
**BETWEEN POETRY, RELIGION, TOLERANCE AND
ANTI-SEMITISM**

**A RE-EVALUATION OF THE PUBLICISTIC WORK OF
THE ROMANIAN THEOLOGIAN NICHIFOR CRAINIC
FROM ‘GÂNDIREA’**

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Abstract

Using the works published in ‘Gândirea’ journal (directed by the Romanian philosopher Nichifor Crainic for more than 2 decades), but also studies and articles dedicated to him or belonging to the known author, we try to present his publications from the aforementioned journal and evaluate it in a critical way. The work speaks about his poetry from there, his theological, philosophical or philological essays, but also about his political texts, the chronicles or book reviews signed by him. It also tries to emphasize the main points of his theological and philosophical ideas and to stick on aspects like tolerance, nationalism, autochthonism or anti-Semitism from his publications and to identify the main influences from his thought and style, but also the political aspects that can be seen into his works and the way how his religious way of thinking have been used to justify some of his far-right attitudes. At the same time, it tries to present his interior metamorphosis with its main topics and influences. The article also insists on the way how it this metamorphosis influenced his activity as a writer. Our research also tries, to underline the fact that, in some times, where interdisciplinarity was still a notion unknown or not trusted, he was a real user of it within his approaches (where he uses elements from Philosophy or literature to present some very interesting theological ideas) being a real precursor of this method in Romanian science. On the other hand, the article tries to emphasize his contribution in being the first professor of Orthodox mystique in the Romanian space and to present the autochthon mystique, using models from other ones, but also a symbiosis between literature, Theology, Philosophy, arts and history.

Keywords: autochthonism, nationalism, Romanian, movement, Orthodox mystique

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1. Introduction

Important but controversial Romanian personality, Nichifor Crainic has been investigated and presented both during his life and after his death. His theological and poetical work has been investigated in monographies [1, 2], studies and articles [3- 6], literary histories [7], or other. Unfortunately, most of the texts dedicated to him have not emphasized his complex and controversial personality in a holistic way, preferring to focus only on one aspect, like his poetry, his activity as the first professor of mystical theology from the Romanian space [8, 9], or his political activity.

Even the monographies dedicated to him [2], have avoided to present some aspects of his 'dark sides' or to speak about some aspects of his life during the communism. Therefore, we will try, using both his work and information about his life and way of thinking, to present the aspects of tolerance, poetry, Theology and anti-Semitism. Journals like *Ramuri* or *Gândirea* [10], founded and directed by him, where he published during his life, will be our sources (especially the last one). In the same time, we will not neglect the literature dedicated to him, but also the memorial works (like: [11], and other categories of writing). Because some of the readers will have not enough information about him and his work, while others will need some more information or at least a refresh of his biography, we will try to present the main landmarks of his biography before analysing the way how his anti-Semite, literary and theological works from *Gândirea* are reflecting his way of thinking.

2. Nichifor Crainic – bio-bibliographical remarks

Before presenting the way how inside his publications there can be found aspects of religion, tolerance and anti-Semitism, we considered important to present short landmarks about his biography and work. We consider that these information will be useful for the readers, helping them to understand the context where he lived and the influences that determined him to have a certain attitude and an opinion in different situations.

Born in 22th of December 1889 in Bulbucata, Romania, and dead in 1972, the future philosopher called Ion Dobre (who will later become Nichifor Crainic), studied at the Central Seminary from Bucharest between 1904 and 1912, and later at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from the same city between 1912 and 1916 [2, p. 5-13]. Close to Nicolae Iorga, will be sustained by the Romanian historian to become priest, but he was refused by the Primate Metropolitan from Bucharest, Conon Arămescu Donici. In 1920, he enrolled at Faculty of Philosophy. In 1922, he graduated here the studies and comes back in order to become professor at the Central Seminary and then at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Chişinău [12], on the chair of Spirituality found by the Romanian Ministry of Education Iorgu Petrovici in 1927 [13].

