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Introduction

"From now on, we are the true Orthodox Church." These were the words Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899–1938), the leader of the Romanian fascist movement, voiced on 10 February 1938 when hearing about the nomination of the Orthodox Patriarch Miron Cristea (1868–1939) as Prime Minister in the authoritarian cabinet of King Carol II of Romania. For almost 20 years, Codreanu had shaped numerous radical right-wing movements, the most famous being the Legion of Archangel Michael, known as the Iron Guard from 1930. This radical expression of Romanian fascism had an ideological particularity that singled it out from the interwar family of fascist movements and parties, the profound religious character synthesized in its ideological core. Unlike any other interwar fascisms, the Legion of Archangel Michael placed an important emphasis on the Christian theology and rituals serving fascist ideology, and the presence of large numbers of Orthodox priests in the legionary meetings and legionary rank and file assured the rapid expansion and extension of the movement's political agenda.

1. Aim and Research Questions

This book is based on a slightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation in History defended at Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) on 20 September 2013. The book explores the institutional and intellectual relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church, represented by its clergymen and theologians, and the Iron Guard in Romania (1930–1941). More precisely, I will analyze and contextualize how the Orthodox Church shaped and influenced the ideology of the Iron Guard by emphasizing the interchange of ideological and theological motifs between Romanian fascists and Orthodox clergymen. Considered by most historians as a "mystical" fascist movement,[1] the Iron

[1] See Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier 1919–1941: Mistica ultranaționalismului*, translated by Marian Ștefănescu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993).

Guard remained throughout the interwar period a peculiar mix between fascism and Orthodoxy interpreted by the traditionalist intellectual circles as a form of national revolution.[2] Furthermore, the present undertaking aims to see how the Orthodox clergy and the Romanian fascists met on theological grounds and how theological exchanges was possible between different layers of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Iron Guard. The collaboration between Romanian fascists and clergymen was not just a pragmatic relation but also a process of mutual approximation that unfolded over time on both an institutional and theological level, with different stages of reciprocal theological exchanges and synthesis. Therein rests one of the key points of originality of the book, emphasizing not just the institutional interplay between the Church and the Iron Guard but also a conceptual back-and-forth circulation of in-and-actual and theological ideas and rituals between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian Iron Guard.

My initial research question deals with how the Iron Guard was perceived within the ecclesiastic environments and the understanding of the Orthodox Church by the Romanian fascists. The main assumption considers that, at different levels of the Church hierarchy, the perception of the Iron Guard differed. The high clergy's project for the collaboration with the movement was destined to support Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and his followers as a political expression of the Orthodox Church, regaining the Church's political ground lost in the nineteenth century, when in the process of national building the Orthodox Church was nationalized and pushed the Church into proclaiming its autocephaly from Constantinople. The Orthodox prelates timidly accepted to grant their support to the movement at the beginning of the 1930s because of its Christian political agenda and the religious revival imposed upon the youth by Codreanu's followers. However, after a state decree in 1936 against the legionary benevolent work in the service

[2] Orthodoxism was an intellectual trend led by the theologian and poet Nichifor Crainic (1890–1972) emphasizing the capital role played by Christian Orthodoxy for the culture and the spiritual development of the Romanian people. For a scholarly account, please see Keith Hitchins, "Gîndirea: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise," in Kenneth Jowitt (ed.), *Social Change in Romania 1860–1940: A Debate on Development in a European Nation* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1978).

of the Church, the hierarchy started to distance itself from Romanian fascists, if only for a short period.[3]

The Moța-Marin burial (13 February 1937) marked the return to a harmonious relationship between the high clergy and the Iron Guard, a change of pace materialized in the decisions of the Holy Synod on 11 March 1937 condemning freemasonry and its implications in the Romanian public life. The coming to power on 10 February 1938 of the authoritarian and conservative dictatorship of King Carol II and the beginning of the movement's repression was followed subsequently by a new and more severe distancing of the high clergy from the Legion. During the short-lived National Legionary State (14 September 1940 – 21/23 January 1941), because of the projects to reform the Church supported by the low clergy and Iron Guard intellectuals, the high clergy led by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania sided with General Antonescu instead of supporting the Legion.

The adherence to the movement of the low clergy after 1932 was gradually growing, especially after the media campaign that specifically targeted them led by newspapers like *Calendarul*, the event of 24 January 1933 in Carol Park at the tomb of the unknown soldier, the fervent activity of the legionary working camps that benefited the Orthodox Church, and the Moța-Marin burial. The uses the low clergy found of their association with the legion differed from those of the high clergy. Their joining the movement was directed both against the state's injustices inflicted on the lay clergy and against the high clergy, who possessed too much institutional power over the common priests. The hierarchy was richly rewarded for providing services to the political power, while the low clergy virtually starved during the economic crisis in the early 1930s. Their reforms in joining the Legion's ranks were both nationalistic and religious. The radical and antisemitic part of the lower clergy considered that all the secular parties were too lenient towards ethnic minorities and implemented a radical process of nationalization of the Romanian culture and the Romanian Orthodox Church. The lower clergy involved themselves in the organization of the movement, taking

[3] When speaking about the "fascist" character or the "fascist" movement, the present thesis refers only to the Legion of Archangel Michal, also known as the Iron Guard, the Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's Group or the "All of Fatherland" Party (Totul Pentru Țară).

up different positions such as county leader, garrison commander, and secretary to carry out their plan of reforming the Church. If the high clergy regarded the movement merely as a political tool to represent the political interests of the bishops, the lower clergy, the Theology students, and their professors perceived the movement as a Romanian nation's return to the Christian millennial precepts and a counterrevolution to the "Satanic", Bolshevik anti-Christian menace from the East.

Adherence to the movement can be noticed in the gradual reassessment of the relationship between higher and lower clergy regarding ecclesiastical discipline. It would also provide solutions to the salary problem of the lower ranks in the Church, to see to fruition the comeback of the high clergy into party politics, to combat the privileged status of the high clergy and the complete lack of interest coming both from the hierarchy and the state towards the lower clergy's needs and grievances. The contribution of the book relies precisely on ascertaining the conflict of clashing interests between the lower and the higher clergy in how in the relationship with the Iron Guard there was not only an Orthodox Church negotiating with the Romanian fascists but several layers of the Church (the high clergy, the low clergy, the students, the laymen, theologians) engaged in different types of negotiation with distinct layers in the fascist movement and outcomes and for various reasons enjoying different statuses and positions within the movement.

The presence of Christian spirituality in the ideology of the movement and the important role attained by Orthodox clergy in the movement's rank-and-file particularized the Iron Guard among other fascist movements. Except for the Serbian case[4], no other fascist movement developed a symbiosis between radical-right-wing ideology and Orthodox theology with an emphasis on religious rituals to play such an important role in its ideological core. For Nazism "positive Christianity"[5] held an unclear and ambiguous value, as is the case with their Italian counterpart, where the rather hostile behavior towards different Christian

[4] Maria Falina, "Between 'Clerical Fascism' and Political Orthodoxy: Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Interwar Serbia," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (June 2007): 247–258.

[5] Richard Steigman-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20–25.

denominations is noted.[6] As in the case of the paradigmatic fascist movements such as the German NSDAP and the Italian fascists, in its rise to power the Iron Guard intended to use the clergy and the Church for their interest, but this use of the clergy and the institution of the Church did not evolve into persecution as in the cases mentioned above. Instead, the Romanian fascists continued the "synthesis"[7] of Orthodox theology with secular nationalism, which started during the nineteenth century with the formation of the autocephalous, national Orthodox Church. According to this "synthesizing, *syncretic* mode of 'clerical fascism'", the fascists and the clergy altered the Church ritual, canon law, and doctrine and reinterpreted Orthodox theology through their nationalist lenses to establish their understanding of theology. In forging a theological expression of the nation, the theological acculturation between the Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church continued the nineteenth-century process of nationalizing the Orthodox Church, an undertaking developed in multiple stages over the years.

