

# **The Labor of Transferring from Modernity to Post-Modernity a Landmark Theological Discipline in Orthodoxy: Pastoral Theology**

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## **Fundamental Theology A “Science of Credibility” of Faith Pastoral Theology**

### **A “Science of Credibilization” in the Public Space of the Ascent to God About the “Cultural Dignity” of a Life Lived with God**

**I**N THE THEOLOGICAL education after the Second World War, Theology—being aware of the mutations recorded at the “recipient” level (which were radical, profound and predictably with long-term effects)—accepted the metamorphoses claimed by Apologetics (which was at risk of abolition, had it not undergone a reform), including changing its name to Fundamental Theology. The changes affected not only its name, but also the content, working method and identity of the discipline. Furthermore, they also clarified the distinctions between it and Pastoral Theology, as well as the “bridges” of communication. Despite self-reformation, Fundamental Theology has failed in its (hesitantly) stated ideal<sup>1</sup> of converting.<sup>2</sup>

Another subsequent stage of total crystallization of identities is one when Fundamental Theology redefined itself through the privileged instrument that defines it: the exclusive use of reason to be credible for and acceptable to those who are content with (and are reduced only to) this instrument for the analysis of reality (but only after the faith has already been “acquired”). It is therefore not a simple “philosophy of faith,” as it is not centered on the subjectivity of the philosopher, but on the certainty from the heart of the faithful analyst, with all speculative approaches starting from a consistent, persistent and definitive conviction.

It aims to demonstrate the correctness of the choice of faith from a human perspective. Pastoral Theology, on the other hand, is defined precisely by the emphasis on a weighted and not exclusive use of reason, being aware that faith always has an emotional

efficient, born after a “meeting” with Christ, a meeting that reorients the whole path of life. Pastoral Theology wants to overwhelm through the outpouring into the world of a transfiguring experience of the encounter with God, of a real contact with the divine, of a continuous “sensing” of God. It seeks to continually work with this experience for its inception and perpetuation in the lives of others.<sup>3</sup>

## **A Modernist Tendency of Some Pastoralists: Towards a Sacred “Pantology”?**

### **The Sectors of Interest of Pastoral Theology, Its Adjacent Fields and the Dialogue with the Bordering Theological Sciences: The Necessary “Transversal Skills” of the Shepherd of Souls**

**C**ONTEMPORARY PASTORALISTS emphasize one aspect: Pastoral Theology is not just a “discipline” among other theological disciplines, but is a dimension of theology in general, each path of theological research having a pastoral applicability. On the other hand, as an autonomous discipline, it has a content and some obligatory thematic areas, which multiply under scrutiny, being “confiscated” at first glance from other disciplines: sectology (which for a long time was part of Missiology/Missionary Guidelines), History and Philosophy of Religions (more precisely, Christian Theology of Religions) because in the parish (and especially in the diaspora) the faithful come to interact with exponents of other religions (Muslims, Buddhists, etc.); ecumenism (since they interrelate daily with Christians of other denominations in both urban areas and villages); the psychology of religion (which provides pastoral theology with a platform able to identify patterns of behavior and differentiated reactions to religious offers, group dynamics and psychological techniques) with religious psychopathology (because often believers with mental problems seek therapy “in” the Church, not outside it); philosophy (philosophical thinking goes in tandem with the theological one: it produces language, methods and analyses that are indispensable to pastoral thinking, outside of which, if it were situated, it would be sterilized; philosophy represents the highest expression of the cultural formation of contemporary individuals; it determines the orientation of culture; pastoral theology is validated and capitalized in direct confrontation with contemporary philosophy),<sup>4</sup> cultural anthropology and sociology (which professionally delineates the real economic/social/cultural conditions in which man lives, identifying the dominant instances: progressive secularization, increasingly differentiated structure of society, the hegemony of utilitarianism, the growing emancipation, the discrediting of ideologies, the atomization of the religious phenomenon, etc.).

