

Recourse to Memory (and Tradition) in the Construction of Non-perishable Identities

The Risk of a Programmed Suicide for an Amnesiac Europe

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THE RELIGIOUS collective memory is the backbone of Orthodoxy¹, the discernment tool of the Church (activated every time), it is a permanent dialogue with Christ the Savior (who raises it from the status of an earthly institution frozen in its origins)², it is the expression of uninterrupted continuity with the Church of biblical times, it is the element of super-temporal constant regeneration potential³.

1. Contextualization: Europe Is Getting More and More Fragile Every Day because It No Longer Has the Strength to Believe in Anything

THE PROPOSED subject compels us to take an intelligent trip to the past, but with a vigilant eye fixed on the future: Europe hangs in the balance, its future soars and falls depending on whether it will know how to step correctly into the future (i.e. if it will know how to reverberate its future projects axiologically).

*Europe hangs in the balance because it sees its principles being questioned—those that have made it what it is and those that it did everything it could not only to observe itself, but to convince others to observe them too.*⁴

In this implacable clash of civilizations we are witnessing today (on the European territory), Europe is visibly losing because it no longer has faith, not necessarily faith in God, but simply the power to believe in something.

*The clash between one who strongly believes in the truth of their faith, no matter how absurd that truth would be, and one who doubts the truth of their ideals, no matter how brilliant, will always end with the victory of the former.*⁵

The collective emotional climate in postmodern Europe bears a striking resemblance to the one of the late Roman Empire:

An air of end of ... season, of ... power, of ... the world. The Romans no longer believed in their own gods, nor did they know who they were anymore, lost in the multitude of gods borrowed from the peoples they had conquered. The Romans themselves hardly found themselves amid the crowd of conquered nations which had slid towards the center, conquering them from the inside out.⁶ The conquered manage to conquer; the old colonies occupy, slowly, the center which, eventually, they dissolve (their traditions, mentalities, beliefs prove to be more powerful weapons than the weapons themselves, on one condition: the former conquerors not to respect them and not even to remember them anymore! We need to understand what it was in order to discover what will be.⁷

Christianity was, in the beginning, a fire thrown between people: a fire of enthusiasm, dynamism, a joy to live our earthly life differently than in the manner proposed by the rancid frameworks at the end of paganism. Orthodoxy—because at that time there was only one Christianity, the Orthodox version (called also “catholic,” meaning “universal”)—suggested to people a new way to live their lives (a new mode of existence), a *modus vivendi* (a perichoresis of values), articulated as follows: a closely-knit (religious-dogmatic) theoretical learning, a formulation of provisions (“canons”) regarding external behavior, an imperative push for social involvement and inexhaustible creativity to fascinate all mankind (hostile to Christianity).

The Gospel came to Europe via St. Paul, the first who brought Christianity out of the restricted Asian environments and introduced it to the ecumenical horizon of the Greek and Roman thought. The European identity is thus inextricably linked to these three constituents: the Christian Gospel, the Greek spirit (Hellenic thought), and the Roman heritage (political and juridical vision). What mysterious element has made this European civilization, Christian in its origin, to become anti-Christian as a result? What was able to extinguish the original fire?⁸

What is, then, the solution the Church proposes? Human beings are ontologically constructed by Divinity with the compelling need to believe in something. In which direction should this need be oriented without making a mistake? Towards a “beyond matter” direction, towards transcendence, towards the ultimate Truth, generator of love. Return to the Trinity dogma: love in diversity, interaction in Truth, construction of the self in affective relation to the other, opening of the self without melting outwardly, invitation to love without being positioned *against* someone else, through hatred.

The West is marked by a dominant religious polarity⁹: on the one hand, a centralizing ecclesiology (crystallized by Catholicism) and, on the other hand, an atomized individualistic ontology. Orthodoxy offers a different kind of expression of Christian love, of social “affection” (specific to the Eastern ecumenical Liturgy) which coagulates its specificity in two royal concepts: *person* and *communion*, in a Western context marked by the cult of the *individual*¹⁰, by a particular self-referentiality; moreover, it emphasizes the mystical, the inner experience, and it would like to help man unlearn the cult of self-interest (to release from under the hypnosis of exteriority and matter). The Western

man has tried to build a coherent society using the outside world, but ended up with an irreducible schizophrenia.