They imagined a new Covenant between God and his *chosen people* that came to life in a new fascist social contract. The theology of the Iron Guard was shaped according to Christian theology, profiting from the developments already present in Orthodox theology at that time. Fr. Serge Bulgakov already spoke about the Church as the chosen people identifying itself with the nation,[8] a synthesis between Orthodox doctrine and the nationalist intellectual agenda similar to that presented by the Iron Guard.[9] The *fascist theology* was envisaged as the Christian theology of the Orthodox Church, providing a theological framework to redeem in the beyond, not just the individual but the nation entirely.[10] To the

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[6] For the Italian case see Emilio Gentile, *Contro Cesare: Cristianesimo e totalitarismo nell'epoca dei fascismi* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010), 81–108.

[7] Roger Griffin, "The 'Holy Storm': 'Clerical Fascism' through the Lens of Modernism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (June 2007): 220.

[8] Fr. Sergei Boulgakov, *Ortodoxia* (Bucharest: Paideea, 1997), 80.

[9] Although the doctrine of *sobornost* remained a popular theological metaphor among lay and consecrated theologians, in the Romanian case it faded away, leaving its place to the metaphor of the nation as the chosen people.

[10] The same perception of the collective sins of the Nation as a collective entity that must be expiated through prayer can be found in Poland. Please see Brian Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55, 242.

seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church providing divine immortality, the Iron Guard "theologians" provided one more sacrament destined to ensure the immortality of the individual in the collective memory of the people and the final immortality of the nation. As the book shows, the sacrament of martyrdom represented the cornerstone of the Iron Guard's theology. Drawn up mainly by Ion Moța and Alexandru Cantacuzino, it was presented as the *eighth sacrament*, which ensured the nation a place in the kingdom of heavens. The book shows how this re-adaptation, systemization, and incorporation of Christian theology of martyrdom for faith to a nationalist worldview had as a direct consequence the legionary re-interpretation of Christian dogma and ritual, sometimes contrary to the canons of Orthodox theology.

In their effort to draw up a modernization project, Romanian fascists set out to modernize not solely the political sphere and the production of national culture but the Church and its theology as well. The importance of Christian theology for the legionary ideological canon was adapted according to the legionary institutional design that used the church perceived as a monolithic and unifying structure active in all Romanian provinces. This relationship of osmosis between Orthodox and fascism was perceived differently by the Iron Guard's leaders, the low clergy, and the bishops. While the Iron Guard's men considered the Romanian Orthodox Church as an institution that provided a sense of unity for the Romanian people, the low clergy considered the Iron Guard as a political higher appellate court against the State's harsh measures threatening the clergy's income and their political involvement, but also against the discriminatory and sometimes tyrannical behavior of the bishops.[11]

Looking at the Orthodox high clergy, the book reflects on how the relationship with the Iron Guard was understood differently, from one case to the other. If Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan and Metropolitan Gurie Grosu of Bessarabia embraced the ideals of the movement to curb the patriarch's claims for the centralization of authority and the patriarchal hold on power inside the higher hierarchy and subsequently the decrease of the bishops' power in their bishoprics, other bishops like Metropolitan Nicodim Munteanu of Moldavia, Bishops Vartolomeu Stănescu

[11] In the Romanian case, "'collusive' clerical fascism" coexisted with "'*syncretic*' clerical fascism." For the terminology, please see Roger Griffin, 2007, p. 219–220.

of Craiova, Lucian Triteanu of Roman or Auxiliary Bishop Vasile Stan or Veniamin Pocitan embraced the movement and participated in various legionary ceremonies out of their antisemitic and highly nationalist personal beliefs, considered to be politically best embodied by the Iron Guard.

2. Fascism as Political Religion – the State of the Art

The present research will be constructed around two important concepts in fascism and totalitarian studies: "political religion" and "sacralisation of politics."[12] I use the concept of "political religion" to map the transformation of Eastern European politics after the formation of the national states. More exactly, starting from different definitions of various scholars in this research field, I will present different understandings of this concept and the changes operated by scholars like Eric Voegelin, Robert O. Paxton, Roger Eatwell, Emilio Gentile, Roger Griffin, George L. Mosse, and others in their use of political religion.

The concept of fascism as a political religion applies to the Romanian Iron Guard; I emphasize that although the Iron Guard had several key concepts shared with the official fascist ideology, there are several differences between the Italian and German case studies of fascism as a political religion. What makes the Iron Guard a distinct case in the family of fascist movements is the close relationship between the Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church. The second relates to the leader's cult being built mainly on a Christian understanding of the saint or chosen man with a national particularity, a saintly leader who does not save humankind but Romania.

According to Stanley Payne[13] and Michael Burleigh[14], its origins can be traced to the French Revolution, when the Jacobins envisaged a new approach

[12] Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Emilio Gentile, "The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 1 (2000): 18–55.

[13] Stanley Payne, "On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and its Application," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 2, (2011): 166.

[14] Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers. Religion and Politics in Europe from the Enlightenment to the Great War*, (New York: Harper &Collins, 2006), p. 48. For an interesting deconstruction of the myth of atheist Nazis see Richard Steigmann–Gall, *The Holy Reich. Nazi Conception of Christianity 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

to modern politics. Shaping a different understanding of political reality and secularizing any perception of politics, the Jacobins fabricated a religion based on Reason, which was used for political purposes.

The first scholar who applied "political religion" to the German fascist movement was Eric Voegelin in his epoch-making book, *The Political Religions* (1938).[15] He defined fascist ideology as a political religion inspired by a secular, "inner-worldly" religious experience, described by chiliasm, an apocalyptic vision, anti-clericalism, and other anti-modern Christian myths. For Voegelin, political religion is a direct reaction to the secularized political project shaped by modernity in which the alliance between a spiritual domain and a political realm cannot exist. Accordingly,

> Wherever a reality discloses itself in the religious experience as sacred, it becomes the most real, a *realissimum*. This basic transformation from the natural to the divine results in a sacral and value-oriented re-crystallization of reality around that aspect that has been recognized as being divine. Worlds of symbols, linguistic signs, and concepts arrange themselves around the sacred center; they firm up as systems, become filled with the spirit of religious agitation, and are fanatically defended as the 'right' order of being.[16]

As Klaus Vondung pointed out, Voegelin foretold "the sacralization of politics" without using the term.[17] Nevertheless, by considering Nazism a "inner-worldly religion" (*innerweltlich Religion*) "that find the divine in the subcontents of the world"[18] as opposed to "trans-worldly religions" (*uberweltliche Religionen*) like Christianity and Judaism based on a transcendent meaning, Voegelin denied Nazism any access to an out-of-this-world sense of transcendence, confining Nazism to a purely secular essence. The articulate separation between secular Nazism and transcendental religions cannot stand as a conceptual tool for the

[15] I use the following edition Eric Voegelin, "The Political Religions," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 5 (Columbia & London: Missouri University Press, 2000). First edition1938.

[16] Voegelin, "The Political Religions," 32.

[17] Klaus Vondung, "What Insights Do We Gain from Interpreting National Socialism as Political Religion," in Roger Griffin, Robert Mallet and John Tortorice (eds.), *The Sacred in the Twentieth-Century Politics: Essays in the Honor of Professor Stanley G. Payne* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 110.

[18] Ibid, 32–33.

Romanian Iron Guard for which the membranes separating transcendence from secular are porous and indistinguishable.

Another seminal approach to the political religion theory comes from the Italian scholar Emilio Gentile. Inspired by the efforts of George L. Mosse,[19] Emilio Gentile stated that "fascism constructed its system of beliefs, myths and, rituals, centered on the sacralization of the state."[20] In other words, "fascist religion placed itself alongside traditional religion and tried to synthesize it within its sphere of values as an ally in the subjection of the masses to the state, although it did stress the primacy of politics."[21] This primacy of politics that Gentile discusses is nothing more than a "lay religion", a consequence of the historical development of Italy.

Elements such as the quest for a secular religion to break up with the Conservative Catholic Party, experience, and rebirth of the nation were present for quite a long time in Italian history. When Mussolini came to power in 1922, this lay religion became a political, "secular religion which was founded on the myth of the nation."[22] Fascism as a political religion is to be found in the leader cult and the need for a regeneration of the Italian race. Other elements that account for this translation from lay religion to political religion were "a new 'moral community,'"[23] the "*experience of faith,* "[24] the cult of the leader (*il Duce*),[25] myths, symbols, and public rituals, stressing the newly coagulated national community of the Italian people.[26] Another important feature was the cult of the martyrs. Even if they had died for the fascist cause or had fallen in WWI, the cult of the martyrs was present during fascist ceremonies.