Only at first glance do we witness a “rapture,” because the method of research, the reason for the approach, the purpose and the vision are different in pastoral theology: they fall within its competence insofar as the priest confronts them in his territory, in his own area of pastoral responsibility. The discipline broadening process does not lose sight of its specificity. In addition, as stated, Pastoral Theology prioritizes its covered topics, it is contextual and focused on a certain cultural space where the future priest will act.<sup>5</sup>

## The Auspicious Context of Affirmation (and the Urgency of Manifestation) for the New Identity of Pastoral Theology “Ritorno del Sacro” and the Chaotic and Confusing Postmodern “Resacralization,” a Sign of Religious Vitality Despite the Current Pro- Secularizing and Transcendent Horizons Amputated European Climate The Collapse of an Enlightenment Thesis, That of the Irreversibility of Secularization

**T**HE FIRST observation of a demanding and nuanced pastoralist while reading contemporary realities concerns the voluptuous survival of the religious in the contemporary self-sufficient and late-modern immanent culture. In this context, it is good to accurately identify the features of a disintegrating society (resulting from the abandonment of moral rigors and the axiological confusion specific to our age) and to ask to what extent secularism (as a theoretical analytical reflection on secularization) can be an indisputable paradigm in reading contemporary social life. There later emerged an irreparable loss in relation to the pre-industrial era: the collective psychological comfort which was defining for the pre-modern period and was “delivered” to the public space by religion (which had an indisputable dominant authority) was replaced by a disarming collective mental vulnerability, a clear result of the expulsion of religion from the public space, the “work” of modernity.

The radical anthropocentrism specific to modernity brought the world to its knees under the (disguised) terror of an angry and totalitarian rationalization, which led to the complete loss of control over the collective emotions, which remained at the unsated disposal of an invertebrate “sacred” characterized by frivolity, incoherence, an outburst of the decayed human unconscious represented by the new religious movements (the only ones that acted on this existential and cultural level, in fierce competition with the traditional, official, historical churches whose credibility was constantly eroded, being permanently discredited, themselves slipping into rationalization, emphasizing the doctrinal, rational part to the detriment of inner feelings, mystical life, spiritual experiences). Therefore, we rhetorically ask ourselves—together with the great missionary Ion Bria—whether the new religious movements constitute a revitalization of religion or a trivialization of it?

The pastoral-theological concept of “cyclical re-sacralization” expresses scientifically the very credible hypothesis that throughout history there have always been increases and decreases in society’s emphasis on religion: the historical relevance of the sacred to society has not been uniform, monotonous and without outbursts, but experienced variations in intensity. The pastoral conclusion generating optimism is therefore that—in this situation, these being the data of the problem—secularization itself can be read as a failed attempt to cut off the metaphysical depths of existence.<sup>6</sup> The postmodern and post-Enlightenment society will return with interest to Religion, albeit showing more appetite for its therapeutic potential at the psychic level and for the collective conscious and subconscious, than for the eschatological soteriology it proposes.

## Possible Pastoral Solutions: Axiological Refocusing Through Theocentrism

**T**HE POST-ENLIGHTENMENT observation is that religion possesses some balancing resources for the individual psyche and for the collective unconscious that so far have been counterproductively ignored and insufficiently investigated by the academia. This openness to the explicit or hidden potential of religion must be “exploited” from a pastoral point of view: we must come forward into the public space with a religious to meet exactly the existing appetite: a religion with a great balancing, fulfilling, and mentally comforting force.

We must emphasize the spiritual, inner dimension of the mystical experience of religion. Orthodoxy works with an unseen, supernatural, therapeutic energy, the energy of grace that is completely ignored by modernity. We live in an age where there is a great openness to experiencing this energy. In today’s post-Enlightenment era, religion slowly but surely draws the conclusions over the monopoly period of secularization of the social order, and argues its belief that only by re-enacting it into the construction of the social order can we achieve the desired climate of harmony, peace and collective psychic comfort, revealing the truth about secularization: a failed experiment! Orthodoxy implicitly comes with an offer of axiological refocusing through theocentrism: placing God at the center of existence, the only Being who can imbue human existence with meaning. The severing of the transcendent layer of the world has led to meaninglessness, axiological confusion, ontological inconsistency, collective mental discomfort, and the vulnerability of individuals and society at all existential levels. The time has come for a historical correction through the conscious option for resacralization.

