

Recovering Life in a Post-Pandemic Era

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THE TOPIC of life and death has fascinated humanity since creation.¹ This was the impetus for man to turn away from God, because he wanted a quick touch of immortality and a way out of the fear of death. Death has always been the anguish of humanity, because we have never known how to perceive it as a transition to eternity. We felt death as the greatest enemy of man and creation because we did not have the belief that death is in fact an angel, a call to true life with God and not a prolongation of suffering here on earth.

Man has always lived in fear of sickness and suffering, although in all of them God has shown his own pedagogy, they being in the divine eyes the sign of eternity. When these divine eyes were no longer transparent to man, then fear and anguish appeared, a permanent fear of the unknown. Or this unknown is considered by God to be the expectation of eternity. That is why Christ said in the Last Supper prayer: “this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn. 17:3). An ascent into the mystery of God, into the ignorance we will know forever. In other words, there is no fear of death because through it we enter into the eternity of knowing and loving God.

But man, being a body as such, being doubtful, does not have the depth of faith and does not understand the mystery of knowing in ignorance of God. Eternity is in fact the mystery of the knowledge of God’s apophatism. What we dogmatically know now about God is so little that we can speak of ignorance rather than dogmatic knowledge of Him. Dogmatics is at most a set of guidelines, which will then continue in eternity, because “to know You the true God” is a process of eternity. Man’s return to this essential knowledge means coming out of myths, from “the spell of the world.”²

The knowledge of the divine eternity does not only mean the knowledge-ignorance of divine being, which in any case cannot be known completely, but is also means the knowledge of the mystery of creation in its totality. Eternity will provide all the answers to the human search. To be more precise, what is being tried at the Large Hadron Collider in Geneva (where the name “God particle” was erroneously used) is only a tiny fraction of the knowledge of how God set the subatomic world in motion. I have said that the name is false, because it defines almost nothing of what God is or does. This particle would need the prefix “post” (post-God particle), meaning something that would come after God made the world out of nothing. However, we

do not know how God began the creation of the world, by what methods, if it was a collision or something else. But before the subatomic collision, it was necessary to create the atom and the subatomic particles. Then after this clash, another problem arises, namely, how the life and harmony of creation were realized, if there was no God the Creator. Everything is very obvious.

In all this heavenly divine-human complexity, disease had no purpose and no place. Illness, like death, were the unfortunate accidents of Adam's fall. Man has never become accustomed to them in his history and as such has rejected them as something unnatural and antihuman. And yet they appeared by the fall of the first fathers of mankind. A whole history of human suffering that has crushed the world. Human suffering has disfigured humanity. We can say, like Henri de Lubac, that in such a man "there is no stability or depth . . . this man has literally been dissolved."³ The consumer society⁴ offered comfort to the body, but also a great drama of the soul.

Many of the Christian denominations have fallen prey to inner chaos, due to their conformity to the image and likeness of liberal cosmopolitan moral commitments. We are witnessing a imanentization of the faith surrounded by a neo-pagan culture dialectically oriented against the Christian past.⁵

The painful part of these stories of human suffering has always been amnesia. People quickly forgot about their suffering and its causes and reiterated it in another form. Suffering in God's eyes has always been pedagogical. It had to shape the soul beautifully, which through the patience with which it assumed the suffering began to live its eternity from the earth. The pedagogy of the disease⁶ was aimed at heaven, at eternity, because the sick and suffering man had to feel much closer to eternity, to God or to real life, than the healthy one, who was often deceived by the illusion of his eternity on the ephemeral earth. Sickness was the sign that God was waiting for Him and that real life was not here but only after the angel of death called him to heaven.

We find it very difficult to accept this pedagogy of eternity through suffering, and we are more inclined to speak of suffering as divine punishment. Just as in the case of the man born blind: the apostles asked the Savior, exactly according to the mentality of the time, "who sinned: he or his parents were born blind."⁷ In any case, this was the mentality of the world, because everyone saw disease as a divine punishment for who knows what sins committed by the ancestors or the sick. In the depths of the faith, the disease should be a revelation, namely the revelation of the eternity to which God calls you. Through it man becomes much more sensitive and transparent to eternity.