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[19] George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Also see George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Towards a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), 10–11.

[20] Emilio Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2–3 (1990): 230. See also Werner Ustorf, "The Missiological Roots of the Concept of 'Political Religion,'" in Roger Griffin, Robert Mallet and John Tortorice (eds.), *The Sacred in the Twentieth-Century Politics*, 39, 44.

[21] Ibidem.

[22] Ibid., 231.

[23] Ibid, 233.

[24] Ibid., 234.

[25] Ibid., 238.

[26] Ibid., 241.

> Fascism tried to give an answer to the problem of death through the exaltation of a sense of community, which integrated the individual into the collectivity. Whoever died believing in fascism became part of its mythical world and thus acquired immortality in the view of the movement's collective memory, which was periodically updated in commemorations.[27]

In the framework of the political religion, fascism placed high importance on the martyrs' cult because they were perceived both as a source of legitimization for the movement and as the seeds of new conversions to the fascist cause. By constantly highlighting the virtues of heroism and the concrete materialization of the *faith* in the fascist religion all impersonated martyr figures, Mussolini's movement attempted to overcome the last bastion of the Catholic Church, which is the privilege over the afterlife. All these features of the fascist political religion emphasized, according to Emilio Gentile, the "socialization of the fascist religion" and had as purpose the "sacralization of the state"[28] in which the nation, *il Duce,* and the State became one entity. According to Emilio Gentile, 'political religion' is

> A type of religion which sacralises an ideology, a movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth, considering it the primary and indisputable source of meaning and the ultimate aim of human existence on earth.[29]

In the context of the 'political religion' theory, Gentile's position towards traditional religion positioned the (Catholic) Church in a subordinate place. The fascist

> Interest in religion was exclusively political and not theological, just as its privileged recognition of the Catholic Church was due to the pragmatic use of religion as an *instrumentum regni*. …Fascist religion placed itself alongside traditional religion and tried to syncretize it within its own sphere of values as an ally in the subjection of the masses to the state, although it did stress the primacy of politics.[30]

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[27] Ibid., p. 244.

[28] Ibid., p. 248.

[29] Emilio Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections of an Interpretation" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 328.

[30] Ibid.: 230.

Therefore, any traditional religion was subjected to pragmatic political purposes and finally incorporated into the fascist system of values, beliefs, and myths. According to Gentile's understanding, the "syncretic" character of the fascist party in Italy manifested in the co-optation and assimilation of Christian theology into the fascist ideology. It also stressed the subsidiary and supporting role of the Catholic Church and its clergy for the new fascist political establishment.

In 2001, Emilio Gentile published another cornerstone monograph on the relation between religion and politics, refining his understanding of political versus civil religion. *La religioni della politica: Fra democratie e totalitarismi*[31] came with a fresh definition of fascism as political religion in connection with a different understanding of civil religion. The distinction between the two concepts answers some of Gentile's critics, who accused him of not accurately defining a distinction between democratic and totalitarian regimes.[32]

As a political scientist, Emilio Gentile distinguished between the two features, encapsulating in one of his definitions the right-wing radicalism manifesting itself from the late nineteenth century onwards. Accordingly,

> *A political religion* is a form of sacralization of politics that has an exclusive and fundamental nature. It does not accept the coexistence of other political ideologies and movements, it denies the autonomy of the individual in the relation with the collectivity, it demands compliance to its commandments and participation to its political cult and it sanctifies violence as a legitimate weapon in the fight against its enemies and as an instrument of regeneration. *In relation with traditional religious institutions, it either adopts a hostile attitude and aims to eliminate them, or it attempts to establish a rapport of symbiotic coexistence by incorporating the traditional religion into its own system of beliefs and myths while reducing it to a subordinate and auxiliary role*."[33] [my Italics]

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[31] Emilio Gentile, *La religioni della politica: Fra democratie e totalitarismi* (Roma: Gius. Laterza&Figli, 2001). I used the following English translation: Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[32] For definitions of different political terms, please see Hans Maier, "Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships: 'totalitarianism' and 'political religion'" in Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume I: concepts for the comparison of dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004), 188–203.

[33] Ibid., 140.

Gentile's view about the absolute subordination of any traditional religion to the fascist secular remained unchanged. The only aspect that seemed to be re-evaluated by Emilio Gentile relates to the use of "symbiotic coexistence" rather than the previous "syncretic" attribute of the relationship between fascism and traditional religions. The idea of a "symbiotic coexistence" presupposes the subordination of the institutionalized religion towards the fascist religion and infers a peaceful process of Christian theology's appropriation by fascist political religion.[34]

Also, Gentile touched upon the issue of fascism represented as a secular religion by focusing his scholarly attention on a historical metaphor, i.e., "the sacralisation of politics," which best describes his view on the rise of a new form of secular religion. Consequently, he clarified his terms as an outcome of the debate by enriching the context through a clear separation taken from political science between totalitarian and democratic regimes.

Accordingly, for Emilio Gentile,

> The term 'the sacralisation of politics' means the formation of a *religious dimension in politics that is distinct from, and autonomous of, traditional religious institutions*. The sacralisation of politics takes place when politics is conceived, lived and represented through myths, rituals and symbols that demand faith in the sacralised secular entity, dedication among the community of believers, enthusiasm for action, a warlike spirit and sacrifice to secure its defense and its triumph.[35]

Gentile's emphasis on the "sacralisation of politics" postulates that politics should be framed through secular lenses as a part of a historical process unfolding and culminating in the development of fascist ideology. Regarding traditional religion, Gentile maintained his previous views about the subordinate role Christian churches should have to the autonomous secular, fascist political religion:

> The sacralisation of politics is a modern phenomenon: it takes place when politics, after having secured its autonomy from traditional religion by secularizing both culture and the state, acquires a truly religious dimension.

[34] The same argument can be found in Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion": 329.

[35] Gentile, "The Sacralisation of Politics": 21–22.

> For this reason, the sacralisation of politics should not be confused with the politicisation of traditional religions.[36]

The sacralization of the modern state following the process of modernization and secularization started in the nineteenth century, separating the secular religion of the state from the revival of traditional religion. By rooting itself in revolutionary, syndical socialism and modernity, fascism continued the path of Italian liberals and created their religion of the state. In conformity with the clear-cut separation between secular and transcendental forms of religiosity, traditional religion was assimilated and incorporated into the new system of beliefs and rituals promoted by the fascist state.[37] Following Gentile's argument, there are three models of appropriating traditional religion in the case of secular and political religion. If the *mimetic* and *ephemeral* stand as potential possibilities, the *syncretic* model remains more appropriate to the fascist religion in general and closest to the Romanian case in particular:

> *syncretic*, in that it incorporates the traditions, myths and rituals of traditional religion, transforming and adapting them to its own mythical and symbolical universe.[38]

Gentile's undertaking of fascism as a secular, political religion was neither unnoticed nor unchallenged by different scholars in the field of fascism and political studies. On the contrary, the concept of 'political religion' associated with fascism was overtly challenged by various scholars. Skeptical about Gentile's understanding of fascism as a political religion, Roger Griffin questioned the scholarly usage of such terms 0 aboveabout totalitarian, extremist right-wing expressions of politics such as fascism. By defining fascism as "a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism"[39] and denying the primacy of the religious element in the creation of fascist ideology, Roger Griffin considered the concept of political religion a sub-category of the secular political ideology and not a heuristic tool in describing the ideological traits of fascist phenomenon.[40]

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[36] Ibid.: 22.
[37] Ibid.: 23.
[38] Ibid.: 24.
[39] Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 26.
[40] Ibid., 30.