New Age—a pathological and opportunistic “resacralization.” In the new context, Pastoral Theology must not be confiscated by the past and “burdened” by the challenges of the present. Instead, it must be prophetic, offering a perspective, future-oriented, prophylactic, i.e. able to avert and defuse in advance the harmfulness of anti-Christian currents in the future. In this respect, it cannot be indifferent to the new religiosity emerging in the Euro-Atlantic space, compellingly and mysteriously entitled “New Age.” The postmodern reality that New Age speculates in its own interest is the “subjectivization” of faith, the option for an individualistic, psychological religiosity, i.e. the uncontrolled spread of the belief that in matters of faith everyone is free to operate a selection—having personal sympathies as criterion—to “doctrinal” beliefs, and this while being presented with the world panorama of religions, accessible thanks to globalization and the internet. The “subjectivization of faith” obviously constitutes the religious variant of the postmodern phenomenon of universal relativization. We have therefore witnessed a slow and progressive loss of legitimacy and plausibility of the ecclesial institution throughout the Euro-Atlantic space and a crisis of confessionalism in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup>

The natural pastoral reaction: the official churches must no longer advocate for a tense, rigid, inflexible, opposed, antithetical, polemical confessionalism, because it is not attractive to believers and cannot be a social binder (otherwise it will be brittle). The sensible pastoral strategy is to make believers aware of the fact that religion is an element that gives you a

firm identity in a world of dissolutions, precarious affiliations, uprooting and loss of identity. This is done not by contrasting it with other identities, but by awareness and increasing inner motivation. The effect will be to increase the public plausibility of the interventions and positions of the ecclesial establishment (and not to dilute its presence). It should not be overlooked that traditional churches in Europe are still the beneficiaries of a consistent public consideration, despite modernity eroding their credibility. The pastoral path is the inner “differentiation” in the community to the detriment of homogeneity, proclaiming the parish as a “strong” resource for community integration (and for the attenuation of tendencies to subjectivize the faith).

Sects and new religious movements: a failed attempt to revitalize religion by the trivialization of the religious (in general); a “preface” of de-Christianization? At the end of modernity, certain sects and religious movements with extremist outbursts compromised themselves, at the same time discrediting the general idea of “religion” in the collective mind. The new religious movements sought to meet the existing appetite for direct spiritual experience, and did so by proposing “meditative techniques” as an expression of their own process of searching, experimenting, verifying the “truth.” Many new religious movements became very attractive through their very emphasis on inner feelings, emotional experiences, “experiences” of the individual, to the detriment of doctrine and intellectual reflection.

The hyper-rationalist extreme (specific to modernity) gave birth to another extremism, hyper-emotionalist and oversentimental. One excess was answered with another: extremism gave birth to extremism. The Church has the wonderful task of promoting the balance between reason and feeling, between mind and heart, between psyche and spirit, between intellectual and spiritual life, and it does so by proposing to all the path of hesychasm embodied in urbanity.<sup>9</sup>

## **A Theological Science of the Present**

### **Complementary Pastoral Tools for Communicating the Message of Christ to the Contemporary People**

**T**HE CHURCH knows how to see beyond the drama of contemporary man, towards the destiny of man in God’s plan. Awareness of the cultural dimension of human existence<sup>10</sup> gives rise to a special attention to this new “field” of pastoral theology. Anchored in Christian anthropology and ethics, the pastoral of culture desires to outline a “Christian cultural project” that will give the chance of Christ—the Redeemer of man, the Center of the cosmos and history—to renew the whole life of people, opening to His saving power widespread domains of culture. The pastoral of culture is applied to concrete situations, in order to open them to the universal message of the Gospel. Through pastoral care, the Church is looking for the most appropriate and effective ways of communicating the gospel message to the people of our time, combining useful “tools”: renewal of humanity, Christian testimony, explicit proclamation, adhesion of the heart, communion, and apostolic initiatives. These elements may appear contrasting and even mutually exclusive, but in reality they are complementary and mutually enriching.<sup>11</sup>

The absolute priority: converting the heart and exercising the discernment of the believers: promoting a faith with “relevance” and cultural-existential amplitude. The living conditions of contemporary man have changed so much that we are talking about a new era of human history, the post-industrial era (“post-modern,” “computerized,” “post-ideological,” etc.), when the Church discovers another “kairos,” another favorable time for a new impetus of the mission, in which new aspects of culture constitute challenges. In today’s dominant cultural situation across different countries of the world, subjectivism predominates as a measure and criterion of life. Positivist proposals regarding the progress of science and technology are being discussed. After the spectacular failure of atheist collectivist Marxism-Leninism,<sup>12</sup> the rival ideology of liberalism shows its inability to bring about the happiness of mankind. A practically anthropocentric atheism, an ostentatious religious indifference, an invasive hedonistic materialism marginalizes the faith, which becomes more and more fragile, without cultural consistency or relevance, within a “predominantly scientific and technical” culture.<sup>13</sup>

