Symposium

Cultural Transparency and the Loss of Privacy in the Era of Digital Technology: How Is This Shaping Our Becoming and the Ethical Dilemmas Related to It

The Twenty-third Ecumenical Theological and Interdisciplinary Symposium

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Being Constantly Watched:  
Identity, Transparency and Perichoresis

Preliminary remarks

Enlightenment promoted the idea of the autonomous individual which basically implies that man does not depend on anybody else, not even on God. If something, God depends on man, as the anthropocentric statement put it: it is not God who created man in His image, but man who created God in man’s image. The autonomous individual is the product of his own making whose moral guide is no longer an objective set of values, like the Ten Commandments; he has his own Decalogue which is based on pleasure and preference. All values are relative and everyone’s choice has to be accepted by all.

Robert Bellah calls this type of society “permissive” and “individualistic”, while Erich Fromm calls it “neurotic” and “narcissistic.”

Technology in general, digital technology in particular, with all advantages it brings to our society, seems to also exacerbate the above mentioned trends.

The “digital man” ’s loss of privacy and forced transparency is already fundamentally affecting his or her identity.

From a theological perspective, man is the image of a Trinitarian God, thus being ontologically communitarian. From this perspective a few questions arise: Is the loss of privacy due to technology in the advantage or detriment of man’ communitarian character? Is privacy opposite to communion? If yes, the loss of privacy is a good outcome because it strengthens communion. If not, the loss of privacy weakens communion. How does that happen?
In other words, how is the “digital man” going to reconcile the need for privacy and distinction with the imperative of communion and the threat of forced transparency?

Will loss of privacy and forced transparency lead to a radical change of people’s idea of who man is, to a new definition of man? Will man become a perichoretic being the way the persons of the Triune God are according to Christian theology? Could this mean a human advance on the way to the likeness of God?

Part of the angels fell and became demons because they wanted to usurp God’s place and be like God. Man fell because the devil came with the same temptation: eat this and you will be like God. And man ate and fell and became animal. A political animal, in Aristotle’s terms.

Is current technology a new face of the old temptation for man to be like God and which will thus lead to a new fall, or is it indeed a new way for man to advance towards the likeness of God?

Being constantly watched

We live in what is becoming an ever more intense surveillance society. We want to know what others are doing. Spying on others is becoming entertainment. And even if not everybody does that, many people are pleased with the idea that if and when they want to do it, they can. That implies that they agree to be spied on. We are slowly adjusting ourselves to this idea. As it becomes common, it no longer surprises us. Yet, that is not happening and will not happen without trouble. As Sarah Igo writes, what we consider a culmination in the digital technology is only the beginning of current and future moral dilemmas.

This spying activity is practiced at both personal and state levels. Speaking of state surveillance, whose capacity of spying is not even imaginable, people have many reasons to be frightened, as what they do, what they say, and coming up, what they think, is recorded and kept on file, stored in the “electronic catacombs of a master computer,” making our society a national warehouse and thus indicating “the state’s ambition towards omniscience.”

The problem here is not only about the capacity of spying and storing data, but also of what data are being collected. The spy can collect information about you not only based on what you do and
say, but also based on what other people say about you, implying gossip, misperceptions and lies. How aware are we of this, of how this data is going to be used and of the fact that virtually each single adult US citizen has such a file, remains a standing question. While surveillance can be justified by the state that it is a good tool against crime and terrorism, however it can be manipulated in order to change behavior or create certain kinds of people.

Wilfred M. McClay, in an article entitled “On the Need for Erasure,” speaks of the controversy related to the “right to be forgotten,” about “the elephant that never sleeps and never forgets,” about the unsleeping digital beast.

When it comes to people themselves storing and sharing data about them and others and the impact on human relations, think of this scenario: last year you posted on the social media something about you which is not true, or someone did that based on misperceptions about you or intention to hurt you. You want to delete that one year later, as you did not pay attention at first, or you forgot about it, or simply did not know. That information stays there and others will see it and can use it against you at any time. Or maybe you did something wrong, you thought it was ok and posted it; in between you changed and do not want it there anymore. You cannot take it off. Take the case of a divorce. She calls you a “monster” and posts on the internet things that you did and that you did not. Then you want to remarry. The person you want to be with now will search your profile on the internet and will find all these “monstrosities” about you. The problems thus created are easy to imagine.

The loss of privacy

The old Latin proverb says that verba volant scripta manent (words fly, what is written stays). It seems that we are moving into the age where nothing flies anymore, not even words. Everything stays. Everything is recorded, even one’s thinking. This is an argument in favor of God’s omniscience. God knows everything. Nothing is hidden from Him. In some religious traditions people say: everything one does is written in the book of life.

If sophisticated computers can retain all ideas, knowledge of a large community, then one can imagine that in the future it is
possible to have computers that will be able to store all knowledge on earth, and then, to control and use it (and hence the issue of manipulation and morality). Again, this makes it easier for a religious believer to figure out how God has the capacity to know everything. If man can reach that capacity, even if in limited yet unimaginable ways, then why not see how God, being a higher power, can have it at higher, divine proportions and levels?

How intrusive can technology be (through wiretapping, personality testing, magnetic cards and chips, and many other means)? Experts in the field promise “to catch in the act anyone who tries to fake [even] a given emotion or feeling.”

Technology also leads people into becoming less private and share more about who they are, what they do and think to the point where in the digital environment there is no more shame, nothing is sacred anymore. Some see a degradation of values in this phenomenon, others call it a “confessional culture” that represents a “discontinuity from the rights oriented privacy talk of the 1960s.” It appears that the boundary between private and public is becoming ever thinner.

In a sense this indicates another feature of the global village, which is our world today. In a traditional village everyone knows everyone. Whatever one does, becomes transparent. The good side of it is that one is inclined to do less evil since all will know who did it.

In this case, the question that arises is as follows: does transparency lead to transcendence? And in which sense: psychological, theological, both?

Identity

As we get immersed more and more in the surveillance system and as we are becoming more aware of it as well, we will become more preoccupied with the image we want to project than with who we really are. This fact in itself makes the spying system a change agent of our identity. This is in a way similar to when we leave home to go to work and we take good care of how we look. That is creating a different self than the real one, at least in many cases, if we cannot generalize. The question that arises here is
whether the projected self is determining the hidden one. And if the response is probably yes, what are the implications of this?

Another aspect of this dual identity or change of identity is related to the situation of the digital human constantly connected to social media devices that determine how he or she wants to be perceived by others. Simple numbers and quantities are significant in this process, as Julia Ticona notices. Numbers of “shares” and “likes” on those devices lead to a reimagining of the self and to a redefinition of one’s social being when it comes to general relationships, friendship or intimacy if intimacy is still what it used to be.

This quantitative approach to human identity leads to what Frank Pasquale calls the algorithmic self which refers to how digital technology affects irreversibly one’s identity, or more precisely, how operating systems and algorithms behind the screens that are watching us are meant to generate or stimulate certain reactions in us, like generating pleasure and exaggerating satisfaction – to name only two more innocent reactions. Pasquale is warning us: “We need some common, clear awareness of whom the algorithms behind the screen truly serve, before we accept their pervasive presence in our lives.”

The entire phenomenon of technological manipulation of the self, of one’s identity, in fact says something about our own fragility and vulnerability.

One way in which algorithms work and how we are being processed by algorithms can be explained through the example of people’s credit scores; this is how they are imagined to work in the near future: credit scores are displayed on so called “credit poles” that will prompt us to make changes that are socially acceptable. Another example is where one’s employer “posts instant updates of the sales persons’ mood and stress indicators encouraging them to optimize their attitudes for demanding clients.”

Aware of the degrading risks of such manipulations, F. Pasquale calls for reinvigoration of tradition which is a fundamental source of meaning and values and implicitly, of religion, which used to be, and statistically speaking still is, the great generator of values.

Another way in which technology affects who we are is by providing cheap skills through mediated operations. As Nicholas
Carr observes (in The Glass Cage) this phenomenon “while initially liberating, threatens to sap the reserves of ingenuity and creativity that enabled the competition in the first place.”14

In other words, cheap skills lead to man’s stultification. However, one can argue that while some skills are being replaced or lost, new ones are created and developed, as man has practically an infinite capacity for innovation and creativity, and even more so if one considers the future marriage between man and the machine.

Yet another case of identity change is related to the posthuman or transhuman future of man as a new phase in man’s evolution which is about enhancement of our “physical and intellectual powers” by technological means, when we will become cybernetic organisms, cyborgs, a strange hybridization between man and machine, as Elaine Graham explains.15 Whether posthumanism is understood in terms of promise and enhancement or of endangerment and dehumanization, of liberation or enslavement, of deification or reification, the image of the “techno-sapiens” remains a contemporary challenge16 and will continue to be in the future.

More precisely, the posthuman “evokes a world in which, thanks to cybernetics, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, plastic surgery, gene therapies, assisted reproduction, biological humans are everywhere surrounded – and transformed – into mixtures of machine and organism, where what we call ‘nature’ has been significantly reshaped by technology, and technology in turn, has become assimilated into ‘nature’ as a fully functioning component of organic life itself.”17

To this type of ontological transformation implying the transcendence of man’s normal physical and cognitive limitations, Kevin Warwick sees no end.18

Does epektasis begin here and now? St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his book The Life of Moses, discusses the theological concept of epektasis according to which those who will be in the kingdom of God in the divine communion will not live in a static existence but in a dynamic one, progressing endlessly in the knowledge of God and the joy of this knowledge19 as God is an inexhaustible being; this will be a sort of progression classically called in theology “from glory to glory.”
According to posthumanists and immoralists such kind of epictatic process will take place even here, at the level of the physical existence and it will also be eternal.

These predictions are worth one’s attention because most of past utopias in the history of humankind became reality and with the scientific and technological advancement developing not in arithmetic but in geometric progression, including quantum mechanics, one can expect anything.

**Manipulation**

Plato said that things in themselves have no moral value; they are neutral. What you do with them is where good and evil come into play. The same is true of technology. It has its own defenders and enthusiasts, but also its own skeptics.

Speaking of civilization, the place where technology is created, developed and used, Emil Cioran wrote: “Civilization instructs us how to take hold of things, whereas it is the art of letting them go that it should teach us, for there is no freedom, no ‘real life’ without an apprenticeship to dispossession.

I seize an object, I consider myself its master; as a matter of fact I am its slave, as I am the slave of the instrument I make, the tool I use. Every new acquisition signifies a new chain, every power factor a cause of impotence.”

The power of destruction of our tools is directly proportional with their advancement and sophistication. That means that while enjoying the benefits of an ever more developed technology, humankind has to live constantly in the shadow of death whose specter grows to planetary and cosmic proportions.

In Cioran’s words, “The more complicated and differentiated civilization becomes, the more we curse the links which bind us to it. According to Soloviev, it will come to an end in the middle of the ‘most refined century’, This much is certain: civilization was never so threatened or detested as at the moments when it seemed best established.”

Yet we need to notice that civilization and, implicitly, technology, means knowledge and that knowledge is power. But in this context we talk especially of expert knowledge and consequently, power. The machines we are using without
understanding them are the product of expert knowledge, which is beyond the control of most people. And here is where manipulation comes into play. As Rudi Volpi warns, most experts are employed by agencies, organizations, or people with money that have their own agendas that in many cases not even the experts know. There is no ethical transparency, no exposition of the sets of values, principles, and criteria behind a certain action, development or innovation; sometimes the only principle is more money and more power. And sometimes, if there is such an exposition of values and interests in relation to a certain development, who guarantees that that is not only a facade?

Facebook, for instance, has not addressed the issue of ethics, who its ethical experts are, and what their review process is like.22 One researcher offers an example of manipulation that alters people’s behavior and implicitly identity: “Once a critical mass of flags like ‘I don’t want to see this,’ or ‘This is spam’ amasses around one person’s account, he may well be deemed ‘creepy’ or ‘depressing’ but he may never know that, or know why the determination was made.”23

According to the same researcher, “data scientists create these new humankinds even while altering them, as new sorting and theorizing induces changes in self-conception and in behavior of the people classified.”24

There is an impression that we create and recreate and refashion ourselves based on our concepts and possibilities and external influences and in particular based on our free choices. There might be forms of manipulation in this type of process too. However, with the technology we have today and the one that is coming up, a more dangerous type of manipulation can be developed and used. In that case we will be somebody else’s creature more than our own.

And one very special type of manipulation that technology, according to some, is, and according to others, will soon be able to do, is related to stealing selves. This issue brings us back to the fundamental question of who we are. Are we our individual selves or do we possess our individual selves? Am I who I am or Am I what I have? We learned that “who” is the appropriate word to use when speaking of people, and not “what” which is degrading as it is applied to things.
However, if we think of ourselves in terms of quantities and attributes that we have or possess, such as intelligence, sensitivity, generosity, courage, compassion and many others, we easily recognize that these are talents and gifts that we have. But they do make one be who one is. Therefore I am what I have. The “what” I have makes the “who” I am.

