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RE-WEAVING MEMORY:
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INTERWAR AND COMMUNIST PERIODS
IN THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AFTER 1989

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Abstract: After the fall of Communism, the Romanian Orthodox Church was forced to face its recent past, scarred by its collaboration – harshly criticized in the early 1990s – with the Ceaușescu regime. The Church's turn to its memory of the interwar period in order to legitimize the (re)casting of Orthodoxy as a public religion was also problematic. Based mainly, but not solely on the analysis of public discourses originating with the Orthodox Church hierarchy and clergy, this paper will address the discursive strategies the Orthodox Church adopted in order to tame the memory of its recent past. We propose to investigate the main issues at stake, and the consequences of the choices the Church makes in re-weaving the memory of its recent past(s). It will be shown that the memorial reconstitution of the two periods remains unbalanced. On the one hand, the Church has used to its advantage some parts of the memory of each period. Yet in both cases, efforts to obscure potentially problematic facets of memory, such as the choice of collaboration/accommodation with the communist regime or the close connexion between prominent Church personages and the Legionary movement remain eminently counter-productive. However, such proceeds fail to exorcise the remaining skeletons in the closet and bar the path to the 'appeasement' of memory.

Key Words: Romanian Orthodox Church, communism, interwar period, *travail de mémoire*, persecution, "survival strategy", national Church, Legionary Movement, truth commissions, historiography.

After the fall of the communist regime in December, 1989, the Romanian Orthodox Church was forced to face its recent past, scarred by the collaboration – harshly criticized particularly in the 1990s – with the late regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu.¹ Its appeal, in the early 1990s, to the memory of the pre-communist period in order to legitimise its renewed status as a ‘public religion’² was also problematic, considering the ambiguous relations this Church had had at the time with authoritarian political authorities and with extreme right movements.

This paper examines, in diachronic, comparative perspective, the way Romanian Orthodoxy has been struggling to ‘appease’ the memory³ of both these periods, by experimenting with the production of multiple, alternative discourses on each. It also analyses the complementary strategies chosen by Orthodox representative voices after 1989 in order to ‘re-weave’ the memory of both periods, a memory that is disputed both with the State and with parts of the civil society. From an idealisation of Church-State relations and turning a blind eye to the Legionary episode for the Interwar period to the penitential or self-justifying discourse and the invention of a “post-communist anti-communism”⁴, we examine the issues involved in choosing between these alternative discourses, as well as their consequences in the Romanian post-communist public space.

The Orthodox Church defines itself par excellence by its rootedness in Tradition: as a constantly transforming body of practical religious experience, yet ideally immutable in its fundamental doctrine. On the other side, it is placed in an ambiguous relation with history itself, in which it sets itself as both an insider and an outsider – at the same time ‘in the world’ and “not of this world” (John 17). That is why, for each step in the Church’s history, a new “*travail de mémoire*” is a necessary means of reiterating its own continuity. Rooted in their spiritual tradition, Orthodox Churches are also grounded in their historical experience. For Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe, this also signifies, in modern times, a self-definition as “national” institutions⁵.

A self-styled “Church of the Nation”⁶, the Romanian Orthodox Church has been constructing for itself a memory aiming to participate in the ‘Orthodox’ articulation of the foundation myths of the “bi-millenary inherent unity and continuity” of the Romanian – Orthodox – people on the territory of modern Romania⁷.

In order to observe if and how this permanent reconstruction of memory corresponds to an internal need to constantly redefine the Church’s own identity, and in order to identify the consequences such a process entails, this paper examines the way the Romanian Orthodox Church articulates the memory of two preceding historical periods: the interwar period (1918-1940) and the communist regime (ca. 1946-1989).

These periods were chosen, in the first place, because the memory of both periods is currently undergoing a process of reconstruction in the

Romanian Orthodox Church. In both cases, it is problematic: for the interwar period, it is quasi-inarticulate, while the communist regime was a period of heavily manipulated identity constructions, permeated with ideology. Both are still under construction. Both periods challenge Church representatives to re-evaluate their Church's demeanour in those periods, and in some cases to re-examine the deeds of prominent personages, some of which are still alive. For both periods, this memorial effort is difficult, and the memorialisation process remains ambivalent, selective, and emotional.

Furthermore, since the fall of the Communist regime also challenged the system of Church-State relations, the reconstructed memory of the recent past also became a useful tool (and, in some cases, a weapon) of institutional (de-)legitimisation in the post-communist renegotiation of the public status of religion⁸.

In examining the memorial (re)construction of both periods, such as it was undertaken in the post-communist period in the Romanian Orthodox Church, we shall look at several elements, in a comparative perspective. First of all, it shall be noted by whom this *travail de mémoire* is being requested for each of these periods. Secondly, we shall examine the various segments and facets of the memory of each period that the Romanian Orthodox Church – in its institutional dimension – decided to engage with. We will be looking at which elements were considered positive, which negative, and which have been excluded altogether from this reconstructed memory or what remains unsaid. We will also try to understand the different practical uses of this constantly reconstructed memory, as well as the consequences of specific memorialisation choices made in the course of this prolonged *travail de mémoire*.

