

CHRISTINE HALL, 'PANCOSMIC' CHURCH - SPECIFIC ROMÂNESC; ECCLESIOLOGICAL THEMES IN NICHIFOR CRAINIC'S WRITINGS BETWEEN 1922 AND 1944

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This work is an exhaustive study on the ecclesiology of one of the most underrated representatives of European culture in the first half of the 20th century, poet, theologian and Christian thinker Nichifor Crainic, one of the main leading forces of Romanian cultural life in the inter-war period. Being imprisoned under the communist oppressive regime, Crainic had no further opportunity to publicly express his views after 1944 and his entire work was placed under index. The attempt to study his extremely important legacy after 1989 finds an important contribution in Mrs. Hall's work, as Crainic was a remarkable thinker not only in the Romanian context, but also in the field of ideas at European level.

The *Preamble* is a short description of Nichifor Crainic's life, focusing on his theological views and on the fact that he was the one who introduced ascetics and mystics as an object of study in Romanian universities. The whole purpose of the thesis is presented and developed in the first chapter. Crainic was a poet, theologian and one of the most important nationalist ideologists of his times. Christine Hall stresses the fact that his entire activity, no matter how diverse its fields, had the pancosmic Church in its center, as its foundation, very connected to the so-called 'specific românesc'. Thus, Crainic's nationalism is different from other types of resembling thinking, by the fact that all national ideal is oriented towards a higher goal, the realization of life in Christ. On one hand, mystical theology is regarded both as a fundament and fulfilling of all other types of dogmatic and morals, on the other hand, a view that closely connects history and faith sees Orthodoxy as a main feature of Romanian identity.

„Zile albe, zile negre” and „Pribeag în țara mea”, the two parts of Nichifor Crainic's autobiography, are main sources for the present study. Although some political disidents who shared even the cell with the author claim that there are short fragments written under pressure from the communist authority and not entirely true, they provide good information to study the spiritual development of the thinker. Important characters of the inter-war period are studied here. Nicolae Iorga, the most important Romanian historian, and Ioan (later Irineu, as a monastic) Mihălcescu, teacher of apologetics, found dead in unelucidated circumstances, said by some to have masonic influence involved, are considered the most important early influences on Crainic.

While the thesis provides accurate information and a serious study, objections can be raised mainly in connection to Chapter IV, *Romania and Europe. The Legacy of the Great War*. The author's statement about *'the churches' realization that closer ties between them were required, if they were to make any further impact on the world scene'* is her personal point of view which has nothing to do with the thinking of Crainic. The growth of the Orthodoxy in the West is by no means an opportunity for the eccumenical movement, as great Orthodox thinkers – Crainic among them, as the author herself mentions – reject the so-called eccumenist approach. Crainic speaks of Orthodox universalism and opposes the „openness” of Miron Cristea (first Romanian patriarch, a highly controversial character).

With Chapter V we are back on track, as the author introduces us to Crainic's journal, „Gândirea”, the organ of traditionalist thinking, opposed to synchronism. Crainic does not talk about reclusion. The way he sees things, one must move towards universality by cultivating his own national ethos. Christine Hall accurately describes the huge influence the journal had on Romanian culture. Poet and mathematician Ion Barbu, poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, philosopher Vasile Băncilă, novelists Mateiu Caragiale, Gib Mihăiescu, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Ionel Teodoreanu, poets Radu Gyr, Păstorel Teodoreanu, Vasile Voiculescu or theologians Dumitru Stăniloae and Sandu Tudor all had their beginnings under the sign of „Gândirea”.

