TOWARDS AN INTEGRAL STUDY OF RELIGIOSITY ROOTED IN MIRCEA ELIADE'S NEW HUMANISM

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ABSTRACT. *Towards an Integral Study of Religiosity Rooted in Mircea Eliade's New Humanism.* The present article advocates for the development and the implementation of a philosophy of religiosity informed by Mircea Eliade's new humanism, Eugeniu Sperantia's axiotropism, D. D. Roșca's outlook on human existence and Aurel Codoban's hermeneutic philosophy of religions. If such an integral study of religiosity were to be accommodated by a new educational paradigm, the resulting humanist pro-social education would protect society from underlying drivers of polarisation such as religious dogmatism and fundamentalism.

Keywords: religion, religiosity, Eliade's new humanism, the philosophy of religions, attitudinal values, the human ideal

REZUMAT. *Noul umanism eliadesc, studiul interdisciplinar al religiozității și educația umanistă pro-socială.* Pornind de la noul umanism eliadesc pe baza căruia Aurel Codoban a construit o filosofie hermeneutică a religiilor, utilizând teoria valorilor propusă de Eugeniu Sperantia precum și concepția filosofică a lui D. D. Roșca privitoare la condiția umană, articolul de față propune introducerea unui studiu interdisciplinar al religiozității într-o nouă paradigmă educațională. Educația umanistă pro-socială rezultată ar proteja societatea de extrem de nociva polarizare cauzată de fundamentalismul religios.

Cuvinte-cheie: religie, religiozitate, noul umanism eliadesc, filosofia religiilor, atitudini-valori, idealul uman

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Introduction

The protean nature of the term "humanism" both accounts for and is mirrored by the plethora of revendications it has enjoyed, especially since it became an umbrella-term for the various "instances of a common phenomenon" that has been manifest around the world for more than 2,500 years and that is best equipped to ensure a human being's unimpaired development from a cultural, intellectual, personal and social point of view (Copson 1). Unfortunately, as Andrew Copson pertinently explains, there have been several tendencies to qualify the noun "humanism" by using adjectives such as "secular" or "religious" – thus creating a false dichotomy – or the adjective "Christian", leading to claims from Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist communities, to name just a few, that they, too, partake in humanism and should be acknowledged rather than ignored. Such attempts only serve to unnecessarily complicate the terminology and are unwarranted if meant to qualify "humanism" in terms of content, given that other expressions – such as "religious humanitarianism", suggested by Karl Popper, or "humanistic Christianity" and "humanistic Judaism", etc. – would be better suited to convey "the accurate sense that what is primary is the religion at hand and that the qualification is secondary" (Copson 3). Nevertheless, adjectives that describe "the cultural context of a particular example of humanism, such as «Chinese humanism», «British humanism in the eighteenth century», «contemporary African American humanism» and so on" are essential in identifying the various "manifestations of humanism in different societies" (Copson 24).

Reminiscent of the critical movement going strong in the United States between 1910 and 1930, and based on Matthew Arnold's work, the concept of "new humanism", as used by both Mircea Eliade and Aurel Codoban, could undergo a new lease of life, as long as it avoids the pitfall of cultural elitism. Eliade and Codoban share the early twentieth-century New Humanists' view on human being's uniqueness in the natural world and agree that humans are essentially free, despite certain determinism engendered by genetic and environmental factors. Yet, given the inextricable link between the cultural, the philosophical and the religious realm, for this freedom to be preserved, enjoyed and brought to fruition, the development and implementation of an integral study of religiosity is mandatory. One which nurtures not simply religious but rather universally moral attitudinal values that reinforce humanity's axiotropic potential. One that transforms the tragic consciousness generated by man's awareness of imminent death not into a religiously-induced fanatic consciousness but rather into a creative spirit able to ameliorate the state of the world he inhabits[2]. One

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[2] "Man" is used in this article as a generic term, not as a manifestation of androcentrism but in order to avoid both unnecessarily protracted statements and the annoying repetitions of the term "human being".

freed from the dogmatism of a particular scripture and, thus, characterised neither by Ethnocentrism, nor by Eurocentrism, since it relies on philosophy rather than religion, albeit informed by a hermeneutical investigation of religious phenomena and by a comparative study of religions.

The final chapter of Ioan Petru Culianu's study on Eliade's work leaves the readers with the following unanswered questions: Is the new humanism described by Eliade viable and possible? Is it not merely another public mask reflecting the decline suffered by *Da-sein*? (131). The aim of this article is to show that the Eliadesque vision of new humanism and Codoban's hermeneutic philosophy of religions informed by Eliade's works could constitute the foundation of an integral study of religiosity as part of a new educational paradigm that would help set the bases for a humanist pro-social education meant to shape profoundly humanist attitudes of mind and protect society from underlying drivers of polarisation such as religious bigotry, dogmatism and fundamentalism.