The Romanian Orthodox Church's project for the post-communist period

Since January, 1990, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church proclaimed to the new state authorities its intention to return to the public sphere. In a message to the 'revolutionary' Council of the Front for National Salvation, the Holy Synod required that the Orthodox Church be acknowledged as the 'national Church', with a significant presence in the public sphere, and autonomous from the State; the message also called for a re-establishment of chaplaincy in public institutions, for the free development of a theological education system, for religious education in public schools, for the Church's right to create its own social assistance network, for public support for the (re)construction of churches and monasteries that had been closed or demolished during the Communist period, and for a continuation of the existing system of partial public subsidising of the clergy's salaries⁹.

Since the early days of post-communism, we may note the desire of and necessity for the Church to position itself with respect to its recent past, but also the difficulty of such an enterprise, in view of the Church's project to negotiate its way back to the public space. Though the project clearly signified a will to break with the recent past, the legacy of the Communist regime could not be entirely rejected, as some of its legal provisions were thought to be indispensable to the proper institutional functioning of the Church itself.

This program has been largely accomplished throughout the post-communist period by means of constant negotiations with State authorities in all fields of interest¹⁰. The results of these efforts were inscribed, by 2006, in the Law for religious freedom and the general status of denominations. Though the Romanian Orthodox Church was not legally acknowledged as a 'national Church', and had to privatise its claim to this title¹¹, and was furthermore placed on the same legal footing as the other recognised denominations, it is still, to this day, the principal beneficiary of a legal regime of Church-State relations that makes religious denominations privileged partners of the State in a number of policy areas.

Memory reclaimed

After the violent fall of the Ceaușescu regime, the most urgent claim for a memorial effort was that concerning the communist period. As a form of exorcising the evil of which society had just been liberated, all willing association with the former regime was chastised, and a call for the ostracising of the main characters responsible for was soon launched.

The process was complicated by the second rank Communist officials taking over leadership in the country after the fall of the Communist regime. The miraculous 'dissolution' – by decree – of the 4-million members Romanian Communist Party into the Romanian State structures in what one researcher called the 'last Leninist revolution'¹² signified the will of the new State authorities to erase all traces of their recent past and to cut short a contentious, painful and potentially politically dangerous memorial effort. The bloody repression of the anti-Communist revolts in the country in December, 1989 was set as the background for a general 'absolution' of all secondary actors of the communist regime now turned into 'revolutionaries'. There was no need to look back to the past, as the 'Revolution' had purified all, while Communism no longer existed officially, and a select group of scapegoats had already been sacrificed. Thus, the new regime would be able to start over with a clean slate.

But this approach was far from being universally accepted. The emergent civil society clamoured for the painful reconstitution of the memory of the communist regime. A lengthy struggle for the (at least temporary) exclusion from public life of those who had been directly

associated with the former Communist regime yielded rather poor results, as a political consensus on the topic proved difficult to reach and almost impossible to maintain¹³. Public archives of the period took a painfully long time to open, and some – amongst which most of the Churches' archives – remain closed to this day¹⁴. A truth commission set up by the President of Romania produced a report which allowed the latter to condemn the late communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal”¹⁵.

The Orthodox Church – and its hierarchy in particular – was caught up in the arguments of the conflicting politics of memory articulated in the Romanian civil society and in the political sphere. At least in the early stages, some form of lustration was required from the Orthodox Church, and though the Church succeeded for a while in being spared official revelations on the collaboration of Church dignitaries with the former political police of the Communist regime, its resistance was eventually – if only partially – broken¹⁶. The final report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship included a chapter on Church-State relations and the situation of the main Churches during Communism. The text was directly challenging the Church's own memorialising efforts.

Another painful call to probe into the memory of the Communist regime was brought about by other religious bodies in the Romanian space. The re-emergence of the Greek-Catholic Church and its efforts to reclaim its formerly held public status called into question the ROC's role in the 'dissolution' of this Church by the Romanian Communist state and forced it to revisit the memory of the event¹⁷. Studies on the situation of the neo-Protestant Churches during the Communist period also called into question the ROC's role in their ill-treatment during that period, as these churches had also seen their activities severely limited during Communism¹⁸.

Finally, there was an *internal* demand both for a critical reappraisal of the Church's role during communism, for a penitential re-evaluation of its collaboration with the Communist regime, and for an exploration and revelation of the Orthodox Church's own sufferings and persecutions by the hands of this regime¹⁹.

Unlike for the reconstruction of the memory of the communist period and the struggle for its 'appeasement', for which there was a constant public demand (both from within and from without the Church), a similar effort of the Orthodox Church concerning the interwar/pre-Communist period has so far appeared as less pressing. By opposition to the Communist period, the interwar period was represented in the early post-Communist years, in the public space as well as in civil society debates, as a golden age of Romanian democracy and as an ideal type for the post-Communist society: a time of relatively democratic government,

economic prosperity and cultural effervescence – and a time of apparent public prestige for the main ‘Romanian’ Churches.

The interwar period became one of the most intensely studied historical periods of Romanian history until the end of the 1990s²⁰, and was treated as one of the essential nodes in the articulation of Romanian identity²¹.

In this context, the intensity of public demand for a reappraisal of the memory of the period within the Romanian Orthodox Church was feeble, and apparently less urgent. While researchers still questioned the role of the Church in the interwar period and its problematic relation with the extreme right movements, and voices within the Church struggled to produce alternative discourses on the spiritual significance of the period for the Church itself, one important actor, namely the Romanian State, was absent from the debates. Its appraisal of the memory of the Interwar period limited itself to the 2004 Report of the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, which had a relatively limited audience in the Romanian public space, and to the adoption of a law banning from the public space all fascist, racist and xenophobic symbols and prohibiting the cult of persons considered guilty of crimes against peace and against humanity²². Save for this aspect of the history of the period, a *travail de mémoire* comparable to that required for the Communist period was not deemed imperative.

