

Romania and Her Jews: Wartime Anti-Semitism within the Romanian Orthodox Church

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Romania was the only European nation, outside of Nazi Germany, to experience a nationally independent Holocaust. 280,000-380,000 Romanian Jews perished, in horrific conditions, over the course of Ion Antonescu's dictatorship (September 6, 1940-August 23, 1944).¹ Starting with the 1941 pogroms in Moldova, Bukovina, and Bessarabia, the Romanian Holocaust culminated in mass deportations of Jews to formerly Ukrainian Transnistria, from 1941-1942, where they met cold, hunger, and death.² During this dark part of Romanian history, the Romanian Orthodox Church and its clergy both legitimated and actively executed these policies of ethnic cleansing. While individual studies have dealt with the origins of Romanian Orthodox anti-Semitism³ and, to a lesser extent, the role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Holocaust,⁴ there is less scholarship⁵ focused on the connection between interwar religious anti-Semitism and the Romanian Orthodox Church's actions during the Holocaust. Thus, this paper will assess the Church's anti-Semitism between World War I and World War II, then trace the manifestations of anti-Semitic doctrine in support for state violence towards Jews, as seen in Church press and clerical action. When evaluated in the context of its interwar activity, the Romanian Orthodox Church's legitimation of state anti-Semitic sentiment during the Holocaust was not an opportunist political decision, but rather a natural extension of ethnonationalist church doctrine.

In the 1930s and 40s, Romanian Orthodox leaders were seeking to return to the positions they had enjoyed before modern Romania was created in 1918.⁶ This effort bore fruit during the dictatorships of King Carol II and Ion Antonescu; under Antonescu, the Romanian Orthodox Church was at the epicenter of political influence.⁷ The Church enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with the state. While the Church provided religious legitimation for state policy, the state enforced participation in churches and

¹ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006): 1; "The Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania," *Jewish Virtual Library*, 2004, 204.

² Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2017): 30.

³ Paul Shapiro, Mihai Stelian Rusu, Jordan Meale, Mirel Bănică, Lucian Leuştean, Roland Clark, Rebecca Haynes, Leon Volovici, Jean Ancel, Carol Iancu, Bela Vago, Zigu Ornea, Boris Buzila, Radu Ioanid, Dumitru Velenchiu, Ionuț Biliuță, and William Oldson have analyzed this. Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 12.

⁴ Ion Popa and Jean Ancel.

⁵ Ionuț Biliuță's article, "'Christianizing' Transnistria: Romanian Orthodox Clergy as Beneficiaries, Perpetrators, and Rescuers during the Holocaust," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* vol. 34, no. 1 (Spring 2020), is an example of such scholarship.

⁶ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 25-6.

⁷ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 26, 66.

maintained Romanian Orthodox religious primacy.⁸ This was presented as a relationship standing since time immemorial; the Church “had always been a part of the Romanian establishment, unifying the people and patriotically serving the ruling power.”⁹ In the Romanian context, the Church does not simply perform a religious function. Using Ion Popa’s definition, it is “an institution: a part of civil society, a political player, and a moral authority.”¹⁰

Aside from a close political relationship with the state, the Romanian Orthodox Church also defined what it meant to be Romanian, which lent force to its nationalistic rhetoric. This monopoly on national identity was codified in the Decree-Law Regarding the Juridicial Status of the Jews, which came into effect on August 9, 1940.¹¹ This law had Romanian, not Nazi, origin; it was put forth before Antonescu’s alliance with Germany.¹² The law marked Jews by their religion and ethnicity, while Romanians, in contrast, had “Romanian blood.”¹³ To be Romanian was to have Romanian blood in one’s veins and Christianity in one’s spirit.¹⁴ Legislators sought to cleanse Romania of “Jewish blood,” tainted by stereotypes of negative genetics that drew, partially, from Romanian Orthodoxy.¹⁵ An instance of the convergence of Orthodoxy and genetic pseudoscience is seen in military commander Colonel Dumitru Tudose’s boasting of having “purged the city [Kishinev] of Jews,” and given it “a Romanian, specifically Christian face.”¹⁶ As executors of Romanian ethnic cleansing, Tudose and his fellow soldiers carried out the violent enforcement of ethnically defined citizenship policy that adopted a Christian motivation. From the 1940 Decree-Law, and its implementation, it is visible that the Romanian Orthodox Church not only held a special relationship to the political function of the state, but also a claim to national identity. It is important to adopt this context when evaluating the impact of the Church’s anti-Semitic rhetoric and clergy.

