined by I.C. Butnaru, Radu Ioanid, Paul Shapiro, Jean Ancel, Randolph Braham, and Radu Florian: see I.C. Butnaru *The Silent Holocaust: Romania and its Jews* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Radu Ioanid *Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*; Paul Shapiro "The Jews of Chişinău (Kishinev): Romanian Reoccupation, Ghettoization, Deportation", Jean Ancel "The Romanian Campaigns of Mass Murder in Trans-Nistria, 1941-1942", Radu Florian "The Jassy Massacre of June 29-30, 1941: An Early Act of Genocide against the Jews", in Randolph Braham ed., *The Destruction of the Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*. Military records will continue to be important ongoing sources for scholars.



Ancel, Braham, and Florian have examined pogroms, massacres, the deportation actions carried out by the police, gendarmes, and military, and other violence against Jews in Romania and Ukraine.

Another group of sources comprises the collections of Jewish communities' records. Ioanid, Butnaru, Leon Volovici, Raphael Vago, Avigdor Shachan, Ayşe Gürsan-Salzman, and others have also included records from Romanian Jewish communities and Romanian Jewish diaries and memoirs, etc.<sup>34</sup> These records provide information about the experiences of Jews both individually and as communities during World War II. The records of the Federation of Jewish Communities (*Federația Uniunilor de Comunități Evreiești* or FUCE) and the records of the Jewish Center (*Centrala Evreilor* or CE) are a large part of current studies of Romania and the Holocaust.<sup>35</sup>

The research presented here will primarily use documents from the Romanian National Archives' *Fond Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor 1933-1944* [Collection: The Ministry of Cults and Arts]. The Ministry of Cults and Arts was the official government arm that oversaw and worked with the Romanian Orthodox Church, FUCE, and also had

---

<sup>34</sup> Leon Volovici "The Victim as Eyewitness: Jewish Intellectual Diaries during the Antonescu Period", Raphael Vago "The Situation of Romanian Jewry during the Antonescu Period: Reactions and Perceptions of the Yishuv", in Braham ed. *The Destruction*; Avigdor Shachan, *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria*, Shmuel Himelstein trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Ayşe Gürsan-Salzman, *The Last Jews of Rădăuți* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1993). The others to whom I am referring is the large group of authors who published works that were edited, compiled, and translated in the US, Canada, Europe, and Israel. These include third person narratives as well as first person narratives from journals, diaries, letters, etc. Also, several families have published relatives' accounts.

<sup>35</sup> FUCE was dismantled and replaced by the CE and was envisioned to be a Romanian version of the German *Judenrat*, although it was never able to function in the same way as the German *Judenrat* thanks to the efforts of Jewish leaders in the CE who constantly tried to resist the efforts of the Antonescu regime, and also because Romania's leaders wanted to keep the German Army and SS out of internal Romanian affairs as much as possible.

oversight over much of the policies and actions of the CE during its short existence.<sup>36</sup>

Based on my work in the archives many of these documents have never been used and in many cases never even been seen by scholars. Archivists were not sure exactly what I would find by looking at the Ministry of Cults and Arts' files. The second most important source for this dissertation comes from the Romanian Orthodox Church's Holy Synod's official magazine, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română: Revista Sfântului Sinod*.<sup>37</sup> This magazine was published in order to share Church news with all the Church's clergy, and by way of the clergy this news was to be passed on to the Church's membership. The magazine contained instructions for the clergy, Church policies and guidelines, articles on theological topics, and information that the Church's highest governing body saw as important to disseminate throughout the Church. The Synod's magazine also contains information regarding the meetings of the Holy Synod thus providing an important insight into why the Synod led the Church in certain directions and what decisions were made by the Synod for the entire Church.

The Romanian National Archives (ANR) has extensive records from the Ministry of Cults and Arts from the offices of the undersecretary of Cults, including correspondences with government officials, local diocese, and the Holy Synod and Patriarchate. Because the Orthodox Church was financed in large part through taxes many sort of everyday institutional activities for the Church were recorded by the Ministry of Cults: these included the hiring, firing, and training of priests, the distribution

---

<sup>36</sup> Previously the Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction, this ministry no longer functions.

<sup>37</sup> Trnsl: *The Romanian Orthodox Church: The Holy Synod's Magazine*. Some editions of this magazine are available at the National Archives and others are available at the Central University Library "Carol I" in Bucharest.

of charitable aid, the construction and maintenance of buildings or properties, special celebrations, etc. While not in any way complete, mainly due to very suspect record keeping at the time, this is a very substantial record.<sup>38</sup> The files also contain documents relating to religious laws enacted during the period such as Law Nr. 711 and other laws designed to restrict religious minorities.

The Ministry of Cults and Arts was responsible for religious oversight. It was the Romanian government's way of tracking those living within Romanian boundaries through their religious affiliations and activities. The Ministry of Cults had power to accept or revoke official church status for minority religions, essentially holding religious control over the entire country. This meant that items such as requests from Jews to establish new religious identities as Christians would pass through the Ministry of Cults' offices. The Ministry of Cults was responsible for keeping track of various churches' memberships, public religious celebrations, churches' properties, and other matters of all religions that it deemed related to public interest, and also was not to have an interest in any particular religion's internal affairs or practices.

The use of sources primarily from the central government of Romania and the Church means that some questions will have to wait for further scholarship to be answered in full, but until the Romanian Orthodox Church allows outside scholars to have free access into its archives this will continue to remain the case. These limitations do not diminish the research data garnered here and after examining these documents one

---

<sup>38</sup> Archive staff admitted after the war and during the communist period that the MCA section of the archive was poorly maintained and in some cases large groups of documents were damaged or lost during fires and flooding.

does not need a large imagination to see why the Church does not want an outside scholar looking at its documents from this period.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **The Romanian People's Church**

#### **The Guiding Light**

The Romanian Orthodox Church's course during World War II in many ways was a continuation of interwar trends. From 1937 to the 1944 coup against the Antonescu regime the Romanian Orthodox Church set itself apart ideologically from other confessions in Europe. This chapter will examine statements made by Orthodox Church's leaders during these years that best represent the ideological foundation for the Church's behavior until the fall of the Antonescu regime. Of course not every parishioner, priest, monk, and nun subscribed to every one of the Holy Synod's ideas found here in this chapter. The Church did not uniformly experience or interpret these paradigms and these should not be seen as the final say for every person in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Because the Church's leaders are considered the guiding light for the entire Church their ideas represented the general principles that undergirded the direction of the Church during these years.

#### **Nationalism**

Perhaps no idea or philosophy shaped the Romanian Orthodox Church more than nationalism. In a 1937 article regarding the political activities of priests in the Church the Synod made clear that nationalism is to be one of the Church's guiding principles. The nationalism advocated by Church leaders can be described as ethno-religious nationalism. Both religion and blood, or race, were the important factors that when combined made

the Romanian people or nation. On the first page the Church was referred to as “The National Church,” even crediting the National Church as “one of the essential factors” gluing the Romanian people “in an indestructible unity.” The Church was also credited as being one of the essential foundations for the Romanian people’s existence.<sup>39</sup>

Orthodox priests were described as “the first guardians of the Romanian language, soul, and conscious... The Romanian Orthodox clergy was and is the standard bearer for Orthodoxy and our nationalism from our people’s earliest history.”<sup>40</sup> They were instructed “that they must be guided by the principle of nationalism.”<sup>41</sup>

The Synod put Octavian Goga’s opinion on the matter in the November-December 1937 issue of its magazine.<sup>42</sup> Goga had been involved in Romanian nationalist activities in Transylvania under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and continued to be an active politician through the interwar period. He had just been appointed Prime Minister by the King on December 28, 1937. The magazine was sure to include the new Prime Minister’s opinion: “We believe foremost in the spiritual rebirth of Romanianism through the wonders and light of the Christian Church.” He continued, “It is a sacred responsibility for us to engrain our dominant ethnic hall-mark in the vast arena of public life from the top to the bottom.” The Synod noted its support for Goga’s view of ethnic nationalism as well as Romania’s Christian Nationalism but asked that the government

---

<sup>39</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 55, no. 3-4 (1937): p. 245. Father Popescu quoted from the Holy Synod’s latest meeting and discussion on the subject.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>42</sup> Octavian Goga, 1881-1938, was sentenced to death in absentia by the Austro-Hungarian authorities for his Romanian nationalist activities. He would go on to be a widely published author known for both his poetry and his political writings. He was a member of the Romanian Academy.

back its words with programs that would realize the Church's Christian Nationalist ambitions.<sup>43</sup> Upon Goga's death in May 1938 the Synod published a tribute to a man whose death they described as "a pain felt by the entire Romanian people." The tribute was written to show that "Octavian Goga was one of the Romanian Orthodox Church's most faithful sons." The strong bond between the state and the Church through the Ministry of Cults was attributed to Goga. He was also credited for trying to turn the Church into "a guide for the people in order to awake the Romanian national and Christian consciousness."<sup>44</sup>

In autumn 1938 the Romanian Orthodox Church celebrated what it considered to be an important milestone in both the history of the Church and the Romanian nation. The Synod included an article on the importance of the translation of the Bible into Romanian by Șerban Vodă in the late seventeenth century. The article said that Vodă "contributed in the highest degree to the preservation of the unity... of the Romanian Nation." The article further stated that the "unification of our speech by its printing sealed it as a true literary language... It will forever remain an act of great significance in our cultural history."<sup>45</sup> It is true that the translation of the Bible into vernacular is generally a celebrated event for most Christian groups but this was declared to be an event just as important for national history.

---

<sup>43</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 55, no. 11-12 (1937): p. 749.

<sup>44</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 56, no. 5-6 (1938): pp. 298-300.

<sup>45</sup> N.A. Gheorghiu, "Cronica Internă: 250 Ani de la Tipărirea Bibliei lui Șerban Vodă," BOR 56, no. 9-10 (1938): pp. 599-602.

One of the ways the Romanian Orthodox Church presented itself as the nation's Church was to partner with the King. The Church held a special service to bless the King every June 8 for several years leading up to the war. The Holy Synod made sure to remind the clergy of this event in its magazine's May-June 1939 issue. The King offered up a few words on the occasion that were published in the Synod's magazine. Speaking to the youth of the country the King stated "In your soul we wish to engrain an unwavering faith in the living force of Romanianism; we hope that every individual's work will contribute to the Nation's success." The article made it clear that the Church supported the King's message to the youth of the country by describing the scene of the King's special service as miraculous and heavenly. The King was described as a representative of Romania's soul and the symbol of him worshipping was a heaven sent blessing. The King's words were followed by a quote stated to be the gist of the King's speech: "Faith and work for King and Country!"<sup>46</sup>

In the fall of 1939 the Patriarch and the Synod offered instructions to the clergy following the assassination of Prime Minister Călinescu. The guidance briefly noted the dangers of following extremist views as well as the need to promote the general welfare and public order of the nation. The article described the Patriarch as "the spiritual father of the Romanian people" whose great love for his country was intertwined with evangelical inspiration.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps this was a reminder to the clergy to avoid groups that were not specifically endorsed by the Patriarch.

---

<sup>46</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 57, no. 5-6 (1939): pp. 359-360.

<sup>47</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 57, no. 9-10 (1939): p. 597.



The Patriarch described one of the ways the Church was to serve the Romanian people and nation. On October 8, 1939 he delivered a sermon in Stoenеști-Dâmbovița that the magazine suggested be read throughout the Church to all the members. The main message of the sermon was summed up as “The Church is the people’s school, founded by God.” After recalling the importance of small local churches in Romania’s history the Patriarch stated: “Here in these little churches the Romanian language and nationality were built and those humble priests and meek monks were the builders.”<sup>48</sup> Is it any wonder then that Romanian nationalism was to be a guiding principle for the Church? This nationalist revision of history by His Holiness the Patriarch promoted Romanian nationalism and served the Church at the same time. According to the Patriarch the reason that the Romanian nation and language existed is that the Orthodox Church created them.

One of Romania’s most prominent cultural figures of the time was Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972). Crainic was educated at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Bucharest and would later serve as a theology professor there and at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău. He was very active politically and worked closely with the Iron Guard during the 1930s. He served as the General Secretary for the Ministry of Cults during the Iron Guard’s brief coalition with Antonescu; Crainic then served as Antonescu’s propaganda minister. He was an avowed Romanian nationalist, an anti-Semite, an advocate for fascism, one of Romania’s most popular interwar authors, and generally one of the most influential public figures for the interwar period and during the

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 605-606.

war. His work probably best captures the ideas that the Church generally tried to promote and Crainic stood as an important link between the government and the Church. The Synod included an eight page tribute to his work on the occasion of Crainic's selection to the Romanian Academy and his fiftieth birthday in 1940. The accolades given to Crainic in the article indicate the kind of ideas about Orthodox Christianity and Romanian Nationalism that were the guiding principles for the Holy Synod: "Celebrating fifty years of life Professor Nichifor Crainic can be appreciated fully as a champion of Christian and nationalist ideas, of Orthodox and ethnic specificity, and of our spiritual and cultural life."<sup>49</sup>

After the Iron Guard was ousted and the country came firmly under Marshall Ion Antonescu's control in January 1941 the Holy Synod felt the need to emphasize again what the Romanian Orthodox Church stood for. It did so in a twenty-nine page article entitled "What does the Orthodox Church Represent Today?" It began stating that the title question needed to be answered for all the faithful children of the Orthodox Church.

The article went on:

We live in a truly new century, a century of spiritual revolution... An epoch of politico-social totalitarianism, of racism, of "integral" nationalism, of a directed economy and a standardized way of life, of fashions, of new norms and senses; our time tries to work out these traditions, systems, and concepts in order to prove their actuality, validity, and strength.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Teodor M. Popescu, "Cinstirea Profesorului Nichifor Crainic," BOR 58, no. 7-8 (1940): p. 532. Teodor M. Popescu was the dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University in Bucharest. He often wrote articles for the Synod and the Patriarch as he was on the publishing/editing committee for BOR.

<sup>50</sup> Teodor M. Popescu, "Ce Reprezintă azi Biserica Ortodoxă?" BOR 59, no. 1-2 (1941): p. 10. These were supposed to be signs of a new wonderful age. While the quote might sound terrible to our ears now at the time it was meant to remind everyone how wonderful all these things were.

The Synod affirmed the importance of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the Romanian people stating that it is the “people’s Church, and that means first and foremost that it is the foremost Church in the people’s midst and a national institution.” As such an institution the “Orthodox Church has honestly fulfilled and will fulfill a popular and national Christian mission... for the Church this constitutes a great national recognition and honor.”<sup>51</sup> The article went on to reaffirm many of the Romanian nationalist historical points of view from earlier publications: the Church was indeed the birthplace of the Romanian people and the Romanian people and the Church had grown together. The article plainly stated that “the Church did nationalism.” Accordingly it was stated that in fact “in the lives of its [the Church’s] faithful national and religious sentiment have almost fused themselves together.”<sup>52</sup>

More than two years later during the war the Synod continued to beat the nationalist drum. The notes published by the Synod on a conference held in May 1943 at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest made it clear that the Church continued to view itself through nationalist lenses.<sup>53</sup> The Church is referred to as “the National Church,” “the People’s Church,” “the National Orthodox Church,” and “the people’s true religious educator,” just to give several examples. It also explained that the Church had a high calling to serve the people’s well being and the flowering of the nationalist state.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> The Synod republished portions of the conference from the Faculty’s publication in BOR 61, no. 7-9.

<sup>54</sup> Deacon Gheorghe I. Moiesecu, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 61, no. 7-9 (1943): pp. 427-433. Highlights from a conference held on May 14, 1943 at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest.

At a similar conference in Sofia two weeks later a Romanian Orthodox theology professor noted that the Romanian Orthodox Church had given national life and culture to the Romanian State.<sup>55</sup>

Continuing to push these ideas forward the Synod's final issue for 1943 included a thirty page article entitled "Christianity and Romanian Culture."<sup>56</sup> Given the precedent set by Church's leaders it is not hard to see where this article was headed. It states:

So it is that the Christian religion is not only one of the essential features of the Romanian nation, it is in fact one of its *existential* features. Without this feature, the Romanian nation could not even be defined, not just in its being and manifestations, but not even in its *origin*. We were born as a people under the Christian seal and we lived and acted in history under this Christian seal. This is not only a simple affirmation of circumstance good enough for teaching and ecclesiastical manuals; rather, it is an elemental and inalterable historic truth. We are one of few peoples who *do not have a date* for their conversion to Christianity. *We were born Christian*; the Christian essence itself is genuinely and organically part of our ethnic structure.<sup>57</sup>

The article then goes on and recounts Romania's mythological history from the conquering of Dacia by Roman Emperor Trajan through to the modern era. It asserts Romanian culture, language, and ethnicity all stem from the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>58</sup> The article served as a strong reminder to the Church that the Church's position remained staunchly supportive of ethnic Romanian nationalism. Under the

---

<sup>55</sup> Father Vasile G. Sibiecu, *ibid.*, p. 36. Highlights from a conference held in Sofia on May 28, 1943.

<sup>56</sup> Although the article is titled "Christianity and Romanian Culture" what it really refers to is the Romanian Orthodox Church and not Christianity in general.

<sup>57</sup> Ioan G. Savin, "Creștinismul și Cultura Română," BOR 61, no. 10-12 (1943): p. 489; italics in the original.

<sup>58</sup> At one point in the article the author confesses that some of the information is not really supported by historical documents but that it was all true whether or not documented.

umbrella of nationalism two other ideas were popular among Church leaders that would play a role in Church policy.

### **Anti-Communism**

The first is anti-communism. The Romanian Orthodox Church took a clear stance against communism as a threat to the Romanian nation. While nationalism was a subject often disseminated to the clergy and the rest of the Church via the Holy Synod's official magazine, anti-communism appears far less frequently on the magazine's pages.

However, the lack of anti-communist articles does not mean the Church's zeal against communism was any less fervent than its zeal for nationalism. When expressing support for the war the Patriarch and the Synod often pointed out the persecution of the Orthodox Church at the hands of the Bolsheviks. When speaking on the Russian Orthodox Church Romanian Church leaders noted that Russia was spiritually lost under the Bolshevik regime. The Soviet occupation of Bessarabia proved to Romanian Orthodox leaders that many of the Church's fears of communism were well founded since the Romanian Orthodox Church was in fact persecuted.

Best capturing the Church's anti-communist views is an article from the January-April 1942 issue of the Synod's magazine entitled "The Antichristian Communist." In the thirty-eight page article Teodor M. Popescu gave nearly the Church's entire argument against communism. The subject is introduced through an explanation of the war. Popescu explained that "this was the first time in humanity's history that a war, a war that is not necessarily a religious war, will decide among other things whether man will have

or will not have the right and the liberty to believe in God.” He then called Romania’s foe “an atheist army, the army of an antichristian revolution that wants to remove Christianity from the world and make it communist.”<sup>59</sup> Further elaborating on the subject he observed:

There were many persecutions and there were many religious wars, but none of them until now have ever presented such a grave problem to a church or a religion, not only of their own faith, rather of faith itself, of anyone’s faith in God. Communism presents this problem to all believers indifferent of their confession or rite, this problem of faith itself that it fights in all its forms and elements as no one has ever fought until now. Christianity has suffered many persecutions for its faith on the part of other religions... Because they believed their faiths to be better than Christianity the persecutors forced Christians to change their religion... But here is the evidence of the perverseness and gravity of the Bolshevik persecution which tries not just to replace or destroy another faith, but rather any belief in God; not just destroy another religion, rather any religion; not just destroy a foreign divinity, but divinity itself: To destroy faith, religion, and God indifferent of the name, cult, dogma, and religious practices. Bolshevism does not affirm or protect anything religious; it only negates and destroys... The situation is so difficult in the totally atheist Bolshevik empire, where the adversarial persecutor’s power is... a destructive religio-moral nihilism, spiritual chaos, and expulsion from the world and men’s minds of any idea of God: it is the ban of any cult, forbiddance of any faith and religious practice, and pure and simple prohibition of religion. Not just the absence of religion or the absence of faith, rather it is antireligious and a universal system of militant atheism... [Communism] sees religion as its greatest adversary... In truth, as great as Bolshevism’s desire and haste are to make the world communist it is as determined to completely terminate religion... Religion is the communist attack’s first objective. Religion’s destruction, it is said, will assure Bolshevism’s triumph.<sup>60</sup>

Popescu went on to provide examples by quoting Marx, Lenin, Yaroslavsky, Yagoda and other communist thinkers to prove communism’s hatred for religion calling their work the work of Satan.

---

<sup>59</sup> Teodor M. Popescu, “Anticreștinismul Comunist,” BOR 60, no. 1-4 (1942): p. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

Popescu devoted seven pages to highlighting persecutions perpetrated against Christians: “Arrests, imprisonment, deportation, exile, pits, concentration camp, hard labor, mutilation, murder, along with a sadistic campaign that includes all kinds of injustices, offenses, threats, privations, tortures and sufferings.”<sup>61</sup> He also provided specific examples of the persecution following the first paragraph that generally explained what kind of persecution Christians suffered under communism. One case was Archbishop Andronic of Perm whose mutilated body was carried through the streets and dumped in a river. Another was Roman Catholic Bishop Budkievici whose legs were broken to put him into a kneeling position so that he could be shot in the head. He also included stories of priests deported to camps in Siberia.

Popescu also elaborated on communism’s antireligious propaganda system: “In practice, the methods of making people atheist are primarily seen used on children and teenagers, on workers, in schools and in the army, in other words the people of tomorrow.”<sup>62</sup> He described the Bolshevik school as a made-up institution whose “role is not so much to instruct and educate children for life as it is to instruct and educate them for communism and that this can only be done through atheism.”<sup>63</sup> He described a monstrous education system that turned children against their parents’ religiosity or took children from their parents to ensure that the children were taught to be antireligious. He also gave the example of the Komsomol as an integral part of the propaganda aimed at the country’s youth in coordination with the education system.

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 21. The section on persecution runs from the bottom of page 20 to page 27.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 29. The section on propaganda runs from the bottom of page 27 to page 40.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

Every Soviet institution according to Popescu had become a site for antireligious propaganda. The army, the press, the theatre, the cinema, literature, the radio, television, and music all served the antireligious propaganda machine. He called the mass of written propaganda against religion a flood. He said that he wanted his description of antireligious propaganda to serve as a reminder “for the great and terrible danger it meant for the Church.”<sup>64</sup> Essentially the antichurch was the church of the Soviet Union. The entire system was organized to provide people an alternative to religion. Popescu’s conclusion was that the Soviet persecution of religion was worse than the persecution of Christians suffered under the Roman Empire.

So it comes as no surprise that until the 1944 Soviet occupation any statement from the Romanian Orthodox Church about communism, even tangentially, portrayed socialism, communism, and anything associated with these terms in the most negative light possible. The Church, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, fully supported the war against the Soviet Union for this very reason. In hindsight people who were devoutly religious did have reason to fear communist or socialist states as these states’ record on religious liberty was and continues to be disappointing at best and frightening at worst. But was the Church really anticommunist just for the sake of religious liberty as Popescu’s lengthy argument suggested? That certainly contributed to the matter, but for Orthodox Church leaders there was a problem plaguing the world that was worse than communism and was also the cause of communism itself- the Jews.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 35.



## **Anti-Semitism**

Because the Church was supportive of ethnic nationalism, it was also supportive of excluding groups that did not fit into popular notions of the Romanian nation. According to the Church's leaders the most dangerous non-ethnic Romanians were the Jews. For example, Popescu believed that the foundations for communism's antichristian attacks, practices, and traditions were prepared "as always by the Jews, Christianity's permanent adversaries, the well known creators and directors of all antichristian streams." He added later that communism in Russia was "instigated by Judaism in order to organize an atheist state to be rid of religion and the Church once and for all."<sup>65</sup>

Anti-Semitism had been quite popular in the decades leading up to the war and the Church's leaders made sure that everyone knew that this was the Church's official stance regarding Jews. Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Ardeal (1882-1955) was one of the most powerful and influential Church leaders during the war and his alleged help to prevent the deportation of Romanian Jews is surprising given that he published an article on freemasonry that included a section deriding Jews. The article was titled "A Study of Freemasonry" but should have been titled "How Jews are using Freemasonry to Infiltrate and Ruin Romania" as this was the gist of the so-called study. Bălan launched into his anti-Jewish remarks after he explained freemasonry's purported origins and purposes. He explained that while the Masonic lodges in Romania pretend to be nationalist they were in fact led by Jews like all the major Masonic lodges in the world. While Bălan admitted that Christians were also freemasons he emphasized that they took all their commands

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

from a central committee of Jews in Chicago. According to Bălan the “most important mission of Freemasonry is to glorify the Jewish race... then to support the Jewish race in order eliminate national boundaries.”<sup>66</sup>

Bălan explained why Freemasonry’s Jewish leadership was so dangerous. He stated that “all of the extreme left’s communist ideas were prepared in lodges and applied by freemasons. The same can be said for all antichristian ideas... All the most important communist leaders were Jews and freemasons.” He also revealed what he believed to be freemasonry’s true purpose: “The establishment of a world republic led by freemasons, in other words led by Jews.”<sup>67</sup> He would go on to describe Romania’s freemasons as following this antichristian path. The reason that freemasonry was against the Romanian Orthodox Church and Christianity in general was that it was led by Jews seeking a new quasi-religious world order. Bălan also declared that freemasonry’s new world order led by Jews would be dangerous for the Romanian nation because that same world order would not have national boundaries.

Bălan urged the Church to combat freemasonry. One way to battle freemasonry was to pursue a persistent campaign in the press and by word of mouth to reveal the allegedly horrible truths about the organization. Another was to demand that Romanian intellectuals abandon freemasonry to join what he called “The Romanian Orthodox Fraternity” and isolate those who refused to leave freemasonry. This included denying funeral rites for those who were freemasons. The Church’s priesthood was to teach the

---

<sup>66</sup> Metropolitan Nicolae of Ardeal, “Studiu Asupra Francomasoneriei,” BOR 55, no. 3-4 (1937): pp. 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

people to avoid freemasonry and to expose political candidates who belonged to freemason lodges. The Holy Synod was to lobby the parliament to make a law to disband Romania's freemason lodges.<sup>68</sup>

Not just the Church's own publication carried such inflammatory statements; the entire country's press published the Patriarch's feelings about Jews. In early September 1937 he gave this statement to the Bucharest daily, *Curentul*, and it was eventually republished in most of Romania's major papers and journals:

The Jews have caused an epidemic of corruption and social unrest. They monopolize the press, which, with the aid of foreign help, permanently flays all the spiritual treasures of the Romanians. One feels like crying with pity for the good Romanian nation, whose very marrow has been sucked from its bones by the Jews.

To defend ourselves is a national and patriotic duty, not antisemitic. Lack of measures to get rid of this plague would indicate that we are lazy cowards who let ourselves be carried alive to our graves.

Why should the Jews enjoy the privilege of living like parasites on our backs? Why should we not get rid of these parasites that suck Romanian Christian blood? It is logical and holy to react against them.<sup>69</sup>

It should come as no surprise that the *Final Report* by the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania characterized the prewar Church as having "strong anti-Semitic leanings both in its senior hierarchy and among local clergy."<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-22. As a member of the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Nicolae could personally try to engage in having the Church follow through on these policies.

<sup>69</sup> From Arhivele Naționale ale României, Ministerul Propagandei Naționale [The Romanian National Archives, Ministry of National Propaganda]: Informații [Information], folder 602. Arhivele Naționale ale României will hereafter be abbreviated ANR. Ministerul Propagandei Naționale will hereafter be abbreviated MPN. It appears on page 8 of *The Churchmen* volume 151, September 15, 1937. The entire September 15, 1937 edition was in the Archive's same folder. The quote appeared in the newspaper *Curentul* on August 19, 1937 and the Romanian version is found in the folder mentioned above. The translation used here is from *The Churchmen*.

<sup>70</sup> *Final Report*, p. 36.

The wartime Church leadership continued to encourage the same negative attitude towards Jews. Popescu's "What does the Orthodox Church Represent Today?" contained an important declaration on the Church's attitude in winter 1941. According to the article many atheist, foreign, and other antichristian ideas that threatened the people and the people's Church were being spread by Jews.<sup>71</sup> He even used the trope of the wandering Jew as an example for supporting this argument. Popescu noted that in spite of Jewish sources fanning anti-Christianity the Church had overcome these terrible philosophies.<sup>72</sup>

On March 28, 1941 the Romanian government announced that it would begin expropriating urban Jewish properties. Orthodox theologian turned propaganda minister Nichifor Crainic gave an explanation to the press as to why such action was good for the country:

I would like to call your undivided attention to the most important event from the last week, and that is this: the decree-law of the expropriation of Jewish urban property.

For Romanian life this event is of epic importance. It comes to integrate an operation that had already begun through the decree-law of the expropriation of Jewish rural properties.

Through these two reforms signed off by the capital General Antonescu has become the supreme leader of all Romanian nationalism. From Eminescu to A.C. Cuza and on through to the new generation, the rural and urban expropriation of Jewish properties has constituted the foundation of the program of nationalist conquest. The battle for this was harder than can be put into words. The battle recounts the individual sufferings and tragedies of so many fighters who were up against the force of formerly democratic parties that had become, through freemasonry and business, complicit with the Jews. The fight was long and bloody thanks to the nearly all powerful international Jewish press.

---

<sup>71</sup> Teodor M. Popescu, "Ce Reprezintă azi Biserica Ortodoxă?" p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

His explanation began to sound like Nazi justifications for taking farmland from foreigners:

Through his reforms, motivated splendidly by Minister Mihail Antonescu, the State's Leader has given satisfaction to Romania's nationalist martyrs. The rural expropriation of Jewish properties has resulted in that the ancestral heartland has become a property exclusively for the Romanian people. The falling of ancestral land in the hands of strangers was a violation of the natural law by which God had grown every people in their own land. The money of foreigners cannot justify the dispossession of the Romanian people and the alienation of the patria. Although this money was squeezed from Romanian blood through well known methods, General Antonescu has restored it to those who gave it up in order for this estranged land to come back into the sacred body of our patria. This is not an act of justice; rather, it is an act of clemency and generosity to the foreigners.

Crainic then applied the principle of taking back the heartland to taking back the city:

The same principle is the basis for the urban expropriation made in the last week. The Romanianization of the cities is a problem of everyday life for our people. The city synthesizes a region and the country. It is the political, cultural, economic, and social center. It should be the image of the most faithful people that have ever existed... The Judaized city has exercised an unrighteous influence on the whole country. The urban expropriation of Jewish properties, with its wonderful consequences in all areas of national activity, will give our cities back the great destiny that they should have among the Romanian people. This reform has significance more powerful than any other because it is focused on the leading center of all national life.

In this statement Crainic, whose other job was to educate future Orthodox priests, captured the essence of the Church's anti-Semitic views. For the Church anti-Semitism was both a spiritual idea and a nationalist idea. Because the Church conflated ethnic Romanian nationalism with Romanian Orthodox Christianity a threat to either one of these was a threat to both. Therefore the Jewish threat was conceived as being unrighteous and antinational at the same time. Because the Jews were seen as foreigners their presence in Romania was a threat to Romanian nationalism and therefore a threat to

Romanian Orthodox Christianity. The praise given to Hitler and Mussolini emphasized the fact that the Church's leaders were fully supportive of ethno-nationalist policies that Romania's own leader, General Ion Antonescu, also supported:

It is necessary for us to say that these basic reforms, which give back rights and dignity to the Romanian people, were sensibly done by the new European Order. But it was only until yesterday that attempts at vindicating Romanian nationalism were tragically taken away thanks to the international Jewish power grafted on western democracies, a power that exercised real terror over the country's governments. They were encircled vassals to this Judeo-democracy, and Romanian nationalism could not achieve anything beyond the Judeo-democratic will.

Today we live in a completely different epoch. International Judaism and its allied democratic forces were smitten back to earth by the new paradigm and power of the Führer Adolf Hitler and Il Duce Benito Mussolini. In European history this fact is identical with the spiritual continental detoxification from ancient Judaism. Thanks to this victory, Romania is free to uproot and remove these gooks from our own patria.

Let us remark what a happy coincidence it is that at the moment when at the congress in Frankfurt... the great doctrinaire of German antisemitism, Alfred Rosenberg, laid the foundations for the Institute of Anti-Jewish Studies General Antonescu responded with the capital reform of expropriating urban Jewish properties.

I do not believe that a true Romanian exists who does not subscribe with all the fire in his heart to the policy of integral nationalism of the State's Leader. The old nationalist warriors see their most daring and tenacious ideas crowned in this policy. The nationalist youth must see the roads freed and wide open in this policy... A man raised a sword and cut off thousands of heads from the dragon that was spilling this country's blood. And think young warriors: it was done without spilling a drop of blood!<sup>73</sup>

In 1943 the Holy Synod published an article entitled "Impediments to Marriage and Motives for Divorce." In the article the Church explains the differences between canonic impediments to marriage and legal impediments. One of the canonic impediments to marriage in the Church was a mixed religious marriage. In other words,

---

<sup>73</sup> Nichifor Crainic, declaration to the press, ANR MPN Informații, folder 864, pp. 1-2.

an Orthodox Christian could not marry in the Church unless the other party was an Orthodox Christian. The article singled out Jews as one of the religious parties that should not be permitted to marry an Orthodox Christian. By contrast the Romanian civil code did not prevent mixed marriages between Orthodox Christians and Jews. Therefore the Synod proposed that the civil code be adjusted to prohibit Jews from marrying Orthodox Christians based on the Church's canons.<sup>74</sup> The Church also requested that the civil code grant divorce to those whose spouse had left Orthodox Christianity after they had been married in the Church. Conversion to Judaism was cited as an example. Based on the fact that Orthodox canons prevented Orthodox Christians from marrying Jews in the first place it was argued that should a spouse abandon Christianity for Judaism then the marriage should be allowed to end in divorce.<sup>75</sup>

Nationalism, anticommunism, and anti-Semitism were all interconnected principles promoted by the Romanian Orthodox Church during the war. Because the Church promoted ethnic nationalism, those who did not fit into the category of ethnic Romanians were viewed by the Church's leaders as foreigners. The Church's ethnic nationalism was intertwined with anti-Semitism. According to Orthodox Church leaders Jews were dangerous to the nation and therefore to the Church as well because Church membership was essential to being Romanian. And because Jews were considered to be communism's founders and leaders, anticommunism was also an important principle for the Church. Communism, according to the Church's leaders, was antinational and

---

<sup>74</sup> Father Dr. Gheorghe Soare, "Impedimentele la Căsătorie și Motivele de Divorț," BOR 61, no.4-6 (1943): pp. 234-235.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

therefore a threat to the Romanian people and the Romanian people's Church. While most of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Church's leaders rested on ethno-nationalist principles the Church could also find canonic reasons that Jews were to be kept away from Orthodox Christians as in the case of marriage.



## **Chapter 2:**

### **The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Government**

#### **Government Preference**

Because the Romanian authorities were the main perpetrators of the Holocaust and other war time atrocities on Romanian territory the Romanian Orthodox Church's relationship to the Romanian government is the key to understanding the Church during the war. The Romanian government's heavy involvement in the country's various religions began before the war and continued through the course of the war. The Romanian government's overall plan was to place the Romanian Orthodox Church in a position of power within the country and to reduce the role of other Christian confessions and religions as well as eliminate religious freedoms. It did this in a series of ad-hoc laws that began in earnest in 1937, became stricter during the war, and was reversed only when Romania was forced to switch sides at the end of the war.<sup>76</sup> The Church repaid the government with tremendous loyalty and support for its policies.