Another poignant critique of Emilio Gentile's view on fascism as a political religion is Roger Eatwell's.[41] He argues that there are several issues Gentile discarded to shape up his theory. First, he states directly against Gentile's view that the "fascism-as-a-political-religion thesis is not simply about issues such as ritual and creed. It also raises the issue of how people continued to view the churches."[42] In other words, to speak about concepts like fascist religion and fascism as a political religion was not enough when one considers that religion does not imply only politics but also brings in questions on the relevance of institutional Catholicism for members of the fascist religion.[43]

Eatwell goes further and argues that even this issue is not clear because how different people regarded the Church and the attitude of the Church towards fascism are ambiguous. Roger Eatwell's statement leaves no space for a perspective about fascism as a political religion: "to the extent that a linking essence can be identified, fascism was a political ideology rather than a political religion."[44] For Roger Eatwell, the most important feature of fascism is represented by the connection with a certain political ideology and not by a sacralization of politics. Emilio Gentile pointed out that the whole debate was related to the understanding of the concept of *religion*:

> The fundamental assumption of the scholars who deny the validity of the concept of political religion is the same as the one we have already seen in the case of civil religion, that is, we do not deal with 'true' religion, but only with a political use of metaphors, symbols and rituals of a religious kind in order to reach utilitarian goals. Consequently, these scholars do not consider the use of the term 'religion' legitimate in order to define totalitarian political regimes which, in their turn, either openly or secretly, were effectively anti-

[41] Roger Eatwell, *Fascism. A History* (London: Pimlico, 2003). For other poignant critics of "political religion" theory, see R. B. J. Bosworth, "Introduction," in R. B. J. Bosworth (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–11; Neil Gregor, "Nazism: A Political Religion? The Voluntarist Turn," in Neil Gregor (ed.), *Nazism, War and Genocide: New Perspectives on the History of the Third Reich* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 5–23.

[42] Ibid., 160.

[43] In the Nazi case the question has been raised by Richard Steigmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion: How Anti-Christian were the 'Pagans'?" *Central European History* 6, no. 1 (2003): 75–105.

[44] Steigmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion": 163.

> religious or 'political anti-religions', according to Hermann Lübbe's expression. It is obvious that the answer to the question of whether political religion and civil religion could be considered 'true religions' depends on the definition of what a 'true' religion actually is. Not even the definition of 'true' religion enjoys an extensive consensus among scholars.[45]

Stanley Payne is on the same page with the definition of the role of religion and what religion *is* in the analytical framework of political religion theory. In his review of the Italian edition of Gentile's book, he showed that, to transform the political religion concept into a universal ideal type, Gentile accepted Roger Griffin and Roger Eatwell's criticisms and expanded the debate's framework.[46] More clearly, Payne identified the principal problem of the ancient concept of political religion used by Gentile in the misinterpretation of the analytical concept of *religion*:

> The concept of political religion, whose usage has became increasingly frequent, has nonetheless been criticized as confusing and conflating. Critics contend that religion refers to a transcendent spiritual reality and hence cannot be used coherently to describe secular political movement or that religion refers to a code of personal and spiritual conduct that should not be conflated with the official state organization.[47]

Stanley Payne implies that Emilio Gentile's view of the concepts of religion and political religions became more expansive because, at a certain stage of the research, Emilio Gentile noticed the criticisms addressed by different scholars in the field about the narrowness of his investigation. Somehow, he had to consider a secular reality having nothing in common with totalitarian movements.[48]

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[45] Ibid.: 164.

[46] Stanley Payne, "Emilio Gentile's Historical Analysis and the Taxonomy of Political Religions" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 3, No. 1 (2002): 123.

[47] Ibid., 125. For another critical view of Emilio Gentile's understanding of "religion," see Mathias Behrens, "'Political religion'–a religion? Some remarks on the concept of religion," in Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II: Concepts for comparison of dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2007), 225–245.

[48] The same understanding in Hans Maier, "'Political religion': the potentials and limitations of a concept" in Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II. Concepts for comparison of dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 272–282.

The Gentilinian understanding of fascism as a 'political religion' and the clear-cut separation between fascist and traditional religions found not only critics but also defenders and converts. Roger Griffin's defense of Emilio Gentile's position also emphasized the character of fascism as a secular religious experience. First, Roger Griffin revised his earlier rejection of a direct relation between fascism and religion and accepted Emilio Gentile's political religion approach.[49] However, Griffin points out that a certain emphasis on clustering the theory and an effort towards interdisciplinarity is mandatory for any scholar from the field.[50] Furthermore, he stresses the difference between various forms of secular religion and sheds light on issues that never emerged before. He is not content only with fascism, but he would rather expand the theory to the relationship between religion and politics. He argues that:

> the important contribution of Gentile's cluster to clear up the many misunderstandings of the aspects caused by this aspect of totalitarianism (and hence of political religion) is that it specifically links the horrific human destructions involved in these campaigns to the revolutionary quest to create a *new civilization* based on the *palingenetic myth.*"[51]

Nevertheless, Griffin's undertaking on Gentile was filtered through the lenses of his theoretical view on fascism that accommodated Gentile's view on political religion into his already-fashioned theory on fascism:

> Once Gentile's concept of political religion is applied to generic fascism it becomes possible to see it in its disparate manifestations as a *totalitarian movement* driven by a *revolutionary variant of ultra–nationalism*. As such, it manifest itself, at least in inter-war Europe and some other Europeanized societies, as a *political religion*, by the utopia of regenerated national community

[49] For a résumé of the critiques addressed to Emilio Gentile's understanding of fascism/ totalitarianism as a political religion see Roger Griffin, "Introduction: God's Counterfeiters? Investigating the Triad of Fascism, Totalitarianism and (Political) Religion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, No. 3 (2004): 304.

[50] Roger Griffin, "Cloister or Cluster? The Implication of Emilio Gentile's Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, No. 1 (2005): 41.

[51] For a critic of the palingenetic myth associated with the impact of modernism, see Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground for Consent in Germany 1930–1945* (London: Routledge, 2013), 210–211.

> saturated with *mythic* and *palingenetic thinking* reminiscent of the early modern forms of European millenarianism without being a direct perpetuation of them.[52]

Roger Griffin reads Emilio Gentile's theory through the lenses of his theory, trying to integrate it into his view of fascism as a "core myth of the reborn nation,"[53] a revival of the "palingenetic myth"[54] Roger Griffin's main contribution to fascist studies. Roger Griffin has a different target in mind than Emilio Gentile. If Gentile proposed his theory starting from the field of political studies, fascist studies are linked to a certain historical age. Roger Griffin understood that Emilio Gentile's separation between political and civil religions represented the breakthrough the narrowed fascist studies needed to expand their research target. By using Gentile's theory and stressing the importance of *palingenesis*,[55] Griffin actualized and applied his theoretical insights regarding Italian and German fascisms to different totalitarian movements and regimes like Islamic Iran or Communist Korea.[56] There still are critics[57] who underlined the fact that fascism

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[52] Ibid., 46.

[53] Roger Griffin, "Fascism," in Roger Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism. Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold Publishing House, 1998), 37.

[54] For the palingenetic myth and its relationship with fascism as a political religion in Roger Griffin's work, see Martin Durham, "The Upward Path: Palingenesis, Political Religion and the National Alliance" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol. 5, No. 3 (2004): 454–468.

[55] For Roger Griffin–Emilio Gentile's understandings of the whole issue at stake see Martin Blinkhorn, "Afterthoughts, Route Maps, and Landscapes: Historians, "Fascist Studies" and the Study of Fascism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, No. 3 (2004): 510; Roger Griffin, "'Sempre Presente?'. The Relevance of the Concept 'Fascism' To Understanding Contemporary Socio-Political Realities," in Andrea di Michele, Fillipo Focardi, eds., *Re-Thinking Fascism: The Italian and German Dictatorships* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022), 283.

[56] For a critique against this attempt by Roger Griffin, who tried to consider Communism as a political religion, see Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Communist Idea in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 108. Also, Christel Lane, *The rites of rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society-the Soviet case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Khamaludin Gadshiiev, "Reflections on Russian Totalitarianism," in Hans Maier, *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*. *Vol. I: concepts for the comparison of dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004), 53–57. Klaus Georg Riegl, "Marxism-Leninism as Political Religion" in Hans Maier, *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*: *Vol. 2: Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2007), 61–112.

as a political religion became more a politicized religion rather than a political religion. So far, Emilio Gentile has not responded to this critique.[58]

3. Iron Guard as a Political Religion

The emergence in 1927 of the Romanian fascist movement is a well-researched phenomenon.[59] Applying this concept to the Romanian case and, in effect, labeling the Iron Guard a political religion must be carefully considered. While some authors call the Iron Guard a classic example of political religion[60], such arguments should be analyzed. On theoretical grounds, it would be challenging to compare the contemporary understandings of the *political religion* of Emilio Gentile to the case of Romanian fascism to see the possible similarities and dissimilarities. Is the Iron Guard a classic example of a political religion or not? Is it an example of a secularized religion used for political purposes by a fascist movement? According to Roger Griffin, the Iron Guard was not a fully-fledged fascist movement because Corneliu Codreanu and his followers never gained absolute power.[61] Constructed as a nationalist organization with terrorist means to achieve power, the Legion of the Archangel Michael was suppressed several times (1933, 1938, and 1941), and although it participated in General Ion Antonescu's government for a short time (6 September 1940 – January 1941) it never achieved control over the means to revolutionize the Romanian society. Therefore, Roger

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[57] For example, Renato Moro, "Religion and Politics in the Time of Secularization: The Sacralization of Politics and the Politicization of Religion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, No. 1, (2005): 71–86; Roger Eatwell, "Reflections on Fascism and Religion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4, No. 3 (2003): 145–166.

