



THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE OF  
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND  
SPIRITUALITY

## *Symposium*

**Contemporary Culture in the Light  
of Christian Spirituality  
at the Beginning of the Third Millennium  
Secular Realities and Spiritual  
Perspectives**

*The Tenth Ecumenical Theological  
Symposium*

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**THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE OF  
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SPIRITUALITY**  
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Editors:

Fr. Theodor Damian, Ph.D., George Alexe

Assistant to the editor and designer:

Claudia Damian

Text revisions: Dr. Suzana Theophilus and Fr. Paul Theophilus

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From the left: Fr. Paul Theophilus, Fr. Andrei Turcoane (Serbia), George Alexe, Daniela Anghel, Fr. Dr. Theodor Damian, Rev. Pavel Nicolescu.



Some of the participants at the Symposium.

## **The 10<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Theological Symposium: Preliminary Reflections**

The Ecumenical Theological Symposium we are participating in today, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, together with its annual publication *Symposium*, are celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This celebration takes place under the distinguished sponsorship of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, which is also marking ten years since its very energetic and proficient founder and president, the Very Rev. Dr. Theodor Damian, incorporated it as a non-profit organization, in August 1993.

Indeed, we are privileged to celebrate this triple anniversary of the same decade, which ecumenically, theologically and historically illustrates the highest *raison d'être* of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in New York. On this occasion, it is significant to mention an interesting detail of this Symposium, because it makes a clear difference in the definition of this particular decade. Historically, it belongs to the last decade of the second millennium (1993-1999) and then to the first decade of the third millennium (2000-2002). This is to say, we are celebrating a decennium at the crossroads of the second and third millennia. Certainly, this transition from the old millennium to the new is theologically and ecumenically acknowledged and reflected in almost all the topics and papers that have been presented in our symposia. In this regard, the magazine *Symposium*, published by the Institute, offers its readers valuable evidence of these efforts and contributions.

An anniversary may have many faces, but the two faces of the Roman god, Janus, come to my mind. They are looking in opposite directions, one to the past, and the other to the future. The faces of Janus are mythologically depicted sitting back to back, symbolizing the beginning and the end. There seems to be a clear separation between the past and the future, since they are opposing each other and looking in opposite directions.

In contrast to this interpretation of the two faces of Janus, the anniversary of this first decade of the Romanian Institute offers to each

of us a different image. The past and the future are not separated, but organically united looking in the same direction. For us, the celebration of our triple anniversary means to re-actualize the past in a very special way, by appreciating our beginning, embodied in the theological, cultural and spiritual ideals, on which Fr. Damian has based this unique Romanian theological foundation in North America. That is why, using an expression dear to Mircea Eliade, we believe that each anniversary celebration reveals “the prestige of origins,” or “the prestige of beginnings,” which, in my opinion, justifies creating new activities and works observing the same original sense and direction. Usually, the past is memorialized, while the anniversary is celebrated looking to the future, and this clear orientation makes the “return to origins” obsolete. However, in our case, a retrospective look at the past means something else for us, because we are not renewing, regenerating or celebrating the past, but we are mindful of our spiritual origins, and particularly our own beginning which we like to believe as being without end, under the wings of the Holy Spirit.

In order to emphasize the origins that our anniversary reveals, one essential question has to be answered. And that question pertains to the basic principles instituted by Fr. Damian. These original principles are ethnically, ecumenically and theologically stressing, not only the spiritual origins, but also the inner history of the Romanian Institute together with the literary and cultural movement created during the first decade of its existence.

I think it is very appropriate for each of us to remember these wise principles, as they were formulated on the occasion of the first Symposium, held on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993. Indeed, they are the spiritual guidelines of our theological, ecumenical, cultural and literary activities. The first principle underlines the relationship between Romanians and Americans, and the relationship between Romanians themselves, here in the United States.

The second relates to a better understanding and knowledge of the Romanian Orthodox faith, theology and tradition as a fundamental part of our personal and cultural identity. The third principle recognizes the multicultural character of our American, pluralistic society, taking into consideration our differences as a source of spiritual richness rather than as a risk and danger, and our willingness to learn from other traditions while bringing a witness of our own. In this American framework of so many religious traditions, Ecumenism is seen as a

foundation for life together, equally based on freedom, respect and harmony. The fourth principle has in view the relationships among the Romanians, themselves. The noble initiative of the Romanian Institute promotes the values of Romanian culture and spirituality, and hopes to create new opportunities and means for the education of our own people and especially the younger generation, in these values of our ancestral religion and spirituality. This means the consolidation of our national and cultural consciousness by our religious identity, thus resisting the danger of being marginalized in this secularized society in which we are living today (See: *Symposium*, Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York, 1994, Vol. I., No. 1, pp. 1-2).

One may find these principles in the magazines edited by the Romanian Institute, as follows: *Symposium*, Vol. I-X, comprising the papers presented in all our Ecumenical Theological Symposia; *Lumină Lină/ Gracious Light, Review of Romanian Spirituality and Culture*, which is circulated in 18 countries, Years I-VII, 2002; and the new historic magazine, *Romanian Medievalia*, Vol. I., 2001, which has published all the papers sponsored by the Institute, submitted at the sessions at the renowned International Congress of Medieval Studies, organized by Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo, Michigan.

For this anniversary we must give testimony to the cultural and spiritual achievements that illustrate the ecumenical and theological topics and papers presented in this decade. These constitute the crown of the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium. In this perspective, I would like to briefly recall the topics of our previous Symposia, since they illustrate beyond this historical moment, the true spirit of their founders, Fr. Damian and his wife, Claudia, who have creatively inspired and promoted them, giving them life from their lives.

These topics are: 1. "Worship and Identity in our Contemporary Society" (1993); 2. "*Quo Vadis Homo?* Salvation and the Modern World"(1994); 3. "Divine Creation and Human Responsibility in the Context of Contemporary Ecological Preoccupations" (1995); 4. "Freedom and Responsibility in Contemporary Society" (1996); 5. "Rediscovering God: The Relation between God and Man and its Significance for our Life Today" (1997); 6. "The Theological Legacy of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae and Its Ecumenical Actuality" (1998); 7. "Jesus Christ as the Theandric Paradigm of Man's Restoration at Dawn of the Third Millennium" (1999); 8. "Humanity in the Third Millennium and the Mystery of the Divine" (2000); 9. "Prayer as the Theology of the



Heart and of the Mind, and the Humanity in the New Millennium” (2001); and finally the present topic of this Symposium: “Contemporary Culture in the Light of Christian Spirituality: Secular Realities and Spiritual Perspectives”(2002).

Complementing each other, these topics express the origin of our Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality. Also, they imply a new ecumenical and theological perspective, to create a bridge in order to transcend, what Fr. Damian has called the paradoxical *coincidentia oppositorum* we experience in our daily lives. As I have mentioned, all these papers have been published in the *Symposium*, except those being submitted today. Here, I think, is the proper place to honor all of our speakers, past and present, regretting that some of them are no longer among us, for their highly appreciated contributions to the ecumenical and theological prestige of the Institute.

I would like to consider the topic of today’s Symposium as a culmination of all the previous Symposia. This general conclusion is suggested by the close relationship that exists between culture and spirituality in their reciprocal correlations with the ecumenical and theological realities of our times. In this context, the secular realities and spiritual perspectives of the contemporary culture, will be critically examined to see if they have any religious or cultural meaning for our world today.

I am confident that the Reverend Father Paul Theophilus will be pleased to moderate the proceedings of this Symposium, with his great sense of humor, colored by his theological wisdom.

The first paper deals with the main topic our Symposium, and will be presented by myself. After that secularism will be discussed in the paper “Is this World Secular?” by the Rev. Doctoral candidate Pavel Nicolescu; the other papers: “Contemporary Culture between Real and Ideal”, by Doctoral candidate Daniela Anghel; “How to Think about Culture” by Prof. Dr. Richard Grallo; “Culture and Cultures: Globalization and Identity”, by Rev. Prof. Dr. Theodor Damian will complete our investigation into the broad topic that we are dealing with today.