By affirming the dignity of the human person, the Church strives to purge social life of many plagues, such as: violence, social injustices, abuses suffered by street children, drug trafficking, etc. In this context, and affirming its preferential love for the poor and marginalized, the Church has the duty to promote a culture of solidarity at all levels of social life: government institutions, public institutions and private organizations. Declaring itself in favor of the unity between people, societies and nations, it will be associated with the efforts of people eager to create an increasingly dignified world. Doing so will help to “reduce the negative effects of globalization, such as the domination of the strong over the weak (especially in the economic field) and the loss of the local cultural values in favor of a misunderstood homogenization.”<sup>14</sup> Today, endemic religious ignorance fuels the various forms of syncretism between the old disappeared cultures, new religious movements and the Christian faith. These social, economic, cultural and moral evils serve as a justification for the new syncretistic ideologies, whose circles are actively present in different countries. The Church proposes to accept these challenges, especially among the poorest, to promote social justice and to Christianize traditional cultures as well as the new cultures that emerge from the great metropolises.<sup>15</sup>

## Outstanding Pastoral Demands Proclaimed by Pastoral Theology

**A** FIRST REQUIREMENT would be the firm choice for transparency in doctrine and increasing the expressiveness of language. Today, people want transparency in doctrine. While certain experiences are vital in determining readiness to “listen,” the hunger for significance of people in the contemporary world must be conjugated with a gradual presentation of Christian doctrine. It is even necessary to have a Christian “initiation plan” that favors a staged evolution towards a Christian vision of life. Post-modern society is one of “language crisis”; it is characterized by the inability of social culture to communicate through words, to use meaningful words, witnessing an erosion of language

(including liturgical language). The words have lost their fidelity to the reality which they refer to. There are no more words to fertilize reality. This is because words, through a long and irresponsible use, are exhausted, drained of their evocative force. In pastoral contacts and encounters, the priest must be aware of this. He must carefully select his words so that they favor communication and not hinder it.<sup>16</sup>

Increasing the impact of ecclesiastic language. We, the leaders of the faith, must be very considerate towards the language we use to spread the faith, to proclaim our beliefs, to communicate to others the inner states of grace. Often the language we use is insufficiently communicative, uncorrelated with today's cultural realities, split from the people's daily concerns; as a result, it is imperative to update the language, correct very old, obsolete or even wrong terms in the religious books, and eliminate those that have a different meaning today than in the past; on the other hand, a careful selection of the terms used during the sermon is necessary, avoiding both the excess of neologisms and the rancid, flat, irrelevant language with reduced communication potential.<sup>17</sup>

The fracture between today's culture and the language of the Church leads to a lack of (or a very limited) reflection of religious realities in the media and in the world of the arts (theater, television, cinema and literature). There is a discrepancy, a rift between today's culture and the language of the Church. This is one of the reasons why theology is closed in on itself, it lacks the impact it should have on contemporary culture.<sup>18</sup> A firm movement is needed for Theology to become a public "science" communicable to all. Truths that can be communicated in plain language must be communicated so; it is mandatory to communicate clear things in a clear manner, without superfluous artifice. Only for the truths of great finesse, for subtle nuances, it is necessary to intervene with a more sophisticated, complex language, resorting to neologisms. Understanding the Christian message is greatly hampered by the recourse to pretentious language, crammed with "technical" terms. Let us not forget that the Savior never claimed to be acknowledged by His contemporaries as part of the "intellectual elite" of the time. However, no one today can deny that He had a culturally gigantic stature.<sup>19</sup>

We are obliged to unite the mind with the heart, to identify the mind as the gateway to the heart. We have the duty to communicate the experience of meeting God through preaching (kerygma) and catechesis (teaching, critical reflection). Pastoral care raises not only the issue of theological language (notions, definitions, style, biblical references, symbols) and terms used during liturgy (and other public services), but also the issue of knowing, understanding, and communicating God with objectivity and competence. The preaching priest must beware of impromptu speeches, of linguistically corrupt words, of terms exhausted of any cultural relevance, of "wooden language." What word must the priest use? Not a superficial one, not a pompous language, but a word full of spirit, full of wisdom and intelligence. He must not speak in an artificial style, in a sophisticated way, but with deep ideas and from his own experience, because only in this way will language have substance. Then it will enrich consciences.