In conclusion, the Orthodox anthropology gives another meaning to society, going beyond activism and utilitarianism, placing at its epicenter the notion of *cooperation* (i.e. *co-activation*). Eastern humanism itself places another model of man in the foreground, a model different from the one specific to Western humanism: the inner man, converted, renewed, with a transcendent vocation: just by spreading this Eastern type of man the Western world will be vaccinated with antibodies able to protect it against the risk of self-dissolution by lack of reaction to invasion from the outside.

*Running away from the historic present means desertion, just as the reckless alignment to everything that the postmodern world rules means estrangement, alienation.*¹¹

Two are the urges that must be taken into account now, both coming from the Apostle of Europe:

walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4: 1-3); I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Romans 12: 1-3).

2. Repositioning towards the National Idea or Constantly Relearning to Love. The Twisted Neo-Imperative of Severing Memory. Hatred—a Fuel of History?

THE NATIONAL collective identity, a laborious construction of the nineteenth century, which gave cohesion and sense to the national states¹², underwent a process of controlled erosion: on the one hand, to exalt the dictatorship of the proletariat on the land remained open yesterday in the East, and today the ideology of the “world village.”¹³ Ana Blandiana warns:

*Satanization of the concept of nation (nationality, nationalism) by the proletarian internationalism or by “political correctness,” even if their purposes are different, they exhibit the same rage, having the same victims: tradition, the legacy of the elders, solidarity with your own people, family.*¹⁴

I.e. a new form of liquidation of the past. If the two shameful follies of the twentieth century were Nazism and communism, the twenty-first century seems to stand under the sign of total nonsense: terrorism—the quintessence of medieval fanaticism. Hatred—

seen as the fuel of history—is not a recent discovery: there was communist class hatred, Nazi racial hatred, and more recently, the suicidal (alleged) religious hatred of the terrorists. Islam has replaced bankrupt communism, becoming a new space for utopia; thus proving to belong not so much to religious belief, but to political ideology (Thierry Wolton).¹⁵

Bankrupt communism has left behind not only a half-derelict continent, but also brilliant methods of manipulation which continue to operate (even when applied to opposite ideologies). Of these, the most poisonous and longest-lasting is the attempt to blur or sever memory. It's a barbaric requirement to inject amnesia into communities (and the individual). Traditional societies were based on memory, had it in the center of their becoming: sons did what their parents had done, and parents what grandparents had previously done. It was easy to preserve continuity, to keep what was essential. What was essential was stabilized, tabooed, transformed into myth and passed on from one generation to another.¹⁶

Our continent is the result of eras and cultures that form a unique heritage: successive or simultaneous sedimentation give Europe an unmistakable physiognomy. Europe cannot become now, in the third millennium, a place of absolute beginning, unless a crippling amnesia is caused. Its very name suggests non-Europeans: pages of literature and philosophy, museums and galleries, libraries and universities, technological laboratories, cemeteries of battles past, bridges and tunnels constructed to facilitate the meeting between countries and people, church steeples, visions and utopia, ethics and spirituality etc.¹⁷ All these symbolize the vitality of collective memory, the ability to give new life to old walls, speaking about the power of the descendants to confront the mistakes or hesitations of their ancestors. History is forcing Europe to think about the future in terms of a fundamental continuity that can be negotiated only at the cost of becoming something else.¹⁸

Religion—generally, immanently speaking—is seen as a form through which societies, social groups, individuals themselves imagine alternatives to daily living. Man has always dreamed of a better world, but only man as the product of Western Enlightenment (with the emergence of the *citizen* in culture) believes in their ability to define good and evil through themselves; until then, this endeavor was a prerogative of the Divine, the Law descended from heaven. Now its source is the will of the people (of the community of citizens). Politics and religion have become parallel¹⁹, religious practice has entered the private realm, public space has been seized by politics; religion has ceased to be the principle that used to guide the social world. Things are very different in the Islamic world, where good and evil are a responsibility of the religious authority, by virtue of the theocracy that dominates this type of society.