Demand from the part of the Romanian Orthodox Church for a critical reappraisal of its situation during the communist and the interwar periods respectively was asymmetrical: while in the first case the demand was permanent, strong, and concerted, calls to a comparable effort on the latter remained feebler.

Changing memories

Throughout the post-Communist period, the reconstruction of the memory of either period had both positive and not-so-positive aspects. Thus, for the interwar period, Church hierarchs would mention the good relations that had existed between the Orthodox Church and State authorities. They would also mention the presence of bishops in the Romanian Senate, a certain ‘freedom’ of the Church with respect to the State and its officially acknowledged presence in the public space. The legal recognition of the Orthodox Church’s pre-eminence over other religious denominations in the country was also mentioned, as well as the Church’s prestige in the Interwar society.

All these elements have been directly used in order to support some of the specific claims of the Church in the Romanian public space, and particularly in its relations with the State. The pre-communist period was implicitly posed as *the* adequate model for Church-State relations in the early 1990s. The idealised memory of Church-State relations in the

interwar period thus served as a legitimising factor in the negotiation of the Church's place in the post-Communist society.

However, the Church's proclaimed attachment to the interwar model and vocabulary also proved to be a stumbling block in the negotiation of Church-State relations. The claim of the Orthodox Church to be acknowledged as a 'national' and possibly as a 'majority' Church in Romania, flatly rejected by all other denominations participating in the debate, blocked the adoption of a Law on the general status of denominations until as late as 2004, when the request was finally dropped and the Law project redrafted²³.

In theological contexts, the engagement of the Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement during the interwar period, notably its good relations with the Church of England is also mentioned as a positive aspect of the Church's positioning at that time²⁴. This, however, was coupled with the memory of a regime of Church-State relations where the State would be privileging traditional Churches and limiting missionary and proselytising efforts by Evangelical and other new denominations²⁵.

As the hostility of the Romanian State towards newer denominations, more difficult to supervise and control, was a shared memory of the communist and pre-communist regimes, the reluctance of the post-communist Romanian state to follow the same course of action was disconcerting for Church authorities (though some did acknowledge that religious freedom also involved freedom of active religious missionary efforts). The latter made repeated appeals to the State to censor what were perceived as the more 'aggressive' proselytising efforts. Though some State authorities did seem inclined to support this view, a ban on proselytising was not written into law, save in the limited area of religious education²⁶.

Finally, particularly in the 1990s (but less and less later on), Orthodox prelates would mention a flourishing of theological thought, and particularly of the distinctive 'theology of the nation' embodied by authors such as Nae Ionescu or Nichifor Crainic. Patriarch Teoctist and some other hierarchs flirted with the idea of a 'theology of the nation', advocating an uncritical attachment and service of the Church to the ethnic Romanian nation²⁷. It was very probably done from an intimate conviction of the legitimacy of such an approach, but expressing attachment to and/or admiration for such thinkers was controversial, due to their proximity to or involvement in the extreme right Legionary Movement/Iron Guard. By the end of the 1990s, their names were only very seldom mentioned as positive references in public speeches by Romanian Orthodox hierarchs. The theme of the 'theology of the nation' as such also faded from the public discourse of Romanian hierarchs, but not from the theological milieu. The idea of the Church's service to the Nation and of its inextricable link to Romanian nationhood did survive, and was expressed, amongst other things, in the Church Statute, as well as

through the multiplication of canonisations of territorially “Romanian” saints, and was one of the central concepts of the prospective Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation. A vast literature on these and other prominent theologians of the interwar period has been published since the early 1990s, and, though some critical assessments of the sources and grounding of their ‘national theology’ were published, the general trend in such publications is largely apologetic. Though challenged both by Orthodox theologians in the “diaspora” and by some lay historians, a nation-centred Church history still appears to capture the minds of Church historians and of prominent clerical figures.

All things considered, the memory of the interwar period, as it was articulated within the Church at the highest level, was eminently positive. Negative or problematic points, which will be discussed further on, were not spoken of, or were taken up either at lower (institutional) levels within the Church, or by the research community, the civil society, and/or the mass media.

By comparison, the reconstruction of the memory of the Communist period was more difficult. The communist regime was declared, since as early as the end of December, 1989, to be diabolical, eminently illegitimate and a sort of illicit detour in Romanian (and Orthodox Church) history²⁸. As such, communism had also brought about an interruption of what was implicitly cast as the “legitimate” – i.e. interwar – model of Church-State relations. Great emphasis was placed on the militant atheistic character of the Communist regime, an ideological positioning that had led to the persecution of the Church.

The Orthodox Church thus defined itself as a martyr of the communist regime. The Church’s hierarchy supported the exploration and expansion of this memory of martyrdom, with the publication of testimonials, records, and evidence of the persecution. Dictionaries, anthologies, volumes reuniting the lives of various ecclesiastics directly or indirectly persecuted by the Communist regime were published, as well as a great number of individual articles and studies²⁹. The exclusion of the Church from the public space, the persecution of monks, theologians, Church hierarchs and of other clergymen were documented. The brutal intervention of the communist regime in church life was denounced, as well as its attempts thwart the “natural” development of the Church, by shutting down numerous monasteries, demolishing churches, downsizing theological education etc.