Mircea Eliade's new humanism

In his article entitled "A New Humanism", a revised and expanded version of the 1961 study on "History of Religions and a New Humanism", published in *The Quest - History and Meaning in Religion*, in 1969, Eliade insists on the necessity for conducting a thorough hermeneutical investigation of religious phenomena, one that is not confined to a specific religion but rather encompasses both religious morphology and phenomenology as part of a comparative approach enriched by interdisciplinarity. Data collection, analysis and publication can amount to an ineffective and incomplete endeavour in the absence of meaningful enquiries into the contextual factors fostering the emergence, development and triumph of each particular religion at that specific time in history:

> It is solely insofar as it will perform this task – particularly by making the meanings of religious documents intelligible to the mind of modern man – that the science of religions will fulfil its true cultural function. For whatever its role has been in the past, the comparative study of religions is destined to assume a cultural role of the first importance in the near future. (Eliade, *The Quest* 2)

Whereas Eliade's intuition was strikingly accurate, it was also ahead of his time, so his predictions have not come to pass, yet the state of the world today calls for an urgent revaluation and worldwide implementation of humanist imperatives. Eliade claimed that the profound understanding of the human condition provided by comparative religious studies can inform a new

humanism which, if globally developed, will offer new insights into the complexity of the religious phenomenon, will transcend nationalist provincialism and will foster cultural creativity (*The Quest* 3).

An interdisciplinary approach[3], being based on a variety of viewpoints, allows for all the valences and meanings of religious phenomena to be revealed and nurtures a better understanding of the sacred. Rudolf Otto's description of the universal dimension of the sacred as the "wholly other" (*ganz andere*) is effective in conceptualizing as para-religious experiences the encounters with the sacred "brought about by depth psychology and modern artistic experiments" (*The Quest* 4). Just like original artistic creations, which "exist on their own plane of reference", being not only the result of economic, socio-political and cultural factors but, most importantly, of the individual creative spirit's victory over the immediate data of experience, so must religious realities be viewed as having "a mode of being that is peculiar to themselves" (*The Quest* 5-6). It is only by investigating how the combination of transpersonal realities with individual experiences gives both the aesthetic and the religious universe their dual nature that one can gain access to the real, profound and complete meaning of artistic and religious realities. And even though it would be a sign of naïveté to assume the eventual erosion of the "tension between those who try to understand the *essence* and the *structures* and those whose only concern is the *history* of religious phenomena", it might be the case that precisely due to this creative tension the science of religions will ultimately "escape dogmatism and stagnation" (*The Quest* 8-9).

Aurel Codoban's outlook on religion and philosophy

The origins of philosophy can be traced back to religion, just like those of chemistry and astronomy can be found in alchemy and astrology. As both philosophy and religion are initiatory undertakings, philosophy may constitute an alternative for religion, especially since their inextricable connection has not been entirely severed, like in the case of alchemy and chemistry or in that of astrology and astronomy (Codoban 12). Therefore, in addition to theology, fields of enquiry such as religious philosophy and the philosophy of religion emerged, the former populated by philosophers convinced that reason can penetrate religion without altering it, and the latter by philosophers engaged in unabated meditations on and criticism of religion, with no regard for a particular religion's inherent dogmatism (Codoban 17).

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[3] Eliade mentions, in addition to the historical, ethnological, anthropological, sociological, economic and political perspectives, the psychological, aesthetic, philological and cultural ones.

Whereas religious philosophy is much closer to theology, its strongly apologetic stance has undermined its position in favour not only of the philosophy of religion but of other competitors as well, from domains such as psychology[4] or sociology[5]. The difference between theology and the philosophy of religion is tantamount, hermeneutically speaking, "to the difference between «autointerpretation» and «heterointerpretation»" and there is a significant divergence in what regards the discourse articulated by the philosophy of religion and the discourse characteristic to the humanities and social sciences: the former "develops at the level of sense", whilst the latter "at the level of significance" (Codoban 19-20)[6].

Codoban proposes a new "hermeneutic philosophy of religions", grounded in Eliade's work, and explains that the use of the plural form, on the one hand, points to a distancing from Eurocentrism and from Ethnocentrism that allows for the worldwide religious experience to come under investigation in its entirety and, on the other hand, signals that the new philosophy, instead of focusing on the divine, strives to frame "a phenomenology of the sacred" in order to cover not only the individual experience, but also the social, historical and cultural ones: "A philosophy of religions from the perspective of the sacred is, in the Kantian sense, a critical philosophy focused on historical forms of religion and on cultural formulas of religiosity" (21)[7]. Following the main lines of Eliadesque thinking, but also combining Martin Heidegger's philosophy with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, and Leroi-Gourhan's anthropology with structuralist semiology, Codoban aims to establish a field of investigation that caters for the needs of those who, as Heidegger had stated, "were born too late for gods and too early for Being" (qtd. in Codoban 24), in a European culture marked by a

