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RIVAL NARRATIVES, COMPETING MEMOIRS AND THE ISSUE OF CANONIZATION OF THE MARTYRS OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH FROM THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

-Abstract-

The Romanian Orthodox Church has developed in the public space, after 1989, its own narrative about the sufferings endured during the communist regime, highlighting the names of those persons (priests, monks or laypersons) who were detained in the communist prisons as martyrs of faith. Through this discourse, the church wanted to answer those who accused it of collaborating with the communist regime but, at the same time, to recover a memory of the suffering that most of the population was not aware of.

Thirty years after the fall of communism, although there have been monuments built and many books have been written about the crimes of Communism, the Church has not officially proclaimed any victim of the communist regime, dead for faith, as a saint of the Orthodox church. This raises perplexity among believers and polemics in public space because, from a symbolic point of view, the act of canonization is, for a believer, the supreme act of consecrating the person's worthiness. The dilemma is the following: is the refusal of canonization an acceptance of the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church did not have worthy priests during the communist period or has the church hierarchy been prevented from doing so? In this study, we will try to show what lies behind this impasse of religious consecration, but also of memory management.

Keywords: Romanian Orthodox Church; communism; martyrs; memory.

I. Preliminaries

1. The church without national saints?

According to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, the saints ought to be honoured as God's "friends" and "members of His household" (Ephesians 2, 19), as

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accomplished brothers of ours who scored numerous spiritual victories, who managed to embody the never-ending beauty into their being, and, after finishing their earthly lives, who dwell near God and pray for our redemption. Therefore, the saint's grave and bones become places where Heaven meets Earth, a permanent, well circumscribed, presence of the holy gift among people. This effective and healing presence of the saint into the world is completed by another dimension that Christians give to honouring the saints, i.e. a reminder of the fact that God reveals Himself and His work for the benefit of mankind in history. It is a reminder and an urge to follow God's ways, to firmly believe that the Holy Ghost constantly works in the Church, that there is no "golden age" that ended in hard times, but each generation of believers produces its own Christ chosen vessels.

Beyond this theological definition of the purpose of the saints' cult, there is what some would call a "policy" built on the memory of the saints, which can be identified in the context of proclaiming a certain saint or in the manner in which that saint is used as a symbol in the public space.¹ From the very beginning, the Christian communities, at the end of the Antiquity, gathered around their saints and, gradually, these religious communities became political-religious communities. As it is known, during the Middle Ages, the kings who led their peoples to Christianity were proclaimed saints, and so were the first bishops; cities, on their turn, had their own saint patrons.² In such a political-religious community, where religion and identity tended to mix, there were many occasions when some people gave their life to defend either the faith or the community, thus becoming, in the eyes of the community, heroes and then martyrs. Oftenly, the role of a hero is mistaken for that of a martyr, especially during the modern era when, in certain cases, the fight for national identity overlapped the fight to defend the right faith.³

A case in point is that of the victims of the communist regime, where political repression mixes with the religious one in proportions difficult to identify. Despite this, those who felt persecuted for their Christian belief during the communist regime wanted to honour those co-believers who proved more worthiness in defending the faith, some of them dying in prisons, by proclaiming them saints. The canonization of these „new martyrs" can be studied as a distinct chapter of the policies to memorialize the communist past.

¹ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, The University of Chicago Press, 2014.

² Andrzej Pleszczyński (ed.), *Explorations in Medieval Culture*, volume 8: *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe*, Brill, 2018.

³ For the Romanian case, see George Enache, *Saints and Heroes, War and Peace. A Romanian Orthodox Historical Perspective*, „Записки історичного факультету", 27, 2016, pp. 325-353.

Contrary to other Christian churches, the Romanian Orthodox Church did not have a “policy” of canonizing the saints, through which to systematically build a legitimating narrative. Before the recognition of the Romanian Orthodox Church’s autocephaly, in 1885, the Romanian Orthodox tradition identified itself with that of the Ecumenical Patriarchy. No rulers of the Romanian principalities were declared saints because Romanians were already Christian when these principalities were founded. Until the 17th century, the only attempt of policy regarding to saints was to bring some relics which functioned as patron saints of the country. The most obvious case is that of Alexandru cel Bun (1400-1432), ruler of Moldavia, who brought the relics of Saint John the New from Crimea and lodged them in the cathedral of Suceava.⁴ However, the cult of Saint John the New did not become very popular.

In the absence of a “policy” of the official church and of any political-religious conflicts that would generate “martyrs”, in the consciousness of most of the population the “saint” is practically equivalent with the “monk”. The “saint” means a man of prayer, an ascetic and a wonder worker.⁵ All these qualities are attributed to the monks. In the context in which monarchism experiences a formidable development in the Romanian space, this image has become dominant in the popular imaginary, even till today.

It was as late as the 17th century, when the Orthodoxy was facing the Catholic Reform and Counter-reform, that a “policy” related to “saints” was developed, the latter being seen as a strengthening element of the Orthodox community.⁶ For instance, the ruler of Moldavia, Vasile Lupu,⁷ who perceived himself as a defender of all Orthodox, organised an important synod in Iași (1642) and paid the debts of the ecumenical Patriarchy receiving as a gift the relics of Saint Paraskeva. These relics have stood for centuries in other Orthodox capitals (Veliko Târnovo and

⁴ „Aducerea moaștelor Sfântului Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/sarbatori/sfantul-ioan-nou-la-suceava/aducerea-moaștelor-sfantului-ioan-nou-la-suceava-149297.html>.

⁵ Carmen Alexandrache, *Stat, biserică și societate în spațiul românesc extracarpatic: Discursuri moral-creștine sec. XVII-XVIII*, Editura Universității „Dunărea de Jos”, Galați, 2017; *Istoria monahismului ortodox românesc de la începuturi până în prezent*, Volume I: *Monahismul ortodox românesc. Istorie, contribuții și repertoriare*, Editura Basilica, București, 2014.

⁶ Ion I. Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul în tradiția spirituală a românilor*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2012; Violeta Barbu, *Purgatoriul misionarilor. Contrareforma în Țările Române în veacul al XVII-lea*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2008.

⁷ Virgil Cândea (ed.), *Istoria Românilor*, volume V, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2003, pp. 136-159.