The Church and Interwar Fascist Anti-Semitism

Clerical participation in the anti-Semitic intellectual movement between World War I and World War II underpinned the Orthodox rhetoric of violence and anti-Jewish actions of the Holocaust. Every right-wing anti-Semitic political party or movement during this period claimed Orthodoxy as a central tenet.¹⁷ This

⁸ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 26.

⁹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns, Volume 1*, (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2003): 474.

¹⁰ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 65.

¹¹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 435.

¹² Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 435.

¹³ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 435.

¹⁴ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 435.

¹⁵ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 435.

¹⁶ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 435.

¹⁷ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 26.

espousal was reciprocated by clerical support, at the highest levels, for extremists.¹⁸ The most influential of these movements, the Iron Guard,¹⁹ also known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, combined “spiritual renewal, immersion in the mystical, violent battle against Satan (i.e., the Jews), Romanian Orthodox faith,” anointed leadership, and the overthrow of a “Judaized” establishment into a doctrine with mass appeal among young Romanians.²⁰ This message of ethnonationalist purity attracted illiterate local Orthodox clergy, who mirrored the “mystical religiosity” and “peasantist populism” the Iron Guard espoused.²¹ Clerical attraction to these ideas was manifested in tangible demonstrations of support. For example, priests blessed the banners of movements such as the Iron Guard in churches, and accepted free services Legionaries provided.²² In 1937, out of 103 total Legionary candidates for public office, 33 were priests.²³ It is estimated that hundreds of priests were card-carrying members of the Iron Guard.²⁴ This tangible support was buttressed by the local clergy’s view of the Iron Guard as a motivator of “religious rediscovery.”²⁵

Local involvement with fascist movements was curtailed by the Church hierarchy, which tried to avoid political turmoil by removing political activity from churches.²⁶ However, due to local priests’ agency to act as they wished, Patriarch²⁷ Miron Cristea’s attempt to forbid clerical political involvement did not take immediate effect.²⁸ Beyond ideological support, some interwar priests independently formed fascist plans and messages. In 1938, Father Alexandru Răzmeriță created a plan to rid urban spaces of Jews, forcibly relocating them to labor camps in rural areas, where escape would be punishable by death.²⁹ The priest Ilie Imbrescu, in his book, *The Church and the Legionary Movement*, wrote that “a true priest will therefore be a legionnaire by the nature of things.”³⁰ Such a statement carried special potency due to its ability to encourage priests’ Iron Guard membership, not merely as an act of ideological purity, but as a prerequisite to priesthood. These instances of priests’ individual engagement with Legionarism and anti-Semitism reflect a fascination with ethnic hatred and fascism among local clergy that promised substantive effects outside of simple ideological affinity.

¹⁸ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 26.

¹⁹ Paul Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church,” In *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, ed. Kevin P. Spicer (Indiana University Press, 2007): 136.

²⁰ “The Report,” 39.

²¹ Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection,” 142.

²² Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection,” 147-8.

²³ Georgetta Pana, “Religious Anti-Semitism in Romanian Fascist Propaganda,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 26, no. 2 (2006): 4.

²⁴ Pana, “Religious Anti-Semitism,” 4.

²⁵ Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection,” 148.

²⁶ Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection,” 148.

²⁷ The head of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

²⁸ Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection,” 148.

²⁹ “The Report,” 42.

