

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND LEGIONARY MOVEMENT**Claudiu Cotan, Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Ovidius" University of Constanța**

Abstract: The Orthodox clergy felt they had something to say in the Romanian society of Great Romania who was passing through a period of social and political organisation. The Romanian political class was aware of the role that the Orthodox Church, which had the largest number of faithful, could have in the process of cohesion of the Romanian provinces, each of them with a specific historical past and different traditions compared to the Old Romania. The Orthodox Church was called to face the challenges of the modern society that was being built into a new state, having been seen as the only force able to take over the role of spiritual unifier of the new Romanian society. The Romanian intelligentsia of the inter war period started to see the Church not only from the point of view of the nationalism, but also to discover the sacred values of Christianity, passing from the discourse on the role of religion in society to its experience in personal plan. An intelligentsia is being born who started cultivating the values of Christianity. The inter war period constituted a true mirage of the political manifestation for the Orthodox clergy, some of the priests having been captivated by the political discourse of the legionary Movement.

The collaboration between the Legionary Movement and clergy cannot be denied, even if this collaboration did not affect the Orthodox hierarchy. A series of remarkable priests have become legionary members, having seen Corneliu Zelea Codreanu as a charismatic leader able to unite the society in a tremendous effort to "change the face of Romania". The mixture between political movement and the Christian doctrine becomes attractive for the Romanian youth willing of great achievements. Thus, the old politics of the parties involved in sterile disputes seemed outdated. The Legionary Movement provided a new inspiration to the Romanian society, a hope for the young people who wished to live in a modern country in a rather near future. The new conception appears that the participation of the priests in the political life could bring about its purification, a deification of the society in its entirety. But there were quite a number of voices saying that the priests should not involve in politics. On the other hand, a series of clergy who participated in the political life pursued rather personal interests. The political options of the priests were also diverse, as there were a good number of priests who sympathised with the historical parties. The priests were co-opted into the Legionary Movement not so much due to a political programme as especially to the political language used full of religious terms and respect for faith.

In his political fight against the legionary Movement, King Charles II co-opted the Orthodox Church on his side. The setting up of the royal dictatorship in February 1938 brings about a major change in the attitude of the king towards the Orthodox Church, proposing her to play a more important role in the Romanian society. The king considered himself as a restorer of the symphony between State and the Church. The Church, in her turn, was near the King in the anti-legionary fight. The King needed the Church for his governing, as she was the only national institution not affected by the political trends that were tormenting a young society who was trying to reach social and institutional equilibrium. The Orthodox Church, in her turn, felt related to the King, the symbol of her own guarantees.

Keywords: religious phenomenon, Orthodox priests, legionary ideology, Patriarch, king

The political unity of all Romanians achieved after the World War I was done with the contribution of the Orthodox clergy too who started strengthening its statutes in the Romanian society¹. The Orthodox clergy had a major contribution to the sustenance of the Romanian society during the war. Although a part of the clergy, especially the hierarchs remained in the

¹ Claudiu Cotan, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în timpul Primului Război Mondial*, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 241-244.

occupied Bucharest, stained the prestige of the priests on the front or in hospitals, the Romanian priesthood enjoyed special respect. War submitted the Romanian society to trials never met before. Although from a moral point of view war is something bad, the clergy was called to take part in it. The Orthodox priests are aware of the fact that they can be elements of great influence in the communities they spiritually led. This is why many of them got involved in the politics of various political parties or were fascinated by the legionary ideology. The Orthodox Church had to consolidate her own church unity, to involve in the social assistance, to uniform the theological education which she was called to watch over and keep in control the spiritual manifestations like the one in Maglavit or the "Lord's Army".

The setting up of the patriarchate institution had a major contribution to the growth of the prestige of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The new church organization was seriously influenced by the Transylvanian model requiring the involvement of the Orthodox laics in the life of the Church². The Orthodox clergy needed to say something in the Romanian society much different from the one before the war. In fact, having been in a period of political and social organization the Romanian state was trying to get the help of the Church to solve the cohesion among the former Romanian provinces, each of them with its specific history and tradition. The Constitution of 1923 tried to achieve a symbiosis of these provinces and a unity of the society, a major challenge for the young state.