Belgrad).⁸ Bringing the relics of Saint Paraskeva to Iasi meant that the city of Iasi became a center of the Orthodox world. Saint Paraskeva became the new protector of Moldavia and her cult was generalised due to its fame of working miracles.⁹ As it can be seen, in this case as well, the actions were less “national” and more pan-Orthodox.

However, 20 years later, Dosoftei – the metropolitan of Moldavia – was writing the first study that approached the issue of the “Romanian saints”. He emphasised the policy of promoting the saint’s cult, adopted by Kiev, and underlined the fact that not only the Russians have saints but also the Romanians, except that in the case of the latter the cult was unofficial. Dosoftei clearly states that, in the monastic world, the memory of people considered saints, whose bones are honoured similarly to relics, is perpetuated even if there is no official proclamation on behalf of the Church. Dosoftei’s conclusion was the following: “God does not keep any people away from the gift of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰

The discussion initiated by Dosoftei was forgotten, however, for 300 years, being brought back into the limelight only after the proclamation of the Romanian Orthodox Church’s autocephaly, when the church explicitly connected to the destiny of the Romanian nation and the idea that Romanians must be Orthodox has become widespread. At the end of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century, Romania witnessed a polemic regarding what religion Romanians should adopt. There was a current saying that the Romanians should follow the Pope as Catholicism means the West, whilst Orthodoxy means the East.¹¹ The question of how the Romanians, the vast majority of whom were Orthodox, could massively switch to another religion was answered by saying that the Orthodoxy was not an essential part of their lives, one of the arguments being the fact that there was no Romanian Orthodox saint.

⁸ „Viața Sfintei Cuvioase Parascheva de la Iași,” *Doxologia*, August 12, 2012, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://doxologia.ro/viata-sfant/viata-sfintei-cuvioase-parascheva-de-la-iasi>.

⁹ „Cum a arătat cea mai importantă zi de pelerinaj la Sfânta Parascheva,” *DIGI24*, 14.10.2017, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/cum-a-aratat-cea-mai-importanta-zi-de-pelerinaj-la-sfanta-parascheva-810780>; Mirel Bănică, *Nevoia de miracol. Fenomenul pelerinajelor în România contemporană*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2015.

¹⁰ George Enache, *Conștiința creștină în modernitate. Chipuri și fapte*, Editura Eikon, Cluj Napoca, 2014, pp. 387-399.

¹¹ George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană*, Editura Nemira, București, 2005, pp. 375-401; Constantin Schifirneț, *Geneza modernă a ideii naționale: psihologie etnică și identitate românească*, Editura Albatros, București, 2001, pp. 360-547. Silvestru Augustin Prunduș, Clemente Plăianu, *Catolicism și ortodoxie românească. Scurt istoric al Bisericii Române Unite*, Editura Viața Creștină, Cluj Napoca, 1994.

Evidently, this aspect gave food for thought to the leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Thus, the concern for the identification of the Romanian Orthodox saints appeared in the first part of the 20th Century but the first modern systematic study on the topic of the Romanian saints was published only in 1946, being signed by the theologian Liviu Stan. The author took the discussion from where Dosoftei had left it 300 years before, talked, in his turn, about the saints that were not officially recognised, but honoured by the people, and suggested a list of Romanian saints that should be included in the calendar.¹²

Paradoxically, the first canonization of Romanian saints happened during the communist period. In 1950, the Holy Synod suggested a list of names for canonization, but it was not Liviu Stan's list; the list was shorter and, as new entrants, there were Orthodox people who, in the 18th century, opposed the Habsburg policy of creating a Greek-Catholic Church among the Romanians in the province of Transylvania, freshly conquered by the Austrians. In 1948, the communist authorities ordered the dismantling of the Greek-Catholic Church which was "reunified" with the Orthodox Church. The gesture marked, symbolically, the end of the religious "trauma" from which the Romanians in Transylvania had been suffering for 200 years.¹³ With great difficulties, the communist authorities accepted the canonization ceremonies in 1956 and 1957. After that, despite other attempts, there has been no other canonization of "Romanian saints".

Consequently, after the fall of communism, when the issue of the faith martyrs from the communist period was raised, neither the church hierarchy, nor the people were ready to manage the matter.

2. The communist regime and the attempts to modify the memory of the Church

Unlike the Christian denominations that have the Bible at the centre of their teachings, the Orthodox Church heavily insists on the idea of Tradition. The Head of the Church, the Orthodox say, is not a book, but Jesus Christ, who lived on earth, had disciples, the apostles, who on their turn had disciples. The book of Eusebius of Caesarea, the church historian of the 4th century AD, clearly illustrates this idea. On more than one occasion, he speaks of person X who testifies the truth of the Church

¹² Enache, *Conștiința*, pp. 387-399.

¹³ The list comprised bishops Ilie Iorest and Sava, the Metropolitans of Transylvania, who opposed the conversion of the Romanians to Calvinism; Visarion, Sofronie and Oprea, clergy and laymen who opposed the imposition of Catholicism by the Habsburgs of the Romanians. It was added St. Joseph of Partos, very cherished in the west of Romania, and Bishop Calinic of Cernica, an extremely popular figure, which was associated with 19th-century political personalities accepted by the Communists.

because he met Y who was a disciple of the apostle Z who was near Jesus, receiving through this chain the true teaching, directly from the Saviour.¹⁴

The idea of this spiritual connection is very present in monachism and it carries significant importance in the Orthodox spirituality. The *master* (abbot) – *disciple* connection is, in these cases, essential.¹⁵ During the communist regime, one of the major attempts of the atheist regime was to break these chains of tradition, to stir rivalries and change the memory of the church in the direction preferred by the political power, giving it a different image.

In its confrontation with the communist regime, the Romanian Orthodox Church had a major advantage and an equally important disadvantage. The advantage was that the church was very present in the consciousness of people and a frontal attack towards it would have generated great social turmoil. The disadvantage was that the communist state inherited a lot of administrative control levers over the church from the previous regime. In this context, the communist state did not want to start an open offensive against the Orthodox Church, therefore it resorted to a subversion technique.¹⁶ In the case of the Catholic Church, due to reasons we do not want to insist upon, they preferred to dismantle it (the Greek-Catholic Church)¹⁷ and to involve the bishops into public trials (the Roman-Catholic Church)¹⁸.