³⁰ Pana, “Religious Anti-Semitism,” 4.

As the most trusted institution in the Romanian countryside, where eighty percent of Romania's population resided, local Church espousal of anti-Semitism carried tremendous weight, despite hierarchical restrictions on clerical politicisation.³¹ Therefore, aside from the beliefs of its own clergy, the locally circulated image of Church support for fascistic anti-Semitism continued to influence the private prejudices of its constituency.

Orthodox Church Press Immediately Before and During the Holocaust

Associations between fascistic movements and the Orthodox clergy were formed into a cohesive doctrine of anti-Semitism during the National Legionary State period. On September 6, 1940, after forcing Carol II's abdication, Ion Antonescu received unlimited authority as "Leader of the Romanian State" from the subsequent king, King Michael.³² In order to maintain a political coalition, in the face of relatively large support for the Iron Guard, King Michael proclaimed Romania a National Legionary State; Antonescu was to be its leader.³³ The radical nature of the new state's leadership quickly became clear. The Iron Guard was given positions in government that enforced its claim to political legitimacy; five ministries were headed by Legionaries.³⁴ While this state did not last, due to the conflicting goals of Antonescu's inclination toward order and the Iron Guard's tendency towards ambition, disintegration, and violence, the Legionary State period (September 14, 1940-January 27, 1941)³⁵ served as a consolidation of anti-Semitic policy in Romania.³⁶ This is reflected in contemporaneous Orthodox rhetoric.

Church press from the immediate pre-war period is a useful vehicle to assess Orthodox policy and its impact due to the Church's role as a moral authority. It is important to examine the public rhetoric of the Church in order to determine the nature of its influence. While the Church officially remained mum about the political developments of the Legionary State period, its publications contained language that supported state ethnic ideology, refining Church discourse in advance of World War II.³⁷ One potent example of such language is found in the issue of *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (BOR), the most authoritative publication of the Romanian Orthodox Church, published on September 7, 1940.³⁸ Patriarch Nicolae Munteanu, in a pastoral letter, printed in the issue, called for priests to "love" their rulers, and to practice "devotion, good example, enforcing the order," and "discipline and sacrifice of any personal

³¹ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 42.

³² Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 49, 53.

³³ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 57.

³⁴ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 57.

³⁵ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 69.

³⁶ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 58-9.

³⁷ Nicolae Drăgușin, "War, Legionarism and Jewry in the Official Press of Romanian Orthodox Church during the National Legionary State (1940-1941)," In *Holocaust. Studii și cercetări* 11 (2018): 312.

³⁸ Nicolae Drăgușin, "War, Legionarism and Jewry," 321, 324.

interest for the benefit of common good.”³⁹ This duty derives from the idea, originating in the Epistle to the Romans, that obedience to the state “comes from God’s will.”⁴⁰ The duty of obedience to the ruler is part of Byzantine tradition.⁴¹ However, Patriarch Munteanu suggests a shift in the closeness of the Church’s relationship with state leadership. Where the Orthodox priests had traditionally been called to maintain the state’s stability, the Patriarch’s letter dictated an unprecedented emotional bond between the Church and the state.

This mandate of love for state leaders, from the top of the Orthodox hierarchy, was concurrent with the removal of rights for Romania’s Jewish population. Between September 6 and October 30, 1940, Ion Antonescu nationalized all Jewish property.⁴² Daily life became much more difficult for Jews; local authorities randomly arrested them, and had the power to institutionalize regionally applicable discrimination.⁴³ Professional unions and associations, ranging from attorneys’ associations to organisations of engineers, expelled Jews from their ranks.⁴⁴ As the legal status of the Romanian Jewish population was exponentially deteriorating under Ion Antonescu’s rule, the call for the Orthodox constituency to love their rulers is stark. Patriarch Nicodim, functioning as the top of the Church hierarchy, asked believers to sacrifice personal interest in the name of a state that was simultaneously consolidating its anti-Semitic policies. The implications of these parallel events are twofold. First, by altering its relationship with the ruler to be one of increased closeness, the Church supported the state in concept, but not in policy, during the National Legionary State period. Even while remaining silent about the political events and figures of the Legionary State, the Church was able to facilitate the ideological backing of state anti-Semitism.⁴⁵ This demonstrates that Church influence was not limited to support for individual policies. Second, by calling for congregations and the clergy to love a leader who was simultaneously institutionalizing anti-Semitism, the Church legitimated these policies, showing that anti-Semitic doctrine had a place in the greater Orthodox hierarchy, and not merely in local churches. While the duty of obedience implies a degree of Church political responsibility, the duty of love represents a shift in that responsibility to one of moral agreement and coordination with state doctrine.