Direct persecutions of clergymen, monks and laymen imprisoned were documented. Aside from that, several authors, and most notably from amongst Church officials also emphasised the permanent pressures put on the everyday functioning of the Church by the secret police, and the direct interventions of State authorities in Church life.

It was argued that the bishops, confronted with the need to choose, and thus decide the fate of the Church during communism, had opted for

what was deemed a “survival strategy”: precarious though it was, the path of cooperation with the communist regime had been necessary for a form survival of the Church, even reduced to its liturgical role. This very survival, indeed, was to be understood as an implicit act of dissidence to an atheistic, persecuting regime³⁰.

The memory of this period could not be altogether repudiated without dramatic consequences for the Church's institutional continuity. Challenged both from within and from without, Church authorities hesitated. Under public pressure, Patriarch Teoctist resigned, only to be reinstated three months and a half later by the Holy Synod, unable to cope with the problem of succession and acknowledging the fact that making the Patriarch a scapegoat for the cooperation of the Church with the Communist regime would only have placed the Church as a whole in a more difficult position than it was before.

Thus, except for the early 1990s, the fact that a form of cooperation or at least coexistence with the atheistic communist state had been reached was generally accepted as a positive achievement of the Church, and of Patriarch Justinian Marina in particular. His opting for this ‘survival strategy’ had insured, it was argued, the institutional and sacramental survival of the Orthodox Church. While most churches had been shut and/or demolished in countries like the USSR, in Romania, many parish churches, as well as a (limited) number of monasteries were able to survive throughout the communist period. At the end of the communist regime, baptisms, as well as religious marriages and funerals were still the norm in Romania, and church attendance, though officially discouraged, was still high on major religious feasts like Christmas and Easter. Monasteries in particular were important spiritual centres, where the institution of spiritual fatherhood was still alive, and well-known spiritual fathers were still able to reach a vast audience³¹.

Though undertaken under great political pressure, the internal reorganisation of the Church is also valued as an important achievement of the Communist period, and as one of the highlights of the patriarchate of Justinian Marina (+1977). The institutional reform brought about by the new 1949 Church Statute and a global reintroduction of the coenobitic rule in the Romanian monasteries were seen as significant steps in the institutional consolidation of the Church, and that despite the political context during which they were introduced, and which had undoubtedly played its part in it.

The implicit “protection” of the Orthodox Church against religious competition by both the Communist and the pre-Communist regimes was looked upon with definite nostalgia. That was the case particularly in the 1990s, when Evangelical Churches and New Religious Movements became intensely active throughout Eastern Europe³², and Church leaders had to face the unexpected³³ situation of an unregulated competition that it had not needed to confront before³⁴.

Likewise, the 'reunion' of the Orthodox Church in 1949, by the 'dissolution' of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania was mentioned as one of the great achievements of the period, particularly in the 1990s. Despite the fact that the brutal destruction of the Greek-Catholic Church had been conducted by the Communist authorities, which confiscated its properties, gave over its churches to the Orthodox Church, forced the conversion of Greek-Catholics to the Orthodox Church, and imprisoned and persecuted its dissident leaders, the 1989 Church "reunion" was saluted as a sort of historical 'compensation' for the original 1700 establishment of the Greek Catholic Church, which the Orthodox saw as equally political and illegitimate³⁵. While open praise for the 1949 "dissolution" of the Greek-Catholic Church faded from the Orthodox hierarchs' discourse in the early years 2000, support for the perpetuation of its effects did not. With one notable exception, that of Metropolitan Nicolae (Corneanu) of Banat, Orthodox hierarchs seldom authorised the return to the Greek-Catholic Church of the churches the Orthodox Church had taken over after 1949, and most of them pleaded for the preservation of the *status quo*³⁶.

On the other hand, continuing efforts begun in the interwar period, the Orthodox Church's commitment to the Ecumenical Movement grew deeper during the Communist regime, particularly since the 1960s. In 1961, the Romanian Orthodox Church became an active member of the World Council of Churches, and in the following years it became ever more involved in various ecumenical initiatives for promoting world peace, such as the Christian Peace Conference. Though the political incentives for these goals were clear, and the Communist regime aimed to improve its human rights credentials by supporting the Church's ecumenical engagement, and though its involvement in the fight for world peace was serving the regime's international political goals³⁷, the post-communist Orthodox Church was not ready to abandon its ecumenical commitment, which was seen as an important achievement that it had every intention to preserve. Indeed, while the Orthodox Churches became increasingly marginalised in the WCC, and many renounced the Ecumenical Movement altogether, the Romanian Orthodox Church was one of those choosing to continue their participation in ecumenical efforts.

Finally, in a move that served both the communist regime's interests and the Orthodox Church's local and inter-Orthodox purposes, it was during the Communist regime that the Church had been able to proclaim, though with some difficulty, the first official canonisations in its history as an autocephalous Church. Adopted in 1950 and publicly proclaimed in 1955, these first canonisations were to consolidate the Orthodox Church's status within the country, as well as its standing in the universal Orthodox Church. These were to establish the Romanian Orthodox Church's aspiration to incarnate the "Church of the Nation" par excellence, as did the consolidation of the cult of St. Andrew, proclaimed the evangeliser of

Romania. Furthermore, it was during the last years of the Communist regime that the documentation for further canonisations was prepared and organised, a process that enabled the Romanian Orthodox Church to proclaim nineteen new “Romanian” saints in 1992. Thus, it was during the Communist regime that Romanian Orthodox Church managed to proclaim its apostolic origin and its status as a fully-grown autocephalous Church. It was also able to firmly stake its claim to be *the* ‘national Church’ *par excellence*, by the canonisation of saints from all regions of Romania, covering the entire span of Christian history until the 18th century.