Starting from the times when he was still student in the Seminary, Ion Dobre published poems in journals like *Flamuri* or *Ramuri*. Later, during the interwar period, he will become the founder of *Gândirism* literary current whose purpose was to bring into attention the literary creations of the autochthone legacy. In the same year when he has been elected professor in Chişinău, he started to use the pseudonym Nichifor Crainic and to lead *Gândirea* journal, replacing Cezar Petrescu who went to Paris [13]. He will direct the journal until August 1944 and under his coordination, the journal, which had 10 issues published by year, was, together with *Cuvântul* (The word) [14], of Nae Ionescu, the two important publications of the Romanian traditionalism from the interwar period. In the same year, he went into politics, being secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Arts under Vasile Goldiș, for four months.

Starting from then, he had a continuous activity as publicist, being, little by little, more known, appreciated and even translated. In 1940, Ion Petrovici will make an evaluation of his activity at his 50th anniversary in an article from *Gândirea*. He shows: “We can find him continuously in the columns of Transylvanian journals like: *Cosânzeana* from Orăştie, *Revista Politică și literară* (Political and literary journal) from Blaj, *Luceafărul* from Sibiu (journal that he directed during its moving to Bucharest). Also, his name can be also found in *Ramuri* (Branches), *Drum drept* (Streight road), *Flacăra* (The flame) and *Viața Românească* (Romanian life) from Iași. Of course, he also leads for two years the journal *Lamura*, and for 17th years the journal *Gândirea*, where he has launched most of the poets, writers and young essay writers, who are writing in the spirit of traditionalism.” [15, p. 194]

Of course, Nichifor Crainic will emphasize his translations into other languages and the chronicles dedicated to him by Charles Mauras [15], and will be between the initiator of an anniversary number of *Gândirea* dedicated to the philosopher, where important Romanian personalities like the Orthodox Metropolite Nicolae Bălan [16], Lucian Blaga [17], Ștefan Baciu [18], Father Dumitru Stăniloae [19] or Sextil Pușcariu [20] published interesting articles. The same year will be also the one when the Romanian writer will receive the Honoris Causa PhD. from Vienna University [13], and the one when, for a while, he was the director of the Romanian Broadcasting society. At this moment, he will come closer to the Legionary movement, the most influent far-right one from the Romanian space. Later, after the killing of some personalities like Nicolae Iorga, he will take a serious distance from them [2, p. 217]. Also, as Father Ioan Ică shows: “In 1940, he becomes for four months, minister of propaganda in the dictatorial government of general Antonescu, and in this quality, he will abolish all the Jewish press as a part of the fight against the Jew influence in Romanian culture” [13, p. 16].

The next year will be the one who on 22nd of May, will be received in the Romanian Academy, at the proposal of Dumitru Caracostea (the 3rd proposal for him after the one of G. Murnu from 1936, and the one of Ion Petrovici from 1939), on the chair released by Octavian Goga. His receiving discourse will be

an eulogy dedicated to the aforementioned poet, and will receive an answer from Lucian Blaga [2, p. 208; 13].

This will be the moment of the apogee of the Romanian philosopher and theologian. After this year, *Gândirea* will start, little by little, to decrease in its importance and in the end of the war, to lose most of his authors, and because of that, he will lose the authority step by step. During the communist period, he will be imprisoned [2, p. 213-214], and then, he censored even his memorial writings, hoping for rehabilitation. 20th of August 1972 [2, p. 222], we find him alone, old, and somehow forgotten by most of his friends. Still, even during the communist period, there were some authors like Virgil Gheorghiu [21], which in literary works will try to portrait him and to underline some of his qualities, creating a legend.

For the Romanian culture and Theology, but also for the theological and philosophical space from abroad, he will be famous for his works of mystique and spirituality [22, 23], poems [24-26], political and philosophical essays [27, 28], or his memorial works [12]. As professor of Orthodox Mystique in Cernăuți and later of Dogmatics in Bucharest, after the election of Irineu Mihălcescu as Metropolitan of Iassy, he started the domain of Mystique in the Romanian space. He left important books, studies and articles on this topic, linking Spirituality with Philosophy and literature and becoming one of the precursors of the interdisciplinarity, so important for nowadays research. As a poet and director of journal, he was important because he was an exponent for the autochthon direction in literature and culture.