After Antonescu’s creation of a military dictatorship on January 27, 1941,⁴⁶ the Church operated in lockstep with Antonescu’s plan to exterminate the Romanian Jewish population.⁴⁷ This political support is

³⁹ Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 324.

⁴⁰ Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 324.

⁴¹ Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 325.

⁴² Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 323.

⁴³ Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 323.

⁴⁴ Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 323.

⁴⁵ Nicolae Drăgușin, “War, Legionarism and Jewry,” 312.

⁴⁶ Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 69.

⁴⁷ Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection,” 158.

well-documented in Church publications. In a September 5, 1941 letter, Antonescu called World War II “a war not against the Slavs but the Jews,” where “the Jew is Satan,” and the consequence of defeat would be Romanian slavery.⁴⁸ The Church echoed this view, and gave it legitimacy by construing the war as a “holy war” against Judeo-Bolshevism.⁴⁹ In his encyclical at the start of the war, published in the *BOR*, Patriarch Nicodim writes that “our leader was right when he called this war a holy one,” pinning Romanian motivations as “the realisation of our [the Romanian] national cause” and “the destruction of the apocalyptic dragon of bolshevism.”⁵⁰ This message reflected the Church’s transition to a doctrine of showing “love” for Romania’s ruler.

The Church did not merely deride Bolshevism in wartime; the Judeo-Bolshevik connection Antonescu used to justify a war against the Jews had ideological origins in Church doctrine. In 1938, in the *Apostle*, an official journal of the Church, the Jews were blamed for the atrocities of Stalin’s totalitarian rule.⁵¹ The journal illogically blamed rampant “atheist destruction” occurring in Russia under the Soviets on Jews.⁵² Therefore, Antonescu’s legitimation of war as a battle between Christianity and Satanic Judaism did not draw solely from his own doctrine. It is clear that the Church’s idea of a Judeo-Bolshevik enemy existed prior to the war, and found opportune political realisation in Antonescu’s war. Thus, the relationship between Church press and Antonescu’s policy was not merely one of wartime approval for ethnic cleansing, but rather a manifestation of existent Church anti-Semitism.

Hatred of the Jews was also espoused in the pages of regional Church journals that did not submit to the authority of the BOR. At the end of 1941, *Cuvântul Preotesc*, or *The Priestly Word*, published in Bukovina, contained an article called “Against Simony,” which lambasted the phenomenon of bribes in exchange for Orthodox baptisms.⁵³ The author did not take issue with the priests’ acceptance of bribes, instead criticizing Jews’ ability to escape death through baptism.⁵⁴ Converted Jews were “dogs” being given “what is sacred,” “pigs” granted the “pearls” of Christianity.⁵⁵ This hatred-ridden language was not an anomaly; such articles condemning Jews, and defending violence against them, were published in Bessarabia, Transnistria, and other regions, especially those with high Jewish populations.⁵⁶ The prevalence of anti-Semitic imagery and conspiracy theorism across the Orthodox clergy demonstrates that Holocaust anti-Semitism was espoused at all levels of the Church. Beyond their ecclesiastical importance,

⁴⁸ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 469-70.

⁴⁹ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 43.

⁵⁰ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 43.

⁵¹ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 43.

⁵² Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 43.