There were people (albeit not many) who assumed the disease as a confession or as a canon of eternity. They felt that suffering ennobles you and does not hate you. These were the martyrs, who saw in their death not pain or a state of panic, but a door to eternity alongside God. They were the seed that shaped the world, and through their death the Church of Christ was strengthened, and Christians took courage to live in the midst of threats. I was the model of an authentic relationship, without compromise with society: love and firmness in faith. However, as they said in Latin, *non multa sed multum*, not the quantity but the quality of the Christian life shaped society and

offered the martyr's paradigm. The suffering of the saints became the reason for the optimism of Christians on the path of sacredness.

Let us remember Saint Ignatius Theophorus who did not want to be pardoned but to be given to the lions, like the wheat that becomes flour for the eucharistical bread of Christ. This is the martyr. Totally different from the Islamic shahid, who wants to die while killing others. The Christian assumes the suffering out of the eternal love for God. The assumption of suffering made them holy, because it was not a fatalistic assumption but the desire for eternity with Christ. When God is a real part of your life, then death is also with Him and can be considered a gateway to eternity. Assuming suffering means the beginning of holiness.

Unfortunately, the lack of genuine faith has made us less confident in God and, as such, more desperate in the face of sickness and suffering. From the lack of faith we no longer felt suffering as the agapic pedagogy of eternity, because our whole existence was reduced to the ephemerality of the earth and life here. Science became the god of contemporary man, who blindly believed in it, waiting for it to offer him the eternity of matter and life here. That is why God in His divine pedagogy has allowed (not created) the sufferings of the world throughout history. Therefore, it is not God, but man who is the author of the current pandemic, and God has left man free, even to do evil, because that is the only way he could prove His divine love.

As such, it is not God who is the author of the current pandemic, for everything is in the hands of man, but it has been catastrophic, as many times in history when the human mind has generated wars and atrocities. The hand and mind of man without God created this virus, which led to this pandemic. And then he turned to fear. Fear has shown that we do not have the depth of faith. We wrap fear in all kinds of packaging but it is also called fear. For some it is the fear of disease, for others the fear of vaccines, the fear of war or calamity, or even of authoritarian regimes. I never thought that a world could become so fearful or that it could be so easily ruled by fear.

Fear is the opposite of the phrase "dare!" ("... for I have overcome the world..."). God came into the world to redeem man and especially to give him the courage to walk along the vector of eternity. The depressed man does not have the power of ascension, because fear puts a barrier in his existential path. Let us remember that the term "panic" comes from the demonic Pan, who produced fear when he appeared. Fear has become a social policy today. I am not talking about occult world organizations, but about a current called neo-Marxism, which tries through forcible laws and threats to lead the world to a universal moral ambiguity.

The world has thus entered an "age of fear," so that no one has courage and confidence, but each is afraid of the other. The mask on the face means protection, but also separation from the other, fear or flight that often turns into hatred. Never before have people looked at each other with more division and even hatred. I am not convinced that we are witnessing a "medical dictatorship," but the permanent fear or phobia of the other, with medical arguments, has led humanity to a fear of the other, which I call the "phobia of otherness." I think that the expression "homophobia" applies more correctly here and not to those who want the moral normality of life. I became homophobic through medical separation from the other, technically called "social distancing."

The expression “social distancing” is also false. Etymologically and semantically, these two words are excluded and cannot form an expression, because I am “social” when only when I approach my fellow man and I am “antisocial” when I distance myself from him. So you cannot be socially distanced but rather antisocial or counter-social. They probably thought of cosmeticizing the flight from the other or the distance from him and for this they added the term social, to make this flight, fear or distance seem milder. It is the exact opposite of the Christian line, which requires agape or love of the other, as the foundation of life in Christ.