The communist regime did not say that they were dismantling the Orthodox Church but that they were “purifying” it by getting rid of anti-popular elements. That is why, during the first years of the communist regime, numerous Orthodox priests were arrested for one official reason: their “reactionary” political opinions.

¹⁴ *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea*, translated by C.F. Cruse (London, 1865), III, 36; V, 1, 31.

¹⁵ Andrei Scrima, *Timpul rugului aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2012.

¹⁶ Enache, *Ortodoxie*, pp. 17-289.

¹⁷ Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2008.

¹⁸ „Procesul unui grup de spioni în slujba Vaticanului”-10-17 septembrie 1951,” 17.09.2011, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.iicr.ro/procesul-unui-grup-de-spioni-in-slujba-vaticanului-10-17-septembrie-1951/>; 10-17 septembrie 1951 – „Procesul Pacha – procesul „spionilor Vaticanului din România”, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.memorialsighet.ro/10-17-septembrie-1951-procesul-pacha-procesul-spionilor-vaticanului-din-romania/>; Ovidiu Bozgan, *Cronica unui eșec previzibil: România și Sfântul Scaun în epoca pontificatului lui Paul al VI-lea: 1963-1978*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2004.

Therefore, from the perspective of the communist state, that was not a religiously motivated repression.¹⁹

On the other hand, though, the communist regime was interested in identifying those centres within the church where the mysticism was cultivated. Mysticism was considered the most dangerous element of religion. There was no coincidence that Ascetics and Mystics were taken out of the curriculum of the theological institutes. The communist state wanted the church to behave like any other ordinary institution in the communist state, to admit and align with the new realities, receiving in exchange state funding. This fact presupposed that the faith in God flame would be dimmed as much as possible so as it did not bother the official atheism since mysticism was a radical denial of the regime.

Between 1948 and 1977, the Romanian Orthodox Church was led by Patriarch Justinian, a remarkable but controversial personality. Those who reproach him that he did not openly oppose the communist regime call him the “red patriarch” whilst the representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church consider him the greatest patriarch so far. There are two rival discourses and memories that only the historic research had managed to surpass. Patriarch Justinian chose the path of diplomacy, trying to avoid an open conflict with the regime, not discussing negatively the political changes that were going on and accepting the idea of “purification” of the Church from the slag of the “bourgeois” past. He asked the government to trust him and his ecclesiastical policy. At the same time, the patriarch tried to stop the interference of other state institutions in the church’s life. Because of this, many priests were saved from prison and those who went through prisons were reinserted claiming they had received their punishment, which had been given for political acts not for inappropriate attitudes in the church. He promised to “re-educate” the priests but the courses he organised were meant to strengthen the missionary consciousness of the priest. Freed from their connections with politics, priests had to concentrate more towards strengthening their Christian mission within the church.²⁰

Patriarch Justinian patroned a remarkable development of monachism which would end up in more monks than before the instauration of the communism (and well better educated) and in the appearance of some cultural and spiritual centres, orientated towards the mystical side of the faith. Some centres were traditional, in

¹⁹ George Enache, *Legea pentru regimul general al cultelor din 1928 și decretul 177 din 4 august 1948. Privire comparativă*, „Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați. Seria 19 – Istorie”, XII (2013), pp. 107-149.

²⁰ George Enache, Adrian N. Petcu, *Monahismul ortodox și puterea comunistă în România anilor 50*, Editura Partener, Galați, 2009.

monasteries which practised the isihast meditation, whilst others were more recent, as the result of certain divine revelations, fact which made them extremely attractive for the believers.²¹

The Patriarch managed to control the situation for 10 years until 1958 when the communist authorities launched a terrible repression against the Church. This repression has not been officially recognized by state authorities. The target was precisely those spiritual centres within the Church that were seen as a major danger for the regime. Hundreds of clerics were arrested and sentenced, the official reason being their connections with the Legionary Movement, a political current included in fascism but which, due to its claim that its ideology comes from Orthodoxy, is perceived today as religious fundamentalism, too. The association was simple: legionarism was classified as “mysticism”, so any mystic was automatically labelled as “legionary”.²²

In this repressive process, the clerics were stirred one against the other through techniques specific to the secret police and this generated a lack of trust and some ruptures which have perpetuated till today. This phenomenon was more obvious in monachism. Here the activity of the political police to create distrust among the monks was even more intense.

By means of Decree 410/1959, the communist regime wanted to administer a deadly blow to the Orthodox monachism by keeping in monachism only the elders and by drastically limiting access for the young. This way, they were trying to break the generation-long master-disciple chain of traditions, essential for the monastic life. One of the great monasteries of the country, Sihăstria, became an asylum for the helpless monks, where they were taken care of by a few young disciples. It was precisely this place where, before 1989, one of the attempts to recover the memory that seemed to be vanishing took place; it was the work of the young monk Ioanichie Bălan who wrote down all the memories of the old monks. In a favourable context, the work was published under the title the “Romanian Patericon”, being, till 1989, the main way of accessing part of the recent memory of the Church.²³

²¹ First situation: Sihăstria, Neamț, Slatina. Second situation: Vladimirești.

²² The investigator told Professor Teodor Popescu during the interrogation: „You are a legionary because you are a theologian, and as a theologian you are an anticommunist, and being an anticommunist means to be a legionnaire.” („Profesorul Teodor M. Popescu, apologetul care și-a dedicat toată viața Ortodoxiei (1/9 iunie 1893 – 4 aprilie 1973). Marele teolog în Dosarele CNSAS,” 1.06.2014, accessed June 2018, available on line at <http://www.marturisorii.ro/2014/06/01/profesorul-teodor-m-popescu-apologetul-care-si-a-dedicat-toata-viata-ortodoxiei-19-iunie-1893-4-aprilie-1973-teologul-in-dosarele-cnsas/>. See Enache, *Ortodoxie*, pp. 313-347.

²³ George Enache, *Biserica în comunism*, Editura Eikon, Cluj Napoca, 2009, pp. 204-217.

