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# **Redeeming Memory: Neo-Protestant Churches and the Secret Police Archives in Romania**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the manner in which members of the neo-Protestant churches dealt with the past of their own communities, the importance they ascribed to the archives of the former secret police and how they utilized state security files in order to write histories of their communities during the communist regime. While some have used the archives as a means to highlight the sufferings and persecutions that the neo-Protestant communities endured in an effort to fill the pages of history left blank, others have seen it as the sole repository of the truth about the past and took the responsibility upon themselves of exposing the names of all those community members who collaborated with the Securitate. Unlike the Orthodox Church, which has been accused of trying to keep under lock and key documents that could bring to light controversial issues, the neo-Protestant communities rushed into the archives in a quest for a true history of their own past. The article analyses some of the most important and controversial books that were written by members of various neo-Protestant churches, in which the subject of collaboration was more or less thoroughly addressed. Taken out of context, some of these works seemed like vengeful attempts to purify the neo-Protestant communities of their weakest individuals. For some members it was difficult to comprehend that such an endeavour could come from within the communities themselves, while for others these attempts were nothing more than an attack against the neo-Protestant churches. The nature of the secret police archives, its uses and abuses, as well as measures of transitional justice are other subjects that are dealt with in the present article.

Following the fall of the communist regime in Romania, efforts were made by numerous historians and theologians to produce, based on research done in the archives of the former secret police, a literature that would encompass the sufferings and repression endured by the various religious communities present in the country. The present article examines the manner in which members of various religious minorities, namely the neo-Protestant churches, dealt with the past of their own communities, the importance they ascribed to the archives of the former secret police and how they utilized state security files to write histories of their communities during the communist regime. Some have used the archives as a means to highlight the sufferings and persecutions that these religious minorities endured in an effort to fill the pages of history left blank whilst others have seen it as the sole repository of the truth

about the past and took the responsibility upon themselves of exposing the names of all those community members who collaborated with the Securitate.

The Romanian Orthodox Church was the first to take the stage in creating a distinctly “sacred narrative” out of state repression that culminated in the development of the so-called *prison saints* movement<sup>1</sup> (Ciobanu 2017, 215). In so doing, the Orthodox Church succeeded in silencing other religious communities by dominating the public discussion on religious persecution and by generating a discourse that, as Monica Ciobanu stresses, only emphasized its own repression (Ciobanu 2017, 232). Faced with the need to come to terms with its recent past in the early post-communist years and as an attempt to legitimize its “recasting as a public religion” (Conovici 2013, 109), the Church adopted certain discursive strategies that pointed instead to its history during the interwar period and to its contribution to the creation of the Romanian nation. The process of transitional justice<sup>2</sup> was initiated in Romania in the early 1990s (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 65) and the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as processing the legacy of its indisputable sufferings during communism, has also been confronted with the need to confess aspects of its controversial past. However, instead of leading the way towards the moral rebirth of the country, as many Romanian intellectuals expected it to do (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 88), the Church tried to restrict public access to its archives, while also impeding the background verification of its priests by the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives.<sup>3</sup> This made the Church even more susceptible to public criticism. This chosen silence on the part of religious actors, that would otherwise be socially vocal and visible, was interpreted as an act of fear that was due to the Church’s awareness of its tainted past (Cişmaş 2017, 303). The opening of the secret police files in 1999 revealed the active collaboration with the communist regime of members of other religious denominations in the country, including neo-Protestant<sup>4</sup> communities, which had until then been shielded from the level of scrutiny and public scandals that had affected the Orthodox Church (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 89).

Unlike the Orthodox Church, which has been accused by scholars and historians of trying to keep under lock and key important documents that could bring to light controversial issues, contributing to what Cristian Vasile calls the “politics of fear” (Vasile 2017, 235), in the case of these religious minorities, mainly neo-Protestant communities, the process of “purification”<sup>5</sup> appears to have been a voluntary act, conducted by some members of the communities themselves. They considered it a step forward necessary for healing from the sins of the past,

without which the true existence of the communities would have been endangered (Mitrofan 2007, 9).

### **Standing in the Shadow of the Orthodox Church**

For a long period of time, the Orthodox Church denied scholars access to documents that might have negatively affected its image, contributing to a so called “silencing of the archives” (Şincan 2012, 144; Trouillot 1995, 26). During the early post-communist years, the Church admitted to a form of cooperation with the communist regime, cooperation that was considered more a “survival strategy” that was necessary in the face of a system that wanted to completely eliminate any form of religion from public life; all things considered, this survival was meant to be seen as a so-called act of “dissidence” to a violent, repressive regime (Conovici 2013, 117). During the 1990s, the Church declared itself a martyr of communism and began a series of actions that would support the expansion of a “memory of martyrdom” (Conovici 2013, 116). This included the publication of numerous articles, dictionaries, volumes depicting the lives and sufferings of various clergymen and monks, testimonies, documentaries and other such studies that were meant to support and legitimize its statements (Conovici 2013, 116).