⁵³ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 48.

⁵⁴ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 48.

⁵⁵ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 48.

⁵⁶ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 47.

authors in the Church press functioned as “conscience polluters, destroying the people’s sense of moral duty to save the victim.”⁵⁷ In light of the inseparable relationship between the Romanian state, nationalism, and Orthodoxy, anti-Semitism in Church journals legitimated anti-Jewish hatred and provided support for the state’s “holy war” against perceived enemies of Christianity.

Clerical Action and Inaction in the Transnistrian Case

There was no direct imperative of violence against Jews from the Orthodox hierarchy; however, clergymen both lived alongside and individually committed violent anti-Semitic crime, demonstrating that the catastrophic effects of interwar doctrination reached beyond rhetoric.⁵⁸ This is perhaps best seen in the Transnistrian case, a “kingdom of death” where Orthodox clergymen were not only bystanders in the systematic murder of Jews, but also killed and robbed Jews, and raped Jewish women.⁵⁹ On August 15, 1941, during the German-aided conquest of Ukrainian Transnistria, Archimandrite Iuliu Scriban and a group of priests established the Orthodox Mission for Transnistria.⁶⁰ Scriban’s goal was to prompt a revival of Christianity in the region; he wrote that the Bolsheviks had attempted to “erase the faith from [the hearts of] the people,” but “the Christian nature of the Russian people” remained.⁶¹ Hundreds of clergymen committed to a Christian revival, many prompted by fascist ideas of renewal, arrived in Transnistria over the course of two and a half years.⁶²

While these priests’ goal was, ostensibly, to re-Christianize the population, many were simultaneous bystanders to, and perpetrators of, anti-Semitic violence. On the day ground was broken for an Orthodox Cathedral in Odessa (November 7, 1941),⁶³ a celebratory event for the Church, “thousands of Jews were shot and hanged in the streets of Odessa, and some 30,000 were making their way on foot to Bogdanovka.”⁶⁴ Professor Georghe Alexianu, the civilian governor of Transnistria, exalted the new cathedral as “a monument to Romanian glory and bravery in Transnistria,” marking the potency of Christianity in the region.⁶⁵ Simultaneously, the 30,000 Jews were to meet, in the words of Meir Feingold, who arrived in the Bogdanovka camp in mid-November, a place where “people were lying on top of one another, inside one another, in pigsties,” where “hundreds of Jews died every day,” and where “[the

⁵⁷ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 66.

⁵⁸ Ionut Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria: Romanian Orthodox Clergy as Beneficiaries, Perpetrators, and Rescuers during the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 34, no. 1 (2020): 19.

⁵⁹ Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria,” 27-8. Ancel refers to the “kingdom of death” on page 502.

⁶⁰ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 473.

⁶¹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 473.

⁶² Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 475.

⁶³ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 483.

⁶⁴ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 483.

⁶⁵ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 483.

authorities] gave no food.”⁶⁶ According to a November 13 count, “11,000 Jews were housed in pigsties that could not hold 7000 pigs.”⁶⁷ While Orthodox officials, and, by extension, the local government,⁶⁸ were celebrating Christian renewal in Transnistria, 30,000 Jews were marching past them to die, of disease, dirty water, and starvation, while waiting for a coveted place in a pigsty.