[58] For a summary of the debate see Stanley Stowers, "The Concepts of 'Religion', 'Political Religion' and the Study of Nazism," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 42, no. 1 (2007): 9–24.

[59] Nicholas M. Nagy–Talavera, *O Istorie a Fascismului în Ungaria și România* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996); Radu Ioanid, *The Swords of the Archange*l, (New York, 1990); Armin Heinen, *Legiunea 'Arhanghelul Mihail': Mișcare socială și organizație politică. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999).

[60] According to Mihai Chioveanu, the Iron Guard was a classic example of political religion. See Mihai Chioveanu, "Legionarismul ca religie politică," *Idei în dialog* 9, no. 24 (September 2006), 48–49.

[61] Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 126.

Griffin considered the Romanian fascism movement a "para-fascist" movement[62] because Romanian fascists failed to gain absolute control over Romanian society and, thus, never implemented the *palingenetic* project while in power.

The most compelling definition of fascism as a political religion that can be applied to the Romanian Iron Guard is Emilio Gentile's definition. Viewing the Romanian blend of fascism as a political religion represents a possible answer to the "mystical" character that made the Iron Guard unique for different scholars.[63] According to Gentile,[64] when fascism develops a political religion it meets several characteristics: a leader's cult with a stress on the leader's charisma, the cult of martyrs, the importance awarded to ceremonies and symbols, the cult of the Nation, the subordination of the society, the belief in the movement, etc. Applying this definition to the Romanian fascist movement offers several helpful insights into its research.

Regarding the leader's cult and leader's charisma in the Iron Guard, several historiographical attempts were made to demonstrate that Corneliu Zelea–Codreanu embodied the values present in the person of other fascist leaders: a God-given mission to reform history and to lead the Romanian people into a new age.[65] The main ideologues of the Iron Guard, Nae Ionescu and Ion I. Moța, developed and expanded Codreanu's charisma into a hagiographic profile. In his *Testament*[66], Moța endowed Codreanu with a messianic investiture. Codreanu was depicted as the true leader of the Romanian people, as a providential person sent from above to help the Romanian people. He was the *Captain of the Romanian people,* a title considered to encapsulate a divine mission.[67] Codreanu's cult, cultivated

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[62] Ibid., 125.

[63] Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel*, 139–148.

[64] Emilio Gentile, "Fascism as political religion": 229–251.

[65] See Stephen Fischer-Galați, "Codreanu, Romanian National Traditions and Charisma," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7, No. 2, (2006): 245–250; for a comprehensive presentation see Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the 'Archangel Michael' in interwar Romania* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004), 72–75; Radu Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 429–435.

[66] Ioan Moța, *Testament*, (Salzburg: Colecția „Omul Nou", No. 8, 1951), 17.

[67] Gentile, "Fascism as political religion": 236; Gentile, *The Sacralisation of Politics*, 132–139.

by the movement, "syncretized" the cult of the archangel Michael with the cult of Codreanu. The legionary divinization of their leader was also intertwined with the idea of reconnecting their present history with the glorious historical past, i.e. Codreanu being presented by legionary intellectuals like Ernst Bernea either in a tradition of the Romanian people's "captains"[68] or as "builder" of churches (*ctitor*), in the tradition of the Romanian prices of the Middle Ages.[69]

The new fascist *ecclesia*[70] as the "new moral community"[71] of the Romanian people was experienced by the legionary members in the working camps, where the principles of legionary doctrine were internalized as the result of sustained political indoctrination.[72] The working camps were places where the legionary members were called to behave as "a missionary order"[73] or as "apostles and soldiers of the 'fascist religion.'"[74] Imposing a harsh, ascetical discipline and providing guidelines for educating the young generation of fascist adherents, Codreanu published a set of guiding principles that clearly stated the duties of the legionary.[75] The provided *fascist Gospel* and fascist canon law had a clear purpose of instilling the legionary virtues (faith, courage, willingness for self-sacrifice, the stern belief in the glorious future awaiting the Romanian nation, etc.) to create the newly *ecclesia*/ "new moral community."[76]

One of the emblematic characteristics that comprised all the features that could define the Iron Guard as a political religion was the martyrs' cult. Although

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[68] Ernst Bernea, *Cartea Căpitanilor* (Bucharest: Serviciul de Propagandă, 1940). Initally published in 1937.

[69] For the idea of a "legendary time" see Emilio Gentile, 1990, p. 245. The legionary case will be developed in Chapter III.

[70] Voegelin, "The Political Religions", 32–33.

[71] Gentile, "Fascism as political religion": 233. For an exploration of national community in the Nazi case see Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 32–54.

[72] Heinen, *Legiunea*, 248.

[73] Gentile, "Fascism as political religion": 238.

[74] Ibid., p. 239. For the "missionary" aspect of the Legion of Archangel Michael, see Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulare si manifeste* (Bucharest: Blassco, 2010), 47.

[75] Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Cărticica şefului de cuib* (Bucharest: Editura Mişcării Legionare, 2000), 35.

[76] For the new theological understandings of "national ecclesiology," see Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 17–36.

the legionary fascination with the martyrs for a cause started during the persecution of 1933, its "classical" *mise en scène* took place during the burial of the Iron Guard's martyrs Ioan I. Moța and Vasile Marin (13 February 1937).[77] This event had all the characteristics that would enable scholars to consider the Iron Guard a clear example of fascism as a political religion. The request addressed by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu to the Romanian Orthodox Church to consider Moța and Marin as martyrs and saints who died for Christianity, the combined rituals and the use of religious/ fascist symbols during the burial were all encompassed into a liturgy of the nation praising its martyrs in which the clergy and the Orthodox theology of the dead blended with the fascist rituals and speeches.[78]

In what concerns the relationship between Iron Guard as a secular, political religion and the traditional Romanian Orthodox Church, according to Radu Ioanid, "the sacralisation of politics" did not mean an attempt "to politicize religion"[79] imposing a subordinate role for the Romanian Orthodox Church:

> Despite its pronounced Orthodox character, Legionary mysticism did not simply mean the total assimilation of Orthodox theology by a fascist political movement, but on the contrary, an attempt at subordinating and transforming that theology into a political instrument. Through an abusive extrapolation, all the Legion's adversaries became in the writings of its followers adversaries of the Church, Christ and God.[80]

The Iron Guard, seen as a political religion according to Emilio Gentile's definition, represents a typical way of applying an ideal type developed in fascist studies to the Romanian fascism movement. However, one may argue that the Legion of the Archangel Michael had peculiarities that set it aside from other fascist movements from Europe, i.e., in the case of the Iron Guard, any form of anti-clericalism or exclusion from its ranks of the clergy is missing. Stemming from these traits is the question: What happens when the followers

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[77] For details, see Heinen, *Legiunea*, 293–299; Valentin Săndulescu, „Sacralised Politics in Action: the February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, No. 2 (2007): 259.

[78] Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard": 435, 438–439.

[79] Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard": 420.

[80] Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard,": 439.

of a fascist movement are Christian clergymen, practicing believers, acting politically according to their Christian involvement? More precisely, when the members of a fascist movement are priests, what concept can describe their forays into extreme-nationalist political involvement?