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[4] See the works of Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (*Primitive Culture* 1871), Max Müller (*Essays on the Science of Religion* 1869 and *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* 1878), Sir James George Frazer (*The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* 1900), Sigmund Freud (*The Future of an Illusion* 1927, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 1930, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 1933 and *Moses and Monotheism* 1939), Carl Gustav Jung (*Analytical psychology: Notes of the seminar given in 1925* 1925, "Psychology and religion" 1938, "A psychological approach to the dogma of the trinity" 1942, "On the nature of the psyche " 1947, "Answer to Job" 1952 and "Religion and psychology: A reply to Martin Buber" 1952), etc.

[5] See Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert ("Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice" 1899), for instance, or Émile Durkheim (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* 1912), and Robert Hertz (*Death and the Right Hand* 1960).

[6] "Hermeneutic, diferenţa dintre teologie şi filosofia religiei este similară diferenţei dintre «autointerpretare» şi «heterointerpretare» (Codoban 19). "Discursul filosofic evoluează la nivelul sensului, pe cînd discursurile ştiinţelor, ale disciplinelor socio-umane, la nivelul semnificaţiilor" (Codoban 20). Translation ours.

[7] "Filosofia (hermeneutică) a religiilor îşi propune o *fenomenologie a sacrului*. (...) O filosofie a religiilor din perspectiva sacrului este, în sensul celei kantiene, o filosofie critică a formelor istorice de religie şi a formulelor culturale de religiozitate" (Codoban 20). Translation ours.

widening rift clearly illustrated by Western philosophical trends, confined in the erratic interim space between "a too late" and "a too early" (24)[8]. Acknowledging that this fundamental gap between a religion which is impossible to uphold and a philosophy that is impossible to pursue must be bridged, in a gesture of "programmatic restitution – restoring the being's access to the sacred", Codoban argues for a hermeneutic philosophy of religions which, by mediating between religion and philosophy, will champion a new humanism, yet "not as a cultural sub-product of metaphysics and ideologies", but rather as a new form of spirituality (24)[9].

D. D. Roşca's humanist view of the "complete spiritual personality"

D. D. Roşca shares Aurel Codoban's concern with what should and what might belong to Being but, whereas the latter's pioneering endeavours are still tributary to religion, the former articulates, in *Puncte de sprijin* and *Existenţa tragică*[10], a profoundly humanistic vision of human existence with a focus on philosophy rather than religion. Given that his particular brand of existentialism is informed by the autochthonous archaic-mythic ethos so accurately conveyed in Romanian popular ballads such as "Mioriţa" or "Monastirea Argeşului"[11], D. D. Roşca views human beings' existence as tragic, though not as tragically inescapable: given the intrinsically liberating role of philosophy, the creative spirit, if accompanied by a philosophical attitude, can aspire to the human ideal (*Puncte* 162). Since there is nothing more organically linked to the complexities of cultural existence than philosophy, "(i)f art could be viewed as the inflorescence of culture, philosophy can be considered its ripe fruit" (*Puncte* 57)[12]. A tragic existence begets a tragic consciousness which, in turn, forges the highest interior tension as well as "the greatest spiritual force that human beings are endowed with" (*Existenţa* 9)[13]. Man's tendency towards balance and harmony

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[8] "Spunînd: «Ne-am născut prea tîrziu pentru zei şi prea devreme pentru Fiinţă», Heidegger definea cultura europeană drept o formaţiune a intervalului. Toată filosofia occidentală este cuprinsă între un prea tîrziu şi un prea devreme" (Codoban 24). Translation ours.

[9] "Programatic, restituind fiinţei sacrul (…) sperăm la un nou umanism, nu ca un subprodus cultural al metafizicilor şi ideologiilor, ci ca o nouă spiritualitate" (Codoban 24). Translation ours.

[10] *Points of Support* and *The Tragic Existence*. Translation ours.

[11] Both the pastoral ballad "The Little Ewe" and the popular one recounting the aesthetic myth of Master-builder Manole and entitled "The Monastery on the Argeş River" reveal how the creative spirit lives on throughout the ages and how, once the tragic nature of human existence is fully understood and bravely accepted, the human propensity towards a defeatist attitude can be overcome.

[12] "Dacă arta a putut fi numită floarea unei culturi, filosofia poate fi asemănată cu fructul copt al acesteia" (Roşca, *Puncte* 57). Translation ours.