Not only the national community has undergone a process of erosion, but the religious community is also facing fragmentation. The fragmentation of the community also means some kind of fracturing, damage, fragmentation of collective memory. Faith continues to proliferate (even in the West), but is based on the individual and the *little religions* manufactured by each person individually; contemporary societies have turned into hyper-individualized communication machines, and—paradoxically—the more a society individualizes, the more people tend to build small, well-structured and very competitive identities. For this, the Internet with its blogs suits perfectly²⁰. The process of

religious identity reconstruction favors the collapse of large community institutions, making a joint society project extremely difficult.

3. Collective Psycho-Diagnostic and Romanian Destiny within the European Context

Terrorism—with religion as a (background or) pretext—has become the main problem of the twenty first century. But the dozens of attacks (with thousands of deaths) are a small danger compared to that of the slow and insidious advance of millions of immigrants determined not to integrate (and who can dissolve, from the inside, the culture and mentality of Europe, replacing them with the imperatives of medieval beliefs). Decisive for the definition and survival of Europe is the cultural and emotional baggage the newcomers bring and which—by applying the European freedoms (and through demographic imbalance) —will replace European culture and spirituality (this is the grim prognosis of Ana Blandiana).

The newcomers do not see the European tolerance as a quality, but as a form of weakness because it does not contain in it the respect for its own definition, nor the courage to defend it. The immigrants have no intention to adapt to the rules and life formula of those willing to host them²¹ so that, after multiple crises that have marked the history of Europe (which were, in the last century, economic crises, internal crises of networking between states, rationality crises, crises of legitimacy, crisis of motivation) the latest seems to be the crisis of response: a certain perplexity and paralysis characterize the attitude of Europe towards those who shout: *Death to the Christians! Death to Germany! Down with the police!* and so on. If until now most Europeans preferred to pursue a retreat in consumerism and leave the discourse on multiculturalism (degraded to the meaning of simple co-existence between different cultures) and the praise of democracy (reduced to proceduralism and the simple technique of periodic election of leaders) to the elites²², after the terrorist attacks the theoretical discourse descended into everyday life. Panic alerts the citizens, a sense of vulnerability endangers them continuously, experiencing the void generated by the absence of a coherent and global vision upon life (upon the purpose and meaning of human existence) specific to a non-religious society without transcendent horizons.

We, the Romanians, who coexisted with Islam over centuries of Ottoman rule, propose Europe an Orthodox spirituality compatible with the various theoretical models of integration and European cohabitation, without needlessly irritating their sensitivities; “the specificity of our nation is living in fear of God²³, respecting our fellow men as children of God.”²⁴ Dan Puric—by his journalistic activity and conferences—invites us to a reunion with memory, to reliving “in” it, to exercising it as a natural model of self-knowledge: memory as falling in love with our own people again, as release from the hell of oblivion²⁵ and as reincarnation of the people in Christ.²⁶

We conclude with the well-known observation of Nicolae Iorga: *We, the Romanians, are great not through our victories, but through our sufferings!*