And here comes the big question: can the machine, or will it be able, to steal my gifts, like my intelligence or other qualities I have? If we look at what transhumanists have to say about this, the answer is “yes”. Stealing selves is a gruesome perspective of our future. Neurotechnology is one field that can be used to do this. An “innocent” example that can indicate future developments was offered recently by an article published in The New York Times about neuro-politics in relation to political advertising in Mexico: you look at an advertiser that promotes a certain political candidate and you have no idea that the advertiser is looking at you, reading you; through sophisticated neuro-technology, it detects your moods, reads your reaction, the pleasure and displeasure in your looks, mouth, face, gestures, etc.; later, you will receive on your media devices a modified version of the advertiser that you will like.

A much higher level of manipulation can be imagined when scientists and neuro-technologists will be able to map your brain, download it and store it. They might give you a copy to have it in case of need!

According to Winfred Denk, director at the Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology in Germany, in the coming 40 years, neurobiology will be able to copy a person’s mind through advanced mapping techniques already in use, to create a replica.

As Ray Kurzweiler writes, the near future will produce cyber-enhanced minds, as he sees our minds as software and our bodies as hardware. The same Ray Kurzweiler, a cyber-utopian, software programmer, considered to be the rightful heir of Thomas Edison, believes that immortality is our next target and it is within our reach. “We have the means right now, to live long enough to live forever,” he wrote.

Of course, this is the constant dream of humankind since the beginning of its history and civilization. Avicena dedicated its life to it, Martin Luther King Jr. talked about it, people continue to be fascinated by it.
Everything begins with illness and remedy. People take pills to live longer and better. According to David Bosworth all sciences must ultimately focus on healing, on finding a final cure for the human condition, meaning, specifically, for death. For the “latter-day doctors,” as he put it, death will no longer be the end of the human adventure in the current existential condition. It will no longer be the inescapable finish line, but just a technical problem that will be solved by working on the perfectibility of our flesh in the sense of its beautification, enhancement and fortification, in a word, of digitalization of our body.

*Perichoresis*

One of the main doctrines about the Holy Trinity, in Christian theology, is related to the way the three divine persons interact. That is called *perichoresis*. It means a relation of “interpenetration, co-inhabitation, mutual fellowship and surrounding or indwelling. In Greek peri-choreo means to make room, to go around […] The term indicates that at the heart of God’s life is the personal relation, and that relation is one of intimacy. According to John of Damascus the persons of the Trinity live together in union in a relationship without coalescence or commingling; they cleave to each other and have their being in each other.”

The term *perichoresis* is applied to the ecclesial community’s life in Christ. People are supposed to be one and called to be one, as this was Jesus’s wish expressed in His prayer to the Father: “That they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us” (John 17, 21).

Thus, *perichoresis* implies total transparency, inter-participation, concomitance, unity in diversity or distinction without separation; this last feature was discussed in depth at the fourth ecumenical council in Chalcedon (451 AD) in relation to the way the two natures, divine and human, co-exist in the person of Jesus Christ. The Chalcedonian conclusion was formulated as follows: the two natures coexist unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly and inseparably.

At the human level we are supposed to be one in and through our communion with God. In the divine liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox Church, people are
exhorted to praise God “with one mouth and one heart.” In fact, the etymological meaning of the term “communion” has to do with oneness. The root of the term is “un” from “ unus”, in Latin which is one. All like one, is the message.

This seems to be utopic, yet we are called to this kind of “utopia.” There were many other utopias in the history of humankind that have become a reality. In many ways digital technology makes the unthinkable a reality.

The angelization of man

A perichoretic society would imply total transparency. This would be a world where all of man’s defects, deficiencies and sins would be exposed. In this case we can have a society where an all accepting and all embracing culture will be created, meaning non-judgmental; but we can also have a society where sin, evil is eliminated from one’s mind even before it appears there, due to the fact that everyone knows that everybody will find out at once what one thinks. (Speaking of sin and evil and of defects and deficiencies as well, one question will come into play: what is the relation between them? Is sin generating a defect or vice versa? Who is responsible for defects and deficiencies? Are we born with them or do we acquire them?)

In other words, in a world of total transparency, where sin, as an error of thinking according to a Patristic definition, will be eliminated from one’s mind, more precisely it will not even appear there, man will reach a kind of angelic condition, a state in a sense similar to what St. John Chrysostom wanted us to become: earthly angels or heavenly people.

In different terms Wilfed McClay speaks of “a culture of transparency in which everything about us is revealed and everything about us is used in tracking, appealing to and ever shaping us.”

It is possible that fear and shame play a positive role in this process.

Fear of being tracked, of your thoughts being stored and then being judged, very much like in the doctrine about the Last Judgement in Christian tradition: everything we do and think is tracked by God, stored, in some traditional accounts “written in the
book of life”, and then, subject to judgement by Christ at His second coming.

The only difference between the two scenarios is that in the case of Christ, it is only God who knows your thoughts, whereas in the other case, with humans, everybody knows everybody’s thoughts and feelings.

The process of our inner transformation is viewed by Frank Pasquale as follows: the machines (surveillance systems) that are watching us are not meant to only record the past, but also to control the future by “modulating” our selves. That is done by the creation of systems of penalty and reward for bad or good behavior, for what is considered socially acceptable or unacceptable.33 Speaking of a “surveillance driven scoring” system Pasquale is asking the following question: “Do we want to be the kind of people who are constantly assessing how each word or deed will affect permanent reputational profiles?”34

The problem of constantly assessing each word we say brings us very close to Christ’s warning in the New Testament: “But I say unto you that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12, 36).

If this kind of total tracking and surveillance is possible in man’s world, all the more it makes sense that it is possible with God.

This is how a scientist envisions our future at this point: our machines such as modem, laptop, palmtop, table, smartphone and others will become smaller and smaller until they reach the dimension of a chip with Radio-Frequency Identification Device (RFID) generalized capabilities that will finally link our biological being to the world network in all possible ways.35

This can be easily imagined if one keeps in mind the quantum mechanics theory and applications which are at the foundation of modern computers and lasers; according to the latest scientific discoveries in the field, when it comes to communications, as Ronald Hanson writes, “quantum communications networks” can be “formed from a chain of entangled particles girdling the entire globe.”36

The angelization of man is a utopic vision now, but previsible by many techno-scientists. For as long as one can envisage evil being eradicated, the digitalization of man brings about an ideal
outcome. Yet, not everyone is so enthusiastic about where the technological developments can bring us. For example, thinking of the possible manipulation through technology and media, or of how technology can contribute to the degradation of traditional moral principles, like in the case where media technology users express preference for good looks over personality traits, Christian Rudder considers that media has to be saved from people, not people from media, because the problem is with people who must be more humane and principled in using the technology at hand. 37

In this sense physicist and philosopher Basarab Nicolescu proposes a change in the way science and technology understand themselves. Techno-science, he believes, has to convert itself towards values. In itself, techno-science is blind to values. That has to be changed and a dialogue with religion, as one of the main sources of traditional values, becomes a necessity. 38 This is because technology will not save the world and the human species, but a radical change in understanding reality will do; and that requires a new type of spirituality. 39

Conclusion

The title for the spring issue 2015 of the academic journal The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture is “Too Much Information”! it sounds like a warning, and it brings to mind the painting called The Scream by Edvard Munch. It also brings to mind the story of Adam and Eve and their “fall into time” (to use E. Cioran’s book title) because they wanted to know too much for their condition. Hence, the question is: how much can we bear and handle before we hurt ourselves?

To many skeptics, all those technological victories are like having opened Pandora’s box. And that is true, in particular when it comes to the possibilities and surprises of quantum mechanics for both the immediate and long term future. Just recently, in an article titled “Sorry Einstein, but ‘Spooky Action’ seems to be real,” published in The New York Times, John Markoff reported a new scientific experiment, which demonstrated that there is an “odd” world (or a miraculous world, in other terms) that is full of surprises that will affect our lives radically and irreversibly. One element of the discovery: “Two previously entangled particles, even if
separated by the width of the universe, could instantly interact just as quantum objects, “could exist at the same time in multiple states and planes, as in a kind of ubiquity.”

This theory might explain or bring some light and understanding of the Christian doctrine in the field of eschatology, according to which after death there will be a resurrection of the body, when the former body will reunite with the spirit of the respective person and will come back to life. In other words, if the particles of my body and those of my spirit were once entangled or “married”, even after separation or death, even if separated by the width of the universe or the multiverse, will instantly “recognize” each other and interact.

Another interesting aspect of the mentioned scientific discovery is related to the demonstration of the existence “of an odd world formed by a fabric of subatomic particles where matter does not take form until it is observed and time runs backward as well as forward.” This reminds one of the philosophy of Parmenides of Elea who taught that for God whom he called “the mathematician of all things”, it is enough to think of anything to make that particular thing come into existence. Here is the similarity again, with the conclusion of the scientific experiment reported by Markoff: “According to quantum mechanics, particles do not take on formal properties until they are measured or observed in some way. Until then, they can exist simultaneously in two or more planes. Once measured however, they snap into a more classical reality, existing only in one place.”

Why is this quantum mechanics discussion so important here? Because, as mentioned above, quantum mechanics “is the foundation of modern computers and lasers”, and our discussion is exactly about how computer technology with its future previsible and imprevisible developments affects and can affect our identity and life in general.

At the same time, in this context, several questions can be raised: as man is a transient, vulnerable and mortal being, is human digitalization a new type of finitude, this time self-made and self-inflicted, or is it a new type of empowerment, a sort of transfiguration meant to take him or her out of his natural limits?

What is the relation between Mircea Eliade’s *Homo religiosus* and *Homo digitalis*? Is this the beginning of the end of the earthly
condition of man or is it the punishment for having wanted to know like God? Is this the right type of knowledge that leads to our final salvation or the wrong type that leads to damnation? Are we at the dawn of a new condition, one of maturity when we are in the process of transcending ourselves? Are we in the hands of God or those of Satan? Is God’s hand in this equation? Are we all subjects of a great new social experiment?

It seems that we reached the point of no return with the new technological developments and that we can only make the best we can of what comes on us like an avalanche.

If we keep in mind that technology develops not in arithmetic progression but in geometric progression, then we cannot even imagine what is in store for us in the near future, not to say anything about the distant one. Maybe Ray Kurzweiler is right when he says: “live long enough to live forever”!

NOTES:

3 Sarah Igo, op. cit., p. 21.
4 Robert Wallace, cf. Sarah Igo, op. cit., p. 21
5 Ibidem, p. 26
10 Frank Pasquale, op. cit., p. 32.
11 Ibidem, p. 34.
12 Ibid., p. 36.
13 Ibid., p. 41.
22 F. Pasquale, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
23 *Ibidem*.
24 *Ibid*.
28 *Ibidem*.
29 David Bosworth, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
30 *Ibidem*.
33 Frank Pasquale, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
34 *Ibidem*, p. 37.
35 Radu Pintea, “Coaja şi Miezul” [“The Bark and the Kernel”], in *Curtea de la Arges*, year VI, Nr. 8(57), August 2015, Curtea de Arges, Romania, p. 4.
40 John Markoff, op. cit., p. 7.
41 Titus Beu, “Limitele cunoașterii în lumea cuantelor” [“The Limits of Knowledge in the Quantic World”] in Tabor, year VIII, Nr. 10, October 2014, Cluj, Romania, p. 12.
42 John Markoff, op. cit., p. 7.
43 Ibidem.
44 Ibid.
The Role of Belief in Problem Solving

Introduction

Imagine going through an entire week in which, no matter what you said, no one believed you. What would such a week be like? What would be its consequences?

This paper has four related aims: (1) to clarify what is meant by belief, (2) to identify and describe the role of belief in everyday problem solving, (3) to identify some general effects of both belief and disbelief, and (4) to present recommendations regarding how to effectively use belief in a relativistic and chaotic environment.

The nature of belief

Everyday life is composed of problems. Problems may be cognitive, emotional or behavioral. They may concern the generation or application of knowledge and information. To fully understand the role of belief in problem solving requires a clear understanding of what is meant by problem and problem solving as well as belief itself.

For our purposes here a problem is defined as a “gap in our experiencing, understanding, knowledge or practice.” The existence of a problem does not require that it is recognized as a problem. Problem recognition is a sense of awareness and familiarity experienced when one encounters aspects of a problem that have been encountered before along with the perception that something is missing. From a psychological point of view, problems may be perceived as threats or as opportunities.
Problem solving then becomes any set of activities designed to close this gap and to supply what is missing. Richard Mayer defines problem solving “as finding a way out of a difficulty, or attempting to achieve a desired state beginning from an initial state.” If the problem at hand is viewed as a threat, then problem solving may take the form of threat avoidance and minimizing losses. If the problem at hand is viewed as an opportunity, then problem solving may take the form of engagement and maximizing gains. Problem solving has both individual and social dimensions. It has individual dimensions because both problem recognition and problem solving occur in the minds of individuals. It has social dimensions because the presence of others can sometimes facilitate the solution of problems and the expansion of that work. The development of what Alfred Adler calls social feeling in individuals is an important bridge between these individuals and the social dimensions of problem solving.