Thus, the memory of the Communist regime, as it was preserved and reconstructed in the post-communist period was ambiguous. It was remembered as a time of overt (and covert) persecution of the Church, but also as one of important achievements. All things considered, though a “survival strategy” had had to be devised in order to ensure the very institutional perpetuation of the Church in the face of a persecuting regime, this choice appeared to have worked well for the Church, and therefore could not be denounced as morally wrong without negating all its positive outcomes.

“The stones will cry out” – or what remained unsaid

However, official efforts to “domesticate” the memory of both the interwar and the communist periods were mined by what had remained unsaid about both periods. For the interwar period, State control over the internal administration of the Church (which was enshrined into law) was conveniently left out of the reconstruction of the Church’s memory of this period; it is only in recent years that this has begun to be discussed by Church historians³⁸.

While the interwar Church-State relations were being used as a model for their reconstruction in the post-Communist period, and served to legitimate the Church’s presence in the public space, there was little reflection on the actual interwar situation, where the State had had extensive rights of direct intervention in Church administration.

When, in 1990, the Church made a radical break with the previous model of Church-State relations, by unilaterally excluding all State authorities from the administration of the Church, the radical character of the move remained discreet: it had not only broken with the constraints placed upon the Church by the Communist regime, but with the entire tradition of the modern Romanian State’s treatment of religion.

But the greater problem with the reconstructed memory of the interwar period was the contentious relation of some of the most prominent characters in the Church – and of the Church as a whole – with the great political and ideological issue of the period, namely that of the rising extreme right movements (including, on occasions, the adoption of an anti-Semitic discourse by prominent personages in the Church). This,

too, was little debated in the context of the official reconstruction of the Church's memory of the interwar: the complex entanglement of priests and hierarchs with the Iron Guard was not examined closely, and was avoided whenever possible. However, as the time passed and several studies were published on the topic³⁹, it became increasingly difficult to do so.

This lack of discussion eventually took its toll. Reluctance to discuss the commitment of some of its priests and hierarchs to the Legionary Movement and efforts to avoid the subject also meant that the Romanian Orthodox Church shied away, until now, from publicly proclaiming any martyrs of the Communist period, in sharp contrast with the Russian Orthodox Church. As many of the priests, theologians, and laymen who lost their lives in the Communist prisons had been, at some point in their lives, connected to the Legionary Movement, the Church avoided coming into the public eye by the canonisation of potentially contentious figures. This, in turn, raised considerable resentment from within the Church itself, and suspicion without⁴⁰.

With respect to the memory of the communist period, the main contentious element in the Romanian public sphere after 1989 was the occasionally voluntary collaboration of various prominent personages in the Church not just with the Communist regime, but also with the latter's political police, the Securitate. Several members of the Church hierarchy and of the clergy had been recruited as informers of the Securitate, but, for the Church, the issue was difficult to cope with, as such accusations would have cast doubts on the legitimacy of several important members of the Holy Synod, and was perceived as a menace to the spiritual authority of the clergy in general.

A first solution adopted in the Holy Synod was to issue a limited penitential discourse, and apologize for the "human weaknesses" that had induced some members of the clergy to cooperate more than was necessary with the Communist authorities. This discourse was soon flanked and moderated by efforts to justify and explain out some of the dubious choices made by individual members of the clergy, and the Church hierarchy in particular⁴¹.

The Holy Synod remained undecided on the procedures to adopt when State-sponsored entities attempted to clarify the specific issue of the collaboration of some members of the higher clergy with the Communist political police: it went back and forth, alternately acknowledging and vehemently opposing such efforts. Eventually, these informations were released in the public space, confirming that several members of the hierarchy had collaborated in some form or another with the Securitate⁴².

The Holy Synod attempted to protect its members and the clergy from the public exposure of former Securitate informants within its ranks, and access to Church archives remained extremely selective and limited. A recent decision of the Holy Synod suggests that the move was deliberate⁴³.

Such efforts to control access to information were repeatedly denounced by researchers and by the civil society, but that did not change the determination of the Holy Synod to insist on crafting an eminently positive memory of the key figures of Romanian Orthodox hierarchy of the communist and post-communist periods.

However, limiting access to documents and emphasis on positive memorial elements rendered more difficult the reconstruction of the life stories of direct victims of communist repression against the Church.

Uses of memory and the consequences of a “precarious memory”⁴⁴

As we have observed, the memory of interwar Church-State relations was extensively used, in the 1990s, as a point of reference for the reconstruction of these relations after the fall of communism. It was in the name of the interwar situation that Church representatives claimed the autonomy of the Church from the state, the establishment of religious education classes in the public schools and the reconstitution of chaplaincy in major State institutions. The representation of the Church hierarchy in the Parliament (in the Senate in particular), a longstanding tradition of the modern Romanian state was also proposed, but was eventually refused, as Romanian politicians proved unwilling to share political power with non-elected actors. Finally, support for the *invocatio Dei* in the swearing in formula for major public offices, and the presence of representatives of the clergy on such occasions were also taken up based on the memory of pre-Communist times.