Distance (social or antisocial) means the loss of the other’s face and this leads to the loss of dialogue and agapic relationship. The moment we lose face and dialogue we lose ourselves, as God’s unique creation, set on the highest existential standard. Multimedia socialization does not offer the form of dialogue that does not only mean the transmission of images and words, but in which everything becomes sacred and pneumatic. In the authentic Christian dialogue between people, everything is pneumatic. The word is no longer a simple combination of letters that conveys information, but it is an exchange of feelings and outpourings of depth through the grace that animates our lives. A graceful dialogue thus becomes a sharing of the other’s being. People in Christ become... the chalice of communion and communion. Thus the people of the faith become Eucharistic, for they receive Christ and then give Him through the logos and being to others.

How could the post-pandemic world recover from the universal fear that paralyzed humanity? It is a question that must be asked and solved otherwise the hiatus between people will widen even more. Who or what can bring the human community together to rebuild a face-to-face dialogue? This face-to-face dialogue has strengthened the communion between people throughout history. The Christian conscience, the consciousness that we are beings created by God and called to communion, has given people axiological verticality. The awareness that we are the only vertical beings in the love of God must make us worthy in the face of society, in which authoritarianism and dictatorship of any kind (medical, political, minority, etc.) must no longer be accepted. Man, through creation, is a free, conscious and upright being before God and creation.

The Christian conscience is at the same time the consciousness of the philo-creation and the recovery of the dignity of any man. The human person becomes upright before God and society not when he is constantly blamed and feared, but when he is loved and must also love and emanate love. And where should man feel the deepest state of love? In the house of God, where expressions like “to love one another, to confess in one thought...” are repeatedly heard. The church is the place of the formation of deep consciousness. The agapic recovery of human consciousness can be done not through a humanistic philosophy or ideology, but through the love of God poured out to us through the sacrifice of Christ.

It is also necessary on the part of the Church to bend to a new approach to man, who must feel the full love received as a gift and which is given further. Love must be given so that the world becomes an agapic paradigm, a space of love of heaven and earth, thus overcoming all the tensions of the world. Even religious tensions must be

overcome through agape and prayer. The struggle with heresy must be turned into a prayer for revealed truth. Good must be affirmed as a reflection of absolute good.⁸

There have been too many struggles for faith, of which I personally am not proud. Faith is not defended with the sword and heresy is not punished by fighting and killing. Only prayer for the revealed truth is the only answer to the otherness of faith. If we read carefully, Christ spoke of the example (“Even so let your light be shining before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”: Mt. 5,16), and when the sword appears He rebukes (“Put back your sword: am I not to take the cup which my Father has given to me?”: Jn. 8,11).

The relationship of the Church with the man of the third millennium must be an eminently agapic one, of awareness. Only in this way will the secularist and globalist man, infested by neo-Marxisms, feel that he has eternal value. The world with all its ideologies has been put to the test, that is, it cannot be more than it has shown in history: either slavery, or feudalism, capitalism, or communism. It comes back every time. It is now trying to make a combination of communism and consumer society, calling “neo-Marxism.” See? It can’t do more and it has no chance.

IF MARX became the new model of society in the third millennium, then we are deplorable. But unfortunately we do not see this or we do not have the verticality and dignity to recognize that what we are offered we have experienced before: communism without God with all its atrocities, now still preached by the intellectual world. These missionaries of Marxism can carry a laptop under their arm and not the sickle and hammer as before, for it is the same. Neo-Marxism can be taught in universities and imposed through the media and multimedia, because it is also about man against man and never about man for man or man with man for eternity.

Society can be, in their view, either capitalist or communist (or neo-communist) but never communionist and communitarian. The world for them is at most social, but not communion. Maybe they don’t even understand what this term means and how deep it is. What does communion mean for a man of secularist horizontality? Nothing but a gathering of people, of beings without dialogue, because they do not feel that every human being is a *prosopon* or a face in dialogue. It’s too little and too low.

