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Summary of the Doctoral Thesis

SECULARIZATION AND THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM

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This work attempts to reply to the challenge released by Cuiianu, according to which *the curse of humankind is the fact that all its myths are equally true*. We consider that the challenge brought implicitly by this statement consists in the possibility to avoid the curse mentioned above.

The encounter of civilizations showed up the relativity of the spiritual references, therefore the individual had either to become the partisan of one of them, or to reject any reference to an external, meaning-generating authority, situation in which he either accepts the lack of meaning, or tries to set up by himself a meaning. Thus, our question shifts to *the problems of making up a community and the relation between the individual and this community*, to the way the collective identities make up and interact with each other.

The heterogeneous societies are set up by means of religion, the only one able to assure the communication between the two levels of existence, and this is way the first chapter (**1. CURRENT THEORIES ON RELIGION**) presents the influence of religion on the forming of the collective and the individual identity and their relationship. The first part of this chapter (*1.1 Approaches to the sacred*) presents the current theories on religion from the perspective of the sacred, following its role as a constitutive and cohesion-generating law, from the primitive communities to the present political communities, whose identity declares itself as an areligious one, or whose spiritual reference is so different from the others, that it was called a post-religious one. The sacred was a solution of approaching to religion both for sociology, that considered it a product of society, and for the perspectives that considered the sacred an original phenomenon.

The second part of the first chapter (*1.2 The secular religion*) follows the forms in which religion shows itself during the late modernity, an epoch of the individual.

A society set up by the individual is vulnerable to anarchy and terror, and cannot maintain without the support of a coercive or persuasive force. In order to surpass this blockage, one has to look into the connection between the individual, freedom, and the constitutive law of a community; this is why in the first part (*2.1 Aristotle and the tension between the individual and the community*) of the second chapter (**2.THE INDIVIDUAL**), we analysed the link between the individual and the *polis* as it is depicted by Aristotle in *Politics*. The short definition of the *polis*, given by him in the *Book II* of *Politics*, comprises all the tensions that assures the endurance of a community: „ that society is a city, and

contains in itself, if I may so speak, the end and perfection of government: first founded that we might live, but continued that we may live happily”. The term *life* refers to the instinctual life, and *the good life* refers to the life with reference to virtue. The two notions are in a coordination relation and are always present in the *polis*, whose role is to warrant to each generation the passing from the animal nature to virtue. In contrast with our modern model, the imperative of endurance manifests the tension existing in a society, proving that this has to be continuously re-set up, that a presumed social contract has to be continuously brought up to date, re-invented and re-signed both by the old members of the community and the new forming generations, this bringing up to date and re-invention supposing the existence of a dynamic relation with certain landmarks.

It was quite natural to Aristotle to talk about the autarchy of the *polis*, as long as he referred to the greek world, proposing an universal that rejected the barbarians. Christianity propose a model to a global scale and a transcendent reference, and therefore two new problems arise: the human identity, as well as the relationship of the individual with the world, are stated in different terms. This is the reason why the second part (**2.2 Christianity as the origin of the individual**) of the second chapter reports on Lous Dumont’s theory, according to which the individualism prepares its period of conquering the world by the most unwordly human type: the individual living out of this world, the Christian hermit. Lous Dumont approaches the tension between the individual and the community by means of two models: the traditional society and the modern society. Thus, there would be just two types of solving this tension, the holistic society and the individualistic one.

The third part (**2.3 Modern trajectories of the individual**) of the chapter on the individual approaches the setting up of the modern individual following two overlapped trajectories – political and philosophical - , the difference between them lying in the stress put upon the individual as the solution of certain problems of the political community (the political trajectory), or as the solution to the disenchantment of the world (the theoretical trajectory). The former one follows the rise of the individual as the solution to the conflict between the universal proposed by the Church and the one proposed by the secular power, and its outcome is the rise of the citizen and the human rights, a process associated to secularization conceived as the loss of the Church’s influence in society and in the making up of the individual identity. The latter follows the making up of the subject as the solution to

the disenchantment of the world, and the problems generated by this process. In the *enchanted*, traditional societies, tradition and religion assured the link of the human being with the super-human reality and the cosmos. The Enlightenment attempted to remake the unity of the world by means of reason, but this endeavour failed, because reason cannot bring into being the unity provided by the myths unless it becomes itself a myth.

For lack of any other ground, the modern subject must self-ground and thus there will always be a distance between the subject and the world turned into an object, so that any intersubjectivity is supposed to solve the next problem: how can a subject refer to another subject in a manner that avoids to turn it into an object? The approaches to this problem were offered either on the line of solving it (they were supposing a self-transparency of the subject – Husserl or the configuration of a subject not opposing to the *world* in a radical manner which implies the turning of other subjectivities into objects), or by the attempts of going out of the philosophy of the subject or the scheme subject-object (Heidegger, Habermas, Rorty, Lévinas).