[13] "Tensiunea interioară produsă de conştiinţa tragică e nu numai cea mai fecundă, credem, dintre toate tensiunile sufleteşti posibile, ci în general e, după părerea noastră, cea mai mare forţă spirituală între toate puterile sufleteşti de cari dispunem" (Roşca, *Existenţa* 9). Translation ours.

is constantly challenged by conflictual interactions with the world, an erratic world which offers a plethora of uncanny trials, irresistible temptations and unpredictable outcomes. Thus, the seemingly never-ending battle between human spiritual ideals and the insouciance of the natural world can account for the contradictory nature of human existence.

This tragic fate, however, is not inescapable. By avoiding the pitfalls of disheartened resignation and idle contemplation, one should be able to constructively turn the ensuing high tension into spiritual passion. As Alexandru Tănase pertinently points out in "Cultură şi umanism" (172-173)[14], it is Roşca's deeply held conviction that cultural consciousness – the outcome of interior freedom, of knowledge and experience, of intellectual and emotional engagement – allows for effective cultural action and cultural creation, thus fostering a constructive way of gratifyingly leading one's tragic existence. Tănase[15] concludes that Roşca's outlook on cultural reality mirrors Lucian Blaga's definition of culture as "the product of a necessary *ontological mutation*, an inherent trait of man's existential status" (174) since he writes:

> It is in the laws of nature that the roots of culture can be found. Culture is a fundamental prolongation of nature. And, thus, it is necessary. (…) Civilisation constitutes the continuation, development and enhancement of the biological. (…) On the infrastructure formed by the inorganic and by the biological, the world of the spirit is reared as a natural suprastructure. (Roşca, *Existenţa* 73)[16]

Moreover, given that the awareness of one's ephemeral existence and the subsequent propensity towards the search for immortality can only be formed at the cultural and not at the biological level, culture becomes the only province that allows humans to extend their presence beyond biological limitations (Tănase 177). Human beings alone can conceptualise death and it is precisely this realisation that has motivated them to negate the biological by means of cultural creations (Roşca, *Existenţa* 124). Thus, for the spiritual beings that humans are, transcendence is made possible through the cultural endeavours prompted by attempts to annihilate the sense of approaching doom.

Yet, due to the deeply-held belief that existence must have a purpose which gets progressively fulfilled, spiritual life essentially "remains the most

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[14] "Culture and Humanism". Translation ours.

[15] "D. D. Roşca este destul de aproape de Blaga (care definea cultura ca produsul unei mutaţii ontologice necesare, un atribut inerent statutului existenţial al omului)" (Tănase 174). Translation ours.

[16] "Considerată dintr'o astfel de perspectivă, cultura este fundamentată în legile naturii. Este o prelungire naturală a acesteia. Şi, ca atare, este necesară. (…) Civilizaţia ne apare ca o continuare, o îmbogăţire şi-o aprofundare a biologicului. (…) Lumea spiritului se ridică drept suprastructură naturală pe infrastructura ce-o formează anorganicul şi biologicul" (Roşca, *Existenţa* 73). Translation ours.

problematic of all imaginable forms of existence" (*Existenţa* 238)[17]. By showing that spiritual values – whose essential role in transforming outer realities cannot be denied – are not merely subjective, but rather originate from objective reality, Roşca highlights the role of critical thinking in overcoming the dire implications of human beings' tragic existence. Against the tragic essence of existence, Roşca employs "brave standards of morality", as well as rationalist approaches to all data, whether rational or irrational (Joja 263)[18]. However, what Roşca deems "irrational" is not a mystical concept but, simply, the as-yet-unknown, which our imagination, emancipated from the reasoning powers, often colonises with mystery and magic (176). So Roşca's "irrational" is, practically, what Lucian Blaga had called "the world's corolla of wonder", though – unlike the poet – "the former is prevented from falling into the trap of dogmatic agnostic idealism by the mobility of the frontiers between the two areas of existence and by the solidity of the bridges" connecting the rational or commonsensical sphere to the irrational or absurd one (Tănase 176)[19].

Thus, D. D. Roşca grants a superior purpose to existence, purpose rooted in the fusion of a scientific stance, an axiological stance and an ethical one which, when combined, configure "a complete spiritual personality" (*Existenţa* 185)[20]. The validity of his approach rests on the correct assumption that values such as kindness, generosity, fairness, etc., even though beyond the bounds of scientific investigation, entail profound emotions outwardly manifested through actions, and are, therefore, "not illusory aspects of existence, but integral parts of it" so it is precisely with the assistance provided by such values that radical transformations of human existence have been conducted (*Existenţa* 228)[21].

Eugeniu Sperantia's "axiotropism" and the human ideal

Given the essential role of individual values for any creative endeavours and the constancy of the interaction between the individual consciousness and the social one, it is not surprising that there has been a continual preoccupation with axiology among philosophers. In the case of Eugeniu Sperantia, the outcome

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[17] "Vieaţa spirituală rămâne, cu'n cuvânt, cea mai problematică dintre toate formele de existenţă imaginabile" (Roşca, *Existenţa* 238). Translation ours.