Beyond these phenomenons, manifested inside the Church, there is the anti-communist armed resistance, led by people who were defending the traditional values of the Romanian society, faith being one of them; their fight was carried in the name of God and nation.²⁴ Moreover, in the same period, the communist regime decides to “re-educate” the students who were sympathizers of the Legionary Movement, in a sinister experiment undergone in the Pitești prison. As the legion was associated with orthodoxy, the re-education in that place, based on extreme violence, included numerous anti-Christian references which went as far as to parody the great mysteries of Christianity.²⁵ The atrocious experiment drove some of the prisoners mad and strengthened others in their belief that they are fighting against the incarnated forces of the Devil. The faith in God became the axis that assured their existence and some of those that survived the prisons wrote devastating memoirs where the name of Christ is always present.²⁶ However, till 1989, few people knew anything about the armed resistance in the mountains and the prisoners tortured in their cells.

II. Dealing with the communist past of the Romanian Orthodox Church after 1989

After the fall of the communist regime in Romania, in 1989, the religious cults took advantage of the freedom they obtained and asked to play a greater role in society, as they used to do before the communism. Numerous churches were built, Religion was reintroduced as a subject in schools (and so was the religious service in the army), schools and hospitals under the patronage of various religious cults were re-established, and there were talks about a partnership between the cults and the state for the good of the society.²⁷

After the years of official atheism, this comeback seemed, during the first post-communist decade, natural; later Romania witnessed, under the influence of ideological currents coming from the West, the appearance of certain opinions that

²⁴ Mircea Stănescu, *Reeducarea în România comunistă (1945-1952)*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010.

²⁵ Paul Siladi, „Plângere pentru Pitești,” 23.07.2008, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://paulsiladi.wordpress.com/2008/07/23/plangere-pentru-pitesti/>.

²⁶ „Lista autorilor români de memorii din închisorile comuniste”, accessed June 2018, available online at https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lista_autorilor_rom%C3%A2ni_de_memorii_din_%C3%AEncisorile_comuniste.

²⁷ Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia din România postcomunistă – Reconstrucția unei identități*, Editura Eikon, Cluj Napoca, 2009.

considered the presence of the churches in the public space as exaggerated, asking for a „new secularisation”.²⁸

Being the most important religious denomination in Romania, with the largest public exposure, the Romanian Orthodox Church became the favourite target of the attacks. Besides the classical accusations brought against the Christian churches nowadays, one of the major accusations referred to the way the Romanian Orthodox Church behaved during communism. The main point of the discourse was the fact that the Orthodox Church has, essentially, an anti-democratic „ideology”, displaying the propensity for a relationship with the undemocratic, even totalitarian regimes. Before 1944, the Orthodox Church would have allegedly supported the Legionary Movement, although it was a fascist movement, while during the communist period, the Church would have made a pact of compromise with the regime, hence becoming the beneficiary of many privileges.²⁹

The accusations coming from the secular side combined with those coming from some religious denominations. After 1989, the Greek-Catholic Church, forbidden in the communist era, was recognised again. The Greek-Catholic leaders set the goal of recovering all believers they used to have before 1948, as well as all their assets. As the Greek-Catholic worshipping places had become the property of

²⁸ Miral Bănică, *Despre secularizare și avansul său. Biserica Ortodoxă Română, înainte și după Colectiv*, „Revista 22”, 02.12.2015, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://revista22.ro/70250369/58378/.html>; Laurențiu Tănase, „Religie, secularizare, pluralism în România contemporană,” 7.12.2016, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.centrulpetrusiandrei.ro/religie-secularizare-pluralism-romania-contemporana/>; Sorina Ionașc, „Un parlamentar cere ca Biserica să nu mai primească bani de la stat, *Gândul*, 7.04.2013,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.gandul.info/politica/un-parlamentar-cere-ca-biserica-sa-nu-mai-primeasca-bani-de-la-stat-colegii-lui-isi-fac-cruce-unde-e-teama-de-doamne-doamne-o-sa-fie-bine-10710640>; „Ateii din România sunt tineri, educați și intoleranți,” 18.09.2011, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.ziare.com/social/romani/ateii-din-romania-sunt-tineri-educati-si-intoleranti-1127951>.

²⁹ Dragoș Ghițulete, *Comunismul s-a lepădat de biserică. Biserica s-a lepădat de comunism?*, „Dilema Veche”, 192, 15.09.2007, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/comunismul-s-a-lepadat-de-biserica-biserica-s-a-lepadat-de-comunism>; Matei Dobrovie, „Biserica Ortodoxă și comunismul: între rezistență și colaborare,” 12.06.2013, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://epochtimes-romania.com/news/biserica-ortodoxa-si-comunismul-intre-rezistenta-si-colaborare---194292>; Olivier Gillet, *Religie și naționalism – Ideologia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române sub regimul comunist*, Editura Compania, București, 2001; Dani Rockhoff, „Oliver Jens Schmitt, reputat istoric elvețian: Fie că e vorba de fasciști sau comuniști, Biserica Ortodoxă Română a fost întotdeauna un slujitor al puterii,” *HotNews.ro*, 25.06.2018, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-22585572->

the Orthodox Church, a tough battle started between the two denominations, which manifested on the symbolic level as well.³⁰ The Greek-Catholic Church was coming with the aura of a martyr-church, all its bishops having been sent to prison. Canonization files were set for those bishops that had died in the communist prisons.³¹

On the other side, the Orthodox hierarchy reacted unconvincingly. Besides the attacks from the secular zone or the disputes with other denominations, there were disputes at the very heart of the Orthodox Church regarding the way in which the communist past should be perceived, with voices that distinguished between those men of the Church who confessed Christ, even with the price of their lives, and the Church hierarchy that preferred to compromise with the regime. Moreover, due to the actions of the *Securitate*, decade after decade, there were misunderstandings even among those who had suffered for their faith. All this conglomerate of factors considerably complicated the discussion about the communist past of the Church and the potential issue of canonizing the church's martyrs from the communist period.

In these disputes, some people within the Orthodox Church, known for their criticising attitude towards the communist regime (e.g. priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa), insisted on the idea of church unity, avoiding the appearance of some schisms, as it happened in other Orthodox churches.³² However, it was clear that the issue of the communist past could no longer be ignored or discussed in general terms (everybody suffered); it was necessary that the names of those who had suffered for their faith in the communist period to appear, clearly, in the public space.

Immediately after the revolution in 1989, former political prisoners started to systematically present the suffering they had to experience in the communist prisons and build monuments to honour those who had died in communist detention. Even a magazine appeared, "Memoria" ("Memory") which published biographies of

oliver-jens-schmitt-reputat-istoric-elve-ian-fie-vorba-fasci-sau-comuni-biserica-ortodox-romn-fost-ntotdeauna-slujitor-puterii.htm.