As for the regime of the cults, the Constitution of 1923 listed democratic principles as the freedom of conscience, and freedom of the religious cults recognized, mentioning that the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches were Romanian. Moreover, having been the religion of the majority of the Romanians the Romanian Orthodox Church was declared as Church prevailing in the Romanian State, while the Greek Catholic one had priority among the other religious cults. The Constitution also mentioned that the Orthodox Church had a unitary organization all over the Romanian Kingdom, with the participation of all her constitutive elements, clergy and laics. The organization of the Orthodox Church and the relationship between State and Church were established through the Bill of 6 May 1925. The State was called to observe freedom of its citizens' conscience.

A very important event in the religious life of Romania was the Concordat with Vatican on 10 May 1927, approved by the Romanian Parliament on 23 May 1929³. This political initiative was seriously criticized by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania, an incontestable leader of the Transylvanian Orthodox faithful, in a speech delivered in the Senate on 27 March 1929, on the draft of the Bill for the Religious Cults. During another meeting of the Senate of 23 May 1929, Metropolitan Nicolae Balan showed "the injustice done to the Orthodox Church,...". Nicolae Balan militated for a real autonomy of the Church towards the State, because Christ cannot be subordinated to any politics of a political power⁴.

² See Paul Lucian Brusanowski, *Reforma constituțională din Biserica Ortodoxă a Transilvaniei (1850-1925)*, Cluj Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House, 2007.

³ See Nicolae Bălan, *Biserica împotriva Concordatului*, Sibiu, 1929; Valeriu Anania, *Pro Memoria. Acțiunea catolicismului în România interbelică*, Bucharest, 1992; Sergiu Tomescu, *Concordatul României cu Vaticanul. Câteva aspecte ale relațiilor României cu Vaticanul și situația Bisericii în perioada 1918-1928*, in „Revista Teologică”, no. 2, 2010, pp. 98-110.

⁴ Ioan Lupaș, *Activitatea socială a Patriarhului Miron*, in „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, years XLI (1938), no. 4, p. 29.

The Orthodox Church was called to face the challenges of the modern society that was being built in a new state, not a very unitary one, as well as of some external challenges. Some people saw the Romanian Orthodoxy as the one able to take over the leadership of the Orthodox world after the fall of Russia under communism. The Romanian State did not succeed in re-establishing the political relationships with the communist Moscow after war. The two Churches passed, in their turn through a period of cold relations. The Russian Orthodox Church was respected for her warm faith manifested, but feared and envied for her attitude in history. The Romanian Orthodox Church is also afraid of her elder sister just as the state is afraid of a strong neighbour. This is why the communism of Russia was seen as a trial and a punishment for the Russians. Romania, in her turn, had to keep off the communism, because “an anti-communist attitude is a religious duty”⁵. The Romanian Christianity, unlike the Russian one subordinated by the communist state, was seen as a harmonious relationship with the state. Nevertheless, we cannot help noticing the permanent worry and care for the Orthodoxy of Russia submitted to a totalitarian abusive state.

The Participation of the Orthodox clergy in the political life was a phenomenon that characterized the church life in Romania during the inter-war period. Many of the priests were members of the political parties, some of them sympathizing openly with the Legionary Movement. The setting up and activity of the Legionary Movement was the political and religious phenomenon that marked the inter-war Romanian society. The promotion of some political ideas based on a discourse with strong religious content was a real attraction for the Orthodox clergy. The Romanian intelligentsia of the inter-war period starting considering the Church not only from the point of view of nationalism, but also began gradually to discover the universal values of Christianity, and pass from the discourse on the role of religion in society, to its experience in the personal life. An intelligentsia is born who cultivates the values of Christianity. For a series of intellectuals Orthodoxy represents the new form of addressing the modern society⁶. These ones consider the Church and the moral values of Christianity as essential for the Romanian society.

The spiritual revival of the Romanian society during this period is obvious, and religion is not seen only as a phenomenon, but also as a way of expressing the national identity. This state of things is manifested in all the structures of the Romanian society, including the intellectual elite too, not only with the peasantry which started having a remarkable social role after the World War I, as a result of the universal vote and of the agricultural reform. The collaboration between the Legionary Movement⁷ and the clergy was a reality, even though this collaboration has not ascended deeply, up to the hierarchs' level. A series of outstanding priests have become legionary members, seeing in Corneliu Zelea Codreanu a charismatic leader, able to determine the “revolutionary” youth to adopt an eschatological view of the Romanian state, in the huge effort “to change Romania's face”. The mixture of political movement and Christian doctrine becomes an attraction for the

⁵ Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, stat și societate în anii '30*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing House, 2007, p. 117.