*The idle word is demagoguery. Why is the Liturgy not celebrated in the mind? Because the liturgical word is a work. The church has remained the only repository of true words, of words that really name, that work, that can be spoken out loud.<sup>20</sup>*

An elementary pastoral duty is the meaningful communication, explicit and without confusing references (with detours), of the Christian message. Another fundamental requirement would be the recognition of the role of reason as a (possible) instrument of access to faith. A renewed Apologetics is needed, which considers the latest positions of Fundamental Theology. The role of reason as a strategy for the access to faith has long been unjustifiably neglected. It is possible to identify new paths that lead to faith, starting from the daily life and experience of the people, in a language that can greatly communicate with today's man.<sup>21</sup> The responsibility for the proclamation of God by priests in our world is accompanied by a fear: it is no longer the fear of punishment (and imprisonment) by communist regimes, but the fear of failing to reach the hearts of the people, many of them being very distant to the Church.<sup>22</sup> To reach their hearts, it is first necessary to conquer their minds,<sup>23</sup> for the mind is the gateway to the heart. And the instrument that enters the human mind is reason; it is a sword that, if properly handled, opens the way to the heart.

### **Conclusions: The Church Must Provide Tools for Criticism and Discernment**

**T**HIS MEANS theological and spiritual reflection on the problems of today's people (such as, for example, on the models of urban family life proposed by the media). Believers must be helped to practice critical thinking, which selectively picks up messages from the media. Our culture (more precisely the mass sub-culture transmitted through the media) shows signs of the dehumanization of human goals and aspirations, manifesting a subtle opposition to religion, not a militant one. It subtly erodes Christian values, discrediting them, mocking them, discreetly ridiculing them, and not "wrestling" with them, because following an honest rational confrontation, it would lose the fight. And the theological science that has the duty to sum up all these reflections and to find the ideal way to apply them is Pastoral Theology; it managed the sensitive transition from modernity to postmodernity, paying attention to local specificities and endemic accents.



#### **Notes**

1. Millions of readers have read the treatises on Fundamental Theology (and the previous ones on Apologetics) without converting. Therefore the discipline could be accused of "infidelity" towards its own goals, and failure. Its approach and perspectives were only speculative, rational-cerebral, while the acceptance of the faith proved to be a further existential, religious, personal act with emotional intensity, the product of an inner adhesion; this acceptance of the faith does not come so much after reading scientific books and articles,



but after an innovative and transfiguring encounter. And this type of destiny-changing encounter is facilitated only by Pastoral Theology and Missiology (not as sciences, but through their practical correlation: pastoral care and missionary activity).

2. In another stage of awareness regarding its own identities, Fundamental Theology reformulated its objectives: faithful to its origins (Apologetics), it defined itself as a coherent, practiced and disciplined system of defense against opponents; for centuries it organized “crusades,” the polemical tone defining it ontologically. This aggressive tone survived in sectology and was “transported” into Pastoral Theology in the chapters of “defending the herd” from harmful intrusions. So it was a negative science, “anti,” “against,” which needed an opponent in order to exist. This spirit was contagious, it survived in Pastoral Theology, sometimes putting it on a false track of “war” with imaginary opponents, not present in the territory. The essence of the Pastoral responsibilities is not aggression (not even oriented towards the universe of the unconverted), not only the “keeping” of the parishioners in the unity of the flock, but towards their spiritual “growth,” inner renewal towards the “stature of the perfect man,” that is, their deification.
3. Fundamental theology is thus a science of credibility of faith (trying to prove that the Christian religion deserves to be believed); Pastoral Theology is a science of the veracity of living with God and of guaranteeing an infinite mystical ascent of the believer towards God, with immanent beginnings and eschatological extension (trying to demonstrate that the Christian religion in general and Orthodoxy in particular deserve to be lived, not just believed). Pastoral Theology is a continuous invitation to the sacramental universe, not a limitation to the rational-cerebral one. From these two different visions and identities also emerge different working methods.
4. We mention the reference episodes from the relatively recent reality: Karl Rahner and the existentialism of Heidegger, Metz and the Marxism promoted by Bloch; a certain confrontation is still insufficiently practiced, the one against nihilistic thinking (nihilism, which has progressively infiltrated large stretches of thought, determining the forms of contemporary atheism) underlies the contemporary conception about the world and life (“Weltanschauungen”). The philosopher (and theologian) Nicolae Turcan from Cluj continuously practices this confrontation.
5. Pastoral theology: a science that has as its objective and subject of analysis the correct Church–world relationship. Since the faithful in the Church are also the “citizens” of the State, Pastoral Theology cannot evade this relation. That is why it constantly reminds that history is part of eternity, that time is a segment of eternity, that the meaning of history is not inside it, but beyond it; that without transcendence the temporal is suffocating and meaningless; through pastoral care, the Church permanently verifies the loyalty to its mission; history is the space in which God intervenes and the place of becoming—with eternal consequences—for man.
6. We can also notice that secularization accepted the survival of a strictly philosophical, rational-cerebral intellectual interest in religion (accepted the strictly phenomenological, empirical-descriptive perspectives on religion, reducing it to the status of a simple anthropomorphic cultural product), but rejecting it as an inner attitude, outlook on life, existential relation; “the relationship with God,” the connection with Him, the knowledge of Him, is, however, the “vocation” par excellence of Religion, and ignoring this fact is a disguised attempt to abolish it. Defining for secularization are also some discrete absolutisms, camouflaged totalitarianisms: it was the promoter of a hidden but radical militancy;