In conclusion, let me express our gratitude and appreciation to each of you attending this event, especially to our distinguished speakers for their pertinent contributions to the topic of this Symposium. We welcome each of them and all of you. Certainly we extend our deepest gratitude and heart felt congratulations to Fr. Theodor Damian and his

distinguished wife, Claudia, who founded the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality. It is our duty to wish them and their friends and contributors many, many happy years.

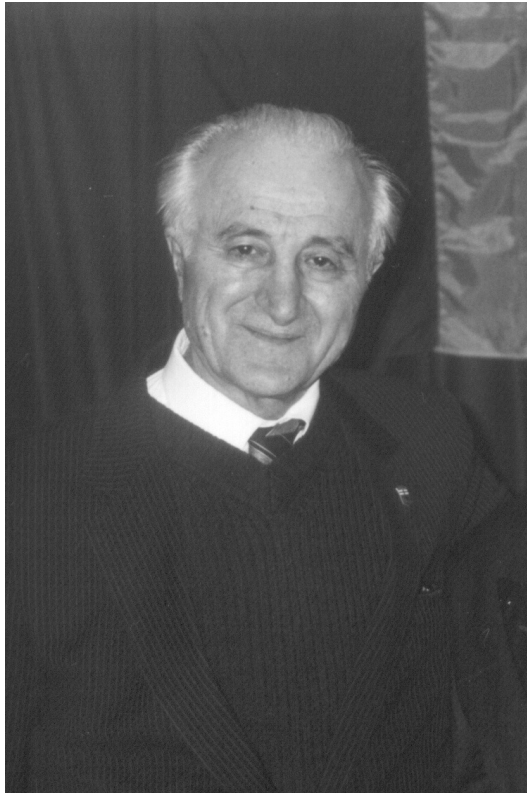
At the same time I am honored to gratefully acknowledge the paternal blessings and warm messages, for the success of our Symposium, we have received from His Beatitude Teoctist, the Patriarch of Romania, as well as from His Eminence Pimen, Archbishop of Suceava and Radauti, His Grace Calinic, Bishop of Arges and Muscel, and His Grace Timotei, Bishop of Arad and Hunedoara.

Also, we are grateful to our new Archbishop, His Eminence, the Most Reverend Archbishop Dr. Nicolae Condrea, whose absence here today is sorely felt. Although he is prevented by previous engagements to be here with us, we appreciate that he has sent his hierarchical message and blessings.

In addition, we want to acknowledge the message of best wishes and success sent to us from Mr. Eugene Raica, Director of the Romanian Heritage Center in Jackson, Michigan, and co-editor of our new interdisciplinary magazine *Romanian Medievalia* edited by the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality.

Following the presentation of the papers, we will take a break during which you are invited to a delicious dinner prepared and served by the Ladies' Committee of "SS. Peter and Paul" Romanian Orthodox Church, where we will continue our discussions.

And now, it is my pleasure to invite Rev. Fr. Paul Theophilus, to moderate the presentation of the papers by our distinguished speakers. Thank you!



George

Alexe

## **Contemporary Culture in the Light of Christian Spirituality at the Beginning of the Third Millennium: Secular Realities and Spiritual Perspectives**

The main commitment of this topic is to articulate a reasonable answer to a dilemmatic issue, if there exists or not a real contemporary culture at the beginning of the third millennium. If it exists, then we need a comprehensive new look at this contemporary culture to see what it consists of because we have to finally acknowledge that under the affixed label contemporary culture coexists within a plurality of cultures at the same time. If it doesn't exist, then we have to find out whether or not this contemporary culture has somehow passed away along with the second millennium.

There are a lot of speculative theories concerning the modern culture that alleges it was followed by the postmodern culture. The internet is full of such theorizations and hypotheses. It seems to be more a kind of cultural competition if not a struggle for the survival of modern culture. Already Walter Laqueur, in his book: *Europe in our time a history: 1945-1992*<sup>1</sup>, has anticipated in 1945, that the old European continent displayed all the signs of a cultural exhaustion.

In other words, the decline of the modern age was already becoming obvious and not only in Europe. Immediately after the second World War, and later on, after the ending of the cold war, the main interest was the economic and industrial recovery not the cultural or artistic revival from their ashes as the legendary Phoenix did. But there seems to be, at least, a kind of discrepancy between the Christian culture and modern civilization in their contemporary development.

However, the ages of culture are also the ages of mankind, beginning with the first stage in Paradise till our Christian contemporary age. The destiny of culture is connected with the destiny of man, as creator, according to his image of God who created him. Man is proving his likeness to God especially through his spiritual and cultural creativity. As Orthodox theologians, we consider culture as being a theandric act of creation which spiritually transcends all ages and civilizations.

Unfortunately, particularly during the modern age, the relationship between God and man, in Western Christianity, was

gradually and unilaterally altered into theocentrism and anthropocentrism, by so aggravating the natural relationship between faith and reason. The separation of modern man from God was almost irremediable. To our salvation and hope, God never separated Himself from man, even from the modern man. Certainly, western culture and civilization were ontologically affected, hopefully reaching their point of modern saturation and consequently by starting to decline toward the ending of the second millennium.

The consequences of this separation of modern man from God still persist, with various intensities, even at the beginning of the third millennium, certainly making our question more dilemmatic because, culturally and theologically speaking, the transition from the second to the third millennium is also a transition from modernism to the so called postmodernism, better said, from the modern age to the postmodern age. Even if someone could identify what the modern age is, yet nobody could tell us what really the postmodern age is, and what legitimate identification it might have in our contemporary culture.

As for myself, the question I would like to stress in this paper is what an Orthodox theologian has to say about our contemporary culture seen in the light of his or her Christian spirituality and culture. Secular realities and spiritual perspectives are tumultuously competing with each other at all levels. There seems to be a real turmoil and much confusion, too, provoked by the avatar of modern age in its transition to the new postmodern era. That is why, we don't know yet what the cultural configuration of this spiritual precipitate would be.

However, the premisses of our contemporary culture seem to be grounded enough upon the secular realities in their spiritual perspectives. On the other hand, the Christian culture and civilization still form the background of modern age, even after almost three centuries of infatuated anthropocentric influence. In reality, the Christian culture has always been a predominant factor of our contemporary culture. It has never disappeared.

To go further, let us have a careful look at the inner nature of what is pretending to be today the postmodern culture.

In this sense, Dr. Steven Best authoritatively affirms that for the past two decades, the postmodern debates are dominating the cultural and intellectual scene in many fields throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> That is true. He is trying to describe the large framework of the new postmodern

movement, by pointing out its virulent polemics that have been emerged in the aesthetic and cultural fields, by questioning if modernism in the arts was or was not dead in order to be replaced by a sort of a new postmodern art. Also in philosophy, debates are polemically asserting whether or not the tradition of modern philosophy has ended and a new postmodern philosophy has arisen.

All these postmodern assaults against modern established positions, that criticize the traditional culture, theory, and politics, are critically analyzed by Dr. Steven Best. In spite of a unified postmodern theory, a large spectrum of postmodern theories and positions, sometimes conflicting with each other are detected. This plurality of postmodern theories and various aspects concerning a large variety of economic, politic, social, cultural and artistic transformations, makes almost impossible a precise definition about what is the postmodern phenomenon in itself.

