

## Codreanu and the Warrior Ethos

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*Corneliu Codreanu was born on this day in 1899.*

European civilization of the early to middle twentieth century was characterized in part by the growth of political movements with a martial character. These included both the many variants of fascism from the far Right and revolutionary socialist currents from the far Left. The proliferation of such movements accelerated sharply in the interwar period. Particularly noteworthy were Mussolini's *Fascisti* and the National Socialists of Germany, given the later success of these at actual achievement of state power, as well as the various factions involved in the Spanish Civil War. Romania's Iron Guard, under the leadership of Corneliu Codreanu, was unique among these movements in that it was one of the few such tendencies with a strong religious orientation, and a highly eccentric religiosity at that. (Payne, 1995)

The religiosity of the Iron Guard is ironic given that the rise of secular mass movements with a strong martial or even apocalyptic outlook during the twentieth century can easily be interpreted as a substitution for declining religious enthusiasms during the same era. Nietzsche had predicted that the twentieth-century would be a time of great ideological wars, and history has demonstrated

the prescience of Nietzsche's prediction. Yet, Nietzsche regarded the ominous cloud of previously unparalleled warfare he saw on the horizon as a consequential phase through which humanity must pass in part due to the "death of God" and the quest for new gods to fill the resulting void. While Nietzsche himself detested militarism, he also lamented the decline of the warrior ethos in the era of modernity. Like Ernst Junger after him, Nietzsche considered the comforts of bourgeois society to have brought with them an emasculating aversion to danger and a pervasive preoccupation with safety and security. These observations were the foundation of the underlying sentiments expressed in the Nietzschean adage that "a good fight justifies any cause." (Preston, 2011; Junger, )

The twentieth century certainly brought with it a myriad of causes which inspired their adherents to "a good fight." While the icons of Race, Nation, or Class largely replaced "God" in the pantheons of twentieth century secularized religiosity, it was among the ranks of Codreanu's Iron Guard (or the Legion of the Archangel Michael, as the Guard also referred to itself) that the older icons of God, Faith, and Church retained their traditional place. Indeed, it was perhaps among the Iron Guard that martial values achieved extremes that were unparalleled among other ideological revolutionaries of the era. Of all the extremist movements of the period, the Iron Guard surpassed perhaps even the German S.A. in the development of a cult of death and martyrdom. The similarities between German National Socialism and the Iron Guard were great. The particularly obvious parallels are the virulent nationalism, anti-communism, and anti-Semitism of both movements. Codreanu could fairly be

said to have rivaled Hitler in the fervor of his anti-Jewish rhetoric. (Volovici, 1991)

However, perhaps the most interesting dimension of the ideology of the Iron Guard was its approach to theology. The Legionnaires conceived of the Romanian nation as having a special relationship to God and its commitment to the traditional Orthodox Christianity of the Romanian people informed every aspect of their thought and action. Like Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the ruthlessly Catholic Jesuit order before them, the Legionnaires recognized no limitations on the ends to which they might go in defense of their particular variation of the Christian faith. The extremism of their cult of martyrdom is perhaps best exemplified by their belief that in order to defend the Faith and the Nation, a Legionnaire might at times be called upon to perform deeds that would result in his own damnation. In other words, not only an individual life but an individual soul must at times be sacrificed for the greater good of the struggle. This is likely the most intense form of cultic martyrdom ever devised. Religious movements which teach martyrdom typically promise reward in a future life for the faithful holy warrior who sacrifices his mere mortal life for the cause. Yet for the holy warriors of the Iron Guard, a soldier of faith could be called upon to lay down not only his mortal life but his immortal soul as well. (Payne, 1995) No cult of martyrdom could ever be more extreme. Their fervent Orthodoxy aside, one might be tempted to compare the theological outlook of the Legionnaires with that of Milton's Lucifer. Just as Milton depicted Satan as having insisted that it is better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven, so might the faithful warriors of the Iron Guard be said to have believed that it

is better to achieve Hell in the struggle for one's nation than to achieve Heaven for having engaged in a less virulent struggle. The Romanian warriors took the martyrdom cults of the Islamic jihadists or the Japanese kamikazes still a step further.