⁶ Gheorghe Racoveanu, *Mișcarea Legionară și Biserica*, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 17-34.

⁷ See Armin Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelului Mihail” – mișcare socială și organizație politică. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, trad. by Cornelia and Delia Eșianu, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2006.

Romanian youth willing to achieve great things. The old politics waged by parties involved in sterile arguments seems outdated. The Legionary Movement provided a new enthusiasm to the Romanian society, a hope for the young people who wanted to live in a modern country in the near future, a country to look like Germany or Italy, but not a simple attachment to their politics. As for the population, the Legionary Movement is adopted especially in the localities with an important number of Jewish people.

King Charles II is aware of the danger of the collaboration between the Church and the Legionary Movement, not very likely, but a real danger for monarchy. The institution of the royal dictatorship in February 1938 brings about a major changing in the King's attitude towards the Orthodox Church, proposing her to play a more important role in the Romanian society. The King sees himself as a great prince of the Middle Ages, as a restorer of the symphony between the State and the Church. The Church, in her turn, is really devoted to the king, having been always close to him, even in the fight he started waging against the legionaries⁸. Maybe if she had been obligated to choose between the Legionary Movement and the king, the Church would have remained attached to the monarchy which provided her authority in society. The king needed the Church for his government, the only national institution not affected by the political trends that troubled the young society which was looking for new ways of manifestation. A different phenomenon in the relationship between the Church and the State was represented by the priests, members or sympathizers of the Legionary Movement, like Ilie Imbrescu⁹, Gheorghe Racoveanu, disciple of Nae Ionescu, or Liviu Stan who have become leaders.

Due to political reasons, in February 1938, in order to show the society that the Church was with the king, Charles II appointed patriarch Miron Cristea as prime minister. The legionary leaders have immediately criticized the event, and characterised the patriarch as apostate, and the hierarchs submitted to the political games of the king. All the Orthodox publications started to promote the king's image, around whom all Romanians were called to gather. The authoritative regime of Charles II is perceived as beneficial in some Orthodox publications, but we should not forget that some of the great Romanian intellectuals of the inter-war period had similar opinions: "The Church of the nation drafted an entire programme of revival of public life in nationalist spirit. The Church's duty is not only to pray, but also to teach the people how to live their lives every day, to be pleasant to God, and useful to the great nation... It is assuming public life related to God by controlling the Christian spirit and building the lasting welfare of the nation. The Church does oppose the material conception which promotes the development of the nation only by satisfying its needs, because only the fight for the spiritual needs ennobles man and takes him to progress. The grasping individualism and class fight were set in the pillory. True laws would settle with no hesitation whatsoever a Romanian life embedded with the spirit of brotherhood and of social solidarity stopping the misunderstood freedom and promoting good understanding and common contribution for the state's welfare. The Church commits herself to take care of the totalitarian

⁸ See Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu. Dictatura Regală (februar 1938-septembrie 1940). Mecanismele schimbului de generație*, Bucharest, Vremea Publishing House, 2007.

⁹ See Adrian Petcu, Gheorghe Vasilescu, *Părintele Ilie Imbrescu, un promotor la României creștine*, in „Rost”, no. 27, May, 2005.

life of the state. The Church salutes the laying of the state on Christian nationalist foundations. The altar embraces the totalitarian life of the nation”¹⁰.

This is why the political rule has no reason to give up the collaboration with the Church, but on the contrary the interests of the state rationality keep it by all means. The nationalist-socialist regime would have really liked to find the moment it came to power in Germany a Church organically identified with the nationalist ideas of the German people. These words appeared with the approval of metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania, an authoritative person in the Holy Synod now, as well as in the political world, who had his own view on the relationship between the Church and the State. In his opinion, the Church had to stay close to the State, but not very close not to lose her identity, and to have something to say in regard to the issues she was directly interested in. In the view of the great metropolitan the autonomy of the Church has always been related to the pragmatism of the political life, so that the Church had to affirm herself in society using the people’s language. The dissatisfaction of many people with the modern capitalist society with all its benefits was felt, because it crushed the spirit in spite of her democracy. The criticism of democracy has often gone hand in hand with the criticism of the values of liberal type¹¹.