According to Dr. Steven Best, we have to avoid any conceptual confusion, by making a clear distinction between *modernity* considered the modern age, and *post modernity*, an epochal term for describing the period which allegedly follows modernity. As an illustration of this distinction we can look at the arts. *Modernism* could be used to describe the art movement of the modern age (impressionism, expressionism, surrealism and other avant-garde movements), while *postmodernism* can describe those aesthetic forms and practices which come after and break with modernism.<sup>3</sup>

In the same manner, Dr. James Seaton, Professor of English at Michigan State University, reviewing the book of Carl Rapp, titled *Fleeing the Universal: The Critique of Post-rational Criticism*,<sup>4</sup> makes some valuable remarks on *The Metaphysics of Postmodernism*.<sup>5</sup> His remarks may contribute to a better understanding of our topic. He cautiously affirms that: “American culture, however, may be postmodernist even if those who explicitly subscribe to postmodernist precepts are few. The thesis that contemporary society is postmodernist does not assert that most people consciously accept postmodernist doctrines... If there is a debate about whether our society can be described as postmodernist, there is also a debate over whether this is a good or a bad thing. The *culture wars*, which are in large part a debate over the trends that make up postmodernism should be encouraged or resisted”.

Prof. James Seaton underlines a very essential characteristic of

postmodernist theorizing (not philosophizing), concerning the rejection of traditional philosophy and metaphysics. This is a very important concern, because these theorists pretend that human reason is an inadequate instrument for achieving truth. Therefore, they have renounced metaphysics and philosophy in favor of what Carl Rapp calls *post-rational criticism*. In conclusion, Carl Rapp implicitly encourages the supposition that our intellectual, spiritual and moral heritage has not been rendered entirely obsolete by the advent of an allegedly “postmodernist” world.

A critical attitude toward postmodernism, this time coming from a neoprotestant point of view,<sup>6</sup> is strongly expressed by David L. Goetz. He seems to be using a very realistic approach. To exemplify, we quote a few sentences: “The culture we minister in has changed. We live in a postmodern world”; “Postmodernism is a throw-away word that means everything and nothing. Postmodernism is a word that has never secured a dictionary definition. Different people use it in different ways...” “Postmodernism, a phenomenon of Western culture... postmodernism is a negation of modernism”. Or, “without the life of modernism, there could be no postmodernism”.

After proclaiming that “Secularity, our old enemy, is in big trouble,” he continues: “Postmodernism, for all its confusion, seems just one more opportunity for the church to do what it does best - be the church.” The Christian replica given by the neo-protestants to the new postmodern age deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated as such.

Concluding his critique, David L. Goetz states: “No doubt postmodernism will only elevate the importance of Christian preaching. The church may be the only avenue left where truth is proclaimed confidently. And it’s certainly the only place where those seeking something more than the cold, rational world of modernism can explore the deep mysteries of God.”

As a general conclusion of all these debates, we may quote Marcus Borg, who has rightly confirmed that: “Culturally, we live on the boundary between modernity and post-modernity. We are modern people, in the process of becoming post-modern people.”<sup>7</sup> And this seems to be the reality of our times. It would be useless to give more examples about postmodernism and its problematic relationship with the contemporary culture in the light of Christian Spirituality.

Nevertheless, I would like to acknowledge the original contribution of a young Romanian philosopher, Horia-Roman

Patapievici, whose already controversial book deserves to be taken into consideration.<sup>8</sup> His book written in Romanian, is titled: *The Actual Man. A critique of modernity from the perspective of the question "What is one losing when something is gained?"* Patapievici argued that postmodernity is nothing else than the profoundness of modernity. In fact postmodernism is an exacerbated form of modernity. Postmodern man is opposing modernity through the reversed assumption of some modern postulates that are consolidating the evolutive sense of modernity. In fact, postmodernism affirms that modernity was exhausted in order to make invisible the very fact that through its exasperation the modernity is born again – exacerbated and falsified. Patapievici seems to be right when he is demonstrating that postmodernism is a post-traumatic phenomenon. The postmodern is an alienated modern. Postmodernism is nothing else than the radicalization of modernity. There is no exit from modernity. Who hopes to go out from modernity through postmodernity will not succeed other than to immerse himself more deeply in modernity. The only way to surpass modernity is to deny its fundamental principle: God is dead. Indeed, outside of modernity there are not only a few people for whom the affirmation "The Lord our God is alive" has become a necessary historical reality. Here each word is important. The statement indicates that God is the Lord and that He belongs to us, living men, mortal as well, and unique as we are. No 'god' or 'gods' can save us, but only the living GOD.<sup>9</sup> Philosophically very articulate, this critique of modernity made by Patapievici deserves to be well studied and eventually translated from Romanian into English.

This paper could not be completed without enumerating at least some of the very important issues of secular realities, raised by the problem of globalization and its relationship with our contemporary culture in the light of Christian spirituality. For me the rapport between postmodernism and globalization is not clear. Both have to be probably not only correlated but also, somehow, related to Christian spirituality. There seems to be a real terror of globalization which is jeopardizing the entire mankind in its inner spiritual existence. As Christians, we have to ecumenically and theologically debate all the issues raised by the globalization, especially by the Center for Global Ethics which coordinates the work of thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world, who are working to define, implement and promote policies of responsible global citizenship, to develop and advance the acceptance



of a viable and sustainable global ethic. It is significant to mention here their tendency in their universal declaration of a global ethics to consider religion as a simple ideology.

Also, another grave issue affecting Christianity and all the other religions is the so called Mankind's Universal Cosmofofic Religion, whose guidelines are promoting the worldwide institutionalization of an undogmatic universal religious faith. For more information about the religious blasphemy of this "Cosmosofy", that has nothing to do with religion, but wants to be a substitute to it by destroying all traditional religions, one can visit the site of this organization, at: <http://www.cosmosofy.org./index.htm>. In their interpretation, The Freedom of Religion Act guarantees the free public and private exercise of religion on the assumption that there is in fact an universal religion acceptable to anybody on the basis of a human feature common to all people. The restrictions imposed on the old-religious organizations are draconic. They will not identify their doctrine with religion or try to monopolize the interpretation of religion in their sense exclusively anymore. More than that, the former churches, synagogues, mosques or temples practicing old-religious or cultic faiths, in all localities where Cosmofofic reforms have been adopted, will be renamed cultural centers as the explicit designation for the unrestricted public places accessible to all people devoted to practicing a reformed free religion that is understood as a culturally extensive activity including undogmatic and unbiased training in all cultural areas, de-indoctrination coaching, and political debate.

And now a short description of "Cosmosofy" in their own words. "The interdependence of the peoples of the world is pushing the human race along the road to an international ethical community with a common cultural value orientation. This road had up till now been blocked by the traditional coercion exerted by dogmatic 'religious' and ideological cults with their competing moral authorities. It is only now that the new doctrine of Cosmofofy achieves the mental and moral breakthrough as a continuation of the Enlightenment, by recognizing itself as a true religion and in fact on the basis of expandable critical, ethical reason which is common to all humans and which corresponds to their religious disposition.

Thus, [it was said and emphasized,] for the first time in the history of mankind, a generally valid value system for common goals becomes available to everybody. This universal, undogmatic, new

religion requires consistent reforms in education, politics, law and science. The cultural crisis is unmasked as a leadership crisis”.

Here we are. The contemporary culture in the light of Christian spirituality, at the beginning of the third millennium, is almost fatally confronted with the secular realities of globalization and spiritual perspectives of the false and heretical religion of cosmosofy. This culture war in America is a result of the deterioration of the theology of natural law, according to Joseph A. Varacally, Associate Professor of Sociology at Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York.<sup>10</sup> His solution to this phenomenon is as follows: “The attempt to restore all things in Christ is the only theological and sociological option available for American Catholics who both understand the demands of their faith and the sad state of contemporary affairs within the Church and society.”

It seems to me that the old war between the Western anthropocentrism and theocentrism, unfortunately so much reflected in the contemporary Christian culture, is not over. And it will not be over since both of them are still ignoring the theological, cultural and spiritual synthesis offered by the Eastern Orthodox theandric perspective. In fact, all the spiritual perspectives are strongly denied and shadowed by the spectrum of the globalization of our western contemporary culture. Whether we like it or not, Patapievici was right. Postmodernism is another anthropocentric mask of modernity. Indeed it is nothing else than a perfect philosophical illusion and a new theological delusion!