The role of the Ministry of Cults and Arts, or Ministry of Cults, is important for understanding the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the

---

<sup>76</sup> The specific details of these laws are covered in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also provides more information on Romania's minority Christian confessions. The Romanian Orthodox Church according to the 1930 census made up more than 70% of the population, with nearly another 15% of the population belonging to the Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church. No other Church or religion represented more than five percent of the population. Because of the transfer of Northern Transylvania to Hungary during World War II the Romanian Orthodox Church represented a much higher percentage of the Romanian population in Romania during the war. Nearly half of Romania's minority Christian religious groups lived in Northern Transylvania. A majority of Greek and Roman Catholics in Romania were and continue to be ethnic Hungarians. Judaism represented nearly five percent of the population and Islam represented only about one percent.

Romanian government.<sup>77</sup> The Ministry of Cults exercised “the right of supervision and regulation over all religious cults and their locations and associations.”<sup>78</sup> As for the Romanian Orthodox Church the Ministry of Cults’ Department of Cults was to approve the Church’s budget, oversee its financial dealings, work with the Holy Synod and the National Church Congress for the election of metropolitans and bishops, and supervise religious education. The Ministry was to supervise and regulate any private association with a constituted religious character, any religious school, and employees of religions. The Ministry had a dedicated team of inspectors with “recognized theological competence” to follow through on enforcement of all laws regarding the country’s religions.<sup>79</sup> Through such broadly described powers the Ministry of Cults was able to reach into Romanians’ everyday religious experiences. The Ministry of Cults also was to keep track of the religious identity of each Romanian inhabitant. Religious identity was part of the way people were identified by the government in official documents. The

---

<sup>77</sup> The name was later changed to the Ministry of National Culture and Cults on May 31, 1941. I generally refer to the Ministry of Cults and Arts and the Ministry of National Culture and Cults as the Ministry of Cults for the sake of space and to distinguish it from the Ministry’s other functions related to the oversight of the arts and education. Today within religious circles it is usually referred to simply as the Ministry of Cults. Within the Ministry there were several departments with responsibilities for things such as art, education, and theatres, besides religion. The Department of Cults within the Ministry of Cults and Arts was a redundant bureaucratic title for the department that fell under the responsibility of the Minister of Cults and even official documents often were titled as being from the Ministry of Cults rather than the Department of Cults. However, they all served under the same Minister and so I cannot nor will I distinguish the Department of Cults from the Ministry except when necessary to distinguish lower officials’ responsibilities from their superiors or if a particular document distinguished the Department from the Ministry.

<sup>78</sup> Ion I. Nedelescu, ed., *Legislația Statului Român: Decrete-legi, comunicate, deciziuni ministerial, jurnale ale Consiliului de Miniștri* [The Law of the Romanian State: Decree-laws, communiqués, ministerial decisions, the journals of the Council of Ministers] vol. 10, (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului “Universul”, 1941), pp. 7-8. The Ministry’s organization was explained in pages 7-31.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27. This idea of recognized theological competence was apparently a euphemism that meant Orthodox clergy as the only identified inspectors were in fact Orthodox clergy or theologians.

government essentially could do whatever it wanted with regards to religion through the broad powers of the Ministry of Cults.

The first major step towards putting the Romanian Orthodox Church into a position of power was the issuance of Decision Number 4.781 of 1937 *Concerning the Interdictions of Sects and Religious Associations*. This very lengthy piece of intrusive legislation banned a large swath of religious organizations that were deemed to be against the government and dangerous to the public.<sup>80</sup> Under these criteria the law also specifically named a dozen religious organizations that were considered to be the worst offenders.<sup>81</sup> Another large portion of the law provided a bureaucratic process for religious associations to try and continue to function in the country. The law allowed certain non-Orthodox confessions to function but under greater bureaucratic restrictions.

This law was changed only slightly by Decision Number 26208/938 on July 11, 1939 to eliminate redundancies in the law's language.<sup>82</sup> It remained one of the standard religious laws throughout the war and would prove to be disastrous for certain churches. One of the Antonescu regime's early decisions took the law "Concerning the Interdictions of Sects and Religious Associations" further by passing Ministry of Cults' decision number 42352 in September 1940. Decision 42352 gave the Romanian

---

<sup>80</sup> DECIZIUNEA Nr. 4.781 din 1937 PRIVITOARE LA INTERZICEREA SECTELOR ȘI ASOCIAȚIUNILOR RELIGIOASE [Decision nr. 4.781 from 1937 Concerning the Interdictions of Sects and Religious Associations], ANR Ministerul Cultelor: Direcția de Studii [The Ministry of Cults: Studies Office], 1937, folder 1, page 1 of the booklet, also see Article I. Ministerul Cultelor: Direcția de Studii hereafter is abbreviated MCDS. It became law upon its publication in the *Official Monitor* [*Monitorul Oficial* in Romanian] number 93 on April 21, 1937. The law in its entirety is discussed in Chapter 3. The details on which religious groups were banned and why they were banned is discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 2. A full list is found in Chapter 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Cults committee hearing on July 11, 1939, ANR MCDS 1939-1, p. 1.

Orthodox Church a special status and allowed only a few other confessions to practice in the country.<sup>83</sup> Such confessions allowed were deemed “historic cults.” The classification as a historic cult was meant to point out that the groups had been in Romania long enough to be truly part of national Romanian history. The main rights of these Churches included the right to assemble in public and in private, the right to raise funds for their support, the right to publish their religious literature, the right to own property, and the right to observe their general religious practices.

The new law also had an article regarding Judaism stating the “Romanian State observes only the de facto existence of the Mosaic confession.” In other words the government recognized Judaism as an existing religion but not as one that had the rights of the other confessions given the legal right to practice. The Romanian government stated in one breath that it recognized the existence of Judaism but not its legality. On the same day decision 42353 and another unnumbered decision were also published to clarify what the new law meant.<sup>84</sup> Judaism was left out because the government considered the country a Christian nation, and therefore it could not be considered a part of Romania’s historical heritage.

Such pieces of legislation demonstrated the importance of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the government. The closeness of the relationship between the

---

<sup>83</sup> Copy of Decision no. 42352, ANR MCDS 1939-1, p. 18. See Chapter 3 for the full list.

<sup>84</sup> The Ministry of Cults and Arts, Decision 42353 and following decision, September 9, 1940, ANR MCDS 1939-1, pp. 22-23. More on these decisions see the chapter on the Church’s anti-Sectarian campaign. It was probably decision 42354, but the numbering system for these decisions was not always adhered to and so I am not sure that was the case since it did not appear on the document; 42354 was mentioned in a subsequent document as being published at the same time and I assume this was the decision to which the Ministry’s letters on the decision referred.

Church and state was further evidenced by Patriarch Miron Cristea's service in the government. From February 11, 1938 until his death on March 6, 1939 Patriarch Cristea served under the King as the prime minister. Yet, the Patriarch's term as minister was regarded as a puppet regime under the King's rule and Cristea was considered merely a mouthpiece for the King.

During Cristea's tenure laws against criticizing the country and its leaders led to arrests. A new policy under these laws was to arrest non-Orthodox clergy for publicly criticizing the Romanian Orthodox Church. In March 1938, Roman-Catholic Father Iosif Lörincz was prosecuted for expressing "a hostile attitude" against an Orthodox priest "in front of the Romanian Church." He was already being monitored by the police for a previous arrest for "offending the nation." He lost all of his pay for several months.<sup>85</sup> Another Roman-Catholic priest, Father Eduard Szell, was arrested for "offending the nation" in Voievodeasa Village in March 1939 but acquitted later in the spring.<sup>86</sup> The policy continued under the King's rule and under Antonescu's early rule.

In late November and December 1939 Greek Catholic Father Gheorghe Stâncă was arrested and tried on charges that he "was a leader of continuous hate against Orthodoxy." He was accused of leading an anti-Orthodox campaign from as early as October 20, 1939. On December 2, 1939 he allegedly preached in public that Orthodoxy represented people who had lost their way from Greek-Catholicism even saying that

---

<sup>85</sup> A report from a court in Miercurea-Ciuc to the Ministry of Cults and Arts from 1940, ANR Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor 1933-1944, 1940, folder 158, p. 4. Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor 1933-1944 will hereafter be abbreviated MCA 1933-1944. Father Lörincz was from Ditrău Village in Ciuc county.

<sup>86</sup> Certificate sent to the Ministry of Cults from Infantry Div. 8-a's Military Tribunal in Cernăuți on May 2, 1939, ANR MCA 1933-1944, folder 158, p. 36.

“those who are Orthodox are like Satan.”<sup>87</sup> Calvinist Priest Eugen Arkosy was fined 2500 lei for “making agitations dangerous to the public order.”<sup>88</sup> In March 1940, Roman-Catholic Priest Bonaventura Romila was arrested for a sermon held on February 4, 1940. He allegedly “made affirmations that offended the Orthodox Cult in front of the population and school children using expressions that lacked respect with regards to His Holiness the Patriarch.”<sup>89</sup>

Several important points are elucidated by these examples. The first is that the government was monitoring what local clergy said in their sermons. This meant that essentially all public religious meetings were subject to censorship. The second is that the police arrested clergy caught making antigovernment or anti-Orthodox statements, and in some cases making statements that could be misconstrued as belonging to either category. The result was the stifling of religious freedom. There are only a few examples in the archives. This could mean that the records were lost or not preserved but more likely it means that after making examples out of a few bold preachers the rest of the non-Orthodox clergy understood that they should keep their opinions to themselves. Third, the Orthodox Church was to be left alone by other confessions. The Orthodox Church was above criticism and protected in the same way that the government was protected.

---

<sup>87</sup> Letters and reports from the Ministry of the Interior General Police Cabinet on Gheorghe Stâncă’s arrest and trial, ANR MCA 1933-1944, folder 158, pp. 26-30. Page 30 outlines the charges in greater detail. He was sentenced sometime in early 1940.

<sup>88</sup> A letter from the Ministry of the Interior General Police Cabinet to the Minister of Cults, February 3, 1940, ANR MCA 1933-1944, folder 158, p. 25.

<sup>89</sup> From the Ministry of National Defense to the Minister of Cults in March 1940, ANR MCA 1933-1944, folder 158, pp. 2-3. The documents are labeled SECRET.

The Romanian government under Antonescu also had plans to use the Romanian Orthodox Church to further the regime's goals. General Radu Rosetti wrote a public letter to Antonescu on April 11, 1941 explaining why religion was important to the regime's goals and specifically to the regime's racial goals. Minister Rosetti argued that because the religions [cults] in the country were bearers of the culture of the country and the culture of the country was found in the country's "deepest ethnic roots, in other words in the people's national character," that the Ministry served an essential and important function in improving the nation.<sup>90</sup> Based on these suggestions the Antonescu government worked to expand the Romanian Orthodox Church through the Ministry of Cults. On September 6, 1940 a plan entitled "The Development and Working Plan Regarding the Activity of the Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts" was prepared by the Ministry of Cults. It was a two year plan that in September 1942 was presented to Antonescu in order to give him the results of the plan's actions. In the beginning of the report Antonescu is quoted as saying of the Church "the Romanian state today has full trust in the people's Church, which [the Romanian state] is beloved by none more than the Church." The report continued that "the Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts has taken to fulfill this great maxim from the beginning. He has sought without any distraction to give the people [*neam*] a Church ever more perfect and ever more beautiful."<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Ion I. Nedelescu, ed., *Legislația Statului Român: Decrete-legi, comunicate, deciziuni ministerial, jurnale ale Consiliului de Miniștri*; vol. 10, pp. 28-31.

<sup>91</sup> PLANUL DE LUCRU SI DESVOLTAREA LUI LA ACTIVITATE SUBSECRETARIATULUI DE STAT AL CULTELOR SI ARTELOR, DELA 6 SEPTEMBRIE 1940 LA 6 SEPTEMBRIE 1942 [The

The first point of the report was entitled “The Church’s Attitude facing Freemasonry and Judaism.” The pride of the Ministry was that from the regime’s beginning the Ministry “took a decided attitude against the two gangrenes taking a destructive root in the State’s and Church’s foundation: Freemasonry and Judaism.” The first action taken in the plan was to order all Freemasons out of government and Church posts on September 8, 1940.<sup>92</sup> The following measures were taken against Judaism. Decision 42120 on September 8, 1940 prohibited Christians from buying any item related to the practice of the Christian religion from a Jewish store. This meant that any clothing, candle, cross, food, or other item associated with the practices of a Christian church could only be bought from a store owned and run by other Christians.<sup>93</sup> Decree-law number 711/1941 was mentioned in the Ministry’s report as a victory for the Church.<sup>94</sup> This law introduced a restriction against Jews preventing them from changing their legal religious status. This was to keep Jews from “hiding their ethnic origin” by belonging to a religion other than Judaism.

Later in the report was a section on “The Problem of Religious Sects.” This section stated that “the sectarians’ and religious associations’ propaganda constitutes a danger to our national unity.”<sup>95</sup> According to the report the propaganda’s danger was that it was trying to “dismantle our Orthodox faith.” As such the Ministry had made a

---

Development and Working Plan regarding the Activity of the Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts, from September 6, 1940 to September 6, 1942], ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1942, folder 100, p. 37.

<sup>92</sup> No doubt this was a result of the Synod’s lobbying to the government as requested by Nicolae Bălan.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>94</sup> Chapter 4 focuses on Law 711.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 38.



decision to prohibit people from leaving the designated historic cults to join and register themselves as Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Evangelical Christians.<sup>96</sup> Local authorities were also given the power to supervise and regulate “the sects’ activities” in their houses of prayer.<sup>97</sup> The idea behind this decision was to strictly enforce the law from 1937. As a result the Ministry of Cults legally oversaw the closure of 260 Baptist churches, 86 Adventist churches, and 32 Evangelical churches for various violations of that law.<sup>98</sup> Publications from each of these churches were blocked along with the continued functioning of any houses of prayer without the legal number of adherents.<sup>99</sup> Christian Science was outlawed.<sup>100</sup> Religious institutions and schools that belonged to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Braşov were closed. As the goal of the Ministry was to strengthen the Orthodox Church clearly the government made eliminating competition it viewed as a threat a priority. Because the Orthodox Church was viewed by the regime as the “the Nation’s” or the “the people’s” Church anything that would diminish it was therefore also a threat to the nation. But there were not only negative measures taken against minority religions as part of the government’s plan to grow the Church.

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibidem. The decision was number 36592/1941 and was circulated by the Ministry of the Interior to all local municipalities for local enforcement.

<sup>97</sup> This was through decision number 56400/1942.

<sup>98</sup> This is per the Ministry’s report, although it is impossible to verify. See Chapter 3 for the confirmed number of closures where the place could be verified by name.

<sup>99</sup> Decision number 53808/1942.

<sup>100</sup> Decision number 60184/1942.

The Ministry actively sought to ensure that Orthodox priests from Romanian territories occupied by the Soviet Union would be able to find posts and that funds would be made available to care for their families. Also, the Ministry and the Church worked to expand the number of priests working in education and in religious service thanks to a “superabundance” of young priesthood candidates.<sup>101</sup> Funds were also opened up to historic cults for repairs to churches following the November 1940 earthquake but most of these went to the Orthodox Church.<sup>102</sup>

This interesting Church expansion was also aided by the government:

Following the strengthening ties with the Romanian state and the Axis Powers two Romanian Orthodox chapels were founded: one in Berlin and one in Rome. The one in Berlin functions under optimal conditions. The one in Rome was rejected by the Vatican. Along with the chapel in Berlin there will be a religious museum organized.<sup>103</sup>

The chapel in Rome may have been rejected by the Vatican but the Italian government allowed it to stay. While the congregations at these chapels would have been small it was still a symbolic action that the Orthodox Church was supportive of the Axis Powers. The establishment of the two parishes in the Axis capitals was actually signed into law by Antonescu himself. The explanation given above Antonescu’s signature was that “the establishment of these parishes constitutes a national religious necessity while at the same time contributing to establishing even closer spiritual collaborations with our great allies

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>102</sup> Protestant churches and Jewish properties did not benefit from these emergency funds. The November 10, 1940 earthquake was one of the largest in Romania on record. There were over 1,500 deaths and more than 10,000 injured. There were more than 50,000 buildings destroyed with tens of thousands more damaged.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

the German Reich and Fascist Italy.”<sup>104</sup> This is a clear case where Antonescu used the Church as a political tool. The nationalist tone should also be noted in the justification for the move.

Finally, the report briefly highlighted the movement of the Church back into Bessarabia and its expansion into Transnistria:

The strengthening and the defense of the Faith and its preaching in the freed provinces and the resurrection of the Orthodox Faith in Transnistria has constituted a preoccupation of the highest and permanent order for the Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts.<sup>105</sup>

Among the actions taken were sending priests back to their posts in Bessarabia and putting local governments at their disposition to receive aid in order to rebuild or repair local churches. For Transnistria the Church organized a permanent mission. The report highlights that over 500 churches and houses of prayer were rebuilt or taken back along with seven monasteries and two convents. In Transnistria the Church published and circulated the magazine *Transnistria Creștină* in Odessa.<sup>106</sup>

Clearly, the Antonescu regime put the situation of the Romanian Orthodox Church high in its list of priorities. Seeing that the Church expand into territories just barely occupied by the Romanian Army shows that the government and Church were both aggressively pursuing the Church’s expansion. The Romanian Orthodox Church’s swift movement into Transnistria shows that the Church was interested in more than just reclaiming what it had lost in the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia; it wanted to take

---

<sup>104</sup> Nedelescu, Ion I. ed., *Legislația Statului Român: Decrete-legi, comunicate, deciziuni ministerial, jurnale ale Consiliului de Miniștri*, vol. 16, 1941; pp. 3-4.

<sup>105</sup> From ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1942, folder 100, p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> For more on the subject see the Chapter 5, there the full extent of the rebuilding effort is explained.

charge of religion in all the territories controlled by the Romanian government. The Church did not need to rush into Transnistria; after all it was busy trying to repair the damage done by the Soviet occupation, the earthquake, and the war as well as deal with the Hungarian occupation of a major part of its constituency. In spite of these obstacles the Romanian Orthodox Church pressed forward with the government's plan for a greater Orthodox Church.

### **The Holy Synod: Trying to Manage the Clergy's Politics**

The cited examples are primarily a reflection of the government's role in the Church and the government's plans for the Church. How did the Romanian Orthodox Church view its relationship with the Romanian government? In 1937 the Synod published an article on the subject of government-church relations entitled "Defining the Relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian State." The article highlighted the fact that the Orthodox Church and the Romanian government were on good terms. It generally described that the government had increased funding for poor priests, priests' pensions, church building repairs and maintenance, and new church construction. It was hoped that the Romanian state would care for the Orthodox Church and that they "would be able to support each other reciprocally."<sup>107</sup> The article primarily depicted the state's actions taken to care for the Church as evidence of the positive relationship between the two. However, it turns out that the Synod had already come to

---

<sup>107</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Precizări de Atitudini între Biserica Ortodoxă și Statul Român" [Defining the Relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian State], BOR 55, no. 5-6 (1937): pp. 372-375.

decisions regarding the relationship and how the Church's clergy were to act in this relationship.

In the next issue of the Synod's official magazine Church leaders defined the relationship in actionable terms for the Church's clergy. The magazine published notes from meetings earlier in the year to address what the clergy was to do in relationship to the government. In the Synod's meeting on March 8, 1937 the issue of the relationship between the Church and state politics became the meeting's foremost concern. The Synod adopted a very lengthy decision that provides tremendous insight as to why the Church came to act the way it did from 1937 until the end of the war. Church leaders decided it was "the right moment" to define more precisely "certain norms and directives regarding the priests' right and action in political and social life."<sup>108</sup> They also declared that this decision was adopted in light of the Synod's "obligation to the defense of the state's interests and to maintaining order."<sup>109</sup> So before emphasizing what the decisions were regarding priests' political rights the Holy Synod pointed out that the Synod's role, or the role of the Church's leadership, was to defend the interests of the government. Before actually getting to the norms the Synod said it would define the Synod first issued a statement on the importance of the Church for the Romanian people and extolled the Church's great work on behalf of the nation. The Synod also issued a statement warning

---

<sup>108</sup> "Partea Oficială: Desbaterile ședințelor Sfântului Sinod pe anul 1937" [Official Business: The Discussions of the Holy Synod's meetings for the year 1937], BOR 55, no. 7-10 (1937): p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Ibidem.

the government of the sects that were such a terrible danger to the country because they allowed the country to be infiltrated by “foreign agents.”<sup>110</sup>

The Synod acknowledged that there was a problem with certain priests becoming overly involved in politics to the point where their activity in political parties was a distraction from their gospel duties. Also, the political activities of priests could confuse parishioners. Parishioners may be led to believe that the Church as a whole endorsed certain political views based on what they saw or heard from their priest’s public political activities when these were actually solely a reflection of the priest’s political views. The Synod said that in the worst cases certain priests had become “fervent electoral agents,” using their clerical positions as political podiums or even running for office. There were even priests who would carry out political activities straight over the altar on Sundays when they were supposed to be holding liturgical services.<sup>111</sup> The Synod emphasized that such activities were done without the Church’s authority and in many cases were the results of priests allowing themselves to fall under the spell of politicians. The Synod’s official statement was that “Church rituals may not be used for political actions.” The Synod proposed solving this problem by asking political leaders who had priests in their parties to not allow priests to participate in actions “incompatible with their priesthood mission.”

This did not mean that priests were to avoid politics entirely. Church leaders emphasized that the Church’s interest was the same as “the State’s superior interest.” As

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 2. Was this a call to the government to prohibit certain sects as it did about one month later with decision 4.781? It is not certain, but it is an interesting coincidence that after the Synod condemned sectarians and asked that the government do something about them the law was issued.

<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately the magazine did not include any specific examples if the Synod had discussed them in its meeting.

Romanian citizens Orthodox priests were to be influenced only by “the supreme ideal of the people [*neam*] and the country [*țara*]” and avoid parties’ special interests.<sup>112</sup> In connection with this idea Orthodox clergy were instructed that priests could not participate in any party that did not support the monarchy and Hohenzollern dynasty or Romanian nationalism. The only example provided in the meeting’s notes was that of Father Constantinescu-Iași who was a professor at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău. He apparently used his position to campaign for communism and was removed promptly from his post.<sup>113</sup> This is quite an interesting point by the Synod. Obviously communism was out since this was the only specific example published. By this instruction priests were essentially told that only the ruling parties were approved for their participation. Following these general guidelines the Synod laid out a redundant set of more specific instructions explaining what priests could and could not do as far as their participation in politics. It was added that priests were free to offer blessings to institutions or associations that did not have a political character, especially those with cultural significance and those that were service organizations.<sup>114</sup>

The Church did not have a very effective or defined mechanism for dealing with priests who violated these rules. Therefore the Synod asked the government to take care

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3. Whatever the special interests were that the Synod wanted priests to avoid is unclear. The special interests comprised probably anything that was deemed not to be in the best interest of the nation. The priests were also told that there could be no party that was a party just for clergy or run by clergy as any clerical participation should take place outside of church duties. The decision implied that priests had tried to come up with a political party only for priests. But the meeting notes in the magazine did not provide specific details on such an attempt.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

of priests who violated these instructions. It turns out that the penal code already had a law on the subject:

Any priest, monk, or preacher of a cult who ties up his disciples through an oath, either individually or collectively, to follow certain political creeds commits an abusive dereliction of spiritual power and will be sentenced with correctional imprisonment from six months up to two years.<sup>115</sup>

The Synod asked that this law be rigorously enforced and that more resources be devoted to catching those guilty of violating the law.

The Synod claimed that the Church was not at all responsible for priests' actions if they worked in the education system even if they encouraged "hate, civil disobedience, anarchy, violence, even murder." The Synod disavowed the Church's disciplinary responsibility for this because it stated that all priests and theology students fell under the state's authority. The Synod asked that the Minister of Cults work with the Church in helping the Church's clergy to balance their priestly duties and their rights as citizens to "protect the superior interests of Romanian Christianity."<sup>116</sup>

Essentially, the Synod's long explanation regarding priests and politics offers a base for explaining the relationship between the Church and the state. The clergy was to support the monarchy and the ruling nationalist parties. The Synod really tried to have it both ways. The Church was defined as apolitical and it allowed priests to participate in politics outside of Church services if they supported Romanian Christian Nationalism. This is an obvious contradiction and quite confusing. If the Synod did not want the Church's priests to participate too much in politics then why support Romanian Christian

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem.



Nationalism? It had to allow for Romanian Christian Nationalism because the Synod had told the priests that nationalism was one of its guiding principles. The problem is that acceptable political actions for priests were never defined in the instructions, only the principle by which their actions were to be guided. Communism was out but what was in? And so, with these confusing guidelines, the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the government would turn out to be complicated even as the Antonescu regime tried to expand and strengthen the Church during the war.

Of course, much of the Synod's bluster about trying to draw a line between religious life and political life was really designed to instruct the local clergy. On a national level the Synod had various members representing the Orthodox Church in Romania's parliament (including the Patriarch and the Metropolitans), and the Church had been guaranteed this representation under Romania's various constitutions and governments during the decades leading up to the war. Also, Patriarch Miron was appointed to the post of Prime Minister in February 1939 after the dismissal of the Goga-Cuza government. Although his work as Prime Minister was considered as a front for the King it still shows that in spite of the Synod's insistence that the Church was apolitical that such statements were simply misleading. How could the Orthodox Church be so close to the Romanian government and at the same time be apolitical? It was not possible. What the Synod wanted to do through its instructions to priests was to limit local clergy from becoming full blown political activists or dissidents.

In February 1938 Romania's new constitution took the instructions given by the Synod to the clergy and put them into law. The new constitution banned clergy from any

religion from using their “spiritual authority in the service of political propaganda, not only in locations used for religious and official functions, but also outside of these... Any political association based on religious pretexts is banned.”<sup>117</sup> On the other hand in the Synod’s meeting on February 22, 1938 Church leaders gave a unanimous decision that the “entire Romanian Orthodox Church from top to bottom” would be a support “towards the wellness and the use of the state.”<sup>118</sup>

It turns out that the Church doubly benefitted when the Patriarch became the Prime Minister in 1938 and Bishop Nicolae Colan of Cluj briefly the Minister of Cults. Rather than being apolitical Bishop Colan had officiated in the public spectacle of two Iron Guard members who had died fighting for fascism in the Spanish Civil War a year earlier.<sup>119</sup> He was a noted Iron Guard sympathizer with a pro-nationalist agenda that included a strong anti-communist agenda. He used his government post to restate why such strict laws against sects and sectarians (including outlawing proselytism) were needed. The explanation was published by the Synod for the whole Orthodox Church to know why laws against sects and sectarians were needed. He deemed sects dangerous for the Church because they drew away the faithful to phony religions that only produce fanatics. He also described them as dangerous to the state because the religious fanatics

---

<sup>117</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 56, no. 1-4 (1938): p. 173.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 3. In the Synod’s meeting leaders admitted that local clergy had acted as opposition political activists and that because this was divisive among the Church’s membership it had to support the new constitutional ban on clerical political campaigning and issue its assurance to the Romanian government that it would be more supportive.

<sup>119</sup> The public funeral for Ion Moța and Vasile Marin was a huge public spectacle in February 1937 that served mostly as a recruiting tool for the Iron Guard. The events and rituals were overseen and officiated by Romanian Orthodox clergy with more than 400 priests participating just in Bucharest. Following the funeral spectacle the Iron Guard enjoyed its largest following and its greatest electoral success.

produced by sects not only worked against the Church but their anti-social behavior also turned against the government and would eventually result in anti-government violence. Worse still, according to Colan, was the threat posed by anti-national sectarians to Romania's national security, culture, and well-being. This was hardly an apolitical statement but the Synod continued to claim that such moves were not political; rather they were seen as cultural or moral issues not related to party politics.<sup>120</sup>

As the political landscape changed in Romania the Orthodox Church proved very adaptable. Prior to the institution of the National Legionary State in September 1940 the Iron Guard had not received much support officially from the Orthodox Church's highest leadership even though many local priests were involved. However, as soon as the Iron Guard leader Horia Sima took the role of vice-premier and the Iron Guard shared government rule with Antonescu in September 1940 the Synod quickly changed its tune. In the Synod's journal a lengthy article was written explaining the Church's sudden renewed interest in politics. The article was entitled "Religion in the Political Fight" and gave the rationale behind the Church's involvement in politics, thus contradicting previous statements that the Church was apolitical. It explained that the separation of Church and state was impossible because both had an interest in the well-being of the people and the nation. The Church expressed its support for the new government: "It is the totalitarian politics of the Christian state, politics that do not divide into factions, ideologies or parties, but rather welds them together in the flame of Christian idealism in its illuminating line of destiny. It is this kind of politics that the Christian religion makes

---

<sup>120</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 56, no. 5-6 (1938): pp. 301-302.

and accepts, even ordains.”<sup>121</sup> The new National Legionary State had brought everyone together in one Orthodox Christian political party and the Church not only accepted the new political situation, the Church gave the new political leadership its blessing.

Does this mean the Church really supported such an extreme new leadership?

The article gave this explanation to the Orthodox clergy:

The country’s ancient religion- Orthodoxy- was our lullaby at birth and protected us along the centuries; it cannot be eliminated nor especially can it eliminate itself from the public work of guiding our national destiny. The righteous and heroic solution was the purification through re-Christianizing political battles. This was made possible through the full triumph of nationalist Christianity in today’s Legionary Romania. Of the four countries in Europe where totalitarian nationalism triumphed Romania is the most profoundly Christian of all. It is probably the most characteristic, authentic, and specifically Romanian note. Our ancestral Church today can finally be reconciled.... Restored to its true mission the political fight has become a sacrifice for the people and a sacrifice for faith. These politics cannot be refused... by our Church nor its servants.<sup>122</sup>

The Synod took a stance that many priests had already taken; it fully supported the Iron Guard and the Guard’s program of creating a pure Orthodox Christian nation. Also, the Synod admitted that it was fully supportive of fascism in Romania because of its “Christian” character. It was a complete departure from the previous attempt by the Synod to act as if the Church was somehow apolitical.

### **The Rebellion: Not all Priests Conformed to the Synod’s Management**

But the Church’s preference and praise for the Iron Guard dissipated as quickly as did Marshall Antonescu’s patience. The Iron Guard rebelled against the regime from

---

<sup>121</sup> Professor I. Gh. Savin, “Religia în Luptă Politică,” BOR 58, no. 11-12 (1940): p. 782.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 782-783.

January 21 to 23, 1941.<sup>123</sup> During the rebellion the Synod threw its support behind Antonescu and rejected the Iron Guard. The Patriarch and Antonescu exchanged telegrams, some of which were published in the Synod's magazine. The Patriarch first wrote "the Church prays feverishly to God to grant you power to carry your actions out to victory for the Country's complete salvation, and the Romanian people [*neam*] will be grateful to you throughout the generations." Antonescu expressed his appreciation for the support in his response to the Patriarch, telling him that the Patriarch's support "constituted a spring of new powers for me to continue down a hard road."<sup>124</sup> The Patriarch made his support for Antonescu public and asked for an end to the violence, calling for peace in the country. In a letter sent to the entire Church the Patriarch cited the Gospel of St. John, chapter thirteen inviting people to stop fighting and "love one another."<sup>125</sup>

The rebellion revealed the Church's leadership's preference for Antonescu but it also revealed that among the clergy's lower ranks many priests did not share the same political views. Some priests during the rebellion openly preached in favor of the Iron Guard, others actually participated in the rebellion. Antonescu's cabinet declared that not only would participants in the rebellion be arrested, but it would also punish anyone who "encouraged others to rebel through speeches, manifests (written or otherwise), and

---

<sup>123</sup> The rebellion was sparked by Antonescu's move on January 19, 1941 to purge many of the country's leadership positions and important posts held by the Iron Guard. The Iron Guard and Antonescu had been at odds over quite a few policies before this and the purge was the final straw.

<sup>124</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 59, no. 1-2 (1941): p. 103.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-105.

through appeals brought to the public's attention."<sup>126</sup> Antonescu and the Council of Ministers later decided that "for priests involved in the rebellion there will be no forgiveness; there will be serious sanctions."<sup>127</sup> The serious sanctions were to be according to the "gravity" of the actions taken and prosecuted on an individual basis. Things did not go quite according to that plan but scattered through the several hundred folders of the Ministry of Cults and Arts for the year 1941 are various reports of priests that fell under sanctions or were even prosecuted and imprisoned for participation in the rebellion. Many of the prosecutions took place months later.

A hearing on June 17, 1941 by the Ministry of Cults disciplinary committee recommended that five priests and three deacons from Galați lose their salaries based on the fact that they were accused of participating in an antigovernment demonstration during the rebellion. According to the report they were part of a demonstration that was chanting antigovernment remarks and the name of Iron Guard leader Horia Sima. Based on this information the eight accused were to lose their salaries for the previous six months and their posts working for a local seminary.<sup>128</sup> Other priests involved in the rebellion were more aggressive. A letter written to the Ministry of Cults, received on April 10, 1941, contained a complaint that three priests involved in the rebellion actually

---

<sup>126</sup> Letter from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers General Șteflea to the Minister of National Education, Cults and Arts January 31, 1941, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 201, p. 143. The decision was made on January 31, 1941.

<sup>127</sup> From ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1942, folder 100, pp. 162-168. This is a report from the Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts about decisions and resolutions from Antonescu regarding the Ministry of Cults. On page two of the report Antonescu instructed that investigations, trials, and sentencing were to be done by military tribunals.

<sup>128</sup> Copy of hearing nr. 658/941 of the disciplinary commission of the Ministry of National Culture and Cults on June 17, 1941, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 108, pp. 50-51.

stood at the front of a group of rebels with pistols in hand. The priests were accused of trying to shoot at soldiers attempting to quell the rebels. The matter was turned over to the gendarme in Hunedoara County where the three priests were from.<sup>129</sup>

A military tribunal in Braşov informed the Archbishop of Sibiu that a priest under his jurisdiction, Father Dumitru Pasenco, was found guilty of “the crime of armed insurrection.” It was recommended that he be punished in some way although the tribunal’s letter from August 1941 showed that the members of the tribunal were in disagreement over what exactly the punishment should be.<sup>130</sup> A military tribunal held in Sibiu during June found Father Ioan Moldovan, who had served as a priest for 35 years, guilty of the same crime in what is now Mureş County.<sup>131</sup>

Father Nicolae Cărmuş, who was also mayor of the Fundata commune during the rebellion, was accused by numerous priests of being a part of the rebellion and the local leader of the Iron Guard cell in the area. The tribunal in Braşov sentenced him to a 10,000 lei fine and three months in prison.<sup>132</sup> Father Petre Vasilescu from Surdiaş-Lugoj was condemned to three years of prison by a tribunal in Timişoara for being in the

---

<sup>129</sup> A letter from Barbara Leonte to the Minister of Cults and Arts in Bucharest on March 24, 1941, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 137, p. 18.

<sup>130</sup> From the same folder, a letter sent to the Ministry of Cults from the Braşov Military Tribunal. The letter has no accurate page number.

<sup>131</sup> Copy of the hearing from the Military Tribunal of Sibiu on June 9, 1941 and June 15, 1941, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 137, pp. 85 and 93.

<sup>132</sup> Two letters from the Seventh Army’s Military Tribunal and the Office of the Gendarme Inspector General, both to the Ministry of Cults, in September and October 1941, Ibidem, folder, pp. 100-101. The investigation and hearings began in April and the matter was not fully resolved until September 1941. Father Cărmuş was caught communicating with legionnaires several months after the rebellion.

rebellion and was stripped of his ecclesiastical rights.<sup>133</sup> Father Stoian Rusu from Cujir commune lost his post simply for being under suspicion of participating in the rebellion. He came to the authorities' attention after he publicly memorialized Iron Guard leaders in the piazza in November.<sup>134</sup> Over the course of several months the Military Tribunal in Timișoara also convicted eight other priests of participating in the rebellion. Some of those convicted were accused of telling the rebels to kill Romanian soldiers.<sup>135</sup> Also, seven other priests were convicted of the same crimes by the Military Tribunal in Sibiu.<sup>136</sup> The problem was more acute in the capital, where the Iron Guard had been more active. In the Archbishopric of Bucharest 73 members of the clergy were sentenced just during March.<sup>137</sup> Arrests and convictions of priests participating in the rebellion continued throughout the war.