While not completely denying these narratives, historians and scholars of political science have drawn attention to the fact that, at the same time, the Orthodox Church blocked the public exposure of the names of those priests who collaborated with the former secret police (Stan and Turcescu 2005, 655). Moreover, the Church was accused of turning into “saints” various political prisoners, or priestly figures who, during the interwar period, sympathized with the ideas perpetuated by the extreme right movement, the Iron Guard. Whilst trying to avoid the issue, the Orthodox Church stated that they had sympathized with the religious message of the movement, not with its political aims (Grigore 2015, 45). In an article discussing the Aiud “prison saints” phenomenon, Monica Grigore claims that the political prisoners who died there turned into venerated figures as a result of a construction,<sup>6</sup> and not due to a natural process, and that it all began when, instead of calling them victims of the regime, the representatives of the official religion designated them as martyrs and saints (Grigore 2015, 45).

The “prison saints movement” has resulted in large numbers of Orthodox believers participating in events, such as public mass veneration of relics, where miracles are said to have occurred, which eventually led believers into manifesting a form of veneration towards these individuals.<sup>7</sup> The Orthodox Church would then use these manifestations, in a circular

reasoning, to justify and legitimize the need to canonize some of these political prisoners. While a controversial topic, the phenomenon marked the appearance of a narrative of self-victimization, subtly coordinated by the Orthodox Church, an act that perhaps inadvertently resulted in the marginalization of the experiences, voices and sufferings of religious minorities. Moreover, it seemed that victims who belonged to other religions, confessions and denominations were almost non-existent in the public discourse; on a platform monopolized by the Orthodox Church, their attempts at public recognition of a shared suffering have become inaudible.

The Orthodox Church's expectation to be recast as the public religion after 1989, an institutional position it had during the interwar period, is related to its historical advantage (Murgoci 2009, 26) and its close link to national identity. Its efforts to legitimize this renewed status - that of the state's official religion - posed numerous problems and by trying to consolidate a version of the communist past that portrayed it as the sole victim of religious repression (Ciobanu 2017, 234) the Church was indirectly pointing to an ideal - in its opinion - pre-communist past in which it played a significant role on both the religious and political scene. The attempt to overshadow other religions was not unintentional and the move had ramifications that go back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the appearance of other religious minorities was perceived as a threat to the Orthodox Church's authority.

During the interwar period, there was a clear distinction made between the right belief of the Orthodox Church and the heretical teachings of the sects (see Sonja Luehrmann 2015, 11), such as the neo-Protestant groups. In a speech held in Parliament on the occasion of the 1928 legislative changes, D. Turcu, an Orthodox priest, accused the Neo-protestant minorities, such as the Adventists, Baptists, of endangering the safety of the state and its newly gained identity (Biserica noastră și cultele minoritare 1928, 79). Just one year later, in the magazine *Church and School* (Biserica și Școala) there was an article entitled *The Dangers that await us* (Primejdii ce ne așteaptă) in which the above mentioned groups were accused of trying to destroy the state by infiltrating foreign elements inside the country (Ardeoiu 1929). The Church and state's attitude towards these new religious groups, that they referred to as sects, could be justified by the fact that the latter apparently refused to be dependent on the state, they spread pacifist messages in times of conflict and war, refused to undertake military service and did not want to participate in national festivities, for which reason they were seen as aggressive (Dobrinco 2007, 595). During Antonescu's dictatorship, January 1941- August 1944, the sects

were seen as dangerous as they were perceived as undermining the purity of the Romanian nation; the 1940s marked the culmination of a process of “purification” of the country, a process which included the deportation of Jewish and Roma communities to concentration camps in Transnistria and population exchanges with Hungary and Bulgaria, and it was clear from the beginning that any belief system that incorporated into the idea of Romanianess propagated by nationalists was meant to disappear. During the communist era, apart from it being an atheist system that professed to reject religion altogether, the so-called sects were considered especially dangerous to the state because of their connections and relations with the outside, capitalist world. On the other hand, after a period of harsh repression, the communist regime eventually realized that the legitimacy of the Orthodox Church, as the denomination of the majority of the population, could be used to its own advantage. For this reason, the Church was tolerated by the state in exchange of its unconditional support (Cișmaș 2017, 312).