#### NOTES:

1 Viking Penguin Books USA, 1992.

2 Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory, Critical Interrogations*, Guilford Publications, New York, 1991, 324 pp; (See also: [www.guilford.com/egy-bin/cartscr...hilosophy/best.htm&cart\\_id=414174](http://www.guilford.com/egy-bin/cartscr...hilosophy/best.htm&cart_id=414174). 11902; and particularly: [http://utminers.utep.edu/best/papers/postmodern\\_theory.htm](http://utminers.utep.edu/best/papers/postmodern_theory.htm)).

3 Idem, *op. cit.*, Chapter 1: “In search of the Postmodern”, by Dr. Steven Best.

4 Karl Rapp, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1998, 272 pp.

5 An essay published in *Humanitas*, Volume XII, No. 1, 1999, Washington, DC; (See also: <http://www.nhinet.org/seatonr.htm>).

6 See: David L. Goetz, "The Riddle of our Postmodern Culture. What is postmodernism? Should we even care?" in *Leadership Journal*, Winter 1997, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, p. 52; (See also: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/711/711052.html>).

7 See: Marcus Borg, *Spirituality and Contemporary Culture*, Resources Transcription from the 2000 TCPC National Forum: [www.tpc.org/resources/articles/spirituality\\_and.htm](http://www.tpc.org/resources/articles/spirituality_and.htm).

8 H.-R. Patapievici, *Omul recent. O critica a modernitatii din perspectiva intrebarii "Ce se pierde atunci cand ceva se castiga"*, Humanitas, Bucuresti, 2001, 488 pp.

9 Idem, *op.cit.*, pp. 114-125.

10. See: Joseph A. Varacalli, Ph.D.: *Whither Natural Law, Catholic Style?* <http://petersnet.net/browse/3732.htm>.

## How to Think about Culture

Would you agree with these statements?

(1) Asking people you just met about the money they make is never polite. (2) The color of wrapping paper for a gift to an adult generally does not matter. (3) It is courteous to write a thank you note after receiving a gift. (4) Someone who does not make eye contact when speaking with you is being evasive. If you agree or disagree with these statements with a great deal of certainty you may be more influenced by your culture than you think.

The accelerating development of communications has brought in its wake both an increasing push toward “globalization” and an increasing resistance to it. It has also highlighted not only cultural differences but cultural clashes. To gain a better understanding of what is happening we need to ask and correctly answer a variety of questions regarding the meaning and functioning of culture. Included among them are the following: (1) What is culture? (2) What is the role of culture? (3) What are the sources of culture? (4) How can we fool ourselves about culture? (5) What can one person do to learn more about culture?

*(A) What is culture?*

Psychologist David Myers defines *culture* as “the enduring behaviors, ideas, attitudes and traditions shared by a large group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next” (2002, G-3).

Philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan offers a more succinct definition: “Culture is a set of meanings and values informing a common way of life.” (1971, p. 301)

As such, culture has cognitive, behavioral and emotive components as well as an habitual aspect. Culture has a *cognitive* (or information processing) component in so far as ideas and attitudes are involved in it. Such ideas and attitudes, as shared by many people around us, greatly influence our views of the world, of others and of ourselves. In exercising this powerful influence, these ideas and attitudes tend to exclude competing and alternate world views. Culture has a *behavioral* component in so far as it also consists behaviors and traditions. It shows how things are and are not to be done. Since ideas

and attitudes, behaviors and traditions are rarely associated with the complete absence of affect, culture also inevitably involves a massive *emotional* component. Such emotion is so powerful that Lonergan (1971) has described it as the “mass and momentum of our lives.” Finally, culture involves an *habitual aspect*: as ideas and attitudes, behaviors and traditions become repetitive they also become habitual. As habits, these aspects of culture can be practiced with ease and efficiency and without much thinking. The ease and efficiency of cultural habits tend to produce order in society. The fact that they can be practiced without thinking tends to promote a general lack of reflection on one's own culture – taking it for granted.

Another point about both definitions is that it is stated or implied that “a large group of people” are involved. Five people living on a hilltop would hardly constitute what is normally considered a general culture. Usually cultures involve many thousands or millions of people, often associated with a geographical area and a specific language or dialect. Moreover, and this is crucial to any understanding of culture, this mass of people is actively involved in passing these ideas, attitudes, behaviors and traditions to the next generation, who originally arrived in the world knowing none of it.

*(B) What is the role of culture?*

Commenting on the roles that culture plays in human living philosopher Joseph Flanagan observes that:

Culture is common to people at all times. While specific manners, customs and beliefs are cultural variables, such schemes of meanings and values change genetically and dialectically throughout human history. What does not change is the fact that people must be born, grow up, eat, work, sleep, marry, dream, get sick and die. These are the basic events of human existence, and they do not vary throughout history. What does develop and decline are the meanings and values that people give to these recurring events. (1997, pp. 205-206)

Consistent with these realities several consequences follow, cognitive, behavioral and affective. Cognitively cultures transmit to their participants widespread expectations regarding the meaning of life and the behavior of individuals. To the extent that these expectations are taken seriously there results a measure of order in the activities of the

general population. Expectations become customs and eventually traditions. In addition, cultures present to their adherents general answers to the basic questions regarding the group's origin, present situation and destiny.

The differences observed between cultures will therefore be differences in the expectations and practices of people. In addition, each culture, through its stories and traditions, will provide its own answers to the questions about that group's origin, present situation and destiny. With such differences in meanings, behaviors and values the possibilities for cross-cultural misunderstandings are numerous, often complex and always present when differing cultures come into contact.

*(C) What are the sources of culture?*

Cultures have arisen flourished and faded away as an ongoing part of human history. To understand this process of growth and decline is to understand a significant component of the history of humanity.

What then is history? The word 'history' itself is ambiguous and calls for distinguishing *history as lived* from *history as remembered*. (Lonergan, 1971) History as remembered is the sum total of writings, artifacts, art and traditions that refer to events of bygone days. Often these materials serve later generations by representing and interpreting past events, showing their relevance to the present situation and transmitting shared values for an orientation to the future. Yet all these writings, artifacts, art and traditions are only a minuscule part of the much larger history as lived. Human history as lived is the sum total of human insights, judgments, decisions and acts moving through time in a vast uncharted wave. Each insight, judgment, decision and act may or may not be shaped by group oriented processes, but they all contribute to the development or decay of cultures. Consequently they serve as significant operators and causes affecting the flow of human history and the destiny of specific peoples.

Insights are the vehicle by which intelligence enters a culture. Reasonable judgments and policies are the means by which a way of life becomes respectful of evidence and facts. Responsible decisions and acts are the way in which growth through knowledge comes to enter a culture. However, the history of a culture is the sum total of *all* thoughts, judgments, decisions and acts, not just intelligent thoughts,

reasonable judgments and responsible decisions and acts. Along with remarkably bright ideas really stupid ideas can enter a culture. Similarly, just as reasonable judgments can enter so can unreasonable ones; and just as responsible decisions and acts can shape the development of a culture, so too irresponsible decisions and acts can shape its decline.

Therefore, human cultures are a mixed bag of the intelligent and absurd, the reasonable and the unreasonable, the responsible and the irresponsible. Furthermore, the legacy that each culture leaves to succeeding generations is also a mixed bag. To emphasize these points let us contemplate the life of a city street.

*Contemplation on a day in the life of a city street:* Consider a city street – any street you please. Think about a day in its existence – any day, yesterday perhaps. How many people traveled on that street yesterday? How did they regard the street? Did they see it as a possible route to their developing plans? What judgments did each person make about the street? What decisions were made on that street yesterday? What actions were carried out on the street during that time? How did each traveler respond to the street itself? Did they respect it? ....repair it? ....ignore it? ....neglect it? ....appreciate it? ....abuse it? The sum total of the reality of all the answers to these questions is but one small part in the day of one city street.