Belief has been defined as “the acceptance of the truth, reality or validity of something, particularly in the absence of substantiation.” In psychology, belief is very similar to trust, which is defined as a “reliance on or confidence in the dependability of someone or something.” If we are relying on a person or persons, that trust becomes social trust. In sociology, belief is considered under the heading of the sociology of knowledge. In these senses belief is to be understood as a conscious act or mental event. Here the focus is not so much on the contents of this or that belief, but the activity of believing.

Belief, understood as an act, is then a form of collaboration with others. For believing to work the following conditions must be in place: (1) the believer has made a prior judgment of fact that she cannot verify everything for herself, (2) the believer must have made a prior judgment of value that the collaboration is worth it in general, and (3) the believer must have made a prior judgment of value that the collaboration is worth it in this particular case because the source of the information is credible. If we choose to collaborate with others then our thought can extend through space to other places and to the work done by others in those places. Our thought can also extend through time to the past and to the work done by others in bygone days. In all cases of collaboration we rely heavily on the reports of others.
Belief in the context of problem solving and everyday life

Consider some everyday examples that intimately involve belief. Jack wakes each morning to the sound of a radio alarm clock that announces the time. Since Jack has not taken steps to determine the time for himself and since he accepts the word of the radio announcer, waking at the sound of the alarm clock is largely a matter of belief. More often than not, if he acts on this information he will not be running late. Jill goes to the computer at work and sends an email. How is belief involved in this event? She accepts that this computer is working and that pressing the “send” button will result in a distant person actually receiving the message that she sent. Most of the time, this activity is successful. Tom drives to work each morning in a large city. How is belief involved in this activity? If he drives on highways with two-way traffic, Tom relies on other drivers to keep to their own lanes. Most of the time he actually gets to work in one piece. In all of these instances belief is a great time saver. Neither Jack, Jill nor Tom needs to go out to verify everything for themselves. In each of these instances, the lack of belief would slow basic social interactions to a halt.

Given these examples, it is useful to indicate what belief is not.

Belief is not simply experiencing. Experiencing is a matter of living though something. Believing, if it is an experience at all, is a special kind of experience whereby one not only processes something meaningful but one also acts on that extracted information. Just hearing the alarm clock would be simple experience. However, regarding its sound as a signal and acting on that signal is part of believing.10

Belief is not seeking understanding. Done well, seeking understanding is a lengthy discursive process that involves generating and exploring multiple possibilities. To be sure Jill generated an intelligible message on her own. But in order to successfully send the message she does not also need a complete understanding of how computers actually work. She merely needs to press the “send” button and believe.11

Belief is not immanently generated knowledge. Immanently generated knowledge is primarily a matter of finding things out for oneself. It involves seeking out information and evidence, and making appropriate judgments of fact. Elsewhere this has been
Tom, before driving to work, does not verify for himself that all the other drivers on the road are sober and have been properly trained to drive. He simply gets in his car and believes. Bernard Lonergan indicates that while belief is not immanently generated knowledge it nevertheless “resembles judgment in its mode, for it is a rational utterance of a ‘Yes’ or a ‘No’ that may be pronounced with certitude or with probability. But while judgment is motivated by one’s own grasp of the unconditioned, the assent or dissent of belief is motivated by a decision to profit by a human collaboration in the pursuit of truth. And while judgment results with rational necessity from reflective grasp of the unconditioned, the assent or dissent of belief results from natural necessity from a free and responsible decision to believe.”

Belief is not pure speculation or fantasy. It is not just making things up, or affirming anything that one wants because it is a collaboration relying on reports of others. It is based on a crowd of witnesses who affirm that this activity works out in practice, and it is also based on memories of our own successful performances in the past. Jack may want to sleep later, but both experience and the testimony of others indicate that doing that usually does not work out well. Jill may be afraid to send the email, but experience and the testimony of others weigh in on the effectiveness of sending the message. Tom may want to drive on the wrong side of the road just for fun, but experience and others warn that that is not an effective way to get to work.

Although, belief is not immanently generated knowledge, belief does have a structure that is similar to a well-grounded judgment of fact. All well-founded judgments of fact share three common elements: (1) They answer reflective questions of fact such as “Is this True?” or “Is this probable?” These questions take “Yes” or “No” as possible answers. (2) Well-founded judgments of fact rest on sufficient evidence. (3) Well-founded judgments of fact require a clear criterion for assessing the evidence. However, in the case of belief, sufficient evidence is replaced by the word of another or the perceived reliability of something. If we are relying on the word of others, belief is sometimes referred to as social trust.

Belief also has the structure of a decision. A decision is part of a process of choosing. Decisions come as an answer to first-
person reflective deliberative questions. Examples of such questions would include “Should I do this?” or “Should we do that?” If taken seriously, these questions require a process to consider whether or not some putative good ought to be imported into one’s life. Reasons and evidence pro and con can be considered, and a criterion of what is worthwhile can be applied. The entire process has been described elsewhere and may be considered as deliberative critical thinking. In believing, the word of another is substituted for reasons and evidence, and a criterion of the believability of witnesses is applied. The decision itself is a choice to rely on the word of another or not.

If belief enters as an important component into problem solving efforts, then like problem solving belief can be subjected to interferences of various sorts. These would include disruptions arising within the individual person as well as interruptions emanating from the environment. Personal disruptions include fatigue, pain, emotional states or the operation of dramatic or individual bias. Environmental interruptions include others demanding or requiring our attention, noise, various external events and the operation of group bias. While the benefits of belief can be reaped, belief itself can also be distorted by interfering factors. Particularly important in these lists are the various biases and the error and mislearning that result.

Some effects of belief and disbelief in various contexts

The table below points to three types of human relationships that can exist in three distinct contexts in the 21st century. Relationships can be personal, professional or casual. Personal relationships are those of family, friends and some acquaintances. They typically involve large amounts of face-to-face interaction. These relationships are generally informal. Professional relationships, broadly speaking, are relationships at work or in other professional or business contexts. Typically these are governed by some set of standards of production and effectiveness. Casual relationships are marked by very brief encounters, often governed by social norms of civility and economics. The blank spaces in Table 1 can be filled in by readers for themselves. They would
contain the actual relationships that are engaged during the course of a period of time.

All of these relationships can and do exist in personal contexts. In the current century, however, there is the enormous influence of electronic media. Non-interactive media involve the one-way communication of newspapers and journals, radio and television. Interactive media allow for the possibility of two-way communication with its inherent feedback loops. If the amount of advertising dollars is any indication, both interactive and non-interactive media are thought to be effective means of communication. Therefore, consumers of media stand in some form of relationship with both the selected medium and its contents. The challenge of belief arises again in questions such as: “Is this media source trustworthy?”, “What is its track record in reporting the truth?”, “Is this message valuable?”, “Do I believe it?” and “Will I rely on it?”

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<th>Relationships in Contexts</th>
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<th>Non-Interactive Media</th>
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In all of our relationships, no matter the context, we are faced with the decision of relying on the word of others (belief) or not (disbelief). If the word of others is both clear and accurate it tends to improve social harmony, results in greater productivity and enhances commerce and business. In contrast, if the word of others is unclear it tends to result in confusion, social disharmony and impeded commerce and business. Moreover, if the word of others is false it will result in chaos and a breakdown of social order. The thought experiment posed at the beginning of this paper allows readers to verify for themselves the effects of believing or disbelieving what is clear or vague, true or false, testable or untestable, growth-defeating or growth-enhancing. This type of
experiment should indicate that it really does make a difference what we choose to believe and not to believe.

**Recommendations for the current age**

In the early 21st century less emphasis is placed on the clarity and truth of transmitted information and more emphasis is placed on *ten privileged variables* of the academy and of media. These privileged variables are aspects of human beings that include: age, culture, disability status, ethnicity, gender, political socialization, race, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. While these ten privileged variables are historically important they are often investigated only to highlight *group differences*. Group similarities are rarely examined, and individual achievement is often devalued. The result is a constant reinforcement of a distorted account of actual situations and events. An odd and dangerous consequence of this is that despite a dramatic increase in technological achievement there is a remarkable poverty of reliable information.

Used appropriately, the privileged variables can be used to promote learning. Learning here includes comprehensive understanding, knowledge and responsible practice. Achieving comprehensive understanding and tested knowledge is a protracted process and is clearly what Daniel Kahneman has named *System II thinking*. This is an extended process of thinking things through. Used appropriately, the privileged variables can assist in this process by: (1) pointing the way to exploration of broad social topics, (2) yielding a first approximation to understanding social trends and historical events, and (3) identifying real gaps in understanding, knowledge and practice that would be better addressed than left unattended.

Used inappropriately, the privileged variables can be used to: (1) highlight differences to the neglect of similarities, (2) reinforce stereotypes, (3) thereby promote social division, (4) be an instrument of bias (in Lonergan’s sense) to block exploration, conversation, dialogue etc. In addition, the restrictive use of these variables described here is (5) insufficient for many purposes, especially purposes involving small groups or individuals, and (6) it is static and therefore cannot capture dynamic trends.
In an age when the pursuit of truth is not taken seriously by many, and when many feel entitled to say or write anything to achieve their ends, it becomes more urgent to consider carefully what we choose to believe and to do. Critical thinking is a set of filters designed to rule out the “cognitively transmitted diseases” of vagueness, falsehood, untestable and growth-defeating claims. Without the filters of critical thinking we may be left in a position of either rejecting everything or of accepting everything. Such a lack of informed judgment mimics the mental states of psychotics: states marked by the conspicuous absence of sound judgment.

Historically, a number of thinkers have offered a methodological approach to handling the problem of what to believe. René Descartes sought to rule out defective claims by insisting on certainty as a goal and by recommending a universal doubt to approach the claims of others. In contrast, John Henry Newman gave up the search for certainty and noted the ubiquity of belief and that engaging in belief is often quite reasonable. In his view belief should not be ruled out of court because it does not strictly follow the precepts of scientific method. Bernard Lonergan got much more specific and advised that we can focus on specific beliefs that have proven erroneous. In this connection he developed a critique of mistaken beliefs. Albert Ellis focused on beliefs that create mental disturbance and noted that they followed a pattern of being both unsupported and untestable in principle. He counseled the disputing of these defective beliefs and replacing them with functional alternatives. In this view misleading vagueness should be replaced with precision, falsity with truth, untestable claims with testable claims and growth-defeating beliefs with growth-enhancing beliefs.

Summary

In this paper four aims have been briefly addressed. First, a clarification was offered concerning what is meant by belief considered as an act of conscious performance. Second, the role and function of belief have been identified and described in everyday contexts. Third, some effects of belief and disbelief have been identified and described. Finally, recommendations have been made regarding the use of belief in the current age. These fulfilled aims
show that belief and believing are basic facts of consciousness, along with question and insight, imagination and formulation, judgment and decision making. Effective self-management requires adequate self-knowledge. Adequate self-knowledge requires knowledge of the basic facts of consciousness. Effective self-management and the self-knowledge it contains are a form of essential personal freedom.26

Each of us is faced with the questions of what we choose to believe, what we are going to do about what we believe, and whether we are going to take charge of our own growth.

NOTES:

1 Richard Grallo, PhD is Professor of Applied Psychology at Metropolitan College of New York. This paper is based on a presentation at the 2015 Ecumenical Symposium in New York City. The author wishes to thank Professor Theodor Damian for his invitation to participate in the Symposium. The author also wishes to thank Bert F. Breiner and William McArdle for their many conversations with me on these topics. Of course any errors or unclarities that remain are my own.


7 APA Dictionary of Psychology, p. 1110.


13 Bernard Lonergan, Insight: A study of Human Understanding, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, ON, 1992, ch. XX.
20 Richard Grallo, “Thinking Carefully…”
22 René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Pearson, NY, 1960.
24 Bernard Lonergan, op. cit., ch. XX.
God, Freedom, and Immortality in the Digital Age: Jean Baudrillard’s *The Perfect Crime*

The hermeneutical ground of Jean Baudrillard, the French cultural theorist, with Christian and Marxist leaning, is informed by a concern for the ontological transformation suffered by late modern self-consciousness under the impact of the digitalization of the world. Since Western consciousness has been generated by our “evolving relationship to the biblical God” in such a way that our “deepest identity and actual becoming” has been indelibly marked by the destiny of our thinking of God, this transformation can only be understood through an investigation of its theological ground.