3. Between poetry, religion, tolerance and anti-Semitism - a re-evaluation of publicist work of Romanian theologian Nichifor Crainic from 'Gândirea'

If in the previous rows, we have tried to present the main aspects of the life and activity of Nichifor Crainic, in the next ones we will try to get into attention his publicist work from *Gândirea* journal, that he directed for almost two decades and where he was an important promoter of young writers from interwar period (like the future metropolitan Valeriu Bartolomeu Anania, Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Ion Barbu, Lucian Blaga, Alexandru Busuioceanu, Radu Gyr, Victor Papilian, Ion Pillat, Tudor Vianu, Vasile Voiculescu, and more others [29]). Here, he published more than 70 titles [10, 26, 30-32] consisting in poems, essays, philosophical and theological articles, chronicles of events, but also some texts containing his political opinion related to a contemporary moment that he took part in. Some of them have been published later in other books, others have been investigated until today [14, 33, 34], and others are still waiting for being discovered and valorised.

For sure, his ideas that will be later developed in the lectures of Mystique were stated and developed firstly in this journal. Some aspects of his Eucharistic conception, but also the ones on eschatology [30] are to be found in his poems from there. He speaks for example about the relevance of the Holy Liturgy for

the Orthodox theology, using biblical and patristic arguments and deepening aspects like the cooperation between angels and humans in this process, in a beautiful mystical approach of this topic. Saying that: "The Liturgy officiated in the altar, whose core is Messiah's sacrifice symbolized in the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist, is seen as happening at the same time with the eternal angelic liturgy, rendered, in parallel, in the painting of the great dome" [35, p. 4] and showing that is part of the patristic tradition from the old times up to nowadays.

The strong tension of the man who feels God and wants to get unite to Him it is also a topic of his enquiries, both for poetry but also for the theological essays. But in this case, Crainic not only does he speak about different opinions, but in the poem *Aproape (Near)*, he tries to describe his own feelings to illustrate the sensation of communion with the Lord: "There are moments when I feel you above me / Like a branch in bloom. With the longing of having you, / My heart is a spring fountain, / It escapes from depths of silence, / And casts away the seething bindweed. /.../ You are close to me... If only you obeyed... / But I know: getting to you would be a victory / Which is not mine and not anyone's." [36]

Many other similar aspects of Theology, related with the idea of *epectasis*, spiritual life, the union of the soul with Lord or the love for neighbour, have been published in the investigated publication of Crainic. They are even today, very important for contemporary approaches on these topics and this is the main reason why, most of them have been anthologised in 2010 in a book that brings him into attention and put them together [22]. As we have already mentioned, most of them have been developed in other researches. It must also being said that, during his imprisonment, the Romanian writer wrote or composed and kept inside his memory a lot of interesting poems. Most of them contain some of the old topics reloaded in a different way. One of his most beautiful poems is *The song of Chalice*. It has been published posthumous in one anthology of carceral poetry. It summarizes all his conception about Eucharist in a very plastic way. He says there: "When the reaped harvest was ready / Grandfather and father / Left a sheaf standing / Piously tying it with a chicory; / And the ears were shining like silk in the sun / To render the beard of Christ. / When the bread in the oven resembled the brass / Grandmother and mother / Bashfully taking it out while crossing themselves / Were seemingly carrying fair and glossy relics /... And, behold, the chalice brings Thou to my mouth, / Jesus Christ, sacrificed on the cross, / Feed me, holy mother of God. / Like grain in the ear and juice in cluster / Thou are all in all and all in you, / Thou my people's bread for aye. /.../ Water me, thou, holy God juice. / Like grain in the ear and juice in cluster / Thou are all in all and all in you, / Thou my people's wine for aye. / Rich vineyards and fertile fields, / This earth, Jesus Christ, / Is the heaven where God wanted us. / Watch thyself in the vine and see thyself in the grains / And bleed in the grapes and break thyself in the bread, / Thou, my people's life for aye." [4, p. 53-54; 5, p. 153] Said in poetry, this topic will be also developed in his lectures from University, and in his book on mystique: "Therefore, the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the fire seed of the Orthodox religion. It is the mystery of turning created nature into divine nature. Wine and water transubstantiated into

Messiah's blood, bread transubstantiated into His flesh are the pure nourishment that change created nature into divine nature. The practical and real essence of our religion is this mysterious feast in which Christ, the true flesh and blood, offers Himself as food to the Christians. And whereas the divine blood and flesh retain the wine and bread image, John Damascene, based on Gregory of Nyssa's ideas, explains that this is a concession God makes to human helplessness." [37]

The beauty of his poems made them to have real value and to be searched until today both by readers and critics or historians of Romanian literature. In the same time, is often quoted in theological researches from Romanian space. Its similitudes with Rilke with whose life and poetry he has been almost in love, as it can be seen from the medallion that he offers to the writer in *Gândirea* [38], has transformed him not only in a professor of Christian Mystique, but also in a mystical poet or, better, in an author of mystical poetry.