The critics of the Orthodox Church’s efforts to control access to information and to create a positive memory of its history during communism did not call into question the intensity or the authenticity of the sufferings of direct victims of communist repression against the Church, but rather condemned it for failing to also admit to the dark and controversial aspects of its past, namely collaboration. *The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship of Romania* (Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste în România – Raport Final),<sup>8</sup> released in 2006, proved a major challenge for the Orthodox Church. It included a chapter on the relationship between various religious denominations and the communist authorities in which the collaboration of some Orthodox leaders with the Securitate and the Communist Party was not downplayed. In response to the *Final Report*, which the Church fiercely criticized, the Holy Synod formed a commission that was given the mission of defending the clergy and the church’s image (Vasile 2017, 236 and Chapter 13, this volume). Once again, the Orthodox Church refused to admit to its past mistakes and to abandon a discourse that portrayed it as almost exclusively a victim of the communist regime. The stance of the Orthodox Church was soon contested by other actors such as the Greek-Catholic Church and the neo-Protestant communities, that once again challenged the Church to examine its memory of the Communist regime. While the Greek-Catholics questioned the role of the Orthodox Church in the 1948 forced dissolution of their own church, the neo-Protestant churches highlighted the fact that their ill-treatment during communism and the interwar period was sometimes backed by the Orthodox Church (Conovici 2013, 113) that felt threatened by their proselytizing actions (Final Report 2006, 455).

In a 2007 article, Radu Preda, a Romanian theologian and Director of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile, expressed his objection to the negative attention that the Orthodox Church was being given, especially in the mass media, attention that encouraged people to lose sight of the fact that living under communism had meant having to make difficult decisions (Preda 2007, 779). He responded to the anticlerical voices with the following statement:

Some have tried to compare the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church with the history of other churches and confessions, failing to see that as there is no monopoly on suffering, there is no monopoly on denunciation either. All religious groups in Romania must write a chapter of their own history during communism, about the strongest and the weakest, about confessors and opportunists. It is, after all, the most honest way of accepting the fact that the Church's holiness does not exclude the fall of its members.

The Orthodox Church, however, in its efforts to reclaim its role as the official, national church, appealed to a form of selective memory (Ciobanu 2017, 221) that generated a particular discourse. This discourse, in its turn, made it seem as if the Orthodox Church was the greatest, if not the only, victim of an atheist and extremely repressive regime, whereas the communist prisons had housed individuals of various confessions and world-views that were forced to go through the same sufferings. Limiting religious persecution to the Orthodox clergy, or even to Christian believers alone, means completely excluding the equally valid experiences and memories of people who belonged to different religions (Ciobanu 2017, 234). Moreover, by restricting or, in some cases, denying access to important documents, the Orthodox Church was, in fact, rendering difficult the reconstruction of real life stories of the many direct victims of the communist repression against the Orthodox Church and other religious communities (Conovici 2013, 121).

### **Healing from the Past**

In the last decade, various religious minorities have made efforts to come to terms with their own past. If, in the case of the Orthodox Church, the pressure to purify its memory mostly came from the outside,<sup>9</sup> in the case of the neo-Protestant communities this process began from within the groups themselves, and was seen as imperative. In addition to the literature depicting the sufferings and persecutions of these communities, considered an important element in the

process of healing the wounds of the past, efforts were made to expose the collaborators and to give them the chance to confess their sins publicly.

The one factor that made possible this redemptive process was access to the archive of the former secret police. Immediately after the fall of the communist regime, even before access to its content was allowed, this archive had a special status among other archival sources (Poenu 2013, 102), for obvious reasons - it was believed that it contained the truth about what happened during communism and, most importantly, why it happened. The paradoxical nature of such an expectation, namely that the products of a failed and immoral system would contain the truth about the past is discussed by Kapáló and Povedák (Introduction, this volume), with some stating that their interpretation is the task of historians, the only ones capable of distinguishing between authentic and manipulated documents (Stan 2006, 395). Both claims developed into mental constructs that Lavinia Stan characterizes as “myths” that have shaped the debate on post-communist transitional justice (Stan 2006, 388). In support of the first aspect of this, she draws attention to the fact that the secret police documents are the product of officers that looked at citizens’ behaviour and attitudes through their own ideological lens, presenting a highly problematic version of reality (Stan 2006, 406). In connection to the claim that historians are the most appropriate interpreters of secret police files, however, she highlights the fact that reconstruction of the past belongs not only to historians, but to all those who lived during communist times and had their privacy taken away by the secret police. In her own words:

Access to secret police files democratizes truth seeking by allowing victims to control the process and ordinary citizens to contrast the truth contained in the files with their own recollection of past events (Stan 2013, 60).