Unfortunately, the legionary ideology starts from the idea that in order to build you should eliminate what stands in the way of the new construction. The way to violence has already been opened. Priest Gheorghe Racoveanu affirmed in a speech delivered in Germany, in 1943: “Our comrades, plenipotentiaries of the destiny of our community, were obligated to punish the hangmen of the nation’s soul; what about their deeds faced with the teaching of Christ? The Captain gives the answer to this question: we are in the state of the sinful men... The doctrine of the Church says that at the last judgement – where everybody and everything must be taken into account – the bodies will be resurrected too, as comrades of the souls during their lifetime and so, solidary responsible. Well, this judgement – the judgement of improvement – will not overlook the times, states and reasons that motivated the decisions and gestures”¹². Although it adopts certain aspects that can place it near fascism, the Legionary Movement also appears as a different political and ideological phenomenon, basing its principles both on the Bible concepts and on the Orthodox theology.

The Iron Guard appeared in its historical evolution as an undefined institutional structure not resembling those existent in Europe at the time. Lacking a well defined ideology it comes rather easy to violence and political assassination. This type of violence is explained on the basis of the Christian theology and morals. If in its first phase, murder is blamed on the basis of the Holy Scriptures texts, at the climax of this political movement a series of leaders of the legionary movement, especially priests like Ilie Imbrescu consider murder, at critic circumstances, as necessary “for saving the community from destiny, for saving the nation”,¹³ “Bible in one hand and the sword in the other”. Very interesting is the evolution of the discourse of legionary type in the bosom of the Church. If in the initial phase some legionary

¹⁰ See George Enache, *Biserică, societate, națiune, stat în România interbelică Biserica Ortodoxă Română și „ispita totalitară” de dreapta*, in „Revista Teologică”, no. 2, 2012, pp. 276-300.

¹¹ Claudiu Cotan, *The Orthodox Church and the Romanian State during the interwar period. Patriarch Miron Cristea's Government*, in „Religion and Politics. The 12th International Symposium on Science, Theology and Arts”, Alba Iulia, 2013, pp. 477-488.

¹² Gheorghe Racoveanu, *Mișcarea legionară și Biserica*, Bucharest, Samizdat Publishing House, 2002, p. 29.

¹³ Flor Strejnicul, *Creștinismul Mișcării Legionare*, Imago Publishing House, Sibiu, 2001, pp. 81-82.

priests used a more cautious language, as time went by and influence by the Iron Guard increased, this language became more aggressive, violence coming up in the articles they published, as well as in the speeches delivered which considered it as necessary for building a new world. The evolution of the same discourse with the Orthodox hierarchs is inverted. Patriarch Miron Cristea says in the pastoral letter drafted in 1934, after the assassination of Prime Minister I. G. Duca that the murder was committed by “a few hot-headed people suffering from nervous diseases that due to their sick fanaticism believed they made a brave act killing a leader of the country. But the majority of the youth cannot approve or follow them”¹⁴. The speech delivered by patriarch Nicodim Munteanu at the funerals of Armand Călinescu does not manifest the same tolerance: “Here is homicide and murder against the public order, sentenced as seriously and with no mercy by the human laws too”¹⁵. The speech of the patriarch delivered at the Holy Synod working session of 18 October 1939, was much harsher, complaining the death of the Prime Minister “killed by criminal hands”¹⁶. In the circular letter addressed to the priests soon before he urged them “not to deviate from the right way of faithful sons of the Church and of citizens devoted to the States”. Although the guilty ones are not named, their gesture is seriously blamed. The hierarchs do no longer accept extreme political deeds in which they were involuntary involved. From now on, a large part of the priests become rather spectators of the events than doers. From now on, the Iron Guard is seen as a danger for the Church too.