Preliminary disambiguations

Perfect crime. Baudrillard calls “perfect crime” the “unconditional realization of the world by the actualization of all data and the transformation of all our acts and events into pure information, the final solution, the resolution of the world ahead of time by the cloning of reality and the extermination of the real by its double.”

A project of irreversible disappearance in the logic of the species without leaving traces.

A “radical effectuation, our disappearance into Real Time and Virtual Reality long before the stars went out.”

It is the “liquidation of the Real, and the Referential, and the extermination of the Other.”

Hyperreal. According to Baudrillard, “any material pursued down to the tiniest detail, any scientific exploration ending up exterminating its real object” becomes more than real, hyperreal.

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His example is Duchamp’s bottle rack hypostasized as art.

1. A hyperreal god or the divine simulacrum

Baudrillard’s questioning about our destiny in the digital age takes the form of a theological reflection in its Kierkegaardian relentless prodding into the pathology of our crepuscular consciousness and identity. Digitalization is an all-comprehensive process involving the fulfillment and a going further of the Galilean-Cartesian mathematization of the world, the human and God. The translation into the transparent medium of the virtual induces an ontological transformation — one, Baudrillard muses, that, when fulfilled, is apocalyptic. In Borgesian style, he muses on Arthur C. Clarke’s “The Nine Billion Names of God” story of the Tibetan monks’ task of transcribing the names of God that once fulfilled, would bring the world to an end. The transcribing is today hastened by IBM technicians who expedite the process of disappearance of the world in real time. The technical transfiguring of the world will have as effects its accelerated end, its immediate resolution, the final success of modern millenarianism, with no hope of salvation, apocalypse, or revelation. The translation becomes an actual translation, a joyful self-downloading or rather up-loading, into the me-ontological sphere of non-being and the simulacra. For an individual, the process is one of turning one’s inside out, spilling oneself, one’s guts, out into the social media, becoming objectified, exposed as a lifeless body for public viewing.

“Everybody is invited to present themselves as they are and play out their lives on screen,” as Duchamp hypostasized the bottle rack into the hyperreal, we are acting out our identities, taxidermized and cloned in our own image by High Definition which puts an end to the real by its promotion of every single instant.

One’s desire of perfection, self-transcendence, and completion is being actualized on the model of Feuerbach’s God as a human self-projection or Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray. In self-emptying into the simulacrum of oneself, this side of it, the remainder may be discarded: Wilde’s dead nightingale once his blood colored the rose red. Sadly, the red rose may be discarded too. The two are disconnected by a radical ontological gap, difference
that can never be bridged. A greater “ugly ditch” than Lessing’s. Since God has been replaced by the Digital, it is the Digital that, like Berkeley’s God, keeps us in existence and confers us virtual immortality.

As Dorian Gray of sorts, we become amorphous disposable leftovers, while our mirrored reflections are perfecting themselves, while proliferating, creating false identities, designer-virtual selves devoid of reality under the sign of the ready-made, the traditional archetype of the double or the twin, Warhol clones, Campbell soup cans and Marilyn Monroes.

If materialism seemed to be the lowest level of ontological and epistemological hierarchy, the digital represents a step further. As in a Dantesque cosmology, it is only at the bottom of hell, one can enter the other world, only climbing over Satan, can one reach Purgatory.

2. The freedom of endless self-cloning and self-transcending

Here, at the bottom of materialism and obsession with the body, one transcends materialism and the body, takes the plunge out of existence, takes oneself out of life, unbecomes, disincarnates. A mass suicide, a universal self-declared autodafe, taking all with it into a mirror-non-existence. Strange fruit of freedom, the freedom of the disincarnated, “spiritual freedom” itself, freedom of endless remaking of oneself with no concern for the truth of oneself — since there is no truth for late modern individual, only appearances, ideologies, constructions. In fact, in the social media, the distinction between truth and false has been overcome as impossible to identify, ultimately, irrelevant. The significance of the Incarnation, in opposition with Gnostic doceticism, becomes finally evident in the process of its overcoming.

The easy and radical freedom of our digital clones and simulacra replaces our difficult and questionable freedom. The total freedom of the virtual, exhilarating as it may seem, is even more problematic and extreme than Kierkegaard’s aesthetic. It is an inhuman, non-human, or post-human of the disincarnate, the ghostly. One is mesmerized by the opportunity to create in the virtual endless imagined, false or true identities.
3. Beyond good and evil

Distinctions between true and false, good and evil, are abandoned for being irrelevant virtually. Beyond good and evil is first distinction that disappears in the digital. All other distinctions are subject to this vanishing. There is no moral responsibility in the virtual. In fact Baudrillard hypothesizes that our terror of death, imperfection, the other, moral responsibility, and the last judgment is the ground of the virtual, our paradise can only be a paradis artificiel.

In its arrogant metaphysical blindness, the anthropocene era of the man-made, the ready-made, the prêt a porter, prêt a manger, prêt a aimer, prêt a être, of the real time, and hyper real, has gradually eliminated God and replaced it with the all too human.

All these trans-figurations are apocalyptic through and through, in both meanings of the word, as eschatological and as revelations.

Once all the names of God are exhausted, the world will end. Analogously, when the world becomes digitalized, or transcribed as information, the world will end.

4. Digital immortality

Our desire of continuous existence by being seen, by the life-giving gaze of God has been translated into the obsession with social media. Since as Berkeley’s theological intuition affirms that “existing is being perceived”, we are kenotically emptying ourselves into the virtual, witnessing as we do the creation of our paradoxical ontology of being-nonbeing, of presence and absence, of disappearing into the simulacra of ourselves. There is a mystical frenzy about recording every moment of our existence in real time. Life lived in obscurity, not constantly witnessed to, becomes null and void. In the process of the hysteria of self-witnessing, inner life externalizes itself, and in this irreversible process of self-evisceration into the hyperreal, the inner reality of the witness to oneself dies a quiet death, without a trace. Our fascination with social media takes on theological and apocalyptic overtones - an ongoing recording of all our recordable phenomenal existence,
which leaves out our numenal being, whose substantial reality was denied by Hume’s empirical rigor and recovered by Kant.

What is the driving force behind the social media?

“The immediate totting up, itemizing, storing of all these exchanges ... bespeaks of an interactive compulsion which respects neither the timing of exchange, nor the rhythms, nor the pleasure.”

It is a desire of being seen, recorded, remembered, in all significant and insignificant moments of existence; of cloning oneself integrally, storing oneself, generating a double as a form of self-insurance against all eventualities, all odds, accidents of history, invisibility, system failure, and death; self-doubling and self-multiplying, as well as self-extending indefinitely into the future. Hence a compulsive self-recording that ambitions to name every moment, every gesture, obscure and invisible as they may be, previously known only to God; oneself transmogrified for a purposeless eternity; like Oscar Wilde’s nightingale, kenotically emptying itself to color a rose with its own blood, a rose that will be discarded lovelessly. A digitalized self-creation fills the empty space and desire of Berkeley’s God all seeing and all knowing whose perpetual and all comprehensive watchful eye would keep the world in existence. A spurious existence in digital hyperreality confers the delights of an artificial immortality. We are all Dorian Grays, projecting ourselves into our digital versions of ourselves, entering our mirrors. Our clones take over our lives. On this side of our mirrors, emptied out, without histories and destinies, we are disposable leftovers.

5. Creation ex nihilo – resurrection or evolution – disappearance

One of his hypotheses for the ultimate ground of the on-going transfiguration of the world into the virtual is the exhaustion of faith. God’s Fiat in a creation ex nihilo contained the possibility of a miraculous ending, the resurrection. Once the idea of evolution replaced creation ex nihilo, the only way out is disappearance, a disappearance without a trace, a perfect murder or utopia realized.
6. Eschatological mood

Baudrillard muses in the last chapter of *Simulacra and Simulation*, “On Nihilism,” on the eschatological novum of late modernity in terms that echo Heidegger’s concern for a bored and technological world.

Baudrillard sees this consciousness as occurring outside the dialectical life and polarity proper to self-consciousness. He notes the loss of the body and emphasizes the transparency of late modern consciousness: Incarnation/embodiment has been lost, according to Baudrillard, in the disembodying urge of virtual reality that de-realizes the ontology of the body. The body has been sacrificed for the sake of the promise of a disembodied freedom. In the desert of postmodern reality, bodies are transparent, they do not cast shadows; they are undead and haunting, carrying on a Levinasian nightmarish impersonal death-in-life existence.

Baudrillard refers to the brave new world that has gradually replaced modernity with the nothing and can be named only apocalyptically – as a “post-” – in the aftermath of the disappearance of our concepts of life and history. Apocalyptic imagination always gives birth to brave new worlds. But unlike Huxley, Baudrillard develops an apocalyptic metaphysics, taking up the role of Nietzsche’s last man, a *vox clamantis in deserto* as we witness the dawning of a posthuman world. Due to the acceleration of technological advances, Baudrillard observes, we are now living the actualization of our sublime and obsessive Platonizing metaphors, from Descartes’s disembodied mind of computerized virtual hyperreality to Hegel’s spurious infinite of cloned eternity. Nietzsche was prophetic in his abhorrence of Platonism, and especially the Platonism for the masses, a docetic Gnostic Christianity. Like Schelling and Kierkegaard before him, he recognized the dehumanizing potential inherent in idealism and rationalism, in any idea abstracted from the body, or as Schelling put it, “the unresisting ether of the concept,” “lacking true life.” Baudrillard laments the literalism of the hermeneutics that grounds this actualization of our dreams and desires. He refuses to transcend in theological hope, philosophical paradox, or dialectics, the desert of postmodern hyperreality. The postmodern shift in metaphysical paradigm ushers us out of the human world of polarity, of good and
evil, love and death, and into a Hegelian spurious infinite of the
 technological eternity of artifice and surface. The Hegelianism
 envisioned by Kierkegaard, in which the world spirit has marched
 over the individual in an infamous leap of *Aufhebung*, is being
 actualized in the submission of the world to the systems, the
 worldwide web spun by the spider of Socratic reason. In light of
 Nietzsche’s prophetic warning against the irrationality of excessive
 rationality, it is as if the cunning of reason were fulfilling our
 innermost desire – that of self-transcendence – in a perverse way; or
 as if a malign demiurge were actualizing our dream literally: self-
 transcendence has become a going beyond our humanity. The
 paradoxical result is a mock fulfillment ensured by a literally
 minded demiurge, a lesser god, or by God’s Other – thus ending
 desire, freedom, and Life. Baudrillard calls it the “saturation of
 systems,” whose offspring is melancholia: “Melancholia is the brutal
 affection that characterizes our saturated systems. Once the hope of
 balancing good and evil, true and false, indeed of confronting some
 values of the same order, once the more general hope of a relation of
 forces and a stake has vanished. Everywhere, always, the system is
 too strong, hegemonic.”

Baudrillard insists that the hyperreal world of the digital age
 situates itself outside the dialectical play of polarity: its beyonddness
 is not the parousia of the kingdom of God but “a simulated
 transparency of all things . . . a simulacrum of the materialist or
 idealist realization of the world in hyperreality.” The culmination of
 Baudrillard’s vision of the apocalyptic negation of apocalypse, or
 the simulacrum of the novum, reaches the culmination of its mock
 parousia with the metamorphosis of God: in the world of the virtual,
 “God is not dead, he has become hyperreal.”

Hyperreal God, the God of the simulacra – outside polarity, nature, and life – is this not
 rather God’s Other, indeed, the Great Deceiver? Meanwhile, the
desert of reality or the spurious infinity of a *paradis artificiel* – is
this not rather an actualization of Hell? Or is it even beyond Heaven
and Hell? If the latter, is it a complete reversal or withdrawal out of
creation and into the absolute indifference of the before-the-
beginning? Baudrillard explains it as the translation of the actual
world into its simulation, which eliminates the mystery of
Incarnation. By entering its mirrored image and assuming a virtual
existence, postmodernity inhabits the land of the shadows and lives

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its own death eternally. One could conclude that Baudrillardian postmodernity is living through its own self-damnation. The bodies will not be judged nor raised: they have vanished. What Baudrillard laments in hyperreality is a paradoxical twofold: on the one hand, the actualization of aspirations, dreams, and metaphors of self-transcendence, specifically transcending the pathetic experience of contingency and finitude, and on the other hand, the loss of the body. Both transcend embodied existence, the Incarnation. All Gnostic idealisms and rationalisms, as well as literal materialism, are refusals of the totality of being and denials of human metaxic existence. They all implicitly oppose the Naturphilosophie of a Böhme or a Schelling, the Lebensphilosophie of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, which manifest concern for the preservation of embodied existence and the sacredness of the person.