A very short time after Antonescu was deposed the interim government began arresting people who were involved in the Iron Guard and in Antonescu's government. The local police kept records of those arrested and sometimes included basic information about the alleged criminals beyond their names including, for example, their occupations. In just one list of selected rural members of the Iron Guard for Argeș County who were

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem folder, no accurate page number. He was condemned and sentenced in May 1941.

<sup>134</sup> Ibidem, pp. 140, 145, 147, and 149. These are copies of reports sent from various agencies to the Minister of Cults and Arts regarding the matter.

<sup>135</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 142, scattered pages throughout the folder. The convictions were recorded by notices sent from the tribunals to the Ministry of Cults.

<sup>136</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941 folders 146 and 161. Like those convicted in Timișoara the accusations included leading bands of rebels and encouraging them to kill Romanian soldiers.

<sup>137</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 201, pp. 6-8. The report from the Ministry of Cults did not indicate what their sentences were, only that they were to be suspended and lose their salaries.



arrested by the police on 16 December, 1944 out of 249 members 31 were priests; 14 of these were listed as cell leaders for their communities and another 5 were listed as organization leaders for their communities.<sup>138</sup> Two similar police lists in nearby Vâlcea County reveal four more priests out of 117 members.<sup>139</sup> Most of the lists of Iron Guard membership reflect broad Orthodox clerical participation.

The problem was that until then the Orthodox Church leadership, rather than pretending to political ambivalence as it had during the late 1930s, had openly supported the Iron Guard. This left the door open for priests to interpret support for Iron Guard in the partnership government with Antonescu as support for the Iron Guard itself. Before the Guard's partnership with Antonescu there was already broad Iron Guard participation among the lower clergy; many were in fact local Iron Guard leaders. However, before the Church's open support for the Iron Guard these priests had been limited in their participation or they risked losing their posts or even being defrocked.<sup>140</sup> The Synod's brief approval no doubt led to priests leading and encouraging bands of Iron Guard rebels in January 1941. This is also the reason that so many priests would later be arrested and imprisoned for being a part of the Iron Guard after the Antonescu regime was deposed.

---

<sup>138</sup> USHMM, RG25.004M, "Selected Records from the Romanian Information Service," Reel 239, pp. 147-153. This particular list was compiled by the gendarmerie in Argeş County. The Iron Guard organized itself in a paramilitary fashion; the smallest units were cells. Reels 237-240 contain hundreds of pages of lists and the one cited here is very typical.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 380-382. These two lists were for people who were in the Iron Guard, but were deemed "no longer dangerous" and therefore not arrested.

<sup>140</sup> Yet the Synod's insistence that they stay out of the Iron Guard during the 1930s did not stop hundreds of priests from becoming Legionnaires anyways. Also, although they risked these punishments it seems as if few priests actually fell under Church sanctions. For more on the broad clerical participation in the Iron Guard see Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1990).

Although the Synod immediately supported Antonescu, the damage had already been done and the Synod later had to learn from military tribunals' letters and from the Ministry of Cults that many priests had been part of the rebellion.

As for those rebellious priests Marshall Antonescu decided in April 1941 to allow cases for clemency to be heard, although only a few were actually granted clemency. He also decided in August 1941 that priests "condemned from [participation in] the January rebellion...are to be removed and interred in prison camps."<sup>141</sup> Apparently the standard sentence in the prison camps was five years but most sentences were suspended by Antonescu who ordered, however, that the priests lose their jobs and be kept from the priesthood.<sup>142</sup>

The fallout from the rebellion was a stricter Church and government policy regarding clerical political participation. On February 15, 1941 Antonescu's government passed a law outlawing government workers from participating in political actions as a preventative measure against further turmoil. The Ministry of Cults decided to follow suit and created a similar provision for priests based on the Orthodox Church canons. The decision followed Orthodox Church canons that "prohibited clergy from taking upon themselves the cares of the world, or unsavory occupations, that they might have a mind to consecrate themselves regarding all matters that are purely spiritual, cultural,

---

<sup>141</sup> Subsecretariatul de stat pentru culte și arte 1941 (1 Februarie 1941- 1 Ianuarie 1942.) Hotărârile Consiliilor de Miniștri. [Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts 1941 (February 1, 1941- January 1, 1942.) The Decisions of the Councils of Ministers.] A report on ministerial decisions for the entitled period, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1942, folder 100, pp. 162-166.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem. The government probably did not want to assume the cost of interring the condemned priests. The threat from the Iron Guard had essentially been squashed and the former Legionary priests now posed even less of a threat because they no longer could use their pulpits for propaganda.

charitable, and administrative Church matters.”<sup>143</sup> The first provision of the new law read

It is absolutely forbidden for any member of the clergy of any confession, category, and group to enroll in, adhere to or be active in any political party or organization, or to participate in political movements and manifestations of any kind. They [the clergy] can be active in national-cultural societies or social service assistants if they are recognized as such by legal bodies; but these [national cultural societies’ member or social service assistant clergy] cannot function in any capacity with a religious character.

The Synod encouraged strict enforcement of the new government policy and published it in the Synod’s official magazine in the section on instructions to the priests.<sup>144</sup>

Importantly, it was an Orthodox Church canon used for a new law that was to be applied to religious servants of any religion or Christian confession. The decision was clearly a reaction to the priests who had participated in the rebellion. Of course, the decision did not apply to members of the Synod who continued to fill government posts and serve in parliament.

The Synod continued to support the government’s decisions regarding the rebellion’s priests. The Synod’s disciplinary committee released a statement that was unanimously approved by the Synod on October 24, 1941:

1. The rebellion is a question for the State and it follows that a judgment will be made by competent court authorities. The priests, since they are also citizens of the State, will be subject to the decisions of these courts. The sentences of civil and military courts will be sent to Church leaders and they will be judged on a case by case basis; those who are guilty from a canonical point of view will be punished; in principal any priest convicted by civil or military courts will no longer be able to remain in the locale where he had worked.

---

<sup>143</sup> “Cronica Internă,” BOR 59, no. 1-2 (1941): p. 107. The decree regarding priests was based on decree law number 314, 1941.

<sup>144</sup> Ibidem.

2. The Holy Synod always opposed clerical participation in the rebellion, just as it has always opposed clerical participation in... unrighteous political opposition which they were already instructed is contrary to their souls' spiritual and mental health.<sup>145</sup>

The Synod stayed true to its word and no Synod interventions can be found in the court cases of priests accused of participating in the rebellion. All the convicted priests had to serve their sentences and lightened or reversed sentences were granted only by the government without any lobbying from the Synod. Those priests who served time in prison forfeited their salaries along with many others who forfeited portions or all of their salaries for much of 1941. Moving the priests out of their posts where they had been during the rebellion was a form of demotion which meant starting out somewhere else in the Church in a lower level position under other clergy who had stayed true to the Antonescu regime.

While most arrests of priests were for involvement in the rebellion some priests would later be arrested for violating the new law. The best example comes from Bucharest in the fall of 1942. A report by the Bucharest police explained that the Holy Trinity Church-Tei was the center of “a degraded sight for the faithful.” The Church had on the outside walls freemasonry symbols and Iron Guard slogans. These included a mural of a skull and cross-bones with the phrases “the Iron Guard, All for the Country, and the League of Death” written nearby. On the inside was a painting with a pistol and a swastika. Also, on the altar was a sacramental tray with a swastika painted across the whole tray. The first result of the report was that the priest in charge of the church

---

<sup>145</sup> “Ședința din ziua de 24 Octomvrie 1941” [Meeting of October 24, 1941], BOR 59, no. 11-12 (1941): p. 30.

building, Father Marinescu, lost his salary and was suspended. Father Marinescu wrote appeals and tried to blame the problem on the two priests he replaced in July 1942. He eventually would win his case showing that his colleagues, Fathers Mușeteanu and Popescu, had been carrying out the activity. The offending priests lost their salary retroactively from July 15, 1942 through March 1943, were fined, demoted, and put under other priests' direct control and surveillance.<sup>146</sup> This was a comparatively light sentence compared to Deacon Chiriarc Mitrofan's sentence for using the church as a political pulpit. His sentence was three years in prison.<sup>147</sup>

While there are numerous examples of priests arrested for rebellion there are only a few examples of priests arrested only for violating the political statute.<sup>148</sup> This is actually not surprising. The most politically active priests in the Iron Guard were arrested for their actions during the rebellion. The statute was thus a preventative measure meant to dissuade the clergy from future actions; it drew a line in the sand where previously there had only been confusing and even contradictory guidelines. It also gave the Synod a stronger reason to bring sanctions against priests who now were not only violating the Synod's guidelines but also violating the law. Either the statute dissuaded priests from being politically active or at least forced them to do a better job of hiding their political activities from civil authorities.

---

<sup>146</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 23, scattered pages of reports in the folder from page 77 to page 111.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 212. There were fewer details in Deacon Mitrofan's case, only that his violation of the law was such an obvious violation that his sentence seemed justified to the Ministry.

<sup>148</sup> The two I cited were really the only examples that had enough documentation to warrant inclusion.

### **After the Rebellion the Church and State grow close**

Easter 1941 saw Antonescu and the Patriarch exchange telegrams that were made available to the press. The Patriarch sent the first one to Antonescu as a congratulatory note celebrating the resurrection and told Antonescu that he “wished with all his heart to see all of our Romanian people’s rights resurrected and for the replenishment of its ethnic boundaries.”<sup>149</sup> Antonescu responded simply with traditional Romanian Easter salutations. The only reason the Easter salutations are worth noting is that the Patriarch made mention of Antonescu’s plans for ethnic Romanians. This was the first sign after the rebellion that the Patriarch was more than just a casual supporter of Antonescu. The Patriarch’s mention of ethnic boundaries could have had a double meaning. It could have meant the recouping of Romanian territories, specifically Bessarabia, which had been lost to the Soviet Union. It could also have meant the renewal of ethnic boundaries within the country or the separation of ethnic Romanians from so-called undesirable ethnic groups such as Jews or Roma. Or it could have meant both. No matter what this was the first public sign since the January Rebellion that the Patriarch was going to stand by Antonescu and support his plans for the country.

On Ascension Day in May 1941 Patriarch Nicodim let his feelings about Antonescu conclude his sermon. He said that the “wisdom full of patriotism of General Ion Antonescu, the State’s Leader, constitutes for us a guarantee that the country’s and the people’s destinies will be carefully protected forever. Therefore let us follow him

---

<sup>149</sup> Deacon Gheorghe I. Moisescu, “Cronica Internă” *Telegrame de felicitare* [Congratulatory Telegrams], BOR 59, no. 3-4 (1941): pp. 243-244.

with faith and fearless power to battle for the triumph of our people.”<sup>150</sup> Following the publication of this sermon in the Synod’s instructions to priests the Synod also included Antonescu’s proclamation calling Romanians to “the Holy War for the people and for the King... alongside the great German Nation.”<sup>151</sup> The Synod’s preface to Antonescu’s proclamation showed that the Synod agreed with Antonescu by referring to the war as holy and saying that this “war is carried by all of Christianity against Christ’s persecutors and blasphemers.”<sup>152</sup> The Patriarch also wrote a telegram to Antonescu (that the Synod published), perhaps in order to anticipate doubt about the Patriarch’s loyalties. He told Antonescu “God chose you to be the Romanian People’s leader” and noted that he also prayed for “the powerful ally and supporter Adolf Hitler.”<sup>153</sup>

Antonescu felt the same way about the Church and responded with an equally impressive endorsement for Romania’s National Church. He addressed the Church by having his Minister of National Culture and Cults, General Rosetti, convey his feelings in a letter to the Synod on June 5, 1941:

I count the Church as a divine institution founded by the Son of God and adopted by our people centuries ago to lift its soul and redeem it.... Today the Romanian State has complete trust in the People’s Church [*Biserica Neamului*], so much so that it does not have the slightest doubt that the Church will be able to carry out its normal ministerial activity even more intensely and even more useful to our people who no one loves as much as the Church.

---

<sup>150</sup> Patriarch Nicodim, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 59, no. 5-6 (1941): pp. 335-336.

<sup>151</sup> Attributed to a proclamation by Ion Antonescu “Cronica Internă,” BOR 59, no. 5-6 (1941): p. 338. In his proclamation as it was published by the Synod, Antonescu called the war “holy” four times and praised Hitler.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>153</sup> Attributed to a telegram by Patriarch Nicodim, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 59, no. 5-6 (1941): p. 346.

I give our Holy Church my full assurance to support it with all my heart and might in order to help it grow definitively towards fulfilling the spiritual mission given the Church by its Godly founder who sent the Church in the midst of our faithful people.<sup>154</sup>

In this letter Antonescu also assured the Church that he and the government would stay out of the Church's internal affairs. The Synod noted that the Church and state always had tremendous rapport in the past and pledged that it would continue to work with the state in "complete harmony" just as God had intended. The Synod thanked the government for giving it the freedom to do what was best for the Romanian people and continued with its business that day of reorganizing religious education in public schools, and reorganizing the education of future priests.<sup>155</sup>

The Synod continued its campaign to support Antonescu and his regime. Upon Antonescu receiving the Order of the Iron Cross from Hitler the Patriarch sent congratulatory telegram that was included in the Church's magazine.<sup>156</sup> The Synod had more than just praises for the Romanian government's leadership; it also had a set of instructions for the Church's priests to help the regime and the war effort. The list of things priests had to do included the following: Every Friday at 6:30 in all parishes priests were to pray publicly for the armies' victory; all church employees and clergy were to donate five days of salary to a fund to support the wounded and servicemen's families; in every church a special donation box was to be set up to support the wounded

---

<sup>154</sup> "Sfintul Sinod al Sfintei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: Sesiunea Ordinară din anul 1941, Ședința din 5 Iunie 1941," BOR 59, no. 11-12 (1941): pp. 1-2.

<sup>155</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>156</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 59, no. 7-8 (1941): pp. 469. They also exchanged congratulatory telegrams through July based on the early battlefield success by the Romanian Army in Moldova.



soldiers and their families and the priests are to encourage people every Sunday to put donations in the box; all these monies collected were to be sent to the Patriarchate which would give them to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers; priests and other clergy were to be dispatched to all hospitals and military hospitals to bless the sick and the wounded daily; clergy in the capitol were to work daily to eliminate propaganda by other sects.<sup>157</sup>

To explain why this was all important work the Synod prefaced these instructions by saying that the Church represented the Romanian people's "cornerstone". The clergy were also given detailed instructions on how to put the state's leadership into Church services:

1. During the deacons' prayers: For the diligent State's Leader, for the Country's Government, for the cities and the lands of the greatest peoples, and for the ever faithful Romanian people, to the Lord we pray.

Nearly identical prayers were to be spoken during the collections and during the liturgy.<sup>158</sup> In September the praises for Antonescu continued as the Patriarch sent Antonescu another congratulatory telegram for his first year of rule and praying that God would continue to strengthen him.<sup>159</sup>

On November 9, 1941 Patriarch Nicodim went on national radio to express his thoughts on Antonescu:

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp. 472-473.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 488. In a totally unrelated event following the Church donating to and supporting the government cause over its pulpits Orthodox priests were excused from paying almost any taxes on their income. This tax break was only for Orthodox priests. See Ibidem pp. 494-499.

<sup>159</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 59, no. 9-10 (1941): p. 599.

Beloved Romanians, children of the Ancestral Church,  
After a year of great trials the Romanian Nation is called to give its word regarding the government's acts carried out by Marshall Antonescu; and to give the government a vote of approval or disapproval.

Looking back, with all of the exceptional things that have happened... at the unification of sentiments and thought for the entire Romanian people;

On the results of these activities that were done in scarcely a year, carried out in righteousness, we wish for the divine successes of the man who has assumed the Romanian State's leadership responsibilities.

Marshall Ion Antonescu is a divine man whom God has sent to us. His name is in the heart, the soul, and on the lips of all Romanians.

After facing all of the true catastrophes that have beaten down the people from the torture of immense political mistakes we were left without friends except for our own internal national solidarity. Only he strengthened and assured friendship with our great allies, Germany and Italy.... The entire people, in a unanimous and Romanian voice, followed him... we have given him all our love.... He has triumphed!

The Leader of the Romanian State and of the Romanian Armies returns today gloriously with his head turned towards God and with Romania's righteous pride satisfied. Romania's eastern lands are again made whole with the country's body.... The providential man, Marshall Ion Antonescu, calls us again to a national plebiscite; this is for us to express our feelings on his government's actions; for all that he has done for his beloved and holy country.... It is with the objective judgment of history's centuries, with the reestablishment of the Romanian consciousness, and with an honest soul close to the distinct wisdom of this great statesman and defender of Romanian citizens' rights that the Romanian Orthodox Church submits to Marshall Antonescu.

We give him our Patriarchal blessing for the reforms that are naturally necessary in order to assure and solidify for centuries the Romanian State's existence and its geographic and spiritual unity within the borders that God ordained and sanctified.... Long live Marshall Antonescu, brave leader of the armies and ingenious Romanian State leaders....

NICODIM Patriarch of Romania<sup>160</sup>

There could not have been a stronger endorsement for Antonescu than what Patriarch Nicodim gave on national radio and had distributed to the clergy. The Patriarch had declared Antonescu ordained by God and given Antonescu the Church's blessing for everything he had done and was going to do as Romania's leader.

---

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., pp. 602-603.

Patriarch Nicodim continued to express nothing but adoration when he addressed a national leadership meeting on March 19, 1942. Although the speech was primarily to declare the current war as “ordained” by God he made space to praise Antonescu’s leadership and continued to stress the regime’s divinity. A representative of the Orthodox Clergy Association followed the Patriarch with a speech thanking Antonescu and expressing their support for his leadership.<sup>161</sup> Although there is no indication that Ion Antonescu and Patriarch Nicodim were close besides infrequent letters shared with the public and occasional meetings the public impression they gave was that the two shared a strong bond.

Public telegrams published by the Synod for its December 1942 meeting again emphasized this bond. The first telegram from the Synod read:

To Marshall Ion Antonescu, State Leader

The Members of the Holy Synod, assembled in the first meeting of the 1942 session assure you of their total devotion and send to you their best wishes for your health. May God grant you full power to successfully guide our people’s destiny on clouds of glory and to be prosperous.

To which Antonescu replied:

To His Holiness Father Nicodim the Patriarch of Romania

Thank you from the heart to your Holiness and the members of the Holy Synod for their wishes. With unshaken faith in God and by our people’s righteousness we will battle to the end in the defense of our people and our Church.

The Synod sent a similar telegram to Marshall Antonescu’s second in command, Mihai Antonescu (no relation), and received a similar response.<sup>162</sup> The perception of the regime

---

<sup>161</sup> “Cronica Internă,” BOR 60, no. 1-4 (1942): pp. 133-136.

<sup>162</sup> “Sfântul Sinod al Sfintei Biserici Ortodoxe Române Sesiunea Ordinară din Anul 1942: Ședința din ziua de 2 Dechemvrie 1942,” BOR 60, no. 9-10 (1942): pp. 6-7.

and the Church marching arm in arm and working towards the same goals continued to be pushed in the Synod's magazine. By publishing warm, friendly, and supportive messages between the government's leadership and the Church's leadership in the Synod's magazine all the parish priests in the Church could see the Church united with the government. Such sentiments would then be relayed to their parishioners especially since the priests were told to publicly pray for their country's leaders to lead the Romanian people to victory. Virtually no opposition to the regime's policies can be found in the public record.<sup>163</sup>

At the Synod's meeting on December 2, 1942 Antonescu sent the following message to the Synod via the Minister of National Culture and Cults:

I do not want to make the Church a political tool, rather a principal agency in collaboration for the State's salvation. In order for this to happen, the Church must be exemplary, and it cannot be exemplary unless the State gives the Church the infusion of materials that it needs and the Church gives examples of morality from its bosom.<sup>164</sup>

Antonescu's message that the regime's efforts to strengthen the Orthodox Church were without political motivation was incredulous. How could the Orthodox Church collaborate with the government for the country's salvation and not be involved in government politics? If the Church was to work with the government and then receive a material benefit, as outlined in this quote, then it acted with the government more like a secular special interest group than a religious group. In this relationship described by Antonescu, supporting the government and receiving material benefits, the Church

---

<sup>163</sup> The one exception being law 711 as discussed in chapter four.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-4. The next day the Ministry of Cults gave 100,000 lei to the Church to print bibles.

behaved more like a trade union or industry group than some kind of moral institution selflessly seeking to support a kind of moral cause.<sup>165</sup>

On May 27, 1943 the Patriarch hosted a meeting of priests residing in Bucharest. One of the keynote speakers was Mrs. Maria Antonescu, the Marshall's wife. The Patriarch introduced Mrs. Antonescu and gave her the warmest of introductions and pledged the priesthood's support. Mrs. Antonescu asked for even greater efforts from the priesthood on the home front in aiding the wounded and easing Romanians' burdens. In response to Mrs. Antonescu's call for more help from the Orthodox priesthood the Patriarch laid out two points. First, every priest was to visit every single home or residence within his parish and help the sick, give blessings, and perform other ordinances or services that might be needed without waiting for people to come to church. Second, priests should try and raise more money for projects to benefit the country.<sup>166</sup> Whether or not the Patriarch's promises were fulfilled in every parish it was a nice gesture to Romania's first lady continuing to assure the government that the Church was putting forth its best efforts to help Romania win the war.

---

<sup>165</sup> Occasionally the Synod did take up moral issues. The Synod did put in a request to the justice department to not allow minors to be legally married and to try and put a stop to minors living in "concubinage" (cohabitation). The Church pledged to use everything at its discretion to try and put a stop to these practices. From *ibid.*, 19. The Patriarch also lobbied to have certain businesses closed and certain events prohibited on Sundays so that the Sabbath day could be respected. These included all theaters, cinemas, and public spectacles and educational institutions. The Patriarch also asked that on Sundays barber shops and public bath houses be closed until 12pm. He also asked that all these places and events be closed and prohibited on major Orthodox Holidays, including certain fast days and three days at Easter. He also asked that the Ministry of Labor try to allow workers a day of rest. See USHMM Archives RG25.061 Reel 4 Slides 666, 669-670, 674, which show that the Ministry of Cults apparently agreed to follow through with those requests. Whether or not these policies were implemented beyond the Minister's promise is unclear.

<sup>166</sup> Deacon Gheorghe I. Moisescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 61, no. 4-6 (1943): pp. 306-309. Whether or not this actually happened in every Orthodox Church parish is not really clear but it was the Patriarch's personal pledge to Mrs. Antonescu that this would happen.

Roughly a month later the Minister of Internal Affairs, General Dumitru Popescu, sent a message to all the government's employees throughout the country to emphasize the importance of the Orthodox Church to the government. He began by emphasizing that "Christianity is the moral foundation of the State and nation. At a time when the army and the entire nation fight not only for Romanian soil but also for the ancestral faith it is a basic responsibility for all true Christians to remember to draw closer to the Church than in times of respite." Of course, what he meant by Christianity was the Romanian Orthodox Church. His call to draw close to the Church also contained suggestions and instructions:

The Country's administration has, above and beyond its legal attributes, a moral mission to educate its citizens and must provide the best example. That is why I am reminding you that it is the Christian and Romanian responsibility for all the local leaders and functionaries in the administration to go every Sunday and every holiday to church in his parish... in order to worship and participate in the Holy Liturgy. In places where because of the war there is so much work that people are forced to work Sundays, leaders and functionaries in the administration will take turns so that no one will be forced to miss church two weeks in a row.<sup>167</sup>

The message from Minister Popescu was clear: if you work for the administration then go to church on Sunday. Of course, he justified this directive by explaining that it was for the country's leaders to provide a good example. The Patriarch and the Synod expressed their thanks for Minister Popescu's support for the Church and appreciated the fact that the government continued to maintain a strong bond with the Church.

At a conference for theologians held at the Theology Faculty in Bucharest the keynote speaker was Professor Father Ștefan Tzankov. The title of the conference was

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp. 313-315.

*The Real Problems and Responsibilities of Theology and the Orthodox Church.* He

described the relationship between the Church and state as follows:

The Romanian Orthodox Church... is distinguished by a devout clergy and a faithful people intimately bound to its Church... to an active partnership felt in its breast towards fulfilling its great mission. The National Romanian State Orthodox Church in turn constitutionally granted the people's Church preference as the dominant Church State. Also, today's State leaders for the Romanian Orthodox people are full of the deepest feelings of veneration and attraction for their National Church; in other words they hold fast to the deepest conviction, faith, spiritual power, and divine mission of their National Orthodox Church. The voice of the great state leader, Marshall Antonescu, spoke about Orthodox Christianity as the spiritual foundation of the Romanian State, about the Redeemer's word as the Romanian people's fountain and power, about the eternal values of Christian morality and about the Romanian Orthodox Church as the people's true religious educator.<sup>168</sup>

While this was similar to other statements made about the close relationship between Church and state in Romania this statement indicated that it could be even closer. The Church was not only the object of government praise or patronage but it was also legally given preference by the government. The relationship was so strong that Patriarch Nicodim was quoted as saying "The Romanian Church and the Romanian State are one. Where it is ordained by the State it is also ordained by the Church and where the Church recommends it the State follows."<sup>169</sup>

So it was natural that the opening item on the Synod's agenda for its meeting on December 2, 1943 was to send a letter paying "homage" to Marshall Antonescu. This preceded the Synod's emergency discussion the next day due to a lack of building funds.

---

<sup>168</sup> Deacon Gheorghe I. Moisescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 61, no. 7-9 (1943): p. 433. The conference was held on May 14, 1943.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 436. This was attributed to the Patriarch by a Romanian theology professor at a conference in Sophia, Bulgaria on May 28, 1943. The fact that the Synod republished this comment shows that whether or not Patriarch Nicodim actually made this statement in public, he certainly endorsed it by allowing it to be published in the Synod's official magazine.

The Orthodox Church was building 536 new church buildings that lacked enough funding to be completed.<sup>170</sup> The amount of money needed to finish these buildings was approximately a staggering 1.186 billion lei. However, the Synod received a promise from Marshall Antonescu that all would be resolved and that any means necessary would be found to finish the remaining churches, so long as the Synod did not commission any more churches unless the building was fully funded in advance. The Synod agreed to this condition. It was an extremely generous offer by Antonescu to provide such a large amount of money in spite of the stress on the government's budget caused by the war.<sup>171</sup>

Another side benefit for the government's preference for the Orthodox Church came in the form of a decision to grant the Romanian Orthodox Church educational privileges. Prompted by a series of letters exchanged winter 1943 between the Director of Education in Bessarabia and Church leaders, the Director of Education in Bessarabia asked the Ministry of National Culture and Cults in June 1943 for clarification as to whether or not the Church had the right to control and oversee all religious education in Bessarabia's secondary schools. The response from the Ministry of Cults was an apology that the Bessarabian Education Director did not receive the memo sent on December 7, 1942. Because he did not receive this memo he was "confused" as to what rights the Church had regarding religion courses taught in schools in Bessarabia. The Ministry

---

<sup>170</sup> This meant that there were perhaps even more churches under construction because only those that could not be completed due to inadequate funding were counted. It should also be noted that this is a staggering number of new churches in a country that had been at war for several years.

<sup>171</sup> "Ședința din ziua 3 Dechemvrie 1943: Sumarul ședinței," BOR 61, no. 10-12 (1943): pp. 10-12. Many of these churches undoubtedly remained unfinished in spite of the Marshall's pledge. Antonescu could not control the lack of available building materials and the lack of labor. A year later Antonescu's financial pledge to the Church was moot because he was out of power.



wrote back that the Orthodox Church had the right to oversee religious education in all of Romania's state schools. At the time Bessarabia accounted for roughly a fourth of the Ministry's administration. The Bessarabian Education Director finally received his instructions and agreed that he would make the necessary changes and that he would work with the Church to put this regulation into place.<sup>172</sup>

This change was a significant victory for the Orthodox Church handed down from the government. All of Romania's state schools prior to September 1942 allowed for, and nearly all provided, religious curriculum to be taught in the school. While this curriculum and the amount of instruction time were extremely varied, it was an accepted part of the elementary and secondary education system. The religious education was also open to the various legally recognized religions. This meant that a Catholic priest, Lutheran minister, or other Christian minister could offer religious instruction to their churches' respective members at the same time that the Orthodox Christian instruction was given. Under this new law the Romanian Orthodox Church gained charge of all religious education offered in state schools. Private schools were not subject to this law. That meant that children, whose parents could not afford to send them to privately run or

---

<sup>172</sup> Patriarch Nicodim also wrote to the Ministry asking that the Director of Education in Bessarabia be told that in September 1942 order number 190037 had given the Orthodox Church the right to oversee all religious education in Romania's state schools. The Patriarch also told the Minister that the Church had known about this since January 1943 when the Archbishop of Chişinău and the National Education Director began exchanging letters regarding the subject that resulted in the Bessarabian Director eventually contacting the Ministry. From a ministerial report on the subject stamped as received on June 12, 1943; a letter from Patriarch Nicodim to the Minister written on May 31, 1943; one letter from the Minister of National Education on April 1943 regarding the Patriarch's complaint, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 1, pp. 100-103. Private schools run by other confessions retained the right to run religious education as they saw fit.

owned schools, would all receive religious instruction from an Orthodox cleric.<sup>173</sup> Thus, every child in a Romanian public school was required to receive Orthodox Christian religious instruction as part of the regular curriculum.

The Patriarch and the Synod remained true to Antonescu to the end. In January 1944 Patriarch Nicodim published his usual New Year's address. He continued to argue in favor of Romania's involvement in the war. He also continued to offer his prayers and praises to the government and the Marshall.<sup>174</sup> Exactly why the occasion of the presentation of the new Bishop of Buzău was used as a platform for the Patriarch to praise the government is not clear but the public affair on May 20, 1944 was attended by many state dignitaries including the Minister of Cults. The Patriarch and the Minister both took note of how important the relationship between the Church and state was. The Minister said that the interests of the state were "completely merged" with the Church's interests.<sup>175</sup>

In spite of the war going badly for Romania, which by this time was general public knowledge, not a word was published by the Synod in favor of surrender or a regime change. While the Synod did not publish the same huge bevy of letters praising Marshall Antonescu in 1944 it also did not publish anything negative about him. In fact, besides a few minor disagreements, as in the case of law 711, the Synod did not publish a

---

<sup>173</sup> There was no way of getting out of this instruction unless a school independently decided not to make non-Orthodox students attend. However, since this instruction was during school they would not really have a choice. Also, since Jews were already excluded from the public education system this law was clearly aimed at other Christian confessions.

<sup>174</sup> "Cuvântul de Binecuvântare al Bisericii pentru Anul Nou 1944," BOR 62, no. 1-3 (1944): pp. 1-5.

<sup>175</sup> Father Dim. Rădulescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 62, no. 4-6 (1945): pp. 216-218.

single negative article or speech in its official magazine about Antonescu or anyone else in his government. The Minister's comments on May 20, 1944 rang absolutely true because at that moment the Church and state had a perfectly united front. Each supported the other's propaganda and policies and any hint of a disagreement had dissipated. The rebellion was more than three years away and the Church had by this time aligned itself so completely with the state's program that it would be hard to distinguish the two.

## Chapter 3:

### The Anti-Sectarian Campaign

#### Anti-Sectarianism

The united Church and state front worked very closely together on what can be called an anti-sectarian campaign. The campaign began before the war and was intensified under the Antonescu regime. The driving force behind the campaign was a devotion to the nationalist notion of an ethnic Orthodox Romania.

Before showing the development of the anti-sectarian campaign an explanation of several key terms is necessary. Romanian has several cognates to English words that culturally take on very different connotations. The first word is *cult* (plural *culțe*), spelled just like the English cult. While the word cult in English portrays deviant and dangerous religious groups, the Romanian notion of *cult* reflects none of these meanings. The Romanian *cult* is a legally recognized and a well established religion or church. The *cult* has roughly the same connotation as the English word church. Romanians, then and today, like belonging to a *cult*. What Romanians generally fear are the *secte* (plural for *sectă*). The English speaking notion of cult generally reflects the Romanian notion of *secte*, a separatist religious group that is so out of touch with society that it is to be feared. In other words, *cult* is church and cult is *sectă*.

In Romania, then and now, there are also a few additional important distinctions. First is *biserică* (pl. *biserici*) which literally translates as church. This category usually refers to legally recognized Christian churches as well as to actual physical church buildings such as a cathedral, mosque, chapel, or synagogue. Sometimes *cult* and

*biserică* are used interchangeably. A *cult* could represent Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. But a *cult* could also represent a particular strain of any one of these. A *biserică* usually would represent Lutheranism, Orthodox Judaism, or Shia Islam but occasionally refers to religions in broader terms. The second distinction is the *asociație religioasă* or religious association (pl. *asociații religioase*). Religious associations operate as non-profit organizations of a religious character and are legally allowed to do many things that a cult or church can do with only a few restrictions. Unfortunately, one of these restrictions is that they are not under the full protection of any laws that protect a church or cult. Even worse is the public perception most Romanians had, and still have, of religious associations. For most Romanians, then and now, a religious association is only one step away from being a sect. The category of religious association was and still is a major stumbling block for a church or religion to obtain wider public acceptance beyond just belonging to an inferior legal category. While the religious association category seems legally redundant it continues to persist in spite of post-socialist attempts at putting Romania's religions on more equal grounds.

The anti-sectarian campaign was essentially a part of the government's plans to place the Romanian Orthodox Church in a position of power relative to all of Romania's other Christian confessions and religions. It appears that the Orthodox Church prompted the government to take action prior to the government's first moves. On March 29, 1937 the Patriarch's office sent a warning letter to the Ministry of Cults regarding sectarians. It read:

It is well known by all that sectarians are a destructive element in our people's bosom because they destroy our people's unity through their various methods and means of spreading their teachings.-

It is also known that some sects, by using their sectarian teachings and conceptions under the mask of spreading their faith, spread all kinds of subversive and disastrous ideas that not only undermine the Church's authority but they also undermine the foundation of the unified Romanian state- Greater Romania.-

We have taken the liberty several times before especially to try to call the honorable minister's attention to the sectarians' and their leaders' evil activities among our people.-

The propagandists and leaders of many sects, if not all of them, have foreign ancestry, and some are not even Romanian citizens, and are therefore estranged from any kind of love and interest for our people and our country and thus follow only their own narrow goals.<sup>176</sup>

The letter then went on to name some of the foreigners that were deemed so dangerous to the Orthodox Church and to the state. The list included Russians, Jews, Hungarians, Americans, and others. The Church was apparently keeping track of sectarians all around the country and relaying the information to the Patriarch's office.

Following the warning the Patriarchate included a request:

We would like to draw the Minister's attention to the state of things that could have grave consequences for our people and our country; and we ask you to please take the measures necessary against all sectarians, especially those of foreign tongue and those not of Romanian ancestry, to stop them from any kind of propaganda activities, and to swiftly bring these men to justice under the law in order to save our good faithful people from these foreigners' subversive instrumentations.<sup>177</sup>

What the Patriarch's office wanted was to limit religious freedom within the confines of nationalism. According to the Patriarch the problem was created by non-Romanians.

The solution was both for the good of the Church and the Nation, to take legal action

---

<sup>176</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1937, folder 131, p. 220, dashes appear in the original. The author of the letter was Metropolitan Irineu, but the letter was sent from the Patriarch's office with the Patriarchal stamp. Dashes appear as in the original.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

against the foreign sectarians. Very shortly after this letter the government sought to provide such a solution.