On the other hand, we should not forget that for the legionary ideology the active participation of the clergy in the political life was a must. The legionary propaganda used all the means of seduction to engage the clergy among its members. The priest represents a symbol in the legionary ideology, because he is ordained, Romanian and nationalist, and belongs both to this life and to eternity. The Orthodox priest and Romanian peasant are the symbol of the sacredness of the nation. Now a new conception appears according to which the participation of the priests in the political life purifies it, deifying the entire society. Yet, there were lots of voices that asked the priests not to involve in politics. Lots of priests did not consider normal their active participation in the political life. A series of those who participated in politics were interested rather in their own issues. The priests have also manifested different political options, a large number of them sympathising with the political parties. Many priests have not accepted the affiliation to the Legionary Movement, some of them having been members of the historical political parties, a large number attracted to the Christian National Party (Goga-Cuza), promoter of the principles of the Christian morals. These ones remained faithful to king Carol II, and later on were used by general Ion Antonescu too. The inclusion of the priests in the Legionary Movement was due not so much to a political programme as especially to the language used full of religious terms and of the respect for faith,¹⁷ that flattered the pride of many priests, especially of those from cities

¹⁴ Miron Cristea, *Pastorale, predici și cuvântări*, Bucharest, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești Publishing House, 1938, p. 139.

¹⁵ *** *Cuvântare rostită de patriarhul Nicodim la înmormântarea regretatului Prim-Ministru Armand Călinescu*, in „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, Bucharest, September-October, 1939, pp. 593-596.

¹⁶ *** *Dezbaterile Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, in „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, Bucharest, September-October, 1939, p. 584.

¹⁷ Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, stat și societate în anii '30*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing House, 2007, pp. 146-151.

where they came across the first signs of a more and more secularised society indifferent to the religious message.

As far back as 1934 the Legionary Movement suffers a restriction of its activity as a result of the tough measures taken by the state authorities after the assassination of I. G. Duca. The measures become tougher during the authoritative regime of king Charles II. The royal dictatorship has not been limited only to these measures. The state authorities applied a large plan of repression against the Legionary Movement. The first targets were the legionary leaders, among whom legionary priests too. Imbrescu blames in his articles the measures taken by the hierarchs against the legionary priests sent to the camps of work. After liberation the legionary priests were submitted to the State Safety control, but their affiliation in 1940, to the government of general Ion Antonescu made them active in the political life once again. In the articles published Imbrescu emphasised a few religious aspects that needed fast resolution, such as the appointment of the priests and bishops, and uniformity of the rite and of the theological education at all levels. In fact, all these issues have been fiercely discussed and needed resolution for years. Nevertheless, the legionaries' initiative came across the clear-cut refuse of the hierarchs, due, first of all to the behaviour some legionary leaders adopted in the political field, as well as to the disagreement that general Antonescu manifested later on. Having been a political movement deeply nationalist with an ideology fully marked by Bible texts, the Legionary Movement has gradually degraded as Iron Guard which lost a lot of the mystic zeal of the beginning. The extreme violence adopted by the members of the Guard did not resemble the utopian idea of shaping the national spirit that would be best represented in the Romanian peasant devoted to his land and Orthodox faith.

The Orthodox hierarchs start feeling the danger of the Legionary Movement when the legionary leaders speak about it as of the future nursery of the Church, where elements for hierarchy will be grown, "to be Orthodox in word and deed". For priest Ilie Imbrescu any priest will be a legionary and any legionary will be the best son of the Church. This is why during the legionary government, some legionary theologians and priests expected the moment of the reformation of the Orthodox Church to fit the ideological needs.

Certainly, it must have been a close collaboration between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian State, but with no clear principles. There were no limits for the state's intervention in the life of the Church, or how far could the Church go to support the state. This ambiguous state of things favoured certain political circles to get into the life of the Church and certain clergy to take active part in politics. The State's intervention in the dismissal or appointment of the hierarchs clearly proved the fact that the State was not willing to give up its authority over the Orthodox clergy. In this sense we have the proof of bishop Vartolomeu Stănescu's dismissal at the king's request, certainly a supporter of the legionaries who blessed the labour camp of Arnota and one of those who asked the priests not to take part in politics.