The opening of the archives of the former secret police affected many friendships and family relations as everybody could potentially become a stranger, with a different past, a different identity (Poenu 2013, 103). For some scholars, the secret police archives are the “precursors of WikiLeaks” (Stan 2011, 326; Poenu 2013, 103) as they have the potential to generate scandals and give public access to sensitive information. Despite all these “dangers of the archives”, a thorough investigation was seen as necessary by both scholars and civil society; the archive might not contain the truth, but it certainly contains important information that, handled carefully, could lead to a more satisfactory evaluation of events.



The neo-Protestant communities started to record their history during the communist regime relatively late and their writings first took the form of memoirs, or partial attempts at writing a general history of the communities.<sup>10</sup> When access to the former secret police archives became possible, in the early 2000s, numerous members of neo-Protestant groups, some of whom were historians, took the opportunity to conduct more thorough research and bring to light documents that could prove the sufferings their communities had endured as religious minorities, as well as the efforts they made to oppose the vicious communist regime.

These works were often times accompanied by statements that their place in historiography was imperative, aiming to fill the blank pages of a history theretofore unwritten. From the perspective of the neo-Protestant communities, it was seen as a just and fair measure, meant to also address the wider Romanian population that hardly knew anything about these groups, much less understood them (Silveșan 2012, 19). For the most part, especially in the beginning, the need to tell the story of the sufferings that members of neo-Protestant communities had to endure was the most important task and determined the specific agenda with which historians who were members of neo-Protestant churches, entered the archives. However, they were conscious that their communities were unable to escape a phenomenon that affected all structures and institutions during communism, namely that of collaboration with the Secret Police.

The history of the Baptists during the communist regime was approached by Marius Silveșan, himself a historian and member of the Baptist Church, and developed in articles, such as *The Romanian Baptists - from Monarchic Authority to Popular Democracy* (Baptiștii din România de la regimul de autoritate monarhică al lui Carol al II-lea la regimul de democrație populară, 2018) and various books, such as *The Romanian Baptist Church: Between Persecution, Accommodation and Opposition* (Bisericile baptiste din România: între persecuție, acomodare și rezistență, 2012). The Evangelical Christians were dealt with by Bogdan Emanuel Răduț, a member of the community, in works such as *The History of the Evangelical Christians: Volume of Documents* and *The Evangelical Christians and the Department of Culture: Behind the Scenes of a Public Trial in Craiova* (Creștinii după evanghelie și departamentul cultelor: din culisele unui proces public la Craiova, 2013). The History of the Pentecostals was approached by Ciprian Bălăban, a member of the Pentecostal Church, and written in a recently published work, *The History of the Romanian Pentecostal Church. 1922-1989* (Istoria Bisericii Penticostale din România 1922-1989, 2016).

The subject of collaboration was not left unaddressed in these works, and most neo-Protestant historians and, sometimes, even members of these churches, that took the writing of a history of these communities upon themselves, dedicated at least one chapter in their works to this issue, or dealt with it in subsequent articles. However, the topic was seen as a very sensitive one and the general conclusion was that this controversial subject should be treated carefully and authors should abstain from naming people before having completed rigorous research.

The act of collaboration has been described in various ways, using expressions such as “tightrope walk” (Bălăban 2015, 71), describing the dangerous attempt on the part of the informers to keep a balanced relationship with the Securitate, while still performing their duties within their churches. Others defined it in more spiritual, yet perhaps harsher terms, such as “shaking hands with the (d)evil” (Dumitrescu 2010, 15). This assessment is often met with in neo-Protestant communities, for whom the communist regime was the work of the devil; agreeing to become an informer meant betraying your own brothers and sisters in Christ and bringing harmful consequences upon them.