Confronted with the mode of disappearance of body, dream, and freedom, Baudrillard identifies the late modern nihilism of transparency and has to do with the order of disappearance and its paradoxical accelerated inertia. He describes the latter’s entropic excess: “A destiny of inertia for a saturated world. The phenomena of inertia are accelerating (if one can say that). The arrested forms proliferate, and growth is arrested in excrescence. Such is also the secret of hypertelie, of what goes further than its own end.”

Baudrillard denies postmodern nihilism the darkness and apocalypticism previously associated with the final ending in our imagination. The nihilism of transparency appears as more radical than the apocalyptic nihilism that dwelled in a world of meaning in the shadow of God. Baudrillard articulates the terror of a posthuman universe; in the world of transparency, polarities have vanished, hence there can be no apocalypse qua objective end of the world: neither apocalypse nor absolute novum, neither new heaven nor new earth; the reign is that of the same, indeed, it is Hegel’s bad infinite actualized. It emerges as indifference, as the paradoxical acceleration of entropic systems, with their baroque convolutions and implosions – an inertia on the model of deadly proliferation.

Thus Baudrillard is a postmodern Kierkegaard at war with the Hegelianism of the all-engulfing system, as he witnesses the end of the world of the person, the subjective body, and the actual, the beginning, in its place, of the simulacra of life and the simulated eternity of the virtual and the hyperreal.
For Baudrillard, residing in the domain of the virtual, consciousness lacks self-division and depth, it becomes transparent. In the digital age, God and creation are translated from the actual to the virtual – to the hyperreality of the simulacra. Actual embodied existence kenotically empties itself into its own reflection, its own disembodied shadow, the mirror of the virtual. Consciousness in the digital age is amnesic and thus transparent, “innocent,” since amoral, outside the ethical, unconscious of guilt and sin. It is essentially the aesthetic condition that Kierkegaard condemned as ethical evasion, lingering in the virtual as a way of refusing to choose oneself and self-actualization in existence.

NOTES:

4 *Ibidem*, p. 35.
8 *Ibidem*.
11 “Disappearance, aphanis, implosion, Fury of Verschwinden. Transpolitics is the elective sphere of the mode of disappearance (of the real, of meaning, of the stage, of history, of the social, of the individual). . . In disappearance, in the desertlike, aleatory and indifferent form, there is no longer even pathos, the pathetic of nihilism – that mythical energy that is still the force of nihilism, of radicality, of mythic denial, dramatic anticipation. . . It is simply disappearance.” in *Ibidem*, p. 162.
13 He would agree with novelist Michel Houellebecq’s speculation in his own apocalyptic utopia *The Elementary Particles* that we are living through the third (and last, for human beings) metaphysical crisis or change of metaphysical paradigm: the first was the advent of Christianity, the second was the medieval discovery of science that displaced the former, the third is the transition from the human to the posthuman. Michel Houellebecq, *The Elementary Particles*, trans. Frank Wynne, Vintage, New York, 2001.


15 *Ibidem*, p. 159.


17 “Nihilism no longer wears the dark, Wagnerian, Spenglerian, fuliginous colors of the end of the century. It no longer comes from a *weltanschauung* of decadence nor from a metaphysical radicality born of the death of God and of all the consequences that must be taken from this death. Today’s nihilism is one of transparency and it is in some sense more radical, more crucial than in its prior and historical forms, because this transparency, this irresolution is indissolubly that of the system, and that of all the theory that still pretends to analyze it.” in *Ibid.*, p. 159.
Elithia Pennington, MA

Profs. Louis Tietje (left) and Elvin Ramos

Dean Adele Weiner, Dean Humphrey Crookendale and Theodor Damian

Clair McPherson and Adele Weiner

Viorica Colpacci, MA, director of the „Spiritus” Art Gallery presents works exhibited at the Symposium.
The Hazard of Paul Sterian’s Life

Considered a polyvalent creator and a prodigy by Alexandru Mironescu, his lifetime friend, Paul Sterian remains in the history of Romanian literature as the intellectual who, thanks to his prodigious culture, succeeded to hallmark a few fields. Paul Sterian was “an unmistakable poet, a famous journalist, an exceptional economist, sociologist, cherished by Dimitrie Gusti’s teams, a painter and carver, a playwright and libretto writer, who knew all the secrets of the dramatic art, violin player, who, even at an old age, could play Kreisler’s studies and César Franck’s sonata and who, to crown all, was a dancer whose feet knew the rhythm of the modern dances.”

Paul Sterian was born on May 1st, 1904, in the family of physician Eraclie Sterian. He lived in the downtown area of the Capital, in a manor house at the feet of Metropolitan Church Hill. “The physician was the son of Officer Dimitrie Sterian, who participated in the 1877 War of Independence, together with his wife, Maria, who was a nurse. Dimitrie Sterian was the brother of actress Aristizza Romanescu, who was also step-sister to actor C. Demetriade. It seems like Maria Sterian was the sister of the mother of future university professor C. Levaditi.”

In what his maternal bloodline is concerned, his family was not that famous in the highlife of Bucharest. Alexandrina Gulimănescu, the future wife of physician Eraclie Sterian, was the daughter of a florist from Pitești. Nevertheless, she received a reasonable dowry from her family, according to the local tradition.

Paul Sterian’s literary talent takes after from his father. Along his career, Eraclie Sterian published numerous papers on tuberculosis, typhoid fever and sexually-transmitted diseases. He also wrote a few plays, the most famous being Tout pour l’enfant, presented in 1913 at Oeuvre Theatre in Paris, under the direction of Camelia Suruiianu is an independent researcher with a PhD in Philology from the University of Bucharest, Romania.
the famous playwright Antonin Artaud. The play was published in 1915 in Romania with the title *Copilul* (*The Child*). Eraclie Sterian also wrote the comedy *O invenție ciudată. Luneta magnetică* (*A Peculiar Invention. The Magnetic Telescope*). Between 1916 and 1918, he participated in World War I as a war doctor, being commissioned as a colonel.

Disgusted by the political situation of his country, Eraclie Sterian becomes a supporter of the French Socialists. At that time, the high-class would live as they were outside the time. After World War I, the bourgeoisie rapidly accumulated wealth, competing with the great European families. The grains export to Great Britain, paid in gold, together with the illegal weaponry trading, orchestrated by the Romanian politicians during the neutrality years, laid the foundation for Romania’s entrance in the game of the great Western powers.

Despite the fact that the country was on the verge of impoverishment, the bourgeoisie kept on leading a life of luxury and reckless extravagance. If in the Western world the high-class laid weight on accumulation, in order to ensure family welfare for a long period, in the Romanian space, the bourgeoisie was striving to impress, extravagant expenses being in fashion. In this context, the great landlords estranged from the lower classes, falling into the trap of the socialist movement, which had already started making its presence felt in our country.

The bourgeoisie’s upstarting was what triggered much discontent among the intellectuals. A large part of the Romanian elite, whether doctors, professors or journalists, suffocated by the historical parties, draws near socialists, with the belief that this political movement, which somehow balanced the social classes, could bring a positive change at the level of the state administration.

Thus, earnest in his French-inspired revolutionary spirit, physician Sterian helps his wife give birth to their son prematurely, on May 1st, to mark the international day of socialism. Poetic justice, Paul Sterian suffered precisely because of the socialists, with a 5-year imprisonment and a long period of oppression.

Paul Sterian learned the religious traditions and practices from his grandmother. As a child, he would accompany her in her visits to all the churches in Bucharest. She was also the one who gave him *The Lives of the Saints* and the homilies of the holy fathers, books
which would soon become his favourite readings. Later on, the fruit of this Christian education greatly influenced his religious writings.

He attends the classes of the primary school at “Society Application School for the Education of the Romanian People” (1910-1917) and the secondary school at “Gheorghe Lazăr” High School (1918-1921). During the ninth grade, he makes the acquaintance of Mircea Vulcănescu, a high school colleague, whom he befriends. The two win a literary contest as a team and thus, a lifelong friendship begins.

Anticipating that Romania, which was on the verge of impoverishment, is in need of good economists to fix the damage produced by the First World War, the two friends enrol at the Faculty of Economics, University of Bucharest. Willing to acquire as much knowledge as possible, Paul Sterian attends the courses of the Faculties of Philosophy and Law at the same time.

Almost miraculously, Paul Sterian finds the complete works of Saint John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople, in a second-hand bookstore. Soon, the mystical treatises become the favourite reading of the two young men. Thus, they get acquainted with the greatest Orthodox commentary of the biblical texts. The one who guided them into the correct understanding of Saint John Chrysostom’s writings was the philosophy professor Nae Ionescu.

“Believing in Paul Sterian’s ability to grasp their essence, the professor asks him to give three lectures dedicated to a mystic’s understanding of economics. The lectures prove a success, as Paul Sterian presents Nae Ionescu’s students the doctrine of the mystic with great ease. During a family reunion, reminiscing of those times, he reminds the audience that the holy father himself mentions in an exhortation that he wrote his books under the direct dictation of the Apostle Paul, and he, Paul Sterian, believes that John Chrysostom, grateful to the saint, helps all who bear his name understand his writings.”

His literary debut takes place relatively early, in the autumn of 1918, in the magazine Biblioteca copiilor și a tinerimei (Children’s and Youth’s Library), with the story Minunata călătorie a științului Ionică în țara de dincolo de neguri (The Amazing Travels of Ionică, the Quick-Spirited, in the Country beyond the Mists). In 1923, he begins his collaboration with Buletinul Asociației Studenților Creștini (The Bulletin of the Christian Students
Association). For five years, he publishes here poems, articles and a few monographs dedicated to the Eastern mystics.

Together with Mircea Vulcanescu, Alexandru Mironescu and Mircea Eliade, he takes part in the activities of the Romanian branch of Y.M.C.A. (Christian Students’ Association). He organizes colloquia on various religious themes. In 1925, he is appointed General Secretary of the Association and meets Sandu Tudor, the future founder of Rugul Aprins (The Burning Pyre) movement. Finding, at last, someone who shares his ideas, Paul Sterian discusses many times with Sandu Tudor about the ancient Romanian spirituality.

In 1926, he is awarded a doctorate in Public Law at University of Bucharest, with the thesis The Copyright. Between 1926 and 1929, he continues his studies in Paris, alongside with his wife, the painter Margareta Sterian. He is awarded two other doctorates at Sorbonne University, one in Law and another in Economics, with the thesis La Roumanie et la réparation des dommages de guerre.

Returning to Romania in 1929, Paul Sterian begins his collaborations with the journals Gândirea, Convorbiri literare and Curentul. Paul Sterian used to write on a daily basis: “he was present at his desk with a rigorous work discipline, making the inspiration come and not waiting for it.”5 His first passion, if one wants to establish a chronology, was poetry, followed by literary and dramatic reviews, essays, musical librettos and, last but not least, economic and sociological studies. Large amounts of these works have been lost, as they were not systematically collected.

Accompanying Dimitrie Gusti in a journey through the country, he takes a few psycho-technical tests. In 1929 he is the director, together with Argintescu-Amza, of the documentary film Drăguș, viața unui sat românesc (Drăguș, the Life of a Romanian village). “The film is made up of two parts: the former tends to fully reconstruct a day in the life of the village, whereas the latter recollects a number of customs and traditions” (Dimitrie Gusti). It was filmed in Drăguș village, in Făgăraș Mountains area. “The simple images of our rural life are presented without any luxury and ostentatiousness. A suite of pastoral sceneries unforged by the artifice of the pretentious modernism unveil before our eyes” (Emil Botta).
As he was appreciated by Nae Ionescu, he publishes in Cuvântul, a newspaper under the latter’s direction, many poems, reportages, literary reviews, philosophical and religious articles, as well as economic analyses. In 1931 he publishes in the journal una an interesting avant-garde manifesto entitled Poezia agresivă sau poemul reportaj (Aggressive Poetry or the Reportage-Poem), a short modernist prose, D-l Vam Ex-Inger (Mr Vam, ex-Angel), as well as numerous essays of clear theological influence in the journals Floarea de foc and Credința.

From 1929 to 1930, he is employed at the Ministry of Labour. In 1931, he is appointed the general manager of the University Office for Students’ Support, and in 1932 becomes a member of the Institute for Intellectual and International Cooperation of the League of Nations. He divorces the painter Margareta Sterian, and remarries the actress Alexandrina (Sanda) Dorobanțu, to whom he dedicates the poetry volume Arta iubirii (The Art of Love).

Together with Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Mircea Vulcănescu (whose daughter, Vivi, he had christened), Paul Sterian founds the Criterion group, an association where he gives a series of public lectures, such as Acțiune și contemplație (Action and Contemplation) and Poezia română actuală (Contemporary Romanian Poetry), both in 1932.6

In 1931 he is granted a Rockefeller scholarship in New York, in view of elaborating a new doctoral thesis. After a few months, he gives up this project due to personal reasons and returns to the country. He is awarded a new doctorate in 1933, this time, in Sociology, with the thesis Elements of political methodology.