For both offers of current politics (capitalism and neo-Marxism) man is only a number or a percentage in polls and statistics. Only in dialogical communion can we talk about dialogue and the person, about the faces through which souls speak. *Animus in oculis habitat* is a reality and not a simple word of wisdom. The soul speaks through the eyes and the face. Otherwise we remain rows of biological beings, counted and stored in statistical bases. In divine communion man is a pinnacle of nature, of creation and not an evolving link. Man is thus a partner in dialogue and not in obedience, a dialogue between himself and God, between himself and humanity, between himself and creation in general. Man with a sacred conscience can build a society in which each party matters and not just the ruling one, in which he is the sublime divine creation that must deify everything through its own sacredness.

Man thus becomes a priest of creation and humanity, in which each is equal to the other in their ascension to beauty, goodness and truth. In fact, these are the qualities of God: Good, Truth, and Beauty, in the superlative way. A society that imitates these qualities will also be divine through its vocation. Man, expressed in these parameters, becomes a syndesmos and not a link in the evolutionary chain, a more or less social animal (*zoon politikon*), unless he is imposed a “social distance.”

So only the agapic recovery of human consciousness will be able to restore humanity, which could be understood from the experience of the pandemic, its path to transcendence. We could then talk about the sign and meaning of the pandemic, as a re-awareness of the path we are taking. At that time we can use the expression “pandemic theology” or “pandemic theophany,” because the rediscovery of consciousness during this disease means the reunion with God. Man in his religious-moral conscience meets God and through Him he relates to the world and society. As such, a religious consciousness in the pandemic space is, in fact, the assumption of life with all its states, in the name of God.

I have said many times that life here is not life, but the road to life, and as such the road does not matter, but its end is important: reaching the eternity of life. The road remains a road, with its beauties, its landscapes but also its roughness. It is the way home, because we have left eternity and we return to it. Returning to eternity is in fact the path of life through matter. It is the theology of seeking and returning to God from where we left through disobedience. It is the mystery of search and retrieval. Man who has just reached eternity is found to be in essence, for until then he is dispersed in matter.

We have not yet reached the consciousness of divine providence, to feel that everything has a meaning and we go through these meanings to eternity. The consciousness of divine providence makes us understand the telos of creation, with its pluses and minuses, and how to overcome them, finding their meaning. Understanding the divine message, we will see that both good and evil have a pedagogical meaning, which can lead us to divine eternity. On the way to God man can meet both good and evil, but the end is important: the attainment of eternity in the divine mystery. For better or for worse, if we want we can discover the divine wisdom and through it we find the mystery of human existence on earth, even the meaning of suffering.

We live this mystery without understanding it or in most cases we only understand what we want. The disease has its mystery that goes beyond the earthly meaning. There are several phases in the course of suffering and the Church must expose them to the people. The first phase of the disease begins with the question: “Why?,” “Why me?” It is like a rebellion against God, telling Him that there are other sinners who need to be punished. It is the shock of the man who sees himself ill and who had many plans in life. Man will understand in time why this is happening, only when he realizes that his life is connected to heaven and not to earth.

Here appears a theology of disease that we see permanently as the retribution for sins. And in the case of the man born blind, the strange question was, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” He or his parents?” (Jn. 9:1–3). The

question is thus falsely asked, because if a child is born blind, how can he sin to receive such a punishment? The Savior answers that He is blind to reveal in Him the power of God. In other words, there is a disease in which the transparency of God can be seen.

In other words, we can accept sickness in order to show in it the power of God, but only when we feel that our life is connected with eternity. What does God's power mean in the helplessness of disease? It is a mystery that goes beyond our reason or the logic of the human mind. In the disease there is a theophany that the person affected by the suffering can feel. Here I am talking about the experience of many who have converted in these moments of tension of the disease. They felt closer to God when they suffered than when they were happy and healthy. So there is a much deeper encounter in suffering with God than in health and joy.

Only in this way can you understand the mystery of suffering and especially its transcendental pedagogy. The pandemic has a transcendental pedagogy that must be discovered by everyone, because everyone understands it in their own way. As such, there is a personal heuristic of this state, in which God is at the end. Everyone discovers transcendence in their own way, in the atmosphere of the disease. Unfortunately, there are many who discover nothing or almost nothing: at most a self-victimization and an accusation for what happened.