Although I embrace the understanding of the Iron Guard's secular political goals analytically mapped in Gentile's "sacralisation of politics" I argue that a certain reinterpretation of the Voegelinian/Gentilinian concept of political religion to fit the empirical case of the Iron Guard is necessary to capture how Christian theology and the Orthodox clergy inspired the legionary ideology. The importance given to Orthodox Christianity and the close relation with the Orthodox clergymen were characteristics that cannot be explained through the formal categories of fascism as sacralized politics and the building up of a completely secular worldview. More precisely, Roger Griffin and Emilio Gentile based their views about fascism as a political religion on a Durkhemian concept of religion where any form of transcendence was nonexistent, and the term religion was defined as a link between different layers of the social corpus. For the two scholars, religion is the social glue that assures the connection and adherence of distinct individuals into one holistic representation of the social organism.

If, in these cases, the society had a secular, already disenchanted world-view, where the pre-modern God's decapitation[81] was a consequence of modernity, the case of the Iron Guard's relationship with the Orthodox clergy remains outside this conceptual framework. Because of the delayed process of assuming modernity in terms of theological and conceptual constructions, the Romanian case presents a particularity that comes from the lack of separation between Church and state and the presence of religion in all layers of society, including politics. One of the book's main claims underlines that Iron Guard presented itself beyond the mere conceptual boundaries of a political religion. The Orthodox clergy joining its ranks were already politicizing religion, a version of politics for which the transcendental God has not (yet) been decapitated and represented the linchpin between moderate nationalism and religion. If the Western experience provided an *Ersatz* religiosity as the replacement of institutionalized

[81] Eric Voeglin, "The political religions," 29.

religion,[82] in the case of the Iron Guard, the rejection of the metaphysical, the out-of-this-world experience does not occur. The Iron Guard's theologians and clergymen's intentions were not only to produce a form of secular theology but rather to accomplish their nationalistic mission, that is, to integrate their traditional religious doctrine within the framework of their secular ideology. The movement aimed to offer the Romanian nation a comprehensive symbolic representation where political and religious expressions were no longer separated but associated and merged in the Romanian fascist ideological kernel.

The politicization of the sacred was also a reaction of the church to the late nineteenth-century secularization coming from the State's modernizing drive and the process of industrialization and urbanization witnessed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Orthodox clergymen acting politically constituted a response to the attempt to exclude traditional religion from the cultural milieus. Threatened with political and cultural isolation, the rise of a secular culture advocating for the virtues of individuality and breaking with the past and a highlight on the atomizing, secular city rather than the traditional religious village led to the church's reaction. To hinder secularization and the dissolution of the rural world where the church retained its strength under the impact of modernization, Orthodox clergymen engaged in a "mazeway resynthesis," mixing their theology with the nationalism of the state to preserve the traditional world and the threatened status of religion in society.[83] The clergy took a radical decision to involve itself in party politics and to forge a quasi-religious, heretical political speech associated with secular nationalism.[84]

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[82] For this understanding, please see Juan J. Linz, "The religious use of politics and/or the political use of religion: ersatz ideology versus ersatz religion," in Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, 102–119.

[83] I use the term of Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 106–108. The same story can be found in Poland. See Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 244; Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 22–34.

[84] Paschalis Kitromilides, "The legacy of French Revolution: Orthodoxy and nationalism," in Michael Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume 5. Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 232–233. For a similar reaction of the Catholic Church in nineteenth-century Germany, see Christopher Clark, "The New

After the end of WWI, fascism in Italy and Germany, after an initial cohabitating with the religious establishment, became increasingly anti-clerical to reach even persecution of the Christian denominations or to absorb the Church in its structures to marginalize traditional religion. The attempt of post-WWI intellectuals like Nichifor Crainic or Nae Ionescu to search for a new cultural "mazeway resynthesis" between Orthodoxy and cultural nationalism to keep the dangers of secularization, social and cultural anomie, distrusted in progress, and the loss of meaning at bay attracted many Orthodox clergymen, who were already involved in politics. Using the ideas of Crainic, the Iron Guard perceived the politicization of the sacred in the Orthodox Church as a religious phenomenon. Although it signified enmeshing secular nationalism with traditional religion, the Orthodox rhetorics surpassed in its version the fascist "sacralization of politics." For these intellectuals and Romanian fascists, Orthodoxy became "an ethnocultural label," an "identity marker," just as Catholicism in Poland became

> ... empty of theological meaning; it can become a category of social practice or identity rather than one of doctrine and faith. For some purpose, this definition is sufficient; for many self-defined Catholics, the theological and ideological teachings of the Church are distant memories from childhood Sunday School, and the sermons at mass are things to be endured, ignored, or simply avoided. These are the people who can, without any sense of self-contradiction, call themselves Catholics while using birth control, denying papal infallibility, even questioning the existence of God.[85]

As the book shows, Romanian fascists achieved a nationalist synthesis in which the church and the movement were not mutually exclusive, presupposing each other: the movement was the political expression of the church, and the church was the spiritual expression of the movement. Even more, the Iron Guard used religious rituals to antecede its political rituals, which coexisted in the ideology of the Iron Guard and embarked for electoral reasons, but also to stress its nationalist and organic character in the process of seducing the benevolence of the hierarchy and clergy for the movement's ideology. Unlike

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Catholicism and the European culture wars" in Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars. Secular–Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44.

[85] Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 12–13.

other fascist movements, the Romanian Iron Guard was formed under the banner of a celestial presence, Archangel Michael, whose cult was central to the Iron Guard's theology. The *archangelic theology* of the movement hybridized the Christian theology of martyrdom with the fascist cult of those fallen for the movement into a new sacrament of immortality, the martyrdom for Fatherland.[86] Although imported from the nineteenth-century trend of crafting national martyrs, the inner significance of martyrdom for the movement was inspired and shaped by the legionary intellectuals and theologians according to a national soteriological view. The reason behind the centrality of martyrdom was political. As in the case of early Christianity, the expansion and the rise to power of Codreanu's movement were marked by periods of repression and expansion, followed by martyrdom, an important propagandistic tool of the movement, especially among the youth. The Iron Guard was an example of a fascist movement interested in developing a "theology" and influencing the rituals and doctrines of the Church to present itself as a Christian political expression, acting according to the Church's teachings and not against it.[87] Moreover, the politicization of religion by the Orthodox Church, which was re-evaluated and enriched by various lay intellectuals after WWI, while it did not constitute the ideological essence of the fascist political religion of the Iron Guard it mediated its successful impact on the Orthodox clergy who were already in search of a viable political party to support.

The radical, extremist politicization of the sacred as expressed by the Romanian Orthodox clergy after 1918 with the Iron Guard's fascist "sacralisation of politics" can be understood up to a point through the lenses of "clerical fascism."[88]

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[86] The sacrament was accurately depicted in Gentile, "Fascism as political religion": 244.

[87] For the Croatian case, see Rory Yoemans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 81–125.

[88] For a complete analysis of the career of the term, see Roger Griffin, "The 'Holy Storm': 'Clerical Fascism' through the Lens of Modernism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, No. 2 (2007): 213–217. For a critique of the concept, see James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 352, footnote 13: "Griffen (sic!) has argued for restricting 'clerical fascism' to clerics who range from tactically supporting fascism to internalizing its values. While a welcome intervention for bringing analytical clarity for

Following Roger Griffin's assumptions, the Romanian Orthodox lower clergy's adherence to the Iron Guard is a typical example of "*syncretic* 'clerical fascism'" in which the Orthodox clergy internalized the fascist beliefs and synthesized them with the teachings of Christian theology.[89] This theoretical construct works for priests teaching in theological schools, the young students in Theology, lay intellectuals, and the large majority of priests and hieromonks, members of the Iron Guard. At the same time, the Orthodox bishops and some of the leading Orthodox priests, fellow travelers of the Iron Guard, interested in satisfying their mundane interest and using the fascists for their purposes could be described with the concept of "collusive 'clerical fascism'".[90] Nevertheless, in the Iron Guard's case, "clerical fascism" has its limitations, unable to explain what happened with the legionary clergymen after the end of the National Legionary State or how fascist theology/ideology survived and thrived up to the postcommunist years.

Although the "syncretic" approach to clerical fascism seems to best describe the Orthodox clergy's internalization and synthesis of fascist and Christian ideas, I will argue that the abovementioned clear-cut concepts do not accurately describe different clergymen's and lay intellectuals' political itinerary in or outside the movement. People like Nichifor Crainic, Nae Ionescu, Fr. Grigore Cristescu, Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, and many others supported the movement publicly, internalizing fascist ideas without formally joining the movement or without remaining in its ranks throughout the interwar period. I will argue against James Mace Ward[91] that not ambivalence was the driving force behind their itinerant political career, but, like the clergy from the Roman Catholic Church, a certain border-crossing ability due to their sophisticated intellectual training.[92]

The present undertaking shifts from the literature on the relationship between the clergy and fascism that comes from the German Nazism or Italian fascism cases. For the Iron Guard, the case of Nazi Germany where religion

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the concept, Griffen's approach to my mind still fails to capture Tiso's characteristically ambivalent relationship with revolution."