Influenced by Sandu Tudor, who had published a prayer dedicated to the protector saint of Bucharest, St. Demetrius Basarabov in the journal Gândirea, in 1927, Paul Sterian writes, in 1931, a similar Byzantine poem, Sfintei Cuvioase Paraschiva Acatist (Akatist to the Pious Saint Paraskeva), dedicated to the Pious Saint Paraskeva, the protector of Moldavia. He then publishes the following volumes of poetry: Pregătiri pentru călătoria din urmă (Preparations for the Last Journey) (1932), Poeme arabe, Versuri din O mie de nopți și una (Arab Poems - Verses from One Thousand and One Nights) (1933) and the novel Prințesa Dactilo (Princess Dactilo) (1932), under the penname Allan Lee. He works on another novel, Fata Morgana, from which he only publishes
some excerpts in the newspaper *Cuvântul*. He never finishes it because he cannot find the spare time for that.

Till 1940, he continues with his journalistic activity. He finds the necessary time to run the newspaper *Index* and to collaborate with two other newspapers, *Prezentul* and *Voinţa*. Also worth reminding is his participation with numerous articles in the campaign of refuting the Romanian Orthodox Church’s decision with regard to the modification of the date for the celebration of Easter, in 1929.

With the exile in Paris of a few resounding names of the Russian literature, a number of literary works of great Russian thinkers, such as Vladimir Soloviov, Mikhail Bulgakov, Piotr Uspenski, enter the Romanian space in the form of samizdat. The disputes between the literati amplify against the background of the religious crisis. In 1929, while in Paris, completing his doctoral thesis, Paul Sterian succeeds in interviewing Pavel Florenski, from the Russian Academy of Orthodox Theology, an interview which he publishes in the newspaper *Cuvântul*.

He also grants special consideration to the artists Constantin Brancusi and Mac Constantinescu, who were also in Paris at that time, and to whom he dedicates two articles in *Gândirea*. During the same period, he also writes dramatic reviews for the plays *Cruciada copiilor* (The Children’s Crusade) by Lucian Blaga and *Fata ursului* (The Bear’s Daughter) by Vasile Voiculescu. He also expresses his religious credo in poems such as: *Pâinea Ta cea spre Fiinţă* (Thy Bread towards the Being), *Căinţă* (Repentance), *Predica pentru Vivi* (A Sermon for Vivi), *Emaus*, and drafts a mystical interpretation of Ion Barbu’s poem *Joc Secund* (Secondary Game).

Invited by Vasile Voiculescu to speak on the radio in a few cultural broadcasts, he introduces, for the first time in our country, the renowned Western thinkers Léon Bloy, Jacques Maritain and Paul Tillich, to whom he dedicates many commentaries, proving both to the moderator and the audience that he was well-acquainted to the most recent cultural trends.

During the same radio broadcasts, he also pinpoints the great importance of the old lexicon in the Romanian linguistic space. In his opinion, the reintroduction in the general vocabulary of the old lexicon, used, according to tradition, only in the ecclesiastic language, was necessary in order to revitalize the national
specificity. Consequent to this principle, the writer uses an impressively large amount of archaisms and regionalisms in his poetry volumes, Pregătiri pentru călătoria din urmă (Preparations for the Last Journey) and Șfintei Cuvioase Paraschiva Acatist Acatist (Akatist to the Pious Saint Paraskeva). Also, the word order used carries the reader back to the age of the mediaeval histories. Paul Sterian succeeded in creating an interesting collage of the contemporary Romanian language and the archaic language of the olden homilies.

Starting with the year 1930, Paul Sterian focuses his entire attention on the country’s economic recovery. To this effect, he elaborates a series of articles in which he brings to the economists’ attention the imminent risk of inflation. He also predicts the economic crisis, due to the spectacular increase in the goods demand on the American territory. His opinions are to be found in the following articles: Simptomele crizelor economice (Symptoms of the Economic Crisis) (1930), Variațiile ciclice ale producției românești (Cyclical Variations of the Romanian Production) (1930), Previziunea prețurilor și recoltelor în România (Predictions on the Prices and Harvests in Romania) (1931), Idealul panromânesc și dezvoltarea economică a țării (The Pan-Romanian Ideal and the Country’s Economic Development) (1938).

For a short period of time, he is a referent of the Office of Studies, at the Ministry of Finances. In 1937, he is appointed administrator of the Romanian pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris. Returned to the country, he is detached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and appointed a diplomat on the American territory. In this capacity, he is the economic advisor of the Romanian Commission in Washington (1938). A year later, he is appointed the head of the Romanian Commission in New York. He is granted the honorary citizenship of New York City for his great merits in the field of Economics. During the war, he has a few other responsibilities, including that of the General Secretary in the Ministries of National Economy (1940-1941), Finances (1942) and Foreign Affairs (1944).

In 1941, Mircea Vulcănescu, appointed Secretary of State in the Ministry of Finances, required the government to nominate Paul Sterian as his undersecretary. The two experts would have
substantially contributed to the country’s economic recovery unless George Călinescu had not intervened.

Some time earlier, Paul Sterian had written a somehow ironical article about the literary critic. Although some time had already passed, George Călinescu could not forget the offence and he named Paul Sterian “a Jew” in his *History of Romanian Literature*, published in 1941. The reckless statement, in the legislative context of the time, led to Sterian’s relegation. Of course, the consequences might have been even more serious than that, if Paul Sterian had not been able to present the authorities old documents attesting the ethnic origin of his family. In order to avert any suspicion, Paul Sterian brought George Călinescu to a trial that lasted for a long period of time, during which he managed, with great efforts, to occupy a position as financial expert. As expected, Paul Sterian’s lawsuit was successful and he obtained public rehabilitation. George Călinescu was not condemned for his defamation, neither did he ever apologize.

The relationship between Paul Sterian and the mentor of *Rugul Aprins (The Burning Pyre)* movement, Sandu Tudor, grew stronger in time thanks to their mutual literary, journalistic, and spiritual interests. For a while, Sterian also published in Sandu’s journals, *Floarea de foc* and *Credința*.

Anton Dumitriu, the renowned Romanian logician, introduces him to André Scrima. In his monograph *Timpul Rugului Aprins (The Time of the Burning Pyre)*, Scrima fully acknowledges Sterian’s merits: “Not only was Paul Sterian, one of the representatives of the 1930s generation, known in the society as a man of culture but especially as a great technocrat.”

In 1943, he accompanies Sandu Tudor to the symposium organized in Chernivtsi by patriarch Tit Sîmedrea. During this reunion, he delivers a paper entitled *Cei șapte tineri din Efes și dovazile Învierii (The Seven Young Men of Ephesus and the Evidence of Resurrection)*. The text was an older draft of the play *Coconii din Efes (The Gentlemen of Ephesus)*, which he had written a few years before. “The play was firstly written in English when he was an economic advisor of the Romanian Commission in Washington, at the request of an American director who wanted a clever script inspired by the history of the first Christian centuries. The play was written, as per request, in Byzantine spirit.
Unfortunately, the project of its performance was dropped because of his return to the country as a result of the expansion of the Second World War.  

Later on, during 1945-1948, he participates in many conferences held at Antim Monastery under the aegis of Rugul Aprins (The Burning Pyre). Paul Sterian presented many religious poems and essays during these assemblies. Two of them remained in the memory of the audience: Războiul nevăzut al lui Paisie cel Mare (The Unseen War of Paisie the Great) and Sfânta muceniță Anastasia izbăvitoarea de otravă (Holy Martyr Anastasia, the Redeemer from Poison). The poem The Unseen War of Paisie the Great depicts, with allegorical imagery, “an unseen war in which two ideologies fight”11, reference being made to atheism and Christian ideologies. The latter work, Holy Martyr Anastasia, the Redeemer from Poison, reflects the same theme, also using a much more expressive allegorical imagery. A connoisseur of the international political stage, Paul Sterian uses a few details from St. Anastasia’s life to subtly draw the public’s attention to the socialist danger, perceived as a poisoning of the population, a danger which had started being felt in Romania for some time. 

Mihai Rădulescu, a student in Philology, would come often to Antim Monastery together with his colleagues. In an article reminiscing of those times, he also mentions the two lectures. In his view, the erudite economist tried, with his cryptic message, to show the unseen facets of socialism, before the oppression to start in full force. “I cannot forget the depth of the psychological analysis of the life of Holy Martyr Anastasia the Virgin, the Redeemer from Poison, celebrated on December 22nd by our Church.”12 The people’s estrangement from the spiritual values was perceived as a soul poisoning by Paul Sterian. In order to cast this danger away from the lives of his peers, the writer resorted to the life of Saint Anastasia, “the redeemer from poison”. The Christian tradition maintains that this martyr, whose relics are kept nowadays in Greece, performed many miracles along the centuries for those who accidentally got poisoned with various substances or herbs, delivering them from death. In the Slavonic language, Anastasia translates as resurrection. Therefore, with the help of this pious woman, Paul Sterian tried to keep the flame of hope alive in a resurrection of the soul. The writer
also presented other works from this oeuvre, always overreaching to the audience with „his patristic revelations”.\textsuperscript{13}

Together with Sandu Tudor and Alexandru Mironescu, Paul Sterian financially supported many cultural activities of the association. Worth mentioning are two contests, one of church mural painting and another one of musical composition. He was “charmingly frank, endowed with quick-wittedness and expressivity in gestures. He enjoyed making jokes and was particularly sociable with his guests but he was serious and exigent with himself.”\textsuperscript{14}

Besides his rigorous professional training, “this encyclopaedically educated man found the necessary spare time to study painting and gravure with painter Panait Ioanid, and, for years and years, he painted an icon of Saint John Chrysostom, which he placed above his entrance door, according to the Christian tradition. Moreover, he had a gravure shop arranged for him in Antim Monastery. He had also learned to play the violin and kept on playing until he died. He loved music and appreciated it like a professional. This inclination drew many musicians near him. Among his friends, one could count composers such as Paul Constantinescu, Aurel Stroe, Ştefan Zorzor, the violin player Mihail Constantinescu, the piano players Ion Filionescu, Nicolae Rădulescu, and many others. He had gathered a lot of young but also older people around him, people fond of the world of faith, harmony and beauty. Often, his house would be visited by priests, economists and sociologists.”\textsuperscript{15}

It has already been stated that Paul Sterian was a generous man. He enjoyed supporting various cultural activities, which is the reason why priest Vasile Vasilache, the abbot of the monastery, considered him “a genuine Maecenas”\textsuperscript{16} (Maecenas, a councillor of Emperor Octavian, protector and sponsor of the writers Virgil and Horace, was the first politician in the Roman Empire who financially supported the arts. He remained in history thanks to his generosity and to the protection he extended to literature, arts and, last but not least, sciences – mathematics, geometry, astronomy. Thus, the men of culture under his protection were supported with large amount of money and great honours.)

To return to the topic of the present analysis, Paul Sterian also decided at some point to award a prize, Sanda Sterian Prize, in his wife’s honour. Domnica, Alexandru Mironescu’s granddaughter,
was awarded this prize for her piano interpretation of *Illud tempus* by Aurel Stroe.

In what his humour is concerned, Ileana Mironescu narrates two funny stories. When he married Sanda, his second wife, who was about seventeen years younger than him, he placed a pea under her mattress, just like in *The Princess and the Pea* fairy tale, to check whether she was a real princess or not.

The second anecdote is about a visit he paid to Alexandru Mironescu one winter. He left in high spirits and forgot to put his shoes on. Coming back, he had the surprise to notice that his shoes had been filled with comfiture by Mironescu’s daughters, just like in Caragiale’s sketch *The Visit*. Paul Sterian was not offended by the children’s prank; on the contrary, he was extremely amused by it.

“He advocated for his pleasure to make jokes with a paradoxical statement, claiming that the man who is incapable of making jokes is not taken seriously when he speaks of serious matters. In order to test the attention or sharpness of his interlocutor, he would mix truths and implausible facts, which sometimes led to his being misunderstood. For example, he would claim that Shakespeare had not existed, that this had been an umbrella-name covering a number of anonymous ‘ghost writers’, among whom there was certainly a Romanian, Petru Cercel. Not everyone could understand his challenge, which is why many considered him an original. His hypothesis was well argued, but very difficult to prove, which he knew very well, however, he enjoyed repeating it. Thus, he would mention the case of the German mathematician George Cantor, who had proven that the works attributed to Shakespeare had actually been written by Francis Bacon. However, the presence of themes and exact locations from the Mediterranean area could have been convincingly explained only by the existence of a ghost writer from that part of the world, and why should not this ghost writer be Petru Cercel? He had found this explanation in the works of Professor Nicolae Cartojan, an expert in Romanian mediaeval literature, who had published a poem written in Italian, discovered in the archives of Padua University, which he attributed to Petru Cercel on the grounds of the signature on the document. As legends tend to live longer than reality, Paul Sterian had become famous thanks to this Petru Cercel myth, which he had actually created. He would laugh at this *much ado* and would say, in his usual humorous
tone, that he should have resembled his father somehow, and that he must had taken from him the original style of claiming whimsicalities."