That was just one street. What about the sum total for hundreds of streets in a neighborhood? ....or thousands of streets in a city? ....or tens of thousands of streets in a nation?

That was just one day. What about the sum total of hundreds of days in a year? ....or thousands of days in a decade?

To appreciate the size of what would be known by answering all these questions we begin to approach the gigantic proportion and oceanic vastness of what it is to be an ever-changing culture. Each culture an ocean.

And what is human history? An ocean of oceans.

*(D) How can we fool ourselves about culture?*

*Forget that culture is a human invention, with all the advantages and disadvantages that implies.* If we forget that culture is a human invention, then we are likely to overlook the fact that it is a mix

of the intelligent, reasonable and responsible acts of persons, as well as their unintelligent, unreasonable and irresponsible acts. Consider again our busy city street. Many people pass on it during the day. What is its condition? Is it well kept or dirty? Is it pleasant to see or showing signs of decay? That street is a product of human invention. Bright ideas, reasonable judgment and responsible action brought it into existence. At one time it was new. But what of the ideas, judgments and actions of those who followed the builders? What did they think of the street? How did they behave towards it – day after day, year after year? The present condition of the street is the result of all that, tending toward growth or decline. And that just one street. What about a home, or an educational system, or a government?

*Regard culture, especially one's own, as beyond question.* If we adopt an uncritical attitude toward culture we will be regarding it as beyond question or reasonable judgment. This amounts to an “idolizing” of culture. Its traditions are never examined. Its policies are not brought to a reasonable review requiring evidence of effectiveness. That is a prescription for disaster, particularly as the situation outside the culture dramatically changes, as it sooner or later will.

*Regard your own culture as better than all others.* If we assume that our culture is better than all others, we are likely to blind ourselves to the great insights and achievements that may exist in other cultures. In fact, people often denigrate their contiguous neighbors. Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Tip O'Neil once quipped that “all politics are local.” Perhaps all (or at least most) hatred is local as well. We often really dislike those with “strange customs” that we suddenly find very near to us. A formal expression of this occurred in the “classicist notion of culture” that was current in many ancient empires such as Greece, Rome or China. On that view culture was regarded as illuminating eternal verities and embodying a perennial philosophy. Whatever anyone else did was simply “barbarian.” Lonergan (1971) notes that the classicist view of culture has given way to a more empirical view, with its emphasis on seeking to understand cultures on their own terms, not in comparison with some abstract ideal.

*Forget the fact that cultures rise and fall.* Presently we possess an incomplete understanding of precisely how cultures rise and fall. This problem is compounded when we are considering the culture in which we live. Is it rising or falling? The inability to adequately



account for cultural change often leaves us in an uncomfortable state of unknowing. Often those who lead great cultural movements are aware of this uncertainty. At the founding of the United States George Washington presided over Congress in a wooden chair that had the sun carved into it. He was asked whether the sun was rising or setting. He is reported to have said: "It is rising, I hope." Similarly, Benjamin Franklin was once asked about the form of government that was being newly created. Was it to be a monarchy or a democracy? His reply: "A democracy, if you can keep it."

*Insist that problems of dialogue between cultures are easy to solve.* Of course, they are not. In fact the whole field of intercultural exchanges is an entire *universe of tasks (problems)*, each largely determined by the specific cultures involved. An intercultural exchange between parties from Russia and Borneo will pose a set of challenges and opportunities that will not be duplicated in an intercultural exchange between persons from Paraguay and Nigeria.

*(E) How can one person learn more about culture?*

Some guidelines are useful in helping us to learn more about our own culture and that of others. Each guideline is quite open-ended, and as such will lead to many questions and a lifetime of learning.

*(1) Approach other cultures with the desire to know.*

Often when dealing with persons or situations involving other cultures, negative feelings can arise, such as embarrassment, anger, anxiety or resentment. Work to replace these feelings with the desire to know. Try to find out more. Display a respectful curiosity.

*(2) Study your own "roots." Who were your parents?*

Where were they brought up? What were their lives like? What evidence can you assemble from various sources to help in answering these questions? Who were your grandparents and your great grandparents? What can be learned about them?

*(3) Study the country in which you currently live. What*

are the significant events in the history of this country? What are its customs? How do they differ from the customs of its neighbors? What are some of its greatest achievements? What have been some of its greatest difficulties?

(4) *Study a vastly different culture.* Select a culture that is vastly different from your current country and from your “roots.” What are the significant events in the history of that culture or country? What are its customs? How do they differ from the customs of its neighbors? What are some of its greatest achievements? What have been some of its greatest difficulties? Some people practice for this by reading books and viewing films of science fiction. The “visit to a strange planet” is often an excellent metaphor for the encounter with a different culture.

(5) *Find opportunities to learn bits of different culture and make friends.* Seek out different cultural experiences through foreign films, learning another language, ethnic festivals, sampling the cuisine of various countries and assisting foreign tourists. Each accumulated bit of experience increases the probability of greater understanding and an increased desire to know more.

#### *(G) Summary & Conclusions*

Since human cultures are a mix of what is intelligent and unintelligent, reasonable and unreasonable, responsible and irresponsible, it is wise to adopt a critical attitude toward all cultures. What does this mean? It requires that we learn to distinguish pro-growth and progressive elements in a culture from those that foster decay and decline. This critical attitude is never to be confused with a general cynicism that advances the idea that knowledge in these areas is not possible. Such an overgeneralized and untestable proposition is to be rejected on the triple grounds of its pretentiousness, its untestable nature and the intellectual stupor it engenders.

If we avoid the mistakes and implement the recommendations outlined here we will in fact be practicing concerning culture what Lonergan has identified as the *transcendental precepts*. 1. *Be attentive.*

Pay attention. Keep your eyes and ears open. Follow what is happening. 2. *Be intelligent.* Seek multiple possibilities and alternatives. Explore new ideas. 3. *Be reasonable.* Select from possibilities on the basis of evidence. Let evidence direct our judgments. 4. *Be responsible.* Let your expanding knowing shape an expanded doing. Do not let current habitual choosing and doing distort your potentially expanding knowing.

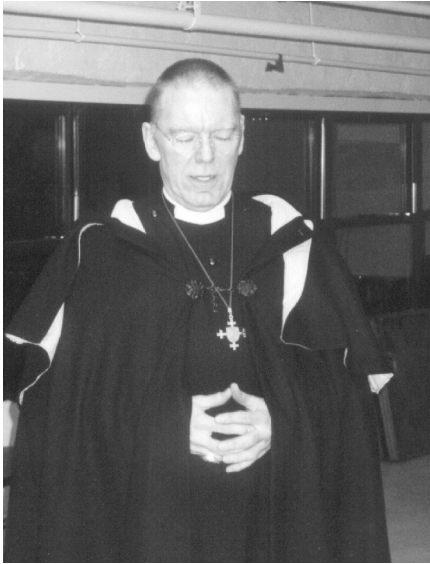
If we act this way regarding any culture we might care about we will be able to more finely understand and appreciate it, enhance and correct it, preserve and save it – should these things need doing, as they surely will.