The communist regime, by contrast, was seen as an illegitimate, abusive, persecuting regime, but also as a source of unchangeable realities. As it permeated the entire Romanian society in the early 1990s, “post-communist anti-communism” became normative in the Church, as well. To that end, the reconstruction of the memory of the Church under communism became above all the articulation of its role as a victim of this regime. The evocation of direct persecutions, personal harassment, imprisonment and even the death of a multitude of Orthodox clergymen, monastics and laymen by the hand of communist authorities became central to the shaping of this dimension of memory.

To this was added, in a lower key in the 1990s, but more prominently during the last few years, the evocation of the nationalisations of Church properties by the Communist regime. Their evocation (together with that of similar previous events), in turn, was used as grounds for claims to the restitution of properties by the State to the Church.

Re-constructing the Church’s memory in this way, Orthodox prelates also helped give an added legitimacy to the return of the Church in the public space: as a victim of the Communist regime, it was, on the one hand, in accord with the rest of Romanian society, where a self-victimising discourse prevailed since the early 1990s; on the other hand,

this selective memory served as an added source of legitimacy for the Church's return in the public sphere.

As an effort to come to terms with the communist past, this solution proved, however, incomplete. The Orthodox Church's status as (exclusively) a victim of the Communist regime was contested on several grounds and by different actors. First, the Greek-Catholic Church, which considered the ROC a willing partner of the Communist state in its destruction in 1948 also sought, in its turn, to restore another facet of the interwar status quo ante (by trying to recuperate its believers and properties), an aspiration that proved as yet impossible to reach. Secondly, the Romanian state, which, by its truth commissions, pointed to the cooperation of prominent Orthodox clergymen with the political police of the Communist regime. Thirdly, the research community revealed a very complex reality, with some characters having acted both as persecutors or collaborators to persecution and as persecuted, as victims as well as perpetrators. Finally, the mass-media periodically brought pressure to bear on the Orthodox Church, constantly questioning its role, and in particular that of its major ecclesiastical figures during the communist period.

The precariousness of this entire *travail de mémoire* within the Orthodox Church is not without consequences. Thus, as far as the interwar period is concerned, one key issue that has been, until recently, occulted in the reconstruction of its public memory was the Romanian State's constant commitment, throughout the modern period, to limit the influence and control the manifestations of the Church – and of religion in general – in the public space, and to turn it, as far as possible, into an instrument of the State-driven national project. It also made it more difficult to identify the several elements of continuity between the interwar and communist regime's respective visions of Church-State relations. It also obscured the understanding of the radical character of the changes introduced in the system of Church-State relations by the decision of the Romanian Orthodox Church to deprive public authorities of all direct control over its internal functioning.

The same approach is also partly responsible for allowing – and discretely encouraging – an apologetic reading and a recuperation of the national mystique of 'Romanianism' advocated during the interwar both by Iron Guard ideologues and by several Romanian theologians. Meanwhile, the lack of the intellectual instruments to help discern between the Christian martyrs of the Communist prisons and the 'martyrs' of the Legionary Movement are only one of the unexpected effects of the insufficiency of a critical appraisal of the situation of the Church in the interwar period. The critical reflection on the role of Orthodoxy in the construction and functioning of the national project and on the necessary limits of such a commitment on the part of the Church remains the

attribute of a minority of laymen and theologians within the ROC, and of Orthodox theologians in the “diaspora”.

The non-appropriation of the most obscure shades of the memory of the communist period also leads to a conflict of memories with various entities of civil society, as well as with some State institutions and with other Churches. Or, it is precisely on these issues that the Church recurrently comes under fire, in the public eye. This, in turn, is fuelling a certain lack of confidence in the ecclesiastical institution as such, and often forces the Church’s discourse into the defensive. The same attitude also makes it impossible to advance in the resolution of conflicts, like that with the Greek-Catholic Church, radicalised by decisions taken during the Communist regime.

Thus, the final consequence of this refusal of a therapeutic reappraisal of the memory and history of both periods is the fact that an “appeasement” or taming of their memory cannot be completed, and the weave of public Church memory cannot be seamlessly woven into the tapestry of the wider Romanian memorial and historical discourses on the interwar and the communist periods.

Without passing through the therapeutic process of remembrance, acknowledgement, and critical evaluation of the role each actor played in both periods, by the wilful or unreflective shading of parts of the canvas, efforts to tame the memory of these periods are deemed to fail. The tension between the “official” canon of remembrance and individual memories is inevitable, and the road to a “happy memory” remains barred.

Notes:

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² José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³ Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 646.

⁴ Daniel Barbu, *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România postcomunistă* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2004), 107-122.

⁵ John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church. Its Past and Its Role in the World Today*, fourth revised edition, with selected revisions by Nicholas Lossky (Crestwood, MA: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 130-132; on the transition from Orthodox universalism to the nationalisation of tradition: Paschalis Kitromilides, *An Orthodox Commonwealth. Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate [Variorum], 2004); Barbu, 277-289 for comments on the Romanian situation.

⁶ Art. 5.2 of the *Statutes for the organisation and functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church*: http://www.patriarhia.ro/_upload/documente/121438488425759490.pdf: 'The Romanian Orthodox Church is national and in majority according to her Apostolic age, tradition, number of faithful and her special contribution to the life of the Romanian people. The Romanian Orthodox Church is the Church of the Romanian nation', while in art. 1 and 5.1 the Orthodox Church claims jurisdiction on Romanians both within Romania and from abroad.