³⁰ Raluca Dima, *Noi și ei. Discursul unei Biserici Naționale despre libertate religioasă și pluralism religios*, „Sfera Politicii”, 168, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/168/art15-Dima.php>.

³¹ „Șapte episcopi greco-catolici din România, la un pas de cinstea altarelor,” 7.04.2018, accessed June 2018, available online at http://ro.radiovaticana.va/news/2018/04/07/beatificarea_episcopilor_greco-catolici_din_rom%C3%A2nia/1370118.

³² „Profeticul părinte Calciu – ultimul cuvânt înainte de marți”, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.cuvantul-ortodox.ro/profeticul-parinte-calcium-ultimul-cuvant-inainte-de-moarte-episcopul-in-biserica-ortodoxa-duhul-si-litera-video-scrisoare-inedita-catre-un-preot-ramanem-strans-uniti-in-jurul-ierarhiei-si-ierarhilor/>

those who had been imprisoned, including biographies of orthodox priests.³³ The next step was to write systematic studies about the orthodox clerics who had suffered in the communist dungeons, the first major study of this kind being „The Imprisoned Church”, made by the National Institute for Studying Totalitarianism, under the aegis of the Romanian Academy.³⁴ After the former *Securitate*’s archives had been open for research, these studies have become more rigorous and, at present, we have precise data about approximately 2,000 orthodox priests who went through the communist prisons, out of a total of 10,000 priests that were in the Romanian Orthodox Church at the middle of the 20th century.³⁵

The first study, though, that was officially assumed by the Romanian Orthodox Church on the topic of communist prisons martyrdom was published as late as 2007, being not an orthodox initiative but one of a German Christian foundation, St. Gerhard, which invited all denominations in Romania to make a common martyrology of the victims of communism.³⁶ The German side supported all the costs. The project was eventually finalized but without the participation of the Greek-Catholic Church which had some differences with the representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

In the same year, 2007, under the aegis of the Romanian Patriarchy, a Committee of Studying the History of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist period was established, its purpose being to clarify the disputed historic aspects. The Committee was supposed to do only historic research but, because of its activity, it was also expected to provide some names of people who had suffered for Christ in order to be proclaimed holy martyrs of the church.³⁷

³³ <http://www.revistamemoria.ro/>.

³⁴ Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, *Biserica întemnițată. România 1944-1989*, București, 1998.

³⁵ Vasile Manea, *Preoți ortodocși în închisorile comuniste*, Editura Patmos, București, 2011; Ana Maria Rădulescu, *Preoți ortodocși în închisorile comuniste*, Editura Aius, 2012; Grigore Benea (coord.), *Preoți din Arhiepiscopia Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului în temnițele comuniste*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj Napoca, 2017); Adrian Nicolae Petcu, *Preoți hunedoreni pătimitori în temnițele comuniste*, Deva, 2017; Nicolae Luchian, Adrian N. Petcu, *Clerici și mireni mărturisitori din Arhiepiscopia Iașilor, în închisorile comuniste*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2017; George Enache, Eugen Drăgoi, Costel Dumbravă, *Biserica din Arhiepiscopia Dunării de Jos în perioada comunismului. Mărturii, pătimitori, mărturisitori*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2019.

³⁶ *Martiri pentru Hristos, din România, în perioada Regimului Comunist*, EIMBOR, București, 2007.

³⁷ Cristina Iamandi, *Comisie BOR pentru studierea activității Bisericii din perioada comunistă*, „România Liberă”, 13.02.2007, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://romanalibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/comisie-bor-pentru-studierea-activitatii-bisericii-din-perioada-comunista-87035.html>.

From this point of view, the expectations were higher and higher. Different organisations appeared and there were also foundations that were publishing magazines (e.g. the ROST magazine)³⁸, making websites (e.g. *Fericiți cei prigoniti*)³⁹ and were compiling lists of possible saints, discussing the issue of the Christian martyrdom and wondering when the church hierarchy would decide to canonize those who started to be called the “prison saints”.

The most ambitious project in this respect was the one initiated in Aiud. Many people were sent to Aiud prison, most of them being connected to the Legionary Movement.⁴⁰ They had a special propensity for faith and displayed a remarkable collective solidarity. Here we see young people, such as Grigore Gafencu, who choose to experience, in prison, an authentic Christian existence, perceiving suffering as an opportunity for redemption.⁴¹ The extraordinary force of these people’s faith is highlighted by the writings of Ioan Ianolide, former political prisoner, who considered himself the apprentice of Gafencu, published after 1989, under the title of “The Return to Christ”.⁴² There was a young man around this group who, later, became a monk and who, after 1989, would establish in his native village, Petru Vodă, a monastery that has become a centre of promoting the idea of “prison saints”. His name was Iustin Pârnu.⁴³

Iustin Pârnu became a famous monk in Romania due to his asceticism and the fact that he would speak with believers for hours on end. “Regular” people perceived him in a way familiar to them, as an “abbot”, whilst his discourse about the “prison saints”, who recovered the dignity of the Romanian people through their sacrifice, was embraced particularly by a cultivated social stratum who supported father Iustin in his actions.

³⁸ <https://www.rostonline.ro/>.

³⁹ <https://www.fericiticeiprigoniti.net/>.

⁴⁰ Demostene Andronescu, „Reeducarea de la Aiud”, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.miscarea.net/demostene-reeducarea-dela-aiud.htm>; Dragoș Ursu, Ioana Ursu, „*Aiudule, Aiudule*”, Editura Renașterea, Cluj Napoca, 2015; Dragoș Ursu, „Reeducare și viață cotidiană în penitenciarul Aiud,” accessed June 2018, available online at https://www.academia.edu/31301928/Drago%C8%99_Ursu_Reeducarea_%C8%99i_via%C8%9B%C4%83_cotidian%C4%83_%C3%AE_n_penitenciarul_Aiud.pdf.

⁴¹ „Valeriu Gafencu”, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.fericiticeiprigoniti.net/valeriu-gafencu/>; „Valeriu Gafencu. Biografie,” accessed June 2018, available online at http://istoria.md/articol/960/Valeriu_Gafencu_biografie.