The ways in which the Securitate tried to infiltrate neo-Protestant communities are described in numerous articles included in *Securitatea*, a journal that was only addressed to and available to members of the secret police. If the Orthodox Church closely collaborated with the Securitate in exchange for its protection and a privileged position among other religions, with harsh consequences for those priests who refused collaboration and openly opposed the regime, the measures taken by the secret police in the case of neo-Protestant communities were slightly different. They were designed to confuse and sow doubt in their members, which would then hopefully - from the regime’s perspective - lead to their dissolution. Due to these communities’ evangelizing activities, it was an easy task for the informers to pose as new converts and infiltrate their churches (Banciu 1974, 51). Recruiting collaborators among the neo-Protestant believers that were imprisoned for various crimes was another option, and the Securitate especially targeted young members (Banciu 1974, 52). If the police had any compromising information about the person that it was trying to convince to become an informer they employed blackmail and intimidation (Croitor 2010, 140), while in other cases members of a community could be recruited in order to supervise and offer information about members of other communities, in an attempt to destabilize and generate confusion amongst believers (Lungu and Medaru 1975, 32-36).

Coming to terms with the past of their own communities implied, for some members of the neo-Protestant churches, accepting both their history of opposition and the repressive measures they had to endure as religious minorities during their short history in Romania,<sup>11</sup> as well as the duplicitous existence of some of their brothers and sisters during the communist regime. The latter aspect, however, according to members of these communities had to be confronted so that the past mistakes could be redeemed, the memory purified and the people who compromised themselves could be offered and receive forgiveness. Few of those who collaborated, however, came forward to confess their “weakness” and, as Paul Negruț, the former president of the Romanian Baptist Community, stated in his 2006 address in the opening of the National Conference:

The Baptist community carries within itself a mixture of traitors and martyrs and it never had a moment of public confession, purification, forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation (Negruț, 2006).

As the Pentecostal pastor Gheorghe Rițișan claims, having been given the chance to confess and, perhaps out of fear and shame of facing the consequences of their actions, having failed to do so, these former collaborators “had to be exposed” so that the faces of the true victims of communism could be brought to light (Croitor 2010, v). The agenda of some members of neo-Protestant communities thus changed; when entering the archives, they had a different purpose, that of “healing the badly closed wounds of the past” (Hayner 2011, 145) by exposing them and giving their brothers and sisters, who “sold their souls to the devil”, the chance to repent and be forgiven (Mitrofan 2009a, 180). They took on the stance of what Florin Poenaru would call “historians as priests”<sup>12</sup>, meaning that they assumed the function of priests, offering understanding and forgiveness and claiming that it was their responsibility to heal what was left unhealed and to mediate between the victims and perpetrators (Poenaru 2013, 103).

### **Redeeming the Memory of a Painful Past**

From 2006 onwards, a series of published works have shaken the neo-Protestant communities in Romania. Written by important members of these churches, some of whom were preachers, these works were the result of a more or less thorough research conducted in the archives of the former Secret Police. The motivation behind these attempts was frequently mentioned within the pages of these works, and it stated that “the church should be the first one to bring

to light the wrongdoings of the past in order to reflect the truth” (Mitrofan 2009b, 166) because “it was the only way it could make peace with its past” (Croitor 2013, 366). Another purpose, however, was of exposing the names of people who had collaborated with the secret police while they were still performing their everyday tasks within the churches they belonged to. Taken out of context, some of these works seemed like vengeful attempts to purify the neo-Protestant communities of their weakest individuals. For some members it was difficult to comprehend that such an endeavour could come from within the communities themselves; for others, these attempts were nothing more than a “terrorist attack” against the neo-Protestant churches (Vaisamar, 2010), an act of treason meant to break down these already small communities.

Some of the most controversial works were those of Daniel Mitrofan, a member of the Baptist church who wrote two books addressing the subject of collaboration, namely *Pygmies and Giants* (Pigmeiși uriași, 2007) and *Steps* (Pași, 2010). The Baptist community had mixed feelings regarding the publishing of these books, especially due to the fact that they seemed to have been written with the sole purpose of unmasking the former informers within the community whilst also trying to prove that more than 70% of the leaders of the Baptist Church collaborated in one way or another with the Securitate (Silveșan, 2010). Moreover, Mitrofan was accused of using the information he acquired from the archives in a selective manner and of trying to manipulate it in order to serve his own purposes (Silveșan, 2010). Apart from these books, he would frequently publish online articles discussing controversial topics, such as the 2009 article, figuratively called *The Tip of the Iceberg* (Vârful Icebergului), in which he exposed the names of some of the most important preachers whom, he alleges, collaborated with the communist authorities whilst also encouraging his supporters to continue his work:

Create blogs, publish files, make all data available, make connections and do not be intimidated by those who try to discourage you from bringing to light the things that happened in the dark (Mitrofan, 2009c).

His actions generated various responses from those he accused in his writings, some of whom imputed to him the fact that he intentionally avoided pieces of information from their files and only made available those parts that would put them in a negative light (Prologos, 2008). The fact that his book, *Pygmies and Giants*, appeared before the elections for the administration of the Baptist community was another problematic issue.