[18] "Tragicului existenţial, Roşca îi opune o morală bărbătească, precum şi o analiză raţionalistă chiar a datelor iraţionale" (Joja 263). Translation ours.

[19] "pe cel dintîi mobilitatea frontierei şi soliditatea punţilor de legătură dintre cele două zone ale existenţei îl fereşte de a cădea în idealism agnostic şi dogmatic" (Tănase 176). Translation ours.

[20] "Personalitate spirituală completă" (Roşca, *Existenţa* 238). Translation ours.

[21] "În acest sens, susţinem deci că rezonabilul, binele, dreptatea, generozitatea, adecă valorile, nu sunt aspecte iluzorii ale existenţei, ci elemente constitutive ale ei tot atât de reale ca şi opusele lor" (Roşca, *Existenţa* 228). Translation ours.

was a philosophical anthropology that provides a theory of values centred on the imperative of "axiotropism" (112). According to Sperantia, humans are the only beings that manifest axiotropic potential, one that they must acknowledge, activate and fulfil in order to foster a harmonious development of their own selves.

Both group psychosocial differences and individual ones are rooted in the morpho-functional biological heredity as well as in the cultural heredity, the latter including etno-psychological features that are the expression of the collective subconscious and become manifest in mentalities, customs and attitudes. Values are the expression of particular social relations that mirror a common outlook on cultural standards and a general agreement on institutionalised norms. Values have been classified as follows: political values, ecological values, scientific values, technological values, cultural values, aesthetic values, moral values and religious values. Once values are acquired and interiorised, they manifest as attitudinal values, becoming motivational factors and forceful ideas that inform human activity, shape interpersonal relationships and frame an individual's exploration of the future (Preda 209). Attitudinal values are social in nature, being the reflection of the socio-cultural environment where a person grows up and develops from childhood to adulthood (Iluţ 44). The dominant in social attitudes is not the cognitive element, but a combination of conative and emotional substrata, so attitudes are dynamic, as they prompt the individual to action in favour of or against a social object, and constitute "one of the fundamental agents of human behaviour" (Chircev 31)[22]. An interplay of various factors leads to the historical, political, economic, social, cultural and religious conditioning of attitudinal values so, in order to ensure the quality of this conditioning and to prevent the formation of a fanatic consciousness, a humanist pro-social education is mandatory, as it relies on quintessential action-reflection dialectics, presupposes varied methods of investigation and nurtures moral-based anticipatory thinking.

Whilst moral values and the respective attitudinal values are universal, having ensured, throughout the millennia, the survival of the human species, religious values may display dangerous levels of partisanship and unhealthy amounts of prejudice, ultimately detrimental to the functioning of society at large. As Lucian Blaga indicated, "High moral consciousness is incompatible with prejudice (…). Any moral imperative must be revised in light of the situation at hand. Otherwise, morals take the pathological form of fixed ideas" (211)[23]. Attitudinal values, being grounded in conative, emotional and axiological

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[22] "atitudinea poate fi considerată ca unul din motivele fundamentale ale conduitei umane" (Chircev 31). Translation ours.

[23] "O conştiinţă morală de cel mai înalt nivel este incompatibilă cu prejudecăţile (…) Orice imperativ moral trebuie corectat printr-un just sentiment al situaţiei. Altfel, morala ia forma patologică a ideilor fixe" (Blaga 211). Translation ours.

substrata and, as such, not dominated by cognitive processes, are relatively stable and discernibly more resilient to change than pure knowledge is (Iluţ 44). Extra-rational elements and religious values distort pure intelligence, preventing it from conducting a consistently logical thorough investigation of researched phenomena (Roşca, *Figuri* 25), a reality perfectly mirrored by the highly incoherent speeches of many self-appointed religious and spiritual leaders who are granted false prestige by those regarding unintelligible and incomprehensible discourses as penetrating and profound. True to Cartesian epistemology, Roşca cites the French historian, philosopher and theologian Joseph Ernest Renan, endorsing his definition of the perfect man through an insistence that not only are honesty, bravery and dignity essential, but a simultaneous propensity towards scientific erudition, philosophical thought and poetic sensitivity are also a must (*Figuri* 33). Man's ultimate purpose is the pursuit of a human ideal that encompasses in one individual the core features and the concentrated image of humanity as a whole (*Figuri* 34). Human beings nurture a burning desire to express themselves creatively, and their determination is marked by a drive towards universalising and eternalising values that must be shared as part of an inter-spiritual communication process if they are to ever heighten both the ego's value and that of the world in its entirety (Sperantia 112-113). Yet the world which the creative spirit wishes to expand, enlighten and elevate is not the physical world, but the human world, the human universe: a true creative spirit aims to "uplift the world through his creations, so that his own Ego's repute will then augment by the very fact that he is inhabiting a world of amplified value" (Sperantia 129)[24].