⁴² „Viața mărturisitorului Ioan Ianolide,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.paltin-petruvoda.ro/viața-marturisitorului-ioan-ianolide-alcatuita-de-maicile-de-la-manastirea-paltin/>; Ioan Ianolide, *Întoarcerea la Hristos - document pentru o lume nouă*, Editura Christiana, București, 2006.

⁴³ „Iustin Pârnu,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.fericiticeiprigoniti.net/justin-parvu>.

One of his supporters was the actor Dan Puric, well-known especially for his pantomime shows, but who also started to hold conferences about the destiny of the Romanian people and about the “prison saints” which enjoyed an immense success. The money generated by these conferences and the books that Dan Puric wrote would be used to build a memorial in Aiud.⁴⁴

There is a place in Aiud called Râpa Robilor (The Slaves Ravine), where the dead of Aiud prison were anonymously buried. After 1989, former political prisoners built a monument there that displayed several crosses, signifying the prisoners carrying a larger cross on their shoulders (built in 1995, author: Anghel Marcu).⁴⁵ The significance was obvious: the sufferance in prison was equivalent with carrying Christ’s cross, action that would sanctify the one assuming such a burden. As the old, abandoned cemetery kept revealing bones, the latter were stored in a room at the basis of the memorial, starting to be worshiped as relics, even if nobody knew to whom they belonged and there was no recognition on behalf of the Church leadership.⁴⁶ It was considered that those bones had been sanctified through the suffering endured in prison.

Father Iustin wanted to build a monastery next to this monument where the dead could be for ever remembered. His project met Pavel Chirilă’s project, a Christian oriented doctor, who wanted to build in Aiud a centre of martyrdom studies.⁴⁷ The result of the encounter of these two ideas was an absolutely remarkable project belonging to architect Radu Mihăilescu who suggests a memorial-church, full of symbolism, with the altar table stuck into the ground where

⁴⁴ „Dan Puric,” accessed June 2018, available online at https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Puric.

⁴⁵ „Calvarul Aiudului,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://atelieruldearhitectura.blogspot.com/2010/04/arh-anghel-marcu-calvarul-aiudului-rapa.html>; „Memorial sau locaş de cult,” accessed June 2018, available online <https://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/11994/Augustin-Ioan/Memorial-sau-lacas-de-cult-IV.html>.

⁴⁶ „Mănăstirea sfinţilor de la Aiud,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.atitudini.com/2009/06/manastirea-sfintilor-de-la-aiud/>; „Aiud, locul plin de moaşte de sfinţi,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/religie/aiud-locul-plin-moaste-sfinti-149539.html>.

⁴⁷ „Proiectul mănăstirii de la Aiud susţinut de părintele Justin Pârveu,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.atitudini.com/2009/08/proiectul-manastirii-de-la-aiud-sustinut-de-parintele-justin-parveu/>; „Interviu lămuritor cu prof. Pavel Chirilă,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://c-tarziu.blogspot.com/2009/08/avanpremierea-interviu-lamuritor-cu-prof.html>; „Schitul şi memorialul Aiudului azi,” accessed June 2018, available online <https://anomismi.wordpress.com/2013/01/13/schitul-si-memorialul-aiudului-azi/>

the martyrs are buried, the centre of martyrdom studies being harmoniously integrated within the ensemble.⁴⁸

Very importantly, the construction of the memorial with a monastery regime was approved by the local bishop, Andrei Andreicuț.⁴⁹ However, shortly after this, some rivalries appeared, some kind of “battle over the saints”, which led to discord. Eventually, the project is carried on thanks to the determination of the monastery’s abbot and the generosity of a financially powerful philanthropist who wanted to remain anonymous.

In the meantime, the “battle over the saints” became even more intense.⁵⁰ Factions emerge that make their own gallery of saints, excluding the others, and a true industry that sells the topic begins to develop. Moreover, people who claim to be close to Iustin Pârvu, get into conflict with the church authorities on the grounds of “bar codes”, vaccination, using the chip-type IDs, etc. They are also known for their radical and xenophobic nationalist discourse, for their anti-west attitude and for their view upon Orthodoxy, very close to fundamentalism.⁵¹ They talk about an Orthodox Romania under siege, whose true believers must be prepared for the final battle.

⁴⁸ „Schitul Aiud,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://anomismia.wordpress.com/tag/schitul-aiud/>.

⁴⁹ „Alba. Un memorial al deținuților politici de la Aiud ar urma să fie construit la Râpa Robilor,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/alba-un-memorial-al-detinutilor-politici-de-la-aiud-ar-urma-sa-fie-construit-la-rapa-robilor-9725584>.

⁵⁰ „Proiectul misterios al mănăstirii de la Aiud,” accessed June 2018, available online <https://apologeticum.wordpress.com/2009/08/28/proiectul-misterios/>; „Mănăstirea sfinților de la Aiud”, accessed June 2018, available online <https://www.atitudini.com/2009/06/manastirea-sfintilor-de-la-aiud/>; „La Aiud chiar se construiește ciudățenia de mănăstire al cărui proiect vi l-am prezentat anul trecut,” accessed June 2018, available online <https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/foto-la-aiud-chiar-se-construiește-ciudatenia-de-manastire-al-carui-proiect-vi-l-am-prezentat-anul-trecut/>; „Despre Aiud și Dan Puric la 66 de ani de la arestarea părintelui Justin și a generației de la 1948,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://roncea.ro/tag/puric/>.

⁵¹ „Interviu cu părintele Iustin Pârvu,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2012/04/17/interviu-cu-parintele-justin-parvu-realizat-de-monahia-fotini-despre-cipuri-gazele-de-sist-curajul-ierarhilor-greci-minunea-de-la-iasi/>; „Monahul Filotheu despre milostenie, vaccinuri și anti-românism,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://manastirea.petru-voda.ro/2017/11/27/monahul-filotheu-despre-milostenie-vaccinuri-si-anti-romanism/>; „Călugării de la Petru Vodă reaprend lupta anti-cip,” accessed June 2018, available online at https://adevarul.ro/locale/piatra-neamt/calugarii-petru-voda-reaprend-lupta-anti-cip-descrie-mecanismul-pierzaniei-primele-semne-decaderii-1_5a82a44edf52022f757d61c0/index.html;https://adevarul.ro/locale/piatra-neamt/calugarii-petru-voda-reaprend-lupta-anti-cip-descrie-mecanismul-pierzaniei-primele-semne-decaderii-1_5a82a44edf52022f757d61c0/index.html.