In the next chapter, Crainic's impact on theology is described, as he managed to bring back religion in the cultural life of the country. The rural, political and historical context of Crainic's ecclesiological thought is based on two of his early articles, “Jesus in My Country” and “Politics and Orthodoxy”. In Crainic's period the institutional Church was going through a tough period, losing its influence due to the anti-clericalism imported by young intellectuals educated abroad. Crainic shows that it had no fundament in Orthodoxy, since the latter never experienced Inquisition, abuse of political power or a rift between belief and science. On the other hand, and in this regard Crainic's writings have a strong echo even on the situation nowadays, the hierarchy tended to make the Church in the image and likeness of the politics. All these were interconnected with the attitude of the two main political parties. In opposition, Crainic describes his view on nationalism in a way that absolves him from all comparisons with European extreme right: *'...the national ideal was not and could not have been a permanent ideal. The permanent ideal of a nation is to surpass itself, to give itself to others, by means of everything good and divinely inspired it possesses, by its creative spirit.'*

In an appropriate theological language, proving a good theoretical knowledge of Orthodoxy, Christine Hall describes the ideal of the pancosmic Church as a fundament for Crainic's thinking. At its center we see *theosis* or deification, as the highest degree of communion between God and man, including within it the entire cosmos. Its cornerstone is the Incarnation, as the Fathers of the Church often described it: God became man so that man could

become god by grace. The Incarnation creates a new mode of existence, the theandric mode, divine and human, materialized in the Person of Christ and to be lived and experienced by every believer. The deep sense of the expression "image and likeness" is also analyzed. Man was created in the image of God, but he is called to reach likeness by his own free will and efforts, always sustained by divine grace. Based on the hierarchies studied by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Crainic shows that, through man, all universe participates in the Church of Christ, Who is both the Creator and the Savior, the Recreator of the universe fallen through sin. Everything is moved within a hierarchy of love, and theosis becomes the supreme goal of human life, since the purpose of creation was a loving communion between God and man including the whole creation, a purpose one can attain through the Incarnation that brought God into humanity in the most intimate way and that restored the human fallen nature. The Incarnation sets the path to Resurrection and the communion is realized by the uncreated grace, energies of God, divine but different from His very essence. The sacramental and the solitary are two ways of Christian mystics, always deeply interconnected.

After this theological analysis, the author moves forth to the description of the 'specific românesc'. Culture, in Crainic's view, has no meaning in itself. It irradiates from faith. The import of unfit Western cultural models in Romania is a consequence of the confusion between civilization and culture. Civilization is the technique of material existence, uniform, while culture is the technique of spiritual existence, different, specific from one group to another. The civilization without culture has a technique without soul as a result, best illustrated by weapons of mass destruction. Culture, Crainic says, survived through religion. The proof of it is that the Byzantine culture still exists today, long after the fall of the Empire, because it is preserved through Orthodoxy, while Egyptian culture was extinct after the disappearance of the Egyptian religion. The cult of the Church, music, painting and so on is also a meeting of religion in culture. Until 1600, almost the entirety of European culture was the work of monastics. Therefore, understanding Romanian - and European - culture is impossible without a study of its Christian origins.

The last chapter analyses the connection between ecclesiology and nationalism in Crainic's thought, based on his "Programme for the Ethnocratic State". It is a political view based on the idea of a religious state, proportionality with minorities in professions, corporatism, monarchy and national culture. Many things can be discussed about the details. But the main point the author underlines is that Crainic sees the nation as a part of the universal Church. The role of the state is to cultivate the values and specificities of the nation, leading it to the integration in the eternal symphony of faith, the fulfillment of human-divine life in Christ.

Besides the necessary criticism mentioned above, Christine Hall's work is welcome in today's European cultural context, as it points out the views of an

important but partly forgotten thinker and the ideals of a different belief than today's mainstream. Christine Hall sheds a light on Nichifor Crainic, on Orthodoxy, on Romania and on old European tradition at the same time. Where some things are incomplete, this work will encourage further readings and research. Therefore we think of it as articulated, documented and well written and would even recommend it to be translated into Romanian, as an impulse for Crainic's co-nationals to discover a great page of their history and thinking and, why not, some paths for the future of education and life.