The conflict between the collective identities is unavoidable because they dispute this unique available world, and each of them proposes other rules to regulate the conflict, so that it is the power again the one which makes distinctions among the disagreements.

The communities appear and last by means of some laws. Depending on the origin of these laws, the communities can be classified in *heterogeneous* and *homogeneous*. In the case of heterogeneous communities, the factor that established the constitutive norms belongs to a field of existence that differs from the field of community; in the case of homogeneous ones, the source of the constitutive norm is the community itself. In both cases, the state is the most important institution that organizes the relationship of the individual with the law, and this is why the first part of the third chapter refers to the relations between ***The Church and the State (3.1)***. This relations, as well as the attitude toward other collective identities, are determined by the attitude of the Christian toward the available world and they were analysed in the first section (***3.1.a The Christian and the natural world***) of this part. The second section (***3.1.b Types of relations between the Church and the State***) analyzes the four types of relations between Church and the State: the State is subordinated to the Church, the Church is subordinated to the State, both of them recognize the specificity of each other and support each other and, finally, the the fourth type – a relation of mutual indifference, though the State

is the main institution, which allows all the religions to express, as far as this does not disturb the public order. Secularization is the process of separation between the two authorities, both confrontation and collaboration between them being possible. The State, in the framework of the relations mentioned above, can be a competitor to the Church, or at least an equal partner, but according to a different reply, what we call today *state* would be the police. The third section (3.1.c) presents the *Mutual influences between the Church and the State*; in this perspective, Christianity would not be the denial of politics, but the initiator of a long transformation that generated a new form of government. The transition would have been from the government by conviction to the political government. During the contemporary period, the Church and the State are losing their importance, therefore the analysis of *The citizen's options after the separation between the Church and the State* (3.1.d) is more relevant to the relation among the collective identities than the analysis of the relations between the two institutions. The development of science and technics does not represent a solution and, despite the means it made available to the human being, it takes a risk to create an unhuman world. On the other side, the criticism made by the humanist thought, in the name of the individual, to the soviet or nazi totalitarisms, or to the one imposed by a consumption society, was justified, but Heidegger showed up the complicity between this individual and the metaphysics that allowed the objectification of the human being. This is why *the mass society*, the society of generalized communication we make our way to, could be considered as a chance to separate from the metaphysical individual. It is thus left to the future to show how a Christianity with a deep sense of the Embodiment would manifest, transcending the violence of metaphysics.

According to the premise of these considerations, the political power and the power that manages on the earth the spiritual realm are the elements of an irreducible binominal. Though, there still is the possibility for this binominal to be a false one, that one term determines completely the other one, so that secularization would exclusively be a process of demystification or, as it can be seen later, a process of replacing the type of mystification.

This hypothesis is presented in the second part of the chapter on **POWER AND COMMUNITY** (3.2 *The social conditioning of religion*), formulated on the basis of certain reserches that followed, for a period of centuries, the parish and electoral district registering, and explain the institutional changes which the cults and the types of ideology passed

through, changes that are subsequent to the process of de-christianization, depending on two stable factors of this period: the family type and the agrarian system. Such a hypothesis cannot be definitively rejected, but, even though one can accept, for the period after 1500, the thesis according to which the religious options are influenced by the anthropological structures, this does not necessarily imply that religion is socially conditioned.

The third part of this chapter (**3.3 *Power and individuality***) analyses the relation between the individual and the power that generates communities. Religion, seen as a curse, is a consequence of the terror of history; in order to protect ourselves from it, we need rules, though they impede creativity. Violence arises when we consider these rules as being different from a strategy of resistance against the terror of history, when we consider a means as a goal. The curse mentioned in the beginning of this work can be avoided when people are not so much scared of the terror of history, that they surrender completely to the rules that protect them, but they also do not ignore it, this ignorance implying the reduction of the world to a realm that can be controlled. If the terror of history shows itself as a power, the solution lies not in finding a counter-power, but in controlling this power. Another possible solution to the unavoidable conflict of religion would be the relativisation of the object in dispute (**3.4 *The relativity of the available world***). The up-to-now history of the emergence of religions and their confrontations allows us to say that the solution to the religious diversity is not to impose a privileged religion, „truer” than the others. The relativization of the reality that is accessible through our ordinary experience, based on the consistency of a much more complex reality, could be a solution. To place the differences in the virtuality of our descriptions is not more than a partial solution, as long as it depends on a symbolic system.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to **SECULARISATION (4.)**, and its first part (**4.1 *Secularization, a discussed and disputed process***) presents the disputes generated by this process. Secularization as the separation between the divine realm and the exclusively human one, between the glory and the human perishable condition, is announced even by *The New Testament*, when Christ affirms: „*My Kingdom is not from this world*”, or when He declares that the world of God and the world of Caesar cannot be reduced to one another.