of an intolerance cut out of the world of pathological religion (therefore it was metaphorically claimed that secularization was a “religious” act originally, but anti-religious as a result), operating the aggressive substitution of theocentrism with anthropocentrism; it had an implied monopoly over the social and institutional order in society; it was a desperate attempt to continually ignore man’s ultimate destiny, thus dissolving any transcendent horizon and stubbornly promoting an autonomous culture opposed to the pre-existing theonomy. These limited (and limiting) absolutisms and visions must be debunked, since they became sources of collective anxiety and destructuring. Secularization has criticized the “absolutism” of religion to secretly replace it with another of its own, a “source of rotteness.” Only religion, which works with the heavenly “Absolute,” with firm values, with an imperishable axiological universe, can convey “incorruptible” concepts.

7. Some pastoralists considered this a postmodern retort to secularization, a form of “resacralization” specific to the times that “exhausted” the experience of secularization. It is not a “religion” in the classical, traditional, consecrated sense, but rather an attitude, a different way of relating to the sacred: a new and seductive way of thinking that is spreading. So we considered a “pastoral autopsy” of the New Age phenomenon mandatory; is it the “superlative religious,” as it self-proclaims, the maximum achievable in religious matters? What is certain is that the New Age is a new way of living, “consuming” and proclaiming religion, marked by the spirit of today’s era: the dictatorship of utilitarianism, a “savior” message which superficially proposes a cure to world’s contemporary “crises,” but its intervention seems to only be epidermal; it is an explicit promoter of syncretistic individualism. It is “thesis,” and therefore ideological, its “central” theses being “the formation of a new man,” specific to the postmodern cultural context. Its strong point, however, is the emphasis on “mystical experience,” on “inner feelings,” but feelings “piloted” only by a naive, invertebrate and disoriented subjectivism. From a pastoral perspective, the New Age can be described as a religion of naive optimism, with a frivolous (and—the future will prove—unconfirmed) claim to replace all other religions. Aldo Natale Terrin, *New Age: La religiosità del postmoderno* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2000).
8. In the current confusion of religious offerings, the Church can propose a spirituality focused on the meaning of life, on man’s appetite for happiness, and only secondarily on “objective religious truth,” on a “doctrinal purity” that can be perceived as repressive (before having a consistent spiritual experience). From a pastoral-missionary point of view, this shift in emphasis (and interest) is not anti-religious, but only a step in the direction of man’s total return to God: a search for the meaning of life will inevitably lead the person concerned to discover the eschatological meaning of existence (if the quest and search are sincere and profound).
9. For a demanding pastoralist, terminological clarification (“churches,” “sects,” new religious movements) and professional classification (sects, gnosés and “psi” groups) are necessary. It is very important for Pastoral Theology to analyze and inventory the reasons for the attractiveness of the new religious movements, making a “spiritual evaluation” of the new religious movements: sometimes they are authentic fraternal communities; they often emphasize the discovery of the inner dimension of faith. However, we emphasize that they remain an objectionable and ambiguous search for God: most often, followers discover them too late as exclusivist and depersonalizing communities, where authoritarianism is practiced and the (hysterical) exaltation of the figure of a founder is achieved. What is certain is that they had a devastating effect on the perception of religion in postmodern