Simultaneously, some nostalgics of the Legionary Movement tried to use the names of some of the “prison saints” in order to justify their legionary doctrine.⁵² There are significantly cases of legionary members arrested by the Ion Antonescu regime or the communist regime who discovered faith in prison and later became monks or famous priests (e.g. Arsenie Papacioc).⁵³ In the opinion of the legionary sympathizers these people became saints because they were legionaries, hence justifying the righteousness of the legionary doctrine.

This kind of approach made possible that the names of some of the “prison saints” caught the attention of the “Elie Wiesel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, which also deals with signalling anti-Semitic activities⁵⁴. As the

⁵² „Dan Lucinescu cu părintele Justin Pârnu,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://vladherman.blogspot.com/2013/07/dan-lucinescu-cu-parintele-justin-parvu.html#.W5UXp-gzbiU>; „Torționarul care a devenit sfânt,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://evz.ro/tortionarul-care-a-devenit-sfant-l-a-ingrozit-pe-ceausescu-si-a-fost-primit-de-reagan-si-bush-la-casa-alba.html>; „Nicolae Steinhardt despre legionari,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://vladherman.blogspot.com/2013/07/nicolae-steinhardt-despre-legionari-n.html#.W5UYJugzbiU>; „Cum au devenit legionarii sfinți în pușcăriile comuniste,” accessed June 2018, available online at https://adevarul.ro/locale/botosani/cum-devenit-legionarii-sfinti-puscariile-comuniste-cele-mai-importante-personaje-cultul-sfintilor-inchisorilor-1_59a40bd95ab6550cb866a703/index.html; „Creștinismul Mișcării legionare, cadru de formare a viitorilor sfinți din închisorile comuniste,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.apologeticum.ro/2011/02/crestinismul-miscarii-legionare-cadru-de-formare-a-viitorilor-sfinti-din-inchisorilor-comuniste/>; Comemorarea sfântului închisorilor Valeriu Gafencu – februarie 2013 – Târgu Ocna, România,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WLabc5ZKP0>.

⁵³ Sorin Apetri, *Între timp și veșnicie – Viața părintelui Arsenie Papacioc*, Editura Accent Print, 2014; Enache, *Biserica*, 235-241.

⁵⁴ Adrian Cioflâncă, Adriana Radu, *Eroi contrafăcuți*, „Revista 22”, 12.02. 2013, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.revista22.ro/eroi-contrafacuti-22471.html>; „Culmea relativității,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2016/04/24/culmea-relativitatii-valeriu-gafencu-a-fost-condamnat-de-antonescu-apoi-elie-wiesel-invoca-acesta-condamnare-simultan-insa-elie-wiesel-condamna-toate-hotararile-regimului-antonescu/>; „Alexandru Florian, directorul Institutului Elie Wiesel duce o campanie împotriva martirilor și eroilor neamului românesc,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.justitiarul.ro/alexandru-florian-directorul-institutului-elie-wiesel-duce-o-campanie-impotriva-martirilor-si-eroilor-neamului-romanesc/>. „Baia Sprie. La parastasul pentru părintele Justin s-a cerut canonizarea sfinților închisorilor,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://vladherman.blogspot.com/2014/09/baia-sprie-la-parastasul-pentru.html#.W5UGv-gzbiU>; „Valeriu Gafencu rămâne cetățean de onoare al orașului Târgu Ocna,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://www.activenews.ro/stiri-social/Valeriu-Gafencu-ramane-cetatean-de-onoare-al-orasului-Targu-Ocna.-Presiunile-institutului-Elie-Wiesel-inutile-112437>.

Legionary Movement is considered an anti-Semitic organisation, such a legitimization, via the “prison saints”, was extremely dangerous. A huge polemic was generated, blowing up the issues of canonizing the “prison saints”, although there were numerous people who tried to demonstrate that, in prison, the people in question moved away from the legionary ideas, embracing the Christian doctrine entirely. Facing the numerous debates, the church hierarchy stopped the discussions about this topic as well as the very tight collaborations with the organisations promoting the “prison saints”.

After 1989, there have been numerous proclamations of Romanian saints, their current number being quite high. Temporally speaking, they come from the Antiquity and up to the 19th century. No saint from the communist period, though.

At a certain moment, patriarch Daniel was talking about a canonization program that would consider this temporal register hoping that, eventually, the topic of the “prison saints” would be approached as well. However, the “prison saints” phenomenon kept developing outside the control of the Church. Taking this into account, patriarch Daniel decided that 2017 should be proclaimed as the “Reverential year of Patriarch Justinian and the defenders of the Orthodoxy during the communist regime”.⁵⁵ This started from the fact that in 2017 patriarch Justinian had been dead for 40 years and, according to the official vision of the Romanian Orthodox Church, he was a defender of the Church, all the other defenders gathering around him, whether they had been to prison or not. The image that defined the reverential year displayed patriarch Justinian having in the background the imprisoned priests behind bars.⁵⁶ The message was that of updating the idea of church unity, of avoiding ruptures and of perceiving the “prison saints” in a larger context, dominated by a rigorous scientific research.

Simultaneously, at the request of Laurențiu, the metropolitan of Transylvania, they started to put up the file for the possible canonization of one of the “prison saints”, perhaps the most famous of them all, Arsenie Boca. His unofficial cult has become a mass phenomenon in recent years.

Arsenie Boca’s celebrity is due to more factors. He is not a “prison saint” like the others, a person that was arrested, met God in prison, remaining anonymous till 1989 and his name becoming known to the believers only after that. He was

⁵⁵ „Proclamarea oficială a anului omagial și comemorativ 2017 în Patriarhia Română,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://basilica.ro/proclamarea-oficiala-a-anului-omagial-si-comemorativ-2017-in-patriarhia-romana/>.

⁵⁶ „Celebrarea martirilor și sfinților ortodocși din închisorile comuniste,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://diasporaro.co.uk/celebrarea-martirilor-si-sfintilor-ortodocsi-din-inchisorile-comuniste/>; „Simpozion internațional la Iași,” accessed June 2018, available

famous before 1944. Arsenie Boca was originary from Transylvania, where the Austrian authority had destroyed the Orthodox monasteries. After Transylvania united with Romania, metropolitan Nicolae Bălan rebuilt Sâmbăta de Sus monastery, which was considered the centre of the monastic rebirth of Transylvania. The abbot of the monastery was Arsenie Boca who had studied theology, medicine and arts but who also had a charismatic personality which attracted crowds of people. They considered him a wonder worker capable of reading people's minds. He also enjoyed the fame of being ascetic. In the absence of other monastic centres, Arsenie Boca becomes known in all Transylvania, being called the "Saint of Transylvania".