The second part of the chapter treats **4.2 *The secularizing effect of Christianity on the other religions***. In this perspective, secularization would be synonymous to the denunciation made

by Christianity to the pagan sacred. The desacralization implied by secularization is not inconsistent with the religious attitude; on the contrary, it represents a refining of this attitude. The attempts to re-affirm the sacred character of the world aim at re-establishing the old magic-religious unity, that is no more possible after the extinction of the archaic traditional life, and thus their outcome is nothing else than a moving off from the divine, that is assimilated to an immanent reality. In other words, the human being is condemned to choose between God and the idols. To choose God would also mean the acknowledgement that He is inaccessible, and to choose the idols would mean to consider something accessible as divine. The Christian answer abandons this alternative, forcing the lack of reason, but not the lack of meaning: God is transcendent, but not inaccessible.

The third part of the chapter (**4.3 *The secularization caused by the Enlightenment***) refers to the secularization which we could call the classical one, as far as the separation from religion is the most influent sense among the meanings given to secularization. The secularization of the Enlightenment can be followed on two aspects: ***Majoratul gândirii (4.3.a)*** and ***The emancipation of society (4.3.b)***. The first one regards the individual process of going beyond the minor character of thought, as it is stated by Kant (*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! "Have courage to use your own understanding!"--that is the motto of enlightenment*). The Kantian conception on the Enlightenment establishes an instanță that validates the discourse of a thinker: the universal civil society.

Another meaning of secularization is connected to ***The contesting of the innovating status of modernity and Nietzsche's nihilism (4.4)***. Nietzsche does not use the term *secularization*, and modernity does not represent what is new, but the continuity with the options of the Platonic metaphysics. The shocking announcement of God's death, though, refers exactly to the loss of the influence of religion on people – a fact they are not aware of. The twilight of religion does not refer to the relation with a personal God, but with the God of philosophers and theologians, but the liberation is implied not by the denunciation of the failure of a concept regarding the divine, but by considering God's death „a colossal event”, a sign of a new stage in the world and human history. In the last part of this chapter **4.5 (*The***

individual as the result of secularization), secularization is seen as the process after which the individual is no more defined in comparison with a law, but is defined as the embodiment of a law. Religion was an important provider of collective identity, both in the traditional society and in the modern society, this is why the shift of the accent was considered an anti-religious movement. Christianity has a peculiar position in these relationships, because, on one hand, it contributed to the affirmation of the individual component and to the disenchantment of the world, and, on the other hand, it contributed to the homogenizing of the individualities. Though it was supposed to be a school of freedom, to adopt as the slogan the Kantian incentive, it was rather a school of obedience and standardization. By this, nevertheless, the novelty of Christianity – love as a personal relationship – starts blurring and, when the experience of some individuals and communities generate new organizing forms for the social life and new structuring forms for the identity based on the individual's autonomy, Christianity is to be treated in a similar way to other religions and ideologies – as a tutor of reason.

In **CONCLUSION**, the human being has a power out of his control, so that the problem of „the juridical and ethical control over this power much beyond the limit we have got accustomed until now” (Ratzinger). The formula, *beyond the limit we have got accustomed until now*, represents more than a simple specification – it is a sign of the novelty of the existing period: there is no more an unquestionable ground, given by itself, so that everything has to be specified; there is no more something able to control the human power and therefore this something has to be invented by the human being. How much can this control be exerted over the human being, according to which principles? Not even the direct negotiation in the life contexts can still offer an effective control over the questions as cloning.

The problem presented by Culiuanu was given by the individual's relation with the collective identity; it assures the cohesion of a community and the meaning of an individual's life, and also the difference from the others, who do not belong to „ours”. Modernity proposed a universal identity, with no one left outside. Nevertheless, in order to reach there, the individual has to give up on a part of his identity (the irrational, the imagination) and a part of his world (the traditional connections have to be abandoned), but this fact opens the way to de-humanization of the individual caught in an economic logic. This is why the

management of this tension should include the acceptance of the legacy of a traditional community. Rorty describes a society of a minimal collective coercion, where the universal structures are nothing else than transient stages, instruments which, in a certain moment, are useful to improve the human life, but disposable later. He exaggerates when he rejects any universalism and legacy, since the legacy of the traditional religions to us consists not only in differences, but also in a symbolism that promises to give us the access to universality or, at least, to an opening towards any human human cultures. This is not about a world-wide ethos similar to that one proposed by H. Küng, seen as an outcome of the collaboration among politicians, theologians and ethicists; this is about the rediscovering the solidarity of the people starting from the solidarity between the human being and the cosmos. If the integral hermeneutics proposed by Eliade is difficult to achieve, this solidarity could be attained by starting from from the contemporary individual's concerns for authenticity, harmony, bioethics and ecology.