- culture, globalization having not only the effect of favoring their dissemination, but also giving worldwide visibility to the religious discrediting operated by them.
10. "Culture is an adornment for the happy and a refuge for the unhappy," said Democritus. "Culture determines our vision of the world," said F. Mayor. "Culture creates us; but we, in turn, create culture, through our double belonging, to a specific social space and to a certain historical epoch," concludes Achiel Peelman. Culture is a creative way of "being" (anthropos), of responding to the daily needs of an organized community (ethnos), together with a common history, understood as a life experience (chronos), according to a shared framework of environmental references and common values (oikos). Apud Teofil Tia, *Descr estinare: O "apocalips " a culturii* (Alba Iulia: Reintregirea, 2009), 91.
  11. Authentic pastoral care allows the community to receive, celebrate, live and express its faith in its own culture, in communion with the universal Church. At the same time it expresses the absolutely new character of the revelation in Jesus Christ and the exigency for conversion that springs from the encounter with the one Savior: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). This shows the importance of the mission specific to theologians and pastors in terms of pastoral discernment and the correct understanding of the faith. The sympathy with which they must approach cultures, using the concepts and languages of different peoples, the "idioms" of different local groups, to express the message of Christ, cannot rule out an engaging discernment in the face of great and serious problems that arise from an objective analysis of contemporary cultural phenomena, whose weight cannot be ignored by pastors, since it is about the conversion of people and, through them, of cultures, that is, the Christianization of the ethos of people. Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura, *Per una pastorale della cultura* (Rome: Citt  del Vaticano, 1999), 19.
  12. Post-communism. Countries that have regained their freedom, long suffocated by the atheist Marxism-Leninism in power for decades, remain with the consequences of the violent "deculturalization" of the Christian faith: artificial relations between people, the collective subconscious denial of the creature's dependence on the Creator, the dogmatic truths of Christian revelation and its ethics are fought against. This violent "deculturalization" was followed by a radical questioning of core Christian values. The reductionist effects of secularism, which spread to Western Europe in the late 1960s, are consolidating the confusion of Central and Eastern European countries. *Ibid.*, 13.
  13. In reality, the judgment criteria assumed by believers are often presented in the context of a very de-Christianized culture, foreign or even opposed to the gospel. Adaptation to cultures requires a prior conversion of the heart and, if necessary, ruptures with ancestral customs incompatible with the Christian faith. This requires serious theological, historical, and cultural instruction and sound judgment, to discern between what is necessary or useful, and what is useless or dangerous to the faith. *Ibid.*, 14.
  14. But it is not enough to say one thing to also be understood. When the recipient was in perfect synchrony with the message, due to his traditional culture permeated by Christianity, and at the same time willing to accept the message due to the favorable socio-cultural context, he could receive and understand what was proposed to him. In the current cultural plurality, the message must be correlated with the cultural context in which it must be accepted. The success of this action requires continual discernment, in the light of the Holy Spirit, invoked in prayer. It is also required, through adequate preparation and proper instruction, to use simple pastoral means—homilies, catechesis, popular pilgrimages, evangelistic schools—correlated with means. *Ibid.*