In 1938, a "Church section" is set up within the Legionary Movement, similar to those operating in other political parties¹⁸. This structure was designed to renew and re-organise the Church. The Legionary Movement seems to think, following Codreanu's suggestion, to set up

¹⁸ Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Slujitorii altarului și Mișcarea legionară. Studiu de caz: Preotul Ilie Imbrescu*, in „Partidul, Securitatea și Cutele 1945-1989”, Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 2005, p. 59.

a special group of legionary priests through whom the Church should be re-organised. In Codreanu's opinion, the priests were the representatives of God on the earth, having been called to the Legion to guide it to the way of faith. Yet, a series of legionary leaders, among whom Horia Sima too, did not wish to set up a separate group of the priests in charge with spreading faith and taking active part in social assistance. Although in full legionary swing, having known the role of the priest in society, a series of theologians could affirm what the role of the priest in society was, where he was called to celebrate the Holy Sacraments and guide the faithful on the way of salvation, and what his role in the Legion was, where he could be only father confessor. The legion, defined by Codreanu as "the political expression of Orthodoxy" was to have the priests inside it only as spiritual guides. In some legionary priests' opinion the fact that after the instauration of the legionary regime "the hierarchs and part of the priests manifested against the legionary regime" was due to their alienation from the teaching of the Church. In the legionaries' opinion the new political order set up in 1940 had a divine legitimacy, having been called to the spiritual guidance of the people. Following this thought, the Legion is seen as a church over-structure, because the official one of the Church was compromised¹⁹.

If the anti-Semite discourse was present in the Romanian society, the debate got a rather theological character within the Orthodox publications. The clergy are called especially to accomplish their missionary work in a Romanian society with multiple ethnic structures. Many people in minority lived in Great Romania, many of them Romanian citizens recently adopted and little integrated. The external threatening was real. Hungary wanted Transylvania, Russia wanted Bessarabia and Bucovina and Bulgaria wanted Dobruđa. Maybe the greatest psychosis was created by the Jewish minority, about 4% of the country's population, which although not very large was quite visible, as a distinct not integrated minority²⁰.

On 11 October 1936, on the occasion of a manifestation that the "Anti-revisionist League" initiated, patriarch Miron Cristea and a series of Orthodox hierarchs and personalities of the Romanian culture - such as Octavian Goga and Nichifor Crainic - delivered speeches with a strong anti-Semite content. The same year, Emil Cioran takes this discourse to the limit, in his book entitled "Romania's Transfiguration" in the style that would characterise him²¹. While sustaining nationalism, even Iorga had some anti-Semite tinges in the articles published in his newspaper "Neamul românesc". Nichifor Crainic affirms "the need to have the native element prevailing in all branches of activity and creation"²². An anti-Semite attitude was present at the priests who had a large number of Jews in their parishes²³.

After the arrival of king Carol II in the country, the political life of Romania was always tensioned, and at the end of 1937 chaotic. It was the best moment for the king to institute his own political regime. He appealed to patriarch Miron Cristea for the purpose because he knew the political life very well and he had already passed through a similar

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

²⁰ Lucian Boia, *Capcanele Istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2012, p. 54.

²¹ See Emil Cioran, *Schimbarea la față a României*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1990.

²² Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²³ Arhiva Parohiei Delea Nouă, Dosar corespondență/1932; Grigore N. Popescu, *Un colț de oraș și un sfânt lăcaș București*, Bucharest, 1935, p.112.

situation when he ensured the Regency. Passing the power to king Charles II in 1930 did not meet any opposition from the patriarch²⁴. The appointment of patriarch Miron Cristea as president of the Council of Ministers was welcomed by a series of political leaders. Nicolae Iorga praised the gesture of the patriarch: “Now we are under the mild ruling of the walking staff...” and people hoped that political life would calm down after the sterile political fights which caused only turmoil in the Romanian society. The symphony between the king and patriarch reminded the old agreement between the Romanian princes and metropolitans. Yet, Iuliu Maniu asked the patriarch, through a letter, not to involve in the political disputes and not to compromise the Church²⁵. This was the last major involvement of the Orthodox Church in the political life.

For Corneliu Zelea Codreanu it was clear that a difficult political situation was coming up, which fact made him address a circular letter the legionaries on 21 February 1938 by which he announced the dissolution of the “Totul pentru Țară - Everything for the Country” party, asking the legionaries to keep their hope in a better future. It was obvious that the new regime was against the legionaries accused of undermining the state authority. The massive participation of the priests, as well as of metropolitan Nicolae Balan of Transylvania, in the funerals of the legionary leaders Mota and Marin in 1937, was a warning sign for king Charles II, who decided to associate the Orthodox Church to the state politics. First the legionary criticism did not focus on the hierarchs, but after the assassination of Codreanu the legionary protests has become more and more violent targeting especially patriarch Miron, in whose government the toughest measures against legionaries were taken, culminating with the physical elimination of the Captain. After Codreanu’s death, the Legionary Movement glides into violence, and the Iron Guard into a period of instability caused by the tacit fight among its leaders, in spite of all efforts of Horia Sima, the legionary leader who has never enjoyed the prestige of the Captain.