The first major decision made to put the Romanian Orthodox Church into a position of power vis-à-vis minority religions was the issuance of Decision Number 4.781 of 1937 *Concerning the Interdictions of Sects and Religious Associations*. This very lengthy piece of intrusive legislation became law upon its publication in the *Official Monitor* number 93 on April 21, 1937. The first article in the law prohibits “those religious organizations that preach doctrine of such a nature that is against the laws and organization of the State and its institutions, and that through their religious practices, are contradictory to good moral standards and the public order.”<sup>178</sup> By these criteria the first religious organizations outlawed by name in the law were “millennial associations” including the International Bible Student Association, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Society for Bible Studies. Other confessions outlawed by name were Pentecostals, The Apostolic Church of God, Penitents [*pocăiții*], Nazarenes, Reformed Adventists, Harvest, Chlysts, Inochentists, and Stylists.<sup>179</sup> While they may have been thought to be dangerous to the public, they were also all very active proselyting, especially from the Romanian Orthodox Church.

---

<sup>178</sup> ANR MCDS 1933-1944, 1937 folder 1, page 1 of the booklet, see Article I. The law was so long it had its own booklet. The definitions of moral standards and public order were not included, thus leaving the door open for the government to make them up as it went along.

<sup>179</sup> Inochentists were Innocentism’s adherents in Romanian territory who allegedly preached free love. Although this point is not certain, it is certain that they were a splinter group away from the organized Orthodox Church considered to be heretical by Orthodox Church leaders. Given that some of their communes had far more females than males there may have been some truth to that. They did try to separate themselves from society and live in communes and was run by apostate Orthodox priests, as were Romanian Chlysts. Those familiar with the term *pocăiții* will note that the term today is used as a derogatory term to refer to all non-Orthodox and non-Catholic Christians rather than any specific group.

Although the law did not allude to these now-illegal confessions drawing away Orthodox Christians specifically, it did give the police guidelines regarding proselytism. The police were to close all those named organizations' meeting places and not allow them to meet anywhere else. Also, all verbal, print, brochure, magazine, and other forms of proselytism were to be stopped and not allowed even for their own members. All of their writings and publications were to be confiscated and their presses closed. Anyone found breaking this law was to be arrested for disturbing the peace.<sup>180</sup>

The law's second chapter provided provisions for "religious associations" to obtain legal recognition and authorization. Article II declared that a religious group could function publicly and state any religious doctrine so long as it was authorized by the Ministry of Cults and Arts. This declaration may have been intended to show that there was a kind of religious freedom in the country but at the same time it gave control of the country's religious practices to the government. Article III explained the requirements for a religious association to obtain legal recognition. The group had to have at least 100 adult male Romanian citizen heads of household in the same community who could prove that they had no other religious affiliation. All of these men had to have voting rights and none could have a criminal record. The group had to bring the Ministry of Cults a memorandum that explained their religious doctrine, religious practices, and organization. There were also quite a few documents and signatures that had to be submitted to the ministry as well.<sup>181</sup> These requirements were also very limiting as many

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.



local congregations, especially non-denominational Christian ones, did not have enough families to meet this requirement. This article would actually prevent smaller congregations from having legal authorization to hold meetings and put them in jeopardy a few years later during the war. Still, it did provide a path for religious groups to continue freely practicing.

The third chapter gave specific recognition to several religious associations even if some of it was conditional. Seventh Day Adventists and Evangelical Christians were both allowed to continue to operate as long as they conformed to the law's other provisions within six months of the publication of the law. Seventh Day Adventist and Evangelical congregations were given three months to submit their documents to be granted authorization. If they did not do so they would be subject to closure just like the banned confessions listed in the law's first article. Baptists were also mentioned as being subject to the same provisions as the Seventh Day Adventists and Evangelical Christians.

Chapter four explained how these larger associations were to operate within the country. Each local chapter, branch, or congregation had to have at least 50 men that fulfilled the requirements from article III. The local congregations had to provide quite a bit of documentation to the Ministry as well. Each local congregation was to submit a table to the Ministry that contained each member's name, address, nationality, ethnic origin, marriage status, and membership in the local congregation. The information also had to be reviewed by local authority and certified. Children fell under their parents' religious affiliation and those born into a specific religious group had to provide a copy of their birth certificate. Each local meeting place had to be inspected by local sanitation

authorities. Each local congregation had to prove that the meeting place was a “sufficient distance” from other religious meeting houses and not on the same street as another cult. Each local congregation also had to prove that there was a local communal cemetery or that the group had a private cemetery. Once an authorization was issued the local gendarme or police was given a copy of the group’s authorization in order to keep track of them. Every year afterward a supplemental registry of the congregations’ new members or those who left was to be submitted to the Ministry. All new members were to provide legal documentation that they had left any confession or association to which they had previously belonged.

Basically, anything that an authorized religious association did needed to be reported to the Ministry of Cults including the functioning of meeting places, cemeteries, religious educational institutions, philanthropic or charitable institutions, and the hiring or release of religious employees including clergy. Clergy also had to be Romanian citizens in order to be authorized to work.<sup>182</sup> Such regulations imposed on religious organizations made it difficult for smaller religious groups to function as it put a lot of bureaucratic pressure on them to try and avoid the myriad of ways they could lose their legal recognition, making it easier for clergy and members alike to just be in a larger confession, especially the Orthodox Church that was not subject to this law.

The Orthodox Church’s leaders were happy to spread the word about the new law. Several bishops volunteered to spread hundreds of brochures about the law over the

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-12. The regulations also included provisions for property ownership, limiting preachers’ functions only to those provided in the religious statutes approved by the Ministry, and a clause that a religious association breaking any of these regulations could lose its authorization.

summer of 1937.<sup>183</sup> The Bishop of Huși used local priests to spy and report on sectarians he felt were in violation of the law.<sup>184</sup> As a result of decree-law 4.781 the summer of 1937 saw the closure of many smaller Christian congregations and the seizure of many of their publications.<sup>185</sup> The Holy Synod mirrored this attitude later in the year during its meeting on September 24. A question had been raised the day before as to whether or not publications by another sect constituted immoral literature. The Synod had published a two page statement against immoral literature in its magazine for January-February that was so broad it could have encompassed many kinds of literature even though pornography was the only genre of literature specifically given as an example.<sup>186</sup> The Synod decided that sectarian literature was in fact immoral and gave it the same condemnation as it had given pornography.<sup>187</sup>

In 1938 the Synod promulgated its stand against sects and sectarians in its May-June magazine issue. These were the Synod's comments on the laws regarding other sects and their adherents:

The problem of sects remains for both the Church and the State:  
a) For the Church it is because these wanderers are ensnared from the Christian community, [sectarians] who are now stoked by the characteristic fanaticism that every new convert has in a new religious life, then feel the need to proselyte. At first it appears that their enthusiasm for their new religious life springs from a

---

<sup>183</sup> A letter from the Bishop of Huși to the minister; a letter from the Bishop of Lugoj, both letters from June 1937, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1937, folder 132, pp. 220-221.

<sup>184</sup> A letter from the Bishop of Huși to the Minister of Cults received July 5, 1937, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1937, folder 132, p. 258.

<sup>185</sup> See ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1937 folders 132 and 133 contain examples of this scattered through several hundred documents albeit without any organizing principle.

<sup>186</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 55, no. 1-2 (1937): pp. 111-112.

<sup>187</sup> "Ședința din ziua 24 Septemvrie," BOR 55, no. 11-12 (1937): p. 71.

depth of religiosity that the community they were ensnared from did not have, and one could believe it was true. In reality their enthusiasm is needed in part to justify to their own conscience the act of abandoning the community in which they lived; and in part it is to find the strength to sustain themselves amongst those who view them as lost. Their aggressiveness in the face of the faithful who have not followed suit springs from false bravado, a courage that people often have when they are not convinced of their own creeds. Still they can blind the naïve with this enthusiasm and can recruit proselytes. This is why the Church suffers from their loss and protects those who could be contaminated.

b) For the state they are just as dangerous and suspect because the sectarian not only rips away from a part of the traditions in which he lived, he separates himself from all of his past traditions. In the beginning, in his soul, the differentiation is made only regarding questions of faith. Before long however, the sectarian sees that he must also cast from his life everything from other creeds and the religious community in which he lived. A religious sectarian becomes, as a necessity for his soul, antinational. It is a logical ending for the soul. That is why the sectarian problem interests both the Church and the state.

The Synod also called the religious laws necessary for the state to “appropriately monitor these dubious citizens.”<sup>188</sup> Following this anti-sectarian commentary it was revealed that recent anti-sectarian laws were written Bishop Nicolae Colan, a clear indication that the Church and government worked in concert to deal with minority religious groups. The problem was deemed severe enough that at its May 3, 1938 meeting the Synod announced that every theology school was to have its own department dedicated to the study of sectarians (sectology) and missionaries. The idea was to better prepare future clerics “for the battle against the sects.”<sup>189</sup>

Patriarch Nicodim continued to lead the Synod and the Church in the same direction. In the May-June 1939 issue of the Synod’s magazine there was a warning to the Church on the subject of mixed marriages:

---

<sup>188</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 56, no. 5-6 (1938): pp. 301-302.

<sup>189</sup> “Ședința din ziua de 3 Mai 1938,” BOR 56, no. 5-6 (1938): p. 37.

*A grave religious and national problem: mixed marriages.*- In local Church magazines in Ardeal and in Romanian publications from the same part of the country appears a danger that continuously draws attention, that mixed marriages present the danger of denationalization and the loss of the ancestral faith.

Because the minority population of Ardeal is not Orthodox, rather Roman-Catholic, Protestant, and sectarian, the Romanian men who marry young non-Romanian and non-Orthodox women slide towards losing their national identity and towards other Christian confessions. The danger is especially large when those mixed marriages are done by officers, professors, magistrates and State bureaucrats who should all have an eye on the Romanian Nation's unity and security. In such cases, it is not out of the question that the case of the Philistine Delilah could be repeated; wherein Samson lost his power because he put his faith in the power of his own soul when he had actually received his power from God. The work of denationalization becomes easier: the mother will teach the children another language and will also baptize them in another faith.<sup>190</sup>

After giving an anecdote about a Romanian man whose children were being raised as Hungarian Catholics, the Synod warned the clergy to “block against this danger.” This warning to the Church and the country highlights one of the main ideas behind anti-sectarianism: the Church looked at other Christian confessions through the prism of nationalism. This is why the requirements for religious associations or other confessions included quotas for minimum numbers of Romanian heads of households and to demand that the leaders be Romanian citizens. Because the sectarian problem was seen not just as religious but also as national the Church's warnings were always addressed to the Church and the Nation.

When Law 4.781 was changed slightly the next month by Decision Number 26208/938 on July 11, 1939 to eliminate linguistic redundancies the Synod commented on the reaffirmation of the law in its September-October 1939 magazine issue as follows:

---

<sup>190</sup> Father Victor N. Popescu, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 57, no. 5-6 (1939): p. 366, italics in the original. Here the word denationalization is used not in the economic sense, rather in the sense of losing national identity. Ardeal is another Romanian name for Transylvania, although it usually only refers to central to southern areas of Transylvania.

“The guiding principle of controlling religious associations is keeping the State’s order, and in no way is opposed to and censoring the freedom of religious conscience.”<sup>191</sup> The short article then went on to explain how the provisions of the law were meant to protect the country and give religious freedom for those who followed the law. The article also explained the importance of monitoring the ethnic make-up of religious organizations.

The Synod summed up its justification for the law as follows:

All of these provisions... show that the activities of some religious associations are subversive, and that they are strong and dangerous enough to merit the special attention and supervision called for because these activities are often clandestine thanks to the anti-national goal that they all follow. The National Churches and minority cults in the Romanian State can do nothing but rejoice at the control the Ministry of Cults will have over religion.<sup>192</sup>

The emphasis on the national importance of religious laws above freedom of religion shows how important nationalist ideology was to Orthodox leaders.

The Synod took such pride in combating these sectarian groups that it listed this as one of its accomplishments for the decade. An article entitled “The Preoccupations and Accomplishments of the Holy Synod for the Years 1930-1940” explained part of the Church’s successful campaign against sectarians. The problem, according to the Synod, was that in local parishes people’s good faith was being taken advantage of by “wolves in sheep’s clothing- sectarians- who look there to sucker in their prey, defaming the Orthodox faith with which they were born and that the Romanian people have lived.”<sup>193</sup>

It continued:

---

<sup>191</sup> From a copy of the decision of the meeting, ANR MCDS 1939, folder 1, p. 1; Father Victor N. Popescu, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 57, no. 9-10 (1939): p. 607.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 608.

They are profiting from the Romanians' traditional tolerance born from the fact that they are good Christians and they seek to slander what we hold most sacred in order to spread the seeds of discord so dangerous not only for the Church but also for national unity. Therefore they become bigots profiting from our own goodness. But the moment they are called out they begin to cry out and look to foreigners to battle our "intolerance".

The Synod lauded its accomplishments in battling these "weed spreaders." This was done by "organizing an internal mission; and allowing the establishment of religious associations [Orthodox religious associations] with a missionary character."<sup>194</sup> Of course, by this time proselyting had been illegal for three years per a law written by an Orthodox Bishop, but no mention of this was made here. Rather, the Synod pointed out that its own proselyting efforts were bearing fruit among sectarians. The Synod saw other confessions' missionary efforts as an attack against the Romanian people and a sign of their bigotry and intolerance. Meanwhile the Church's own missionary efforts were praised as important to Romanians and in no way were these efforts a sign of intolerance, rather they were a sign of the Church's goodness.<sup>195</sup>

### **New Regime: Tougher Anti-Sectarian Campaign**

Law 4.781 remained one of the standard religious laws to the end of the war as other laws would only tighten the provisions in accordance with the law's original

---

<sup>193</sup> Father Gh. Vintilescu, "Preocupările și Realizările Sfântului Sinod între anii 1930-1940," BOR 58, no. 5-6 (1940): p. 494.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 494-495.

<sup>195</sup> In December 1939 the Church held a large missionary conference specifically to "battle sectarians." The conference was mentioned in "Sfântul Sinod al Sfintei Biserici Ortodoxe Române: Sesiunea Ordinară din Anul 1940 Ședința I-a din ziua de 10 Iunie," BOR 58, no. 7-8 (1940): p. 4, and also page 13 from the meeting on June 11 when the Synod agreed to continue an organized mission against sects.

intentions as outlined by the Church nearly two years later. While Decision Number 4.781 placed limits on the ability of certain groups to practice religion and banned certain groups outright, the Antonescu regime issued another important law stating which confessions and religions were allowed to operate fully in the country without being subject to the rigors of Decision 4.781. On September 9, 1940, only three days after Antonescu and the Iron Guard began running the government, the Ministry of Cults published decision number 42352/1940 as follows:

We... the Department of Cults and Arts, seeing a new regime given to the Romanian State, which has become nationalist, Christian, and totalitarian, seeing the law's provisions for the general state of cults, seeing the law's provisions for the organization of the Ministry of Cults and Arts, founded on the powers conferred to us by laws and rules now enacted, WE DECIDE:

Art. I.- The Romanian State protects and authorizes the functioning in its territory of the following historic cults:

- a) The Romanian Orthodox Church, being the dominant religion of the State;
- b) The Greco-Catholic Church (Uniate) considered also representing a Romanian Church;
- c) Catholicism (Latin Rite, Greco-Ruthenian, and Armenian);
- d) The Reformed Church (Calvinist);
- e) The Evangelical Church – Lutheran;
- f) The Unitarian Church;
- g) The Armeno-Gregorian Church;
- h) Islam.

Art.II.- The Romanian State only recognizes the de facto existence of the Mosaic Confession; this will be made manifest in subsequent Ministerial decisions.<sup>196</sup>

The Orthodox Church was given the privilege of being the dominant religion, an important distinction from all other churches and religions because it meant that the government recognized the Romanian Orthodox Church's rights ahead of all others. This caveat for the Romanian Orthodox Church was probably vague on purpose to explain

---

<sup>196</sup> From an unsigned copy of the decision by Radu Budisteanu on September 9, 1940, ANR MCDS 1939, folder 1, p. 18.



away any future preferential treatment of the Orthodox Church. It also meant that only six other Christian confessions and one other religion, Islam, could operate freely in the country without being subject to the rigors of decision 4.781.<sup>197</sup> This decision also stated that except for these historic cults “no other religious associations or sects can exist and are at the present date of this decision to be disbanded both de jure and de facto.” This part of the law sounds like a contradiction to the previous law on religious associations but there was no evidence that in 1940 previously recognized religious associations had been closed.

In fact, to avoid confusion on the rules on the same day decision 42353 was also published. It explained that there could be no sect with a different doctrine and practice than the historic cults. Also, any prayer houses or meetinghouses that belonged to recognized religious associations and sects were to be closed immediately and the police were to make a record of the closures. All the properties that had been prayer houses or meetinghouses became the property of the state, which would then turn over those properties to another “Christian cult.”<sup>198</sup> But the government was not quite ready to completely take away the rights granted to recognized religious associations and published a third decision (number 42354) on September 9, 1940: the members of previously recognized religious associations and sects were now considered “non-

---

<sup>197</sup> I cannot speculate as to why Islam was recognized as a historic cult, nor could I find anything in the archive explaining why this was the case. The law only recognized the de facto existence of the “Mosaic confession” or Judaism and this law did not explain what de facto recognition meant for Judaism.

<sup>198</sup> From decision no. 42353 dated September 9, 1940 and signed by Radu Budisteanu, ANR MCDS 1939, folder 1, p. 22. No mention was made of synagogues or Jewish properties in this decision.

confessional.”<sup>199</sup> All people who fell under this “non-confessional” category would remain legally registered Christians “without confession” until they joined a historic cult. Local governments were supposed to retroactively change all marriage and birth certificates to reflect the new religious registration changes.

The purpose of these laws was to push people out of smaller Christian religious associations into confessions that were considered to be long established in the country and therefore a part of Romania’s national-historical heritage. The reason for calling them historic cults was a way of rewriting the history of religion in the Romanian territory into a nationalist paradigm. The other groups of recognized Christians, most notably Seventh Day Adventists and Baptists, were now in a state of limbo as not legally belonging to any category.<sup>200</sup> Also, the loss of properties to the state could prove devastating to these confessions should the government follow through with all the provisions of the law. These laws were designed to put minority religions at a disadvantage and served to give the few confessions left a tremendous advantage. Those seeking to remain active Christians and enjoy the benefits of free religious practice had to look for another church that was legally permitted to continue practicing. And since the Orthodox Church was so ubiquitous in Romania it stood to gain the most. These laws were intrusions into people’s private religious lives, telling people which religions they could practice and which were not allowed. While the 1937 law had similar clauses the

---

<sup>199</sup> From decision no. 42354 dated September 9, 1940 and signed by Radu Budisteanu, ANR MCDS 1939, folder 1, p. 23. The Ministry of the Interior was also to ensure that all of its documents were changed to reflect the change in religious status.

<sup>200</sup> Though these three were not specifically named as outlawed, hypothetically under the new law they seemed as if they would be. They were still allowed to operate after this decision in spite of what seemed might be the end for them.

door had been left open for smaller confessions to exist under certain criteria. Under the Antonescu regime the intent of the 1937 law was now expanded to its logical conclusion that smaller groups deemed to be un-Romanian were outlawed. Because the government had also issued a law stating that the President of the Ministerial Council (Marshall Antonescu), the Minister of Cults, the Supreme Court's Chief Justice, and the country's university administrators all had to be Orthodox, there was nowhere for people belonging to minority religions affected by these laws to turn to appeal.<sup>201</sup>

The Antonescu regime again modified religious laws to curtail religious practices in Romania several months after the Iron Guard rebellion in January 1941. In June 1941, the Ministerial Council, led by Marshall Antonescu, issued a four pronged decree-law similar to the initial laws from September 1940 under the Legionary Government. It named the Orthodox Church as having a special status and continued to recognize the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, Roman Catholics, Armenian Catholics, the Reformed Church (Calvinists), the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, The Unitarian Church, the Armenian Gregorian Church, and Islam as Romania's historic cults. The laws also included a statement that all other religious communities' properties were to become state property. Along with these changes in the wording of the religious legal code the council and Antonescu renewed the approval of the continued operation of the Baptist Church in Transylvania, but only as a religious association and not as a historic cult.<sup>202</sup> The de facto

---

<sup>201</sup> Ion I. Nedelescu, ed., *Legislația Statului Român Legionar* vol. 9 (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului "Universul", 1941), pp. 187-188.

<sup>202</sup> Letters to the President of the Council of Ministers from the Minister of Cults on the modifications of the law, also a response on the approval of these new changes, copies of the changes to the laws, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 185, pp. 34-43. Each of these laws had already been piecemealed out in

recognition of Judaism was again presented as it had been in September 1940 and exactly what would happen in the future to Jewish religious sites was left to future ministerial decisions. The Council of Ministers did not spell out policy details as to how the new laws were to be carried out in practice. Nothing in the decree-laws in June 1941 explained how churches were to be closed, by when, or by whom. Although a decision from February 20, 1941 stated that “policing bodies” were responsible for taking measures against illegal sectarian activities no mention of this policy made it into the text of the laws signed by Antonescu that summer.<sup>203</sup>

Beyond these laws it seems that at the time not much was done by the Romanian government to curb the activities of sectarians. This drew the ire of the Archbishop of Alba Iulia and Sibiu, who in early October 1941 wrote an angry letter to the Minister of Cults explaining his disgust at the state’s “indifference in the face of sectarian propaganda.” Describing sectarianism as “an acute moral plague” for the Orthodox Church and a “permanent danger for the state” the letter explained that the Church had dramatically increased its activity to keep Orthodox Christians from running to other sects. The complaint was that the government had not met its obligation to enforce anti-sectarian laws. The letter went on to complain about a specific Adventist church in the Braşov-Stupini community that the Archbishopric had repeatedly asked to be shut down

---

prior decisions, but the Ministerial Council’s decisions on June 21 and 29, 1941 made a final decision that all of them would be made permanent through one decree signed off by Antonescu. It modified articles 21, 53, 54, 55, 56, and 58 from the religious legal code at the time. It is also interesting that they even had time to meet and take care of this during the first days of Operation Barbarossa. Seventh-Day Adventists and Evangelical Christians were also allowed to operate.

<sup>203</sup> See Undersecretary of State of Cults and Arts 1941 (February 1, 1941- January 1, 1942.) The Decisions of the Councils of Ministers. ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1942, folder 100, pp. 162-164. This was supposed to give local authorities power to enforce such laws, but because the statement was so vague it appears that early on very little action was taken against minority cults other than Judaism.

because it violated the legal religious codes.<sup>204</sup> The letter left resolving the issue in the hands of the state and did not make suggestions as to how the Adventist church there should be closed, just asking that the government do something. The letter then turned back to a general complaint against sectarians and that the government was not resolving the problem quickly enough.<sup>205</sup>

After Bessarabia had been taken back from the Soviet Union by Romanian and German forces, the Synod began an anti-sectarian campaign in that territory. In the Synod's meeting on October 25, 1941 the Synod was notified by the Minister of Cults that the Police in Chişinău had already observed the rapid growth of activity by "religious sects" in Bessarabia. Based on this information the Synod decided the following:

1. The Holy Synod will lobby the honorable government to disband all religious sects, giving back our People religious and national unity;
2. Their holinesses, the Bessarabian Fathers, will be instructed to take the quickest and most efficient measures to crack down against these lost undercurrents that have spawned a number of adherents, especially under the Bolshevik regime.<sup>206</sup>

Bessarabia had barely been reoccupied for a month and the Church wanted to try and eliminate competition, including using its own priests to crack down against sects. While most of the people living in Bessarabia were Orthodox Christians, and the report greatly exaggerated the perceived problem, it still shows the aggressiveness of the Church in its anti-sectarian campaign.

---

<sup>204</sup> Other than this one tenuous example of an Adventist Church in Braşov-Stupini there is little to no evidence that people were running from the Orthodox Church.

<sup>205</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 134, pp. 5-6. There are no accompanying documents that reveal whether or not the Adventist church in Braşov-Stupini was closed. The letter was stamped as received on October 9, 1941.

<sup>206</sup> "Şedinţa din ziua de 25 Octomvrie 1941," BOR 59, no. 11-12 (1941): p. 37.

While the decision was based on reports from Bessarabia, the Holy Synod's decision was to lobby for the general disbanding of all religious sects. This meant that the Holy Synod intended to ask the government to outlaw all Christian minority groups that were not Orthodox, Catholic, or Unitarian. Catholics and Unitarians, about whom the Orthodox Church leadership also complained, were not categorized by Orthodox Church leaders as sectarians. Because the Holy Synod usually met with at least one official from the Ministry of Cults or had clergy working in the ministry, lobbying the government with such requests was easy. While the request was not granted in full a year later the Ministry of Cults came to see several minority Christian groups in the same way the Holy Synod did in fall 1941. Still, the government did continue to allow Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Evangelical Christians to continue to operate as religious associations through the summer of 1942 as indicated by a letter sent to a courthouse in Cluj County by the Ministry of Cults.<sup>207</sup>

In September 1942, the undersecretary of cults published a report entitled "An Account of the Religious Associations (Sects) in Romania." The introduction complained that because of a lack of government involvement on this issue the Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Evangelical Christians had tremendous success in stealing away converts: this was "verminous to the people and the general interests of the National Romanian State." This report was correct in part because the archives contain little evidence that the government did anything to enforce the laws it had issued. This

---

<sup>207</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1942, folder 163, pp. 21-22. It was apparently a response to a letter from a judge in that county who asked which cults were allowed to practice openly besides the Orthodox Church.

was typical of the Romanian government under Antonescu; the government issued numerous decree-laws that were left to local authorities to be enforced.

The report then went on to list many specific allegations of sects “Breaking the law”:

- There are still some sects banned as dangerous to the public order and good morality that are still active. The proof: recent statistical reports from the gendarme legions and police authorities.
- Many of these local sectarian organizations function without following the rules: especially the Baptists who consider themselves a cult and therefore free from the obligation to obtain authorization.
- When it was requested by authorities that they follow the rules or cease their meetings, the sectarians have been meeting clandestinely. The proof is the many condemnations and prosecutions brought against the sectarians for this violation.
- Even today, in this time of war, the sectarians defy the provisions and meet clandestinely in Bukovina and Bessarabia or continue their proselytizing propaganda in any way they can.
- Currently there is evidence that at these religious meetings they receive persons who have not legally abandoned the cult to which they belong.
- They provide insincere, false or incomplete information.
- They file complaints against the authorities that are proven unfounded for which they are sent to court and sanctioned.
- They have not sought to fulfill the conditions that authorize them to function, especially the Baptists who cause disruption in the country and abroad. This activity must be punished according to the Penal Code; it is contrary to the country’s interests.<sup>208</sup>

The allegation that sectarians were breaking the law is a more specific complaint than the Synod’s complaint a year earlier but is essentially rooted in the same idea that their illegal activities were undercutting national unity and the Orthodox Church.

---

<sup>208</sup>ANR MCDS 1933-1944, 1939, folder 1, pp. 24-25. The report is designated Ministry of Cults and Arts No. 3683 stamped with the date September 29, 1942, although it was actually dated on the report for October 1, 1942 indicating that the actual date it was publicly revealed was two days after it was written. The dashes are used in the original report. While the allegations are somewhat specific no sources were cited. So there is no way to tell how widespread these alleged problems were, or if they were just citing specific examples and making generalizations about sects from single incidents.

The report's next section explained that the sectarians' activities were "against national interests":

- They seek to destroy national unity through an aggressive attitude against the dominant church. This thing is proven in Ardeal, where they used and still use the Baptist sect, in order to weaken the unity of enslaved Romanians.
- Ritually using their faithful jargon, in many areas, religious meetings from the western border that were a spark for irredentism, revisionists and Magyarization for members who were ethnically Hungarian or Romanians attracted to their interests. In the eastern border they spread communist propaganda in Ukrainian religious meetings.
- Uprooted from the country's tradition and past, the faith they witness and by the fact that their faith is imported, they do not feel solidarity with their blood brothers and manifest repulsion against the state's national organization, against the hierarchy, and against the principle of authority. Under the mask of a universal and free church they do not recognize borders and undermine nations.
- Every sectarian pretending to interpret the Holy Scripture has come like so many to a mistaken understanding of the precepts "Thou shalt not kill" and "love thy neighbor." That is why not only have the adepts of banned sects understood this to mean that they should not fulfill their military duty, but also validated to sectarians that they should not take up arms against the enemy in wartime. The sentences pronounced by the War Councils and Court Martials confirm the existence in the army of cases of insubordination based on religious motives.
- The religious associations cannot depend on any similar foreign organization as this opposes the idea of a national sovereign state, and should suffer the proscribed consequences quickly. Yet the sectarians, especially the Baptists, have complained abroad against the treatment they have received. With false information they provoke a reaction of public opinion especially in the United States and England. They create difficulties for the country especially in these hard times without any consequences: The Congressional Resolutions, audiences with Romanian diplomatic representatives, hostile publications, threatening hostilities, etc... The Romanian citizens who make such legal mistakes should lose their citizenship and have their belongings confiscated. In these cases there were no sanctions applied.
- With funds received from abroad they have upheld Magyar sentiments amongst their faithful and have converted more members, have made it possible for foreigners to proselyte in the country, have maintained a Baptist seminary in Bucharest and an Adventist Bible Institute in Stupini-Brasov, and have developed an intense proselytism through publications such as the Adventist press "The Gospel's Word." All with these funds must pay fines and must be condemned as illegal sectarians; meanwhile they must be forced to pay these fines immediately.



These allegations of undercutting the Romanian nation and its Church, undercutting the war effort, and conspiring with foreigners and communists were very serious. They amounted to treason and if true would attract Antonescu's attention more quickly than the allegations of holding religious meetings without a permit.

The third section of the report explains why the sects are a danger to society:

- Whereas Freemasonry was for the intellectual class, the activity of religious sects is for simple people- workers and peasants-. The sects maintain apathy in the face of general interests, manifest an attitude of disobedience to stable order, and preach giving up material goods to benefit the sectarian movement.
- The Adventist sectarians have their day of rest on Saturday instead of Sunday, and create through their activity a disruption in the good working of society and are a drain in the national economy. The time is not used for work, and is more than just something for another faith. They use the time for meetings day and night where preachers fill their heads with all kinds of mistaken ideas.
- There is no serious religious education given to the children of parents who belong to these religious sects, because the sects do not have qualified people. They leave resolving problems to fate, which keeps them from forming a good and prepared citizen for the future.
- The sectarian children single themselves out from other children and are encouraged by their parents to have a vile attitude against ancestral traditions, national games, holidays of patriotic nature, the national costume, etc...
- The birth rate does not grow among sectarians, because of their change in lifestyle and their change in faith. Very often families suffer a lack of unity caused by misunderstandings where spouses do share the same faith.
- In the localities where they have their houses of prayer they create a state of agitation, weakening the idea of order, unrighteously blaspheme the Orthodox Church, and spread false and foreign ideas about our people [*neam*].

After all of these explanations as to why sectarians have been ruining the country and are a continuing threat the report comes to its conclusions:

- 1.- The expansion of sects in their activities was based on the principle of a free church in a state that has left this idea behind a long time ago. That is why they ignore or avoid the provisions referencing the function of religious associations and have created a permanent situation of confusion through their activities.
- 2.- They have done aggressive and exploitative proselytism in bad faith, for whatever complaints are among the people. This has damaged harmony among

the confessions, the peace and safety of the country, grown their number of adepts, and has given the possibility for partisans to spread to places that before had none. Their love can be considered suspect as it has drawn away the citizens of this country from their ancestral faith and by the fact that their proselytism has been sustained through foreign financial backing.

3.- The fruit of faith of some of these banned sects is that they do not encourage their adepts to be compliant to their military obligations, oaths, etc... Even if the adepts of authorized sects do not publicly oppose their military obligations there are still cases of disobedience based on erroneous interpretations of the Holy Scripture because the sectarian literature recommends fulfilling military obligations by serving as noncombatants.

4.- The sects by their actions preach ideas that take them away from the idea of the nation. Preaching an uncontrolled liberty they open the door to anarchy and create a favorable sphere for the development of ideas pleasing to internationalism. They attack the homogeneity and unity of our people [*neam*], they butcher the pride of our existence, and they do not acknowledge tradition or that the foundation of the Romanian soul is its tradition.

5.- Although they are citizens, and the majority are ethnic Romanians, when they try to make an atmosphere against the provisions that regulate the activity of religious associations in the country they still seek help from foreign organizations...

7.- The proselyting of religious associations has had success among members of the Orthodox Christian Church...

8.- There is lack of effective control on the part of the state in the face of sectarian organizations' activities and especially the lack of organization with a missionary character (monks or something else) made up of competent people as well as the immediate possibility of carrying out this activity where it is needed.

Thus, the report singles out Seventh-Day Adventists and Baptists as guilty of undermining the Orthodox Church, Romanian nationalism, and the war effort.

Each of these allegations was taken very seriously by the Ministry of Cults. On October 7, 1942 the Ministry issued decision number 53,808 which directly reflected the conclusions of the report. The Ministry revised the religious laws to eliminate any portion of the laws regarding cults and religious associations that allowed for special operating requests to be granted to a non-historic cult. The explanation given for the issuance of the law was that religious associations had not respected the regulations they

were supposed to follow when operating, (e.g. religious associations had engaged in proselytism), and the state found it impossible to monitor so many local religious groups.<sup>209</sup> Antonescu confirmed the modification made by the Ministry and further clarified that all religious associations were disbanded, regardless of whether or not they had been previously authorized.<sup>210</sup>

While there is no indication that the government did all of this as a direct result of the Holy Synod's lobbying it is hard to ignore this as just a coincidence. Every complaint against sectarians included proselytism against the Orthodox Church and drawing away Orthodox Christians. A persistent problem was that the government did not have the capacity to monitor these religious groups. So how did the government become aware of them? It had to be made by the Orthodox Church. Local priests knew best which of their parishioners had left the fold for other pastures. As the October 1942 report against sectarians indicated in most cases there was no legal action taken against the alleged parties. This meant that local police were either not apprehending religious law violators or at least not reporting them to the central government. The report was made through the Ministry of Cults, meaning that it came from Church officials first. Only then could the Ministry of Cults pass the information along to the other government authorities who had the power to enforce the law. An example of this is found in the Holy Synod's

---

<sup>209</sup> Ion I. Nedelescu, ed., *Legislația Statului Român Legionar* vol. 26 (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului "Universul", 1943), p. 43.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471. The law was decree-law 3.792. The law was also published in *Monitorul Oficial* two days later. This was news for the Baptist community in Cluj-Turda county. The archive shows that as late as December 1942 the Baptist community was still authorized to function by local authorities. See ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume I, pp. 7-10 that show it still was authorized to function in December 1942. Those pages include the original authorization and certificate papers from 1935 and 1940 and that on December 22 they continued to have the same authorization from county officials.

meeting from December 4, 1942. During the meeting one item on the Synod's agenda was a letter by the Bishop of Argeş. The letter contained complaints about the activities of sects in the Bishop's jurisdiction. The Holy Synod decided that it would work with the government "with all perseverance" to see that all sects were disbanded.<sup>211</sup>

As for the disbanding of the previously allowed religious associations, the Synod waited six months to publish a statement on the exact terms of the law. The Synod made its feelings clear on the matter:

Our Church has always fought staunchly against the sects because it has always upheld that a falling away from the true faith would consequently shatter the people's lives that had always traveled this traditional Christian Orthodox path... It is also through Orthodoxy that the Romanian people has preserved its ethnic being, and it has fought unceasingly to advance and give rise to a "country", in other words a united and free national state.

This is the reason that the different religious brotherhoods and sects are opposed to our Orthodox teachings, why they must be expelled, because they have no other purpose than to break the security of Romanian unity and to destroy the Orthodox Faith's foundations that firmly bind all Romanians together...

Therefore we consider that *the law for the abolishment of the sects and religious associations* put forward by Minister Ioan Petrovici is a wise and healthy law, one that our Church had waited righteously for a long time.

Marshall Ion Antonescu's government could not have come up with a better law for these difficult times than this, as it is intended to strengthen the unity of the people's soul, putting an end to the sectarian stain that had done so much damage to the Christian and Romanian soul. Those who drew up and realized this law, which we consider to be true religious reform, deserve the highest praise on behalf of the Orthodox Church and her servants.<sup>212</sup>

Orthodox leaders had more than religious reasons to rejoice at the passage of the law.