For D. D. Roşca, the ideal man's attitude to worldly living is a moral philosophical one, based on the valorisation of experience through a twofold spiritual effort, both rational and emotional, so that the whole personality is involved in a balanced manner, fostering an enhanced ability to adapt to the demands of everyday reality and a true sense of freedom, internal and external, active rather than merely passive: "The most endowed personality whose interests lie exclusively in the unseen realm of spiritual values […] will not always succeed in adapting to the exigency of practical life" (*Existenţa*, 128)[25]. Given the tragic antagonism that plays on the conflict between antinomies such as good versus evil, truth versus deceit, justice versus injustice and, last but not

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[24] "Primatul e deţinut de voinţa de a spori valoarea Lumii prin valorile pe care el însuşi le creează şi, apoi, de a-şi spori valoarea „Eului" prin faptul că se încadrează într-o lume cu valoare sporită" (Sperantia 129). Translation ours.

[25] "Personalitatea cea mai bine înzestrată, dar al cărei interes este îndreptat întreg către lumea nevăzută a valorilor spirituale (…) nu e în stare totdeauna să se adapteze la exigenţele vieţii practice" (Roşca, *Existenţa* 128). Translation ours.

least, survival versus demise, this ideal attitude commands a healthy dose of "intellectual heroism" and a strong will that is absolutely necessary for constant, unrelenting attempts at self-betterment and at life-betterment, in order to make more beautiful, more sensible and more righteous this cruel, indifferent world marked by uncertainty in all its aspects except one: the certainty of death (*Existenţa* 129). And, as Viktor Frankl explains, it is precisely "through attitudinal values that even the negative, tragic aspects of human existence, or what I call the 'tragic triad' – pain, guilt, and death – may be turned into something positive and creative" (125-126).

Towards an integral study of religiosity

At the foundation of what D. D. Roşca had called "the Greek miracle" lies the emancipation of Hellenistic reasoning processes both from the practical utilitarianism that had been the ultimate aim of human endeavours for Oriental scholars, and from the mythical and the magical, which had governed Indic thought (*Figuri* 24). Similarly, Aurel Codoban points out that philosophy is religious in nature, springing from "the significance strata of Greek mythology" (11)[26], and that it was precisely the non-canonicity of the description given to the Greek gods, with their much too human features, that led to the emergence of philosophy. Early Greek philosophers discarded these mythological figures as unsatisfactory, favouring instead "an abstract principle", whose leverage consisted in "a more rigorous ethics and a more coherent logic" (12)[27].

Ever since medieval times, philosophers and theologians alike have been longing for a "universalistic, transhistorical, «mythical» religion", being bitterly dissatisfied with all the available theologies and with their respective views on man's place in the universe. Yet their quest was dismally unproductive and, by the nineteenth century, a consensus had been reached among the intelligentsia that "the philosophers had proven the impossibility of demonstrating the existence of God" and that "the sciences were proving that man was made from matter only, that is, that there is no such thing as the «soul», a spiritual entity independent of the body and surviving it" (Eliade, *The Quest* 39). But, albeit notable, scientific discoveries and technological advances have done little to eradicate man's irresistible urge to reconfigure "the original, universal *matrix*" by identifying the "primordial situation" that had marked the absolute origin of Being (Eliade, *Myth* 111). And, although this has always been a

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[26] "discursul filosofic occidental îşi are originea în stratul semnificaţiilor mitologiei greceşti" (Codoban 11). Translation ours.

[27] "primii filosofi greci le preferă un principiu abstract, care are calitatea de a fi mai sobru etic şi mai coerent logic" (Codoban 12). Translation ours.

universal quest, its extent, complexity and variety of manifestations remained for much too long unknown to the world.

According to Eliade, magico-religious behaviour dates as far back as Paleanthropic times, since "the experience of the sacred constitutes an element in the structure of consciousness" and the Paleanthropians are considered to have been complete humans (*History*, vol. I 5). Nevertheless, the consistent and complex religiosity that characterises human existence was not acknowledged due to a purely terminological issue: "in the second half of the nineteenth century, the term «religion» had a decidedly limited application, the rest being designated by various pejorative terms: «magic», «superstition», «savagery», etc.". Thus, the term was only used with reference to "an ideological complex" comparable to Judeo-Christianity, Islamism, Hinduism, or "the pantheons of the ancient Near East" (*History*, vol. I 377). This hijacking of the term "religion" rendered impossible "the homologation of different multiform religious universes" (*History*, vol. II 404). What is more, if primitive religions were dedicated to "exalting the solidarity of man and nature", Judeo-Christianity, Islam and other religions in which "the element of other-worldness" is central inevitably brought forth Feuerbach's and Marx's well-deserved criticism of the alienation induced by religion (Eliade, *The Quest* 64).