Because of their stalwart religiosity and fervent attachment to Romanian tradition, it is also tempting to dismiss the Legionnaires as mere reactionaries of the throne and altar variety rather than to recognize them as a manifestation of an authentic revolutionary force in European civilization of the time. Yet such a conclusion would be problematical. As early as 1919, Codreanu himself had joined Constantin Pancu's National Awareness Guard, a right-wing anti-communist faction that simultaneously advocated for greater worker rights. Likewise, the Iron Guard itself was involved in the organization of cooperatives and, like many radical right movements of the era, voiced fervent opposition to both capitalism and communism. (Barbu, 1993) In many ways the Iron Guard might be considered an Orthodox counterpart to the Falangist movement of Spain's Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera. The ideological parallels are rather significant. Both movements espoused a radical nationalist philosophy that attacked communism, finance capital, liberalism, internationalism, and parliamentarism and while expressing support for the traditional faith of the people of their respective nations. Both maintained a primary orientation towards paramilitarism and armed struggle in a way that represented the evolution of the Right beyond the throne and altar reactionary current towards a genuinely revolutionary nationalism. (Rivera, 1936) Yet both movements maintained an outlook that was more

traditional than the modernist influences exhibited by some radical right movements of the era, such as the anticlericalism of the German National Socialists, the avante garde influences on Italian Fascism, the Nietzscheanism of the Conservative Revolutionaries, or the Marxism of the National-Bolsheviks. In other ways, the Iron Guard resembled the now forgotten anti-communist Buddhist or Catholic militias formed in the nations of Indochina during the early period of the civil wars in those nations.

The prevalence of so many forces exhibiting an uncompromising martial spirit throughout the Western world in the first half of the twentieth century is all the more remarkable given the near total disappearance of martial values in Western culture of the present time. The militaries of the contemporary Western nations are barely militaries at all but instead function as glorified police departments forever being deployed in the pursuit of dubious and never-ending “peacekeeping” and “humanitarian” endeavors. Even the massive military-industrial complex maintained by the United States functions more as a corporate welfare scheme for legions of crony capitalists connected to the American state. American military personnel are careerist bureaucrats rivaling their counterparts in the civilian sectors of the state or the world of capitalist corporations. Indeed, even among the rank and file, the military forces of the United States are more a collection of mercenaries and fraternities than anything that could be said to exhibit a warrior ethos in the historic or traditional sense. The blending of modern warfare and high-technology has served in many ways to eliminate the truly martial aspects of warfare. Instead, the forces

of the American empire and its allies drop bombs from the safety of the skies. "War" for these modern imperial legions is sometimes more comparable to a visit to a video arcade than engagement on the battlefield. Indeed, the American military now serves a primary force for the perpetration of Political Correctness as represented by its conscientious commitment to "diversity," properly integrating women and homosexuals into its ranks, and upholding "human rights" on a global scale rather than cultivating a warrior ethos or upholding its own historic traditions. (Hunter, 2009)

One is inclined to wonder what Western civilization might be today if its recent ancestors who did indeed exhibit such martial valor had not simultaneously squandered so much blood and treasure in internecine warfare over petty nationalisms, sectarian ideological squabbles, and class hatreds. Whether they were the Legionnaires of Romania, the Falangists of Spain, the Brownshirts of Germany, the Blackshirts of Italy, the Anarchists of Catalonia, or the Communist street fighters of the KPD, it seems a pity that so much blood was lost in struggles that were ultimately futile and meaningless and that these struggles eventually culminated in explosive and historically unrivaled warfare that ended the reign of Europe as the world's premiere civilization in favor of the American hegemony that has dominated since 1945. One wonders if such martial spirit could ever again be recaptured and directed towards a more constructive vision. The decadence of modern society is illustrated by the apathetic nature of its population. The principal values of contemporary Western culture are the pursuit of material comfort, safety, and personal hedonism. Only a

dramatic psychic sea change among Western peoples generated by necessity would likely reverse this prevailing trend.