The results turned out to be a great benefit to the Church.

---

<sup>211</sup> "Şedinţa din ziua de 4 Dechemvrie 1942," BOR 60, no. 9-10 (1942): pp. 26-27.

<sup>212</sup> Deacon Gheorghe I. Moisescu, "Cronica Internă," BOR 61, no. 4-6 (1943): pp. 309-310. The statement was released to the public in Bucharest on June 28, 1943. Also included in the magazine was the entire text of the law for the clergy's general knowledge. The list of allegations was of course much longer, but it essentially repeated earlier anti-sectarian statements from Church leaders.

## **Laws Enforced: Church Enriched**

The best example found in the Ministry of Cults' archives of what actually happened between the Orthodox Church and another minority religion is looking at the Ministry of Cults' records on the Baptist Church. On May 27, 1941 Father Victor Marinescu, the parish priest in Viișoare Parish in Constanța County, wrote a letter to Marshall Antonescu to complain specifically about Baptists. After referring to the appearance of religious sects as a "Trojan Horse" he explained the situation as follows:

It appears that one could believe they are inoffensive, yet at their base they have engaged in illegal activity under the direction and guidance of the International. The Baptist sectarians carry out the communist cause; be it through word or be it through correspondences across the country's borders. They have succeeded in recruiting... from our midst, lending themselves to foreigners and the country's enemies.

They should in the first place be reminded and called back to the fold of reality and national solidarity in order to respect our correct national history and ancestral traditions that they want to betray.... The sectarians pick away at the foundation of being Romanian, which is the Orthodox Christian faith.<sup>213</sup>

Father Marinescu explained that Jews and Russians had been found among Baptists and reiterated the danger of communism. He asked Antonescu to order "categorically and definitively, by law, the removal of this congregation by bringing back all sectarians to their ethnic Romanian origin in the breast of the ancestral Orthodox Church from which they left at the suggestion of foreigners and the country's enemies."<sup>214</sup> The letter, whether or not it was read personally by Antonescu, was stamped as having made it to his senior council, which means that someone in his cabinet was aware of the complaint

---

<sup>213</sup> ANR MCA 1941, folder 125, p. 45.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

against the Baptists and the request to return Romanians back to the Orthodox Church by law.

In 1942 a teacher named Ioan Balaban published a twenty-one page report on Baptists using examples primarily from Arad County where he lived. His report indicated that Baptists in Romania were directed by foreigners, primarily by Americans and the English Baptist chapters. He also said that most Romanian Baptist converts had joined because they were persuaded by the dollar. Balaban cited an Orthodox Bishop who described the Baptist sect as “a rebellion against religious authorities and a dangerous gangrene for our people’s (*neamului*) body.”<sup>215</sup> Worse than that Balaban compared them to Jews and gypsies who look out only for themselves and are antinationalist.<sup>216</sup> He wrote that when it came to Baptists, feelings of patriotism “are practically nonexistent.”<sup>217</sup> He also accused the Baptists of harboring communists.<sup>218</sup> In his study he examined Baptist practices, traditions, doctrines, and social life being sure to point out that the Baptists were wrong with virtually everything they did when compared with the beautiful and correct traditions of the Romanian people’s Church. He made it very clear that the Baptist Church was a danger to Romania politically, socially, and spiritually.

Balaban’s conclusion is a good summary of his report:

---

<sup>215</sup> Ioan Balaban, “Acțiunea Baptistă în România: Studiu Social” [Baptist Action in Romania: A Social Study], 1942, pp. 1-5; from ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943-144 vol. II.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

Sectarianism, which Baptism is a part of, is a social plague... and an instrument in the hands of our people's enemies.... The sects, especially the Baptists in Romania, are a type of popular freemasonry, an occult in the hands of Judaism in order to influence the lowest masses of the people- the peasant and the worker.... Along with Orthodox clerical action... a lay action must be organized- an awakening for citizens and Christian pride.

Baptism is a social problem launched on religious ground.... It is time for everyone with public leadership responsibilities, our legislature, clergy, and judiciary to take decisive action, to put an end once and for all to these sects' and religious associations' freedoms, especially the Baptists. Their actions must be stopped by force.... Their properties and goods should be expropriated by the state to be used for the public good. Legislation ought to be passed quickly and firmly against this problem, in order to bring about tough sanctions like other countries did a long time ago.<sup>219</sup>

The report was sent to the Ministry of Cults and became the basis for what happened to Baptist churches in 1943. It was in 1943 that Balaban's suggestions for legislation and the expropriation of Baptist property eventually came to fruition.

The anti-sectarian lobbying paid off. In decree-law 3792 there was a provision explaining what was to be done with the properties of the now closed religious associations. All were to become state property and the Ministry of Cults was to oversee their expropriation by local authorities.<sup>220</sup> In January 1943 swift enforcement of this measure went into action. Father Constantin Sârbu of Bumbăcari Parish in Bucharest sent a request to the Ministry of Cults in connection with the closure of religious associations and their soon to be expropriated properties. He explained that his parish had no official building to meet in. In light of the fact that the local Baptist church was now banned and his parish's needs he asked that the Baptist church building be given to his parish so that it could be made into an Orthodox chapel. His request was stamped by

---

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>220</sup> Ion I. Nedelescu, ed., *Legislația Statului Român Legionar* vol. 26 (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului "Universul", 1943), p. 471. Anything found inside the seized properties became state property by default.

the Ministry of Cults as received on January 11, 1943 and his request was granted on January 20 after a short correspondence.<sup>221</sup>

In February 1943 the Baptist orphanage in Simeria was closed after a brief court hearing. In the court's decision it was decided that because the Baptist sect was now outlawed that the orphanage could no longer function either. The court directed the authorities to wait to seize the property until all the children could be given new homes. Although it took several months, thanks to extensions granted by local authorities, the orphanage was closed and all twelve children were placed in other homes. It was then decided that the orphanage was to be turned into an Orthodox mission to "reconvert these religious wanderers" and "remake our unity in faith."<sup>222</sup> This was in spite of a plea from a community representative who asked that the orphanage be spared: "You would bring great joy to the minds of these sobbing orphans who do not want to hear that they are to lose their old home where they were cared for with tremendous Christian love."<sup>223</sup> What the petitioner, Rusu Ioan, did not know was that the orphanage had been secretly under police surveillance for over a month after being anonymously reported by a "serious source." The "serious source" accused the orphanage of harboring "false apostles" to spread Baptist propaganda. The complaint also mentioned the Baptists'

---

<sup>221</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume I, pp. 15-18. The Hăpria-Română parish in Alba County tried to get a similarly early jump on January 13, 1943, but was told that the state had not yet officially seized the Baptist church and would have to wait until the paperwork was completed to take the fairly new church building over for Orthodox Church use. Also see ANR MCA 1933, folder 1944, volume I, pp. 21-22.

<sup>222</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume I, pp. 105-112. The order to close the orphanage was sent in January.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116. The letter was dated January 26, 1943.



misunderstanding of the Holy Scripture.<sup>224</sup> Given that the complaint was signed by the Ministry of Cults and that the end result was to turn over the orphanage to the Orthodox Church it is safe to say that the entire takeover of this orphanage was orchestrated by the Orthodox Church and the state working together.

For each Baptist property expropriated there was a hearing to decide whether or not the church, prayer house, school, or other kind of property would be expropriated. This was a mere legal formality as every hearing produced the same result- the closure of the property from Baptist use. In most cases an inventory was taken of everything found on the property to make sure that the authorities seized everything there. Among the confiscated items the authorities seized books, archives, furniture, money, and more. Local county, town or city, and police authorities would be present to oversee the confiscation. Also, an Orthodox priest would represent the Ministry of Cults and would work with the secular authorities to help expropriate the property. For example, in Vârfurile village in Arad County there was a hearing January 7, 1943. Even though the Baptist Religious Association in Vârfurile had operated an approved congregation for nearly ten years, the association was deemed illegal based on the provisions in law 3.792 and therefore the property's ownership was granted to the community and an inventory was taken. At that time it was not decided exactly what the church building was to be used for. On October 3, 1943, another formal hearing transferred the building's ownership from the village to the Orthodox Church. It may have taken ten months but

---

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

eventually the Orthodox Church obtained full ownership of the property.<sup>225</sup> This is the way most of the properties were taken away from the Baptist Church and eventually landed in either the local government's possession or the Orthodox Church's. During the Antonescu regime there were at least 338 Baptist church properties confiscated along with everything authorities found inside buildings.<sup>226</sup> Out of these former Baptist properties at least 105 ended up in the Romanian Orthodox Church's possession.<sup>227</sup> Nearly all the rest were to be used by their respective communities as cultural centers, community centers, or as school classrooms. This was counted as a huge success by the Orthodox Church, which not only had succeeded in seeing that the government outlawed the Baptist sect but also now had enriched itself with over a hundred of its former rival's properties.

Some Baptists tried to continue practicing after their sect had been outlawed but this could also have consequences. In Chilia Nouă County, in the village of Sagani thirteen Baptists were arrested and sent to court martial for meeting secretly at one of their homes. This was in April 1943, only a few months after their meetings had been outlawed.<sup>228</sup> In the capital police continued to monitor the movements of those who had

---

<sup>225</sup> An inventory of the Baptist Church in January 1943, a hearing on the same day, letters from the local police, local city hall, the Ministry of Cults, identification papers, and other documents relating to the events, ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 148, pp. 130-144.

<sup>226</sup> This is based on my findings in the archive, there definitely could have been more, 338 is the number of cases I can confirm.

<sup>227</sup> There may have been more, but this is the number that can be confirmed. See ANR MCA 1933-1944, the 1943 folders numbered 144, volumes I and II and 147-149.

<sup>228</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume I, p. 155.

been Baptists. The police sent warnings to four Orthodox churches that Baptists were secretly attending their services as a way to try and avoid detection by the police.<sup>229</sup>

Baptists were not the only targets for the Orthodox Church and the Antonescu regime. Seventh-Day Adventists found themselves in the same situation as the Baptists. The Reformed Adventists had been outlawed in Romania since 1937.<sup>230</sup> Still, the regular Seventh-Day Adventists, like the Baptists, had been allowed to continue practicing even if only as a religious association until it was dissolved and banned by decree-law 3.792. Just like the Baptists, each building or property that belonged to the Seventh-Day Adventists was subject to a hearing to decide whether or not the property should be confiscated. An inventory was taken by the police or gendarmes on the same day as the hearing. Then if the property were to pass into another group's possession there would be another hearing. At least eighteen Adventist churches were confiscated; six of these were later turned over to the Orthodox Church.<sup>231</sup> On January 2, 1943 Ene Dumitru was arrested in Buzău for "illegal Adventist propaganda." He was sent to Ploiești where he was court-martialed and incarcerated.<sup>232</sup>

Smaller groups also came under scrutiny. At least sixteen other churches belonging to smaller confessions were closed and confiscated. Of these sixteen church

---

<sup>229</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume II, pp. 193-194.

<sup>230</sup> Other European countries had banned Reformed Adventists as well and Romania may have just been following this broader European trend.

<sup>231</sup> See ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folders 144, volume II, and 147-149. Again, there may have been more properties expropriated but this is the number that I can confirm based on information available in the archives.

<sup>232</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume I, pp. 96-98.

properties, six were eventually turned over to the Orthodox Church.<sup>233</sup> With hundreds of smaller church closures some wondered what was to become of these religious communities. The Orthodox Church clergy assumed buildings turned into Orthodox meetinghouses would eventually bring sectarians back into the Orthodox fold. If that did not work there was a plan to reconvert sectarian children back into the Orthodox Church.

This displaced tens of thousands of members from their congregations and put more than one hundred new church facilities into the hands of Orthodox clergy. Another effect was that religious education and religious schooling for these smaller congregations was banned. A confidential memo was circulated to all the Orthodox leaders regarding the matter in June 1943. The memo read as follows:

Of all the consequences that resulted from the disbanding of the sects through the law... the most vital and important are the sectarian children. That is why the greatest care must be taken to bring these children back into the Orthodox faith.

As far as religious coursework is concerned, this being an object of study, all sectarian children are obligated to follow it, even those who have not formally come over to Orthodoxy. Because the study and examination of religion are obligatory only those children who follow it will advance in their classes. Those who refuse to take this course will not be promoted....

The Church's and State's primary occupation is to continue to work to return the lost people back into the Ancestral Church's bosom, with special care and spirit given to the children, for the consolidation of the unity of the Romanian people's soul.<sup>234</sup>

Not only did the Church and State plan on ridding the country of religious groups seen as a threat to the "Romanian soul," they also planned on bringing as many people as possible into the Orthodox Church. The most important were the children. The

---

<sup>233</sup> See ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folders 144, volume II, and 147-149.

<sup>234</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 144, volume II, p. 126. The memo was prompted by a letter from the Bishop of Alba Iulia who wondered what was to be done regarding children who now did not belong to a legally recognized religious group. See *Ibidem* pages 128-130.

Orthodox Church and the government probably realized that most of the adults who found themselves thrown out of their own churches would never come to really accept the Orthodox Church as their own. Instead, the attention was focused on reprogramming their children in school so that the next generation of sectarians would grow up into good Romanian Orthodox Christians. And if their parents refused to accept this their children would be forced out of public school for failing to complete the state's required coursework. The state's education system and the Orthodox Church in this way had a symbiotic relationship. The educational system supported the Orthodox Church by only allowing Orthodox priests to educate Romanian children; the priests were sure to indoctrinate the children with "traditional Romanian values" that further supported the system.

The government also made sure that sectarians would not spread their message in print. The Center for Press Censorship, the Ministry of National Culture and Cults, and the Postal Service worked together to "stop the printing of any kind of brochures or pamphlets, on any subject, that could be presented by religious sects."<sup>235</sup> The Romanian Postal Service was also asked to intercept any publications that were "of a sectarian nature."<sup>236</sup> Only two letters regarding the monitoring of the mail can be found in the archive, both of them with a very prominent "SECRET" label.<sup>237</sup> The letters contain basic instructions to monitor, seize, stop, and report sectarian publications and to

---

<sup>235</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, from 147, p. 201.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 202. The Postal Service was supposed to intercept communications coming in and out of the country.

<sup>237</sup> At least I could only find two. Other letters were not mentioned in any finding aides nor did any similar material appear in folder descriptions. A search of other archives might reveal much more in future studies.

intercept any mail that could be considered relevant. The extent to which this program was carried out by the Postal Service is not clear. However, given that the police were monitoring sectarian activity it is probable that the Postal Service, which was already monitoring mail with tremendous scrutiny due to the war, followed its secret orders.

The anti-sectarian campaign was hardly the worst crime committed during the war but as far as religious bigotry goes it was still a painful wartime chapter. The ultimate responsibility for the confiscation of minority religions' properties does of course remain with the Antonescu regime. Still, the Romanian Orthodox Church vigorously supported the program and used it to obtain large amounts of property for itself at the expense of Christian groups it saw not as brothers but as anti-nationalist rivals.

## Chapter 4:

### Law 711: The Orthodox Church and Romanian Jews

#### Can Jews be Orthodox Christians?

On January 22, 1938 the Romanian government called for a review of Romanian citizenship that resulted in more than 200,000 Jews losing their rights as citizens.<sup>238</sup> In a meeting of the Holy Synod held on March 15, 1938 the Synod's Committee for Doctrine and Religious Life reviewed two letters prompted by this new law, the first from the Bishop of Hotin and the second from the Ministry of Cults, both sent earlier in the year. The letters asked whether or not the conversion of Jews to Orthodoxy was permitted. The Holy Synod approved the following recommendation by the committee:

In the Future no request for conversion to Orthodoxy on the part of Jews will be recognized unless the request is accompanied by documented proof that the solicitor is a Romanian citizen who has earned [retained] citizenship with respect to all legal formalities.<sup>239</sup>

This was the first major step by the Church to put limits on Jewish converts.<sup>240</sup> In fact, it would mean that under the Church's new policy more than a fourth of Romania's Jews would not be allowed to convert to Orthodoxy. When this meeting was held the Goga-Cuza led government had ended and Patriarch Cristea had been appointed prime minister.

It is not surprising that the Synod came to this decision. Patriarch Miron Cristea was known to be anti-Jewish. The Synod's decision emphasized that the Romanian Orthodox Church was first and foremost for Romania's citizenry, and that the Church's

---

<sup>238</sup> Decree-law no. 169.

<sup>239</sup> "Desbaterile ședințelor Sfântului Sinod pe anul 1938," BOR 56, no. 1-4 (1938): p. 16.

<sup>240</sup> Prior to this decision the baptism of Jews into the Orthodox Church, while rare, was legal and there were no restrictions on baptism so long as they met the Church's requirements for baptism.

character was national rather than universal.<sup>241</sup> This was in line with other Church publications as explained earlier. The Church was to be the Romanian people's Church, and non-citizen Jews were deemed as non-Romanian people. Interestingly though, the Church never came to such a decision about other non-citizens or any other group of people. The Church's ban in this case was clearly an anti-Jewish policy.

### **Decree-law no. 711/1941**

Between 1938 and 1941 the Church's and Romanian government's policy towards Jews remained unchanged, in that Romanian citizens of Jewish descent were allowed to convert from Judaism, or any other religion to which they belonged, to Orthodox Christianity in the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>242</sup> Even after other laws restricted Jews' rights in Romania they were allowed to convert to other religions. Leading up to decree-law no. 711/1941 many Jews lost the right to own rural property, practice law, serve in the military, work as public servants, own rural businesses, to have a liquor license, and the right to own media outlets and publications.<sup>243</sup> Many Jewish owned companies and stocks were expropriated. Much of the Jewish owned heavy industry and capital was expropriated as well. Jews were banned from Romanian public schools.<sup>244</sup> The laws discriminated against Jews based on their ancestry and their faith,

---

<sup>241</sup> This was contrary to official Church doctrine and scripture but that apparently was not an issue.

<sup>242</sup> The decision was upheld again in the Synod's meeting on June 27, 1939 by Patriarch Nicodim, who followed his predecessor in emphasizing caution when Jewish conversions to Orthodox Christianity were involved. See "Sumarele ședințelor Sfântului Sinod din anul 1939" [The Summaries of the Holy Synod's meetings for 1939], BOR 57, no. 9-10 (1939): pp. 21-22.

<sup>243</sup> Decree-law no. 2650 from August 8, 1940. See *Final Report*, pp. 182-183.



and each new anti-Jewish law defined what being Jewish meant for that particular law. Most of these laws defined being Jewish as having Jewish ancestry, in other words they were anti-Jewish blood laws modeled after Germany's anti-Jewish laws. Occasionally exceptions were written into particular laws for Jews who had converted to Christianity, or were raised by one Christian parent. This was the case for the ban against Jews attending Romanian schools. Christians of Jewish descent who had converted by August 9, 1940 were allowed to attend Romanian schools and confessional schools such as those run by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>245</sup> While this meant that in theory Christians of Jewish descent could escape certain anti-Jewish legislation the reality was much different because most of the laws defined being Jewish as an issue of ancestry or blood. The Antonescu regime's continued pressure and persecution of the Jews tried to close what it saw to be loopholes for Jews to escape the law.

Records show that while there were few Jews who converted to other religions, including the Orthodox Church, from 1938 to March, 1941, it was not illegal or unheard of. However, that would change in March 1941. Under Antonescu's government, one of the many restrictions placed on Romania's Jews was to limit their freedom of religion. While the Romanian government had restricted religious freedom in various ways for several years, Decree-law no. 711/1941 stands apart from all others. It was the most important religious law to come from the Antonescu regime for its content, ideological background, and ramifications.

---

<sup>244</sup> These were just the legal ways in which Jews lost properties. Many of Romania's Jews lost their properties, belongings, and businesses through plain theft, and almost none of these were returned. See *Final Report*, pp. 183-203. Anti-Jewish legislation of this sort continued through Antonescu's entire reign.

<sup>245</sup> See *Final Report* p. 195.

The law was published in the *Official Monitor*, no. 68, part 1 on March 21, 1941 as it appears below:

**The Law of Cults**

DECREE-LAW

*Regarding the modification of art. 44 from the general law of cults*

ART. *single*.- In addition to art. 44 from the general law of cults from April 22, 1928, the following is added:

“Those persons who belong to the mosaic cult do not benefit from the provisions contained in this article.”

The date in Bucharest is March 18, 1941.

Leader of the Romanian State and President of the Council of Ministers General ION ANTONESCU

Minister of Instruction, Education, Cults and Arts General RADU ROSETTI

Nr. 711.

The report of the Minister of Instruction, Education, Cults and Arts to the Romanian State’s Leader and President of the Council of Ministers.

*GENERAL SIR,*

*Based on the provisions of decree-laws nr. 3.052 from September 5 and nr. 3.072 from September 7, 1940, we are honored to present to you for your approval and signature the following decree-law for the modification of art. 44 from the general law of cults from April 22, 1928. The ethnic being of our people must be protected from mixing with Jewish blood. The Jews today have the possibility to hide their ethnic origin by leaving the mosaic cult for our national religions.*

*In order to block these infiltrations in our national community, it is necessary to modify the text of art. 44 from the general law of cults, so that Jews of the mosaic religion cannot pass into another cult.*

*For the reasons explained, we honorably ask you to approve this decree-law project yourself, amended to remedy this situation.*

*Please receive, General Sir, our greatest considerations and assurance.*

The Minister of Instruction, Education, Cults and Arts, General RADU ROSETTI

Nr. 13.568

1941, March 7.<sup>246</sup>

The article in the Law of Cults that law 711 amended had granted Romania’s residents the legal right to change their religion. Because other laws had required that all residents

---

<sup>246</sup> Ion I. Nedelescu, ed., *Legislația Statului Român* vol. 7 (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului “Universul”, 1941), pp. 172-173; italics, bold and underlined print, and all capital names in the original.

of Romania be legally registered under a particular religion, or as non-denominational Christians, this meant that Jews would not be able to register under a different religion. Law 711 took this right from Romania's Jews in connection with other anti-Jewish measures that the regime had passed.

The reasoning behind the law is very clearly explained in the accompanying letter written by Minister General Rosetti asking Antonescu to sign it into law. The Ministry of Instruction, Education, Cults and Arts subscribed to the notion that Romania's purity could be preserved by keeping Jewish blood from mixing into the Romanian gene pool. The Ministry felt that Jews who joined the so-called "national religions" or the short list of Christian Churches recognized in Romania along with Islam, were trying to infiltrate Romania's racial community in order to continue whatever it was that Jews were supposedly doing that was so terrible. At its core it was a racist law designed to further deprive Jews of their rights, in this case the right to freedom of religion. Although this law was touted as a religious law, it was clearly a racial purity law like other racial purity laws issued by Europe's fascist governments. This was the law that merged anti-Jewish legislation based on ancestry with religious nationalism.

Unlike the Church's decision three years earlier to exclude Jewish non-citizens this was a case of the government telling the Orthodox Church how it should deal with Romania's Jews. This is clearly illustrated by a short series of letters exchanged among some of the Church's leading clergy, the Holy Synod, and the Ministry of Cults shortly after passage of law 711.

Church leaders' first responses to law 711 were surprisingly negative. In a letter written on April 8, 1941 to Minister Rosetti, Bishop Andrei of Arad vented his opposition to the law:

In principal no one on the face of the earth can stop the Gospel and redeeming mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ from being shared with every man. The Son of God descended to earth and suffered death on the cross for the redemption of all men whosoever should believe in him. The same goes for this interdiction of the state... [the Church's] right to baptize cannot be legislated by the state.<sup>247</sup>

Bishop Andrei's primary objection to the law was based merely on the fact that he felt the state had overstepped its bounds by getting involved in a purely dogmatic matter. He also stated that the law "contradicts the Church's dogma." To Bishop Andrei, the matter was purely theological and therefore only the Church could make such a decision. In a letter to Antonescu Minister Rosetti stated "we honorably ask you to approve this decree-law." He was speaking on behalf of the Ministry, not on behalf of the Church.

A similar, albeit much shorter, letter was sent by Metropolitan Nicolae of Ardeal, Bishop Andrei's clerical leader, six days earlier to both Minister Rosetti and Patriarch Nicodim. Nicolae's letter was read and discussed in the Holy Synod's meeting held on April 9, 1941. Bishop Andrei and Metropolitan Nicolae were both members of the Holy Synod and either convinced the Synod of their position or their letters represented how the rest of the Church's governing body felt. Either way, as a result of the Synod's meeting the Patriarch sent a letter to Minister Rosetti on April 12, 1941 expressing to the

---

<sup>247</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 2, pp. 133-134, underlined in the original.

minister that the Holy Synod “endorsed” Metropolitan Nicolae’s position to revoke the law.<sup>248</sup>

However, the Church’s leadership did not oppose the principle to exclude Jews from the Church. The same racist ideology espoused by the Antonescu regime was also espoused by the Church and Bishop Andrei’s letter had much more to say on the matter:

The State ought to do something else: Stop the mixing of Jewish blood with Romanian blood through the prohibition of mixed marriages, whether or not the Jews are baptized. Furthermore it should stop getting mixed up in dogmatic issues.

This principal objection is raised by commandment from our Church’s conscientious Pastor who is burdened from on high with the work of men’s salvation. However, we can show that in practice in the Metropolitan Diocese of Arad, more so than others, the Romanian Nation is fully protected. Other Metropolitan Dioceses around the country number among their faithful Russians, Ukrainians, and Greeks etc. We do not have these, just like we do not have Hungarians, Germans, Swabians etc., rather we have exclusively Romanians. Nor do we have a record of Jews asking to be received through baptism. For us Orthodoxy is actually identified with and accompanied with the sufferings and aspirations of the Nation, being its supreme succor and the most honest help at all times.

The Church knows... how to shepherd the nation [*neam*] away from the danger of dissolution and degeneration....<sup>249</sup>

This was in line with the Church’s earlier decision to exclude non-Romanian Jews. Here Bishop Andrei affirmed that the Romanian Orthodox Church was of national Romanian character. Of course, it was misleading for him to make a statement that his Church in Arad only had ethnic Romanians given the diversity of Arad near the Hungarian border. Still, his insistence that the Church was for the Romanian people is very telling. This statement goes beyond just saying that only Jewish citizens could join the Church. He

---

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 135. The letter had the numerical designation 793 under the Patriarchal Seal. Metropolitan Nicolae was cited in the letter because of his higher clerical ranking.

<sup>249</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 2, pp. 133-134.

tried to make Romanian ethnicity the Church's distinguishing characteristic. His solution to ban the mixed marriages of Romanian Christians and Jews shows that Bishop Andrei in fact supported the spirit of law 711, if not the actual letter of the law.

Even though he objected to Jews mixing among the Romanian people in agreement with the principal upon which law 711 was founded, Bishop Andrei found a way to reconcile this general Christian doctrine and his opposition to the law:

Because the situation of our Church is that it has a rapport with the ethnic being of the nation [*neam*], our position is strengthened so much that it affirms that its right to baptize cannot be legislated by the State. Our Church has a universal character, as it is sent to "all nations" (Matthew 28, v. 19) to baptize them. The Apostles and their followers received the Redeemer's commandment to preach the Gospel "to every creature" (Mark 16, verse 16)...

Therefore, we ask you, Minister, to be so kind as to recall the aforementioned Decree-Law, as it contradicts the Church's dogma. If you do not do this we will need to declare to you that for the Church which we shepherd that we will consider the litigious Decree-Law void, because it is in conflict with the Redeemer's heavenly commandment and that between a Decree-Law given by men we are required to repeat the words of Holy Scripture: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (The Acts chapter 4 v. 19).<sup>250</sup>

Bishop Andrei found perhaps the most interesting way of reconciling scripture with racism. The right to baptize was dogmatic, and therefore could not be changed by the state. But, because the Church was connected to the Romanian nation, it did not need the law because the law contradicted the New Testament scriptures he cited. In other words, the Church could come to this decision on its own terms and the government needed to stay away from theological matters.

The government did not accept the Patriarch's request to rescind the law. In a response Minister Rosetti explained why the law would stand in spite of the Church's

---

<sup>250</sup> Ibidem.

objections. Rosetti argued that “the conversion of Jews to Christian churches puts the foundations of the Romanian State in jeopardy” and explained further that he saw the problem as a national one and that there was also a dogmatic aspect to the law and that neither was ignored when creating the law. He also noted that “the ancestral Church” should understand the danger that the Romanian people faced from the entry of undesirable and degenerate elements. He hoped that the Church would identify itself with the people’s “superior aspirations.”<sup>251</sup>

Given that the Church already expressed support for the underlying racial reason behind the law, the Synod’s response to Antonescu’s and Rosetti’s decision was not surprising. The Patriarch signed the Synod’s response letter to the minister in June later that same year. His statement read:

The State has the complete freedom to put up any barriers necessary for the defense of the country and the People’s being [*ființa neamului*]. Yet the Church cannot give up on fulfilling the commandment given by God the Creator, in His words: ‘Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’.

As such the Church cannot impede the baptism of he who asks for salvation, yet baptism does not weaken the laws and provisions now in place regarding the protection of the race.<sup>252</sup>

The Holy Synod quickly reversed its position and conceded to the minister that the government could keep the law while still trying to save face and assert the right to baptize whoever it wished. The Church could say that it could baptize Jews because the law only prevented Jews from changing their legal registration as belonging to the “Mosaic Cult” (Jewish religion) and did not explicitly say that baptizing Jews was illegal.

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibidem. The letter had the numerical designation 22095/941 and was stamped with the date April 28, 1941.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p. 129. The letter was dated June 10, 1941.

The Holy Synod also made sure to communicate this policy to the clergy. In the Synod's magazine for the same period, March-April 1941, the Church published the text of the law as it appeared when published in the *Official Monitor*. It also republished the reasons for the law as given in Rosetti's letter to Antonescu with a note for the reader to give attention to Rosetti's reason. Still the matter continued to be a point of contention for certain members of the Holy Synod. In the Synod's meeting on June 6, 1941 an argument broke out between Metropolitans Irineu of Moldova and Tit of Bukovina as to whether or not Jews should be barred from baptism. It was this argument that prompted the first draft of the Synod's statement to appear in a letter to Minister Rosetti only four days later.<sup>253</sup>

While theoretically Jews could be baptized into Orthodox Christianity per the Synod's conclusions, the reality was that it did not matter legally whether or not they were baptized after the appearance of law 711 because they could not register themselves as belonging to the Orthodox Christian faith. One of the consequences of law 711 was that Jews who had converted to Orthodox Christianity after the appearance of this law could no longer receive a Christian burial service nor be buried in an Orthodox cemetery. The Ministry of Cults and the Orthodox Church had already previously decided that only Jews who died as legally registered Orthodox Christians could be interred in an Orthodox cemetery even if they had been baptized. Some deceased Jews had already been exhumed from an Orthodox cemetery in Bucharest earlier in the year and reburied in a

---

<sup>253</sup> "Ședința din ziua 6 Iunie 1941," BOR 59, no. 11-12 (1941): p. 253.



Jewish cemetery because technically they had not been legally registered as Christians.<sup>254</sup> This shows that the local Church officials had buried Christians of Jewish descent in the Orthodox cemetery, but the higher ranking Synod officers' decision to go with the Ministry of Cults' proposal superseded previous decisions. This would continue to be the Church's policy regarding the burial of Christians of Jewish descent, a stinging post-mortem rebuke to those who may have hoped for a Christian burial.

It seemed as if it was Orthodox Church policy to enforce law 711; for some Orthodox clergy this meant that Jews could not be baptized. In April 1943 the Bishop of Argeş sent a letter in response to an inquiry by the Ministry of Cults as to whether or not any Jews had converted to Orthodoxy and been baptized after March 21, 1941. The letter also notes that the Ministry had made the same inquiry in January 1942. The Bishop of Argeş responded that there were no cases of Jews converting to Orthodoxy or being baptized in the Argeş Archdiocese after law 711. The bishop's letter also told the Ministry that the Archdiocese's bulletin again carried a reminder to the priesthood there "the decision was categorically to not receive Jews for baptism."<sup>255</sup> Argeş was in the top ten most populous regions in Romania, and so for the Church to shut out Jews in an entire county showed that the message was taken seriously.

---

<sup>254</sup> Three letters from the Jewish Communities Union to the Minister of Cults December 1940, a letter from the mayor of Bucharest to the Jewish Communities leaders December, 1940, and other letters from the Ministry of Cults, other letters from the Jewish Communities Union, other letters to the Ministry; ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941-185, pp. 4-18.

<sup>255</sup> USHMM, RG25.061, Selected records of the Romanian Ministry of Cults and Arts (Inv. 2720), Reel 4, page 64. I was unable to find the letter from 1942 in the ANR in Bucharest, only the letter from 1943 refers to the 1942 letter but I do not doubt that the correspondence took place. Many archived documents I use refer to other letters or documents that are no longer extant.

## **The Church worked with the Ministry of Cults on the Law**

Given the Synod's contradictory decision to retain the Church's right to baptize who-ever it wished while deferring to an anti-Jewish policy it is no surprise that the Church would often turn to the Ministry of Cults for further questions regarding the baptism of Jewish individuals. As it turned out, in spite of the ban on Jews being allowed to change their religious registration, there were exceptions made for the Orthodox Church. The Metropolitan of Ungro-Vlahie sent a letter on February 3, 1943 to the Minister of Cults in response to a request by the ministry for a record of the Jews baptized in the Archdiocese. The attached table showed that from March 21, 1941 when law 711 went into effect, until February 1943 thirty-three Jewish individuals were baptized in Bucharest and three others in nearby communities under the Archdiocese's jurisdiction. Below is a discussion of specific examples of Jewish individuals who were fully admitted into the Orthodox Church in spite of law 711.<sup>256</sup>

In September 1941 a case was sent to the Ministry of Cults regarding a request by Sara Golopența to be baptized in the Romanian Orthodox Church. The request was sent in by the Bucharest Archdiocese explaining that Mrs. Golopența was married to an Orthodox Christian, that the entire family was Orthodox, and that she wanted to baptize her daughter in the Orthodox Church. Also, Mrs. Golopența had officially registered as an Orthodox Christian in June 1940 and therefore was not legally Jewish by religion. Her baptism was approved by the Ministry because she had met the conditions of law 711.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 120, pp. 2, and 4-7. Not all of the names in this section appeared in this chart, although the Kleins and Haas Gheza Iuliu both were on the Archdiocese's chart.

<sup>257</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 120, p. 19. Also in footnote 11.

The Jewish engineer Haas Gheza Iuliu married a young Romanian Orthodox Christian in 1924. The couple had two children who were raised as Orthodox Christians and in 1939 Mr. Iuliu officially left Judaism for the Romanian Orthodox Church. (He was not baptized at that time; rather, he had changed his legal religious status.) In mid November 1941 he made an official request to be baptized and sent a letter to the Ministry of Cults explaining his situation. However, the Ministry of Cults rejected his request and sent letters to him and to Church leaders in Bucharest. The official explanation was that because of law 711 he could not be baptized nor could he legally be an Orthodox Christian. The Ministry noted that he may have left Judaism in 1939, but because he had not yet been baptized he had not truly abandoned Judaism. However, Iuliu did not give up trying to complete his conversion to Orthodoxy. His attorney, he, and Church officials from the Bucharest Archdiocese all wrote letters further requesting baptism. Iuliu had certified documents by Church officials proving that he had left Judaism in 1939, was married to an Orthodox Christian and that his children had been raised in the Church. Mr. Iuliu's attorneys cited Sara Golopența's case as evidence that his baptism should be approved. Even the Archbishop of Bucharest sent a letter in December 1941 asking that the Ministry review the case and allow him to be baptized. After the intervention of Church officials following rejection by the Ministry of Cults, his baptism was approved and he was baptized in March 1942.<sup>258</sup>

These two cases show that the Church could lobby the Ministry of Cults to approve decisions regarding the Church's acceptance of Jews when it wanted to accept

---

<sup>258</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 120, pp. 3-4, and 8-18.

them. The Church could have just left Mrs. Golopența and Mr. Iuliu out of the fold by citing law 711. Instead the Church actively followed through on their baptismal requests, even seeking to contradict the Ministry's initial decision regarding Mr. Iuliu's baptism.