15. The new challenges that “inculturated pastoralism” must accept, starting from the cultures shaped by two millennia of Christianity and from the pillars identified in the heart of the new cultural areopagus of our time, require a renewed presentation of the Christian message, anchored in the living tradition of the Church and supported by the testimony of the authentic life of Christian communities. To filter, to think of everything new through the prism of the Gospel, proposed in a renewed and convincing way, becomes a main requirement in pastoral care. The pastoral of culture has as its main objective the insertion of the vital lymph of the Gospel in cultures, to renew from within and transform in the light of revelation the perspective of society on man, a vision that shapes cultures, the conception of man and woman, of family and education, of school and university, of freedom and truth, of work and “fun,” of economics and society, of science and arts.” *Ibid.*
16. The priest must avoid both verbal clichés and archaisms, as well as neologisms. Or, if he uses archaisms and neologisms to give flavor and originality to his own expression, to permanently parallel them in speech with clear and expressive synonyms for the interlocutors. Sometimes, a spiritually immature priest wants to exhibit the fact that he is on another intellectual “level” compared to his parishioners by resorting excessively to neologisms. It is a harmful and offensive practice for the faithful, as a man’s inner nobility is not given by the accumulated anniversary diplomas, but by his inner wealth and his power to love: “A simple peasant who thinks disinterestedly of the good of his village is also part of the national elite!”—N. Iorga warned us.
17. † Gurie Georgiu, “Urgențe pastorale în confruntarea cu fenomenul expansiunii grupărilor neoprotestante din România: 7 pași spre recuperarea ‘Ortodoxiei integrale,’” *Ortodoxia* (Bucharest), 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 4, 4 (2012): 17.
18. The term “culture” has a whole range of meanings: on the one hand, when we refer to the “culture” of an individual, we understand his expression, his way of thinking, his style of communication; on the other hand, when we speak of the “culture of a nation” we refer to its specific lifestyle, heritage, dominant habits, etc.
19. The Savior: the leading exponent of the “intellectual life” of His time? Some priests want to be considered by their parishioners personalities of great intellectual caliber, to have their great cultural-intellectual authority recognized. That is why they practiced ever since school at a cerebral-rational level, but forgot the emotional load of the rational. Without realizing it, they become the promoters of an arid, barren rationality, which does not lead to the heart, but is locked in the brain, forgetting that the Savior did not want to be a leading exponent of the intellectual life of his time. And in spite of this, His stature was gigantic, and the effects of His activity in time, unmatched. Where did His power hide? Precisely in the emphasis on the mystical-emotional component of His message. He had a critical attitude toward the “intellectuals” of his day (scholars and Pharisees) because he sensed the rift between word and deed, that is, their hypocrisy.
20. “De la letargie la liturghie: Un dialog despre normalitate: Interviu realizat de Paul Siladi cu Mircea Platon,” *Tabor* (Cluj-Napoca) 3, 1 (2009): 92.
21. Regarding apologetics, it is necessary to emphasize the new, positive relationship between science and faith, outlined in recent decades (paradigmatic is the case of Galileo Galilei). The old tensions between faith and science had their roots in an overly pragmatic and empirical model of science. But today, within the scientific methodology, an extremely “humble” epistemology has developed, which no longer has the “visible” as the only criterion of truth. Old scientism is no longer in vogue (i.e. the arrogant claim that science will be able

to solve all man's problems discredited itself, as much as atheism). The world is aware that there are many things we do not know ("There is something above us..."). Michael Paul Gallagher, "Parlare di Dio nella cultura di oggi," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 145, 2, 3455 (1994): 448.

22. It is, in fact, a contemporary version of the parable of the sower, with three harmful factors that hinder the germination of the seed: irresistible forces that remove the word, the land dried out by heat and the countless distractions that petrify the "heart" of man and generate a superficial thought, away from the Christian "path." The lifestyle of modern man (fascinated by TV) is an "incarcerated" one, sterilizing in man the disposition to faith. Just as no intelligent human being is free from prejudice, so at the collective level, the culture in which we live may predispose ("to") or impede access to the knowledge of God. The parable of the sower speaks of different degrees of soil fertility, which condition the "rich harvest." *Ibid.*, 442.
23. Today, many Christians are skeptical towards reason, believing that the gospel should be proclaimed as "pure faith," which must be accepted on the basis of God's word alone, and by virtue of a strong and peaceful religious experience to which the follower is lead. It must be emphasized that this irrationalist and fideist attitude is dangerous. As has been rightly pointed out, "the sleep of reason produces monsters," and despised reason sooner or later takes its revenge. In fact, adherence to the Gospel is by no means the decision made at the end of a purely rational reasoning: it is therefore not based on human reason, but on the Word of God. However, in order to be solid, beyond God's grace, this decision cannot but have a rational foundation—that is, serious and compelling reasons to believe—not as causes of the act of faith, but as an aid to fulfilling it. "Editoriale: Inculturare il Vangelo nell'Europa di oggi," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 143, 1, 3398 (1992): 137.

### Abstract

#### The Labor of Transferring from Modernity to Post-Modernity a Landmark Theological Discipline in Orthodoxy: Pastoral Theology

The current study attempts to record the metamorphoses of Pastoral Theology, a discipline pertaining to theological education. This discipline must take into consideration all the cultural fluctuations of an era. It is a science connected to Apologetics and Missiology, but the reality in the field forces it to be much more attentive than all the others to the variations in the territory. We are attempting to outline the challenges it encounters while fulfilling its duty, especially during the sensitive times of transition from modernity to postmodernity, when its adaptation potential was greatly put to the test, since the new mutations were unpredictable and radical.

### Keywords

cultural dignity of religion, transversal pastoral skills, postmodern resacralization, invertebrate and frivolous sacred, terminological fertilization of reality