89 Griffin, "The 'Holy Storm'": 220.

90 Ibidem.

91 Please see footnote 83.

92 John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teachings on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 63–64.

played a role only in the beginning of the movement[93] with the Nazi party members inside the Protestant Church of an inferior rank[94] does not apply. The institutionalized religion and Orthodox theology played an important role in the ideological crystallization of the Legion's political view with Codreanu, a practicing Orthodox Christian. Unlike the Protestant and Catholic theology's subordination to the Nazi or Fascist regimes[95] and the fragmentation of the clergy in groups siding or opposing fascist regimes,[96] the Iron Guard intended not to subordinate, but to integrate the theologians and the clergymen within its ranks, without compromising their religious creed.[97]

The literature on the intersection between Romanian fascism and the Orthodox Church focused more on the institutional relationship between the two, by emphasizing a quantitative/ sociological perspective, counting the number of priests joining the movement, the hierarchical participation at different Iron Guard rituals, the impact of the movement in the Orthodox Church, etc.[98] Almost entirely, the literature is concentrated on the negotiation between the high clergy and the Iron Guard[99] and the subordination of the clergy towards the

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[93] Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the roots of Nazism: Religious identity and National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 77–106.

[94] Steigmann-Gall, *Holly Reich*, 87.

[95] See Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Emilio Gentile, "New Idols: Catholicism in the face of Fascist totalitarianism," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2006): 143–170.

[96] For pro-fascist clergy see Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 1996); Kevin P. Spicer, *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Emma Fattorini, Hitler, *Mussolini and the Vatican: Pope Pius XI and the speech that was never made* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011). For the opposing groups see Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010); John Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism: A Study in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[97] This was not the case of Nazism where the Nazi party diluted the Christian theology according to its ideological goals see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[98] Heinen, *Legiunea*, 302–305.

[99] Iordachi, *Charisma*, 114–117; Constantin Petculescu, *Mişcarea legionară: Mit şi realitate* (Bucharest: Noua Alternativă, 1997), 65.

movement's ideology.[100] To explain the influence of Orthodox doctrine over the ideology, the Legion was understood as "blasphemous,"[101] heretical[102], or as having "a religious structure."[103] The Legion also incorporated "popular Orthodoxy"[104] in its attempt to sacralize its ideological political core and to transform Orthodoxy into a category of racial exclusion of the Jews from the Romanian nation.[105]

The novelty of the current research comes from the fact that the literature does not refer to the theological questions debated by the Romanian fascists and Orthodox clergymen. Iron Guard integrated Orthodox theology into its version of theology, adapting Christian concepts and creating a nationalist Orthodox theology. Going beyond personal/ individual salvation seen as a mark of Liberal individualism, the Legion sought to envisage a beyond for a collective redemption

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[100] Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard": 43; Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, stat și societate în anii '30* (Iași: Polirom, 2007), 204.

[101] Constantin Iordachi, "God Chosen Warriors. Romantic paligenesis, militarism and fascism in modern Romania," in Constantin Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative fascist studies: new perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010), 350.

[102] Iordachi, *Charisma*, 117; Petculescu, *Mișcarea legionară*, 5.

[103] Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel*, 140.

[104] Rebecca Anne Haynes, "The Romanian Legionary Movement. Popular Orthodoxy and the Cult of Death," in Mioara Anton, Florin Anghel, Cosmin Popa (eds.), *Hegemoniile trecutului: Evoluții românești și europene. Profesorul Ioan Chiper la 70 de ani* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), pp. 113–126.

[105] Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of the Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991), 59. Meanwhile, since the defense of my doctoral thesis, a lot has been said in the field of Romanian fascist studies. See Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Der orthodoxe Klerus in Rumänien und die extreme Rechte in der Zwischenkriegszeit," in Aleksandar Jakir and Marko Trogrlć (eds.), *Klerus und Nation in Südosteuropa vom 19. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 187–214. Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Radu Harald Dinu, *Faschismus, Religion und Gewalt in Südosteuropa: Die Legion Erzengel Michael und die Ustaša in historischen Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013); Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain: Histoire de la Garde de fer* (Paris: Perrin, 2014); Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Capitan Codreanu: Aufstieg und Fall des rumänischen Faschistenführers* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2016); Răzvan Ciobanu, *Ipostaze ale ideologiei legionare în România interbelică (1927–1938)* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2020); Constantin Iordachi, Constantin Iordachi, *The Fascist Faith of the Legion 'Archangel Michael' in Romania, 1927–1941: Martyrdom and National Purification* (London: Routledge, 2022) Cristian Manolachi, *Revolverul Arhanghelului: Mișcarea Legionară și mistica asasinatului politic* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2023).

of the Romanian nation. The nation's sins had to be cleansed by the legionary elite's suffering and expiating the nation's transgressions before God. Through a joint effort of its intellectuals and clergy, the movement introduced another sacrament next to the seven acknowledged by the Orthodox Church, valid according to the legionary doctrine, and necessary. Thus, self-sacrifice (*jertfă*)/ martyrdom became the *eighth sacrament* competing at the national level with the other seven sacraments dispensed by the Orthodox Church for every believer to gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Through the sufferings of the legionary elite, the nation's sins were to be redeemed, therefore earning a place for the Romanian nation in the final resurrection of the nations.[106]

Unlike in other fascist movements where elements of Christian theology were integrated, the clergy played no role in the fascist movement's rituals. In the case of the Iron Guard, the clergy performed most of the movement's rituals, including the public display of the martyrdom sacrament. The novelty of the present approach lies in the transition from a quantitative approach regarding the numbers of priests and hierarchs joining and sympathizing with the movement to a more analytical, qualitative research method. I argue that the Iron Guard produced a theology by projecting Orthodox theology from an individual to a national scale. This mutual approximation process between theologians and fascists, between consecrated priests and lay theologians, set a common ground of discussion and a regular source of inspiration for the movement and the Church.

The importance of the institutional aspect and the pragmatic negotiation between the Iron Guard and the Orthodox Church is discussed at length. However, the present undertaking presents the relationship between different layers of the Orthodox Church (such as the low and the high clergy) and various directions in the Legion (a more secular and a more religious group). For every group, the negotiation had its specificities and the appearance of a single Church negotiating with a single/ coherent group of Romanian fascists; while seductive, it is rather reductionist and essentialist. The low clergy understood the Iron Guard as a revival of Christian devotion and a solution to their problems, such as remuneration, the need for new parishes, and a restriction of the State's and the high clergy's

[106] This idea, although presented in historical terms, was present in Catholic Poland. See Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 225.

abuses. The high clergy was comfortable with the rebirth of Christian devotion instilled by the legionaries throughout Romanian society and sought to transform the Iron Guard into a clerical party, a political expression of the Church in Romanian politics, defending the clergy from the dangers of Communism, secularism, and immorality. The educated clergy thought of the movement as a theological expression of the Christian people, as a reaction of the Christian laity against the injustices coming from a secular state and directed towards the Church, and that inferred in the nation's destiny.

The religious group within the movement surrounding Codreanu thought the Church a national asset and that its presence in Romanian society bolstered nationalism and highlighted the appeal of the historical past in comparison with the grim present. The secular group in the Iron Guard considered that Orthodoxy had a role until the formation of the Romanian state and the fulfillment of the national dream, that is, the unification in 1918. From that point onwards, the mission of enlightening the masses belonged to the young generation of Romanian fascists.

4. Sources and Methodology

The analysis of the Iron Guard's ideology would be configured based on legionary books, speeches, letters, and newspaper articles. The collections of *Pământul strămoşesc*, *Axa*, *Iconar*, *Vestitorii*, *Revista mea*, *Garda Bucovinei*, *Calendarul*, *Însemnări sociologice*, *Cuvântul Argeşului*, *Buna Vestire*, *Cuvântul*, and other similar interwar press, would be thoroughly investigated to map the permutations of legionary rhetorics, its main topics of interest, and evolution over the interwar years. These writings have numerous references to the importance of Orthodox spirituality in the Nation's rebirth, the leader's cult, or the creation of the New Man. For the Iron Guard's ideologues, Orthodox spirituality and the village's traditional society joined hands to emphasize the particularities of the Romanian nation. Starting with some of the most important texts from Ion Zelea Codreanu, Ion I. Moța, and other important members of the legionary hierarchy, I will try to emphasize the relationship between Orthodox ideas and fascist ideology.