Apart from the numerous criticisms he received, some of which were connected with the manner in which he (mis)used the secret police archives, or disregarded some of its policies and regulations<sup>13</sup> generating the so called *Dosariada*<sup>14</sup> phenomenon, an improvised form of lustration, within the Baptist community, the reality was that his works had a deeper effect. They encouraged people to go through a process of moral introspection, irrespective of how his initial intentions, as reflected in his writings, came across. The silence that followed was disappointing and devastating for some members of the community (Cruceru, 2011a); not only were the names exposed in a chaotic manner, but those who knew their guilt still refused to come forward, thus contributing to the ongoing proliferation of a widespread climate of suspicion. Ironically, some members of the Baptist community asked for a public confession of the kind made by the Orthodox Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu,<sup>15</sup> claiming that such examples have yet to happen in the Baptist Church (Cruceru, 2011a).

A similar process took place within the Pentecostal Church in early 2010. Vasilică Croitor, a Pentecostal preacher from Constanța, published a well-researched book, which he metaforically called *Redeeming the Memory* (Răscumpărarea memoriei) implying from its title his intention of cleansing a dark memory through the same process, namely that of exposing the names of those who had not confessed their past mistakes. It was the same story as in the case of the Baptist Church: due to the fact that a voluntary admission of past collaboration was a difficult thing to do, a public exposure of the guilty ones was seen as necessary. However, his work comes across as more thoroughly researched and written in a less condemnatory tone. In the introduction to the book, Croitor lists the most important arguments that made the publishing of his work a *sine qua non* initiative:

*Redeeming the Memory* should not have been published! It should have been the Church's duty to act immediately after the fall of communism. *Redeeming the Memory* should have been the consequence of a laborious trial initiated by the Church and its results should have been published in a report. This book should not have been written now! The church should have kept one step ahead of society by offering a model and showing the way to redemption... This book should not have been written by me! Tens of researchers should have been invited to thoroughly analyse the communist period... This book should not have been written in the form of a public exposure! This should have been the last resort to be taken. It was needed due to the former collaborator's lack of will to confess their mistakes, and to our incapacity to create a healthy, forgiving environment for them to do so (Croitor 2010, xvii).

Irrespective of his intentions, his effort was followed by various negative reactions; one such example was the attitude of Ioan Ceuță, a member of the Pentecostal church, who accused Croitor of having committed an “act of terrorism” while also expressing his intentions to take him to court for shaming the entire Pentecostal community (Vaisamar, 2010). Other critics, however, pointed out his ill-intended determination to expose the names of those members who were still active within the community; as a result, after the book was published the leaders of the Pentecostal Church resigned (Jarnea, 2014), retiring from the functions they had within the church. Newspapers around the country published articles introduced by titles such as *The Pentecostals Expose Their Brothers* (Evenimentul Zilei, 2010), which only gave way to further accusations against the author for allowing, even enabling, the portrayal of a negative image of the Pentecostal Church in Romanian society.

In order to set aside the arguments, or the so called “myths”, regarding the futility of exposing the names of those who collaborated with the Securitate, Croitor dedicates more than 10 pages to dealing with each “myth”, finding reasons to maintain that such an endeavour was, in fact, more than necessary (Croitor 2010, 357-370). His actions were defended by younger members of the church, demonstrating that his intentions of redeeming the memory so that the younger generation would be given a new beginning seemed to hold true.<sup>16</sup>

The last neo-Protestant community that I will deal with in the present article which went through a similar process of purification is the Adventist Church. Due to its pyramidal structure,<sup>17</sup> different from the congregational structure of the Baptists or Pentecostals, the Adventist church was more prone to the communist regime’s invasive measures (Dumitrescu 2010, 24). In his article, entitled *Shaking Hands with the (D)evil*, Cristian Dumitrescu attempts to address the issue of collaboration, which he admits he was confronted with on numerous occasions (Dumitrescu 2010, 15). However, in his conclusions he states:

The question regarding the morality of such cooperation must be judged against the prospect of the Church’s survival under Satan’s relentless attacks. The understanding of the Great Controversy offers the correct perspective. In my opinion the issue should not be “if” but “how far” the Church should go to shake hands with an oppressive regime (Dumitrescu 2010, 32).

In other words, one should abstain from passing judgment on decisions made by individuals or institutions who lived under a repressive regime.