Despite his busy schedule, in 1942, he publishes a poetry volume, Mănăstiri bucureștene (Bucharest Monasteries), with 60 gravures, also signed by him. Although he had never adhered to a political party, in 1944, Paul Sterian is expunged both from the government and the public life. From 1945 to 1947, he is the manager of the factory Textila română. After the political changes of 1948, he is removed from this position. Considered a bourgeois by the authorities, he has a hard time trying to find a new job. He works as a lay labourer (1948), as an accountant (1950), as a credit inspector in Tecuci (1951), again as an accountant, in Bucharest (1953) and Balotești (1954), only to end up working as a greengrocer (1956-1958).

Paul Sterian is arrested in 1958 due to his involvement in Rugul Aprins (The Burning Pyre) association. He is included in “the lot Alexandru Teodorescu and others”. Just as his friends, he suffers from the rush of the investigations. He is released from prison in 1962, after the amnesty decree. Completely impoverished, as his entire fortune had been confiscated at the time of his arrest, he faces again the old obstacle, i.e., the impossibility to find a job. The “former political prisoner” stigma could only bring a broken destiny to him.

After having been released from prison, Ileana Mironescu reports, he would go daily to the great factories and institutions, in search of a job. He would not be afraid to ask for a worker position, in any department. Not only were these wanderings tiresome for a sixty year-old man but they also unsettled him and discouraged him.

Along the years, he worked as day labourer, salesman, and assistant accountant. In 1963, he worked for a few months at the International Relations Office at the Composers’ Union. Fired again, because of the former political prisoner stigma, which greatly affected his file, Paul Sterian finds himself, once again, without a bean. Nevertheless, from 1964 to 1969, he occupies the position of statistician at the Geriatrics Institute. The circumstances that led to his employment were seen as divine signs. Here is what happened during the job interview. Entering one day in “the office of the institution, where he had previously asked for a job, nervous that he
had to present his autobiography and his former political prisoner file again, he hastily opened his documents folder, and a small icon of Virgin Mary, which he had had with him since childhood, fell on the clerk’s desk. The clerk, suddenly annoyed, admonished him: ‘So, you’re carrying icons with you, aren’t you? All right, let’s see your file. You may go’. After this very short interview, Paul Sterian went home, exhausted and pensive. Sanda, his wife, welcomed him, happily telling him that she had received a call informing her that he had been hired and that he was supposed to come to work the next morning, at the institution he had just left. For Paul Sterian, this was a divine miracle and the certainty that there were some genuine human beings left around.”

After 1966, the year of his literary rehabilitation, he publishes a few essays in the journals *Luceafărul* and *Viaţa românească*. After his wife’s death, he lives a modest life in a one-room apartment in the Colentina neighbourhood of Bucharest. Because of the social context, he gradually recedes into the world of books, and, after 1970, he completely dedicates himself to study and introspection. Thanks to Zaharia Stancu’s efforts, he receives a small pension from the Writers’ Union.

Paul Sterian would write and pray until his death hour, on September 16th, 1984. He was never frightened by death. He would often say that, in our Christian life, we know and feel that religious thinking and especially prayer are luminous anticipations of our after-death existence, and that even our terrestrial state as genuine Christians is geared towards spiritual living, as the body is just a temporary container of the spirit.”

Although he did not have children, Paul Sterian always loved to give, and he made up for the lack of children with a remarkable altruism. Unfortunately, the most part of his works remains scattered in the publications of his time. Its systematisation is a challenge even for an experienced philologist, as the libraries were repeatedly expurgated in the 1944-1955 period. Nonetheless, Paul Sterian remains of great interest through a few particularly valuable works which underline his talent as a prose writer, poet, essayist, and sociologist.

Paul Sterian was buried in Străuleşti 2 Cemetery, next to his wife, Sanda, under a beautiful wooden triptych “designed by him and carved by his friend, sculptor Mac Constantinescu”.

57
In 1996, the file “Alexandru Teodorescu and others...” was reopened at the priest Adrian Fâgețeanu’s request. Following the appeal for annulment introduced by the General Prosecution at the Supreme Court of Justice, the sixteen members of Rugul Aprins (The Burning Pyre)\textsuperscript{20}, declared “mystical enemies of the people” in the year 1958, have been exonerated.

NOTES:

1 Ileana Mironescu, “Paul Sterian, Creatorul creștin polivalent (Paul Sterian, the Christian Polyvalent Creator),” in \textit{Tabor}, nr. 4, April 2014, p. 67.
4 Ileana Mironescu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 69.
5 \textit{Ibidem.}, p. 70.
6 Victor Durnea, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.
10 Ileana Mironescu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.
11 Antonie Plămădeală, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 31.
14 Ileana Mironescu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 69.
15 *Idem*.,
17 Ileana Mironescu, *op. cit.* p. 70.
18 *Idem*.,
19 *Idem*.,
Aspects of the event held at the General Theological Seminary, New York.
Abstract. In this research, the author emphasises elements of Christian Theology and Spirituality which can be found in the literary works of the Romanian writer Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, the author of the prestigious novel The 25th Hour, translated in different languages and of over 40 other literary works, amongst which novels and poetry. The author highlights his Christian feelings which can be found in the book of poetry. He also presents the way in which he promotes his faith in the pages of the literary biographies of Saint Ambrosius, Bishop of Milan, and Saint John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople, and in the work Dieu ne reçoit que le dimanche (God receives only on Sundays), and also the way in which he uses elements of Christian spirituality in works like The 25th Hour, mentioned above, Condotiera, The People of Immortals, The Life of Mahomet, The Foreign People from Heidelberg, My Father, the Priest Who Was Elevated to the Sky, in his literary autobiography, and in other books as well.

The author shows that Christian Orthodox Spirituality is almost always present in the literary works of Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu. A particularity of his writings is the fact that, often, he presents the way in which this spirituality is linked with the Romanian culture and with the lifestyle of the Romanian people (especially from his birth place, Moldavia, where everything has a spiritual significance and must be seen as part of the link between man and God).

Keywords: Orthodox faith, martyrdom, monastic life, Spiritual autobiography, sufferance, poverty, purity of the soul.
Personalitate importantă și controversată deopotrivă a exilului românesc, scriitorul și mai apoi preotul Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, cunoscut spațiului occidental cu precădere cu ultimul său prenume, a lăsat posterității o operă vastă ce însumează peste 40 de volume de literatură, dintre care, unele au fost publicate postum. Dinamica tematică, frumusețea stilului, actualitatea problemelor abordate în paginile scrierilor sale, dar și personalitatea sa complexă ce l-a făcut să fie adesea parte a unor aprige dispute, i-au asigurat un loc în rândul marilor personalități, a căror operă nu a pierit odată cu plecarea din lume a fondatorului ei.

Din nefericire, multă vreme, din pricina relațiilor sale încordate cu regimul comunist, cărțile sale nu au fost traduse și în limba română. După 1989, prin strădania mai multor oameni pricepuți, cea mai mare parte a lor, au devenit disponibile și publicului cititor din acest spațiu. Astăzi, ele sunt lecturate cu interes și pasiune de către consumatori care să cunoască istoria comunismului văzută din afară, dar și de către alte categorii de devoratori de beletristică. Cert este că autorul pomenit a fost o personalitate de-a dreptul prolifică din punct de vedere scriitoricesc. Între operele lui se regăsesc biografii romanțate de sfinți ortodocși, similare celor pe care le vor încerca scriitorii precum Paulo Coelho, treceți în revistă ale parcursurilor biografice ale unor oameni importanți ce au marcat destinul unor mari religii, ale unor confesiuni ale creștinismului, descreri ale unor pietre interesante ale plaiurilor sale natale, ale soției triste împărtășite de unii oameni în timpul comunismului, ale unor aspecte autobiografice, poeme de-a dreptul răvășitoare prin conținutul lor și tensiunea mistrică pe care o transmit, sau reportaje de război.

Spiritualitatea creștină, despre care ne-am propus de altfel să vorbim aici, este astfel foarte bine rezentată în scrisul său, începând din primele încercări literare ale lui și continuând până la cele din urmă. Astfel, în paginile plachetei intitulate Caligrafie pe zăpadă, publicată în anul 1940 și premiată de către fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă „Carol al II-lea”, se regăsesc constante dialoguri cu divinitatea, purtate în conformitate cu tradiția și spiritualitatea ortodoxă. Dorul după Dumnezeu, cântat de atât de mari autorii înainte și după aceea și tristețea produsă de absența Lui din viața omului, îl va experimenta atunci și tânărul poet, care-și

Ulterior, în poezia *Rugăciune*, el va cere asemenea lui Petru, care îl întâlnește pe Mântuitorul Hristos în cadrul minunii pescuirii minunate, să plece Domnul de la dânsul, întrucât nu se simte vrednic de potopul de binecuvântări ce se revarsă asupra lui și de bogăția pe care o aduce el asupra slovei sale:

„Nu-s vrednic să-mi calce-n cernăală / Piciorul lumii cu condur de beteală, / Nici să-mi crească stihul cât secara. / Rogu-te nu mai îmi umple, Doamne, cu stele călimara. / Stemele de gândă, aur și trifoi, / Pe cari le am sub pieptar – ia-le-napoi! / Iar zăpezile ce mi se scutură pe mâini, / Zarzării și lacrămile dogorite: albe pâini! / Mi-e fruntea mânjită de singurătate, de cucește. / Îa, Doamne înapoi, buzele fetii ce mă sărută... / Ia steaua pe care-o port, ia-mi penița de pâpădie: / Nu-s vrednic să mi se scutere luceferii pe hârtie”.

Nu doar poezia este însă cea în cadrul căreia scriitorul român valorifică părți și aspecte interesante ale bogatului tezaur al spiritualității răsăritene. Romanele lui abundă și ele de astfel de elemente, fie că au o tematică creștină, constituindu-se în biografii romântești ale unor sfinte precum Ambrozie al Milanului sau Ioan Gură de Aur, sau sunt dedicate unor aspecte mundane ale vieții. Asupra celor două biografii nu vom insista aici, întrucât ele sunt, prin înșăși existența lor, părți ale unui scris aghiografic în paginile căruia regăsim într-o proporție corespunzătoare spiritualitatea răsăriteană, trecută prin filtrul unui mare iubitor al ei, care se străduiește să o prezinte în intelesul celor de alte credințe și din alte neamuri. În aceeași categorie se înscrie și volumul *Dumnezeu nu primește decât dumimages* al cărui personaj principal este prințesa româncă devenită maică la o mănăstire ortodoxă din Elveția și a...
cărei acţiuni se petrece cu precădere într-un spaţiu impregnat de spiritualitate şi teologie răsăriteană.

De asemenea, cea mai celebră operă a sa, despre care s-au pronunţat favorabil oameni precum Gabriel Marcel¹⁷, care i-a adus deopotrivă celebritate şi condamnare¹⁸, a fost recenzată în diferite țări şi chiar ecranizată, *Ora 25*, conţine ample referiri la spiritualitatea ortodoxă. Greutăţile prin care vor trece personalitățile de aici în timpul celei de-a doua conflagrații mondiale şi apoi în exil, care-l vor impresiona pe Mircea Eliade¹⁹ şi-l vor face pe unul dintre principalii săi biografi să susțină că scriitorul vibrează la unison cu personajele sale²⁰, care-i sunt în parte familiare²¹, le va apropiia de Dumnezeu şi le va face să Îl pomenească adesea. Prin intermediul lor, el va crea pasaje în care va descrie aspecte ale spiritualității răsăritene. Un astfel de pasaj îl are în centru pe Traian Corugă, personajul principal al lucrării. Ajuns la capătul puterii, într-unul din lagăre, el își dorește să moară. Dar moartea este văzută în sensul creștin, ca o formă de trecere din lumea aceasta şi este privită prin filtrul smereniei. În plus, ea nu este un element de care creștinul dispune după bunul său plac, ci unul care depinde de voia lui Dumnezeu, care a oferit şi viața. Astfel, personajul se roagă. Ajunge să regrete zilele pe care le trăieşte şi îşi dorește să moară. Dar, ca şi viața, şi moartea sa sunt puse la dispoziția lui Dumnezeu, căruia i se cere moartea. El este conștient că, fără divinitate, nici să moară nu este în stare:

„Totul este parcă vrăjit şi mintea mea nu mai înţelege. De aceea, aş vrea să mor! Ajută-mi Doamne, să pot muri! Ora aceasta este prea grea pentru mine. Ora în care mă aflu apartine vieţii şi nu se poate trece cu carnea şi sângele prin ea: este ora 25, când e prea târziu pentru mântuire şi pentru viaţă! Pentru toate e prea târziu! Împietreşte-mă Doamne, dar nu mă lăsa singur aici! Dacă mă părăseşti Tu, eu nu voi putea nici măcar să mor! Carnea şi spiritul, uite, îmi sunt moarte, dar eu trăiesc mai departe! Lumea a murit, şi trăiesc! Şi nu suntem nici strigoi, nici oameni...”²²

Pasajul se constituie, după cum se poate vedea, într-o veritabilă lamentație scrisă în duh ortodox. Prin intermediul lui, autorul evidențiază modul în care creștinul se raportează la moarte. Dezădezdea, o caracteristică a societății occidentale contemporane lui şi a celei a zilelor noastre, nu se regăsește în sufletul creștinului,
care e conștient mereu de faptul că, în cele din urmă, Dumnezeu se va milostivi şi va salva lumea, fapt pe care ține să îl evidențieze²³.