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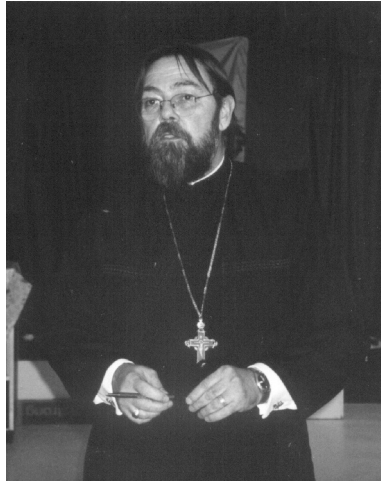
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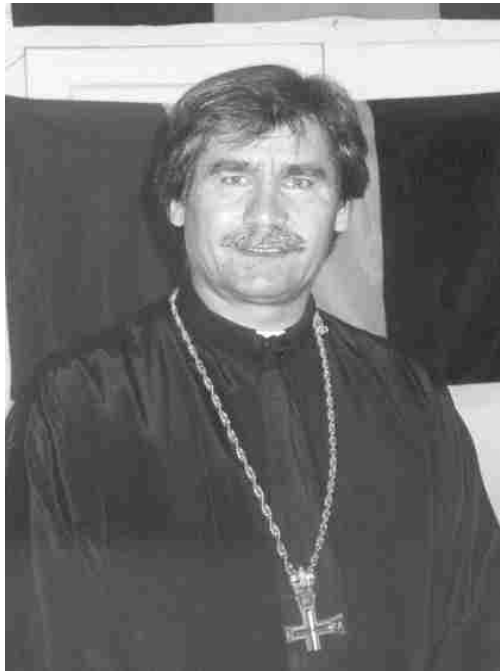
Fr. Dr. Paul E.C. Hamilton



Fr. Paul Theophilus

Rev. Pavel Nicolescu





Fr. Prof. Theodor Damian, PhD

## **Globalization: Between Fear and Joy. The Future of Religion**

### *Preliminaries*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century just started and it has already a good number of epithets, labels and nicknames. Some of them are coming from the past century and are just being applied to the new one. Expressions like post modern, post industrial, post religious, but also post nihilistic, age of disbelief, the abolition of man are telling examples of how we feel and think about our time. It would not be uninteresting to collect a few dozen of such labels, to analyze and interpret them, and to envision a future.

One of the most debated labels today that indicates a powerful movement, a complex phenomenon that we are confronted with is globalization.

In this paper I plan to explore this phenomenon, to look at several of its aspects and implications, to raise questions and especially to see how religion in general and Christianity in particular could be affected by it.

I do not plan to address the topic in all its possible details, just as I do not intend to offer answers and solutions. Rather, I would like those considerations to be part of the effort to conscientize the issue, to be a sign of the need for the Church to get involved in the debate and dialogue that relates to its present and future in our society.

### *Definitions*

Although globalization has no precise definition as Alex Berca notices,<sup>1</sup> different thinkers have attempted to define it in different ways. According to the renowned sociologist Peter L. Berger,

globalization is a world wide process, driven by economic and technological forces. It brings with it a multitude of social and political developments, some benign, others anything but benign (as recent events have made clear in a compelling way). But globalization has also had massive consequences in the area of culture, including the central cultural phenomenon of religion.<sup>2</sup>

A similar definition is given by Dennis P. McCann:

Globalization is a manifold process, driven to a great extent by epoch-making changes in communications and transportation technologies that impact the full range of diverse societies and institutions in complex and unprecedented ways, though with no single center of initiative and control.<sup>3</sup>

For A. Sachedina

globalization denotes the evolution of a supernational role that Western industrialized nations are going to play under the leadership of the United States in shaping the social, political, and economic future of humankind. Whether imagined or real, this ongoing supernational role of the U.S., and its seminal influence in global politics is the source of fear in the rest of the world, including the European nations.<sup>4</sup>

These three definitions tell and also make us think of the nature of globalization, its origin and destination, and multilevel consequences.

Before taking up these aspects in order to reflect on their characteristics and connection to contemporary religious doctrines and institutions we need to pay attention to some other general but important considerations.

### *Globalization and secularization*

Globalization per se is not a new phenomenon. Even secularization which preceded globalization was - to some still is - a globalizing movement.

Rooted in Enlightenment, it displaced the Church from the center of society's life and pushed it to the margins, it brought it from the top of the individual's hierarchy of values down to the optional, to the one-among-many status, not even to the status of *primus inter pares*. Secularization demythologized the sacred texts, deritualized the divine services, detraditionalized the daily life, desacralized the highest values that had led people's life for millennia. Sometimes it produced a radical reversal of values transforming the abnormal into normal and vice versa.

Secularization, according to Peter Berger does not characterize

our age any longer.<sup>5</sup> It exists as a limited phenomenon which has generated the globalization that we are witnessing today; consequently there is continuity between the two. Secularization has spread in the entire Western hemisphere drastically affecting the Protestant Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and even the Orthodox Church beyond the iron curtain where Marxism, and, in general, materialistic philosophies and ideologies were imposed.

However globalization has an even older history. We can easily find it in ancient times. What was Hellenism if not one of the most significant globalizing forces in our entire history? Its effects are easily visible up until the present age. The Roman Empire was a globalizing system as well that left recognizable marks on all societies after it, of course, especially in the West.

Christianity itself in its very nature, is a globalizing religion, since its missionary character is a fundamental part of Christ's testament for the apostles: "Go to all nations and preach the Gospel to everyone" (Matthew 28, 19 ). Christ's apostles, Paul first of all were probably the most dynamic and stubborn globalizers ever.

Christianity is meant to go everywhere, to take on different forms of existence, and while keeping and protecting its essential values it inculturates itself borrowing from other cultures - as it did with Hellenism - that which makes it stronger. It did just as St. Paul did when he said: "I became everything to everyone in order to convert as many as possible" (I Cor. 9, 22). This globalizing tendency is clearly expressed even in the name that Christianity attached to itself: catholic, universal. It is part of the Nicean Creed as well: "I believe in the Church that is one, holy, apostolic and universal."

The Christian Church generated a process of globalization at the most profound possible level: that of faith which in turn created a mentality, then a culture and a way of being.

### *Globalization: Yes and No*

Many of those who oppose globalization today fear the decline, indeed the loss of cultural identities and the fall in MacDonalidized collectivism. Even though that is not impossible to occur at some levels, the fear may be easily dismissed if one looks at the Hellenistic, Roman or Christian globalizations.

Christianity is an especially relevant example as, in distinction



from Hellenism or Romanization, it dealt with faith, people's highest values and as it had and still has a life much longer than that of the two previously mentioned phenomena.

The Christian Church expanded from culture to culture while installing itself in them, incorporating them without destroying the cultural and ethnic identities of the peoples that embraced it.

The contemporary process of globalization that we are discussing here does not start from people's faith in God but from industry and technology. The result, though, like in the other case, is the same: a mentality is created (consumerism) and a culture that affects all levels of people's lives, it does engender a new way of being in the world. Is it going to produce that gregarian stultifying type of uniformity that many are afraid of? Most probably not.

If we think of it in terms of systems theory, it is the dimension of change that will have to meet another fundamental one, the *status quo*. What the result of that meeting will be is not really previsible. What is previsible is that the values with stronger stability will prevail.

In fact globalization has not only demonizers but advocates as well. The skeptics are afraid, among other reasons, that the loss of people's traditional national and religious values will lead to their replacement by those of the consumerism society. This fear is justified by the fact that we are already partially immersed in this type of society and we do see many of the negative consequences that come out of it among which depersonalization and dehumanization of our relationships are listed by some sociologists, philosophers theologians in the first line.

As Michael A. Casey notices, "The problem with globalization as it currently operates, is its tendency to foster secularization among peoples and cultures that are not secular and do not want to be secular."<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, globalization seems to be in this sense like a last spasm of an obsolete type of enlightenment that took our society on the wrong existential path, or like a too late corollary of it.

However, at this point it is perhaps useful to have in view those societies that while living in the midst of the most powerful consumeristic systems, like the American one, are still holding very strongly on to their religious, cultural or ethnic values and identity, such as the Orthodox Jews, for instance.

Optimists, on the other hand, see globalization as a chance to diminish the plague of individualism generated by Enlightenment and

which is responsible for many crises that affect our Western Society. The hope is that globalization would bring nations and people closer to each other and consequently would implicitly promote the values of communion.

At this point it is also perhaps useful to have in view that it is possible to live together without necessarily being in communion. Think of that example where people live for years in the same apartment building or across the street from each other and do not meet and know each other.

### *Globalization and Culture*

However, in as much as globalization facilitates communion and openness this value has to be acknowledged.