However, in 2014, Gheorghe Modoran, author of other articles dealing with the fate of the neo-Protestant communities during communism,<sup>18</sup> also a member of the Adventist church and a historian, published a controversial book, *The Church through the Red Desert (1944-1965)* (Biserica prin pustiul roșu. 1944-1965),<sup>19</sup> a history of the Adventist Church, written after years of research in the archives of the former Romanian Secret Police, as well as in the archives of other institutions. What singularizes his endeavour, however, is that he avoided exposing the names of people who were still alive or, if they were, they had already retired from their functions within the church. For some people, this was considered a wiser option than that of trying to purify an entire clerical apparatus by publicly exposing their names (Jarnea, 2014). His critics, however, challenged his statements and the information he revealed in his work with complex questions regarding the extent to which one should consider the former Secret Police archives as repositories of truth (Speranța TV, 2014). Others have accused him of violating the policy of the Romanian Secret Police archives by publishing controversial information regarding various individuals, who were still alive, without contacting them beforehand. In a public letter, entitled *Letter for my informers*, resembling the title of the book written by the Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu,<sup>20</sup> Ungureanu Emanuel-Dumitru, himself a researcher and member of the Adventist community, critiqued the Church's leadership for allowing the publication of Modoran's thesis. His argument was that the latter manipulated the information contained in the archival documents and publicly exposed the private lives and conversations of numerous individuals, thus becoming himself an informer (Ungureanu, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

All of the cases discussed above bring to light the conflicting emotions and values encountered when trying to come to terms with a painful past. Due to their self-proclaimed moral high ground, the churches, irrespective of the confession in question, fell victim to their own silences and omissions; proclaiming that these mistakes were the result of "human weakness" proved to be insufficient and perhaps even unfair towards all the direct victims of the repressive methods that the communist regime used against religious communities.

While the Orthodox Church, for a long period of time, clung to a positive memory of its own past, blocking any attempts at reassessing its role and of reshaping the discourse that turned it into an almost exclusive victim of the communist regime, the neo-Protestant communities rushed into the archives in a quest for a true history of their own past. The need to confess the sins of the past was a “burden” felt by all and was often described in biblical terms as an act of redemption; however, a process that was expected to come naturally was stunted by the former collaborators’ reluctance to come forward. This was the moment when various members of the communities took upon themselves the public exposure of the names of collaborators in order to give them a chance to apologize, to be forgiven and, perhaps, in some cases, to punish them.

The value of their work was contested, and the methods they used have been fiercely criticized. Was this the only option left? According to some of them, it was, especially when exposing these issues was also an act of justice to all the other victims of the communist regime. Their works were intertwined with numerous efforts on the part of other church members who called for a public confession of those who knew their own guilt (Cruceru 2011b, 11). For others, these public exposures proved overwhelming and made them question how one could put to shame one’s own brothers and sisters in Christ? In answer to this question, the authors replied with another question: how could those brothers and sisters do what they did, in their turn, to their own brothers in Christ?

The priests, pastors, ministers, rabbis, and all other religious leaders that have been identified as former Securitate informers were criticized for remaining silent in a time when recognition and apologies were needed. The Orthodox Church was blamed for avoiding an apologetic stance, seen less as the simple words of an apology<sup>21</sup> and more as the “transmission of a history that clearly states the wrongdoings” (Wolfe 2014, 74). Since 2006, the first moment when the Church’s official history was challenged, it has not expressed repentance as an institution, nor has it addressed its past wrongdoings at an institutional level (Cişmaş 2017, 316). Only a few individual clerics have come forward in order to confess their tainted past and asked the wider society for forgiveness. The situation is no different for the neo-Protestant communities; for fear of facing the consequences of their actions, many former informers missed the opportunity to reveal their past and to express remorse immediately after the fall of the communist regime. However, silenced for two decades on a platform monopolized by the Orthodox Church and shielded from the public backlash that the latter received, the neo-Protestant churches understood that it was time for them to honestly face their past, with its best and worst aspects.



The books written by the neo-Protestants, in which they publicly address the issue of collaboration, do not find equivalent in the Orthodox Church's historiography (Vasile 2010).

The quest for truth and redemption was seen as a "witch hunt" rather than as a step forward. What was expected of the Orthodox Church was expected of the neo-Protestant communities, as well. The fact that the archive of a former secret police which, in its turn, was the product of a corrupt, immoral system, was the main instrument used to bring the truth to light makes the issue even more complicated. The fascination with the purification of memory led to the proliferation of a climate of suspicion and fear. Ironically, this is exactly what the Securitate was blamed for; in the words of Florin Poenaru, "by inscribing the Securitate files as sites of truth about the past, post-communism simply prolonged its logic into the present" (Poenaru 2013, 104). To this, we can only add that the churches still have to walk a long road to redemption and acceptance of their own painful past, a road that is only made bearable by their members' belief that there is still a chance to receive and offer forgiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined by Monica Ciobanu as a term that includes religious associations that promote the canonization of clergy or other Christian believers who were persecuted by the communist regime (Ciobanu 2017, 230).