In order to consolidate the new political regime a new Constitution was drafted, submitted to the referendum of 24 February and accepted with an overwhelming majority. It was for the first time that the women’s right to vote was granted through this Constitution²⁶. The political parties, in their turn, ceased to exist.

There were priests who never agreed with the direct involvement of patriarch Miron Cristea in the political life, a deed blamed by the church canons²⁷. The legionary priests did attack the patriarch’s gesture. The Holy Synod was blamed for having taken anti-legionary decisions, such as the one of October 1935, which forbade building churches or road side shrines by the legionaries, although some bishops encouraged these initiatives. The patriarch was also criticised for having forbidden Mota and Marin to be remembered, and especially for having allowed the imprisonment of the legionary priests at Easer time, in 1938. The patriarch was accused of the infringement of the Constitution and of the church canons under his patronage when he allowed the arrest of the legionary priests. The accusations were entitled. The king, the declared adversary of the legionaries, was also seriously criticised.

²⁴ Cristian Vasile Petcu, *Guvernarea Miron Cristea*, Bucharest, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 2009, p. 223.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 237.

²⁶ Ioan Scurtu, Gheorghe Buzatu, *Istoria românilor în secolul XX*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing House, 1999, p. 345.

²⁷ Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *art. cit.*, p. 49.

The Legionary Movement wanted to do away with the old society and set up a new world. This is why the intellectuals were easily attracted by the idealism of the movement. It was this idealism that led to violence. The “cleansing” of Romania could not be done with the principles of democracy. Unfortunately, while facing the legionary the state has become criminal too. Arrested in 1938, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment together with 13 other comrades. The King thought it was the good time to get rid of some political adversaries, but especially of the completion with the charismatic “Captain”. The 14 legionaries were killed at the order of the king, on 30 November. This fact created a breach between a part of the Romanian society and the king. In fact the legionaries prepared their attack and assassinated the Prime Minister Armand Călinescu on 21 September 1939, the main author of the anti-legionary actions. As a result of this assassination the repression against the legionaries got an intensity never seen before in the history of Romania, 252 legionaries having been executed, some of them imprisoned in labour camps, and others taken from their own houses. Hated for having assassinated Armand Călinescu, after the terrorist action of the state the legionaries have been seen as victims and martyrs²⁸. Young intellectual legionaries died, who could have succeeded in giving another course to the Legionary Movement and to history, the moment it came to govern. Although he accepted to govern together with the legionaries, the moment he took over the power general Antonescu – an adept of discipline not only in the army but also in society – was aware that he would not be able to remain together with the Iron Guard, which led chaotically and tried to impose itself through brutality and violence. The removal of the Iron Guard after the rebellion of January 1941 has also meant the falling into disgrace of the majority of the legionary priests, many of them imprisoned or deported. The law-decree no 314 of 15 February 1941 forbade the clergy to be party members or participate in the political manifestations of any kind²⁹.

The death of patriarch Miron Cristea closed one of the most interesting periods in the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Nicodim has not had the same openness to the political life. This is why he has never been in his element during the time of the government of the Iron Guard seeming to have asked general Antonescu to dissolve it. He was relieved when the legionary leadership was dissolved in January 1941, and he addressed a telegram to the leader of the state. The Romanian Church and society remained near the leader of the state, but who was trying to change it, according to his own ideas, into an instrument of control of the state over the society. General Antonescu seemed to see the Orthodox Church as a second army of the country, “a unitary state, a unique Church”³⁰. The government of general Antonescu thought of an organisation of the Church on new principles to serve especially the new political structure. We must not forget that other political leaders had such views concerning the role of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian society.

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²⁸ Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

²⁹ George Enache, *Biserică, societate, națiune, stat în România interbelică Biserica Ortodoxă Română și „ispita totalitară” de dreapta*, in „Revista Teologică”, 94 (2012), no. 2, p. 298.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 299.

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