Just as a person finds his or her fulfillment in communion with other persons, so it is with cultures. They find their full value and validation in communion with other cultures.

In an “open culture”<sup>7</sup> both separatism or exclusivism on the one hand, and uniformity or collectivism on the other are not actual risks. The open culture can preserve its own values through which it identifies itself, while being willing to adopt new ones. The model is unity in diversity, a paradigm provided for centuries by each major branch of Christianity, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.

Of course, one can object that this theory is valid only when it comes to culture and not when the process is about industry and economics. As Jeronimo Moscardo puts it, for as long as globalization will manifest itself in hegemonic tendencies it will be looked at with reservation or even hostility. In fact, the only hegemony the nations would accept without reservation is the cultural one. This would place the other nations before the option whether to borrow from the hegemonic culture or not.<sup>8</sup>

### *Globalization and Christianity*

When it comes to Christianity I think that while being mindful of globalization and cautious it should not be afraid of it. The Christian Church is itself a globalizing force as shown above. It was confronted historically with other types of globalization and not only survived them

but was even victorious, and became stronger. Christianity has in itself the necessary resources - even if in some cases they will have to be rediscovered and reassumed - in order to adapt itself, to assimilate or incorporate a new culture, movement, process without getting lost in it.

Globalization will be a major challenge for the Christian Church. The Church will be called to do its regular job, to convert it, to baptize it, as it successfully did for instance with Hellenism.

However, the Church, or Religion in general, is a challenge to globalization as well. Religion, Joshua J. Yates writes, is the most recalcitrant and reactionary force at large in the world today.<sup>9</sup> A similar idea is expressed by Michael Casey when he explains that the test that globalization needs to pass consists in proving that it has the capacity to take religion seriously.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, globalization seems to be an inevitable and irreversible phenomenon. It has already started, it will grow and profoundly mark the new century.

As Stanislav J. Lec wrote: “we are too many already to go back to the caves.” That is the reality. The question is not whether we receive it or not but what we do with it. Do we find an acceptable *modus vivendi* when it comes on us like an avalanche?

While science deals with facts, religion deals with values. Then, in our case, especially when globalization will become militant and economically hegemonic, the Christian Church has its well acknowledged extremely powerful tool that will have to be put at work in the defense of human dignity: the traditional religious values.

As A. Sachedina wrote in more general terms: “Globalization of any form of militancy whether religious or secular, is in need of ethical, universal criteria to prevent it from becoming a source of further destruction to the sanctity of human life and dignity.”<sup>11</sup>

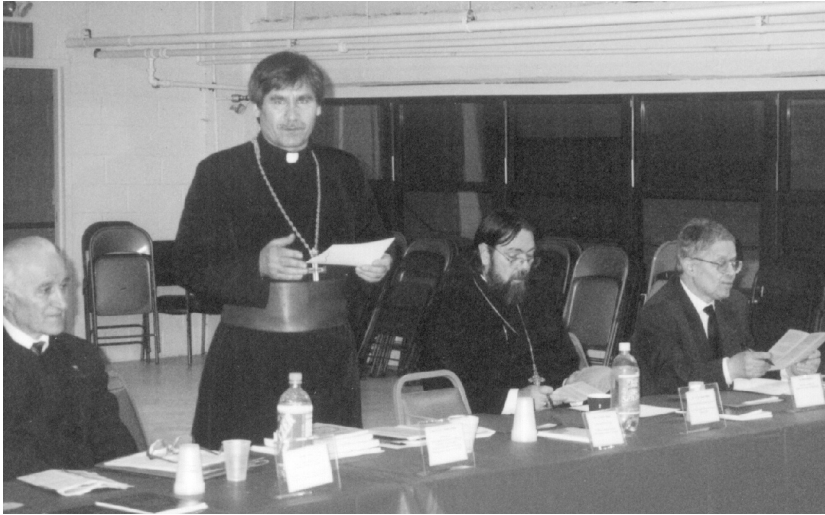
This is where the Church will have a chance to, once again, demonstrate its relevance to the world.

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From the left:  
George Alexe, Fr. Dr. Theodor Damian, Fr. Paul Theophilus,  
Rev. Pavel Nicolescu.

Fr. Dr. Paul Hamilton, Daniela Anghel, Fr. Andrei Turcoane (Serbia),  
George Alexe, Fr. Dr. Theodor Damian.



## **Contemporary Culture Between Real and Ideal**

I would like to begin my presentation with Jung's motto carved above the door of his house: "VOCATUS ATQUE NONVOCATUS DEUS ADERIT", so to say, "CALLED OR NOT CALLED, GOD IS WITH US".<sup>1</sup> This has to be the ultimate consciousness of the human being at the beginning of the third millennium.

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon, a system of values that is continuously transforming. One could talk about different aspects of culture: tradition, modern culture, cultureless society, acculturation, and multiculturalism. But more important is our attitude concerning culture as its creators, connoisseurs and promoters.

The modern man of the XXI century is confronted with the same metaphysical issues like the man of previous times. The cultural and spiritual crises were started when man, committing the ancestral sin, lost his original condition granted by God at his creation and lost Paradise. Death was the consequence.

Since then, all his struggles were dedicated to rediscover and reconquest his lost Paradise and his immortality. He increases his efforts to regain spiritual forces in order to surpass his conditions of a man exiled from Paradise, to find again the magic formula of "youthfulness without elderness and life without death" and to put an end to his agony.

The culture, created outside of Paradise, was totally different. Now he has to create a system of values that will lead him to rediscover the meaning of life.

According to Dr. Viktor Frankl, Europe's leading psychiatrist, there are three ways man can find meaning in life: "The first is what he gives to the world in terms of his creation; the second is what he takes from the world in terms of encounters and experiences, and the third is the stand he takes to his predicament in case he must face a fate which he cannot change".<sup>2</sup> Also, Frankl has affirmed: "meaning of life is composed of the second triad – creative, experiential, and attitudinal values."<sup>3</sup>

"However, being human means being in the face of meaning to fulfill and values to realize. It means living in the polar field of tension established between reality and ideals to materialize. Man lives by ideals and values. Human existence is not authentic unless it is lived in terms

of self-transcendence”.<sup>4</sup> “To be sure, if man is to find meanings even in the era without values, he has to be equipped with the full capacity of conscience”.<sup>5</sup>

“A lively and vivid conscience is also the only thing that enables man to resist the effects of the existential vacuum, namely, conformism and totalitarianism. It is true - man is free and responsible. But his freedom is finite. Human freedom is not omnipotence. Nor is human wisdom omniscience, and this holds for both cognition and conscience”.<sup>6</sup>

Man has to reconcile himself with God in order to properly use his freedom and his responsibilities. If he is willing to do goodness and to give meaning to his life, then man has to call God his Creator for assistance, by praying and partaking of the Holy Sacraments. He has to realize that without God, he will be agonizing between good and bad, not even being able of make the necessary difference and to avoid an unhappy end.

We have to live our lives in a responsible manner. Science and progress have their extraordinary contribution to humanity and life. But when man is eliminating God from His creation, he leads science to turn against humanity and life, like a boomerang. That is why man has to stay in a permanent, uninterrupted relation with God.