Și în paginile altor lucrări, Biserica, cu ritualul sau teologia ei, este prezentă. În Le grand Exterminateur, contextul întâlnirii personajului principal cu spionul trimis de Securitate la Paris pe urmele lui se petrece în timpul slujbei parastasului pe care acesta îl slujește pentru răposata lui soție și soçul său. În La tunique de peau, personajul principal sfărșește prin a deveni pustnic, începând astfel o viață nouă, după ce este impresionat de solidaritatea unui monah și de dialogul cu pustnicul pe care îl întâlnește²⁴, iar decedatul Mircea Macedon din romanul Necunoscuții din Heidelberg este înmormântat cu slujbă ortodoxă²⁵. În plus, folosirea unor nume specifice spiritualității răsăritene pentru personajele sale, precum Botez²⁶ sau altele similare, se constituie într-un procedeu prin intermediul căruia Virgil Gheorghiu promovează într-un mod voalat spiritualitatea răsăriteană.

Autorul pare însă să aibă o adevărată slăbiciune pentru descrierea credinței sale într-un anumit context. În contextul în care el a trăit, pe care l-a experimentat și care se pliază cel mai bine pe sufletul său și pe modul său de a experimenta și a gândi teologia. Este vorba despre spațiul românesc, cu precădere cel moldovean. Acolo el a crescut, a supraviețuit Ortodoxiei din matca ei românească de asemenea și a învățat că, pentru român, orice eveniment biografic are legătură cu divinitatea. De aceea, ține să accentueze că, faptul de a fi urmașii dacilor a creat contextul instaurării unui creștinism atât de puternic ancorat în ființa poporului său²⁷. Tatăl său, preot ortodox decedat în condiții suspecțioase, este cel care i-a inspirat dragostea de Dumnezeu și de credință și dorul, ce se va materializa în cea de-a doua parte a vieții lui, când va deveni preot și va păstra comunitatea românească din Paris. Îl va purta întreaga viață un adânc respect și îl va evoca în mai multe dintre lucrările lui. Pagini interesante privitoare la biografia lui, în cadrul cărora se vor regăsi desigur, ample referiri la credința răsăriteană și modalitățile ei de manifestare, pot fi aflate atât în De la vingt-cinquieme heure a l'heure eternelle, tradusă în limba română sub titlul Tatâl meu, preotul care s-a urcat la cer²⁸, sau în De ce mă numesc Virgil, a cărei traducere românească, apărută în anul 1999 la editura Deis, poartă titlul: Cum am vrut să mă fac sfânt. Alte amintiri dintr-o copilărie teologică²⁹. Descrierea vieții preotului moldovean nu poate
fi făcută altfel decât în cadrul contextului în care acesta a activat. Aşa se face că, în paginile acestor lucrări se vorbeşte despre slujirea lui, despre necesităţile comunităţii pe care o păstrează, modul în care se raportează aceasta la suferinţă, moarte, evenimentele importante din viaţă, calamităţi sau natură, şi felul în care aceste lucruri influenţau credinţa lor în Dumnezeu. Faptul că autorul consideră importantă reliefarea acestor lucruri e de a dreptul benefic căci, prin intermediul lor, el face cunoscută viaţa românească, ancorată în tradiţie şi spiritualitate, publicului cititor din spaţiul francez şi din alte arealuri culturale, oferind astfel o schiţă a vastei bogăţiilor care rezidă în tradiţia ortodoxă românească, care circumscrie modul de viaţă al oamenilor de pe aceste meleaguri.

Izolat în spaţiul parizian, marginalizat de oamenii de cultură importanti ai exilului românesc în urma disputei cu Monica Lovinescu şi a altor fapte, Gheorghiu ăşi găsesc refugiu în scris. Temele sale recurente sunt religia şi istoria poporului său. Arătând păşeşte înspre alte spaţii, precum al Americii latine, dar chiar şi atunci, personajele sale principale sunt de origine română şi duc cu ele un crâmpe din sufletul naţiunii pe care o părăsesc. Din capitala Franţei, el vede altfel neamul său de origine şi modul său de viaţă. Depărtarea de ţară îi generează un dor puternic şi o stare de nostalgie. Ochii prin care el priveşte ţara din depărtare sunt plini de urat faţă de regimul comunist, pe care îl consideră ocupant, dar îngăduititor cu oamenii de rând, a căror viaţă aproape că o divinizază. Unele personalităţi marcante ale peisajului cultural şi politic interbelic sunt şi ele evocate în scrierile lui. Un astfel de exemplu este Nichifor Crainic, căruia îi dedică, într-un fel, volumul publicat postum al cărui titlu poarte de la o icoană a Maicii Domnului, Condotiera. Cu poetul, el este generos, oferindu-i circumstanţe atenuante, aşa cum el însuşi îşi atribuie în propriile sale memoriuşă ce îl prezintă ca pe un apărător al oropsiţiilor şi un propovăduitor al credinţei. Prin intermediul lui, dar şi al celorlalte personaje (cu precădere cel al fratelui morarului, călugăru), el reuşeşte să ofere o imagine amplă asupra vieţii spirituale a satului moldovean. Aspecte din biografia tatălui său pot fi regăsite şi aici, în acţiunile şi modul de viaţă al diferitelor personaje.

Putem afirma aşadar că, o particularitate a scrisului literar al lui Virgil Gheorghiu o constituie prezentarea spiritualităţii
răsăritene, pe care o insinuează în diferite locuri în paginile operelor sale, prezentându-o însă prin filtrul românului moldovean, pentru care credința cunoaște aceinte specifice și profunzimi neînăvățate, fiind plină de savoare și de consistență mystică.

Nu doar asupra spiritualității românești se concentrează însă autorul, ci și asupra istoriei zbuciumate a creștinătății, pe care o prezintă uneori în cadrul volumelor sale. În Christ au Liban. De Moise au Palestiniens, el realizează o amplă incursiune în trecutul Bisericii creștine din acel spațiu, scoțând în evidență suferințele ei. În Tinerețea doctorului Luther, vorbește despre reformă, oferind o perspectivă bine documentată asupra acestui eveniment. De asemenea, în Viața lui Mahomed, oferă informații bogate despre interacțiunile dintre creștini și primii musulmani, despre comunitățile creștine arabă și alte lucruri similare. Interesant este faptul că nu rămâne tributar unei istorii pozitiviste a creștinismului, prezentând doar lucrurile frumos și vesele, ci se concentrează și asupra unor pașaje triste. Astfel, de exemplu, în cea din urmă dintre lucrările pomenite, vorbește despre distrugerea, sub un pretext fals, a unei întregi comunități creștine din Najranul arab în secolul al cincilea al erei noastre, insistând asupra dimensiunii sângeroase a evenimentului.

Observăm așadar cât de bogată este opera literară a scriitorului investigat. Variată tematică, densă din perspectiva ideilor exprimate, plăcută ca stil, ea conține din abundență referiri la spiritualitatea răsăriteană, pe care autorul o iubește și încearcă să o utilizeze în propria viață și să o împărtășească și cu cititorii săi. Prin ideile teologice ce pot fi regăsite în paginile textelor ce poartă semnătura lui, prin descrierile liturgice și cele ale modului în care s-a impregnat Ortodoxia în modul de viață al românilor moldoveni, el face un mare serviciu românismului și Bisericii, promovând valorile ei și relievând marea bogăție a națiunii noastre. Cunoașterea și valorificarea operei lui, deși rod al activității unui personaj controversat, se impune ca o datorie pentru orice ortodox și pentru orice român care privește cu responsabilitate trecutul său și moștenirea pe care strămoșii i-au oferit-o de-a lungul veacurilor.
NOTES:


7 Cum este și Viața lui Mahomed.


14 Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, Caligrafie pe zăpadă, p. 31.
15 Ibidem, p. 10.
16 Idem, Dieu ne recoit que le dimanche.
19 Acesta va ajunge să exclame, lecturând această operă, dar şi celelalte lucrări similare: „N-am citit nimic, în nici o literatură, care să sâ se apropie, cât de departe, de teroarea istoriei pe care o îndură personajele dumitale”. Mircea Eliade, Europa, Asia, America..., vol. 3 – “Corresponenţa R-Z”, p. 545.
20 Amaury d’ Esneval, Gheorghiu, p. 59.
23 „La sfârșit, Dumnezeu se va milostivi și-l va salva pe om, cum l-a mai salvat de atâtea ori. Între timp, așa cum a plutit Noe pe ape cu corabia lui, vor pluti la suprafață, fără a fi trași la fund, oamenii care au rămas oameni. Ei vor fi salvați. Și prin ei nu se va stinge, cum nu s-a stins nici în trecut, viața omenească”. Ibidem, p. 223.
24 Cf. Idem, La tunique de peau.
26 Ibidem, p. 211.
29 Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, Cum am vrut să mă fac sfânt. Alte amintiri dintr-o copilărie teologică.
35 Iată cum o caracterizează o cercetătoare contemporană care s-a preocupat de opera și personalitatea scriitorului: „Deși în ansamblu se pare că reia la nesfârșit teme ce reiterează mesajul iubirii de neam, de datinile românești și de credința ortodoxă, Gheorghiu este un scriitor care nu se repetă. Scoapul său declarat este acela de a-și lărgi și aprofunda bazele culturale și religioase”. Mirela Drăgoi, Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu: între lume și text, p. 43.
The XXIIIrd Ecumenical Theological and Interdisciplinary Symposium

Cultural Transparency and the Loss of Privacy in the Era of Digital Technology:
How Is This Shaping Our Becoming and the Ethical Dilemmas Related to It

Saturday, December 5th, 2015
10:00 AM

The General Theological Seminary, New York
Seabury Building
Theodor Damian, PhD  
Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, Metropolitan College of New York; President of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality:  
*Being Constantly Watched: Transparency and Perichoresis*

Clair McPherson, PhD  
Professor of Ascetical Theology, General Theological Seminary; Priest Associate, Church of the Transfiguration, Manhattan (Episcopal)  
*Transparency, Accountability, and Honesty in Twenty-first Century Theological Education: A Theory and a Test Case*

Richard Grallo, PhD  
Professor of Applied Psychology, Metropolitan College of New York:  
*Social Trust and Problem Solving in an Age of Chaos*

Louis Tietje, PhD  
Professor of Ethics, Metropolitan College of New York:  
*Should Mr. Green Pen Be Fired or Are the Prescriptivists Right?*

Doru Tsaganea, PhD  
Professor of Mathematics, Metropolitan College of New York  
*Contradictory Political Results of Internet Utilization*

Alina Feld, PhD  
Affiliate Faculty at the General Theological Seminary, New York  
*The Digital Age and the Transparency of Evil: Jean Baudrillard’s “Perfect Crime”*
Elvin T. Ramos, PhD
Founder and President, Global Tassels, Inc.
Adjunct Assistant Professor, St. John’s University:
Global Transparency and Harmony: Protecting the New Culture, the Modern Identity, and the World of Ideas of the Millennial Generation Living in the Slums of Poverty

Elithia Pennington, MPA/PP
Metropolitan College of New York:
Should People Fear Technology?

MODERATOR:
Humphrey Crookendale, JD
Dean, School for Public Affairs and Administration, Metropolitan College of New York

GUESTS OF HONOR:
His Eminence Nicolae Condrea, PhD Archbishop, The Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

Adele Weiner, PhD
Dean of Audrey Cohen School for Human Services and Education, Metropolitan College of New York

HOSTS:
The Very Rev. Kurt Dunkle
Dean and President, The General Theological Seminary
Clair McPherson, PhD
Professor of Ascetical Theology, The General Theological Seminary
DISCUSSANTS:

Bert Breiner, PhD
Associate Professor of Religion, Hunter College, City University of New York

David Rosner, PhD
Associate Professor of Values and Ethics, Metropolitan College of New York

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