The response of the Orthodox Church's hierarchs, theologians, and clergy is traced via church newspapers (*Telegraful Român*) and journals (*Revista Teologică*, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, *Mitropolia Moldovei*), biographies, and oral interviews.

Their penetration into the legionary press was also analyzed along with various church regulations, legislative proposals, parliamentary answers to legislative proposals, and reform projects. They make up a corpus of writings that mirrors the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church towards the Romanian fascist movement, the nationalist projects of the state, the church, and the Iron Guard.

The State's archives are meant to supplement the archives of the Church. Detailed reports coming from the Secret Police (*Siguranța Statului* and *Securitate*), the Police, and the Gendarmerie (*Jandarmerie*), but also from the Department for Religious Denominations offer important information regarding how the inner mechanism of the Church functioned, how the members of the Church and the Guard effectively worked together in electoral campaigns or in organizing different fascist event.

To integrate the Romanian case into a larger framework, I use "asymmetrical comparison" (Jürgen Kocka)[107] and compare the Legion's relationship with the Orthodox Church with the case of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany where the relationships between the fascists, the Catholic, and respectively the Protestant Church can shed light on a more general aspect regarding the influence of Christianity over fascism and vice versa. Despite collaboration with the fascists, by establishing this comparison, I look at a pattern in the Church's reaction when confronted with a totalitarian regime. A direct comparison with the Serbian case will also be undertaken. Because of the same approach regarding the role of the secular state in its relationship with the Orthodox Church, the relationship between the Orthodox Church and different Serbian fascist movements[108] will be brought into the discussion to broaden the frame of analysis.

5. The Structure of the Book

The thesis has a chronological structure that will ease understanding of the evolution of the relationship between the Iron Guard and the Orthodox Church.

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[107] Jürgen Kocka, "Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The case of the German *Sonderweg,*" *History and Theory* 38(1999): 40–51.

[108] Maria Falina, "Between 'Clerical Fascism' and Political Orthodoxy: Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Interwar Serbia" in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (2007): 248–253.

The first part will discuss the intellectual context for the relationship and its ideological precursors (Junimism, Orthodoxism, religious nationalism, etc.) that facilitated the interwar intermingling between fascist ideology and the theology of the Church. I argue that in interwar Romania, these intellectual turned ideological trends led to a certain polarization of cultural life under the banner of cultural and religious nationalism, a background present all over Eastern Europe after the end of WWI. In this foggy and diverse intellectual picture, the position of the Church and the change of its political theology under the impact of the State's patronized nationalism will also be considered as an important factor that has made things easier for the Romanian Orthodox Church to adopt a violent, antisemitic, ultra-nationalist discourse.

A different chapter will be dedicated to the Romanian Orthodox Church. This chapter offers a historical overview of the relationship between Orthodoxy and the national state from the mid-nineteenth century to the Second World War. It will discuss the reassessment of the institutional religion after the fall of the Empire and the transformation of the Imperial Orthodoxy into a national church, the constant negotiation of the Church's position in Romanian society with the advent of modernization, and the reasons for the relationship that the Church had with the Iron Guard.

The third chapter will dwell on the beginnings of the Iron Guard's movement and how a certain category of clerics went from being members of a mainstream antisemitic party such as A. C. Cuza's Christian National Defense League to Codreanu's radical solution. A closer look will be given to the issue of the connection between religious and political ritual in terms of propaganda and how the Church has institutionally reacted to the increasing propaganda of the Iron Guard. This chapter also focuses on the Iron Guard's efforts to propagate its ideology through different newspapers such as *Pământul strămoșesc*, *Calendarul,* and *Garda Bucovinei.* It will analyze the reaction of the Orthodox clergy in the first stages of the movement's expansion, the input of the hierarchy on the first legionary propaganda campaigns, and an account of the first clergymen joining the movement.

The book maps the relationship between the Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church after 1934 in 'the working camp' stage. In re-directing the manpower of the movement toward working on different sites belonging to the Church, Codreanu struck a decisive blow in winning the sympathy of the Orthodox

clergy for his movement. The chapter concentrates on establishing and disseminating the Archangel's cult by building churches with him as patron saint and forming a ritual of the movement through the observance of religious ceremonies performed by the young men and women inside the working camps. The chapter will focus on the participation of the clergy and the support of the Orthodox hierarchy for the legionary building project, accepting and promoting the legionary work for the benefit of the Church. At the same time, the condemnation of the assassination of I.G. Duca and subsequently the rejection of the movement's benevolent work in favor of the Church at the State's intervention will also be tracked.

An important part is consecrated to the establishment of a *legionary theology*. I argue that corroborated with the numerous changes in Orthodox doctrine and ritual, the most important contribution to the elaboration of a fascist theology was the sacrament of martyrdom. The leader cult, the cult of the Archangel, the veneration of the national religious tradition, and the devotion towards the Orthodox Church were united in the melting pot of martyrdom for movement and fatherland. The purpose of this theological maneuver was to unify the movement and to produce a secret initiation-type brotherhood for the young followers of the movement, but also to point out the divine nature of the movement in the eyes of the peasant voters.

The Moța-Marin burial (13 February 1937) and its funeral ritual best expressed the link between theology and ideology, faith and propaganda, which was preserved to the movement's very end. A special chapter is devoted to this Moța-Marin moment in the life of the legion. The burial marked a turning point in the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox clergy and the Iron Guard. Even the high clergy started to shift their stance towards the movement in the funeral's aftermath.

The last chapter will be focused on the legionary taking power after 6 September 1941 and subsequently on their relationship with the Orthodox Church during their short government. While the low clergy acted upon their aims of reforming the Church and restricting the authority of the Holy Synod through a project of law intended to reorganize the functioning of the Church, the high clergy chose to reject the project and ally itself with the most important enemy of the Guard, General Ion Antonescu. This period represented the moment when the Iron Guard put into practice the sacrament of martyrdom in an elaborate ritual,

combining both the religious and the legionary funerary ceremonies as experienced during the Moța-Marin burial.

In some of the texts published in other academic outlets, I used certain ideas contained in the chapters or subchapters from the thesis:

Chapter 2:

"The "Jewish Problem" in the Light of the Scriptures: Orthodox Biblical Studies and Antisemitism in Interwar Transylvania," in Eva Kovacs, Raul Cârstocea (eds.), *Modern Antisemitism(s) in the European and Colonial Peripheries from the 1880s to 1945* (New Academic Press, Vienna, 2018), 237–254.

"Periphery as Centre? The Fate of the Transylvanian Church in Romanian Patriarchate," in Carmen Andras, Cornel Sigmirean, eds., *Discourse and Counter-discourse in Cultural and Intellectual History* (Sibiu: Astra Museum, 2014), 378–393.

Chapter 3:

„Rejuvenating Orthodox Activism: The Romanian Orthodox Forum in Interwar Romania," *Studia Universitatis UBB, Seria Theologia Orthodoxa* 62, no. 2 (2017): 21–38.

Chapters 5–6

"Antisemitism in Orthodox Guise: Accommodating Fascist Antisemitism with Newspaper Rhetoric in Interwar Romania," *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetari Socio-Umane Gh. Șincai* 22 (2019): 180–206.

"The Fascist Newsroom: Orthodox 'Ecumenism' in the Interwar Transylvanian Press," Review of Ecumenical Studies 10, no. 2 (2018): 46–88.

"Antisemitic Tropes in the Liturgy of the Saints of the Communist Prisons in Post-Communist Romania, " in Alexandru Ioniță, Stefan Tobler, eds., *Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2024), 231–252.

Chapter 7:

"Orthodox Church's Power and the Iron Guard: The Antisemitic Conflict in the Camp of Romanian Authoritarian Forces, SEPTEMBER 1940–JANUARY1941," *Beregyna*, 26, no. 3 (September 2015): 52–63 (in Russian).