Culture is a creative activity being an assimilator and promoter of the values it created. More than that, Professor Constantin Pavel deeply defines culture as an exercise of the body and the soul, to reach perfection and eternal happiness, redemption and everlasting life.<sup>7</sup> However, it is not enough to conduct the cultural activities to the perfection of man and nature; it is also necessary to build the virtues. Man’s effort to create and promote culture will not be non-sense or destructive, if it will be founded on a concept were ideals and values, religion and morals have supremacy in life, without eliminating any elements that are creating a perfect harmony.<sup>8</sup>

Nichifor Crainic has remarked that none of the attempts to clarify scientifically or philosophically the origin of culture consider the dependence of the culture on religion. On the contrary, they put the origin of culture totally independent from religion.<sup>9</sup>

According to Crainic the artificial separation between culture and religion is a specific modern phenomenon. Faith, Crainic said, is the generative power of Culture.<sup>10</sup>

Nature is God’s creation; Culture is the creation of man. Neither

minerals, nor plants or animals, not even angels create culture. On the cosmic ladder of creation, culture is an attribute specific only to man. After God and from God, only man has the potential to create in spirit and to conceive the culture.<sup>11</sup>

Fr. Dumitru Popescu speaking about the relation between theology and culture affirmed: “theology needs the culture, in order to discover and answer the questions that preoccupied man in a specific time, especially because in its essence Theology remained the same over the centuries, only the cultural context is changing from age to age, from one geographical place to another.” Father Popescu emphasizes the positive face of culture, the face of spirituality and theology that shows man the way to God. The role of theology is to purify and transfigure the culture, by liberating it of its negative aspects. Unfortunately, modern science abruptly refuses to cooperate with theology. Nevertheless, extraordinary discoveries of the science, especially in contemporary physics managed to knock on the transcendent gate.<sup>12</sup>

I would like to mention here the contribution to our discussion of Sir John Eccles, the greatest neuro physiologist of the last century, a distinguished scientist and Nobel Prize winner. His scientific studies led him to the conclusion that “since materialist solutions fail to account for our experienced uniqueness, I am constrained to attribute the uniqueness of the Self or Soul to a supernatural spiritual creation. To give the explanation in theological terms: each Soul is a new divine creation, which is implanted into the growing fetus at some time between conception and birth. It is the certainty of the inner core of unique individuality that necessitates the Divine creation. I submit that no other explanation is tenable; neither the genetic uniqueness with its fantastically impossible lottery, nor the environmental differentiations which do not determine one’s uniqueness, but merely modify it. This conclusion is of inestimable theological significance. It strongly reinforces our belief in the human Soul and its miraculous origin in a Divine creation. There is recognition not only of the Transcendent God, the Creator of the Cosmos, the God in which Einstein believed, but also of the loving God to whom we owe our being”.<sup>13</sup>

In his book about orthodoxy and contemporaneity, Father Dumitru Popescu noted that contemporary culture in its vast majority is being secularized and he believes our ideal stays in the return of the culture to religion. Man, nature and the entire creation of God, has to be transfigured through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ.



In the beginning of the third millennium we are witnessing a confrontation between two concepts regarding the creation. The first concept is the autonomy of the world, developed in the XVIII century. This concept eliminated God from His creation and from the visible world. The second concept belongs to the orthodox theology and affirms the transcendence of God in the same time with His immanence or His presence in this world through His uncreated energies. The antagonism between the two concepts leads man of the third millennium to be equally attracted either by God's light or by the darkness of nothingness.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, this antagonism between secular realities and spiritual perspectives represents a real crossroad of our contemporary culture seen in the light of Christian spirituality.

This concept of autonomy of the world gives birth to a culture that places man in the center of the universe, thus replacing God. Man considers himself self-sufficient and thinks he can create progress and accomplish life by himself without God's help. In this situation, man cannot resist the temptations of sins and is so becoming their slave.<sup>15</sup>

On the other side, the theandric culture and the orthodox spirituality are sustaining that the existential mystery of man does not consist in man himself but in God. Therefore man fulfills his sense of being only if he is maintaining his relation with God in Jesus Christ.

Today, a new era is born in history. Today's sciences, in their fundamental fields – physics and biology – do not reject the revelation. In the place of materialism and atheism of the old centuries, now they are affirming the primacy of the spirit and the faith in God.

Einstein, for instance, recognizes that “in our materialist epoch, the honest savants are the only profound religious spirits”. He also affirmed that “If we follow the Prophets and Jesus Christ, we have the knowledge capable of healing the humanity from all its social sicknesses”.<sup>16</sup> The materialistic and atheistic philosophers, who were slaves of science, begin to change their attitude.<sup>17</sup>

The walls of separation are falling. Revelation and Science are meeting now. The philosophers, scientists, politicians and the theologians must find and start a dialog of communion in order to discover the true spiritual, moral, social and economic growth for the goodness and the future of humanity. History, in order to avoid moving from crisis to crisis, has to avoid the mistakes of the past. According to the Holy Scripture, the sense of history is the Kingdom of God. As Rene Girard said, “The necessity of the Kingdom of God became

scientific...<sup>18</sup> and as Andre Malraux also pointed out, the XX<sup>th</sup> century will be religious or is not going to be at all.

The old questions about human being and life are still valid today: who are we, where are we coming from, who do we want to be, where are we going? One of the answers came to my mind in the words of one of the greatest Romanian philosophers, Petre Tutea who said: "Without God man is just a simple rational animal who came from anywhere and who is going to nowhere."

To conclude this paper, in order for the contemporary world to find spiritual meaning in life, culture, science and art, it needs to experience the Christian ideal of goodness, truth and beauty, as they are embodied in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to follow the way to God under His leadership.

#### NOTES:

1. Carl Gustav Jung, *Word and Image*, Princenton University Press, 1983, p. 136.
2. Viktor E. Frankl, *The will to meaning*, Meridian Book, New York, 1988, p. 70.
3. *Idem*, p. 73.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 52.
5. *Ibidem*, p. 64.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 65.
7. Constantin Pavel, *Tragedia omului in cultura moderna [The Tragedy of Man in Modern Culture]*, (in Romanian) Editura Anastasia, Bucharest, 1997, p. 40.
8. *Ibidem*, p. 43.
9. Nichifor Crainic, *Nostalgia Paradisului [The Nostalgia for Paradise]*, (in Romanian) Editura Moldova, Iassy, 1996, p. 33.
10. *Ibidem*, p. 11.
11. *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20.
12. Dumitru Popescu, *Stiinta si teologie, preliminarii pentru dialog [Science and Theology. Preliminaries for Dialogue]*, (in Romanian) Editura Eonul dogmatic, Bucharest, 2001, p. 8.
13. John Eccles, *Evolution of the brain: creation of the brain*, published by Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 237.

14. Dumitru Popescu, *Ortodoxie si contemporaneitate [Orthodoxy and Contemporaneity]*, (in Romanian) Editura Diogene, Bucharest, 1996, pp. 169-170.
15. *Ibidem*, pp. 170-171.
16. Albert Einstein, *Comment je vois le monde*, Flammarion, 1990, pp. 19, 102, *apud* Parintele Galeriu, *Talcuiri la mari praznice de peste an [Interpretations at Great Celebrations thoroughout the Year]*, (in Romanian) Editura Anastasia, Bucharest, 2002, Postfata.
17. Christian Ruby, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Reperes, 1991, pp. 87-88, *apud* Parintele Galeriu, *op.cit.*, Postfata.
18. Parintele Galeriu, *op. cit.*, Postfata.

## **Contributors**

### **George Alexe**

Senior theologian of the Romanian Orthodox Church, member of the Union of Romanian Writers, director and founder of *Romanian Communion*; Chairman of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality

### **Richard Grallo, Ph.D.**

Professor of Human Services, Metropolitan College of New York; Quest Institute, New York

### **Rev. Theodor Damian, Ph.D.**

Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Metropolitan College of New York; President of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality

### **Rev. Dr. Pavel Nicolescu**

Romanian Baptist Church, New York

### **Drd. Daniela Anghel**

The National Institute of Thraco-Dacian Studies, Bucharest

MODERATOR:

### **Fr. Paul Theophilus**

SS. Peter and Paul Romanian Orthodox Church, New York

GUEST OF HONOR:

### **Rev. Prof. Dr. Paul E.C. Hamilton**

Priest-in-charge at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in College Point, NY; Teaching Psychology and Sociology at Metropolitan College of New York.



In the Church (from the left): Claudia Damian, Pr. Theodor Damian,  
Ruxandra Alexe, George Alexe, Daniela Anghel