Recognizing Europe means returning to true values.⁹ Obviously, there were false values in history that distorted the European spirit. Even Christianity has had in history its moments of deviation from the depths of the faith. All must be assumed and for possible mistakes one can ask forgiveness from history and from God. But what needs to be restored is the deep state of agapic Christianity, which sees the other as a gift from God. We need this recovery of depth so that we can rediscover the meaning of a united Europe. United Europe has many advantages, as it brings people closer together, eliminating the disjunctions of far-right nationalisms.

Every people is called to preserve its ethnic and national values, because only through them does that wonderful people remain in a united Europe. National value must not be annihilated, but neither can it be transformed into extremism and ethnic exclusivism. You can't love your people until you come to hate other people. The competition of nations should become their complementarity, because each nation can complete the other through the depth of feelings. Tolerance, love and complementarity between peoples are the signs of an authentic Christian conscience. When the expressions "pride of being..." (Romanian, German, French, etc.) disappear and are replaced with the depth "joy of being," then people will have a beautiful perception of the value of the other.

Certainly, we are at an impasse between asserting ourselves and being asserted by others. If I assert myself, I'm in competition with others. If the other person appreciates me and affirms me, we are in a complementarity. We live in this state of misunderstanding the other because we cultivate a feeling of narcissism, so damaging in the relationship with the other. The consciousness of otherness can make us forgiving and happy for others. The great Christian mystery is to enjoy the presence of others around you and to see them as gifts given by God for communion with you. However, the

state of competition that would generate progress is false. It is not through envy of the other that progress is born, but through the awareness that we work “as for God, not as for men.” Unfortunately, this mentality of the heavenly consciousness in us does not exist or is so easily annihilated by the materialist and empiricist conception that dominates us. The world needs the re-awareness of the sacred in us, in order to put on a clear basis the social relations that have been damaged.

Christian morality is truly authentic, and no one can contradict or complete this deep ethical line. It is the most extensive social program, because it realizes the deepest connection between people. Nowhere in any law do phrases like “love your neighbor as yourself” appear (Mt. 22:37). Here the law is overwhelmed by the divine depth. People are no longer partners or statistical figures, quantified and coordinated by civil or criminal codes, but are brothers in creation and soteriology. It is the highest level that man can aspire to: eternity lived in immanence. In such a society, no one has enemies but the one who sabotages the happiness of heaven (the devil). Recovery from this post-pandemic depression is no longer about drugs and vaccines, but about the awareness of the Christian depths, through which people live the relationship of brotherhood in creation. The return to that sacred towel with which people look at themselves and through which they transmit their feelings of love and respect, can only be made by the one who feels in the other the iconic reality of the Creator, that is, the divine image we each carry within us.

Far from being a return to dogmatism, Europeans must rediscover their simple roots of authentic, agapic Christianity. Knowing God does not mean memorizing dogmatic definitions, but first and foremost discovering the sacred and loving reality of God’s presence in true revelation. After gaining this awareness of sacred reality, which makes us change our perspective on the whole of creation, we resume a new process of recovery of man and of the society in which we live. Society must not become theocratic or ecclesiocratic in order to reach the consciousness of divine holiness. The mission of the Church of Christ is not to become a parliament, but to transform parliaments into spaces of faith, where leaders are aware of the divine presence and the agapic relationship between people. Then the expression “fear of God” will translate into love for Him and fear of upsetting Him out of love. Then people will not work because there are laws and cameras, but out of conscience. Truly then we will speak of the thing that is “well-done,” not as an electoral slogan, but as a norm of life, which has an aspect, namely from the “well-done” thing to the “profoundly done” thing, culminating in the “sacredly made” thing.