Notes

1. In Orthodoxy, the collective memory is an established form of reconstruction of the past, whereby it is not the source that matters most, reconstruction being more important than the original significance of the event, because it involves the elimination of impurities (the negative elements are decanted and removed), everything being crystallized into a mystical memory—a final product with supra-temporal sanctifying potential. In other words, tradition in Orthodoxy is a trans-historical unity of imagination and evaluation of this memory. The matrix of the Orthodox archaic mentality does not accept the *individual*, it only preserves the *transcendent*, and respectively it focuses on a positive of reference. Cfr. Mirel Bănică, *Tradiția și transmiterea memoriei religioase în Ortodoxie*, in “Tabor,” 3, 2008, p. 78.
2. One of the particularities of the Orthodox religious group is the tendency to *flee into the past* by favoring the images of saints (and their memory); the works of the Orthodox collective memory are regularly brought to the surface: there is a repetitive character of Orthodoxy and a formal *refusal* of History. Everything is done in order to have the power to connect successive generations of believers with the Divine. Everything is done in the presence of a witness, who is the saint or the spiritual man, ensuring continuity: he is a *true incorruptible heritage* of Orthodoxy, bearer of sense. *Ibid.*
3. If we were to name a few elements of the Orthodox Tradition, we would mention: the Ecumenical Councils, Monasticism and the Church Fathers, the Liturgy and music of the consecrated liturgical ministries, the Icon (as a specific visual form of recovery of the Orthodox memory) etc. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
4. It is obliged to stop the irrational chase for profit and progress and to analyses, to judge, to look into the past like in a rear-view mirror—in which the driver sees whom they overtook and who intends to overtake them—to enable them to advance correctly. *I look into the past*—Winston Churchill said—*to have the perspective of the road I have to follow*. Cfr. Ana Blandiana, *Istoria ca viitor*, in “Tabor,” 5, 2016, p. 37.
5. Ana Blandiana, in the speech she delivered when being awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (24 March 2016), does not plead for fanaticism, but for trust and firmness. She remembers how Europe devlued the phrase *the Christian roots of Europe*, thus invalidating its own history and cultural definition. It is true, Europe believes in *freedom*. But “freedom” is a notion with unsafe edges able to produce anything but not to excuse anything. The concept of “freedom” must be set—mandatorily!—in connection to that of “duty,” responsibility. Worker Lech Walesa, once he became president, proclaimed: *Evil takes advantage of freedom more than good does!* Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 39.
6. At the time when Christianity was pervading, Rome had no more than 60,000 Romans, in a population of 1,000,000 inhabitants who had come from other regions of the world, as a result of the successive conquests of Rome. Today, 50% of London’s population is non-English, and in the suburbs of Paris or Rotterdam you have to constantly tell yourself where you are in order to remember that you are in Europe! *Ibid.*, p. 38.
7. *Globalization is not an invention of the twenty first century. Throughout history, every power attempted to go global, but did it according to its strength and size of the world known at the time. Alexander the Great and Caesar were the two Europeans who had the courage to mix the populations of the world known then, changing their habits, replacing their languages, influencing their religions, transforming them so as to rule them. Today’s planetary village gathers together not only information but also populations.* Cfr. *ibid.*
8. Constantin V. Skouteris, *Realitatea multiculturală europeană contemporană ca provocare ortodoxă*, in “Tabor,” 3, 2007, p. 50.

9. Another inconsistency and oscillation between extremes is the tactics of the past half-century of the Western societies: they jumped from imposing an aggressive civilizing imperialism to the indiscriminate acceptance of the multicultural form of society, skidding violently from conservatism into syncretism. Orthodoxy proposes a careful analysis of the *signs of the times*, i.e. a creative fidelity towards (an) (unadulterated) Tradition. It's about finding the balance between tradition and innovation, the re-credibility of its own past, and the clever appeal to memory. Ibid., p. 53.
10. Dostoevsky, referring to the European countries, wrote: *These countries without God, these countries of the human-king, of money, of mathematic calculus, of science, are collapsing slowly under the wealth of their fireworks. Salvation is elsewhere. Salvation lies within a new society, renewed from within.* Cfr. *ibid*, p. 52.
11. Ibid, p. 53.
12. The homeland is an extended "self," an open self, an entity that, although diffuse, is more persistent historically speaking. It mandatorily requires two elements: a people and a territory (that would become one's homeland, country; a migratory people has no homeland); it means the origins of life. Childhood is—metaphorically speaking—a first homeland, for it contributes to the emergence of the sense of belonging to a sacred space; likewise, the parental home is a close sign and landmark of the homeland. Patriotism means insertion into tradition, respect for the values already accumulated and total commitment to producing others that are being added permanently; by loving your motherland, you assume the longings, aspirations, ideals of your people. Cfr. Costion Nicolescu, *Iubirea de Patrie la Andrei Tarkovski*, in "Tabor," 12, 2012, p. 58.
13. Ovidiu Hurduzeu, *Conștiința critică presupune libertatea gândirii*, in "Tabor," 7, 2008, p. 85.
14. Family cohesion was regarded as a potential opponent in the most suffocating periods of repression because withdrawal within the family as the last redoubt against folly was the most general form of resistance, passive, but invincible. The lethargy, the fatigue of a well-fed, too hedonistic, too little spiritualized society is manifested not only by lowering the moral rigors and traditions, but also by declining birth rates, the direct consequence of the decrease in family cohesion (the average number of children per family in Europe is 1.2, while for the Islam is 8). In addition, the latest politically correct directive in Europe is to legalize marriages of families who cannot have children naturally. Cfr. Blandiana, *Istoria* cit., p. 41.
15. Ibid.
16. Today, when everything changes suddenly (the political system, communications, even the climate), it is infinitely more difficult to determine what should be continued. The problem of memory is the answer to the question: Which of the things lived by those before us should we preserve? Memory is the skeleton of human society: without it, society becomes a soft, disjointed monster, re-moldable by the desire (however criminal) of the strongest. To the extent that we do not know what it was, we cannot intuit what will be (or recognize the extent to which the past is reflected into the future). Knowledge is "recognition," Aristotle used to say. Ibid., p. 42.
17. Jacob H. H. Weiler, *Un'Europa cristiana. Un saggio esplorativo*, Milano: Rizzoli, 2003, *passim*.
18. Radu Preda, *Creștinismul pe harta dinamică a Europei. O abordare social-teologică*, in "Tabor," 2, 2008, p. 67.
19. There are various models of separation between Church and State: in France, the separation was carried out in order to protect the state from the interference of the Roman Catholic Church; in America, by contrast, the separation law was designed to protect religion from too much state interference. Cfr. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Renașterea identităților religioase în Europa*, in "Tabor," 12, 2009, p. 48.