Jean Ancel has described the Church’s bystander role, seen in its simultaneous “Christian” behavior and proselytisation, alongside the systematic murder of Jews, as “almost schizophrenic.”⁶⁹ Ionut Biliuta recently advanced this characterisation by chronicling the extent of individual clerical violence in Transnistria, demonstrating the entanglement of the Romanian Orthodox Church with anti-Semitic violence, despite an ostensibly benign goal of re-Christianisation.⁷⁰ Figures such as Dumitru Pandrea, who was a lieutenant in the field gendarmerie, awaiting priesthood after one year in military service, robbed Jews in ghettos and ordered many executions.⁷¹ As a graduate of Sibiu Theological Academy and future priest, Pandrea was a clerical figure, who exerted a military role, demonstrating that Church indoctrination had physical effects for Jews. In a similar vein, married priests committed acts of sexual violence against Jewish women, in a phenomenon called “sex for survival.”⁷² Partially due to a state policy against married priests bringing their families to the Mission in Transnistria, these priests sexually assaulted wives and daughters of forced laborers and took Jewish concubines.⁷³ Often, these women sought to protect their families from further violence and hard labor, or to acquire necessary items.⁷⁴ While there were attempts within the mainstream Church hierarchy to curtail immoral behavior among the clergy, Church authorities in Transnistria feigned ignorance.⁷⁵ Mortal and sexually violent clerical crimes exemplified an indifference towards Jewish humanity, which infected the very missionaries carrying out “Christian” values and renewal in Transnistria. The inhumane brutality of the crimes clergymen committed in Transnistria, juxtaposed against a Christian mission, are representative of an anti-Semitic Christian doctrine with firm roots in the interwar period.

In Conclusion

⁶⁶Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 115.

⁶⁷ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 108.

⁶⁸ Jean Ancel argues that the Mission in Transnistria was under the control of the Romanian administration, and thus functioned as a subsection of state power. Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1943*, 481.

⁶⁹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria*, 483.

⁷⁰ Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria.

⁷¹ Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria, 27.

⁷² Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria, 30.

⁷³ Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria, 30.

⁷⁴ Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria, 30.

⁷⁵ Biliuta, “‘Christianizing’ Transnistria, 31.

Church rhetoric against Jews did not cease after Antonescu halted deportations in 1942.⁷⁶ In 1943, the journal *Christian Transnistria* published an article calling for Romanians to “drive out Satan from the Romanian realm,” to “do the work of Our Redeemer, where the Satan and the Yids have destroyed.”⁷⁷ The publication of harshly anti-Semitic rhetoric in a notorious killing ground, after official state policy of deportation was over, demonstrates that Orthodox anti-Semitism had transformed into an independent doctrine informed under, but not delimited by, the political circumstance of its involvement in Antonescu’s regime. This extended understanding of Orthodox anti-Semitism, as a project with beginnings before the Holocaust, and an uncertain end, is crucial to evaluating the role of the Church in legitimating ethnonationalist hatred. Clerical hatred of Romanian Jews did not live and die with political expediency. Orthodox intellectual anti-Semitism, represented in characterisations of Jews as “pigs” in official Church press, exceeded the mere sanctioning of state policies. Just as the Romanian Orthodox clergy was enamored with anti-Semitism prior to the Holocaust, this hatred remained after state-enforced genocide ended. Romanian Orthodox clergy saw an ideal political partner in Antonescu; however, Church targeting of Jews during World War II did not stem from his policies, but rather from an established anti-Semitic tradition.

The Romanian Orthodox Church did not function monolithically. Individual actions taken by benevolent priests to decrease the suffering of Jews, in their immediate circles, must be commended in Romanian public memory of the Holocaust. For example, the metropolitan of Bukovina, Tit Simedrea, intervened to halt deportations in 1941.⁷⁸ However, such rescue efforts did not form a substantial part of church policy or attitudes towards Jews, and appear to be isolated incidents.⁷⁹ Thus, it is clear that, in word and in deed, the Romanian Orthodox clergy transformed interwar religious anti-Semitism into political and violent action during World War II, lending popular support and legitimacy to a genocide of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

The legitimisation of Antonescu’s regime in official Church press marked a period of anti-Semitic rhetoric, publicly espoused in Church press and privately carried out by clergymen, that lent religious support to a political policy of eradication. From a position of unparalleled political power and ecclesiastical primacy, the Romanian Orthodox establishment furthered a program of ethnic cleansing that truncated the existence of a generation of Romanian Jews.

⁷⁶ Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 205.

⁷⁷ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 49.

⁷⁸ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 58.

⁷⁹ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, 60.

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