IN CONCLUSION, without an authentic Christian conscience, the world cannot recover itself and regain its historical, spiritual and cultural values. Without this consciousness we will live in such a damaging pseudo-history, pseudo-culture and atheist neo-Marxism. Our children will accuse us of destroying their roots and spirit, leaving them without the power to stand upright in the face of the nebulous future. Without the divine consciousness in them, people will live without roots and without a future, transformed into electoral, impersonal masses, threatened and organized without their will by all kinds of world interests, without knowing where they are

going. In the lie in which we stubbornly lived, we destroyed our descendants, leaving them without a spine. A world without a sacred conscience is a dead world. □

Notes

1. There are a number of other works that address the topic of a world of suffering, which, however, did not understand much of this pain. About these issues, see: Lawrence Knorr et al., *After the Pandemic: Visions of Life Post Covid-19* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Sunbury Press, 2020); James Ball and Kristie Brown-Lofland, *Autism after the Pandemic: A Step by Step Guide to Successfully Transition Back to School and Work*, preface by Temple Grandin (Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, 2020); Ion Bria, *Ortodoxia în Europa: Locul spiritualității române* (Iași: Trinitas, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, 1995); Andrei Marga, *Religia în era globalizării* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2004); Gheorghe Popa, *Comuniune și înnoire spirituală în contextul secularizării lumii moderne* (Iași: Trinitas, 2000); Vasile Răducă, “Grija Bisericii față de mediul ambiant,” *Studii teologice* (Bucharest) 62, 3 (1990): 105–119.
2. See Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, with a foreword by Charles Taylor, translated by Oscar Burge (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
3. Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, translated by Edith M. Riley, Arne Englund Nash, and Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 66.
4. About the consumerist man, Viorel Rotilă says: “The new man has appeared! He is the man of consumption! It is the individual who feels like a stranger in nature if he does not carry with him the objects of consumption that mediate even his relationship with himself. He is appaled to sit on the grass, he is afraid of the creatures that swarm around him, united as if by a plot aimed at undermining his comfort, and his physiological needs become almost insurmountable problems. He needs the sound and visual ambience of the eternally on television set, the rustle of nature being accessible to him only through the mediation of technology, in a sterilized version that removes any dirt. His nose, grown in the olfactory spectrum of designer perfumes and various types of fragrances, perceives only possible similarities with them.” Cf. Viorel Rotilă, *Omul societății de consum: În așteptarea unei noi ideologii* (Iași: Institutul European, 2011), 33.
5. Nichifor Tănase, “A treia ispită: ‘Cetățeni de credință’ a unei ‘religii civile,’” in *Postmodernismul—o provocare pentru creștinismul contemporan*, edited by Vasile Vlad, Radu Trifon, and Alexandru Vlad (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea; Deva: Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, 2015), 285.
6. Everything thus becomes suffering, including the present culture. “The drama of secular culture consists in the complete abandonment to the private consciousness of the problem of truth and the expulsion from public debate of the ultimate anthropological questions.” Cf. Teofil Tia, *Descrăștinarea: O “apocalipsă” a culturii* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2009), 339.

7. However, the question was false, for he could not sin and then be born blind. When to sin if he was born blind? Before what? Of his procreation? So there was a sophistry in this false question.
8. The rev. prof. says in this regard: “A reason that does not serve the good becomes absurd.” Cf. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Isus Hristos lumina lumii și Îndumnezeitorul omului*, edited by Monica Dumitrescu (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993), 26.
9. There is a need for the “unconditional Christian responsibility for humanity and creation,” as Professor Stăniloae says in the study “Responsabilitatea creștină,” *Ortodoxia* (Bucharest) 22, 2 (1970): 185.

Abstract

Recovering Life in a Post-Pandemic Era

The study focuses on the idea of a confused society, which seems to have no meaning after the pandemic. The world is not the same as before and unfortunately it is experiencing depression and moral confusion. It is therefore necessary to return to the consciousness of values and this can only be found in Christianity. We are now living the drama of an isolated humanity. I am convinced that the isolation of people did not happen now, during the pandemic, but before, through selfishness and self-isolation in consumerism. Social networking sites have been and remain just ways to present our isolated “happiness” in our comfort. Our only goal has been our economic comfort. The pandemic changed our scale of values for a moment, but it still did not take us out of the isolation of our selves. Only a re-awareness of our vocation as religious, Christian beings can bring us back to real communion.

Keywords

pandemic, consciousness, consumerism, depression, communion