20. Fragmentation is therefore the *keyword* for defining the contemporary religious fact, including in Islam, where it is not about a mass return to the great religious tradition of Islam, but about isolated groups (the second or third generation born in the West) who need to communicate with each other, who need validation, hence their massive presence on the Internet. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
21. The crisis of conscience faced by Europe should operate as a regenerative factor. It should be an opportunity to travel towards the depths of the self and towards the Christian core of its own identity. It should be an invitation to exit the exclusivity of material interest and rediscover its spiritual and cultural values; it should be an opportunity to rethink its own cultural definition and historical consciousness. Cfr. Preda, *Creștinismul* cit., p. 43.
22. Andrei Marga, *Despre societatea postseculară*, in “Tabor,” 2, 2007, p. 36.
23. *Preserving the national identity, the survival of a people, seems unimportant to many who live abroad. Many compatriots who arrive there believe that their adaptation to the new environment should be “radical”: in their view, the complete negation of their origin and language is mandatory. I say that to be a Romanian means lucidity, to have the knowledge that nobody becomes what they are not. And, in addition, to bring a contribution of originality, of novelty, where they live. The campaign led in Romania against everything Romanian has nothing to do with “Europeanization.” The exponents of the “free thought” must be convinced that not every killer instinct means “freedom.”* Cfr. Lidia Stăniloae, *Ce înseamnă să fii român?*, in “Tabor,” 5, 2011, p. 32.
24. Dumitru Horea Ionescu, *Uitând că am învățat să uităm*, in “Tabor,” 2, 2009, p. 82.
25. *Today’s youth has no idea of the tragedy of the past: the best of the Romanians were exterminated in a systematic manner; the intelligentsia was decimated. This is the sign of what it means to be a Romanian: in no case belonging to bad groups that mock everything that is part of the essence of the Romanian soul. To love your country, your people is no outdated saying, no outdated mentality, as insinuated by those who have learned nothing from the lessons of the past. This is the only road that guarantees the future, if we do not want to sink into oblivion and dissolution, as has happened with other peoples, whose moments of unconsciousness have permanently deleted them from the book of history.* Cfr. Stăniloae, 2011, p. 33.
26. Ionescu, *Uitând* cit., p. 83.

Abstract

Recourse to Memory (and Tradition) in the Construction of Non-Perishable Identities. The Risk of a Programmed Suicide for an Amnesiac Europe

In capturing the Romanian “imaginary nation,” a crucial role is played by the Orthodox component (collective and individual), just as, in capturing the *European identity*, Christianity has a fundamental role (the triad: Jerusalem–Rome–Athens). This study, structured into three complementary sections—*Contextualization: Europe is becoming more and more fragile every day because it no longer has the strength to believe in something* (1); *Repositioning towards the national idea or constantly relearning to love. The twisted neo-imperative of severing memory. Hatred—a fuel of history?* (2); *Collective psycho-diagnostic and Romanian destiny within the European context* (3)—is trying to focus readers’ attention on the importance of memory (individual and collective, conscious and unconscious) in the foundation, affirmation and survival of significant identities.

Keywords

collective memory, European amnesia, supra-temporal continuity, ecclesial discernment, critical awareness