After 1944, he was constantly followed by the Securitate, since he was suspected, but not proven, of legionary sympathies; they tried to blame various things on him but failed and he was eventually sentenced, by an administrative decision, to forced labour in a concentration camp because the authorities were afraid of his fame. After executing his punishment, Arsenie Boca goes back to monastery but, in the context of the measures taken against the monks, he is forced to leave the monastery and to become a layman. He lived, nonetheless, close to the church and there were people who constantly followed him and wrote down his various and occasional speeches. He died in 1989, little before the fall of the communism.

His past fame and the numerous people who kept his memory made Arsenie extremely popular after 1989 and his grave became a pilgrimage place. In the absence of an official position of the Church, Arsenie Boca became, little by little, "privatized". Numerous books have appeared containing Arsenie Boca's alleged words of advice, numerous objects with his image emerged on the market as well as a blooming business of transporting numerous pilgrims to Prislop monastery, where he is buried. Gradually, even Arsenie Boca's image has been distorted, becoming a stereotype of popular religiousness, a "miracle worker", most people forgetting the fact that he was first a great **spiritual figure** and a redoubtable intellectual.⁵⁷

online at <https://doxologia.ro/arhiepiscopia-iasilor/simpozion-international-la-iasi-martiriu-memorie-din-romania-comunista>.

⁵⁷ George Enache, Adrian N. Petcu, *Părintele Arsenie Boca în atenția poliției politice din România*, Editura Partener, Galați, 2009; George Enache, *Părintele Arsenie Boca în dosarele Securității*, „Formula As”, 1190, 2015, accessed June 2018, available online at <http://www.formula-as.ro/2015/1190/spiritualitate-39/parintele-arsenie-boca-in-dosarele-securitatii-19939>; „Fenomenul Arsenie Boca,” accessed June 2018, available online at <http://dilemaveche.ro/tag/fenomenul-arsenie-boca>; Daniel Guță, „Declinul fenomenului Arsenie Boca. Ce a rămas după invaziile pelerinilor care au căutat minuni la mormântul călugărului”, 19.02.2018, accessed June 2018, available online at

The climax of the commercial use of Arsenie Boca's name was reached when a firm, established by British and Romanian citizens, which registered the "Arsenie Boca" trademark asking then for "copyright" from all those who were using the image of the saint, including the Prislop monastery.⁵⁸ This was the gesture that convinced Laurențiu, the metropolitan of Transylvania, to ask for the acceleration of the works of the Arsenie Boca canonization committee, established at the end of 2016.⁵⁹ The plan was to officially canonize Arsenie Boca on November the 28th, 2018 (Arsenie Boca died on November 29, 1989). Through the clarifications brought by historians regarding the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime and through the possible canonization of Arsenie Boca, it was thought that a precedent could be set, a way to solve the difficult problem of the "prison saints" in Romania might be open, from a theological point of view. On October 28, 2019, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church "took note" of the documentation submitted by the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania for the canonization of Arsenie Boca.⁶⁰ Since then, nothing has been discussed about the issue of saints and martyrs from the communist period.

Conclusions

1. The Romanian Orthodoxy had not had a canonization "policy" like other churches. The first canonization in the Romanian Orthodox Church happened in 1950.
2. The popular religiousness equates "saint" with "monk", the judgement criteria for a saint being the power to prey, asceticism and the ability to work miracles.
3. The connection between holiness and the destiny of the "people" appears relatively late and only in certain social circles.

https://adevarul.ro/locale/hunedoara/declinul-fenomenului-arsenie-boca-ramas-invaziile-pelerinilor-cautat-minuni-mormantul-calugarului-1_5a8ae0f1df52022f75badfdd/index.html.

⁵⁸ „Arsenie Boca, marcă înregistrată deținută de o firmă din UK. Scandalul pornit din Arad”, accessed June 2018, available online at <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/arsenie-boca-marca-inregistrata-detinuta-de-o-firma-din-uk-scandalul-pornit-din-arad.html>

⁵⁹ Mihai Niculescu, „Părintele Arsenie Boca va fi canonizat în regim de urgență,” *Libertatea*, 6.06.2018, accessed June 2018, available online <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/parintele-arsenie-boca-va-fi-canonizat-regim-de-urgenta-de-la-ce-pornit-totul-2284037>.

⁶⁰ „Noi hotărâri ale Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române,” accessed June 2018, available online at <https://basilica.ro/noi-hotarari-ale-sfantului-sinod-al-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane-28-octombrie-2019/>.

4. In the communist period, the Orthodox Church played what seems to be an ambiguous role of a victim but, at the same time, of collaborator of the communist regime, fact which influenced the way in which the martyrdom idea was managed.
5. The martyrs of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the communist period come from among the priests, the monks but also from among the laymen (intellectuals, people who were part of the armed resistance against the regime, etc.). The phenomenon of finding God in prison is highly present.
6. Some of those arrested were members and supporters of the Legionary Movement, a fascist movement, which mixed ideology with orthodoxy. Being considered “mystics”, they received, in communist prisons, a special re-education which, in fact, strengthened their faith (in God or in Legionary Movement).
7. After 1990, the communist past of the church was difficult to manage due to different experiences and rival memories. Because these difficulties, the hierarchy preferred to either ignore the topic of “prison saints”, or to speak, generally, about the suffering of the church.
8. In the absence of some coordination on behalf of the hierarchy, the topic of “prison saints” witnessed an explosion in the informal media. Former legionaries, due to the coherence of the group, dominated the discussion agenda. Therefore, it generated great turmoil because it seemed that the “prison saints” were not in fact Christians, but legionaries. The “prison saints” come from all social categories and had various political orientations.
9. The year 2017 marks a change in as far as the policy of the hierarchy regarding the “prison saints” is concerned, by proclaiming the “reverential year of patriarch Justinian and of the defenders of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the communist period”. It started the first canonization file of a Romanian orthodox from the communist period: Arsenie Boca.