⁷ Alexandru Duțu "Naționalizarea tradiției", in *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței europene* (Bucharest: All Educational, 1999), 179-195; also Alexandru Duțu, *Lumea dinăuntru și lumea din afară (articole, interviuri, note de lectură)*, edited by Laurențiu Vlad (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2009), 235-344. For a general assessment of the foundational myths of Romanian historiography: Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, IInd edition (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000) – 17-20 for the author's notes on the 'Orthodox' articulation of national identity.

⁸ Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România postcomunistă. Reconstrucția unei identități publice*, (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, vol. I: 2009; vol. II: 2010).

⁹ Decision no. 439/1990 adopted by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church during its session of January 3-4, 1990, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română (BOR)* CVIII, 11-12 (1990), 97-98, quoted in Conovici, 76.

¹⁰ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); also Conovici, *cit.*

¹¹ Which it did, by inscribing it in the Church Statute, as we have shown in Conovici, 370-382.

¹² Alexandra Ionescu, "La dernière révolution léniniste. Pensée et pratique d'une autorité révolutionnaire en Roumanie", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VI, 4 (2006): 821-866.

¹³ Lavinia Stan, "Lustration in Romania: The Story of a Failure", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VI, 1 (2006): 135-156.

¹⁴ Cristian Vasile, "Considerații privind sursele și temele istoriei ecleziastice postbelice", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VII, 3 (2007): 697-706; Cristian Vasile, "Domnul Ciachir, Biserica și Raportul Tismăneanu", *Revista 22* XVIII, 6, February 6-12, 2007, 16.

¹⁵ Traian Băsescu, President of Romania, Speech on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Report by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (delivered in the Romanian Parliament, December 18, 2006), http://cpcadcr.presidency.ro/upload/8288_en.pdf.

¹⁶ Stan and Turcescu, 65-89 ("Confronting the Communist Past"); also Conovici, 110-123.

¹⁷ Anca Șincan, in "Writing Their History: Trends in the Romanian Orthodox Church Historiography on the History of the Greek Catholic Church after 1948", *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Historia* 7, Târgu Mureș (2007): 217-229 reconstructs the articulation, in the Communist period, of an Orthodox historiography supporting the "dissolution" of the Greek-Catholic Church, and notes the perpetuation of this historiographical "canon" in the post-communist period. There were, however, Orthodox bishops like Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu who publicly denounced this canon after 1989 and adopted a penitential attitude with respect to the role of the Orthodox Church in the 1948 act, for example in Nicolae Corneanu, *Pe baricadele presei bisericești*, II vol. (Timișoara: Înviearea, 2000), in a 1997

article, “Noi și frații greco-catolici” published in vol. I, 733-739, and in several interviews published in vol. II, e.g.: “Biserica și unitatea noastră națională” (1991), 223-229 and “Neînțelegerile cu greco-catolicii”, 229-233.

¹⁸ Gheorghe Modoran, “Confesiunile neoprotestante din România în perioada regimului comunist: 1945-1965”, *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VII, 3 (2007): 655-674.

¹⁹ Discussed in Conovici, 110-123.

²⁰ Boia, 339-348.

²¹ Lucian Boia, *România: țară de frontieră a Europei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), 89-97.

²² Comisia Internațională pentru Studiarea Holocaustului în România, *Raport final* (Iași: Polirom, 2004). First adopted by Government Emergency Decree no. 31/2002, it was later adopted by the Parliament as Law no. 107/2006.

²³ Conovici, 390-402.

²⁴ Andreea Nanu, “Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, Dumitru Stăniloae: un ecumenism interbelic? Repere pentru o definiție a Ortodoxiei românești”, *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VII, 3 (2007): 625-638; Conovici, 127-128.

²⁵ Dorin Dobrințu, “Religie și putere în România. Politica statului față de cultele (neo)protestante, 1914-1944”, *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* VII, 3 (2007): 583-602; also Barbu, 285-289.

²⁶ The Law for National Education (Law 1/2011) forbids religious proselytising on school premises, on a par with political activities, immoral practices and physically or mentally dangerous activities (art. 7 (1)), http://www.cdep.ro/proiecte/2010/500/80/7/leg_pl587_10.pdf.

²⁷ For a critical assessment of their role: Lucian Leuștean, “‘For the Glory of Romanians’: Orthodoxy and Nationalism in Greater Romania, 1918-1945”, *Nationalities Papers* 35, 4 (September 2007); Ionuț Florin Biliuță, “Between Orthodoxy and the Nation. Traditionalist Definitions of Romanianness in Interwar Romania” (M.A. Diss., Central European University-History Department, Budapest, 2007).

²⁸ Dușu, *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței europene*, 222; Conovici, 111-113. One should note this is also the perspective endorsed by President Traian Băsescu, after having been presented with the final report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania. In his speech to the reunited Chambers of Parliament on December 18, 2006 (see n. 15 in this paper), he endorsed a vision of the Communist regime as a historical period hijacked by a political group “imposed by foreign dictate”: “For the citizens of Romania, communism was a regime imposed by a political group, self-designated as possessor of the truth, a totalitarian regime born through violence and ended by violence. It was a regime of oppression that expropriated the Romanian people of five decades of their modern history, a regime that trampled the law underfoot and forced citizens to live in lie and fear”.

²⁹ On the status of these studies in the historiography of the Church during communism, see Anca Șincan, “Debating the Truth. History of the Church in the Hands of the Lay Historian?”, *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Historia* 6, Târgu Mureș (2006): 233-242. It was not, however, until 2007 that the Romanian Patriarchy endorsed a volume – *Martiri pentru Hristos din România în perioada regimului comunist* (Bucharest: ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii

Ortodoxe Române, 2007) relating the lives and martyrdom of Christian martyrs of the Communist period. This work was drafted following a German Catholic initiative, yet the biographies of Greek-Catholic martyrs are – significantly – absent from it.