A correspondence between Nety Herșcovici Constantinescu and the Ministry of Cults presents a similar case. From February 1943 through March 1943 Mrs. Constantinescu tried to obtain approval for her baptism directly from the Ministry of Cults. Again, as in Mr. Iuliu's case she was initially blocked from being baptized based on law 711. Yet she explained that she had been legally registered since before the law's appearance and that she was working with a priest from the Bucharest Archdiocese. The Ministry investigated her case and wrote to the Church that "there is no reason that the Church cannot administer the Holy Sacrament of baptism to her."<sup>259</sup> Again, not until someone from the Church became involved was her case for baptism approved.

In these three cases the persons had all legally abandoned Judaism for Orthodox Christianity prior to law 711's issuance. Because they had been registered as Orthodox Christians before law 711 appeared the Church made a case to the Ministry that they were not in violation of the law, and therefore their baptisms should be allowed. Cases where the person was trying to obtain a legal Orthodox Christian status after law 711 were more difficult to resolve. Olga Nicolae-Brinder had been married to a Jew and they had a son whom Mrs. Nicolae-Brinder wanted to have baptized in March 1943. She sent a letter to the Ministry explaining that her son had never attended a Jewish school, religious service, and that her family was faithful to the "ancestral church" and that his

---

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-33.

being unbaptized was a terrible oversight. She indicated that she was no longer in a relationship with her former Jewish husband. However, the Ministry agreed to approve the baptism only after she provided her sons' birth documents, marriage documents, and her own Church documents; only then would she be allowed to baptize her son. Should any of her documents be inaccurate then her request would be denied. Without the Church's involvement or without documentation from the Church proving her story Mrs. Nicolae-Brinder's son would remain a registered Jew.<sup>260</sup> Mrs. Rozalia Neuschatz also requested that her son be allowed into the Orthodox Church through baptism. Her son was born during a prior marriage to a Jewish man and she had trouble enrolling him in school because he was not legally registered as a Christian. However, she was a legally registered Greek-Catholic, and like Mrs. Nicolae-Brinder's son, Mrs. Neuschatz's son's baptism was also approved in September 1943.<sup>261</sup>

In March 1943 Iancheli Ziuși Ițcovici sent a letter to the Ministry of Cults requesting permission to be baptized an Orthodox Christian in Techinovca Village in Iugostru County, Transnistria. His baptism was firmly rejected on the basis of law 711. Mr. Ițcovici's letter had no other accompanying documents and apparently no Church support. Unlike the examples above, he made no case that he was in any way involved with the Church prior to law 711 and he did not declare himself as an unbaptized but legally registered Christian. Also, he did not present himself as the descendant of anyone who was an Orthodox Christian, nor did he state that he was married to an Orthodox

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-96.

Christian. His lack of Church support probably stemmed from at least one of these reasons, if not all of them. Without any Church lobbying he was flatly rejected.<sup>262</sup>

Similarly Salomon Amandu ran into trouble with local authorities under the terms of law 711. In 1926 he married a Romanian Orthodox Christian and then joined Orthodox Christianity two years later; he and his wife raised a daughter in the Church. Amandu had tried to prove that he was no longer Jewish and therefore not subject to anti-Jewish laws. This was the only request I found in the archive which stated specifically that a person of Jewish descent would not be subject to anti-Jewish laws solely based on their religious registration. However, when he went to provide Church documentation he was told there was none. In fact, the Ministry indicated he would be subject to anti-Jewish laws unless evidence was brought forward that he was not fabricating his story. To make matters worse the priest who had baptized him had since been defrocked and could not be counted on to back up his story. It was only after he had other clerical witnesses sign sworn statements that they had seen his baptism did the Church reissue his baptismal certificate in order for his legal status to be confirmed as an Orthodox Christian. The Archdiocese of Craiova and the Ministry of Cults eventually cleared him of any wrongdoing.<sup>263</sup>

The Church's documentation had to be current as Mihail-Nicolae Hornstein learned. He tried to register himself as an Orthodox Christian with local authorities in July 1943. He had a Certificate of Orthodoxy issued by the Patriarchate in 1939 as an

---

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., pp. 46-49. Mr. Amandu's ordeal lasted nearly two months from March-April 1943.

affirmation that he had left Judaism. Yet when the authorities investigated they discovered that not only had he failed to register his religious change with the authorities, he also had not been baptized. His request was denied on the basis of law 711 and the Church rejected him because he had failed to be baptized for four years.<sup>264</sup>

Husband and wife Sapsen and Elisa Klein ran into a similar problem when trying to prove to that their conversion to Orthodoxy was correct and legal. The Kleins had officially left Judaism and were registered as Orthodox Christians on August 8, 1940. However, according to Church policy they were told to wait at least six months to be baptized.<sup>265</sup> According to the Kleins' letter to the Ministry of Cults from November 1943, they were baptized but could not prove whether or not they had been. Their request to obtain their Orthodox baptismal certificate was rejected by Father Traian Costea. Father Costea said that "in the face of the latest provisions given with respect to the baptism of Jews, that they cannot be received in Christianity's bosom... they [the documents] cannot be provided."<sup>266</sup> However documents from the Ministry showed that they had been legally registered as Orthodox Christians since August 8, 1940 and that the Ministry found no reason that they should not be baptized. However, the Ministry in this

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>265</sup> I have not found evidence of any such policy by the Church at the time, but according to the Kleins' letter this is what they were told by their local priest.

<sup>266</sup> Father Traian Costea does not appear in any other documents that I could find in the archive. I cannot speculate as to whether or not he held anti-Jewish sentiments; I only know that he cited law 711 as the reason he refused to help.

case left the decision to the Church. The Ministry decided that this was purely a doctrinal issue within the Church and it therefore could not intervene.<sup>267</sup>

If these cases of Jews being baptized into the Church seem random it is because they were. Church officials, when they wanted, could lobby the Ministry of Cults to help Jews get around law 711, or make the case that there was no violation of the law. The Church's willingness to help certain Christians of Jewish descent, or those of mixed Jewish-Romanian heritage also was not met with any sort of action taken against the Church by the government Ministry charged with the Church's oversight. These cases do show that it very much depended on whether or not the local Orthodox clergy were involved in supporting the requests.

There was at least one case in which the Patriarch himself got involved. Aurel Agon Mariamciu was a Jewish Orthodox Christian who had converted to Orthodox Christianity in 1918, was married to an ethnic Romanian of the same faith, and his son was also raised as an Orthodox Christian and wounded at Stalingrad. He had run a restaurant in Constanța prior to the seizure of urban Jewish properties that took effect in 1941 when he lost his business and job; he also had suffered a several month internment. However, for reasons unknown he was able to return to his wife and work for friendly neighbors. Because he considered himself to be a Romanian and no longer Jewish, and because he had sacrificed his son for the war, he felt he should be excused from the anti-Jewish business and employment laws. He wrote a letter to the Patriarch in November

---

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-119. The final resolution of the case was not in the archive. If they were successful in later appeals no other documents appear.



1943 explaining his situation and asked the Patriarch to intervene on his behalf.<sup>268</sup>

Patriarch Nicodim obliged and wrote a letter to the Minister asking for Mr. Mariamciu's case to be reviewed and that Mariamciu be "excused" from the anti-Jewish provisions.<sup>269</sup>

The outcome looked positive even though the Ministry replied to the Patriarch that it could not make any exceptions but that through the courts exceptions could be made and that there were procedures for such cases.<sup>270</sup> Whether or not the matter was resolved is not clear from the extant documents. However, the fact that Patriarch Nicodim would write a letter on behalf of a Jewish convert is another example that the Church's clergy was willing to help Jewish converts when it wanted. Also, the response from the Ministry of Cults, that exceptions had been made, shows that the courts were willing to make exceptions for cases such as Mr. Mariamciu's.

Each of the cases in which Christians of Jewish descent were able to change their legal status was exceptional, and showed that the Orthodox Church had the ability to advocate for some of its few Jewish members. When examined closely though, these exceptional cases were actually in line with the Church's previous positions regarding Jews. The Church was not advocating for all Jews or even groups of Jews to convert, rather it allowed individual exceptions that fell into its nationalist ideology. Mrs. Golopența was married to an ethnic Romanian, so her children would be Romanian Orthodox Christians and therefore contribute to the Romanian people. Mr. Mariamciu, Mr. Iuliu and Mr. Armandu had married an ethnic Romanian and had raised their children

---

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-109.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 107 verso.

in the Orthodox Church, thus contributing to the national Church. Mrs. Nicolae-Brinder and Mrs. Neuschatz both were ethnically non-Jewish: and even though their sons were both from their marriages to Jews because they had been raised as Christians they could be accepted by the Romanian Orthodox community. Those Jews accepted by the Church were considered Romanian enough to belong to the Church. Those who were not seen as sufficiently Romanian, such as the Kleins who had no children baptized in the Church or Mr. Hornstein who was not married to a Romanian nor previously involved in the Church, did not receive the Church's support.

Although the Ministry of Cults at first disagreed with clerical opinions in some of these cases, eventually the Patriarch wrote a letter to try and explain these exceptions. In April 1943 the Patriarch explained that his office "had only approved the baptism of those Jews who were fulfilling the civil formalities before March 21, 1941."<sup>271</sup> However, as demonstrated by the Kleins and Mr. Hornstein, this did not mean that every case started before March 21, 1941 would be approved by the Church. While the Patriarch cited a final date for when Jewish converts needed to have begun the legal procedure for converting to Orthodox Christianity it was not the only requirement for Jews who wished to be baptized.

### **Putting a stop to it**

The Romanian Orthodox Church may have shown a willingness to baptize or allow a few Jewish converts but its attitude towards Jews in general remained negative.

---

<sup>271</sup> USHMM, RG25.061, Selected records of the Romanian Ministry of Cults and Arts (Inv. 2720), Reel 3, p. 116.

Within the Ministry of Cults, the oversight of “minority cults” or non-Orthodox churches was run by the Inspector General of Cults, Father Gheorghe Tilea, who had a long and distinguished career within the Orthodox Church and worked for the Ministry of Cults in this capacity from 1943-1947 while also serving as an Orthodox priest.<sup>272</sup> Father Tilea filed a lengthy report to the Ministry of Cults on the first two and half years of law 711. The report does not just provide information on the conversion of Jews, but shows the Church’s callous attitude towards Jews. Father Tilea wrote regarding the conversion of Jews that “as this problem has represented and still represents a great national danger, these conversions to Christianity are made in a moment of opportunity and lack even the most basic interior conviction.”<sup>273</sup> Considering the persecution and stress that Romania’s Jews were under, his suspicion that Jewish conversion to Christianity was simply an attempt to protect oneself shows that perhaps he was not familiar with the cases presented earlier.<sup>274</sup> After all, many of these Christians of Jewish descent may have not been officially registered as Christians or been baptized, but their cases of having practiced Christianity for years, in some cases decades, hardly match Tilea’s characterization. He did not mention the cases where a Jewish registration was the result of a mixed marriage

---

<sup>272</sup> Father Tilea served as the Priest in charge of the Romanian Orthodox Church’s chapel in Rome prior to his serving in the Ministry of Cults. During his time in the Ministry he served as a priest in one of the Church’s important Bucharest cathedrals, Sf. Spiridon Nou, where he continued to serve during the socialist regime. He continued to work as a priest and a theological scholar until his death in 1982. He must have had a change of heart after the war because he went on to write a more socialist leaning work entitled “Freedom and the Universalism of Work” (1946), also he was able to continue publishing throughout the socialist period including during the Ceaușescu regime.

<sup>273</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 180, p. 1. The report is dated September 11, 1943.

<sup>274</sup> I am not entirely dismissing this as a possibility, but none of the cases I found showed opportunistic conversions. Even in cases when Jews were denied conversion lacking “even the most basic interior conviction” was never the reason cited for denial.

and it was decided that a child would be raised as a Christian. He also failed to mention the fact that poor record keeping may have resulted in mistakes of Christians of Jewish descent being registered as Jews.

While his report is very important his conclusions seem pre-determined by his wish to prove that “Christianity’s adversary” was ruining the country by making phony conversions. He lauded himself on how broad his research was and his methods of searching high and low to find out how many Jews and churches had violated the principles of law 711. His investigation was looking for results, not for any sort of cause. His focus was on statistics to support his conclusions rather than investigating why Jews were converting to other religions.

Father Tilea was alarmed that Jews were converting to Christianity in far greater number than in the previous four decades:

I want to give anyone the possibility to understand how great the distance is between internal conviction and the moment’s opportunity... because they must be put before anything else in the balance of verifiable estimation of the danger represented to our country, for through Jewish conversions to Christianity... that were done in approximately half a century prior are not close to the number with those that were done in barely the last year.<sup>275</sup>

In his presentation of these numbers again he reiterated his point that Jewish converts at this point were opportunistic and devoid of conviction. He provided statistics later in the report to try and support this conclusion. According to the first table in his report from around the turn of the century to March 20, 1941 there were 994 conversions from Judaism to Roman-Catholicism, 71 to Greek-Catholicism, 303 to the Reformed Church, 62 to the Unitarian Church, 172 to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, 12 to Ruthenian

---

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

Catholicism, and 36 to Islam.<sup>276</sup> He did not provide information in his first table on conversions to the Orthodox Church. Not counting conversions to unofficial religions and Orthodoxy, there were about 40 or so conversions per year. Tilea was correct in pointing out that this was a fairly small number of converts given the large Jewish population in the country.<sup>277</sup> His second table shows that in Bucharest from 1928-1940 there were nine conversions from Judaism to the Orthodox Church, six to Roman-Catholicism, five to Greek-Catholicism, one to the Lutheran Church, nine to the Reformed Church, and eight to non-denominational Christianity. This was to confirm his conclusion that prior to law 711 few conversions had taken place. His numbers were probably not completely accurate given the poor record keeping in Romania for that period; but even if they only tell half the story his point that conversions from Judaism to other religions were rare prior to law 711 is still valid.

His third table was to show the number of Jewish converts after March 21, 1941 when law 711 was issued. There were 1276 conversions to Roman-Catholicism, 614 to Greek-Catholicism, 56 to the Reformed Church, five to Unitarianism, four to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, one to the Baptist church, and ten to Islam. There were also 42 conversions to the Orthodox Church. This was a dramatic increase in the number of Jews converting to other religions, that in about two and a half years there more Jewish converts to other religions than in the previous four decades.<sup>278</sup>

---

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 4. I suspect he did not provide information on conversions to Orthodoxy because he in no way wanted the Orthodox Church to look bad.

<sup>277</sup> This was less than one hundredth of one percent.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

Tilea had an explanation for all this that reflects his preconceived notions. First, he absolved the Orthodox Church of any responsibility. He excused the conversions to Orthodoxy by noting that those conversions had received special approval, and in most cases the process had begun prior to law 711.<sup>279</sup> Regarding these conversions he also said that they “were not done by the Dominant State Church about which we cannot speak in this sense, because the Church has always conformed with the categorical and crucial imperatives of our people [*neam*], she belonging to the people and the people belonging to her.” Tilea essentially concluded that the Church only looked out for the best interest of nation, and therefore violations of law 711 were not a problem with the Orthodox Church. After all, any Jewish converts to Orthodoxy were exceptions to the rule that the Church was looking out for the best interests of the nation.

Second, Tilea concluded who was responsible for this problem:

Rather generally, the Roman-Catholic Church here has kept in line with its historic missionary activity, in other words it is infiltrating the lives of different Orthodox states in the most difficult moments of their political lives, and has found it convenient and even moral to grow its number here in our parts with a people that by definition are Christianity’s adversary and ours all during these difficult political moments for us. And this campaign to christen the Jews, brought to us by Catholicism, has rallied after the principles of universal proselytism and expansion.<sup>280</sup>

He especially blamed the Roman-Catholic diocese in Iași as one of the worst offenders.

The only specific case Tilea cited was from the Catholic Church’s Iași diocese. In that case an entire family was registered as Catholic even though only the child had been baptized. Tilea did not mention that even if this was an opportunistic conversion, perhaps

---

<sup>279</sup> But not all of them, he did not explain why some received special approval even though they had begun after March 21, 1941. He also did not provide any specific examples.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

it was driven by the extreme persecution of Jews in Iași who had suffered pogroms, deportations, and worse. Maybe desperation had driven one family to try this strategy, but he did not cite a source or record from either the family or the Catholic Church.

For Tilea, the Jewish problem was also a Catholic problem. Even though a significant part of his report is a large complaint about the Catholic Church breaking laws to help Jews, he did not make any suggestions as to what should be done. In fact, he only suggested that the information in his report be turned over to the police. He made no case for actions against the Catholic Church or any other church.

Attached to his report was a 79 page chart with information about the Jewish converts he demonized in his report. He recorded each person's first and last name, the confession they joined, their place and date of birth, birth certificate number, citizenship, date of conversion, current address, place of conversion or congregation, and the title and name of the cleric who baptized them or officiated at the baptism. This information could only have the purpose to be turned over to police authorities for some kind of action to be taken. Otherwise the report could have been done without publishing this information and arrived at the same conclusions. His goal was definitely more than just to make the Ministry of Cults aware of a problem; it was also to publicly expose Jewish converts and their helpers. According to Tilea all of them were in violation of the law.

Whether or not this report determined the Church's future course regarding baptizing Jews is not clear. It is clear though, that after this report was published the number of requests from Jews for Orthodox Christian baptism declined. Those Jews who tried to receive the ordinance of baptism in the Orthodox Church were met with

disappointment. In Vaslui in December, 1943 Riva Dubin made a request to have her son Ițic baptized in the Orthodox Church. She tried to explain that her son's father was Romanian, but that she had the child out of wedlock and raised him by herself. The Ministry of Cults responded that illegitimate children would be considered as having their mothers' religion. After she persisted a report was sent to her with this explanation:

The essence of our people's [*neamului*] ethnicity must be protected from the mixture of Jewish blood along with the possibility of Jewish infiltration in the national Romanian community through their conversion to the Romanian Orthodox Church and therefore the practical consequence for them would be that they could hide their ethnic origin. Seeing as Ițic Dubin's child is ethnically Jewish and a male and that through his introduction into the Christian community through baptism would surely result in the long run in a mixed marriage... it is our opinion to not grant authorization for the baptism of Ițic Dubin's child in the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>281</sup>

Riva did not provide any documents or even try explaining that she had registered Ițic as an Orthodox Christian nor that he had been raised in the Church. "Romanian blood" was to be kept pure by keeping Jewish blood out even by keeping Jews out of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Church also did not make any plea on her behalf to try and change the Ministry's opinion.

Another mother, Eva Lillu, tried to prove that her adult daughter Virginia Feldstein had already been baptized before law 711, but also without success. She sent her request for the certificate to a local parish priest in Craiova in June, 1944 and explained to him that Virginia's baptism in 1912 was sponsored by a colonel in the Romanian Army who later served in World War I. The Archdiocese of Craiova replied that the certificate was not available because of "administrative procedures" that had to

---

<sup>281</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944 1944, folder 97, pp. 9-17 and 1944 folder 98, p. 2.



be followed before the certificate could be released. These procedures included providing many other documents, the recalling of witnesses and obtaining their signatures. It proved so difficult to fulfill these requirements that the matter was never resolved and Lillu was not able to provide all the documents, nor find all the necessary witnesses. Eva Lillu appears to have needed much more documentation than in any other case I was able to find and the Archdiocese did not say that it did not have the certificate; rather that it would make it available. Ms. Lillu never indicated why she needed this document so badly, other than her daughter Virginia was for some reason unable to obtain the documents herself.<sup>282</sup>

Not only did the number of requests decline dramatically, the number of Jewish baptisms approved by the Church and the Ministry of Cults was reduced to zero after Tilea's report was published.<sup>283</sup> A series of letters remain in the archives that demonstrate that law 711 was by and large carried out according to the letter of the law despite the exceptional cases discussed above. These letters were in response to the Ministry asking each Orthodox Bishop to report to the Ministry of Cults how many Jews had been baptized in his jurisdiction. The letters reveal that most Bishops were in fact trying to keep Jews out of the Orthodox Church. The Bishop of Constanța wrote to the Ministry of Cults in February 1943 that in Constanța "for two years there were no requests for baptism received in the Orthodox Christian religion by Jews, and none would

---

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-29.

<sup>283</sup> I say "zero" because I am not discounting that there could have been a few exceptional cases that perhaps were either lost from the archives or mistakenly put somewhere else in the archives. However, I found no cases of Jews baptized into the Orthodox Church after this report until the law was reversed in late 1944. Other churches probably continued to allow those of Jewish ancestry to continue to convert although I do not have exact data to show to what extent it continued.

be approved even if they asked for it.”<sup>284</sup> The Bishop of Timișoara wrote that the Orthodox Church there “had respected Law 711 and would continue to respect it.”<sup>285</sup>

The Bishop of Roman explained how his jurisdiction dealt with law 711:

We have the honor to report to you that since we put Decree-Law nr. 711/941 into effect there was not one Jew in our entire Bishopric received unto Baptism in the Orthodox Church’s bosom. Also, we have again set back on the path to circulate in our official bulletin dispositions of the decree-law mentioned above, insisting that they are applied with complete rigor by our priesthood.<sup>286</sup>

The Bishop of Huș, the Bishop of Maramureș, the Bishop of Caransebeș, and the Bishop of Dunare de Jos each wrote similar letters in February 1943, asserting that law 711 was followed to the letter and that all the priests in their jurisdiction were given instructions not to baptize Jews.<sup>287</sup>

The Bishop of Hotin was particularly cruel in his letter, demonstrating that he was as interested in the spirit of the law as he was in the letter of the law:

In connection with the absolute ban against the conversion of Jews from the Mosaic Cult to any of the historic cults... we have the honor to inform you that in our Bishopric there was not a single case approved; in fact, all requests by Jews to be baptized were refused categorically.

Our priests are completely educated about the role of International Judaism in the absurdity of communism’s establishment on the earth, which when fully analyzed is simply a “Jewish business.” They have seen with their own eyes the behavior of Jews in Bessarabia under the Soviet’s rule and they know that Carl Marx, communism’s founder, was a baptized Jew.

---

<sup>284</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 147, p. 144.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., p. 145-146.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 182 for the Bishop of Huși’s letter, 193 for the Bishop of Maramureș’s letter, 188 for the Bishop of Caransebeș, and 195 for the Bishop of Dunare de Jos’s letter. The Bishop of Caransebeș noted that there had not been any Jews baptized in his jurisdiction since the decision not to baptize Jews who were not Romanian citizens in 1939.

As far as steps taken regarding the matter, I have repeated the order to the priests to not admit any Jews unto Baptism for any reason.<sup>288</sup>

Even the Patriarch wrote to the Ministry's inquiry in February 1943, saying that "the Holy Metropolitan understands the national interest that required Decree-Law 711/941 and respects it in all its provisions, not approving any Jews to be baptized. If any Jewish baptisms were approved they had fulfilled the legal formalities required... before the apparition of the decree."<sup>289</sup> The Orthodox Church's full adoption of Law 711 became the standard Church policy enforced down to local parishes by the Bishops. This policy continued until Antonescu's regime ended and Romania switched sides in August 1944.

### **Other churches and Law 711**

Father Tilea's report revealed an important development in Romania regarding law 711. He found nearly 2,000 converts from Judaism to other religions outside the Orthodox Church. These conversions were quite a contrast to Orthodox Bishops writing letters assuring their leader that they were keeping Jews out of Orthodox Christianity. It turns out that Orthodox Church leaders were not too happy to see Jews joining other churches, and looking at Orthodox leaders' reactions provides further evidence of the Orthodox Church's anti-Jewish sentiments.

Not long after law 711's passage, the Roman-Catholic Church, working through its Papal Nuncio in Bucharest, sent a complaint to the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to the Nuncio the law was against the letter and the spirit of the

---

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

provisions of a concordat that had been signed between the Vatican and the Romanian government several years earlier. According to the Nuncio's complaint the law had resulted in a situation in which the Catholic Church was being mistreated in comparison to other churches in Romania. The complaint was forwarded from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Justice with a request that the Ministry of Justice decide whether or not there was any merit to the Nuncio's allegations. The State's Superior Legal Council met to review the matter on July 11, 1941 and that same day published a decision regarding the Catholic Church and law 711.<sup>290</sup> The Council decided that because law 711 was not specific to any one church the Papal Nuncio's complaint was moot. The Council noted that although the Roman-Catholic Church did have a concordat with the Romanian government, the concordat did not extend special privileges to the Catholic Church but only the same rights as any other church in Romania.<sup>291</sup>

But the council went further and explained that the real intent of the law was to keep Jews from being able to hide their identity, infiltrate Romanian society, and pollute Romanian blood and the national being. The council decided that the real crime against law 711 was not letting Jews attend Catholic services and schools, or even be baptized in the Catholic Church. Committing a crime under law 711 was deemed as any attempt to register a Jewish person under a different religion besides Judaism. The council's decision further elaborated that any religious employee who registered a Jewish person in any government or church registry as belonging to another religion besides Judaism or

---

<sup>290</sup> Decision number 823/1941.

<sup>291</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 184, pp. 2-7.

changed a Jew's civil status as pertaining to their religion would be prosecuted.<sup>292</sup> The Council's decision also noted that any church or religious association involved in such activities could lose its state approval.<sup>293</sup> The Council's decision did not apparently have an effect on the Catholic Church's activities as Father Tilea's report showed; the Roman-Catholic Church had by far the most Jewish converts of any of the confessions in Romania.

The Catholic Church's activities must have caught the attention of someone in the Holy Synod, because at the Synod's request Professor Aurel Popa, the General Secretary of Cults, compiled a report in December 1942. The report accompanied a letter that asked the Holy Synod to review the report in its next meeting because it was in the interest of "the good of the Church."<sup>294</sup> What was in the report that was allegedly important for Orthodox leaders?

Popa's report began by reviewing the concordat between Romania and the Vatican. The concordat stated that all Catholics have the right to preach and practice Catholicism in public in the entire Kingdom of Romania. According to Popa the Romanian government had not put any impediments in the way of this section of the concordat. Also, in the concordat the Catholic Church agreed to respect the principles and laws of the constitution, uphold the morals and laws of the state's organization, and not to disturb the peace. Consequently the Catholic Bishops were to take an oath of fealty to the King of Romania and his successors, the constitution, and the laws of the

---

<sup>292</sup> The council did not provide guidelines for what kind of sentence should be administered in such a case.

<sup>293</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>294</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 2, pages 69 and 70 for two copies of this letter.

country.<sup>295</sup> Because of this Popa argued it should be the government's responsibility to inform the Catholic Church what its obligations were regarding the country's laws. Popa noted that before the concordat was signed the General Law of Cults had given the state the right to observe and regulate all the churches and religions in the country. Popa concluded that the Catholic Church was to be subject to all laws in the country.<sup>296</sup>

Popa's report then took a very accusatory tone, stating that either the Vatican did not know Romania's laws or was seeking to circumvent them. An investigation by the Ministry of Cults found that the Roman-Catholic Church had "after the appearance of decree-law 711/1941, continued to administer the holy sacrament of baptism to the Jews, in spite of and in total disregard to this law."<sup>297</sup> He went on to accuse the Papal Nuncio of trying to have law 711 rescinded and legalize the Jewish Catholic converts who were baptized after the appearance of law 711.

Popa took exception to the Nuncio's attitude and published a two point rebuttal. His first point was that law 711/1941 did not prevent the Roman-Catholic Church from fulfilling its mission of preaching Christian truths to the entire world, nor did it stop Jews from listening to Christianity's truths and learning the Catholic Church's views on the subject. Like Tilea, Popa argued that the Catholic Church had erred in so easily administering baptism to "these Jews" without ensuring their motives were pure; the Catholic Church had violated the principle of law 711 by allowing "heterogeneous

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>296</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., verso.

infiltrations” into Romania’s “ethnic treasure.”<sup>298</sup> Popa’s second point was that law 711 did not restrict Catholic rights, in fact it safeguarded against Jewish growth in the Christian community through baptism.

Popa made a few proposals at the end of his report. He suggested that the Catholic Church be made to conform to all the laws for cults. He said that the Catholic Church should be obligated to conform to the oath of fealty the Catholic bishops had taken. His third point was that if the Catholic Church continued to maintain the same attitude regarding Jews converting to Catholicism then the government should take measures against the Catholic clergy. His last point was that if the situation deteriorated to the point where the Roman Catholic Church broke off the concordat or violated it then the Catholic Church in Romania should be denounced.<sup>299</sup>

It is clear from Father Tilea’s and Professor Popa’s reports that Catholic clergy were perfectly fine with allowing Jews to convert to Catholicism. Even more than that, the Catholic Church was actively working against law 711. Why would the Orthodox Church care so much about whether or not Jews were becoming Catholics? According to Tilea’s and Popa’s reports, the Romanian Orthodox Church was special for the Romanian people or nation. It was the national church and anything that could weaken the nation could also weaken the nation’s church. Their argument was that by allowing Jews to enter into the general Christian community the entire nation would be at risk. Jews who became Catholic might be able to hide their Jewishness from the authorities, or even

---

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., verso.

worse from other Romanians with whom they might have children (their language). By expressing outrage at the Catholic Church's acceptance of Jewish converts, that is, Orthodox Church leaders showed that they supported the racist principle behind law 711, to keep Jews away from mingling with other Romanians.

Given the large number of Jews who converted to Catholicism compared to other confessions there are surprisingly few documents in the Ministry of Cults and Arts' files in the archive. Looking at how difficult it was for Jews to convert to Orthodoxy this seems a bit surprising. Still, they reveal some similarities to cases of conversions to Orthodoxy. On March 5, 1943 Schöffner Disca Ghizela wrote to the Ministry of Cults asking for a special exception to allow her to convert to Catholicism in Timișoara. Her letter explains that she was born to a Roman-Catholic father and that her father's parents were ethnic Germans. However, her mother was Jewish and so on her birth certificate it stated that she was Jewish. She noted that she was never enrolled in a Jewish community, synagogue, school, or group and considered herself a Roman-Catholic.<sup>300</sup> The Ministry responded with a letter on March 11, 1943 that because her birth certificate was never changed, nor was there any documentation of her trying to become Catholic or be baptized she could not be allowed to convert to Catholicism under the conditions of law 711.<sup>301</sup>

In April, 1943 Irma Maria Parjakter sent a similar request to the Ministry of Cults trying to prove that she was a Roman-Catholic. Her argument was that although she was

---

<sup>300</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 120, p. 37.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 38.



registered as Jewish on her birth certificate, she was a baptized Roman-Catholic and that she was also raised as a Roman-Catholic. When she presented herself to local authorities in Timișoara to change her documentation from Jewish to Roman-Catholic she was told that on the basis of law 711 such a change could not be made.<sup>302</sup> Like Ms. Ghizela her father was a Roman-Catholic and her mother was Jewish.<sup>303</sup> However, Ms. Parjakter did have a baptismal certificate proving that in 1923 she had been baptized in a Roman-Catholic church in Timișoara.<sup>304</sup> Still, in spite of her document the Minister confirmed the decision by the authorities in Timișoara that her request be rejected. Neither Ms. Parjakter nor Ms. Ghizela included documents from Catholic clergy with their requests which probably contributed to their rejections, similar to cases of Jews trying to convert to Orthodoxy without documented clerical support.

In May, 1943 a case was forwarded from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Cults. Two women, Paula Schnabl and Ecaterina Weinberger asked to have their religious status changed from Jewish to Roman-Catholic. Both had apparently been married to Jewish men but now were divorced and seeking to return to their previous religious status as Roman-Catholics. A local judiciary had decided that under law 711 their conversion was legal because they were ethnically German by birth.<sup>305</sup>

In January, 1943 a request was sent by the Ministry of Cults to the Papal Nuncio in Romania to ask the Catholic Bishop of Alba Iulia to make a list of Jews who converted

---

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

to Roman-Catholicism after the appearance of law 711.<sup>306</sup> The Catholic Bishop of Alba Iulia sent a letter to the ministry indicating that four Jews were baptized in Braşov: one in July, 1941 and the other three in June, 1942. In Petrila Parish in the city of Hunedoara one Jewish woman was baptized in April 1941. In Rupea parish two more were baptized on January 2, 1943.<sup>307</sup> It was in Rupea where there was a disagreement between local officials, the Ministry, and the Catholic Church. The Rupea Parish was in the city of Ungra, and the Ungra city hall sent a letter to the Ministry indicating that while two Jews may have been reported by the Catholic parish as baptized, it was not in 1943 as reported by the Catholic Bishop. Rather the city's investigation showed that they had been baptized in 1941, but that the two people named in the report had never registered themselves as Catholics, and therefore would remain legally registered as Jewish by religion.

Perhaps there are so few documents in the Ministry's archive regarding the more than one thousand Jewish conversions to Catholicism because they were not reported to authorities. Father Tilea's report did not explain in great detail how he came up with all of his figures, but he did say that he checked churches' records as well as government records. Local Catholic clergy probably just went ahead with their business because trying to go through the Ministry of Cults proved too burdensome. Since the Papal Nuncio did not care for law 711, many Catholic clerics also probably ignored the law. This would explain why even though complaints against the Roman-Catholic Church

---

<sup>306</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943-134, p. 38.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

would appear in these official reports they had little evidence other than numbers, because the Catholic Church did not work with the Ministry of Cults when baptizing Jews.

By the time the Antonescu regime collapsed, the threats against the Catholic Church and its clergy turned out to be empty. Three things must have kept the Roman-Catholic Church from being subject to penalties. The first is that Romania was allied to Italy in the war, and if it had taken any serious action against the Catholic Church it would have been a serious blow to Romania's foreign relations. The second is that it simply was too difficult to do anything about the Catholic Church in Romania. The government had devoted so many resources to fighting a war against the Soviet Union, persecuting Jews, and dealing with other churches deemed to be a greater national security risk than Catholicism that trying to enforce law 711 on the Catholic Church was probably unfeasible. With hundreds of thousands of parishioners, thousands of clergy, and foreign backing the Catholic Church was too big to be taken on over just one law. And third, there was the issue that the Romanian government had a concordat with the Vatican, making any action against Roman-Catholicism even more troubling.

But the Romanian government did take action against smaller religious groups over this law. This is best illustrated by the story of Magne Solheim and the Norwegian Church Mission. Father Magne Solheim had obtained an authorization in 1938 to run a mission for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania titled the Norwegian Church

Mission or Eben Ezer.<sup>308</sup> The Mission's headquarters were in Danube port city Galați, with an affiliate in Iași run by Isac Feinstein. In early March, 1941 Solheim wrote to the Ministry of Cults asking that his authorization be renewed "on the basis that the activity it exercises consists in holding divine services and religious conferences among Jews with the purpose of preaching the Holy Gospel."<sup>309</sup> He also noted that the Mission would distribute bibles, copies of the New Testament, and religious tracts that passed censorship regulations. Solheim wanted the Ministry's new approval to avoid problems with local authorities since it had been a few years since the Mission's activities were last approved.<sup>310</sup>

He was successful; on March 15, 1941 the Ministry sent registered letter 15711/941 to Solheim at his Galați address giving both Solheim and Feinstein permission to continue their activities. The letter approved them to hold services and religious conferences among Jews, and to preach the Holy Gospel, distribute bibles, copies of the New Testament, and any brochures approved by censorship.<sup>311</sup> Then, less than a week later law 711 appeared.

Law 711 seemingly was in conflict with the Norwegian Church Mission, yet it was not until 1943 that the Mission ran afoul of the authorities. On January 27, 1943 the Council of Inspectors General for Cults in the Ministry of Cults filed a report on Magne

---

<sup>308</sup> In some documents it is referred to as the Norwegian Church Mission and in others as the religious association Eben Ezer.