<sup>2</sup> Transitional justice strategies pursued in Romania are lustration (banning former communist decision-makers from post-communist public life), court trials, access to the former secret police archives, the presidential history commission, memorialization, and property restitution (Stan 2006, 383).

<sup>3</sup> The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, an institution established in 1999, is the authority that administrates the archives of the former communist secret police in Romania.

<sup>4</sup> The term neo-Protestant refers to the Baptists, the Pentecostals, the Evangelical Christians and the Adventists. These communities usually refer to themselves as Evangelicals; however, in order to avoid confusion, in Romania the neo-Protestant term is generally accepted as a more proper term to refer to these communities.

<sup>5</sup> The term purification, in this context, is used to refer to the cathartic effect that digging up the truth about a difficult past is sometimes expected to have.

<sup>6</sup> The politics of saint-making is not limited to Romania and it is a phenomenon that appeared in both Orthodox (see Christensen 2018 and Bodin 2009) and non-Orthodox countries (see Anttonen 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For example, exposure to miracles performed by the bone remains of the former political prisoners, intentionally referred to as “relics” (Grigore 2015, 38).

<sup>8</sup> The Commission’s purpose was to identify the institutions and methods that made possible the human rights crimes and abuses during communism (Vasile 2017, 236).

<sup>9</sup> Here I should mention the initiative of the Group for Reflection on Church Renewal, a seven-member group, initiated by Andrei Andreicuț, Bartolomeu Anania and Dumitru Stăniloae, three important members of the Orthodox clergy, in January 1990. It was meant to regenerate the Church leadership by replacing its tainted leaders. However, the action was interpreted as an insulting attack against the Orthodox Church and the group ceased to exist soon after it was created (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 82).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *The History of the Romanian Baptists. 1856-1989 (IstoriaBaptiștilor din România. 1856-1989)* by Alexa Popovici, published in three volumes.

<sup>11</sup> Most of the neo-Protestant communities that are present in Romania appeared in the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>12</sup> Based on the manners in which historians approach archival documents, Florin Poenaru offers three types of stances, namely “the historian as priest”, “the historian as judge”, and “the historian as inquisitor”.

<sup>13</sup> Mostly connected with the issue of revealing the names he found in the files in the absence of a thorough investigation and without contacting the people who were still alive.

<sup>14</sup> A phenomenon that refers to the studying of the “files of people who stand for higher positions within society in order to see if they collaborated with the Securitate, in which case they were denied the right to obtain such positions.

<sup>15</sup> Nicolae Corneanu was one of the first Orthodox hierarchs who confessed his collaboration with the Secret Police, a gesture that transformed him into a beacon of moral honesty and integrity. Due to his willingness to admit to his past mistakes, Corneanu was not criticized when he later called on to others to admit to their own collaborations (Stan 2013, 79).

<sup>16</sup> One of the supporters of Croitor’s book is Emanuel Conțac, a young lecturer at the Pentecostal Theological Institute in Bucharest who is also the administrator of a website called *Vaisamar*, referenced in the present article, where numerous young people, members of various neo-Protestant churches, expressed their positive opinion about the publishing of the book.

<sup>17</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Church is organized on more levels, starting from the local church, an organized body of individual believers, and going up to the General Conference, the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which includes all members and organizations. This particular structure proved to be problematic during the communist regime as connections with the world leadership were cut. Isolating a national or local church from the General Conference was a way used by the regime to gain control over the structure of the church (Dumitrescu 2010, 32).

<sup>18</sup> Such as *The Neo-Protestant Confessions during the Communist Regime: 1945-1965* (*Confesiunile neoprotestante din România în perioada regimului comunist: 1945-1965*) published in *Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. VII, no. 3, 2007, pp.655-673.

<sup>19</sup> Biserica prin pustiul roșu [translation by the author].

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Liiceanu wrote a book entitled *My Dear Informer* dedicated to the person who gave information about him to the Securitate during the communist regime.

<sup>21</sup> In late 1989 Patriarch Teoctist delivered an apology for the mistakes of the Orthodox Church during communist years, an apology that was described as “halfhearted” by Lavinia Stan (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 71).