There is an inherent danger posed by any belief system grounded in eschatological visions: for true believers, the idea that "the triumph of Sacred History – manifested by the End of the World – in some measure implies the restoration of Paradise" may constitute an incentive to abandon moral values and to justify, through an adherence to religious values, their contribution to the onset of the apocalypse (Eliade, *Myth* 65). If this life is seen as nothing more than a phase of transition towards the real life after death, not much value is placed on terrestrial existence and its obliteration seems less final. In light of the terrifying surge of religious fundamentalism resulting in the hindrance of scientific progress, in a gross infringement on human rights and in atrocious terrorist attacks, the words of Matthew Arnold resonate today with reference not merely to Christianity, but also to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.: "one is not always to attack people's illusions about religion merely because illusions they are. But at the present moment two things about the Christian religion must surely be clear (…). One is, that men cannot do without it; the other, that they cannot do with it as it is" (xiv).

Arthur C. Clarke's claim that "the greatest tragedy in mankind's entire history may be the hijacking of morality by religion" (360) holds true at least for proselytizing religions such as the Christian and the Islamic ones, especially because the self-contradictory nature of the Bible and of the Qurʾān allows for these religions to be used for antipodean purposes, so the religious values they

promote may be at odds with human rights principles and practices, which makes them anything but moral. The progress of civilisation cannot be bolstered by discouraging independent moral thought in an insistence on a prescribed morality that hinders medical progress by banning stem cell research, that promotes hostility towards believers in other deities and non-believers alike, that upholds the objectification and exploitation of women, that perpetrates violence and hatred against certain minority groups, that mandates the killing of apostates, etc.

Yet religion's powerful grip on humanity seems, in many parts of the world, still unrelenting, because for adults it may be challenging to liberate themselves from forms of totalitarian thinking, to rationally shape their way of seeing and being with and in the world, to enhance their own capacity for presence in this world instead of anticipating its end through an eagerly awaited apocalypse. But children are far from being a lost cause and, thus, should not be abandoned, but helped to grow both intellectually and spiritually through the undeniable power of education. Since religious transmission among family members cannot be prevented, the mechanisms of the educational systems must provide access to more than one religious worldview, to a variety of belief systems able to accurately mirror the religiously manifold human societies and cultures that populate our planet. Children need not be taught only the precepts of one religion, but shown the roots of humans' propensity towards religiosity and the diverse manifestations of the religious phenomena, if they are to ever escape the tentacles of fanatic consciousness. Thus, an integral study of religiosity from an early age is mandatory, because once individual values have been shaped, attitudinal values are acquired and care must be taken, during this value-acquisition process, to secure the desired extent of flexibility that fosters a person's integration in the ever-changing world of today.

The idea of a "homo universalis" rests on the realisation that no discipline can, by itself, offer all the necessary knowledge and skills for a deep understanding of human existence, of its purpose and of its role. This understanding relies on the proper investigation of religiosity as a worldwide phenomenon, especially since "culture is secularised religion" (Codoban 22). Even though modern culture and contemporary culture seem to have distanced themselves from religion, it is "through the perspective of religiosity" that they can best be understood, since "the fundamental forms of culture are manifestations of religious origin" (Codoban 22)[28]. Codoban's hermeneutical philosophy of religions can offer a rational analysis of the conditions that make religious experience possible and of those that foster the crystallisation of religions, together with the religious criticism

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[28] "Cultura este o religie secularizată. Formele fundamentale ale culturii sînt manifestări de origine religioasă" (Codoban 22). Translation ours.

of culture which Eliade had auspiciously practiced (Codoban 23). Codoban acknowledges the essential requirement that this be a critical philosophy of culture from the perspective of religiosity – mainly concerned with the sacred, not of theology – mainly concerned with the divine, yet the hermeneutical philosophy of religions is still tributary to the study of religion and, therefore, if it were to be employed in the educational realm, it would benefit from the distancing that a philosophy of religiosity can offer, because the Eliadesque concept of "homo religiosus" has reverberations closer to the term "religiosity" than to the term "religion" (Codoban 22).

For Eliade, "homo religiosus" is a "total man", so a "total discipline" that can "use, integrate, and articulate the results obtained by the various methods of approaching a religious phenomenon" must be developed if the contribution of any religious phenomenon to a certain culture is to be "elucidated" (*The Quest* 8). Since modern science has as one of its fundamental principles the realisation that "the scale creates the phenomenon", and given that the history of religions is meant to "further the rise of a new humanism", the imperative of developing an understanding of religiosity which fosters the formation, preservation and enhancement of new humanist values on a worldwide scale becomes evident (*The Quest* 7). Once the obsolete reductionism of an independent theological study confined to one and only one particular religion is acknowledged, new research opportunities arise and fields of enquiry such as the history of religions, philosophical anthropology, the comparative study of religions and religious phenomenology can join forces and offer researchers the chance to "grasp the permanence of what has been called man's specific existential situation of «being in the world»" (*The Quest* 9).