But, reading these rows, one may be tempted to think that all the works published by Nichifor Crainic in the aforementioned journal are either theological investigations, or poetries with Christian message. The reality is that there are many other texts signed by him, from different thematic spheres. In some of them the author speaks about the relationship between Theology and art [32], in others about the nature, its beauty and its relevance for Christian space [39], or about other topics like the androgynies [40].

Some of them are also political articles. Here, he speaks about topics like the legionary revolution [41], the war and its effects for the Romanian space [42], Jews and Christianity, trying even to justify the superiority of Christianity from Judaism and to use his faith to justify anti-Semitism [27], or even about Hitler and his allies, praising the German leader [43], about Nazi ideology and the way how it contributed to the development of Germany [44], or even about fascism and its role in development of Italian state from his times [45]. Also, polemics with philosophers like Constantin Rădulescu Motru [31, 46], who although he was a nationalist like Crainic and had different visions on the topic, will become part of his publications from *Gândirea* journal.

For example, about the legionary revolution and its relevance to him, the author speaks in one article published at the beginning of October 1940, showing that the event of losing Transylvania is doubled by a positive one, namely the instauration of legionary dictatorship [41]. Praising the aforementioned movement and criticising the traditional political parties and movements, saying that they are culpable for the situation of the country, he will underline then the fact that the arrival of them at the ruling of the country means a very happy moment for the history of the country [41]. In the same time, he will militate for the 'legionarisation' of Romania and will let to understand his support from German space at the end of his enthusiastic article [41]. Most probably this will bring him later the promotion as Minister of Propaganda. Of course, as it has been already mentioned, his ideas in the support of this movement are also linked with Christian heritage and traditions, presented in a misunderstood way.

The Romanian writer will have a similar attitude concerning Italy and fascism. In an article dedicated to the National Day of Italy, trying to link Roman history with the Romanian one, he will also write a very pro-fascist text, presenting the regime from Rome as the founder of the 3rd dynasty of the historical city: “The fascism, by consecrating the day of foundation of Rome and associating it with the labour day, it consecrates the creator fact from which was born not only the threefolded eternal city, but also the whole Italy, and through it, the entire European Civilisation...” [45]

Of course, there can also be found other examples in proving the pro-fascist, Nazi or legionary ideas of him. But it also must be mentioned there the fact that most of them were part of a real movement of the time, composed by intellectuals with far-right orientations. In spite of that, they did not contribute to the decrease of the theological and poetical value of his work, which has also influenced many young people during communist area and after.

4. Conclusions

We can surely say that the thematic of the publishing work of Nichifor Crainic from the aforementioned review is a large one, with interesting approaches on Theology, literature, Philosophy, arts, and politics. Part of an autochthonism, the Romanian writer will have valuable contribution on the understanding of Romanian mystique, offering interdisciplinary approaches which will help the theologians, but also all the other readers, to taste the beauty of the Orthodox spirituality and to feel motivated do deepen their relationship with God, inside the Church, using the Scripture and the theological works. In the same time, he was very implied in the political, cultural and social life of his times, being, in some moments, close to far-right movement from this space, but also with Nazi and German regime, and in some situations will try to find even theological arguments to justify some of his political attitudes.

In some situations, his work can be criticised, like his options too. In others, one must recognise the fact that, there still are aspects emphasized by him that are still debated, but he offered useful tools in their understanding, while, others are truly valuable contributions on some topics. Unfortunately, his sincere feelings are hard to identify, because later, during the communist period, he tried even to censor his own memorial writings, in a hope to be rehabilitated. But despite of all, his works still must be read and investigated, because, while for the Romanian space they can offer bibliography for future investigations and, in the same time, are a pleasant lecture, for the abroad one, it can offer examples of the way how some problems were understood and the forms they took in our space. Moreover, they help them to understand better the entire European cultural, social and political context from the interwar period.

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