<sup>309</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 185, p. 107.

<sup>310</sup> Ibidem. No doubt his activity would have been deemed suspicious by local authorities after so many anti-Jewish laws had been passed. The date stamp indicates the Ministry received the letter on March 15, 1941.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

Solheim and the Norwegian Church Mission. Point one stated that Solheim had asked the Ministry for proof that the services his mission held at chapels in Galați, Iași, and Bucharest were authorized because they were part of one of Romania's "historic cults." Solheim wanted Jews to be able to attend the religious services his mission provided in Lutheran chapels.

The second point of the report was an underhanded complaint by Patriarch Nicodim. The Patriarch wondered why Jews were attending Solheim's services instead of the approved Lutheran services. He said "especially when talking about the Lutheran rite as they belong to a recognized confession. We would ask the Minister to make things right."<sup>312</sup> What he meant by this is defined in the third point of the report. The report stated that since Jews who had joined through the mission were part of a historic cult, they could not be recognized as being a separate group. In other words, the report was noting that if there were Jewish converts, they should be considered as Lutherans and not as members of a different religious association.

The conclusion of the report based on the first three points read:

In the face of this situation the Council of Inspectors General for Cults is of the opinion that inasmuch as Decree-law nr. 711/941 prohibits any passage of Jews to a Christian confession; the above named association no longer has any reason to exist as long as its purpose is only the baptism of Jews.<sup>313</sup>

The recommendation was that Jewish converts to Christianity from before law 711 be allowed to attend Lutheran religious services. This meant that the Norwegian Church Mission would cease to exist separately from the Lutheran Church, and that the Mission

---

<sup>312</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 143, p. 2.

<sup>313</sup> Ibidem.

would not be able to continue its activities. The report did not mention Jews who were baptized after law 711 because this was considered impermissible.

It turns out that the Norwegian Church Mission was closed down. In a secret report written to the Ministry of Cults in August 1943, the police indicated that they had been tracking Solheim's activities. They reported that because his association's headquarters had closed he was now holding meetings with Jews on Saturdays in a building owned by the German Lutheran Church. He had received permission to work as a preacher for that particular Lutheran church but it was actually a front for his continued preaching to Jews from whom he received a lot of help.<sup>314</sup> The report further showed that government authorities did take the recommendations from the Ministry of Cults seriously and that law 711 was enforced with serious consequences.

Later, on October 30, 1943, the same Council of Inspectors filed a similar report coming to the same conclusion that the Norwegian Church Mission should no longer exist.<sup>315</sup> The report labeled the association a "sect." The Norwegian Church Mission and Magne Solheim illustrate the seriousness with which authorities and the Orthodox Church's leadership viewed infractions of law 711. Solheim's mission must have been quite small as documents indicated that the two congregations met in borrowed or rented spaces in Galați and Iași, and that Solheim continued to operate for months after the Mission was closed. Yet the fact that he was working with Jews drew enough attention

---

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., pp. 88-89. The police report on Solheim made mention of a German Lutheran school, which is where the meetings may have taken place, but it is not definitive. The report also notes the closure of another "sect" in Brașov called *Creștini în Biblie* [Christians in the Bible]. There was no explanation as to what the "help" was that Jews were providing.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., no page number as the top corner was ripped off.

that the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch was cited in the Ministry's official complaint against him.

The Church's decision to fully support law 711 shows the depth of its anti-Semitism. The fact that the Church would take notice of a congregation like Solheim's demonstrates that it was not passively obeying the law; rather it was trying to ensure that the law's purpose would be fulfilled. Because law 711 was a racial law there is no doubt that the Church's ultimate acceptance and enforcement of the law demonstrates that Church leaders fully supported the Antonescu regime's anti-Jewish goals.

Law 711 is such an important issue for the persecution of Jews in Romania because it demonstrates an entire culture dedicated to anti-Semitism. Specific comments regarding pogroms, the government seizure of Jewish property, and Jewish deportations by Orthodox Church leaders are rare in extant documents. The Antonescu government did not need the Church's cooperation in rounding up Jews, taking their property, and deporting them. But the government needed the Church's help in this one part of its racist agenda to separate Jews from Romanian society, and the Church obliged.

## Chapter 5:

### The Church on the Eastern Front

#### Transnistria and Bessarabia

The main reason that this study includes a section on Transnistria and Bessarabia is that these areas were the primary sites of mass violence against civilians by the Romanian Administration during World War II.<sup>316</sup> Up to November 1943, around 120,000 Romanian Citizens of Jewish descent were killed or died in Transnistria. The death toll was even higher for Ukrainian Jews; more than 200,000 Ukrainian Jews perished in Transnistria under the Romanian administration.<sup>317</sup> The Eastern-most controlled Romanian territories saw mass murder, deportations, concentration camps, and pogroms. Against this background the Church's policies in this area stayed consistent with those discussed earlier.

One of the main goals of the Romanian Orthodox Church during World War II was to recapture what the Church lost during the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia from July 1940 to June 1941. Eventually this effort would be expanded into Transnistria and Bukovina. The Romanian Orthodox Church moved in behind Operation Barbarossa to reestablish itself as the dominant Church in the area. The Church moved so quickly that within two weeks of the Soviet withdrawal the Church had already sent 536 church

---

<sup>316</sup> Transnistria encompassed all the Romanian occupied territory east of Bessarabia between the Bug and Dniester Rivers, including Odessa.

<sup>317</sup> Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), p. 289



personnel to Bessarabia, of which 443 were priests.<sup>318</sup> An additional 150 Church personnel were sent over the next month, including two bishops and 98 priests.<sup>319</sup> Of all of these 500 were sent back to Bessarabia after being displaced by the Soviet Union's year long occupation.<sup>320</sup> The Romanian Orthodox Church demonstrated an effort to proselyte in these areas that could be described quite accurately as militant. The philosophy of militantly proselyting in these areas fit into the Patriarch's description of the war as a "holy war." This put the bravado preached by the Patriarch and Synod when they expressed support for the war led by Antonescu into action.

The Romanian Orthodox Church's return to Bessarabia was prominently featured in the Synod's magazine for its issue on July-August 1941. One of the Patriarch's published telegrams to Antonescu read as follows:

The Church is grateful to you, the people's redeemer General and the country's healer, and puts at your disposal, a gift as it were, sacred books valuing a million lei for the Church in Bessarabia and Bukovina and we pray to God to give you a great victory.<sup>321</sup>

Antonescu responded with a thank you telegram. That gesture was followed by an address from the Patriarch to the Romanian troops. The Patriarch first explained that

---

<sup>318</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 108, p. 5. From a report on how many Church personnel were sent to Bessarabia by August 12, 1941.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., p. 4. From a subsequent report on how many church personnel were sent to Bessarabia up to September 15, 1941.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-17. The report predates the reports that summarize the number of Church personnel that were already sent to the country. This report indicated how many displaced priests were to return to Bessarabia, including their function in the Church, name, from where in Romania they were returning to Bessarabia, and what locality they were to go to in Bessarabia. An accompanying letter was dated with the stamp August 2, 1941.

<sup>321</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 59, no. 7-8 (1943): p. 470. The exact date of the telegram was not given in the magazine. The telegram must have been sent before August 17 as the Patriarch's speech that followed exchanging telegrams with Antonescu was dated on August 17.

Stephen the Great of Moldova had united all of modern day Bessarabia with Romania into one country. He then explained:

This was ours for 500 years. In that day when a little flower called “Moscow” was just blossoming, surrounded by wilderness and Asian barbarians, Bessarabia, sprung from the loins of Moldova, was a country of faith, of courage, and of Romanian and Christian piety. It was the rampart against the Tatar and Ural-Altai hordes; it was the border town for European civilization, a country of tragic idealism and Latin light... Thanks to his Majesty Mihai I and to our great leader, Marshall Ion Antonescu. The origin of the Romanian people’s soul, our Moldovan Bessarabia is ours again, and will forever be... the Country of the Cross.<sup>322</sup>

According to the Patriarch the war effort was to re-Christianize the land after it had been defiled by the godless communist invaders. The Patriarch was so excited about recapturing Bessarabia that he encouraged Romanians everywhere to buy war bonds. He personally bought half a million lei worth of bonds and publicly acknowledged that the Church was going to buy nine million lei worth of bonds.<sup>323</sup> The Synod also released a general statement about the glorious recapture of Bessarabia declaring that “Bessarabia had returned home.”<sup>324</sup> The other sign of the Church’s interest in Bessarabia was how fast it moved hundreds of priests back into the region. Within months of Bessarabia’s recapture the Orthodox Church functioned as did before the Soviet invasion.

As soon as the Church reestablished itself in Bessarabia, it turned its attention to Transnistria, the newly occupied region to the east of Bessarabia. The Church’s overall

---

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., pp. 470-471. From Patriarch Nicodim’s speech to the troops.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., pp. 471-472. From the Patriarch’s undated speech regarding the recapturing of Bessarabia, given the chronology of the articles in this section it was probably after August 17. He also instructed all the Church’s clergy to use a portion of their salary to buy these bonds. The property damage in the area was fairly severe, and the government started selling bonds as a way to raise money to rebuild.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., pp. 473-474.

missionary operation in Transnistria would also be manifest through various forms of proselytism. The first was sending in priests to attract people back to the Orthodox Church. A press release regarding the Church's new role in the region was put into the Holy Synod's magazine. Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Ardeal had decided that it was not enough to send a few groups of missionaries to Transnistria. He instead organized an entire mission that initially would consist of four bishops and fifty-six missionary priests. Each group of priests was to work in a region under the direct leadership of a bishop. The Transnistrian mission was to be divided into five regions. They were to visit and provide liturgical services every morning, with every priest having his own village to serve in. They were also to preach according to the plans and themes decided by Metropolitan Bălan. A shipment of religious books printed in Ardeal was sent with the missionary groups in order for them to establish village libraries. The idea was that in 20 days the Church would perform one thousand liturgies.

All of the new missionaries were instructed and blessed by the Patriarch on September 2, 1941. The bishops were invited to have dinner with the Patriarch, vice president Mihai Antonescu and leaders of the Ministry of Cults. During that dinner, the Patriarch explained that the mission organized by Metropolitan Bălan was "only a part of the great missionary battle that the Romanian Orthodox Church had begun to carry out in the places that were poorly treated, ruined, and broken by the godless hordes."<sup>325</sup>

In the Synod's magazine for September-October a sixteen page article extolled the successes of the missionary effort in Bessarabia and Transnistria. The article

---

<sup>325</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 59, no. 9-10 (1941): pp. 606-607.

included anecdotes of how the Romanian Orthodox priests were welcomed back into the Bessarabian and Transnistrian communities. The first order of business was simply to put priests back into the communities from which they had been forced by Soviet authorities. The article also details that the Church had missionaries right behind Romanian troops on the front. While the article was scant on details about the missionary effort, it does make it clear that the Church was making a strong effort to reestablish itself in the region. The Synod wanted to broadcast its success in order to demonstrate that it was having as much success as the military.

While official publications made the entire mission seem like it was well on its way to heaven, a few letters on the subject indicate that there were problems. On November 6, 1941 Patriarch Nicodim sent a letter to the Ministry of Cults asking for more support in improving the organization of the Church in Bessarabia and Transnistria.<sup>326</sup> The decision was based on a letter that the Bishop of Huş, Grigore, sent to the Synod indicating that the Transnistrian mission faced some difficulties. A copy of the letter was sent to the Ministry along with the Synod's request. Bishop Grigore's letter noted that in Transnistria many teenagers and young adults had grown up completely

---

<sup>326</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 2, p. 123. The decision to ask the Ministry for help was, according to the letter, made in the Synod's meeting on October 24. The meeting notes found in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* on the Synod's meeting on that date show that indeed Bishop Grigore's letter was discussed. This meeting marked the official establishment of the Mission in Transnistria by the Synod, even though the mission had been operating for some time under the leadership of Metropolitan Bălan. This meant that the mission was now under the direct leadership of the Synod. See BOR 59, no. 11-12 (1941): p. 34. Even more confusing is the fact that in BOR 60, no. 1-4 (1942): p. 138 the *Cronica Internă* states that the mission began on August 15, 1941 and was founded by Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban because he sent the first delegation to Transnistria. More likely than any of these separate stories is that Archimandrite Scriban did send the first delegation, followed by Metropolitan Bălan's actual organization of mission personnel, and then it was completed after two months to be officially recognized by the Synod after Metropolitan Bălan had the personnel organized. It was then that Archimandrite Scriban took full leadership over the entire mission. In November 1942 Metropolitan Visarion Puiu was named the mission's leader; he would lead the mission until December 1943.

under Soviet rule, and now were indifferent to the Church and to moral authorities in general.<sup>327</sup> Innocentism had become quite popular in the region. Innocentism in Transnistria had not been tolerated by local Soviet authorities. But because the group practiced communal living similar to the kind of socialist farming communes pushed by Soviet authorities in the area it was not well liked by Romanian authorities either. The letter complained multiple times about Bolshevik sentiments and communist sympathies, considered by Bishop Grigore to be the worst of all the problems.

The difference between Transnistria and Bessarabia was that while Bessarabia had only been occupied about a year by the Soviet Union, Transnistria, which had many Romanian communities, had never before been under the Romanian government.<sup>328</sup> Transnistria had been run by Soviet authorities since shortly after World War I came to a close, and its inhabitants responded very differently to the Romanian Orthodox Church's efforts. The majority of Transnistria's residents were not Romanian and much in the same way that many Ukrainians viewed the Soviet Union as a different form of Russian Imperialism, the Romanian administration was also viewed as a form of foreign imperialism. The lack of infrastructure, both in building and personnel, was proving to be a stumbling block. It was also decided at the Synod's meeting on October 24, 1941 that the Synod would lobby the government to make any accommodations necessary to run the mission in Transnistria.<sup>329</sup> One of the accommodations that the Church

---

<sup>327</sup> This was a result of there not really being any active priests or churches open in the area for years. The Soviet authorities had closed down nearly all of the churches in the region.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., pp. 124-128.

<sup>329</sup> "Ședința din 24 Octomvrie, 1941," BOR 59, no. 11-12 (1941): p. 34.

specifically wanted had to do with the Church's anti-sectarian campaign. The Minister of National Culture and Cults, with information from Metropolitan Irineu of Moldova, had sent a letter to the Chief of Police in Chişinău "regarding the activity that religious sects in Bessarabia had begun to successfully develop." At the meeting the Holy Synod decided to ask the government to outlaw these sects, and that the Bessarabian clergy would be instructed on how to defend against sects.

The Transnistrian mission picked up steam in 1942, and even began publishing its own magazine. The Synod's magazine explained the Mission's proselyting success:

The most characteristic phenomenon in Transnistria is the triumphant people's return to the faith. All over churches are repaired and the tainted alters are purified. Hidden icons and vexilla are carefully put back in their rightful places.

There is a great thirst for faith, one that cannot easily be quenched. The faithful bring children en masse to be baptized. Right before our eyes there is a new Christianization of the people that can be compared to the times of Prince Vladimir of Kiev.

The Transnistrian people have received the news of the first priests' arrival with great joy... People are coming from the farthest corners of Transnistria to beg for their churches to be dedicated, to be given priests, to be sent books of rites, ritual garments, crosses, holy vessels and more... Up till now there were 32 churches dedicated and a much larger number of churches were open by the faithful... It should also be said here that civil and military authorities all over have been a great support in repairing these sacred places.<sup>330</sup>

The article further explained that as the first missionaries arrived in Transnistria they had so many requests compared to the small number of priests that they worked in undefined territories to try and reach as many people as possible. Then in the second half of September 1941 they began working in teams. The teams were effective in "leaving

---

<sup>330</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 60, no. 1-4 (1942): p. 139.

behind a good impression... preaching, doing mass baptisms and sharing prayer books and crosses.”<sup>331</sup> Many of these efforts were part time or temporary, with priests rotating in from all across the country. By Christmas there were 63 full time missionary priests sent from across the country, a deacon, a music leader, and 14 archpriests. Choirs were organized by locals. Military clergy were also in “the missionary work, so that along with their service duties they found time to be missionaries.” Around 150 local priests returned to the area to work. Seven monasteries were reopened. At the Faculty of Medicine in Odessa the Romanian Orthodox Church began offering Christian religion courses, the first being titled “Religion and Medicine.”<sup>332</sup> The Church planned on opening a Faculty of Theology in Odessa as soon as it was feasible. Also not to be outdone, the missionary effort in Northern Bukovina published a couple of months later that it had succeeded in 129 missionary services to “tons of people.” There were within these missionary efforts in Bukovina over a thousand evangelizing meetings.<sup>333</sup>

Another part of the plan to bring people to church was reopening churches that had been closed by the Soviet authorities, or rebuilding churches that had been destroyed. Exactly how many churches were reopened by the time the mission closed in mid 1944 is difficult to find out due to lack of documentation. The mission’s official magazine, *Transnistria Creștină*, gives quite a few numbers in each issue, but provides far fewer

---

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-140. The teams were as large as 55 priests.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>333</sup> BOR 60 nr. 5-6 May-June, “Cronica Internă,” BOR 60, no. 5-6 (1942): p. 246.

names of which churches were rebuilt or repaired.<sup>334</sup> This reopening, rebuilding, and dedicating churches continued until the end of the mission.

The missionary effort in the area according to the Romanian Orthodox Church was full of success with only minor hiccups attributed to the people's zeal for the Orthodox priesthood's services. It is not surprising that so few negative things were published by the Holy Synod. The Synod rarely printed anything that might paint the Church or the government in a bad light. So even though Transnistria's Jews were being concentrated and murdered, such horrors never made it into Transnistrian Mission documents. In fact, the only problem the Synod admitted to was that local parishes were running out of basic church items like Bibles, candles, crosses, and ritual objects for both local priests and parishioners. In 1942 the Transnistrian Mission began publishing its own magazine under the direction of Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban. The very first article in the magazine was entitled "Romanian Traces in Odessa from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century." The article explained how Odessa had been tremendously influenced by Romanian Orthodox Church figures from the late 1700s through the latter half of the 1800s. Its purpose was clearly to explain why the Romanian Orthodox Church, and Romanians in general, belonged in Odessa.<sup>335</sup> Without this basic philosophy, that the Romanian Orthodox

---

<sup>334</sup> The figure of 32 churches opened and dedicated by the Romanian Orthodox Church was also put into *Transnistria Creștină* 1 January-June 1942, page 23. However, the names of the churches reopened by Romanian Orthodox clergy were not provided and neither were the names of churches reopened by locals provided. In *Transnistria Creștină* 1943 both issues provide many more details on which churches were being repaired and where some churches were built. The January-June 1943 issue noted that in less than two years the Church repaired and reopened 632 churches with an additional 309 under repair or construction. See *Transnistria Creștină* 2 January-June page 75. But the names are few when compared to the numbers that the Orthodox Church claimed.

<sup>335</sup> Archimandrite Antim Nica, "Urme românești la Odesa din veacul XIX-lea" [Romanian Traces in Odessa from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century], *Transnistria Creștină: Revista Misiunii Ortodoxe Române în Transnistria*



Church belonged in Odessa and Transnistria it seemed like the Romanian Orthodox Church could be overstepping its bounds, actively proselyting in an area to be governed by another autocephalous Orthodox Church. Technically, the Russian Orthodox Church had jurisdiction over the area. Patriarch Nicodim had even voiced concern over the matter.<sup>336</sup> Yet the article explained that the Church in the area was once run by a Romanian Orthodox cleric. Therefore, it was deemed as part of the Romanian Orthodox Church's jurisdiction. This was using a singular Romanian historical figure to justify the religious takeover of an entire region. This was taking Romanian nationalism to the furthest extreme that Church leaders could make up short of falsifying the entire story.

As the Transnistrian Mission continued past simply offering religious services to as many people as possible, including mass baptisms and other rites, it moved on to other matters the Church considered important. Proselyting would also occur in Transnistria's schools. The Romanian Orthodox Church had been granted complete control of all secondary religious education in Bessarabia's public schools. By June 1943 this same control was established over secondary schools in Bukovina.<sup>337</sup> Where there were priests the Romanian Orthodox Church taught religion in elementary and secondary schools. Sunday schools for adults were also established and in some cases met during the week to accommodate the religious educational needs of parents who had a difficult time trying to

---

[Christian Transnistria: The Magazine of the Romanian Orthodox Mission in Transnistria], Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban President of the Directors' Committee, 1 no. 1 (1942): pp. 4-9. The magazine will hereafter be referred to or cited as *Transnistria Creștină*.

<sup>336</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1941, folder 2, p. 31. In a letter to the Minister of Cults the Patriarch was concerned about the canonical ramifications involving one autocephalous Orthodox Church establishing a mission in another autocephalous Orthodox Church's territory. He did not lay out any specific concerns, and whatever they were they did not slow down the Romanian Orthodox Church's efforts in Transnistria.

<sup>337</sup> See ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1943, folder 1, pp. 100-103.

teach their children about the Church. Archimandrite Scriban himself taught the new classes on Christianity at the University of Odessa.

The Mission's leadership noted that one problem with the influx of Romanian priests was that many priests did not know Russian, Ukrainian, or Moldovan dialects spoken by locals. Of course most locals did not know Romanian either. In Ochakov, one of the local priests established classes to teach locals Romanian. Then while they learned Romanian they were also catechized.<sup>338</sup> In Tiraspol similar efforts to in the language front were made and the Cathedral held services with Romanian and Russian translators.<sup>339</sup> In Ananiev the local Church leaders asked the local schools' director to remove teachers who had taught ant-religious propaganda under the Bolshevik regime as part of collaboration among the schools and the Church.<sup>340</sup> The Church in Râbnița also taught Romanian language courses.<sup>341</sup> These stories tend to be repeated across Transnistria's counties. The Church was interested in becoming involved in schools and trying to teach people Romanian. Church leaders envisioned a future in which Transnistria was a part of Romania and where the Romanian Orthodox Church would feature as the religion for the people there. It was an expansion of Antonescu's and the Synod's vision for an expanded Romania after the Axis victory.

---

<sup>338</sup> "Spicuiuri din activitatea protoierilor" [Collections from the Outlying Districts], *Transnistria Creștină* 1, no. 1 (1942): pp. 51-52.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

This was a perfect fit for the Antonescu regime's plan to eventually make Transnistria a fully Romanian territory, by educating the children and youth in Romanian and Romanian Orthodox Christian traditions. The Romanian Orthodox Church was simply fulfilling its mission as the "National Church." The strong collaboration and connection outlined in the chapter on the Church and the Romanian government also worked on the local level in Transnistria. The religious and civil authorities in Transnistria worked together to further the Church's and government's nationalist goals. The first article of *Transnistria Creștină* for the January-June 1943 issue makes it clear that this was part of the nationalist program, saying: "This wonderful missionary operation is both Christian and nationalist."<sup>342</sup>

The second way the Church hoped to achieve its overall mission was to eliminate un-Christian sects. This was an extension of the anti-sectarian campaign taking place in the rest of Romania's territory. The mission had already complained to the Synod and government authorities about the increase in sectarians. The Synod had previously asked for sects to be outlawed in Bessarabia. In Transnistria the Romanian Orthodox Church did not wait for civil authorities to take control of the so called sectarian problem as it had in Bessarabia, although the sects were eventually outlawed sometime during 1942. Certain priests were designated "inspector-missionaries" to go to places where sectarianism had become well established and try to draw people away from sects.<sup>343</sup> The mission's magazine also had a few words concerning the problem:

---

<sup>342</sup> Cernăuți Theological Professor Constantin Tomescu, "Trans Nistrum..." *Transnistria Creștină* 2 nr. 1-2 (1943): p. 5.

<sup>343</sup> "Dare-de-seamă," *Transnistria Creștină* 1, no. 1, (1942): pp. 30-34.

The religious drought has made the people ready to listen to anyone who would speak to them about faith. In this atmosphere sects can easily take hold. Until now we had never seen a danger such as this so close to us. In order to fend off these dangerous sects there is a need to put as many enlightened priests as possible among the people and we should do this as quickly as possible. Meanwhile there is a visible flowering Innocentism movement cradled between Balta and Ananiev. This movement in the past had a terrible effect on the Moldovans living between the Dniester and the Bug. Also it has come to our attention that in the territory there is a Baptist movement. We have taken the measures that we think are necessary.<sup>344</sup>

What measures did the Church take? Proselyting among sectarians was the most benign course the Romanian Orthodox clergy took. Outright confrontations did happen: in Ovidiopol County, for example priests confronted sectarians in Grădinița, Iasca, and Troița villages.<sup>345</sup> And in Golta County, the Clergy worked with local authorities to take measures to stop Baptists from being able to grow or make public “propaganda.”<sup>346</sup> The Romanian Orthodox clergy reported on any sectarian activity. They reported that “about 50 souls from the ‘nazarene’ sect were found in Tihonovca village.”<sup>347</sup> Reports on sectarian activity also came in from Tulcin County.<sup>348</sup>

In 1943 the situation for people who belonged to sects worsened. In Berezovca County sectarians were monitored by the Orthodox clergy, local administration, and the military. Golta County clergy reported that sectarians had ceased to operate publicly. This situation eventually spread to nearly all of Transnistria. Few complaints about

---

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>345</sup> “Spicuiuri din activitatea protoieriilor,” *Transnistria Creștină* 1 no. 1 (1942): p. 51. Unfortunately exact details of the confrontations were not provided in the article.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 57, italics in the original.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p. 59. The report was on Evangelicals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Baptists, and Stunde.

sectarians appeared in 1943's issues, with nearly all of them being that the sectarians were operating clandestinely. Certainly the fear of the authorities drove them to this. However, it was primarily the Orthodox clergy who reported them, but there was also the danger that ordinary Orthodox members would turn them in. For the Orthodox Church's leadership this meant nothing but success. Some sectarians also converted to Orthodoxy. Whether or not these were true the Orthodox Church claimed them as a victory.

The third way the Romanian Orthodox Church tried to fulfill its mission was to fight communism. While not one of the stated mission objectives it is clear from *Transnistria Creștină* that this was an important part of the mission's efforts. The Romanian Orthodox Church's strong opposition to anything communist or socialist could actually bear fruit in this region; there were so few actual communists living in Romania's prewar territory that fears could often be wildly speculative. But in Transnistria, where the Soviet Union had ruled for about two decades, the Church found real communists. It tried to put a positive spin on the matter, saying that communism "had a kind of influence on the youth, but this would be handled."<sup>349</sup> One of the problems was that students had complained about the following: "Last year the teacher told us there is no God and do not listen to your parents, but now teacher says we should believe in God."<sup>350</sup> Church leaders complained that communists had been effective in antireligious scholastic campaigns, replacing religion with communist doctrine.

---

<sup>349</sup> "Dare de Seamă," *Transnistria Creștină* 1 no. 1 (1942): p. 22.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The clergy in Berezovca County reported it would distribute religious literature to “combat communist theories.”<sup>351</sup> In Ananiev County the leading Orthodox Father asked the Schools’ Inspector (the man in charge of schools for the county) to remove teachers from their posts who had been guilty of antireligious communist propaganda.<sup>352</sup> In Balta County, Dubki village, the Church took over an orphanage that was built to “to raise new generations in the communist spirit.”<sup>353</sup> The orphanage, built in a forest outside the village, had gathered children from all over Ukraine and, according to *Transnistria Creștină*, was run like a communist indoctrination camp. The local priest, Father Arventiev, contacted the authorities and began an initiative to change the communist orphanage into an Orthodox Christian orphanage.

A nine page article decrying communism’s negative effects on the region appeared in the mission’s magazine’s 1943 January-June issue. Much of the issue was under a multi article work entitled “Religious Life in Transnistria.” The fifth article, entitled “Persecution against the Faith under Soviet Rule,” chronicled the history of the Soviet Union’s antireligious campaign for the region. It primarily focused on the closure and destruction of the Orthodox cathedrals, houses of prayer, and schools. It also included information on the persecution of clergy and the spread of antireligious propaganda in its many forms.<sup>354</sup>

---

<sup>351</sup>“Spicuiți din activitatea protoierilor,” *Transnistria Creștină* 1 no.1 (1942): p. 52.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. 55. This is what the article alleged.

Another article, “Bolshevism’s Horrors,” further explained the reasons why the Church and the people were threatened by communism. The primary cause of communism’s terrible results was given to the readers six times in four pages: the Bolsheviks were led by Jews. It was these Jews who “fought against the true light.” It was the Jews who “were merciless towards the Russian Orthodoxy.”<sup>355</sup> This argument meant that the Transnistrian mission subscribed to the same philosophy as both the government and the Romanian Orthodox Church’s leadership. Perhaps this was the reason why the mass murder of Jews in Transnistria does not appear in archived Church documents that I and other scholars could find; the Church saw Jews as the reason for the persecution of the Church in by communism. If the Jews were the root cause of “Bolshevism’s Horrors” then their disappearance from the local community would be welcomed by the Orthodox clergy. A local priest sharing this attitude towards Jews with his congregation would certainly work to dissuade them from helping Jews escape concentration and death. It was a contribution to a culture that saw an invading force murdering Jews and others while the local community almost completely abandoned them.

A good portion of the journal issue brought readers up to date on what the mission’s clergy were actually doing. Transnistria’s clergy were heavily involved in collecting and distributing Red Cross aid through the Church’s cathedrals, meeting

---

<sup>354</sup> Archimandrite Antim Nica, “Prigoana Împotriva Credinței sub stăpânirea sovietică” [Persecution against the Faith under Soviet Rule] from “Viața Religioasă în Transnistria” [Religious Life in Transnistria], *Transnistria Creștină* 2 no. 1 (1943): pp. 54-62.

<sup>355</sup> Andrei Baleasnâi, “Ororile Bolșevismului” [Bolshevism’s Horrors], *Transnistria Creștină* 2 no. 1 (1943): pp. 79-82.

houses, and cultural centers. While not every county reported that the Church had worked with the Red Cross, each reported very large amounts of charitable aid for the poor, widows, orphans, war victims, injured veterans, local hospitals, and so on.<sup>356</sup> While teaching religion in school, charitable aid, rebuilding and reopening churches, and the priests' clerical duties it seems that the Transnistrian mission was doing a wonderful job serving the people who lived there. The mission was so wonderful that in Ochakov County, in Varvarovca, that even the Roma were served:

His Holiness Father A. Culicovschi... visited a good portion of the parishes in the district... trying to make sure that no place would miss divine services and the gospel; he has a fruitful pastoral activity among the gypsies that are concentrated in his district's villages. We should point out that Cabura village, where a part of the gypsies brought from the country are concentrated, has one of the most beautiful positions on the Berezansc's port's coast.<sup>357</sup>

It should also be noted that Father Culicovschi is the only priest mentioned in the Orthodox Church's magazines who served people in Transnistria's concentration camps.<sup>358</sup> Unfortunately, Culicovschi's service was apparently only to meet the Roma's spiritual needs as there is no mention of charitable aid like food or clothing.

### **The Self Righteous Mission**

Official documents and Church publications paint a rosy picture of the Church in Transnistria. Based on these it seems as if the Church really was running a wholly

---

<sup>356</sup> Spicuri din Rapoartele Misionarilor" [Collections of Missionaries' Reports], *Transnistria Creștină* 2 no. 1 (1943): pp. 93-123.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>358</sup> It is possible that other priests visited the camps in Transnistria, but I was unable to find any other mentions of such service.



benign mission in the face of a brutal war. But while the mission was run the war was to the East and the people who really suffered were the people against whom the Church preached: Jews and religious minorities. Paul A. Shapiro wrote a little on the mission in Transnistria in a book chapter entitled “Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church.” He points out that at the same time the mission was being carried out by the Romanian Orthodox Church there were between 280,000 to 380,000 Jews murdered in Transnistria. He points out that “no documentation has surfaced to implicate the mission directly in Holocaust-related crimes. But humanitarian consideration for the fate of the Jews does not appear to have been voiced at any level.”<sup>359</sup> Shapiro is right that no humanitarian attempts were made by the Romanian Orthodox Church on behalf of the Jews living in Transnistria. That is not surprising. As discussed earlier, the Church’s leadership, and most of its clergy, did not care for Jews and many actually believed that Jews were the source of Romania’s problems. There were numerous opportunities to intervene prior to the tragedies in Romania’s Eastern territories and none were taken and so the Church had no precedent for humanitarian efforts on behalf of Jews.

Jean Ancel also is clearly troubled by the Church’s presence in Transnistria. He cites several reports found in the Odessa Archives that highlighted exactly the same kind of work done by priests as described above. All the Church could report was the wonderful work it did by bringing people back to the gospel and repairing the damage

---

<sup>359</sup> Paul A. Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church”, from *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, Kevin P. Spicer ed., Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007, pp. 159-160.

done by the Soviet Union. Ancel did not find that Church officials mentioned the local Jews or their mass murders. He notes that the Church worked to create what it thought of as a normal Christian society and turned a blind eye to the crimes happening in its parishes' boundaries.<sup>360</sup>

However, the few documents available regarding the Church in Transnistria show that it was not just the Church's hatred of Jews that led Transnistria's Orthodox clergy to turn a blind eye to the mass slaughter happening in their parishes' boundaries. Under the Romanian administration there were around 2.3 million people living in Transnistria, and most of them were Orthodox Christians. There were only at most 500 priests in the Transnistrian mission.<sup>361</sup> This meant that each priest would have over four thousand parishioners. In addition to a fairly heavy congregational load, the priests were also working to repair and rebuild hundreds of buildings, teach religion in schools, distribute large amounts of Red Cross aid to a local population that was suffering from the war, combat sectarians, and serve the wounded who were recovering area hospitals.

The mission was stretched thin in human and material resources, so why would busy clergy try to intervene on behalf of Jews? According to Orthodox Church's leaders' logic they were at war against a global Jewish conspiracy that included communists,

---

<sup>360</sup> Jean Ancel, Yaffah Murciano translator, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2011, pp. 430-435.

<sup>361</sup> Exact figures for how many clergy there were is difficult, because not all the Romanian clergy working there were permanent, and because not all the Ukrainian clergy were officially part of the Transnistrian mission. The number 500 is fairly close to the maximum number of clergy that would have been working at the same time. This number differs from Alexander Dallin's figures used in *Odessa, 1941-1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule*, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998, page 164. He puts the number of clergymen at 617 and includes Romanian and Soviet clergy, but the discrepancy can be attributed to Dallin's use of German sources. Jean Ancel provides a slightly lower figure of 250 official missionary priests and 219 local Orthodox priests; see Ancel, Yaffah Murciano translator, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2011, p. 430.

Freemasons, and others derided by Church leaders. The Patriarch and the Synod had already agreed to a government decision that Jews could no longer convert to the Orthodox Church. In other words, such actions would have been a lost cause in their eyes. Only one priest even felt sorry enough for the Christian Roma to visit their encampment. Although Father Culicovschi was lauded for his effort, his example only highlights the fact that nothing was done to stop the Jewish and Roma concentration camps in Transnistria. Not a clerical voice was raised when the Jews were put in ghettos. No voice was raised later when the Jews were slaughtered there. But applauding a Church official for administering to Roma in a concentration camp shows that the Church was perfectly aware of what was happening. The self-lauding for all of the Church's wonderful charitable and humanitarian efforts in Transnistria did not extend beyond fellow Christians. The self-righteousness of all the Church's publications on the matter shows that the Church was broadcasting a fantasy of a wonderful life in the East while purposefully ignoring reality.

The Roma visited by Father Culicovschi probably wished he had been there to distribute much needed aid. In Ochakov County hundreds of Roma had died and continued to die after his visit from starvation, exposure, and illness.<sup>362</sup> No mention of those terrible conditions made it into the report on Culicovschi's visit. For all the aid distributed by the Romanian Orthodox Church very little made its way to the Roma. Father Culicovschi's visit was to administer religious services, not the desperately needed physical services needed. Many of the bodies were found on the roadside. How could he

---

<sup>362</sup> *Final Report*, pp. 232-233.

have seen those conditions and not done more? This brings to mind one of the most cited stories from the Bible with regards to helping others:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan ends with Jesus telling the lawyer who had asked Jesus the question that prompted the story, to “Go and do thou likewise.”<sup>363</sup>

This is a fairly good analogy for the Church’s entire mission in Transnistria. The Church, like the priest in the parable, turned a blind eye to the “half dead” who needed help the most. But the Church’s behavior was worse than the priest in the parable. The priest in the parable happened upon the situation and like any ancient traveler would have worried about suffering the same fate as the man who was beaten and robbed.