For as long as man fears old age and death, religion will prosper. Yet it can do so in a less detrimental manner if change is implemented on the basis of a philosophy of religiosity that is not confined to the academic sphere, but rather informs the educational system to prevent the formation of fanatic consciousness and promote the development of naïve consciousness into critical reflexive consciousness: "There could be no such thing as human existence without the openness of our being to the world, without the transitiveness of our consciousness" (Freire 82). Most parents are adamant that their offspring be immersed in a particular religion, the only true one, in their view, which means that, during the critical period of development, namely between 2 and 7 years of age, children undergo experiences whose long-lasting effects are bound to negatively influence their outlook on the world: children's innate curiosity is stifled and the formation of their critical thinking skills is hindered by the "God did it" answer. At home, religious education exposes children to a singular world view and to a set of religious values masquerading as moral ones.

Consequently, to ensure that it does not continue to counter the efforts made towards the desired peaceful religious pluralism, the home-schooling in a particular religion must be supplemented by compulsory classes during which children are exposed to the impressive range of religious phenomena, encouraged to explore the many different cultural manifestations of religion and prompted to meet and exchange views with children coming from various religious backgrounds, including non-believers. Such interactive classes, if properly integrated in the curriculum from kindergarten to college, are likely to result in a surge of empathy, tolerance and acceptance as well as in the acquisition of truly universal moral values.

Conclusion

Human beings' inability to serenely accept the imminence of death, their need to be given a purpose for their existence, coupled with the hope for salvation in life eternal, have always made them vulnerable to the illusion of comfortable lies, chosen at the expense of uncomfortable truths. And in the absence of appropriately devised interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary methods of religious education meant to cast some light on the human propensity towards religiosity, the anticipated undramatic and steady progress of mankind shall continue to be thwarted by unwarranted interference on the part of ever-growing anti-scientific movements grounded in religious dogma. Hence the pressing need for a pro-social humanist education that will lead to the creation of more welcoming communities, whose members display supportive, dignified and selfless attitudes, and prove themselves capable of more humane, balanced and harmonious interpersonal relationships. The focus on universal values generates pro-social behaviour, characterised by respect for, openness towards, and tolerance or even acceptance of other communities. When social consciousness and individual consciousness are clustered around spiritual values agreed upon through a reliance on the principles of universal human rights, rather than on a particular scripture, differences are no longer perceived as threatening and, hence, feared, but regarded as complementary features, and, therefore, valorised as enriching and worthy of being cherished.

This pro-social humanist education could be achieved through the timely introduction in the school curriculum of an integral study of religiosity, suitably prepared so as to meet the age-appropriateness standards. From the Myths and Legends module to be done in kindergarten and primary school using board books and picture books containing material related to various parts of the world, to a Comparative Mythology module in secondary school followed by the Philosophy of Religiosity module during the high-school years,

there will only be a small step to "a historic-religious creative hermeneutics" that, as Eliade claimed, can revigorate philosophical thought and stimulate a new phenomenology of the mind (*The Quest* 64). The creative expression of the young will be nurtured by their exposure to a diversity of mythological accounts, including but not limited to those pertaining to the religion in which they are raised; thus, they will not succumb to totalitarian modes of thinking, progressing instead towards the formation not only of a cultural consciousness, but of a critical reflexive consciousness as well. This will allow them to embrace their existence in the world of their peers and to strive for the realisation of their full potential, whilst generating a social climate characterised by openness, empathy and equity.

A harmonious microcosm, the ideal man, freed from the limitations imposed by dogmatic authority and specious superstitions, will employ rigorous reasoning, along with a flexibility of approach, in an attempt to advance the field of knowledge, as well as that of artistic creation, not only for his own sake, but for that of society at large. Although man is doomed to live under the permanent threat of annihilation, with death as the final prospect, the only – albeit terrifying – certainty, he can and will find his life's purpose by creating it. Accepting the painful truth of his own transience and the impetus given by the ensuing painful tension is more beneficial than embracing the comforting lie offered by one of the various supernatural accounts that promise delivery of suffering in life eternal. Human existence is precious because of its brevity and it is precisely its curtness that should urge one to waste it not on apocalyptic scenarios, but to treasure it instead, making it count in the here and now. This is the right attitude towards human's tragic existence and man can fully adopt it, becoming himself a demiurge by turning his dreams and ideals into objective realities through a reliance on his unique combination of cognitive skills, emotional intelligence and axiotropic potential.

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