It appears that just as the torch of politico-economic dominance and cultural evolution is currently being passed from Europe to Asia, so is the torch of martial spirit and the warrior ethos being passed to the insurgent forces of the Third World. The spirit of the Legionnaires continues to thrive not among Western Christians but among Islamic insurgents originating from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and the remaining armed struggle movements of Latin America. Today's holy warriors are Islamists rather than Legionnaires or Falangists. It is the Muslim insurgents who now raise the banner of the classical Anarchist ideal of "propaganda by the deed." (Hari, 2009) It is the youth of the Muslim nations rather than Western youth who fight the institutions of decadent, corrupt and archaic authorities in the streets. Indeed, virtually the only elements demonstrating any sort of martial values in contemporary Western society are lumpenproletarian street gangs.

The most advanced military theorists of the contemporary era have recognized the dramatic changes that are currently evolving on a global basis concerning the nature of war. Commonly labeled as "fourth generation warfare," the new form which human martial endeavor assumes is that involving non-state actors. This is a genuinely revolutionary phenomenon that is essentially overturning the monopoly on the waging of war assigned to the state since the time of the Treaty of Westphalia. War is now waged not by states but by movements lacking state power or which have replaced

state power in a situation of political collapse. Among the most prominent example of these is Lebanon's Hezbollah militia which essentially serves as the defense force of the otherwise militarily impotent Lebanese nation, having successfully repelled the Israeli invasion in the summer of 2006. Hezbollah has likewise assumed the domestic as well as external roles normally played by conventional states with its provision of public health, education, and welfare services. (Preston, 2006) Ironically, it might well be said that Hezbollah is the closest parallel to the Iron Guard of any contemporary political or military movement.

It is clear enough the legacy of Corneliu Codreanu and the Iron Guard, like the legacy of so many comparable movements of the era, belongs to the past. However admirable the personal valor of Codreanu and his Legionnaires may have been, there can be no doubt that many of the ideas that fueled their movement have become increasingly archaic with the passing of time. For instance, their adherence to the model of the Jewish conspiracy outlined in the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" now seems a bit primitive, and one need not be an adherent of the pieties of contemporary political correctness to recognize the anti-Jewish rhetoric and actions of the Legionnaires as inordinately extreme. Likewise, one may find the alleged mystical nature of the relationship between the Orthodox faith and the Romanian nation championed by the faithful of the Iron Guard to be dubious in nature. The era of such extreme fidelity to a particular nation-state has certainly passed and conventional patriotism of the kind assigned to historic nation-states becomes increasingly less prevalent in the contemporary world. Likewise, the

decline of orthodox or traditional Christian religious belief of any kind among Westerners is well known. It is doubtful that either Christianity or national patriotism could ever again inspire the inhabitants of Western civilization in the way these inspired those of previous eras. Clearly, these things are relics from the past. Valuable relics they may be, perhaps, but relics nevertheless. (Van Creveld, 1999)

Yet as Western civilization continues its process of decline, it is likely that its indigenous peoples will once again be in search of identity as a result of the dislocation generated by the collapse of their civilization. As the current century unfolds and Asian preeminence becomes ever more obvious and the demographic overrun of the West becomes ever more imminent, it is likely that the primordial spirits of Western peoples will once again awaken. At that point, the indigenous peoples of the West will become insurgents once again and may well come to resemble present insurgents of the Third World. When such an era arrives, indigenous Europeans will no doubt look to find inspiration from past figures representing the martial spirit and warrior ethos that Westerners once took for granted. It is certainly possible that Corneliu Codreanu will be one among many such figures.

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