Transnistria’s Orthodox priests knew who the villains were and blessed them. If the parable were changed to reflect the Orthodox Church the priest would have watched the thieves do their business, passed by the beaten man, and then walked on back with the thieves as if nothing happened. The deported Roma and the imprisoned and murdered Jewish population in Transnistria needed more Good Samaritans and fewer priests.

---

<sup>363</sup> *Bible*, KJV, Luke, Chapter 10, verses 25-37.

The Church's silence was worse than what Shapiro described. The Church's Transnistria Mission was in large part humanitarian, but since Jews were not considered human they would not be the recipients of the Church's aid. The problem was that the Church was not really silent. Yes, it was silent on the concentrations, the starvations, the deprivations, and murders of the Holocaust. But it was not silent on how it felt about the Jews who were concentrated, starved, deprived, and murdered. The Church's leaders told their parishioners, either directly or via instruction to the local clergy, that the Jews were the root of Romania's problems and a danger to the nation. The Church was not silent about the men leading Romania's government and military to persecute and murder Jews; the Church called these men Romania's saviors.

Complicity is understood as being involved in an illegal activity or wrongdoing, or having knowledge of the activity and choosing not to intervene in order to allow the activity to be carried out. Certainly the Romanian Orthodox Church was complicit with the Antonescu regime. The Antonescu regime may have committed the most terrible crimes against humanity, but the Church was only directly involved in some of the lesser crimes such as persecuting religious minorities. Yet the Romanian Orthodox Church allowed for the worst crimes either through silence or through implying that such murderous actions were necessary to save the nation.

As the Red Army approached Transnistria in 1944 the Romanian Orthodox Church's mission retreated as quickly as it had rushed in behind Operation Barbarossa. The surviving Roma returned to Romania's borders in spring 1944 and the surviving deported Jews also returned in spring 1944. In spite of trying to reverse course in the

face of certain defeat, the Antonescu regime collapsed in August that same year. The Romanian Orthodox Church tried to move on as well.

## Conclusion

Timothy Snyder reminds scholars in his work *Bloodlands* that “it is less appealing, but morally more urgent, to understand the actions of the perpetrators. The moral danger, after all, is never that one might become a victim but that one might be a perpetrator or a bystander.”<sup>364</sup> It is difficult to classify the Romanian Orthodox Church as a perpetrator because it seems as if the Church had no documented involvement in the violent actions carried out by Romanian troops during the Holocaust in Transnistria.<sup>365</sup> The Church’s leadership did not condone the actions of any individual priests that might have been involved in the violence against Jews in the Romanian Kingdom.

However, the Romanian Orthodox Church was not a bystander either. Being a bystander implies being passive and nearly inactive. A bystander simply watches an event unfold while trying to stay as uninvolved as is possible. The Romanian Orthodox Church was far too active to be a bystander. The Church’s leadership was far too vociferous to be a bystander. Church leaders took sides, offered support, and were helping their chosen people go forward. Being a bystander implies a very large amount of passivity, and the wartime Church was anything but passive.

What then made the Romanian Orthodox Church a perpetrator? Overall, the Church’s support for Antonescu’s regime, especially the anti-Jewish and anti-sectarian

---

<sup>364</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 400.

<sup>365</sup> This is of course, based on the archival resources used for this study. Should other documents be brought to light that show the direct involvement of Romanian Orthodox clergy in the Holocaust this would not be a surprise. Given that some clergy were involved in violent actions during the Iron Guard rebellion, and that the Church was led by men who supported the Antonescu regime, it is a possibility that clergy may have been involved in massacres and concentration camps in Bessarabia and Transnistria. I doubt that they would have actually murdered anyone, but they may have been present as witnesses or even given the troops committing these crimes their blessing.

policies, made the Romanian Orthodox Church a perpetrator for fanning the flames of hate, spreading propaganda, and demonstrating terrible negligence to generally accepted Christian principles. The Church accepted some properties seized by the government. While working to keep Jews from converting to Christianity the Church's leaders made it clear that just like the regime that was deporting and murdering Jews to keep them out of the nation, the Church was to keep itself free from people who it deemed racially inferior. The documentation on Church leaders who publicly disparaged Jews is not as full as the documentation on the Antonescu regime. However, what exists in the Romanian National Archives confirms that the Church's leaders openly supported Antonescu's racist policies and programs. Since the Church was and remains the largest non-government institution in Romania it must be named as a responsible party in contributing to the culture and atmosphere of hate that allowed the Antonescu regime to commit its crimes. The Antonescu regime passed many laws against Jews, most of which received no comment in the Synod's magazine. When looked at in the context of comments made by Church leaders regarding Jews it makes sense: they saw Jews as the source of Romania's problems and the evils of communism and perhaps they felt they did not need to comment every time the government furthered its anti-Jewish programs.

The Romanian Orthodox Church's cooperation with the Antonescu regime makes it part of the Holocaust narrative, regardless of its silence on the subject. So how are the Church's actions to be understood? The Church's self proclaimed role was to persuade and influence people to be good Christians. Unfortunately during the war the Church's leaders decided that in order for Romanians to be good Christians they should also be



good nationalists and fight against the imagined trope of a global Jewish conspiracy that included the communists against whom Romania was actually fighting. According to the Church's leaders it all somehow made sense to them. Oldson pointed to the excuse by the Church that it did not proselytize among Jews and therefore was not involved in persecuting them. The evidence tells a different story: the Church did not proselytize among Jews because it was opposed to the mixing of Jewish blood with Romanian blood. The Church's actions following the coup against Antonescu help to further understand another motivation for such actions: selfishness.

### **After the War**

When the Romanian government switched sides in late August 1944 to fight with the allies the Romanian Orthodox Church quickly threw its support to the allied cause. However, the Church's relationship with the minority churches in Romania was a mixed bag. There is very little information in the archive about what the Church's relationship was with other Christian sects following the end of the war.

The Orthodox Church did try to patch things up with the Church of England, with which it had a favorable relationship prior to the war. On May 3, 1945 Patriarch Nicodim sent a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey expressing his desire to rekindle that relationship:

We are hurrying to send your excellence our warmest salutations and to assure you that the brotherly bonds shared in earlier, happier times, between the Church of England and the Romanian Church will grow even stronger than before

in the Christian spirit of peace and a fullness of understanding for the glory of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Redeemer's Kingdom.<sup>366</sup>

The Patriarch also met with the Papal nuncio twice in Bucharest a few days before Easter. The meetings were held "in the most courteous atmosphere and in the great spirit of Christian brotherhood and understanding."<sup>367</sup> He also received representatives from the Armenian Orthodox Church and from the Patriarch of Russia in similar meetings. The Synod published this statement on religious plurality: "The Constitution of modern states guarantee *absolute freedom of conscience*. Every citizen is the master of his own religious convictions."<sup>368</sup>

On October 16 and 17, 1945 Romania held a convention for Orthodox priests and representatives of "all the Cults in the country." The Church continued with its campaign of brotherhood, understanding, and Christian love. The Patriarch and Metropolitan Nicolae of Ardeal, among others, expressed their love for all their countrymen and their desire to unify the country. At times the convention seems to be a bit Soviet in style, referring to the solidarity among nations in Eastern Europe; the tone was warm and friendly, but no apologies were made to Baptists, Adventists, Jews, or any other groups for what happened during the war.<sup>369</sup>

---

<sup>366</sup> "Cronica Internă," BOR 63, no. 4-5 (1945): pp. 182-183. In the Holy Synod's meeting on June 21, 1945 the Synod decided to establish more permanent ties with the Church of England, as found in "Cronica Internă," BOR 63, no. 6 (1945): pp. 272-273.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 183. In the same meeting on June 21, 1945 the Synod also approved reestablishing connections with the Russian Orthodox and Bulgarian Churches.

<sup>368</sup> Professor Lazăr Iacob, "Biserica și Transformările Sociale," BOR 63 no. 7-8 (1945): p. 315.

<sup>369</sup> Grigore Spuru, "Cronica Internă," BOR 63, no. 7-8 (1945): pp. 365-373.

While the Synod's publication would maintain for at least the next three years that everyone enjoyed religious freedom, the magazine never mentioned any church by name, except for other Orthodox churches and the Roman-Catholic Church. The Synod paid special attention to and frequently gave high praise to the Russian Orthodox Church. The church properties that were seized under the Antonescu regime were nearly all returned to their respective congregations. But no apology was made, no wrongdoing admitted. Secretly the Romanian Orthodox Church worked to keep minority sects it perceived as a threat from being allowed to practice legally in the country. A letter from late 1945 sent to the Minister of Cults asked that Jehovah's Witnesses be put under surveillance in order to see if they should be banned from functioning.<sup>370</sup>

The anti-sectarian campaign was hardly the worst crime committed during the war, but it certainly was a crime that should not be ignored. The ultimate responsibility for the confiscation of minority religions' properties does of course remain with the Antonescu regime. However, when the Romanian Orthodox Church vigorously supported the program and used anti-sectarian laws to obtain large amounts of property at the expense of other Christian groups it became complicit in the crime. The Romanian Orthodox Church has never formally apologized to Baptists, Adventists, or any other Christian group that was targeted during the war. When properties were returned it was because the government forced them to be returned. When the Orthodox made statements regarding the freedom of religion in Romania, it would only reference the freedoms of Catholics, other Orthodox churches, and legally recognized cults. In other

---

<sup>370</sup> ANR MCDS 1933-1944, 1945, folder 14, pp. 13-14.

words, the public rhetoric changed to reflect the new government's socialist philosophies but not because the Church in any way felt it had done anything wrong.

### **Law 711 Ends**

Mercifully for those Christians of Jewish descent, ministers, and others who had come under fire for trying to work around law 711 their struggle came to an end in 1944. After Antonescu had been deposed and Romania switched sides in the war, the government switched many of the policies put into place under the Antonescu regime. On November 9, 1944 the Ministry of Justice received a letter from the Ministry of Cults in response to the Ministry of Justice's inquiry as to whether or not conversion from Christianity to Judaism was permissible. The Ministry of Cults indicated that law 711 had been annulled through law number 562/1944, and therefore "conversion from Christianity to Judaism and the inverse are permitted."<sup>371</sup> The following year the Holy Synod officially made its position known regarding Jews and the Orthodox Church in an article in its official journal entitled "The Church and Social Transformations." The Church's official position was that not only could Jews be baptized, but that "the Church cannot refuse to receive anyone in its bosom because of racial motives." The article went further and stated that the law itself was "the greatest intrusion in the spiritual domain of the Church."<sup>372</sup> Of course, this is exactly the opposite of what the Church said when it began implementing law 711. The wartime Synod had supported the exclusion of Jews

---

<sup>371</sup> ANR MCA 1933-1944, 1944, folder 98, p. 22.

<sup>372</sup> Lazăr Iacob, "Biserica și Transformările Sociale," p. 315.

from the Church based solely on racial motives and tried to ensure that all churches in Romania complied. It was a complete denial of what had actually happened.

It was not coincidental that the Orthodox Church came out with this policy after the war was over and the Antonescu regime's racial laws had ended. The Church's sudden change of heart was quite dramatic and no doubt had everything to do with the Soviet occupation and the new government's attempts in trying to undo some of the damage done by the Antonescu government.

### **New Direction for the Church**

Patriarch Nicodim's first article following the end of the war shows just how easily the Romanian Orthodox Church's leadership could follow the wind any which way it blew. His published remarks in the Synod's journal explain how wonderful it was that Antonescu had been deposed in August 1944 because it was exactly what the Romanian people needed. He was also happy that Romania's army had joined "the brave Soviet armies against our true enemies and the enemies of all the peoples of Europe... how could we not laud and admire the deeds of these great armies." He went on to offer further support: "The Holy Synod, convinced by the humaneness and honorable feeling of our people, addresses a warm call to all the Church's children to support the State's organizations' actions to fulfill the armistice's conditions." He noted that as Romania's new government grew closer to the Soviet Union the Romanian Orthodox Church would reach out to the Russian Orthodox Church. As for the years of dictatorship Patriarch Nicodim asserted that "during these years the Church fought to preserve a democratic

organization.”<sup>373</sup> By 1947 the Holy Synod was republishing statements like this in its official magazine:

It used to be that lying propaganda showed that religion in the Soviet Country was forbidden, that the churches were torn down, and that the priests were persecuted without reason. But today the truth is told. Religion was never forbidden. It was freer than anywhere else. The churches were not torn down and the priests were not persecuted for their religious beliefs or for preaching their faith.<sup>374</sup>

The Romanian Orthodox Church, which had been completely antisocialist before and during the war, had a sudden change of heart after the establishment of a socialist government. Incredibly, many of the Church’s leaders retained their positions into Romania’s early socialist period.

The Romanian Orthodox Church during World War II illustrated one principle that the Synod tried to teach the clergy about nationalism and the Church: supporting the current government was one of the Church’s most important functions. And so when circumstances beyond the Church’s control changed the Romanian government, the Church proved adaptable to supporting the new government. When the government was fascist, so was the Church. When the government said Jews should be kept out of Romanian society, the Church agreed. When the government said certain religions should be outlawed, the Church was there to accept the forfeited properties. And when the government changed its mind about all of those things, so did the Church.

---

<sup>373</sup> Patriarch Nicodim, “Pastorală: Din Partea Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române,” BOR 63, no. 7-8 (1945): pp. 289-292.

<sup>374</sup> Deacon Gheorghe I. Moisescu, “Deschiderea Congresului Național Bisericesc,” BOR 65, no. 10-12 (1947): p. 310. The statement was attributed to the new Minister of Cults Stanciu Stoian.

While ideology certainly contributed to Church complicity with the Romanian government, post-Antonescu Church decisions were also driven by a different motivation: self preservation. The fact that the Church could so quickly abandon ethno-nationalism, anti-communism, and anti-Semitism showed that the self preservation instinct was just as strong as its affinity for any of the principles it had previously espoused. Selfish and personal interests outweighed former ideological considerations, and they could be manifested in many ways. The post-Antonescu Church leaders maneuvered so deftly to avoid serious consequences that a second look should be given to the Church for the mid to late 1940s.

Selfishness had a significant role under Antonescu. The Church's initial opposition to Law 711 was driven by Church leaders' unwillingness to accept a direct order on what it thought was solely an ecclesiastical matter. The Church's exceptions to 711 saw some leading clergy and local working for their own personal causes. And while the anti-sectarian campaign was clearly based on nationalist rhetoric, it can hardly be called a selfless endeavor by the Orthodox Church. The tremendous financial benefit for the Orthodox Church had to be a consideration to become so involved in the anti-sectarian campaign. Somehow the Church still managed to draw huge financial support from the government in spite of the war; this was a testament to the Church's lobbying power.

This is the troubling fact, collusion with a murderous fascist regime that the Romanian Orthodox Church continues not to deal with today. The postwar denials that it supported the Antonescu regime, that it condoned racist laws against Jews, and that it did

anything wrong of its own volition are contradicted by the archival record. Denial is just another sign that the modern Romanian Orthodox Church continues to be driven by selfishness as much as it is by longstanding principles. It prefers to save face rather than to accept the truth.



## **Appendix**

### **Chronology of Religious Laws**

April 1937 Decision nr. 4.781 “Concerning the Interdictions of Sects and Religious Associations.” This law banned a dozen religious organizations by name that deemed dangerous to the public and the government. It created a strict set of criteria for religious associations to achieve legal recognition that led to the further demise of many unnamed organizations. Certain non-Orthodox confessions were allowed continued operations under strict bureaucratic restrictions. Chapter 3 discusses the law in greater detail.

February 1938 Constitution outlawed all clergy from using their clerical office to make political propaganda in and outside of their official religious functions. It also banned political associations based on religious pretexts.

July 1939 Decision nr. 26208/938 was meant to eliminate redundancies in the language of the law “Concerning the Interdictions of Sects and Religious Associations.”

September 1940 Decision nr. 42120 prohibited Christians from buying any item related to the practice of Christianity from a Jewish store. Chapter 2 discusses this law.

September 1940 Decision nr. 42532 designated only seven Christian confessions and Islam as the officially recognized religions in Romania. It named them historic cults and named the Romanian Orthodox Church as the dominant religion of the state. It recognized the de facto existence of Judaism but not its legality. Chapter 3 contains a detailed explanation of the law.

September 1940 Decision nr. 42353 declared that no other sect could differentiate itself from the historic cults and that those not listed as historic cults were to be closed by the police and then turned over to the state, which would then turn the properties over to another Christian cult. 42353 also discussed in Chapter 3.

September 1940 Decision nr. 42354 declared members of non-historic cults to be registered as non-confessional Christians until joined a historic cult. Local governments were to retroactively change marriage and birth certificates to reflect the new religious category. 42354 also discussed in Chapter 3.

February 1941 Decree-Law 314 prohibited government workers from participating in political actions. The Ministry of Cults made this policy apply to all clergy by declaring that they could not be part of any political party, organization, movement, or demonstration.

March 1941 Decree-Law 711 prohibited Jews from converting to another religion or confession and legally changing their religious registration. This law is detailed in Chapter 4.

August 1941 Decree-Law nr. 2.329 established Orthodox chapels in Berlin and Rome in order to strengthen ties with Romania's allies.

Unknown date in 1941 Decision nr. 36592 prohibited people from leaving a designated historical cult to join and register as Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Evangelical Christians.

Unknown date in 1942 Decision nr. 53808 blocked publications from groups that did not adhere to decision 4.781 of 1937 and discontinued their functioning if they did not have the number of members as proscribed by the same law.

Unknown date in 1942 Decision nr. 56400 gave local authorities the power to supervise and regulate sect activities in their houses of prayer.

September 1942 Order nr. 190037 gave the Orthodox Church the right to oversee all religious education in Romanian state schools.

October 1942 Decision nr. 53,808 eliminated previous laws that had allowed special operating requests to cults or religious associations that were not given the historic cult designation.

Unknown date in 1942, Decision number 60184 outlawed Christian Science.

December 1942 Decree-Law 3.792 by Antonescu disbanded all religious associations even if they had previously been authorized. The properties of these religious associations were to be expropriated by the state with oversight by the Ministry of Cults.

Late 1944 Decree-Law 562 allowed for conversion from Judaism to Christianity and the inverse as well.

## Biographical Notes

A. C. Cuza (November 7, 1857- November 3, 1947) - After founding the Universal Antisemitic Alliance with Iorga in 1895 Cuza later joined historian A. D. Xenopol to create the League Against Alcoholism. The League Against Alcoholism created to fight what Cuza alleged to be a plague of Jews ruining Romanian lives by selling them liquor. After World War I he helped found the National Christian Union in 1922, a party inspired by German fascists that even used the swastika as its symbol. Working with Codreanu, Cuza helped to found the National Christian Defense League, although Codreanu later left it because it was not militant enough. Cuza would later partner in politics with Octavian Goga and served as Minister of State alongside Goga as the co-leaders of the government until they were replaced by Patriarch Cristea led government.

King Carol II (October 15, 1893- April 4, 1953) - Carol II was the first Romanian monarch raised in the Orthodox Church. He was known as much for his playboy antics as he was his rule. He had two brief failed marriages from 1919 to 1925. His second marriage failed because of his affair with Elena “Magda” Lupescu, the Roman Catholic daughter of a Jewish pharmacist. Following the scandal he abdicated the throne in 1925 for five years, and when he returned he pursued politics more aggressively. By 1938 he grew tired of rival fascist parties and created a royal dictatorship with Patriarch Cristea as his appointed prime minister. He transferred most of his powers to Ion Antonescu in September 1940, abdicated the throne to his son Michael again, and went into exile. He never saw his son Michael again. He initially fled to Mexico but eventually settled in Portugal. He married Lupescu in 1947 and he passed away in Estoril, Portugal. His remains were returned to Romania and he was reburied with several other Romanian kings, but his son Michael refused to attend.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (September 13, 1899- November 30, 1938) - Codreanu was the founder of the Iron Guard (also known as The Legion of the Archangel Michael or Legionary Movement). He was pro-fascist, ethno-nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-communist, and very much into Orthodox mysticism. He incorporated all of these ideas into the group he founded and was dubbed “The Captain.” He even was responsible for overseeing political assassinations. Codreanu was eventually assassinated himself, the victim of a rivalry among competing fascist political groups. Neo-fascist groups such in Romania including *Noua Dreaptă* [The New Right] continue to claim his teachings as their inspiration.

Horia Sima (July 3, 1907- May 25, 1993) - One of the early members of the Iron Guard, he worked closely with Codreanu as one of the organization’s leaders. After Codreanu’s death Sima became the second and last leader of the Iron Guard. He was vice-premier in the Antonescu-Iron Guard government, and he initiated series of de-possessions, pogroms, and assassinations against Jews. He fled Romania following the unsuccessful Iron Guard rebellion against Antonescu in January, 1941. He eventually

fled to Spain after the war where he was able to continue publishing his views until his death in 1993.

Ion Antonescu (June 15, 1882- June 1, 1946) - Antonescu was a career soldier and far right politician who worked with various right-wing political groups that emphasized ethno-nationalism and anti-Semitism as their platforms. He was the Prime Minister and *Conducător* [Leader, effectively a dictator, he also was titled Marshall of Romania] from September 5, 1940 to August 23, 1944 when he was deposed. He oversaw the deportation and murder of hundreds of thousands of Romanian, Bessarabian, and Ukrainian Jews and Romani. He was convicted of war crimes but is still considered by many Romanians to be a national hero.

Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban (May 31, 1878- January 4, 1949) - Scriban sent the first delegation of missionaries to Transnistria and was the director of the Romanian Orthodox Mission in Transnistria based in Odessa. Like Metropolitan Puiu, Scriban worked overseeing local publications to fight communism. He oversaw the mission when it worked against local non-Orthodox confessions before the government of Transnistria was able to close them. This contradicts the article printed in 2010 by the Church in *Ziarul Lumina* that declares part of his life's work was to promote brotherhood and peace among Christian confessions.

Matatias Carp (1904-1952) - The son of Horia Carp who was the General Secretary for the Jewish Community in Bucharest, Matatias became an attorney and the General Secretary for the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania as World War II began. At great personal risk he chronicled the persecution and murder of Jews in Romanian territory and compiled his information in *The Black Book: The Suffering of Romanian Jews, 1940-1944* [*Cartea Neagră: Suferințele evreilor din România 1940-1944*], one of the main sources of information about Romania and the Holocaust.

Mihai Antonescu (November 18, 1904- June 1, 1946) - Mihai was not related to Ion Antonescu. Mihai was not initially involved with extreme right politics and had been a prominent attorney in Bucharest prior to the war. Upon working for the Antonescu government he established himself as a staunch supporter of Nazism and became Ion Antonescu's most trusted advisor. He was the vice president of the council of ministers, the deputy prime minister, and the minister of foreign affairs in the Ion Antonescu regime. Because Ion Antonescu spent so much time devoted to the war Mihai was in charge of most of Romania's internal affairs during the war and worked closely with the Ministry of Cults and Orthodox Church leaders during the war. As early as 1943 he began to be convinced that Romania would not succeed in the war and began destroying records of many of the government's activities, but was not successful in finding a way out for Romania before the regime was overthrown and he was arrested. Mihai Antonescu was killed by a firing squad after his trial in 1946.

Patriarch Miron Cristea (July 20, 1868- March 6, 1939) - Born in Transylvania under Austro-Hungarian rule, he rose through the ranks of the Romanian Orthodox Church and became Bishop of Caransebeş in 1910. Near the end of World War I he joined the Central National Romanian Council, an organization that sought the union of Transylvania and Romania. He led the first religious service with King Ferdinand I of Romania to commemorate the unification of Greater Romania. He was chosen to be Metropolitan-Primate of all Romania at the end of 1919. In November, 1925 he was named Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church becoming the Church's first patriarch. He was known to work frequently with politicians and was chosen by King Carol II to be prime minister on February 11, 1938. He remained prime minister until his death. He was known to be aggressive towards other confessions, especially Protestants. He was also very anti-Semitic and continued as prime minister to carry out anti-Jewish policies begun by his predecessor in office, Octavian Goga.

Nae Ionescu (June 16, 1890- March 15, 1940) - A popular philosopher, professor, and journalist, Ionescu was an influential thinker in Bucharest's leading social circles. Later in life he became devoted to far right politics, eventually joining the Iron Guard. His early 1920s teachings focused on religio-mysticism but grew increasingly anti-Semitic as he combined his religio-mysticism with ethno-nationalism. His radicalism grew to the point where he was arrested during the King's dictatorship and he died in prison under suspicious circumstances. Some of his writings became popular and were republished in the 1990s, including *The Suffering of the White Race*.

Nichifor Crainic (December 22, 1889- August 20, 1972) - He was a theologian and professor of theology at the Bucharest Theological Seminary and the Chişinău Faculty of Theology. He was also one of Romania's most popular interwar writers and was a noted editor, philosopher, historian, poet, and publisher. He was an ardent nationalist who advocated for Orthodox and ethno-nationalism and was affiliated with pro-fascist groups in Romania. Although not a member of the Holy Synod or officially an Orthodox Church leader, he was one of the most popular figures within the Church's leading circles. He openly praised German National Socialists and Hitler. During the Iron Guard-Antonescu partnership he worked for the Ministry of Cults and was eventually appointed to be the propaganda minister for Ion Antonescu. He was convicted by a postwar tribunal and served 15 years in prison from 1947 to 1962. He was removed from the Romanian Academy by communist leaders but reinstated post-mortem in 1994. Several of his works, including *Orthodoxy and the Ethnocratic State*, have been republished since the 1989 revolution and have been fairly well received.

Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu (December 6, 1864- February 27, 1948) - Patriarch Nicodim led a theological career that saw him move frequently to new posts until he was chosen as Metropolitan of Moldova in 1935. He was chosen as the second patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church on June 30, 1939, where he served until his death. Little is published on his tenure as Patriarch, even by the Romanian Orthodox Church. He was close to the Antonescu regime during the war and clearly had anti-Semitic views. He was

a staunch anti-communist, although when faced with the reality of a Soviet occupation and communist Romania he stayed silent. Although accounts of his intervention on behalf of Romania's Jewish population are probably greatly exaggerated and are unsubstantiated as of yet by documents, he did intervene on behalf of at least one Orthodox Christian of Jewish descent.

Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Ardeal (April 27, 1882- August 6, 1955) - Bălan was a theology professor in Sibiu from 1905 to 1920. He then served as Metropolitan of Ardeal from 1920 until his death. He was also a member of the Romanian Academy. It was thought that because of his participation in the Transnistrian Mission and his anti-Semitic publications that he would face prosecution from Soviet authorities after the war. Instead he became a proponent for communism and a tool for the new government. From 2008 to the present the Romanian Orthodox Church has written articles extolling his accomplishments, including the as yet unsubstantiated account that he tried to save Jews from the Holocaust as claimed by the online Romanian Orthodox journal, *Ziarul Lumina*.

Bishop Nicolae Colan of Cluj (November 28, 1893- April 15, 1967) - Bishop Colan would also later become the Archbishop of and the Metropolitan of Ardeal. Colan was an anti-communist activist and Iron Guard sympathizer who helped Patriarchs Cristea and Nicodim press forward nationalist agendas as a member of the Holy Synod. He was also an advocate for outlawing sectarians from Romania. Under Patriarch Cristea, Colan was briefly the Minister of Cults. He was somehow able to parlay this into a long career which saw him promoted under the communist regime during the 1950s and 60s. Several articles have been published praising his accomplishments by the Romanian Orthodox Church as recently as 2013 in the Church's journal *Ziarul Lumina* and on the Church's official website.

Nicolae Iorga (January 17, 1871- November 27, 1940) - In his late teens he became a Marxist activist, but later abandoned Marxism for ever increasing right-wing politics. He was one of Romania's most prolific scholars during his lifetime, working in ancient and modern languages in literature and history. He studied abroad frequently for his education and was recognized as somewhat of a genius at home and abroad. Unfortunately upon becoming a full professor in 1895 he began collaborating with A. C. Cuza, and together that same year they founded the Universal Antisemitic Alliance. He prominently featured the Orthodox Church as one of Romanian history's greatest national institutions. He was well known to be an ethno-nationalist and like other Romanian right-wing thinkers at the time included the Romanian Orthodox Church in his nationalist views. He became active in Romanian politics in the early 1900s while continuing to work in education and publish scholarly works, as well as run several newspapers and journals. He was an ardent nationalist who advocated for the creation of Greater Romania during World War I. Eventually his nationalist political activities brought him to achieve such prominence that he became prime minister from April, 1931 to June, 1932. Although Iorga was anti-Semitic, nationalist, and extremely right-wing in his political activism he was in opposition to the Iron Guard, who assassinated him. His

assassination was one of the main sources of conflict between Antonescu and the Guard. He continues to be one of Romania's most beloved national figures and his books continue to be widely read.

Octavian Goga (April 1, 1881- May 7, 1938)- Born in Transylvania in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Goga was active early in life agitating against the Austro-Hungarian crown as a Romanian nationalist. He was a key figure in interwar right-wing political groups such as the People's Party and the National Agrarian Party. He led the latter into an alliance with the National-Christian Defense League to form the National Christian Party. Although he only served as prime minister from December 1937 to February 1938, he managed to pass numerous anti-Jewish laws during his short tenure, including stripping many Romanian Jews of their citizenship. Because of his early nationalist activism he continues to be a popular historical figure in Romania.

General Radu R. Rosetti (March 20, 1877- June 2, 1949) - General Rosetti was a member of the Romanian Academy and was the most well known military historian during his lifetime. Because of his leadership during World War I he served as a military attaché in London. He spent his most of the 1920s and 30s he oversaw the National Military Museum and the Romanian Academy Library. Under the Antonescu regime he served as the Minister of National Education, Cults, and Arts for most of 1941. Because of this he was tried as a war criminal and sentenced to prison in 1949, where he died the same year. His signature achievement as Minister was Law 711 as an effort to try and prevent Jews from co-mingling in Romanian society.

Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu (February 7, 1915- July 30, 2007) - The Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church from 1986 until his death. He is alleged by some to have collaborated with the Ceaușescu regime and resigned from the Patriarchate after the 1989 revolution. However, he was restored to office soon afterward and served until the end of his life.

Metropolitan Visarion Puiu (February 27, 1879- August 10, 1964) - Puiu had a lengthy career in the Romanian Orthodox Church from 1905 until the war began. He was Metropolitan of Transnistria at Odessa from November 1942 to December 1943. While in that position he helped to oversee the Church's local publications which published anticommunist and anti-Semitic articles. Although he is known for reopening churches once closed by Soviet authorities, he was also an anticommunist who was sentenced to death by a pro-communist Romanian tribunal in 1946. He was eventually deposed from the Church but rehabilitated in 1990. It is unclear why he stayed silent on the Holocaust there, and numerous articles written about his mission's wonderful accomplishments in *Ziarul Lumina* shed no light on the subject.

## **Abbreviations**

ANR- Arhivele Naționale ale României [The Romanian National Archives]

BOR- Biserica Ortodoxă Română: Revista Sfântului Sinod [The Romanian Orthodox Church: The Magazine of the Holy Synod]

CE- Centrala Evreilor [Jewish Center]

FUCE- Federația Uniunilor de Comunități Evreiești [The Federation of Jewish Communities]

MCA- Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor [The Ministry of Cults and Arts]

MCDS- Ministerul Cultelor: Direcția de Studii [Ministry of Cults: Research Department]

MPN- Ministerul Propagandei Naționale [The Ministry of National Propaganda]

USHMM- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives



## Bibliography

### Archival and Primary Sources

Arhivele Naționale ale României, Ministerul Cultelor: Direcția de Studii [The Romanian National Archives, The Ministry of Cults: Studies Office]. Bucharest. Folders 1/1937, 1/1939, 1/1940, 2/1940, 1/1944, 3/1945.

ANR, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor 1933-1944 [The Ministry of Cults and Arts 1933-1944]. Bucharest. From 1937 folders 2, 40, 46, 60, 67, 89, 94, and 131-133. From 1938 folders 2-3, 35, 73, and 107-108. From 1939 folders 87 and 106 volumes 1-2. From 1940 folders 14, 122, and 155-158. From 1941 folders 2, 38, 48, 70, 80, 108, 122-123, 125, 131, 134, 137, 142, 146, 161, 184-185, 187-188, 199, 201-203, 213, 226, and 229-230. From 1942 folders 99-100, 103, 106, 119, 125, 133-134, 136, 140, 149, 158-160, and 163. From 1943 folders 1-2, 23, 100, 120, 134, 143, 144 volumes 1-2, 147-149, 177, and 180. From 1944 folders 8 and 97-99.

ANR Ministerul Propagandei Naționale: Informații [Ministry of National Propaganda: Information]. Bucharest, folders 602 and 864.

*Biserica Ortodoxă Română: Revista Sfântului Sinod* [The Romanian Orthodox Church: The Holy Synod's Magazine]. Bucharest: The Holy Synod and Patriarchate. Volumes 55-65 and 107.

Nedelescu, Ion I., ed. *Legislația Statului Român: Decrete-legi, comunicate, deciziuni ministerial, jurnale ale Consiliului de Miniștri* [The Law of the Romanian State: Decree-laws, communiqués, ministerial decisions, the journals of the Council of Ministers] Bucharest: Editura Ziarului "Universul," 30 volumes and 5 supplements from 1940-1943.

*Transnistria Creștină: Revista Misiunii Ortodoxe Române în Transnistria* [Christian Transnistria: The Magazine of the Romanian Orthodox Mission in Transnistria]. Tiraspol: The Romanian Orthodox Mission, 1942-1943.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington D.C. Record Group 25.004M, "Selected Records from the Romanian Information Service," Reels 237-240, and 244.

USHMM, RG25.061M, "Selected Records of the Romanian Ministry of Cults and Arts," various reels.

*Ziarul Lumina* [The Light News]. From [www.ziarullumina.ro](http://www.ziarullumina.ro), an online newspaper published by the Romanian Patriarchate's Press Center in Bucharest.

## Secondary Literature

Ancel, Jean. *Contribuții la istoria României: Problema evreiască*. Bucharest: Hasefer, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. Yaffah Murciano translator. *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

Banac, Ivo, and Katherine Verdery eds. *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*. New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995.

*Bible*. King James Version. All scriptural translations from Romanian scriptural citations were translated using the King James Version of the *Bible* in English.

Braham, Randolph ed. *The Destruction of the Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts*. The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1998.

Bergen, Doris, L. *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Butnaru, I.C. *The Silent Holocaust: Romania and its Jews*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.

Dallin, Alexander. *Odessa, 1941-1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule*. Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998.

Iancu, Carol. *Evreii din România (1866-1919): de la excludere la emancipare (Les Juifs en Roumanie 1866-1919)*. C. Litman transl. Bucharest: Hasefer, 2006.

The International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid and Mihai E. Ionescu eds. *Final Report*. Bucharest: Polirom, 2004.

Ioanid, Radu. *Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Livezeanu, Irina. *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Oldson, William O. "Alibi for Prejudice: Eastern Orthodox, the Holocaust, and Romanian Nationalism," *East European Quarterly*, XXXVI, No. 3 September 2002.

Ornea, Z. Eugenia Maria Popescu trnsl. *The Romanian Extreme Right: The Nineteen Thirties*. Boulder: East European Monographs 1999.

Phayer, Michael. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Ramet, Pedro ed. *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1984.

Ramet, Sabrina P. *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Spicer, Kevin P. ed. *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008.

Stone, Dan ed. *The Historiography of the Holocaust*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