³⁰ Conovici, 139-152.

³¹ Alexandru Duțu, *Political Models and National Identities in 'Orthodox' Europe* (Bucharest: Babel Publishing House, 1998), 161-162, 175; idem, *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței europene*; see also comments in Nicolas Stebbing, *Bearers of the Spirit: Spiritual Fatherhood in Romanian Orthodoxy* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2003).

³² Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat. Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 265-274, 308-334; Marat Shterin, "New Religions in the New Russia", in *New Religious Movements in the Twenty-First Century. Legal, Political and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, edited by Philip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 79-94.

³³ Daniel Ciobotea, (then) Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina stated in 1991 that the Church had been 'surprised by freedom': in Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, *Dăruire și dăinuire. Raze și chipuri de lumină din Istoria și spiritualitatea românilor* (Iași: Trinitas, 2005), 349-350.

³⁴ Barbu, 285-289.

³⁵ Anca Șincan, "Writing Their History: Trends in the Romanian Orthodox Church Historiography on the History of the Greek Catholic Church after 1948", 217-229.

³⁶ Stan and Turcescu, 91-117.

³⁷ Anca Șincan, "Inventing Ecumenism? Interconfessional Dialogue in 1960s Romania", *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXVI, 3 (August 2006): 1-16; Lucian Leuștean, "Eastern Christianity and the Cold War: An Overview", in Lucian N. Leuștean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-1991* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 3-9; also, for a case study: Lucian Leuștean, "Religious Diplomacy and Socialism: The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Church of England, 1956-1959", *East European Politics and Societies* 22, 1 (2008): 7-43.

³⁸ For example Claudiu Cotan, *Ortodoxia și mișcările de emancipare națională din sud-estul Europei în secolul al XIX-lea*, (București: ed. Bizantină, 2004) discusses the foundational period and the clear intention of the constructors of the Romanian state to treat religion as a public issue and to exert direct control over it; Ionuț Corduneanu, *Biserica și Statul – două studii* (București: Evloghia, 2006) makes similar comments; George Enache, "Problema autonomiei în dezbaterile parlamentare din 1925 privitoare la Legea pentru organizarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române", *INTER Romanian Review for Theological and Religious Studies* I, 1-2 (2007): 302-313 deals with some specific issues of the interwar period; Paul Bruszanowski, *Stat și Biserică în vechea Românie între 1821-1925* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010) reconstructs the whole period spanning from the beginnings of modern Romanian political entities to 1925 and clearly points out the voluntarist streak in the Romanian state's treatment of religion throughout the period.

³⁹E.g. Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, Stat și societate în anii '30* (Iași: Polirom, 2007); Lucian Leuștean, "For the Glory of Romanians': Orthodoxy and Nationalism in Greater Romania, 1918-1945", *Nationalities Papers* 35, 4 (September 2007): 717-742; Ionuț-Florin Biliuță, "The Philosopher and Orthodoxy. An Inquiry into the

‘Ethnic Ontology’ of Nae Ionescu”, *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Historia* 7 (2007): 175-200.

⁴⁰ The matter is taken up in George-Eugen Enache et al., “Biserica Ortodoxă Română în anii regimului comunist. Observații pe marginea capitolului dedicat cultelor din Raportul final al Comisiei pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România”, *Studii Teologice* 2 (2009): 7-103 (particularly 25-27); they argue that to generalise suspicion on the collaboration/involvement of some clergymen with/in the Legionary Movement would be to play in the hand of past Communist propaganda, who had attempted to discredit the clergy by associating it in its entirety with the former extreme right movement. However, the authors do acknowledge the need for further study on the topic of the involvement of the clergy with the Legionary Movement.

⁴¹ Conovici, 110-138.

⁴² The National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate eventually discussed and issued decisions of collaboration with the political police in the cases of several members of the Holy Synod; though several such decisions have been successfully reversed in a court of law, the names of former informers did make their way to the public space. Though borrowing in an unorthodox manner, in its Introduction, excerpts of the text of the *Final Report* of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007, edited by Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu, and Cristian Vasile) the volume *Culte din România, între prigonire și colaborare* (Iași: Polirom, 2007), edited by Carmen Chivu-Duță also published a series of documents from the Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives that had been used to incriminate as Securitate informers some of the most prominent figures of the main religious denominations in Romania. Theologian Radu Preda, in *Comunismul - o modernitate eșuată* (Eikon: Cluj-Napoca, 2009), 210-217 drafts an empirical typology of the profiles of former and current prelates of the Romanian Orthodox Church who had accepted to become collaborators of the Securitate.

⁴³ Decision no. 5944 of July 5, 2012 of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church concerning the procedures for authorising access to documents from the Archives of the Holy Synod and of diocesan centres for the purpose of academic, journalistic or other types of research, published online at: http://www.patriarhia.ro/_layouts/images/File/5944%20Comunicare%20documente%20Arhiva.pdf confirmed that access to the Holy Synod and diocesan archives was and would remain deliberately limited, in order to “preserve and honour the memory of past and current members of the Holy Synod”.

⁴⁴ The formula is borrowed from Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe. A Memory Mutates* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2000); the author uses it for different purposes.

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